

## The Ethical Value of the Qur'ānic Concept of Taqwā

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### Abstract

This article presents the important ethical value of the Qur'anic *Taqwā* and its consequences at individual, collective and universal levels. In Islam, *taqwā* means the fear of *Allah*, piety, and righteousness. The article objective is to demonstrate that *taqwā* is a major ethical concept in the Qur'anic text and drives the conduct of Muslims in their all-present life aspects. Also, it has a significant consequence on their life Hereafter. The article finds that if Muslims can feel and understand all the vertical and horizontal aspects of *taqwā* in the present and life Hereafter, the Islamic world will be much better than what it is now, even then, they can export this Qur'anic value of *taqwā* to the whole of humanity and establish for a new Islamic ethical theory. During the text, a verse analysis approach is applying to develop the whole aspects of *taqwā* in Islam. The article concluded the integral and identical aspect of the ethical-religious aspect of the Qur'anic *taqwā* and its significant impacts on Muslims life.

**Keywords:** *Taqwā*, *Qur'ān*, Ethics, Piety, Virtue

### Introduction

The object of this article is to provide the reader a specific illustration of the term of *taqwā* in the Qur'ān. To do that, I divided the present article into different sections; I started with the linguistic, religious, and spiritual meaning of *taqwā* and then I moved to the importance of the term in Islamic religious text by analysing two Qur'anic verses related to different aspects of the term *taqwā*. First, individuals and social context of *taqwā* (Q: 2:177), and second, universal aspects of *taqwā*, (Q: 49: 11-13). The consequence of the ethical value of *taqwā* on Muslims and the whole of humanity in a mundane and Hereafter life and how to approach *taqwā* will be discussed in detail also.

### Linguistic and Spiritual-Religious Aspects of Taqwā

The word *taqwā* is the noun form from the verbal form of (*wāqā*), which means protection and avoidance of something normally powerful or dangerous. *Wāqā* is described as protecting and conserving something from any threat or damage (Ibn Mandhūr: 1999, Vol, VI, 4901). In religious terms *taqwā* means the fear of God, piety, and righteousness, because there is not a specific/literal translation into English. But there are a several similar meanings of the term which I will explain in the adequate place in this article. The religious significance of *taqwā* in Islam is crucial. The essence of Islamic doctrine is reflected and

demonstrated through *taqwā*; the road of *taqwā* in Islam is a long and difficult one to tread, because a serious and persistent spiritual efforts are required for its achievement; only pious of those who are conscious of God in their acts and practices during present life will have the dignity to obtain this ethical virtue.

The idea here is to be conscious of divinity not only because of the carnal or physical punishment; it is about the admiration of the almighty God's power and strength. *Taqwā* and faith makes the essence of Islamic religion and creed, the relationship between two concepts, identical. In other words, if faith is the laboratory for Islamic religious and spiritual doctrine; *taqwā* is its bank of proofs. The inner connection between both terms is obvious, clear and it is an impossible task to understand these terms separately. Because *taqwā* has two essential aspects: doctrine and act. Doctrinal *taqwā* means the belief in the oneness of God and in the divine message, when acting *taqwā* is related to religious practices; now the first kind is nobler, and it is the origin of the former. Because almighty God does not want or need anything from a believer like material or acting practices, he wants a pure *taqwā* (Q 22: 37).

I would like to exhibit what scholars point out concerning religious, ethical, and spiritual importance and significance of *taqwā* / piety in Islam. Scholar's approach to the Islamic concept of *taqwā* are diverse, depending on their methodologies such as linguistic (Izutsu), and theological-religious (Raḥmān; Levisohn; Farid and so on). Izutsu justifies his methodology in this way "it is Important to keep in mind, when trying to analyse the ethical language of any given community, that main body of a moral code is, linguistically, always composed of words of this category". (Izutsu: 2002: 20). Faḍlur Raḥmān musters his disagreement to Izutsu concerning the term of *taqwā*. Sadly, he did not mention the reason beyond this divergence, (Raḥmān: 2009; XX). But one can understand this disagreement as a methodological issue. The indication of humankind concerning *taqwā* and what Izutsu argued about the possible, pre-Islamic origin of Qur'anic *taqwā* and other pre-Islamic virtues such as generosity remain as a strong possibility of the contrast between Izutsu and Raḥmān. Izutsu believes that you must explain the opposite meaning of the word under study to achieve a better approach" we might mention the case in which the semantic structure of a given term is elucidated by contrast". (Izutsu: 2002: 38). So, to demonstrate *taqwā*/faith he explained the structure of Shirk (polytheism) first. Izutsu argued that *taqwā* is the central element of the idea of the Islamic conception of religion in general (Izutzus: 2002: 120).

As I mentioned above the author starts by pointing out the basic character of polytheism which is the negation of Gods Oneness and His mercy on humans. He argued even God himself

does not accept ingratitude towards man. God He wants from man to complete his religious duties and be grateful to God for his acts of grace and God on his part will show mercy to pious people for their good works and his response to the divine call and He will pay them back on the day of Judgement. (Q: 2: 153-158). Izutsu explains that the concept of *taqwā* in Islam is directly related to the *Imān* (faith), and the reward of the last day which has the meaning of Fearing-God (Q: 22; 1). the fear of God and belief in Last Day is the essential motif for the religion of Islam. *Taqwā* and *Imān* are the genuine dual of Islamic creed's essence, Izutsu mentioned in one Qur'ānic verse to demonstrate the identical relation between two virtues (Q: 2; 208-212), and there are other such as: (Q 2; 223). If belief is A *Taqwā* is, then B. But B is essential to form A. B, in the most Qur'ānic contexts has an imperative mood- form, so it reminds believers to be honest and pious toward God almighty commands.

In this regard, Levisohn argued that the Qur'anic overview of the virtue of *taqwā* "suggesting the idea of faith animated by works and works quickened by a genuine experience of faith.... *taqwā* is the substance of all Godliness as an element of faith *taqwā* embodies the purely internal and contemplative attitude of heart". (Levisohn: 2007, 2-3). And for this reason, I believe that B is essential to form A, knowing at the same time the superiority, dignity, nobility, and originality of A. The prestigious Islamic thinker Faḡlur Raḡmān, pointed out *taqwā* in this sense; "this unique balance of integrative moral action is the Qur'anic term *taqwā*, perhaps the most important single term in the Qur'ān". (Raḡmān: 2009: 28). He argued that *taqwā* denotes to man a full and entire rational and moral stability to figure his personality to realise right religious and spiritual duties. *Taqwa* as a protection against divine penalty is right and shows the sense of moral and religious responsibility from man towards divinity, here and life Hereafter. Raḡmān furthermore, explained that *taqwā* is on most Qur'anic verses meant acting within moral limits of God and not to violate or disobey these ethical divine rules; human behaviour in this case became good and right and believers will get their reward back multiply (Q: 6; 160). Almighty God knows the human capacity when doing anything and this knowledge has been shown in the virtue of *taqwā* in term of its achievement; every believer is expected to do what they can do according to their own faculty; so, he/she should fear God as much as he/she is able to do that (Q: 64; 16).

Azim Nanji describes the concept of *taqwā* as such "the human quality that encompasses the concept of the ideal ethical value in the Qur'ān is summed up in the term *taqwā*". (Nanji: 1991: 3). The real *Taqwā*, Aḡmad fried explained it is that by saying that

“the man makes a serious effort to leave all sins (big and small), and at same time an effort to complete all religious duties obligatory and optional according to his capacity”. (Fried: 1993: 15). The virtue of *taqwā* is investigated by ‘Afif Ṭabbāra as a virtue which “the Qur’ān wanted from to make a good connection between humans and between human and God and for this reason, most ethical and social Qur’anic verses are related to *taqwā*” (Ṭabbara: 1995; 283).

In short, the significance of *taqwā*-Piety in Islamic doctrine is enormous; *taqwā* is the ethical soul of Islamic faith. In the next section I will demonstrate some synonyms of the Islamic term of *taqwā* briefly. Let us commence with *Birr*. *Birr* linguistically means good and right acts. It is a good virtue and does not differ to *taqwā* in its social aspect. *Birr* means to feel the responsibility to help people and to do good work and religious duties as well. One Qur’anic verse describes both terms are related to each other in the context of morality and religion (Q: 2; 185). *Ihsān*, is one of the synonyms of *taqwā*, it basically means goodness. As other ethical terms in the Qur’ān, *Ihsān* is related to moral and religious contexts. People who practice *Ihsān* are doing right things and they are pious (Q: 12; 90). *Khāshya*, linguistically means to be scared from some thing or someone. In religious terms, means fear of divine power and punishment. It is related to *taqwā* in a sense that to obey religious commands is the cause to a better conduct to achieve Gods reward (Q: 24; 52).

### **Different Kinds of *Taqwā***

#### **Individual *Taqwā***

I elucidated the term of *taqwā* earlier and it is understood how essential this virtue, in the hierarchy of Islamic ethics is, Now I will demonstrate its three basic kinds: individual, social, or collective, and universal. Let us start with the first type, the individual. Individual *taqwā* does not differ from the collective one. In other words, they are totally connected to each other in the socio-religious realm, and this is because of the integral character of Islamic faith. But individuals remaining as the point of departure in religious duty and by grouping and establishing rules they (individuals) become society. Some Qur’anic verses are related to humans as individuals concerning *taqwā*. In this verse, *taqwā* is presented as the unique relief to difficulties, crises, and main times; that whoever fears God, he will make for him a way out (Q: 65; 2-3). In the religion of Islam there is a huge doctrinal value toward individuality itself and as member of society, individuals are responsible for their acts and will get his reward on the last day. This Qur’anic verse strongly demonstrates the individual values in Islam (Q: 74: 11).

Individual *taqwā* then is based in issues related between individuals and God and this is the motif of the collective *taqwā*. Concerning this kind of *taqwā*, Fdlur Raḥmān argued that “the best way to define *taqwā* is to say that, whereas action belongs to man, real and effective judgment upon that action, as well as the standard whereby that action is to be judged, lies outside of him”. (Raḥmān: 2009; 29).

### **Collective-Social Taqwā**

*Taqwā* of any Muslim believer towards God is demonstrated in his dealing with other members of society. The stronger is the former; the most noticeable will be the later. So, we are talking about a degree in *taqwā* in its two essential aspects; this dualism is the core of believer’s *taqwā*. The nature of Islamic creed dose not separates these aspects from each other as I mentioned earlier. To get a better illustration of this sort of *taqwā*, I will run to a verse-analysis approach. I chose this present verse because of its inclusive character; in other words, in this verse one can find without debut the whole Islamic religious essence in its different aspects. Great faithful, social, and ethical values are included and a believer who can complete all these commands and virtues are described as pious or God-fearing. The verse has the sense of these words:

*It is not righteousness that you turn your faces toward the east and the west, but righteousness is the one who believe in God and the last day, and the angels, and the Book and the Prophets | and give away wealth with out of love for him to the near of kin and the orphans and the needy and the wayfarer and to these who ask and to set slaves free | and keeps up prayer and pays the poor-rate: and the performer of their promise when they make a promise| and the patient in distress and affection and in the time of conflict | These are they who are truthful; and these are they who keep their duty.* (Q: 2; 177).

I will discuss two classic interpreters on this verse, Al Ṭābāri, (838-923 CE), and Al Zāmākhshāri’s (1074-1143 CE). The first interpretation will give us a clear traditional and religious approach to the verse and the second is for a rational and linguistic achievement; for this reason, I chose these exegetes (*mufasssirūn*) in concrete. Let us start with al Ṭābāri comments. Al Ṭābāri’s approach is based on Prophetic tradition, Aḥādiths (sayings), and for this reason is known as an interpretation by M’athūr. Al Ṭābāri divided the verse in sentences; so, to the microstructure of the verse, and then present several Prophetic sayings related to sentences under the study and then give his own. I will follow Al Ṭābāri’s method to divide his comments too. The first sentences interpretation is as such: the righteousness is not making prayer only; it meant many other religious duties as well it is related to do good things and have a pure heart toward almighty God.

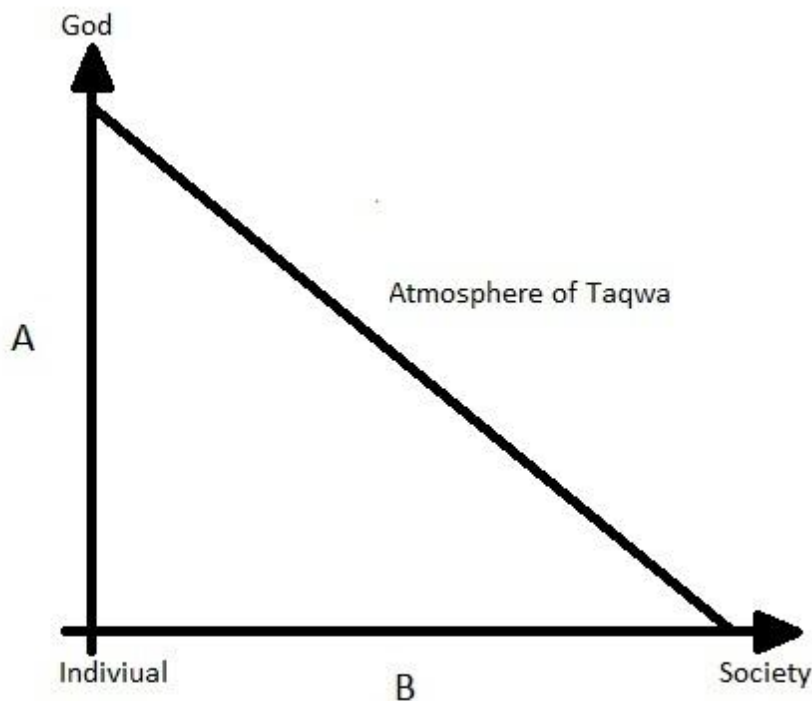
There is a clear indication to the practicality of Islamic faith and religion in Al Tabari's analysis. Another explanation Al Ṭābārī said is that this sentence was also directed to Christians and Jews, and that you must not only pray toward East and West, but you must also believe in Almighty God, angels, and Books. The second sentence's interpretation is that who gives wealth to poor peoples and others in need, despite of his intention to be rich, and regardless of his present poverty and who does efforts to free the slaves. The third sentence's interpretation: whoever prays and gives Zākāt (charity), and they are fulfilled when the promise, and patients in poverty and hardship and difficult times. Fourth sentence: those are indeed true people because they did not only make prayer, but they also believed in God's Oneness, angels and Books and did many other good and right duties, those are pious because their fear of God made of them good believers and they did it according to God commands.

One can see clearly that this interpretation is based on religious criteria and the language, which was used, contains religious meaning such as: commands and belief. The second exegete is Al Zāmākhshārī. He argued that the word *Birr* means goodness, but this starting sentence is conducted to Christians and Jews because they used to pray towards East (Christians) and West (Jewish). The fact that when the prophet changed the *Qiblah* (geographical orientation towards Makkāh for prayer), Christians and Jews started to contrast each other in this issue. And then Qur'ān answered them in this way that the goodness is not that what you are fighting for, the goodness is believe in the Oneness of God, the Last Day, angels, and Books, and whoever gives financial support regardless of their limited capacity to poor and needy people, people who are working. Who is doing everything possible to free slaves and give Zākāt in these main and conflictive times? people who are patients in critical moments, those are truthful and serious in their religious practices and faith and those who are also pious.

The meaning of this comments does not differ from the Al Ṭābārī's interpretation in meaning but there are also linguistic details about the different linguistic and semantic meaning of the words; this fact is clear in the huge quantity of footnotes given; which I do not want comment on because it is not the aim of this analysis. In this long semantic explanation, it remains the rational aspect of Al Zāmākhshārī approach; he used diverse aspects of language to show the diversity and rational aspect of his thought, the language is in service of rationality in this case.

After explaining the meaning and kinds of *taqwā* and doing a verse-analysis, I would like to do a geometric illustration concerning individual, socio-collective and universal aspect of *taqwā*. Izutsu, argued that the ethical language of the Qur'ān contains key concepts relating to social ethics and all the rules are

conduct dependent upon divine commands; so, concepts which are horizontal are related to relations between humans in communities and the ethic-religious which is vertical are related between humans and God. (Izutsu: 2002; 252). In this sense, Faḡlur Raḡmān pointed out that when man and society concerning the Last Day Judgement, are conscious of it, he and they have true *taqwā* and human conduct then becomes in the way and quality to be in the service of God (Raḡmān: 2009; 29). Here I provide a geometric form of individual socio-collective *taqwā*; which reflects the ideas discussed earlier.



**Figure 1: Individual and Socio-Collective Aspect of *Taqwā***  
**Universal Aspect of Islamic *Taqwā***

The ethic-religious value of Qur'anic *taqwā* it became universal, when is conducted to the whole humanity and this is one of the most characteristic of Islamic ethics as whole: the universality. The fact that Islam is valid in every place and time; its validity does not have any time-place limitations; its ethical validity relies on the fact that it offers to humankind the happiness in the present and life Hereafter, thus, does not have time to be expired. Because these ethics are divine ethics; therefore, they are fixed, permanent and oriented to the whole of humanity regardless of their race, ethnic background, language, or culture, contrasting in this sense, Greek ethical thought, which is based on ethical relativism.

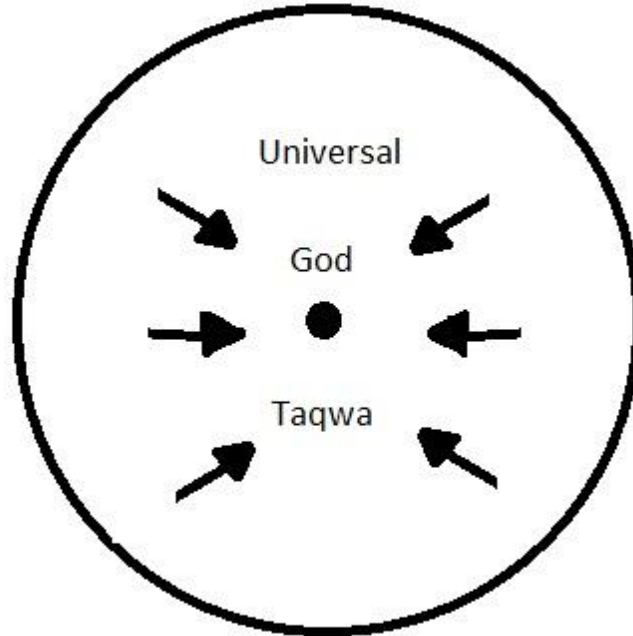
Divine ethics, includes the satisfaction of the spiritual, religious, and material needs of the human according to the divine commands. In this context, *taqwā* became the crucial virtue of how people from different background should treat each other based on goodness and God fearing. This unlimited aspect of the behaviour among human diversity makes *taqwā* a universal ethical value. To point out properly the full sense of this aspect of the Qur'anic *taqwā* I would apply a verse-analyses as a method of elucidation and will also cite some interpreters. So, with the same criteria applied with the earlier verse. The verse under study here is: “O humankind! We have created you male and female and constituted you into different groups and societies, so that you may come to know each other-the noblest of you, in the sight of God, are the ones possessing *taqwā*”. (Q: 49; 11-13).

I will start with Al Ṭābāri `s interpretation of the verse. God said: o humans We created you from male and female and We made you tribes and communities not for your virtue and dignity but to know each other; the most noble of you is who are most pious. In this verse we can see clearly that human being was created from male and female from different background to know each other in term of ethics and virtues and not make distinction between nations. Only pure *taqwā* is the path to obtain the nobility and God thankfulness. Here there are a local (tribal), and universal (nations), diminutions of these interpretations. Therefore, *taqwā* is the unique path to obtain the universal ethical knowledge between members across humanity.

Al Zāmākhshāri `s interpretation for this verse is, God said: we created you from male and female (Adam and Eve), or from father and mother. So, no one of you should be prude of his family or pedigree. We created you tribes and societies so you can know each other better on an ethical basis, the noblest of you is who possess *taqwā* and not to pertain to a noticeable clans or nations. This interpretation is quite similar in meaning and language to Al Ṭābāri version. Al- Ṭābāri `s interpretation could offer the local and universal aspect of *taqwā* better. Al- Zāmākhshāry focuses on the fact that people will know each other in terms of clans and pedigree; so, by knowing that they will avoid the confusion about the pertinence of people according to their tribe. After explaining the meaning of universal *taqwā* and doing a verse-analysis I would like to do a geometric illustration concerning this kind of worldly *taqwā*.



Universal Aspect of Taqwa



**Figure 2: Universal Aspect of *Taqwā*.**

**Characteristics of Pious People**

*Taqwā*, as I discussed earlier, is an entire ethical system; thus, to describe truthful pious is not an easy task. But I will mention some major aspects of religious, spiritual, and ethical aspect of pious believers. The best manner to do that I believe is cite Qur’anic verses in each context. First, *Faith is one of the features of pious people*, believing in unseen facts. Unseen facts here mean to believe in Gods Oneness, Angles, and Last Day. This Qur’anic verse has this sense of words (Q: 2; 2-3).

Second, *establishes the prayer*. this religious duty is considered as the second after faith and truthful God-fearing can practice it with pure faith and spiritual feelings, because the practice only without right will and intention does not have any sense, and this is one of the characteristics of Islamic religion and ethics; freewill and vocation to acts with responsibility and rationality according to the almighty God’s commands and rules. (Q: 2; 3). Third, *give wealth to poor and needy believers*. They are aware of God’s judgement in their richness and for this reason, they give financial support to purify their wealth and spirits, seeking God’s blessing and mercy on their property. Fourth, *restrain anger and pardon people*. These virtues are very important for treatments daily between members of the community. Control feelings and keeping silence is a proof of long-term vision and mature mentality;

a real pious one has the dignity to obtain these virtues by doing a serious effort and having God's awareness present in all instances.

This awareness towards divinity makes from them God-fearing and good persons in same time. (Q: 3; 134). Fifth, *Internal fear of God*, so, be scared by heart and mind towards unseen fact, in this case the almighty God. It is a synonym of *taqwā* in linguistic and religious aspects, I mentioned it here again because of its identical relation to *taqwā*. This Qur'anic verse has this sense of words; we had already given mosses, around the criterion, a light, and a reminder for the righteous, who fear their Lord unseen, while they are of the hour apprehensive. (Q: 21; 48-49). The list of pious virtue is too long through Qur'anic text, I mentioned some of them to understand them separately in its own context. I would like to also discuss another crucial aspect of the virtue of *taqwā*; its moral, religious, and social results in both: mundane and Hereafter life.

#### **Consequences of Taqwā in the Present and Life Hereafter**

It is clear now how *taqwā* is essential for Muslim believers; its ethical and socio-religious value is enormous. The beauty of its lightness and the significance of its meaning to humanity as whole are obvious. I explained earlier briefly in a geometric way the significance and realm of *taqwā*; here I will say the consequence of the vertical line in relation to the life Hereafter and the horizontal line to the present or earthy life to a certain extent. In the present life pious believers will always have Gods help and protection, God will make their life easier; will help them in critical and conflictive times, such as lack of materials or sources, and the absence of good health. God will not forget who is right and just, who will live according to divine will and rules. So, God will give strong guidance to contentious with their life in a safe and tranquil way. And in the life Hereafter, the paradise is waiting for them; God will reward them back even better, for their religious efforts and pure *taqwā*. God said: whoever does righteousness, whether male or female, while he is a believer, we will surely cause him to live a good life, and we will surely give them their reward according to the best of what they used to do, (Q:16; 97). If the happiness in the whole sense of the word (in divine terms), in the present and life Hereafter is a result of an applicable *taqwā*; we will now know, who to approach this ethical virtue?

#### **Ways to Approach Taqwā / God Fearing**

First, reflective reading of the Qur'ān. Read the Qur'ān carefully; think about its different meanings and contexts. Therefore, the believer in this way will know God message and commands will better and then know how to fellow them. Achieving *taqwā* will then will became easier for believers; everyone according to their own efforts and will. Second, personal application; this could be realizing intensive religious practices and other good morals in

general. Fear of God in all time, in every act, control his carnal desires and live pious style-life. (Q: 5; 35). I summarised briefly, two basic manners to obtain *taqwā*, where each have a whole system of application and theory. The first one is related to theory, so a believer must understand the divine words first and in the second step, apply the theory in spiritual, moral, and religious practice. Now understand, feel, and then achieve this dual pathway to *taqwā*, depends on everyone's capacity.

### **Conclusion**

The aim of this article was to illustrate the Qur'anic ethical concept of *taqwā*. To do that, I started to demonstrate the linguistic and religious nature of the concept by explaining its different kinds through the analysis of two Qur'ānic verses. And then I moved to investigated the consequences of this virtue of *taqwā* in both individual and society aspects, and the ways to approach it. Obviously, it is a difficult task to establish limits for the ethical dimension of the virtue of *taqwā* in the Qur'ān, because of its inclusive character and extent realm. Thus, two Qur'ānic verses as a point of departure to develop the article. It is very important to know how the term of *taqwā* is containing a whole religious, spiritual, and ethical system. The article sustained that the consequences of this Qur'ānic virtue on Muslims as an individual and a society are huge. If Muslims can feel and understand all the vertical and horizontal aspects of *taqwā* in the present and Hereafter life, the Islamic world will be much better than what it is now, even then they can export this great Qur'ānic value of *taqwā* to the whole of humanity. The religious practice will be like a river without water if is not well joined with *taqwā*.

Therefore, a whole modern ethical theory (which include the vertical and horizontal aspects of *taqwā*) of Qur'ānic ethics are needed for the Islamic world today. A theory, modern in methods and language but loyal to Qur'ānic rules and principles at the same time; this will make the communication between Islam and the rest of the world and the adoption of Islam to a new realities and circumstances easier. Furthermore, it will complete the universal character of Qur'ānic ethics such as *taqwā*. I believe that Islamic law is the keystone in this ethic-religious reform. Because of the integral and practical character of Islamic religion and because Qur'ān is considered by the Muslims as the ultimate source of Islamic ethics, and there is not original difference between ethics and religion in Islam. The religion is ethical and the ethical is religious in Islamic case.

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