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# Eschatological aspects of the Twelve Tribes' teachings: A theological perspective

Mgr. Anna Pokorná

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**Abstract:** In this text, I offer a basic description of the theology of the Twelve Tribes movement based both on a research study of relevant written sources and on participant observation and interviews with the members of the Twelve Tribes community of Mšecké Žehrovice. I focus especially on the eschatological expectations. The study explains the core motivations of the members' beliefs, such as the intent to return to the ideal of God's creation. In their endeavors, they use two portions of the biblical tradition – the first four generations of Abraham's family and, again, first four generations of the Early Church. According to the Twelve Tribes, both traditions represent historically successful intents to form God's true people. The article explains the evolution of the covenant between God and his people and the way the movement recognizes it in history. I concentrate both on the content the Twelve Tribes adopted from its sources in Old and New Testament and on its critical evaluation. Nevertheless, the core emphasis of the article is the movement's eschatology. It is precisely this dimension of their teachings that represents the main ambition of the Twelve Tribes: that is, to help with the transformation of the eras and earn the right to call themselves God's true people. The theological view of this New Religious Movement's belief and practice, which I present in this study, also covers the controversial topics of child training and closed community life.

**Keywords:** The Twelve Tribes community; millennialism; communal life; New Religious Movements; children in New Religious Movements

**Abstrakt:** Na základě rozhovorů se členy společenství, zúčastněných pozorování v komunitě ve Mšeckých Žehrovcích a studia dostupné literatury předkládám v textu základní popis teologie a praxe společenství Dvanáct kmenů se zvláštním zřetelem na eschatologická očekávání komunity. Tato studie vysvětluje hlavní motiv víry členů společenství jako snahu o návrat k ideálu Božího stvoření. V tomto úsilí jsou jim vzory zejména dva úseky biblické tradice – první čtyři generace Abrahamovy rodiny a stejný úsek první apoštolské církve. Obě tradice považuje Dvanáct kmenů za historicky částečně úspěšné pokusy o formaci pravého Božího lidu. Studie předkládá vývoj vztahu smlouvy Božího lidu s Bohem tak, jak jej společenství Dvanáct kmenů sleduje v dějinách. Pozornost je věnována jak prvkům, které od starozákonního i novo-zákonního pravzoru společenství Dvanáct kmenů převzalo, tak kritické zhodnocení obou duchovních předchůdců. Hlavní zřetel je ve studii brán na eschatologii společenství. V ní se soustřeďují ambice společenství napomoci transformaci věků a dosáhnout tak oprávněnosti titulu pravého Božího lidu. Teologický pohled na víru a praxi tohoto nového náboženského hnutí předložený v této studii se také dotýká kontroverzních témat výchovy dětí a uzavřeného komunitního života.

**Klíčová slova:** Dvanáct kmenů; milenialismus; komunitní život; nová náboženská hnutí; děti v nových náboženských hnutích

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Mgr. **Anna Pokorná**, Evangelical Theological Faculty, Charles University, Prague  
E-mail: pokorna.ann@gmail.com

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## Introduction

This text is a basic introduction to the theology of the Twelve Tribes movement seen through its eschatology. I believe that a general summary of the movement's faith may help all those interested in it to reach a better understanding of the movement's life and contribute to scholarly discussions ranging through different disciplines. The description of the movement's theology represents a specific view of how the group understands its own position, both in a historical context and in the context of contemporary society, and thus helps to explain the often incongruous types of the movement's spiritual practices.

It is precisely the spiritual practice of this closed community that may seem controversial to outside society – especially in cases when its description is not accompanied by theological explanation. In this context, the media often inform the larger public of specific types of the movement's parenting practices (spanking with a rod, ego repressing, adolescence spent in an isolated environment) and of raids during which the children of the movement's members were taken away by the authorities. Naturally, it is not a concern of theological studies to explain the possible controversies that arise from the Twelve Tribes' specific child-rearing or even to defend the movement against them. On the other hand, we should take in account the spiritual foundations of those parenting practices. Therefore, if we stick to the child-rearing example, theological understanding may contribute to a discussion with the Twelve Tribes by explaining to the public the logic of this strict parenting and understand why the movement sees the larger society's call for change in those practices as problematic. In much the same way, a general introduction to the movement's beliefs may be useful in explaining other aspects of the Twelve Tribes' life: it may help to clarify the theological motivation behind the movement's isolation or explain the importance of eschatological expectations of the movement as a whole.

## Methodology

The following results of the Twelve Tribes' theology investigation are based both on a study of the movement's texts and on personal interviews with the Twelve Tribes members I accumulated during my fieldwork in the community of Mšecké Žehrovice. The written sources created by the movement may be divided into two subgroups – first, texts intended for the public (missionary texts), and second, internal texts meant for the exclusive use of the movement's members. While the movement freely distributes the missionary texts during its public activities, the internal texts are only physically available in the communities (this applies to the four volumes of the so-called Books of Teachings). Due to actions of apostates, the texts are also available on the Internet (see Bibliography); however, I compared those materials during my fieldwork in the community with the official printed versions so that I could check the authenticity of the online version. During the participant observation in the move-

ment I also underwent a series of discussions and talks with the community members, mostly of informal character; those helped to clarify unwritten and unofficial rules and customs of the movement.

In this paper, I chose to focus mainly on the eschatological dimension. The eschatological perspective represents the core of the movement's motivation and strongly appears in other *loci theologici* of this New Religious Movement. This also means that even if we focus solely on the eschatological theme, we still cover a wider scope of the movement's theology. Due to the character of the eschatological topics, the paper also needs to deal with the concept of the creation. I present the material through the methods of descriptive theology. In order to make the article's structure more transparent, I reserved the theological analysis for the conclusion.

### God's intention for mankind and human failure

In the hermeneutics of history that form the nucleus of the Twelve Tribes' theology we can see a dualistic tension between the Good and the Evil, which acts as the origin of everything.<sup>1</sup> The evil forces plunged the originally good world into chaos<sup>2</sup> and in response to this situation, God created man to his image as an eternal spiritual being,<sup>3</sup> whose role it is to defend the good in the world. This means that unlike the rest of the creation, Adam the Man was capable of living a deeper spiritual life.<sup>4</sup> Adam's substance, due to which he was close to God, was supposed to ensure mankind's resistance against Evil. Also thanks to this substance, man was entrusted with the rule of the world and the whole of creation.<sup>5</sup> According to the Twelve Tribes, man's fundamental task (that God assigned him with during the creation) is to become the representative of God's rule upon the world and to help eradicate the Evil.

In accordance to their original purpose, the first people lived in the Garden of Eden only for a limited period of time. The situation changed in the moment when God's forbade the first people to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil and they failed to obey.<sup>6</sup> This insubordination, regarded in traditional theology as "the Fall of Man", meant that man diverged from his original purpose and became a sinner by nature. According to the Twelve Tribes, sin is the state of alienation from God.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In the movement's theology, he appears personified as an antipode of the Good (that is, God), a fallen angel or Satan (also known as The Evil One or simply the Evil).

<sup>2</sup> Which is an interpretation of Gn 1:2.

<sup>3</sup> "Back to The Garden" (online), *twelvetribe.org*, 2014, accessed January 2016, available online at <http://twelvetribe.org>.

<sup>4</sup> "The Majestic Ones" (online), *twelvetribe.org*, 2012, accessed October 2016, available online at <http://twelvetribe.org>.

<sup>5</sup> "The Parable of Fascination" (online), *twelvetribe.org*, 2016, accessed November 2016, available online at <http://twelvetribe.org>.

<sup>6</sup> Genesis 3; "Adam and Eve – The Fall" (online), *question12tribes.com*, accessed November 2016, available online at <http://question12tribes.com/tt-teachings/>.

<sup>7</sup> S. R. LAVIN, *God's People: In Search of a Destiny – A Look Into Life in the Twelve Tribes Community*, Amazon Digital Services LLC, 2016, loc 2041.

Under the yoke of sin, the character of human existence changed and Adam ceased to be an eternal spiritual being. At the same time, the origin of sin brought about the introduction of death into human life. Another attribute of the fallen creation is the innate conscience. The sinful mankind lost its original closeness to God and it gained an instinctive awareness of the Good and the Evil instead.<sup>8</sup> While good deeds make people happy, evil deeds create a “bad conscience”.<sup>9</sup> At the same time, by the fall into sin, the human nature lost its ability to resist Evil and became quite prone to it. According to the Twelve Tribes, while conscience allows mankind to resist the forces of Evil, it does so only to some extent.

### Natural law

According to the Twelve Tribes’ teachings, in the world after the Fall of Man, the clear distinction between the Good and the Evil is called the *natural law*. This term refers to a series of laws that are natural for the world and therefore lead mankind to its nature; that is why the law is called *natural*. Alternately, the natural law is also called the eternal covenant; this covenant was established by God for the new (damaged) state of humanity.<sup>10</sup> The content of the natural law can be recognized both in God’s reaction to the Fall of Man<sup>11</sup> and in the covenant God later established with Noah.<sup>12</sup> Part of the natural law sentences the man to work hard do provide for his family, while the woman is supposed to bear children with painful effort.<sup>13</sup> According to the Twelve Tribes, the covenant with Noah broadens the natural law with the instruction to have a plenty of children, to refrain from eating blood and to punish the shedding of human blood with death penalty.<sup>14</sup>

The natural law is valid for all the nations founded by Noah’s descendants.<sup>15</sup> As long as they keep fulfilling the covenant, their societies remain healthy and protected from the decadence that dates from the times immediately before the Flood.<sup>16</sup> The Twelve

<sup>8</sup> “Adam and Eve – The Fall”, <http://question12tribes.com/tt-teachings/>. See also Genesis 3:22: “Then the LORD God said, Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil; and now, he might stretch out his hand, and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever.”

<sup>9</sup> “Maladies” (online), *twelvetribe.org*, 2015, accessed October 2016, available online at <http://twelvetribe.org>.

<sup>10</sup> “Back to the Garden”, <http://twelvetribe.org>.

<sup>11</sup> Genesis 3:16–19: To the woman he said, “I will make your pains in childbearing very severe; with painful labor you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.” To Adam he said, “Because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You must not eat from it,’ ‘Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.”

<sup>12</sup> Genesis 9:1–7.

<sup>13</sup> “Back to the Garden”, <http://twelvetribe.org>, p. 10.

<sup>14</sup> “Back to the Garden”, <http://twelvetribe.org>, p. 18.

<sup>15</sup> “Back to the Garden”, <http://twelvetribe.org>, p. 11.

<sup>16</sup> “Back to the Garden”, <http://twelvetribe.org>, p. 18.

Tribes illustrate this antediluvian disrespect of the natural law on the examples of the murder of Abel<sup>17</sup> or the building of the Tower of Babel.<sup>18</sup> At the same time, the movement insists the consequences of trespassing against the natural law have been apparent until now, in a global context. According to the movement's teachings, the first part of the natural law goes against states establishing unemployment benefits, since it is contrary to the principle of man's hard work, through which he maintains his family.<sup>19</sup> The same applies to childbirth – it is unacceptable to bear a child in a hospital since it may result in accepting an epidural anesthesia.<sup>20</sup> Consequences of Noah's covenant also lead the Twelve Tribes to conclude that those governments that shun the capital punishment of murder are acting against the natural law.<sup>21</sup> Generally, the movement considers the state of the world to be unsatisfactory and interprets the situation as the result of general disrespect of the natural law and ignorance of the innate conscience.<sup>22</sup> The opposite of life lead by the natural law is the life controlled by human righteousness.<sup>23</sup> This type of life is always rooted in Evil.

### **The first intent to re-create the ideal of the creation: Abraham's offspring and the decadence of Israel**

In the Twelve Tribes theology, the eternal covenant represents an obligation applicable to everyone (including the unbelievers). The members of the movement, on the other hand, relate more to a special covenant meant for God's people. This is due to the idea that while the natural law keeps the world more or less in balance between the Good and the Evil, it is not an adequate tool to eradicate the Evil completely. The teachings insist that even after the Fall of Man, God kept in mind his original closeness with humans. He thus called Abram (Abraham) and through him he begun a radical reinstating of the world and man's purpose. For this reason, the core binding "document" for the movement's members is God's covenant with Abraham.<sup>24</sup> This agreement establishes a chosen people set apart for God's service.<sup>25</sup> Biblically said, while the obligation to live according to the natural law binds the nations, the covenant with Abraham binds the Chosen People.<sup>26</sup> On the other hand, this does not

<sup>17</sup> Genesis 4:8.

<sup>18</sup> Genesis 11:3–9.

<sup>19</sup> "Instinctive Knowledge and Second Covenant" (online), *question12tribes.com*, 1995, accessed September 2016, available online at <http://question12tribes.com/tt-teachings/>.

<sup>20</sup> "Instinctive Knowledge and Second Covenant", <http://question12tribes.com/tt-teachings/>.

<sup>21</sup> "Instinctive Knowledge and Second Covenant", <http://question12tribes.com/tt-teachings/>.

<sup>22</sup> "Earth: The Final Century" (online), *twelvetribes.org*, accessed May 2017, available online at <http://twelvetribes.org>.

<sup>23</sup> Based on this type of thinking, the Twelve Tribes criticize, among others, the idea of human rights.

<sup>24</sup> Genesis 15.

<sup>25</sup> "Israel: The Seed of Abraham" (online), *twelvetribes.org*, 2015, accessed November 2016, available online at <http://twelvetribes.org>.

<sup>26</sup> "Instinctive Knowledge and Second Covenant", <http://question12tribes.com/tt-teachings/>.

mean Abraham's covenant is in any conflict with the eternal covenant. For God's people, acting in accordance with the natural law should be a matter of course. At the same time, the special covenant creates special obligations for the Chosen People, since it requires a return to the original purpose of man and reinstates a personal relationship with God.

In the Twelve Tribes movement, Abraham enjoys special respect and popularity. The teachings emphasize the care with which Abraham provided for his family as a father<sup>27</sup> and appreciate the stress the first generations of his offspring put on spreading the gospel of God's righteousness and justice in raising their children.<sup>28</sup> For the Twelve tribes, this interest in children is extremely typical. Even though the core motivation for child training can be found in the eschatological perspective, the movement finds its original inspiration in the Abraham cycle. All the context of Abraham's life as well as the meaning of the name Abraham ("the father of many") suggests the supreme importance of plentiful offspring.<sup>29</sup>

According to the Twelve Tribes, the people that follow Abraham's special covenant (e.g. the Chosen People) are supposed to be a living proof of God's righteousness in the world.<sup>30</sup> Abraham's offspring declared this specific calling of God's people by means of circumcision and through different annual feasts in God's honor.<sup>31</sup> According to the movement, the success of God's people manifests in the ability to keep the seventh day holy; that is, to celebrate the Sabbath.<sup>32</sup> The movement insists that the duty to observe the Sabbath is the most important of the Ten Commandments.<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless according to the Twelve Tribes, only four generations were actually able to fulfill the terms of Abraham's covenant. In all of the Hebrew Bible, only Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Jacob's sons, who created the twelve tribes of Israel, are supposed to be the true representatives of God's Chosen People.

Based on the rest of the Old Testament's texts, the Twelve Tribes insist that the later people of Israel have forsaken the ideal and ceased to be a nation set apart for God. According to the movement, the decadence of the Chosen People is caused by the process in which Israel started to adopt other nations' moral values<sup>34</sup> and failed to perform its role of people set apart for God's service.<sup>35</sup> The Twelve Tribes interpret the corruption of the Chosen People as an inability to resist external pressures of the nations, practical examples of this process being idolatry or increasing social injus-

<sup>27</sup> "Suspended Animation" (online), *twelvetribe.org*, 2016, accessed November 2016, available online at <http://twelvetribe.org>.

<sup>28</sup> "Restoring the Ancient Way of Genesis 18:19" (online), *twelvetribe.org*, 2016, accessed November 2016, available online at <http://twelvetribe.org>.

<sup>29</sup> "Faith of Abraham" (online), *twelvetribe.org*, 2015, accessed October 2016, available online at <http://twelvetribe.org>.

<sup>30</sup> "Israel: The Seed of Abraham", <http://twelvetribe.org>.

<sup>31</sup> "Israel: The Seed of Abraham", <http://twelvetribe.org>.

<sup>32</sup> "Sabbath – the Signifier" (online), *question12tribes.com*, 1995, accessed October 2016, available online at <http://question12tribes.com/tt-teachings/>.

<sup>33</sup> "Sabbath – the Signifier", <http://question12tribes.com/tt-teachings/>.

<sup>34</sup> "Israel: The Seed of Abraham", <http://twelvetribe.org>.

<sup>35</sup> "Suspended Animation", <http://twelvetribe.org>.

tice.<sup>36</sup> The journey of Israel from Egypt to the Promised Land is filled with cases of the loss of identity of God's people. And finally, a marked symbolic proof of a failure to uphold the ideal of God's people is the Law that Moses brought to Israel.<sup>37</sup> According to the teachings, the stone slabs inscribed with the Law are a concrete proof of the fact that Abraham's offspring abandoned its original good deeds. While Abraham's children still had the Law in their hearts (and therefore automatically acted according to God's righteousness), in case of the obstinate Israel it had to be inscribed in stone and brought by Moses.<sup>38</sup> According to the Twelve Tribes, the Law generally corresponds to the actual life of Abraham's children; nevertheless, Abraham himself already followed the Law four hundred years before it was established on Sinai.<sup>39</sup> That means that for the members of the movement, not only the content of the covenant is important, but also the inner motivation with which it is kept. This is also the reason why the Twelve Tribes put so much stress on Abraham's acts, despite of the superficial similarities in the behavior of Israel. At the same time, the movement maintains a spiritual distance from Jewish religion, which was created from the original faith of Abraham.<sup>40</sup> The community of the Synagogue ceased to fulfill the function of the Chosen People – they started to focus on ritual practice and Scripture reading instead of life of faith. And ultimately, Israel's status as God's people finally ended when, during the Exile, the unified twelve tribes finally dissolved.<sup>41</sup> In the movement's theology, the tribes represent the true nature of Israel: therefore, God's Chosen People cannot abide without them.<sup>42</sup> Another visible sign of corruption is the inability of later generations of the Israeli to celebrate Shabbat properly.<sup>43</sup>

## Yahshua, the New Adam – new conditions of restoration

According to the Twelve Tribes, the New Testament confirms there was another attempt to restore the original creation – in this case, the God's people were represented by the Early Church. Nevertheless, due to the failure of Israel, the “process of restoration” was changed and in the New Testament, the core protagonist of the restoration was Jesus the Son of God. Only instead of “Jesus”, the Twelve Tribes call him “Yahshua”, an allegedly original Hebrew form of the Greek name Iésus.<sup>44</sup> This is

<sup>36</sup> “Suspended Animation”, <http://twelvetribes.org>.

<sup>37</sup> “Chosen to Walk Like Abraham” (online), *question12tribes.com*, 1992, accessed October 2016, available online at <http://question12tribes.com/tt-teachings/>.

<sup>38</sup> “Chosen to Walk Like Abraham”, <http://question12tribes.com/tt-teachings/>.

<sup>39</sup> “Chosen to Walk Like Abraham”, <http://question12tribes.com/tt-teachings/>.

<sup>40</sup> This information is based on the Author's interview with a Twelve Tribes male community elder. Anonym C, Mšecké Žehrovice, 18. 12. 2015.

<sup>41</sup> “Natural Israel” (online), *question12tribes.com*, 1992, accessed October 2016, available online at <http://question12tribes.com/tt-teachings/>.

<sup>42</sup> “Natural Israel”, <http://question12tribes.com/tt-teachings/>.

<sup>43</sup> “Sabbath – the Signifier”, <http://question12tribes.com/tt-teachings/>.

<sup>44</sup> “The Name Above All Names” (online), *twelvetribes.org*, 2016, accessed November 2016, available online at <http://twelvetribes.org>.

based on the idea that since Jesus was a Jew and since the Jews spoke Hebrew, it was the name “Yahshua” that Archangel Gabriel brought to Mary.<sup>45</sup> The Twelve Tribes attach great importance to the Hebrew name’s significance – as the movement often insists, *Yah-shua* means “the God’s Salvation”.<sup>46</sup>

For the community, Yahshua represents the perfect man, who matches God’s original concept of creation.<sup>47</sup> Moreover, he has the privilege to bring his followers to this original perfection. According to the movement, Yahshua was born as a human child that was devoid of the fallen creation’s sins.<sup>48</sup> In the same sense, the Twelve Tribes explore St. Paul’s thought from The First Epistle to the Corinthians.<sup>49</sup> Here the Apostle calls Yahshua “the second Adam” or “the last Adam”.<sup>50</sup> Both the first Adam and Yahshua (the second Adam) had a common state of origin – neither was burdened by sin. Nevertheless, in the Twelve Tribes’ interpretation, Yahshua surpassed Adam because he never left God’s presence and never disobeyed him.<sup>51</sup> By calling him “the last Adam”, the movement expresses its belief that after Yahshua, no similar man will ever be born.<sup>52</sup>

The Twelve Tribes consider Yahshua’s death on the cross and his resurrection to be the core moment of his life.<sup>53</sup> The movement understands Yahshua’s death as the supreme sacrifice,<sup>54</sup> which has power to bring mankind closer to God.<sup>55</sup> In order to reach a better understanding of the place that Yahshua’s death holds in the movement’s theology, we need to recall that human death is considered to be a negative attribute of the Fall of Man; death itself is understood as a kind of payment for the corrupted state of mankind. Every person must pay for the original sin by his or her death; in the eternity, it is the only way we can become spiritual beings again. In the

<sup>45</sup> “The Name Above All Names”, <http://twelvetribes.org>.

<sup>46</sup> “The Name Above All Names”, <http://twelvetribes.org>.

<sup>47</sup> The stress on Yahshua’s true humanity leads to the question to which extent (or if at all) the Twelve Tribes consider Yahshua to be God. It seems that in the movement’s theology, no emphasis is put on Jesus’ divinity and if we consider the exceptional and central status of God the Creator, it may not even be compatible with the movement’s teachings. This is further confirmed by the words of one of the community members spoken during the meeting of the Twelve Tribes with the public in 2004 in Nelson, Canada. The person said in front of witnesses he does not consider Yahshua to be God. For a report of the meeting see “The Twelve Tribes: Who are They?” (online), *MM outreach*, 2004, accessed November 2016, available online at [http://mmoutreachinc.com/cult\\_groups/12tribes.html](http://mmoutreachinc.com/cult_groups/12tribes.html).

<sup>48</sup> “The Unshakable Certainty” (online), *twelvetribes.org*, 2012, accessed November 2016, available online at <http://twelvetribes.org>.

<sup>49</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:45.

<sup>50</sup> “A Suitable Helper” (online), *twelvetribes.org*, 2015, accessed November 2016, available online at <http://twelvetribes.org>.

<sup>51</sup> “The Three Eternal Destinies: Adam and Messiah” (online), *question12tribes.com*, 1998, accessed October 2016, available online at <http://question12tribes.com/tt-teachings/>.

<sup>52</sup> “The Purpose of Creation & Redemption”, (online), *twelvetribes.org*, 2016, accessed September 2016, available online at <http://twelvetribes.org>, p. 22.

<sup>53</sup> “The Purpose of Creation & Redemption”, <http://twelvetribes.org>, p. 4.

<sup>54</sup> In the movement’s theology, Abraham’s sacrifice of Isaac is understood as an analogy to the sacrifice of the Son of God.

<sup>55</sup> “The Gospel of the Cross” (online), *twelvetribes.org*, 2016, accessed May 2017, available online at <http://twelvetribes.org>.

perspective of these beliefs, the movement understands Yahshua's death as God's substitute payment for the human nature corrupted by sin.<sup>56</sup> By Yahshua's death, which paid a price for the whole of mankind, God actually gave human beings a gift. Yahshua's death represents God's will for reconciliation that leads to the successful restoration of mankind. The death of the Son of God is literally understood as a "ransom".<sup>57</sup> All those who claim Yahshua's sacrifice and imitate him by living a life of servanthood to God will be redeemed; by following Yahshua's example, his disciples can break free from sin and return to God's proximity, which was enjoyed by Adam before the fall.<sup>58</sup> The ability to abandon the corrupted state of mankind is brought about by offering of one's life to God every day.<sup>59</sup>

In the context of the coming of Yahshua, the movement operates with the idea of the return of the covenant "into the heart", connecting it symbolically to its opposite, the covenant (the Law) inscribed on the stone slabs.<sup>60</sup> Those that follow the God's covenant (in his Spirit) by accepting Yahshua as the Messiah fulfill the requirements of the covenant: in the perspective of the Old Testament, these consist of service to God. By its service, God's people reflect God's righteousness. In the terms of the New Testament, this is parallel to a life lived according to God's righteousness, following the principles of the Kingdom of God. According to the Twelve Tribes, this type of life is the program of Yahshua's teachings<sup>61</sup> that coincides with the application of God's righteousness in the world. Yahshua was constantly explaining the principles of the Kingdom of God to his followers, both by his sermons and his own example. Moreover, after the Ascension he instructed them to proclaim that the Kingdom of God will arrive within this age.<sup>62</sup> Nevertheless, the Kingdom will have its major say in the following era. The Kingdom of God on Earth as represented by God's people today only heralds or reveals the upcoming state of the world that will take place in the following age.

## **Second intent to restore the original state – the Early Church and its corruption**

For the Twelve Tribes, the second example of God's faithful people is the Early Church as described by the Acts of the Apostles. The members of the Early Church

<sup>56</sup> "The Purpose of Creation & Redemption", <http://twelvetribe.org>, p. 7.

<sup>57</sup> "Redemption" (online), *question12tribes.com*, 1995, accessed October 2016, available online at <http://question12tribes.com/tt-teachings/>.

<sup>58</sup> "The Gospel of the Cross", <http://twelvetribe.org>.

<sup>59</sup> "The Gospel of the Cross", <http://twelvetribe.org>.

<sup>60</sup> "Re-establishment the Covenant" (online), *question12tribes.com*, 1992, accessed October 2016, available online at <http://question12tribes.com/tt-teachings/>. See also the analogical comparison of Abraham's and Moises' covenants.

<sup>61</sup> "Where Did the Gospel Come From?" (online), *twelvetribe.org*, 2016, accessed August 2016, available online at <http://twelvetribe.org>.

<sup>62</sup> "The Black Box" (online), *twelvetribe.org*, 2016, accessed March 2017, available online at <http://twelvetribe.org>.

accepted Yahshua as the Lord, renewed the covenant in their hearts and became the witnesses of the Kingdom of God on Earth – in other words, they became the new bearers of the title of God’s people (thus turning into a spiritual Israel). Due to the fact that the Church emerged immediately after Yahshua’s Ascension and thanks to the Book of Acts, which captured the way the Holy Spirit affected the Early Church, the Twelve Tribes consider Luke’s image of the Early Church to be the only model of God’s people that it is at the moment possible to imitate.<sup>63</sup> The movement insists that the core feature of the Early Church, inspired by the respect to Abraham’s offspring, was the renewal of the tribal organization. This fact affirmed by the Old Testament is further confirmed by Acts 26:7 – therefore, the new formation of the tribes is a necessary part of restoration of God’s people.<sup>64</sup>

According to the Twelve Tribes, the triumph of this first community was only possible through the influence of the Holy Spirit, which acted as an intermediary between the people and God’s will and continued Yahshua’s work on Earth. Another important reason why the community was so successful is the direct personal instruction Yahshua gave to its founders, his disciples.<sup>65</sup> People, changed by the power of the Holy Spirit,<sup>66</sup> followed the Apostles, who in turn were authorized by Yahshua to “teach them to obey everything I have commanded you”.<sup>67</sup> To the Twelve Tribes, the apostolic teaching based on the second chapter of the Acts of the Apostles became one of the four pillars of the Church.<sup>68</sup> The other pillars are communal life (*koinónia* in Greek), the breaking of bread, and prayers.<sup>69</sup> According to the movement, a *koinónia* takes place if the believers partake in three following things – participation, contribution and distribution.<sup>70</sup> Participation means an active presence in communal life upon every occasion. According to the Twelve Tribes, a member of the community is supposed to contribute to the success of these events both by personal endeavor and by sharing material means and personal efforts.<sup>71</sup> These three requirements are the core conditions that need to be met to produce the “fruit” of Yahshua’s following.<sup>72</sup> According to the Twelve Tribes, Yahshua’s call for unity is fulfilled by communal devotion.<sup>73</sup> The third pillar, the breaking of bread, is not understood as syn-

<sup>63</sup> “The Gospel of the Cross”, <http://twelvetribes.org>. “Why We Live in Communities”, (online), *question12tribes.com*, 1995, accessed October 2016, available online at <http://question12tribes.com/tt-teachings/>.

<sup>64</sup> “Why Twelve Tribes” (online), *twelvetribes.org*, 2015, accessed November 2016, available online at <http://twelvetribes.org>.

<sup>65</sup> “Abraham’s descendants” (online), *question12tribes.com*, 1992, accessed October 2016, available online at <http://question12tribes.com/tt-teachings/>.

<sup>66</sup> “Abraham’s descendants”, <http://question12tribes.com/tt-teachings/>.

<sup>67</sup> This is an interpretation of Matthew 28:20 according to “Apostle’s Teachings Acts 2:42” (online), *question12tribes.com*, 1995, accessed October 2016, available online at <http://question12tribes.com/tt-teachings/>.

<sup>68</sup> Acts 2:42.

<sup>69</sup> “The Purpose of Creation & Redemption”, <http://twelvetribes.org>, p. 10.

<sup>70</sup> “Apostle’s Teaching Acts 2:42”, <http://question12tribes.com/tt-teachings/>.

<sup>71</sup> “Apostle’s Teaching Acts 2:42”, <http://question12tribes.com/tt-teachings/>.

<sup>72</sup> “Apostle’s Teaching Acts 2:42”, <http://question12tribes.com/tt-teachings/>.

<sup>73</sup> John 17:20–23.

onymous with the Eucharist – instead, it denotes a wider concept that incorporates the Eucharist as well as the week-long preparation that precedes the ceremony. This preparation also includes confession of sins and thanksgiving.<sup>74</sup> Prayers, the last of the four pillars, applies both to individual prayers and communal prayers that take place during gatherings.<sup>75</sup>

Other frequently quoted verses of the Acts are those that mention communal property.<sup>76</sup> For the Twelve Tribes, the second and third chapter of the Acts that deal with sharing communal life and collective property express a necessary aspect of the God's people's life. Luke's description of the communal life of the first followers of Christ is understood as an imperative. According to the Twelve Tribes, joint property and communal life are necessary conditions for the fulfillment of Yahshua's will. The Kingdom of God exists only in those communities that share material goods so that nobody lacks anything. Holy Spirit provides the strength that the newly christened need to leave their former lives (including leaving their property) and embrace a communal life.<sup>77</sup>

Nevertheless, the Twelve Tribes insist that, just as with Abraham's offspring, the Early Church's active efforts to fulfill the conditions of God's Kingdom lasted only four generations. According to the movement, the cause of the corruption was the change of the Early Church into a synagogue.<sup>78</sup> By changing its liturgical life, the Early Church abandoned its communal character and its connection to the Holy Spirit vanished.<sup>79</sup> Consequently, they lost the ability to resist Evil. According to the Twelve Tribes' teachings, if a man tries to fight the forces of Evil without the necessary help of the Holy Spirit, he is in grave danger: the evil forces disappear, leaving an empty space behind, and if the Holy Spirit does not fill it, new and more powerful evil forces come to reside there.<sup>80</sup> Thus when the Early Church lost its connection to the Holy Spirit, it was populated with forces of Evil; according to the Twelve Tribes, this became one of the most important reasons for its fall.<sup>81</sup> An alternative explanation of its corruption is also the emergence of Christianity:<sup>82</sup> just as in Israel's case, it was the abandoning of Sabbath celebration that became the most tangible manifestation of the Church's corruption.<sup>83</sup>

<sup>74</sup> "The Purpose of Creation & Redemption", <http://twelvetribes.org>, p. 10.

<sup>75</sup> "The Purpose of Creation & Redemption", <http://twelvetribes.org>, p. 10.

<sup>76</sup> Acts 2:44; 4:32. Since these two verses are considered to be the core pillars of the Twelve Tribes community life, they are included in the short description of the communities in the movement's printed materials.

<sup>77</sup> "Community at the Crossroads" (online), *twelvetribes.org*, 2015, accessed in April 2017, available online at <http://twelvetribes.org>.

<sup>78</sup> "The Anatomy of the Fall of the First Church" (online), *question12tribes.com*, 1995, accessed October 2016, available online at <http://question12tribes.com/tt-teachings/>.

<sup>79</sup> "The Anatomy of the Fall of the First Church", <http://question12tribes.com/tt-teachings/>.

<sup>80</sup> "The Anatomy of the Fall of the First Church", <http://question12tribes.com/tt-teachings/>.

<sup>81</sup> "The Anatomy of the Fall of the First Church", <http://question12tribes.com/tt-teachings/>.

<sup>82</sup> "The Fall of The First Church" (online), *question12tribes.com*, accessed November 2016, available online at <http://question12tribes.com/tt-teachings/>.

<sup>83</sup> "Restoration of the Sabbath" (online), *question12tribes.com*, 1995, accessed November 2016, available online at <http://question12tribes.com/tt-teachings/>.

### Third intent to restore the original state – the Twelve Tribes movement

In their religious practice, the Twelve Tribes are inspired both by the life of Abraham's offspring and by the Early Church as described in the Acts of the Apostles. Both these models represent the model life of God's people established by God. At the same time, the movement also insists that unlike Abraham's offspring and the Early Church, the Twelve Tribes will be successful in fulfilling God's intent to restore the original state of the creation.<sup>84</sup> In the effort to avoid its predecessor's mistakes, the movement puts great stress on isolated community life and rigorous child training.

The Twelve Tribes movement uses two titles for itself – the first is the Hebrew term *Edah*, the second is the *Body* (that is, the body of the Savior or of Yahshua). The latter has its origins in the New Testament's image of the Church as a body, while the former, inspired by the Book of Jeremiah, expresses the Hebrew background of the movement.<sup>85</sup> While the Old Testament Hebrew Lexicon translates *edah* as "congregation" or "gathering", the Twelve Tribes base their interpretation on the root *ed*, which means "witness".<sup>86</sup> For the movement, the term *Edah* thus represents a reminder that they are the witnesses of the Kingdom of God. Another less frequent meaning of the word *edah* is "beehive"; the Twelve Tribes use it as a metaphor for their communal life, in which, just as in the beehive, all the members unselfishly serve a common goal.<sup>87</sup> The concept of the "Body" (of the Savior) reminds the movement of the Early Church's heritage. Thanks to following Yahshua's example and to the power of the Holy Spirit, members of the Twelve Tribes are spiritually incorporated in the Messiah.<sup>88</sup> And according to the movement, after Yahshua's Ascension his followers in the Early Church became his real resurrected body on Earth.<sup>89</sup> The term also expresses the exclusive gifts of the Holy Spirit that the movement believes to receive. The Holy Spirit, which formerly dwelled in Yahshua's mortal form, resides today only in his Body.<sup>90</sup>

We should therefore understand the isolated community life of the *Edah/Body* specifically as a life that is exclusively reserved for God and, as such, it fulfills the duty of the Chosen People. Yes, the recommended limited contact with the surrounding world is also motivated by the desire to live outside of the realm where the powers of Evil reign. But at the same time, the movement insists that striving for a greater

<sup>84</sup> "The Voice From Outside the Camp of Organized Religion: Last Day" (online), *twelvetribe.org*, 2007, accessed November 2016, available online at <http://twelvetribe.org>.

<sup>85</sup> Jeremiah 30:20. "Their children also shall be as aforesaid, and their congregation shall be established before me, and I will punish all that oppress them."

<sup>86</sup> "Ed Meets Edah" (online), *twelvetribe.org*, 2012, accessed January 2017, available online at <http://twelvetribe.org>.

<sup>87</sup> "The Purpose of Creation & Redemption", <http://twelvetribe.org>, p. 44.

<sup>88</sup> "Incorporated in Messiah" (online), *question12tribes.com*, 1995, accessed November 2016, available online at <http://question12tribes.com/tt-teachings/>.

<sup>89</sup> "Nightfall" (online), *twelvetribe.org*, 2016, accessed February 2017, available online at <http://twelvetribe.org>.

<sup>90</sup> "Nightfall", <http://twelvetribe.org>.

closeness to God and proper service to Him greatly surpasses the importance to keep a distance from Satan. An important similarity with Abraham's offspring is also the stress on family and children. The Twelve Tribes understand the traditional model of family as fulfillment of a command that God issued after the creation of man and woman.<sup>91</sup> Consequently, the communities comprise mostly of families living together. At the same time, the communities are geographically divided into tribes.<sup>92</sup> Since the interpretation both of Abraham's era and the Early Church period stresses the importance of tribal organization, it is hardly surprising that tribal structure has become the key element both for the theology and the practice of the Twelve Tribes (even the name of the movement itself recalls the twelve tribes of Israel). In the Bible, tribal organization is emphasized in Isaiah's prophecy of restoration of the tribes of Jacob<sup>93</sup>, as well as in Paul's testimony to Agrippa in the Acts of the Apostles.<sup>94</sup>

For the Twelve Tribes, communitarian life (or participation on the Messiah's Body) is a challenge to transform their life into everyday sacrifice.<sup>95</sup> The demand to follow Yahshua unconditionally is called the "Gospel of the Cross":<sup>96</sup> in practice, this means that Yahshua's followers should repeat his sacrifice by means of surrendering everything that makes them distant from God. The followers are supposed to give up all earthly possessions and aspirations and fully embrace a life dedicated to God's Kingdom.<sup>97</sup> Following the Early Church's example, the movement especially emphasizes communal property: its members have no personal finances. The image of Yahshua's Body and Edah fits well the collective spirit of the community, in which every member serves the needs of the whole organism, most notably its head (that is, Yahshua himself).<sup>98</sup> An individual's sacrifice must also contain the spiritual sacrifice of his or her ego (which is the substance of the fallen creation) – this enables the person to return to God's proximity and leave his or her sins behind.<sup>99</sup> The Twelve Tribes view the human ego both as a bearer of false motivations and a fertile ground for the forces of Evil; it gathers imperfections from the spiritual struggle, as well as the imperfections we were born with or which we received from our education. The sum of all human imperfections (not only sin as such, but also each and every grievance

<sup>91</sup> Genesis 1:28a. "And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it."

<sup>92</sup> There are four tribes in the U.S. (Manasseh, Judah, Joseph and Benjamin) and four in Europe: France (Reuben), Spain (Simeon), Great Britain (Zebulon), and a former German community that now resides in the Czech Republic (Levi). Two are in the Latin America in Brazil (Naphtali) and Argentina (Issachar), one is in Australia (Asher) and one in Canada (Gad). SUSAN J. PALMER, "The Twelve Tribes: Preparing the Bride for Yahshua's Return", *Nova Religio* 13 (3/2010), p. 75.

<sup>93</sup> Isaiah 49:6.

<sup>94</sup> Acts 26:7. "And now I stand on trial because of my hope in the promise that God made to our fathers, the promise our twelve tribes are hoping to realize as they earnestly serve God day and night. It is because of this hope, O king, that I am accused by the Jews."

<sup>95</sup> "The Gospel of the Cross", <http://twelvetribes.org>.

<sup>96</sup> "The Gospel of the Cross", <http://twelvetribes.org>.

<sup>97</sup> "The Gospel of the Cross", <http://twelvetribes.org>.

<sup>98</sup> Ephesians 5:23: "For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body."

<sup>99</sup> An interview by the Author with a married couple, Mšecké Žehrovice 8. 5. 2016.

or act of selfishness) is called *iniquities*<sup>100</sup> – and breaking out of this burden, whether inherited or caused by one's own mistakes, is only possible through the community and by means of Yahshua's redemption.<sup>101</sup> An individual's spiritual path consists of prayers, an effort to act righteously and, most notably, active participation in communal life.<sup>102</sup> Members of the Twelve Tribes believe that thanks to the exclusive influence of the Holy Spirit, their movement is the sole way to suppress the destructive human ego. In the community, the individual reaches his or her spiritual perfection through public confession of sins (that takes place during gatherings) or through a correction administered by one of the community elders.<sup>103</sup>

Naturally, celebration of the Sabbath occupies an important place in the community life of the Twelve Tribes. For the movement, the ability to keep this feast is a confirmation of their status as God's people. During the seventh day, the community members quit working and rest, having prepared their meals beforehand. At the same time they insist that unlike the Jews, they have no specific list of allowed or forbidden activities.<sup>104</sup> Since appropriate celebration is rooted in spiritual readiness, the seventh day begins by a correct understanding of the rest day "in the believer's heart". On the Sabbath evening, the community serves a special meal that is considered to be the apex of the week.<sup>105</sup> The Twelve Tribes combine the celebration of the Sabbath with a Eucharistic dinner that expresses their unity with the Early Church.<sup>106</sup> This dinner is celebrated after Sabbath, that is, on Saturday evening (which is considered to be the beginning of the new week), and acts as a reminder of Lord Yahshua's Resurrection.<sup>107</sup> Before the breaking of the bread (as the Twelve Tribes call the Eucharist), all the community members confess their sins committed during their spiritual battles of the last week.<sup>108</sup> The confession is also the first part of the celebration, the so-called Victory Cup. Here, the Gospel of Luke serves as the biblical basis for this practice.<sup>109</sup> Only those that successfully resisted sin during the previous week are allowed to drink from the Victory Cup<sup>110</sup> – both baptized community members and unbaptized children can participate, the only requirement being success in the spiritual struggle.<sup>111</sup> If a person's spiritual fight is considered to be unsuccessful, he or she cannot drink from the Cup. After the drinking, the breaking of the bread takes place. During it, a second Cup is shared by the community members and this time all the baptized members can drink from it, including those who were not allowed to taste the first one. The

<sup>100</sup> An interview by the Author with a married couple, Mšecké Žehrovice 8. 5. 2016.

<sup>101</sup> The application of Yahshua's sacrifice as a redemption from the sinful substance as such is, in this case, virtually limited on partial manifestations of sin.

<sup>102</sup> This applies to all three aspects of koinónia – participation, contribution, and distribution.

<sup>103</sup> An interview by the Author with a young woman, Mšecké Žehrovice 8. 5. 2016.

<sup>104</sup> An interview by the Author with a male community elder, Mšecké Žehrovice, 18. 12. 2015.

<sup>105</sup> An interview by the Author with a male community elder, Mšecké Žehrovice, 18. 12. 2015.

<sup>106</sup> An interview by the Author with a married couple, Mšecké Žehrovice 8. 5. 2016.

<sup>107</sup> PALMER, "The Twelve Tribes", p. 71.

<sup>108</sup> An interview by the Author with a married couple, Anonym A, Mšecké Žehrovice 8. 5. 2016.

<sup>109</sup> Luke 22:17–20.

<sup>110</sup> An interview by the Author with a young woman, Mšecké Žehrovice 8. 5. 2016

<sup>111</sup> An interview by the Author with a young woman, Mšecké Žehrovice 8. 5. 2016.

breaking of bread ceremony has the format of a dinner and only permanent members of the community can participate. The combination of the Sabbath celebration and a variation of the Eucharist is one of the examples of how the movement's practices are connected to its beliefs that reflect the Twelve Tribes' self-understanding as the rightful heirs of the Chosen People.

## The Twelve Tribes' eschatology

The most concentrated expression of Twelve Tribes' conviction that they represent God's true people (the spiritual Israel) can be found in their eschatological expectations. The strong eschatological orientation arises from the movement's self-interpretation as the basic condition of the transformation of the times.<sup>112</sup> During this transformation, the age corrupted by Evil would change and revert back to God's original intention for the creation. The Twelve Tribes' core eschatological concept is the abovementioned world of the fallen creation that has been ruled by the forces of Evil ever since the Fall of Man. In this world, God's people live in isolation, resisting the Evil through its participation on the restored creation of the Kingdom of God. The movement's eschatology is steeped with criticism towards the acts of the offspring of Israel (or the "natural Israel"), as opposed to the true, spiritual Israel, which is represented by the movement itself. The movement understands itself as a new God's people, which has to take the role of the original (natural) Israel by producing the fruit of the Kingdom of God in its stead.<sup>113</sup>

The Twelve Tribes understand the present times as the last segment of this era's history.<sup>114</sup> This idea is based on the biblical prophecies about the End Time, which, according to the Twelve Tribes, are being slowly fulfilled.<sup>115</sup> One of the main arguments the Twelve Tribes use to support their idea of the approaching end of the contemporary era is an interpretation of the Book of Isaiah. The movement sees the current state of society as the fulfillment of the prophet's words about a confusion of the Good and the Evil,<sup>116</sup> which is a sign of the End Time.<sup>117</sup> The reason for the reversal of traditional values is the fact that society has broken away from the natural law.<sup>118</sup> Although in the history of the fallen creation the law has never been followed fully, at least its main features were considered essential. Man was supposed to bring food to

<sup>112</sup> An interview by the Author with a married couple, Mšecké Žehrovice 8. 5. 2016.

<sup>113</sup> "The Three Eternal Destinies #105 My People Israel, the Holy" (online), *question12tribes.com*, 1997, accessed November 2016, available online at <http://question12tribes.com/tt-teachings/>.

<sup>114</sup> "Earth: Final Century", <http://twelvetribes.org>.

<sup>115</sup> For the entire list of the prophecies see "The Voice From Outside the Camp of Organized Religion: Last Day" (online), *twelvetribes.org*, accessed November 2016, available online at <http://twelvetribes.org>.

<sup>116</sup> Isaiah 5:20: "Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!"

<sup>117</sup> "The Voice From Outside the Camp of Organized Religion: Last Day", <http://twelvetribes.org>, p. 13.

<sup>118</sup> "Earth: Final Century", <http://twelvetribes.org>.

his family, holding the position of an unquestionable authority; woman was supposed to respect her husband and bear him children with painful effort. Even though people occasionally resisted this natural law, social pressure helped to maintain it. However, contemporary phenomena such as changes in the male and female social role, liberal upbringing of children, the welfare system, and progress in modern medicine led to the values which the contemporary society praises being in direct contrast with the natural law.<sup>119</sup> The Twelve Tribes specifically speak about secular humanism – they considered it to be the enemy of the natural law<sup>120</sup> and see it as the reason why the Good is not respected as the Good but shunned as the Evil.<sup>121</sup> Another sign of the coming End Time is the state of the Earth's nature. An interesting moment in the apocalyptic interpretation of the contemporary world is the interpretation of the Book of Revelation, specifically of those verses that mention the Sun scorching men with fire.<sup>122</sup> The Twelve Tribes see this as a warning against global warming.<sup>123</sup>

In an eschatological context, while the movement identifies with Isaiah's twelve tribes of Jacob's offspring,<sup>124</sup> it also sees itself as the kingdom of stone mentioned in the Book of Daniel.<sup>125</sup> At the same time, it speaks about itself as the witness of the Kingdom of God mentioned by Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew.<sup>126</sup> All these biblical terms express the eschatological context of the movement's identity and the Twelve Tribes use them interchangeably. The most frequently used biblical motif is the identification of the movement with the Bride meant for the Groom, which must undergo a purification process in order to call Yahshua back to earth and start the End Time events.<sup>127</sup>

### **The restoration of all things and the eschatological dimension of parenting**

The sings of the End Time are both a warning for mankind to return to the natural law and (most importantly) a sign for the God's people to fulfill its role in the apocalyptic events. The goal of the God's people is to take steps to ensure the triumph of

<sup>119</sup> "The Voice From Outside the Camp of Organized Religion: Last Day", <http://twelvetribe.org>, p. 13.

<sup>120</sup> "What Was Normal Has Become Perverted" (online), *question12tribes.com*, accessed November 2016, available online at <http://question12tribes.com/tt-teachings/>.

<sup>121</sup> "What Was Normal Has Become Perverted", <http://question12tribes.com/tt-teachings/>.

<sup>122</sup> Revelation 16:8ff.

<sup>123</sup> "The Voice From Outside the Camp of Organized Religion: Last Day", <http://twelvetribe.org>, p. 13.

<sup>124</sup> Isaiah 49:6: "It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth."

<sup>125</sup> Daniel 2:35, 44 and 45. See also the interpretation of Daniel's prophecy in the rest of the chapter.

<sup>126</sup> Matthew 24:14: "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come." "The Voice From Outside the Camp of Organized Religion: Last Day", <http://twelvetribe.org>, p. 27.

<sup>127</sup> According to the Gospel of John. See also PALMER, "The Twelve Tribes", p. 75; "The Voice From Outside the Camp of Organized Religion: Last Day", <http://twelvetribe.org>, p. 27.

the Kingdom of God on earth.<sup>128</sup> From the eschatological point of view, this goal is termed “restoration of all things”. The basis for this is the third chapter of the Acts of the Apostles<sup>129</sup> – the Twelve Tribes insist that according to this text, the Second Coming (and therefore also the definitive end of our times) will only take place after the restoration of all things.<sup>130</sup> For the movement, this means that the main condition under which the End Time can come is its own activity; this idea is also based on the Gospel of Matthew.<sup>131</sup> Before the Apocalypse comes, people from outside of the community will receive God’s will through the God’s people.<sup>132</sup> In other words: even now, long before the full restoration of the creation, God’s people must put restoration at work in their community.

In the eschatological context, a symbolical expression of God’s people’s restoration is the image of God’s people as a Woman or Bride, who expects the coming of the Groom (Yahshua) and prepares herself for him.<sup>133</sup> The Twelve Tribes find support for this interpretation in the twelfth chapter of the Book of Revelation, which tells of “a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head”.<sup>134</sup> The movement insists the twelve stars symbolize the Twelve Tribes.<sup>135</sup> Yahshua the Messiah will not return until an “spotless Bride” is prepared for him.<sup>136</sup> The reason for Yahshua’s waiting is a logical consequence of the idea that God’s people must be cleansed from their sins lest Yahshua should destroy them: according to the Twelve Tribes, during his second coming Yahshua will triumph over the forces of Evil and those include the God’s people, as long as they are overcome with them. But since Yahshua cares for the God’s people, he will not come back until they are fully cleansed.<sup>137</sup>

In the movement’s religious practice, the image of the Messiah coming for his pure people is well illustrated by the ritual of marriage. The ceremony takes the form of an enactment, in which the groom symbolizes the coming Messiah and the bride repre-

<sup>128</sup> “The Voice From Outside the Camp of Organized Religion: Last Day”, <http://twelvetribes.org>, p. 35.

<sup>129</sup> Acts 3:19–21: “Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that he may send the Messiah, who has been appointed for you – even Jesus. Heaven must receive him until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets.”

<sup>130</sup> “The Voice From Outside the Camp of Organized Religion: Last Day”, <http://twelvetribes.org>, p. 35.

<sup>131</sup> Matthew 24:14. “The Year of Jubilee” (online), [twelvetribes.org](http://twelvetribes.org), 2013, accessed April 2017, available online at <http://twelvetribes.org>.

<sup>132</sup> “The Voice From Outside the Camp of Organized Religion: Last Day”, <http://twelvetribes.org>, p. 9.

<sup>133</sup> “Pre-enactment of The Marriage of the Lamb” (online), <http://twelvetribes.org>, 2002, accessed September 2016, available online at <http://twelvetribes.org>.

<sup>134</sup> Revelation 12:1.

<sup>135</sup> “The Voice From Outside the Camp of Organized Religion: Last Day”, <http://twelvetribes.org>, p. 31.

<sup>136</sup> “Called to be Saints” (online), [twelvetribes.org](http://twelvetribes.org), 2015, accessed May 2017, available online at <http://twelvetribes.org>.

<sup>137</sup> “Pre-enactment of The Marriage of the Lamb”, <http://twelvetribes.org>, p. 5.

sents the God's people, which will unite with the Messiah at the End of Time. During the ritual, both the fiancées and the guests loudly recite biblical texts that contain references to the movement's eschatological expectations. The space in which the wedding is being held has the appearance of a theatrical stage. In the first part of the ceremony the groom awaits the bride near a heavily adorned throne symbolizing the Throne of God.<sup>138</sup> After a short time of silence that represents Yahshua's waiting for the restoration of God's people, the groom loudly exclaims that the bride is ready. Then he moves to a stage set with clouds that represent the mid-heaven.<sup>139</sup> From this place, he calls for the bride to join him. At this moment, the bride enters the scene<sup>140</sup> and her appearance in the mid-heaven represents the reuniting of the faithful part of God's people with Yahshua at the End of Times. During the next part of the ceremony, a dance of warriors follows, which represents an allegory of the final battle of Armageddon. The dancers move in a very dynamic fashion that embodies Yahshua's wrath against the forces of Evil that tortured the Bride while he was waiting for her in the Heavens.<sup>141</sup> Afterwards, a joyous dance of victory takes place.<sup>142</sup> The last dramatized part of the ceremony describes the millennial kingdom of Yahshua and his people, including the establishing of his throne in Jerusalem<sup>143</sup> on which the newlyweds remain for the rest of the ceremony. A wedding supper follows, symbolizing the plenty and richness of the messianic kingdom.<sup>144</sup> During the feast, the newlyweds exchange vows, expressing the durability of the marriage bond, as well as the covenant between Yahshua and the God's people. The man promises his bride that he will "sacrifice his life for her" and she promises she will "submit entirely to her husband's care."<sup>145</sup>

This process of restoration, symbolically closed by a wedding ceremony, forms a part of the movement's eschatological expectations and its core basis is the education of children. In order to become husband and wife, the fiancés must spend their adolescence with spiritual preparations. According to the Twelve Tribes, children born into the community are more resistant to sin than other children and after three or four generations, only sinless children fully prepared for the new era should be born. However, before this happens, one of the basic necessities of the life of God's people is a strict upbringing. Separate education of the adolescents serves to consolidate the male and female role: while the girls represent the pure God's people (the Bride), the boys prepare for their service to the resurrected Messiah (the Groom). Through their purity, the girls help fulfill the prophecy of the end of the current era, while the boys are supposed to take active part in its creation. Both male and female children are brought up to obey their parents and God through them. In accordance with the Old Testament, the strictness of the upbringing is secured with punishment by means of

<sup>138</sup> Revelation 4:2-3. "Pre-enactment of The Marriage of the Lamb", <http://twelvetribe.org>, p. 4.

<sup>139</sup> "Pre-enactment of The Marriage of the Lamb", <http://twelvetribe.org>, p. 7.

<sup>140</sup> "Pre-enactment of The Marriage of the Lamb", <http://twelvetribe.org>, p. 7.

<sup>141</sup> "Pre-enactment of The Marriage of the Lamb", <http://twelvetribe.org>, p. 11.

<sup>142</sup> "Pre-enactment of The Marriage of the Lamb", <http://twelvetribe.org>, p. 12.

<sup>143</sup> "Pre-enactment of The Marriage of the Lamb", <http://twelvetribe.org>, p. 12.

<sup>144</sup> "Pre-enactment of The Marriage of the Lamb", <http://twelvetribe.org>, p. 15.

<sup>145</sup> "Pre-enactment of The Marriage of the Lamb", <http://twelvetribe.org>, p. 16.

spanking with a rod.<sup>146</sup> According to the Twelve Tribes, the rod (a narrow, flexible instrument resembling a balloon stick)<sup>147</sup> is an ideal chastising instrument designated by God and therefore unlike other physical punishments, its usage has a necessary training effect.<sup>148</sup> The movement insists that spanking with a rod has the ability to eliminate possible sinful thoughts of the child;<sup>149</sup> the parents of the community believe that this type of correction is an expression of parental love.<sup>150</sup> This opposition between love and punishment on the one side and lack of punishment and hate on the other is based on the thirteenth chapter of the Book of Proverbs.<sup>151</sup>

Girls are raised to become proper mothers for boys, who, in turn, will play the crucial role in the most significant events of the End of Times.<sup>152</sup> The goal of the Twelve Tribes movement is to raise 144 000 servants who, according to the Book of Revelation, will bring Yashua's Second Coming upon the world.<sup>153</sup> In accordance to the fourteenth chapter of the Book of Revelation,<sup>154</sup> The Twelve Tribes call these servants "virgin male children".<sup>155</sup> Every tribe should provide twelve thousands of them. The servants together are called the "Male Child" born from the "woman clothed with the Sun", which represents the God's people.<sup>156</sup> The Male Child is a "fruit" of the covenant with God's people that will be renewed by Yahshua at the End of Time.<sup>157</sup>

The preparation of the Male Child requires three or four generation of strict and perfectly organized training.<sup>158</sup> One of its core parts is the Bar Mitzvah ritual – only after this ceremony can the adepts start their transformation into servants that will emerge from the movement in the last era of human history. The preparation usually extends from 12 to 20 years of age.<sup>159</sup> This also means that boys do not become part of

<sup>146</sup> Proverbs 13:24; 19:18; 22:15; 23:13ff; 29:15 and 2 Samuel 7:14; see also "Our Child Training Manual" (online), *question12tribes.com*, accessed November 2016, available online at <http://question12tribes.com/tt-teachings/>, p. 72

<sup>147</sup> "Our Child Training Manual", <http://question12tribes.com/tt-teachings/>, p. 72.

<sup>148</sup> "Our Child Training Manual", <http://question12tribes.com/tt-teachings/>, p. 72.

<sup>149</sup> "Our Child Training Manual", <http://question12tribes.com/tt-teachings/>, p. 6.

<sup>150</sup> "Our Child Training Manual", <http://question12tribes.com/tt-teachings/>, p.15.

<sup>151</sup> Proverbs 13:24: "He who withholds his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him diligently."

<sup>152</sup> An interview by the Author with the Twelve Tribes members during the conference "Současná náboženská scéna. Dvacet let časopisu Dingir" [Contemporary religious scene: Twenty years of the Dingir magazine], Hussite Theological Faculty, Charles University, Prague, 4. 11. 2017.

<sup>153</sup> Revelation 7:4: "And I heard the number of them which were sealed: and there were sealed an hundred and forty and four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel."

<sup>154</sup> Revelation 14:4: "These are they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins. These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. These were redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb."

<sup>155</sup> "The Purpose of Creation & Redemption", <http://twelvetribes.org>.

<sup>156</sup> Revelation 12:5: „She gave birth to a son, a male child, who "will rule all the nations with an iron scepter." And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne."

<sup>157</sup> "The Purpose of Creation & Redemption", <http://twelvetribes.org>, p. 36.

<sup>158</sup> After three or four generations, the sins of the fathers (and sin as such) is supposed to be fully gone. See p. e. "The Purpose of Creation & Redemption", <http://twelvetribes.org>, p. 37.

<sup>159</sup> "Bar mitzvah – not loving the world" in: "Child Training Manual II" (online), *question12tribes.com*, 1997, accessed November 2016, available online at <http://question12tribes.com/tt-teachings/>, p. 64.

the eschatological Male Child automatically: they have to deserve this honor.<sup>160</sup> The strict upbringing administered by their parents is meant to guide the boys, help them in their efforts and, when the apocalyptic events arrive, secure their ultimate success in God's eyes.

### **Second coming of Yahshua and the change of the ages**

According to the Twelve Tribes, once the God's people are restored and ready, the last days of the present era will come.<sup>161</sup> The Bride will give birth to a Male Child – that is, she will produce 144 thousands of servants – and then she will take refuge in a shelter God has prepared for her in a desert.<sup>162</sup> This moment of relocation of the God's people into the hideout also starts the countdown of 1260 days that have to pass before Yahshua the Groom comes for his Bride.<sup>163</sup> During this time, the environmental catastrophe will reach its peak and the kingdoms of Earth will unite under Satan's rule. In this deteriorating land, immaculate boys will preach the Kingdom of God and warn people against God's Final Judgement.<sup>164</sup> According to the movement's interpretation of the sixth chapter of the Book of Revelation, Satan will kill them one by one.<sup>165</sup> The Twelve Tribes believe this sacrifice of Male Children (their sons) is required by God. God's people must be like God and therefore must undergo the same sacrifice that, through Yahshua, God himself underwent.<sup>166</sup>

In addition to the servants, two witnesses will be called forth during those 1260 days: according to the Twelve Tribes, they will be killed in the streets of Jerusalem.<sup>167</sup> Those two witnesses are mentioned in the text of the eleventh chapter of the Book of Revelation,<sup>168</sup> which states that all the nations will laugh at their bodies with mockery, refusing to bury the corpses. The movement believes that the words of the Revelation will be fulfilled and regardless of the onlookers, the witnesses will be resurrected.<sup>169</sup>

During the last day of the present era, Yahshua will descend into the plane between Heaven and Earth, surrounded by his angels and witnesses (his past faithful followers).<sup>170</sup> The remaining resurrected followers together with the living faithful

<sup>160</sup> "Giving Birth to the Male Child", <http://question12tribes.com/tt-teachings/>.

<sup>161</sup> "The Voice From Outside the Camp of Organized Religion: Last Day", <http://twelvetribe.org>, p. 32.

<sup>162</sup> "The Voice From Outside the Camp of Organized Religion: Last Day", <http://twelvetribe.org>, p. 32 (Revelation 12:6).

<sup>163</sup> "The Voice From Outside the Camp of Organized Religion: Last Day", <http://twelvetribe.org>, p. 32 (Revelation 17:14).

<sup>164</sup> "The Purpose of Creation & Redemption", <http://twelvetribe.org>, p. 37.

<sup>165</sup> An interpretation of Revelation 6:9–11 according to "The Voice From Outside the Camp of Organized Religion: Last Day", <http://twelvetribe.org>, p. 32.

<sup>166</sup> "The Purpose of Creation & Redemption", <http://twelvetribe.org>.

<sup>167</sup> "The Voice From Outside the Camp of Organized Religion: Last Day", <http://twelvetribe.org>, p. 32.

<sup>168</sup> Revelation 11:9ff.

<sup>169</sup> An interpretation of Revelation 11:11 in "The Voice From Outside the Camp of Organized Religion: Last Day", <http://twelvetribe.org>, p. 32.

<sup>170</sup> "The Voice From Outside the Camp of Organized Religion: Last Day", <http://twelvetribe.org>, p. 30; "Pre-enactment of The Marriage of the Lamb", <http://twelvetribe.org>, p. 4.

hiding in the desert will join Yahshua in his last battle.<sup>171</sup> According to the Twelve Tribes, the events of the Battle of Megiddo (Armageddon) are described in the Book of Revelation<sup>172</sup> and they represents Yahshua's necessary and just retribution against the forces of Evil. Only after those can he return the Earth to the One that created it.<sup>173</sup> The battle will last for thirty days, that is, for one moon: this number is a metaphor for fullness.<sup>174</sup> The return of the Earth to God's ownership is expressed in the concept of the Jubilee, which the movement associates with the End Time.<sup>175</sup> According to the Book of Leviticus, every seventh year is supposed to become a year of Sabbath (dedicated to the soil's rest) and after seven times seven years, a Jubilee will come (the return of the soil to its rightful owners).<sup>176</sup> The reason behind the return of the soil is to declare that except for God himself, nobody owns land permanently.<sup>177</sup> It seems that the Jubilee's description is an indication that the movement expects an imminent end of the present era – God's rule upon the Earth is supposed to come exactly 49 years after the restoration of God's people began.<sup>178</sup>

In the approaching new era, Yahshua and his people will reign in their millennial kingdom; Yahshua will establish his throne in Jerusalem and together with him, two of his faithful followers will rule.<sup>179</sup> According to the Twelve Tribes, the Second Coming will make the Jewish nation realize that Yahshua was the Messiah.<sup>180</sup> Consequently, before the installment of Yahshua's millennial kingdom, the spiritual Israel (the actual God's people) will merge with the natural Israel (the Jews). In the new era's kingdom, Abraham's natural offspring will be given back the Promised Land.<sup>181</sup> According to the Twelve Tribes, God will thus fulfill the covenant he had sealed with Abraham.<sup>182</sup>

<sup>171</sup> "The Voice From Outside the Camp of Organized Religion: Last Day", <http://twelvetribe.org>, p. 32.

<sup>172</sup> Revelation 19:11–15:19.

<sup>173</sup> "Pre-enactment of The Marriage of the Lamb", <http://twelvetribe.org>, p. 10.

<sup>174</sup> "Pre-enactment of The Marriage of the Lamb", <http://twelvetribe.org>, p. 10.

<sup>175</sup> "The Year of Jubilee", <http://twelvetribe.org>.

<sup>176</sup> Leviticus 25:10; "The Year of Jubilee", <http://twelvetribe.org>.

<sup>177</sup> "The Year of Jubilee", <http://twelvetribe.org>.

<sup>178</sup> Lavin says that the final battle between the Good and the Evil should happen after fifty years of restoration intents of the Twelve Tribes. LAVIN, *God's People: In Search of a Destiny*, loc 462. The expectance of the end of the current era after 49 years of restoration is also attested by a fragment of the interview between Susan Palmer and two elders by the name of Hakam and Yochanan in 1999 in Boston. PALMER, "The Twelve Tribes", p. 67.

<sup>179</sup> "The Three Eternal Destinies #80: Judgment of the Body of Messiah and the Judgment of the Nations" (online), [question12tribes.com](http://question12tribes.com), 1997, accessed November 2016, available online at <http://question12tribes.com/tt-teachings/>.

<sup>180</sup> "To the Jew First" (online), [twelvetribe.org](http://twelvetribe.org), 2012, accessed December 2016, available online at <http://twelvetribe.org>.

<sup>181</sup> "To the Jew First", <http://twelvetribe.org>.

<sup>182</sup> "The Voice From Outside the Camp of Organized Religion: Last Day", <http://twelvetribe.org>.

### The restoration of the creation – the eternal age

After the millennium, a new age will come – due to its permanent character, the Twelve Tribes call it the eternal age. Nevertheless, before this new era begins, God's judgement will take place. Contrary to the dualistic concept of Heaven and Hell, the Twelve Tribes emphasize the threefold outcome of God's judgement.<sup>183</sup> The movement deduced its doctrine of the "Three Eternal Destinies of Man" from the Book of Revelation<sup>184</sup> and it is one of the scarce examples of the movement's idea of how the eternal age will look – in other words, what is the core of God's intention for the creation. According to the Twelve Tribes, the Three Eternal Destinies of Man reflect the fact that in this present era, every human being that has ever been born participates on the image of the eternity. The verses of the last chapter suggest that in the eternity, everyone's place will be determined by the thoughts and acts he or she exhibited during the mortal life. Before the Final Judgment, all people will be resurrected and humankind will be divided into three groups – the unjust, the righteous, and the holy.

The first group consists of those who by God's justice are found to be *unjust* and morally filthy.<sup>185</sup> According to the Twelve Tribes, this category comprises of those who act consciously against the natural law and ignore the inborn conscience. The movement insists this is how most of the world lives, since from the position of sinful creation, people cannot effectively resist the forces of Evil that rule the world. The acts of the unjust harm other people – in their egoism, the filthy take advantage of others and gain a supposed profit from it.<sup>186</sup> The teachings give a list (based on the twenty-first chapter of the Book of Revelation) of specific groups of people considered to be unjust.<sup>187</sup> According to the Twelve Tribes, God will cast those people into eternal damnation in the lake of fire.<sup>188</sup> The same fate awaits Satan and his angels.<sup>189</sup>

<sup>183</sup> "The Three Eternal Destinies #148: The Good, the Bad and the Holy, Part 1" (online), *question12tribes.com*, 1997, accessed November 2016, available online at <http://question12tribes.com/tt-teachings/>.

<sup>184</sup> Revelation 22:11: "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still."

<sup>185</sup> "The Three Eternal Destinies #148: The Good, the Bad and the Holy, Part 1", <http://question12tribes.com/tt-teachings/>.

<sup>186</sup> "Three Eternal Destinies Introduction" (online), *twelvetribes.org*, 2015, accessed May 2017, available online at <http://twelvetribes.org>.

<sup>187</sup> Revelation 21:8: "But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death." "The Three Eternal Destinies #162 What Happens After the Judgement?" (online), *question12tribes.com*, 1997, accessed October 2016, available online at <http://question12tribes.com/tt-teachings/>.

<sup>188</sup> "The Three Eternal Destinies #162 What Happens After the Judgement?", <http://question12tribes.com/tt-teachings/>.

<sup>189</sup> "The Three Eternal Destinies #160: Like Adam they have Broken My Covenant" (online), *question12tribes.com*, accessed November 2016, available online at <http://question12tribes.com/tt-teachings/>.

The second group consists of those who are *righteous* in the eyes of God's righteousness<sup>190</sup> According to the movement, these are the people who, during their mortal life, acted in agreement to their conscience and in accordance to the natural law. Since they obeyed the commandments of the nations' eternal covenant, an eternal life awaits them in the Kingdom of God. They may belong to different religions and confessions – even Jews, Buddhists or others.<sup>191</sup> Moreover, even those who declare themselves to be unbelievers may act according to their conscience. The Twelve Tribes base their concept of eternal life for nations on the Books of Revelation<sup>192</sup> and the prophet Isaiah.<sup>193</sup>

Finally, the third group is the people set apart for God, the *holy*. Those are the ones who were able to overcome sin in their mortal lives and for that they will be rewarded a special place in the eternity. They will become the dwelling of God the Creator, which the Twelve Tribes, in accordance with the Book of Revelation (Revelation 21:12), call the "New Jerusalem".<sup>194</sup> The people set apart will be joined by those members of the God's people who were condemned to a second death during the millennial kingdom. The Twelve Tribes consider themselves to be the true God's people and thus believe they belong precisely to this group.

In other words, the eternity will be the restoration of creation and everyone who failed to fulfill God's demand in their mortal life will be excluded from it. Those who followed the eternal covenant even though they lived separately from the God's people as well the holy that fulfilled the destiny of the Chosen people will all live together in the restored world and the forces of Evil will no longer bother them.

## Conclusion and theological analysis

I suggest that the core motif of the Twelve Tribes theology is the intent to return to God's original intention that he had in mind during the creation of the world. This motif is reflected in the movement's struggle to change the current state of the world. By the fulfilment of God's command, its members strive to bring forth a situation that would lead to the end of the present era and bring about the new age. This new era is supposed to be the restoration of the original paradisiacal state that had already existed before it was corrupted by human failure. The Twelve Tribes believe themselves to be a formation of God's people that serves God properly; as thanks for their service, they expect their due in the form of mankind's transformation and a return to God's proximity. From the eschatological point of view, God's people have a duty to exterminate evil in the world and end the lineage of human sin.

<sup>190</sup> "Three Eternal Destinies Introduction", <http://twelvetribe.org>.

<sup>191</sup> PALMER, "The Twelve Tribes", p. 69.

<sup>192</sup> Revelation 21:24–26.

<sup>193</sup> Isaiah 60:11–14.

<sup>194</sup> "Three Eternal Destinies Introduction", <http://twelvetribe.org>.

According to the Twelve Tribes, God's people's obligation was established during the life of Abraham. He is thought to be the ideal forefather and the movement largely idealizes him, for example by comparing his life to Adam's life in the Garden of Eden. Selected texts of the Old Testament serve for the movement as the basis for insisting that only the first four generations of Abraham's offspring followed in his footsteps. The later generations adopted the customs of the neighboring nations instead and stopped serving God properly. The life of the Early Church follows a similar scenario. With respect to these two biblical role models of God's people, the Twelve Tribes combine elements belonging both to the Jewish and Christian Tradition. Nevertheless, if we are to interpret this fact, we have to keep in mind that the movement itself adopts a critical or outright disapproving stance towards both traditions – it sees them as a result of corruption and decadence of two original intents to become God's people and claims relationship to neither of them. While the Twelve Tribes somehow “imitate” them, they also insist that they are merely trying to repeat the correct acts of the first four generation of Abraham's offspring as well as of the Early Church. Contrarily to both, the movement aims not only to obey God's people's duties temporarily, but intends to fulfill them in the ultimate perspective of the events leading to the end of the current era.

Even though the movement thinks that both of the archetypical models of God's people had the same mission and the same obligations, it believes to recognize a big change of Abraham's covenant in the context of the New Testament. The Chosen people are no longer limited to Abraham's kinship – after the coming of the Son of God, the concept of God's people is opened to society at large. For the adepts who want to become members of God's people, this innovation brings new demands as well as new privileges. The core demand is the fact that after Jesus Christ's coming, it is literally impossible to become a part of God's people without accepting him to be the true Messiah. The privilege, on the other hand, consists of the influence of Jesus' salvation upon the spiritual life of God's people. In the movement's perspective, this influence helps to overcome sin and, finally, to free oneself from death.

The Twelve Tribes find the proof of its status of the true God's people by its ability to celebrate Sabbath properly. They understand the celebration as a sign of God's people, which used to be an attribute of Abraham's offspring as well as of the Early Church. It is essential to persist in celebrating Sabbath, lest the movement should lose its status of God's people in the same manner as its two predecessors did. At the same time, the Twelve Tribes' self-identification with God's people significantly strengthens their eschatological outlook. In this perspective, they see isolated community life as a space in which they put into practice the Kingdom of God – and its manifestation brings about the new era. Even though the movement's communitarian life may provoke concern and worry in society at large, it seems that the teachings rather emphasize active change through spiritual renewal of the community instead of outward revolutionary actions.

The stress on God's people's communitarian life is reflected in the emphasis on the collective and group-related. For example in the movement's theology, questions

of individual salvation are discussed much less often. Even though the teachings of the Three Eternal Destinies insist every person is judged individually, the group of the holy would only contain members of the God's people. Also, the stress on the spiritual purity of the individual, which is apparent in the movement, ultimately serves the spiritual purity of the community. Its members mostly focus on the task given to the God's people as a whole. If some Twelve Tribes fan tried to adopt their practices without actually joining the community, he could never reach the same result, since it can be only reached collectively. Other expressions of the communitarian character of the movement's theology include its tribal division and the intent to gather 144 000 servants (or the Male Child).

The core of the child training's theological motivation are the movement's eschatological convictions. Children's obedience to their parents is an image of their deference to God – as such they can become permanent part of God's people and thus participate on the ultimate restoration. Children are brought up to be obedient: their parents believe this type of upbringing will help them to understand God's authority and have no trouble submitting to it fully. To ensure the child's compliance, the community uses physical punishment in the form of spanking with a rod. The movement considers this type of chastisement to be the ideal way of child behavior correction that was designated by God himself. Due to the God's people's mission, major stress is put on the upbringing of boys between 12 and 20 years of age that will serve (as Male Child) during the events of the End Time; conversely, the girls' purity symbolizes the purity of the God's people. God's people's connection with the eschatological Messiah is expressed in the wedding ceremony. The movement's members consider the form of child upbringing to be designated by God and to ease its strict requirements would represent cultural assimilation to the surrounding world, which is precisely what the Twelve Tribes hold against its predecessors. The movement's specific child training practices make its members feel exceptional and this feeling in turn strengthens the idea they are set apart for God. Consequently, the parenting practices cannot be interpreted as a minor part of theology/practice which is devoid of importance and can be easily corrected in response to outside criticism. In fact, the situation is quite the contrary – these practices represent an expression of this New Religious Movement's core ambitions. The Twelve Tribes' child training's manual explicitly states that to skip spanking means to disobey God's command.

This survey of the Twelve Tribes' theology also helps to determine the role played by the people from the outside world. For instance, it may help to assess the questions of the "safety" of the New Religious Movement, that is, its potential effect on its immediate neighbors. Many theological points may help us understand the movement's relationship to the rest of the society – for example the view of Noah's offspring, the idea of natural law, the criticism of worldly justice and the disapproval of present society. Systematically, their view of the outside world is best expressed in the doctrine of the Three Eternal Destinies, which complements the usually strongly critical accent with a promise of hope for those who (according to the movement's moral

ideals) act righteously. On the other hand, we cannot ignore the clear division between God's people and the rest of humankind, righteous or not. At the same time, even the criticism of the unjust offers two possible interpretations. On the one hand the movement's doctrine does not allow those people that fail to act according to certain criteria in their lives to participate on the next era's eternal life. But on the other hand, the members of the movement leave the judgment to God and, at present, they take no active stance against those they count among the unjust. Instead, they focus exclusively on their own spiritual purity.

The idea of one's exclusive status and the certainty of one's righteous acts (as opposed to the acts of everyone else) is hardly an exception among other New Religious Movements. In case of the Twelve Tribes we may conclude that all their efforts to fulfill God's intention take place inside of the movement itself. Thus, at least according to this theological analysis, they represent no danger to the surrounding society. On the other hand, two questions remain open. First, should the tension between the movement and the outside world rise, this situation may possibly change. And second, we have no idea of how the movement may transform its theology if the expectations of the imminent coming of a new era prove futile.

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# Before and after of the Gurukula phenomenon

Jitka Schlichtsová

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**Abstract:** The article's goal is to gather information about the general idea, principles and ways of education as practiced by the International Society for Kṛṣṇa Consciousness (ISKCON). First, the text summarizes the foundations and theoretical concepts of ISKCON's education and compares them with the traditional Vaishnava education. Second, the article explores the historical development of Hare Kṛṣṇa education in the Gurukula context, explains the problem of child abuse and presents the available information about the current state of Gurukula education around the world. Finally, the text briefly mentions the Czech Gurukula project in Kršňův dvůr (1995–1997) and reconstructs the failed applications of the Czech devotees to include the Gurukula in the list of schools and educational institutions of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of the Czech Republic.

**Keywords:** Gurukula; Hare Kṛṣṇa Movement; International Society for Kṛṣṇa Consciousness; Prabhupāda; education

**Abstrakt:** Práce si klade za cíl především shromáždit informace o smyslu, principech a způsobech výchovy a vzdělávání v gurukulách Mezinárodní společnosti pro vědomí Kršny (ISKCON). V textu jsou nejprve popsána východiska a teoretické pojetí výchovy v hnutí a jeho srovnání s původním způsobem vzdělávání višnuistické tradice. Dále se práce věnuje konkrétnímu historickému vývoji a podobě vzdělávání v gurukulách ISKCON, problematice zneužívání dětí a přináší dostupné informace o současném stavu gurukulského vzdělávání ve světě. Práce okrajově zmiňuje I projekt Gurukula Kršňův dvůr v České republice a rekonstruuje neúspěšné snahy českých oddaných o její zařazení do sítě škol a školských zařízení Ministerstva školství, mládeže a tělovýchovy České republiky v letech 1995–1997.

**Klíčová slova:** gurukula; hnutí Haré Kršna; Mezinárodní společnost pro vědomí Kršny; Prabhupāda; výchova; vzdělání

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Mgr. **Jitka Schlichtsová**, independent scholar  
E-mail: [jschlichtsova@gmail.com](mailto:jschlichtsova@gmail.com)

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The concept of primary education in the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement (the International Society for Kṛṣṇa Consciousness, ISKCON) has only been explored very little, not only in Czech academia, but also in the international context. The most systematizing approach to this problem appears in the works of the American sociologist E. Burke Rochford (Middlebury College, Vermont), who dedicated thirty years of his life to sociological research of the Hare Kṛṣṇa. A great part of his work comprises of analyses of the Gurukula education and attempts to solve its problematic aspects. He gathered a plethora of testimonies and interviews with devotees from the United States. He wrote two monographs about the social structure of the Hare Kṛṣṇa, *Hare Krishna in America* (1985) and *The Hare Krishna Transformed* (2007).<sup>1</sup> Rochford is also a member of the editorial board of *ISKCON Communications Journal* published semi-annually since 1993 by the International Society for Kṛṣṇa Consciousness. In this journal he published many scholarly studies about the abuse of children in the Gurukulas, which have improved our understanding of the problem and significantly contributed to worldwide scholarly discussion.<sup>2</sup> His 1999 study “Education and Collective Identity: Public Schooling of Hare Krishna Youths” presents a kind of conclusion to his research in the Gurukula education.<sup>3</sup> Among other publications that deal with the Gurukula theme, is a 2013 collective monograph *The Hare Krishna Movement: The Postcharismatic Fate of a Religious Transplant*.<sup>4</sup>

In the Czech context, the phenomenon of ISKCON’s Gurukula education is seldom mentioned. The only larger work that focuses specifically on the Gurukula phenomenon is my M.A. thesis *Výchova a vzdělání v hnutí Hare Kršna (Education in the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement)*<sup>5</sup> and a short article “Pán Kršna a oddané děti” (“Lord Kṛṣṇa and the devotee children”) published in the *Dingir* magazine.<sup>6</sup> Among the older Czech scholarly production, only Martin Fárek’s *Institucionalizace alternativního náboženství (On the institutionalization of alternative religions)* dedicates some space

<sup>1</sup> E. BURKE ROCHFORD, *The Hare Krishna in America*, New Brunswick, N. J.: Rutgers University Press 1985, 324 p.; E. BURKE ROCHFORD, *The Hare Krishna Transformed*, New York: New York University Press 2007, 285 p. Regarding the role of the family in the ISKCON, see also E. BURKE ROCHFORD, “Family Development and Change in the Hare Krishna Movement”, in JAMES R. LEWIS and JESPER AAGAARD PETERSEN, *Controversial New Religions*, New York: Oxford University Press 2005, xii, p. 101–117.

<sup>2</sup> Here I am specifically referring to the following two articles: E. BURKE ROCHFORD, “Family Formation, Culture and Change in the Hare Krishna Movement”, *ISKCON Communications Journal* (2/1997): p. 61–82, and E. BURKE ROCHFORD and JENNIFER HEINLEIN, “Child Abuse in the Hare Krishna Movement: 1971–1986”, *ISKCON Communications Journal* (1/1998): p. 43–69.

<sup>3</sup> E. BURKE ROCHFORD, “Education and Collective Identity: Public Schooling of Hare Krishna Youths”, in SUSAN PALMER and CHARLOTTE HARDMAN, *Children in New Religions*, New Brunswick, N. J.: Rutgers University Press, 1999, p. 29–50.

<sup>4</sup> EDWIN F. BRYANT and MARIA EKSTRAND, *The Hare Krishna Movement: The Postcharismatic Fate of a Religious Transplant*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2013, 496 p.

<sup>5</sup> JITKA SCHLICHTSOVÁ, *Výchova a vzdělání v hnutí Haré Kršna (Education in the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement)*, unpublished M. A. thesis, Praha: Hussite Theological Faculty, Charles University 2013, 72 p.

<sup>6</sup> JITKA SCHLICHTSOVÁ, “Pán Kršna a oddané děti” [“Lord Kṛṣṇa and the devotee children”], *Dingir* (3/2013): p. 74–76.

to the Gurukulas.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, Fárez touches the phenomenon only briefly, in the context of status of families and family lives in ISKCON and puts the stress on the abuse of children in the Gurukulas.

If we are to understand the phenomenon of education in the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement, we need to look at the literature Hare Kṛṣṇa devotees publish and distribute themselves. These are mostly the books written by the movement's founder Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda and to lesser extent also by others. The most frequently quoted books include *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* (1991) and *The Nectar of Devotion* (1992).<sup>8</sup> However, the personal views of the movement's founder regarding education and its logic and goals can be found in many other sources.<sup>9</sup> The 1984 brochure *Srila Prabhupada on Gurukul*, which is a compilation of Prabhupāda's letters and interviews, contains the movement's founder's instructions on how a Gurukula works and it can therefore provide a more general outlook on Prabhupāda's view on education and the ideal upbringing. Unfortunately, the full version of the book is practically impossible to find.<sup>10</sup> A Gurukula ex-teacher Bhurijan Dasa is an author of *The Art of Teaching*, another work that systematically summarizes instructions for the education of children in the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement.<sup>11</sup> I also used many articles published in the movement's periodicals *ISKCON Communications Journal* and *Nāma Hatta*.<sup>12</sup>

There is only one scholarly analysis of the failed attempt to found a Czech Gurukula in 1995–1997 – that is Martin Fárez's short article from 2001 “Gurukula jako zkouš-

<sup>7</sup> MARTIN FÁREK, *Hnutí Haré Kršna: Institucionalizace alternativního náboženství* [*The Hare Kṛṣṇa Movement: On the institutionalization of alternative religions*], Praha: Karolinum 2008, 208 p.

<sup>8</sup> A. C. BHAKTIVEDANTA PRABHUPADA, *Bhagavad-Gītā As It Is*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Los Angeles et al: The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust 1989, 924 p.; A. C. BHAKTIVEDANTA PRABHUPADA, *The Nectar of Devotion: The complete Science of Bhakti Yoga: A Summary Study of Śrila Rūpa Gosvāmī's Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* (online), The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust 1969, 502 p., available online at [https://ebooks.iskcondesiretree.com/pdf/Nectar\\_of\\_Devotion\\_with\\_Sanskrit/Nectar\\_of\\_Devotion\\_with\\_Sanskrit.pdf](https://ebooks.iskcondesiretree.com/pdf/Nectar_of_Devotion_with_Sanskrit/Nectar_of_Devotion_with_Sanskrit.pdf).

<sup>9</sup> A. C. BHAKTIVEDANTA PRABHUPADA, *Beyond Birth and Death* (online), The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust 1972, 68 p., available online at [http://prabhupadabooks.com/pdf/Beyond\\_Birth\\_and\\_Death-Original\\_1974\\_edition\\_scan.pdf](http://prabhupadabooks.com/pdf/Beyond_Birth_and_Death-Original_1974_edition_scan.pdf); A. C. BHAKTIVEDANTA PRABHUPADA, “Śrīmad Bhāgavatam canto 1–10” (online), The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust 1972, available online at <https://krishna.org/srimad-bhagavatam-original-edition-pdf-download/>; A. C. BHAKTIVEDANTA PRABHUPADA, *Life Comes from Life* (online), Bhaktivedanta Book Trust 1973, 137 p., available online at <http://www.krishnapath.org/free-ebooks-audiobooks-of-srila-prabhupada/life-comes-from-life/>; A. C. BHAKTIVEDANTA PRABHUPADA, *The Science of Self-Realization* (online), The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust 2008, 233 p., available online at <http://www.krishnapath.org/free-ebooks-audiobooks-of-srila-prabhupada/the-science-of-self-realization/>.

<sup>10</sup> A selection of Prabhupāda's instructions on Gurukul is available online: “Prabhupada on Gurukul” (online), March 2018, available online at <https://krishna.org/srila-prabhupada-on-gurukul/>.

<sup>11</sup> BHURIJANA DASA, *The Art of Teaching: A Guide for Training Our Children in Kṛṣṇa Consciousness*, Vrindavana Institute for Higher Education 1995, 506 p.

<sup>12</sup> Nāma Hatta is a magazine published by the ISKCON in Czech Republic. The following articles focus specifically on education: ASVAHARI DĀSA, “Gurukula v Mayapur” [“Gurukula in Mayapur”], *Nāma Hatta* (1/ 1997): p. 6–9; JÓGA MÁJÁ DÉVÍ DĀSÍ, “Škola základ života” [School, the Basis of Life], *Nāma Hatta* (4/2008), p. 12–13; JALANGI DÉVÍ DĀSÍ, “Děti jsou velice citlivé” [“Children are very sensitive”], *Nāma Hatta* (4/2008), p. 14–15; “Gurukula 1/4”, *Nāma Hatta* (2/2009), p. 25; “Gurukula 2/4”, *Nāma Hatta* (3/2009), p. 22; “Gurukula 3/4”, *Nāma Hatta* (4/2009), p. 30–31; and “Gurukula 4/4”, *Nāma Hatta* (5/2009), p. 23.

ka: Ohlédnutí za úsilím založit školu hnutí Haré Kršna” (“Gurukula as a Challenge: Looking Back at an Intent to Found a Hare Kṛṣṇa School”).<sup>13</sup> Between 1993 and 1998, Martin Fárek was a member of the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement himself and he was one of the authors of the project of establishing a Gurukula in Hare Kṛṣṇa environmentally conscious farm in Kršněv dvůr near Městečko u Benešova in Central Bohemia. Fárek was in charge of communication with the authorities during the process of including Gurukula Kršněv dvůr into the network of schools and educational institutions presided by the Czech Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MŠMT). In this article’s conclusion, I offer a short overview of the process.<sup>14</sup>

## The Principles of Hare Kṛṣṇa education

### The basic points

Since the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement emerged from the Gaudiya Vaishnava tradition, it also follows its predecessor’s educational model: from early childhood, the children are entrusted to the care of a spiritual teacher, a Guru. The Guru and his disciples together form a single community – a *Gurukula* (based on Sanskrit *guru*, “teacher” or a “master”, and *kula*, “extended family”). The importance, position and personal characteristics of the Guru are described in the Indian book of *Guru Gita*, one of the traditional Hindu scriptures. The term “Guru” is believed to have been created from the syllables *gu* (“darkness”) and *ru* (“light”). In this sense, a Guru is supposed to bring people from darkness into the light. A Guru can also be titled as “enlightened master”, “perfect teacher” or “living god”.<sup>15</sup>

In the original sense, the Guru and the disciple (*brahmacārī*) enjoy a very close relationship. Even though it seems the pupil’s duty is to serve the Guru in accordance to his or her age or abilities, the servitude’s reason is the closeness to the Guru it creates. The pupils are allowed to remain in the Guru’s presence and absorb his knowledge, ask, discuss and learn. In other words, the relationship leads to the most basic type of human education – learning by imitation. “Its core goal should be study of the scriptures, development of self-control and other personal qualities and acquiring abilities useful in life.”<sup>16</sup> The basis of the Guru-disciple relationship is trust and love. The disciples are supposed to love the master – not because it’s their duty, but because they genuinely like to serve him, since the Guru treats them with kindness, takes care of them and gently and patiently teaches them his wisdom. This is how Prabhupāda explained the relationship between the Guru and his disciples to his first devotees:

<sup>13</sup> MARTIN FÁREK, “Gurukula jako zkouška: Ohlédnutí za úsilím založit školu hnutí Haré Kršna” [“Gurukula as a Challenge: Looking Back at an Intent to Found a Hare Kṛṣṇa School”], *Dingir* (2/2001): p. 20–21.

<sup>14</sup> A detailed analysis of the case based on my interviews with Martin Fárek was presented in my M.A. thesis: SCHLICHTSOVÁ, *Výchova a vzdělání v hnutí Hare Kršna*, p. 47–112.

<sup>15</sup> FÁREK, “Gurukula jako zkouška”, p. 20–21.

<sup>16</sup> FÁREK, *Hnutí Haré Kršna*, p. 125.

Initiation means that the spiritual master accepts the student and agrees to take charge, and the student accepts the spiritual master and agrees to worship him as God.<sup>17</sup>

In other words, the Guru's role is not unlike that of the child's parents. Štampach adds: "The obedience to the Guru only makes sense if it's voluntary and based on personal choice and selection. In the true Guru-disciple relationship, obedience is born from trust and love."<sup>18</sup>

Whole concept of child education is deduced from the idea of four stages (*āṣrama*) of life – *brahmacārī*, *gṛhastha*, *vānaprasha* and *sanjāsī*. The *brahmacārī*'s role consists in studying of the Vedas and listening to the spiritual master. Some children, especially little Brahmin boys, left their families and joined their spiritual master's family as early as 5 years of age. Around the age of 14, some of them went on to continue their studies in one of the big Brahmin centers. During the years of their study, they were expected to remain celibate and live an ascetic life, focusing only on the study of the scriptures, service to their Guru and maintaining a daily regime. As Prabhupāda says, "Study of the Vedas is not meant for the recreation of armchair speculators, but for the formation of character."<sup>19</sup> The most important positive characteristics are humility and devotion and this type of education is specifically aimed to create them in the disciple. In *Nīti Śāstra*,<sup>20</sup> Paṇḍita Cāṇakya states: "Those who are uneducated do not shine even if they are endowed with beauty and youth and are born in renowned families just like *kimsuka* flowers which are beautiful but odourless."<sup>21</sup> Prabhupāda briefly comments to this quote: "Education is required to help culture. Not that you take degrees from the university and remain a dog. That is not education."<sup>22</sup>

### Prabhupāda's view

Prabhupāda often referred to American public schools as "slaughterhouse". He specifically criticized the memorizing of a plethora of encyclopedic knowledge and the simultaneous absence of spiritual education, which, in his opinion, would better help with character development. He insisted that only after the pupil had studied the Vedas under his master from 5 to 20 years of age, he may become a person of perfect

<sup>17</sup> SATSVARUPA DASA GOSWAMI, *Prabhupada: Your Ever Well-Wisher*, Los Angeles et al: The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust 1995, p. 54.

<sup>18</sup> IVAN O. ŠTAMPACH, "Problémy náboženské autority: Nalézt rovnováhu ve vztahu k autoritě" ["Problems with Religious Authority: Finding a Relationship with an Authority"], *Dingir* (1/1999), s. 14–15.

<sup>19</sup> PRABHUPĀDA, *Bhagavad-Gītā As It Is*, p. 392.

<sup>20</sup> Paṇḍita Cāṇakya, also known as Kauṭilya or Viśṇugupta lived in 4th century. The title of his work, *Nīti Śāstra*, is usually translated as "civil and moral law".

<sup>21</sup> Paṇḍita Cāṇakya, "Niti-Saara – Collection of Subhashitas – Sanskrit English" (online), accessed March 2017, p.12, available online at <https://ia802606.us.archive.org/26/items/Niti-sara-CollectionOfSubhashitas-SanskritEnglish/Niti-sara-CollectionOfSubhashitas.pdf>.

<sup>22</sup> [An interview with Prabhupada] (online), Mumbai, 19th December 1975, accessed March 2018, available online at [https://prabhupadabooks.com/conversations/1975/dec/morning\\_walk/bombay/december/19/1975](https://prabhupadabooks.com/conversations/1975/dec/morning_walk/bombay/december/19/1975).

character.<sup>23</sup> The founder of ISKCON put great stress on the study of traditional scriptures. He insisted throughout many of his works, translations, commentaries, and interviews that reading the Vedas is the best way to learn devoted service. For instance, in *The Nectar of Devotion* he paraphrases the *Brahma-yāmala*:

If someone wants to pose himself as a great devotee without following the authorities of the revealed scriptures, then his activities will never help him to make progress in devotional service. Instead, he will simply create disturbances for the sincere students of devotional service.<sup>24</sup>

According to Prabhupāda, study of the scriptures has the greatest impact on spiritual growth. He considered the traditional texts to be the flawless and full revelation of the entire truth. Specifically, he insisted that in order to advance in devotional service, one especially needs to study Bhagavad-Gītā and his own (Prabhupāda's) commentaries and translations:

Practically, if one very carefully reads Bhagavad-gītā, Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, Teachings of Lord Caitanya and this Nectar of Devotion, that will give him sufficient knowledge to understand the science of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. One need not take the trouble of reading other books.<sup>25</sup>

### **Nāma Hatta – Gurukula**

In order to clarify which methods, tools and principles the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement uses in its education, we can use a four-volume article published in 2009 in the Czech Hare Kṛṣṇa magazine *Nāma Hatta*.<sup>26</sup> The article is dedicated to the most important features of both children and adult education, which serve to prepare the movement's members for further public work and spreading the devotees' teachings. The series uses the following motto: "Books are the basis, preaching is the essence, utility is the principle and purity is the force." One by one, the article presents all the principles and emphases of the ISKCON education. In the end, all lead to the same goal: to form future missionaries and preachers of devotion to Kṛṣṇa.

#### **First part: the books are the basis**

The first article lays down the three core principles:

a) All the basic concepts of education ought to be based on Srila Prabhupāda's books.

<sup>23</sup> PRABHUPĀDA, *Bhagavad-Gītā As It Is*, p. 392.

<sup>24</sup> PRABHUPĀDA, "The Nectar of Devotion", p. 64.

<sup>25</sup> PRABHUPĀDA, "The Nectar of Devotion", p. 68. In this chapter Prabhupāda refers to reading a spiritual master's text; however, the same applies to the disciples.

<sup>26</sup> The magazine is published by Centrum pro védská studia (Center for Vedic Studies) in Lužice u Prahy.

- b) The state of mind, in which the education is held, ought to be based on Srila Prabhupāda's teachings.
- c) The school's results should be evaluated through Kṛṣṇa conscious standards set by those books.<sup>27</sup>

The article then proceeds to elaborate upon these principles, insisting that all the information that a Kṛṣṇa devotee needs to perfect his life, can be found in Prabhupāda's writings. Even if the information is not explicitly formulated, the books always contain at least indirect references and instructions. The article states that if a person studies those themes diligently and seeks those topics, he or she will find a great deal. Based on this type of reasoning, the article declares:

If a person explores those books, sincerely looking for guidance in the questions of education, he will find it. If we meticulously analyze all the examples of instructions given to students, sons or pupils in Śrīmad Bhāgavatam, we would be able to learn a lot about educational techniques and the basics of learning.<sup>28</sup>

In other words, the core principle of the contemporary Hare Kṛṣṇa movement and its Gurukula education is the idea that the only knowledge that the pupils needs is already contained in Prabhupāda's books. Those that seek knowledge or ways to educate themselves should only look for inspiration there, examining their assumptions in the light of the ISKCON teachings. When making conclusions, they should only take Prabhupāda's teachings into account, which, so to say, play the role of a filter of possible interpretations for both the content and the form of education.

### **Second part: preaching is the essence**

The objective of the second part of the article is to discuss the ultimate goal of Hare Kṛṣṇa education and the ways the Gurukula helps to achieve it:

- a) The students will be trained (both by study and practice) in the philosophy and devoted principles of the ISKCON.
- b) During the training, the students will have to listen to preaching as much as it is practical, so that the preaching enhances a proper spiritual development.
- c) The teachers themselves must be preachers that actively use their talent to spread their mission.
- d) The apex of the Gurukula system should be the formation of preachers of Kṛṣṇa consciousness that would unwaveringly focus on ISKCON principles established by Śrīla Prabhupāda.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>27</sup> "Gurukula 1/4", p. 25.

<sup>28</sup> "Gurukula 1/4", p. 25.

<sup>29</sup> "Gurukula 2/4", p. 22.

These principles clearly declare the abovementioned goals of ISKCON's Gurukula education: a professional preparation of new preachers of Kṛṣṇa consciousness, whose main objective is to fulfill the movement's mission established by ISKCON's foundation chart. At the same time, all the seven articles of the chart explicitly state that the movement's essence is its missionary work. The article then elaborates upon these principles and points out those controversial elements in master-pupil relationship that are often termed as "Guruism":<sup>30</sup> the creation of pupil's dependence on the master and his or her compliance and devotion both to him and his objectives. In respect to this, *Náma Hatta* gives the following commentary:

If the student goes out to preach with his master, he can develop the ability to control his senses and foster respect and devotion for his master much earlier. This also enables him to develop the *sudridha-sauhridāh* – a lasting friendship with the teacher.

When the new student goes out to preach for the first time, he will feel insecure and frightened. Nevertheless if he observes his master replying to questions he would not be able to answer himself or doing things he would not be able to do yet, the pupil will develop a respect and dependence on the master, realizing he needs him.

If the student lives at home, he remains dependent on his parents and feels no need to rely on the master; the true friendship then develops much slower. Greater engagement with preaching together with listening to it will bring the masters and pupils close together. The stronger their relationship is, the easier it is to direct the students and the lower their tendency to have disciplinary problems gets.

Preaching together is also a way to share exciting experiences that will add a greater importance to their relationship. While preaching and travelling, each and every student must accept their share of responsibility, which will somehow ease the master's burden. And if the student helps with work the master would otherwise have to do himself, the master's interest in the student and his progress increases even more. The pupil then feels "needed" or "wanted", realizing he is able to live in an *āśrama* and to have a place at his master's side, and he will become happy in his seclusion from home. As the respect and friendship deepens, the student becomes more docile and happily acts in his master's favor. The preaching also gives the student a necessary practical use of the philosophy he has learned.<sup>31</sup>

Even at the first glance, this part of ISKCON's educational principles seems very controversial, since it contains an image of a master-pupil relationship that is openly manipulative and created to specific purposes. The dependence of the pupils on their

<sup>30</sup> "Guruism" is usually understood as a system in which the master is endowed with a strong and unquestionable authority. At the same time, he requires an absolute devotion and blind obedience from the students, which in turn are used (or abused) to fulfill the master's goals. ŠTAMPACH, "Problémy náboženské autority", p. 14–15.

<sup>31</sup> "Gurukula 2/4", p. 31.

master is deemed desirable and the movement uses it for the formation of future preachers. To reach this goal, the masters should use the following: time spent together, shared experiences, taking the pupils out of their environment and inducing them to leave the comfort zone in their family, entrusting them with responsibilities and giving them a sense of their own importance and an indispensable role in their mission. The article presents those points in a clearly formulated and well thought-out way, using them to secure the pupil's interest and obedience. At the same time, the text deals with the role of the master. He should take interest in his pupils since they alleviate him of some of his duties.

### **Third part: utility is the principle**

The third part of the article series explains the relationship of education and the meaning of an individual's life. It returns to the nonsensical character of Western education and science, which is understood as atheistic and only of a speculative nature, containing partial, misleading, erroneous, and ever changing information:

The contemporary scholastics have no clear line of development and change all the time.<sup>32</sup> (...) In fact, contemporary knowledge is simply a study of the physical nature offered by social sciences and numbers. Moreover, it is not based on any authority – only on observation and logical conclusions.<sup>33</sup>

The article emphasizes the contrast between the Western type of education and the meaning of the Gurukula education. While the second article of the series identifies the goal of education as the practical formation of a future missionary, the third part puts the stress on the training of the pupils to escape the cycle of births and rebirths. It says:

The Gurukula should transmit the knowledge that helps the students to leave this material world and the Samsāra or the constant rebirth (gurōr na sa sjāt). We shouldn't care to transmit that type of "knowledge" that allows the students to specialize on an easy life and become successful or socially acceptable in this material world. Instead, we want to prepare them for leaving the world, not for living comfortably in it.<sup>34</sup>

In other words, "utility" means that the only meaning of human life is to seek spiritual wisdom which allows us to leave both the material world and the cycle of Samsāra. This is what education should supply. Only those abilities and information that lead to this goal are worthy of being transmitted and considered "practical" – every other kind of knowledge is useless, as it leads people astray and lengthens their journey to salvation. Only stable and anchored knowledge, which is not subject to change or to new discoveries, is accepted by the Gurukula as "complete". This knowl-

<sup>32</sup> "Gurukula 3/4", p. 30.

<sup>33</sup> "Gurukula 3/4", p. 31.

<sup>34</sup> "Gurukula 3/4", p. 31.

edge, based on the Vedic literature and accepted as an ultimate authority, cannot be doubted, since it comes from God himself and was passed down by a succession of spiritual masters. This idea, combined with the principles of the previous part of the article, leads to the conclusion that the goal of education is to find a way to escape the *Samsāra*; the strategy to achieve this goal is devoted service, its clearest and most desirable form being missionary activity.

Even though the article does not fully reject modern sciences, it insists their acceptance depends on their usefulness:

Modern knowledge created many useful things that the movement for Kṛṣṇa consciousness can use, but we should never let them bewitch us and consider them life-giving or eternal.<sup>35</sup>

This means that the way we understand and use scientific knowledge must be subject to the movement's authoritative texts, which means to Prabhupāda's writings and the Vedic scriptures. Those are thought to be the sources of eternal and unchanging truth, which, in the moment of applying scientific knowledge, should be used as a filter. The article explicitly says:

By higher knowledge we mean Śrīla Prabhupāda's books; arts and social sciences are always subordinate to the eternal knowledge.<sup>36</sup>

In conclusion, the third part of the article returns to the Vedas once more, stressing again that they are the sources of all important knowledge. It also warns against studying books containing modern methods of education and against listening to the techniques of the *karmī* (those burdened by *karma*, those who don't live in the devoted service to Kṛṣṇa) – the devotees can contact the *karmī* only with the purpose of spreading Kṛṣṇa consciousness.<sup>37</sup> If a method is working, then its principle must be contained in the Vedas. And if the devotees don't find it there, it means that the method should be avoided.

#### **Fourth part: purity is the force**

The final part of the series<sup>38</sup> compares different types of human behavior. It divides these motifs in two groups: *material* and *spiritual*. As for material behavior, the article mentions two kinds of human relationships to the world at large – on the one hand, the humankind has a natural tendency towards enjoying nature and conquering it. On the other hand, the danger of anger and frustration leads men to an unnatural tendency to avoid the world; ultimately, this approach destroys the motivation for

<sup>35</sup> "Gurukula 3/4", p. 31.

<sup>36</sup> "Gurukula 3/4", p. 31.

<sup>37</sup> "If you listen to non-devotees, you are in danger of contamination. If you try something you read and it works, you can start to trust them and meet with them more often." "Gurukula 3/4", p. 31.

<sup>38</sup> "Gurukula 4/4", p. 23.

spiritual activities. For example, children motivated by praise and reward won't be interested in the spiritual life, since they will be too comfortably settled in the superficialities of the material world. In this case, the article seems to refer to the fulfillment of one of the basic human needs of the Maslow pyramid – the need for recognition and respect. Nevertheless, the article does not say whether the teacher should incite the children's interest in a spiritual life by intentionally frustrating those needs.

The *spiritual* consciousness means that the person voluntarily acts only to please Kṛṣṇa and his or her Guru. Thus if a person understands the relationship of every act to Kṛṣṇa consciousness, he or she is inspired to act rightly. The Vedic education aims to destroy material motivation with three of its aspects: purity, authority acceptance and humble service.

Since purity refers to leaving material desires aside, it can be interpreted as frustration, even though it does not mean either hunger, rejection of the individual or no such thing. The concept refers rather to conquering these needs, a kind of detachment. The article explicitly mentions sexuality, since ISKCON considers it to be a key problem. Celibacy means conquering the strongest impulses and therefore if the individual achieves it, he or she will be rewarded by a higher level of spiritual knowledge and the power to bring others to Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

Controlling of one's needs also means humility and humble service. They are necessary to purify the children, make them accept learning as their duty and to incite humility and respect both towards their master and the scriptures in them.

## **ISKCON Gurukulas around the world**

Now that we have described the theoretical bases of a Gurukula's functioning, we can have a closer look on the way ISKCON implemented this Gurukula type of education in the past. The practice has been problematic since the beginning and it has stained the movement's reputation in such a way that it has never fully recovered. The biggest problem was the abuse of children in the Gurukulas, both psychological and physical, which took place there almost from the start of the project in the 1970's and which has not been discovered until the 1990's. After making a brief summary of the scandal, I will add the main methods of how the movement tried to solve the situation. Finally, we will have a closer look at the form and organization of present Gurukulas.

### **Child abuse in the ISKCON Gurukulas in the 1970–1980's**

According to Rochford,<sup>39</sup> Prabhupāda started to ponder about the necessity of devotee children's education as early as 1968. As we saw in the last chapter, the main goal of the Gurukula would be to train its student in spiritual life, so that they learn devotion and escape the cycle of rebirth. Even though the Gurukula also taught academic subjects, its core objective was to teach the children control over their senses

<sup>39</sup> ROCHFORD, "Education and Collective Identity", p. 30.

and ascetic techniques. By means of obedience and self-control, the young devotee would reach self-realization in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Prabhupāda believed that due to the natural strength of the bond between children and their parents, there is little hope to teach the child self-control in the family environment. Children thus had to leave their families as early as at 4 or 5 years of age. Rochford quotes a 1990 interview with a parent, who at the same time was an ex-teacher in a Gurukula:

It's understood that the parent is lenient and easily influenced by the child because of the ropes of affection. So this is why it is best if a *gurukula* teacher is instructing them.<sup>40</sup>

The children remained in the Gurukula all year and parents were only allowed to visit during sporadic holidays. The pupils lived in *āśramas*<sup>41</sup> together with their teacher who supervised them and took care of them. At first, the *āśramas* had the ratio of six to eight children of the same sex and age for one teacher. However, the number slowly grew, until one teacher was responsible for up to 20 kids. The Gurukula also had “academic” teachers who, as opposed to the *āśrama* teachers, were only responsible for teaching their subjects.<sup>42</sup>

The first Hare Kṛṣṇa *āśrama school*, which for a long time remained the only one, was founded in 1971 in Dallas, Texas. Since the authorities threatened to close it, two more were established in the USA – one in New Vrindaban, Virginia (a big ISKCON center) and one in Los Angeles. Short after, the Dallas Gurukula was indeed closed down – at this time it had about one hundred pupils between 4 and 8 years. By 1978, 11 *āśrama* schools had opened in the USA, but none of them survived longer than until 1986 – all were either closed or transformed into day schools. The only *āśrama school* left in the USA was *Vaisnava Academy for Girls* in Florida, which functioned both as a day school and a boarding school.<sup>43</sup> At the end of the 1970's and the beginning of the 1980's, Gurukulas begun to emerge in other countries, such as Great Britain, France, Sweden, Australia and South Africa,<sup>44</sup> but none of them remained an *āśrama type of school*. *All contemporary Gurukulas outside of India are only day schools. In India, two boarding Gurukulas have appeared, one in Vrindavan and the other in Mayapur. Both of them still exist.*

Since their beginning, the ISKCON Gurukulas wrestled with many problems. The reason was largely the fact that their education concept changed from following the

<sup>40</sup> ROCHFORD, “Family Formation, Culture and Change in the Hare Krishna Movement”, p. 67.

<sup>41</sup> Generally, the term *āśrama* is used for Hindu pilgrimage places, temples, and temple complexes. In the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement, the term is used for separate community lodging spaces – usually one room is reserved for men (men's *āśrama*), the other for women and children (women's *āśrama*). In the Gurukula, it is a room used for the accommodation of a teacher and several children of the same sex and more or less the same age.

<sup>42</sup> FÁREK, *Hnutí Haré Kršna*, p. 114.

<sup>43</sup> The part for boys was converted to day school after the teacher and director of the Gurukula was charged with abuse of four of his pupils of about ten years of age. He pleaded guilty and left ISKCON (FÁREK, *Hnutí Haré Kršna*, p. 114). As for today, not even the girls' part offers the *āśrama* form of schooling.

<sup>44</sup> ROCHFORD, “Family Formation, Culture and Change in the Hare Krishna Movement”, p. 68.

original Vaishnava principles towards fulfilling the necessities and goals of the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement. In other words, the original idea of upholding the Indian education and its traditional value of a kind relationship between the master and his pupils gave way to alleviating the parent’s responsibility for their children, so that they could return back to their missionary activities (and other work for the movement) as fast as they could. All family life was thus put under control and the devotees were free to spend all their energy on ISKCON missionary work:

Of course one of the main things that Prabhupada wanted to achieve was to free the parents from the encumbrance of the children. Because without children, and that responsibility, parents would be able to do more book selling and more preaching, and to devote full-time to institutional engagements.<sup>45</sup>

Rochford’s research shows that three factors contributed to the creation of an environment that led to child abuse:

- »The emphasis on book selling, which spread the movement’s mission and raised money for the movement;
- »insufficient support and control of the schools;
- »and the fact that parents were not informed of the true state of things in the Gurukulas.

These three factors cannot be separated – they blend into and influence one another. The parents couldn’t possibly face and avoid the socially pathological phenomena that started appearing in the Gurukulas and slowly became the standard. It seems that the parents generally lived in communities far from the Gurukulas where their child lived and they got only fragmentary or possibly even intentionally distorted information. They were not allowed to visit the child often or engage personally in the Gurukula matters.

Other problematic aspect was the choice of teachers. As I mentioned, ISKCON put greatest possible emphasis on book selling and missionary work. Those two activities were seen as the best way to please both Prabhupāda and Kṛṣṇa. Unsuccessful sellers and missionaries were relocated to do other work – for instance, to teach in the Gurukulas. Unfortunately, since the most praised form of service lay in raising money to build new temples and centers, becoming a teacher was seen as being demoted to an inferior position. Subsequently, the frustrated teachers vented their dissatisfaction and anger on the children. Moreover, the ISKCON leaders did not want the Gurukulas to spend the hard-earned money – even Prabhupāda himself prioritized temple construction and refused to use the movement’s financial means on the Gurukulas. Instead, he recommended to move the Dallas Gurukula to India.<sup>46</sup> Nobody was really

<sup>45</sup> ROCHFORD, “Family Formation, Culture and Change in the Hare Krishna Movement”, p. 68.

<sup>46</sup> “Letter for Ramesvara no. 76-1-64 (23. 1. 1976)”, in “Letters from Śrīla Prabhupāda Vol. V, 1975–1977” (online), The Vaishnava Institute, Culver City, 1987, p. 3055–3056, available online at <http://www.krishnapath.org/free-ebooks-audiobooks-of-srila-prabhupada/prabhupada-letters/>.

interested in how the Gurukulas worked. Bharata Shrestha dasa, one of the *ISKCON Communications Journal* correspondents, wrote the following:

Children suffered denial of medical care for life-threatening illnesses, serious bruises and contusions, lost teeth, broken noses, scarring from caning, repeated sexual abuse and even homosexual rape at knifepoint. The perpetrators of these very serious crimes were none other than the teachers, the ashram leaders, the administrators, and in some cases even sannyasis and ISKCON gurus... An entire generation of children had been subjected to horrendous treatment at the hands of those entrusted with their welfare by parents who thought that they were doing what was best for their children.<sup>47</sup>

Rochford's research documents a plethora of mostly anonymous testimonies of the situation in the ISKCON Gurukulas in the 1970's and 1980's. I selected three of those testimonies that illustrate the situation well:

Seattle was hell because I was only six years old, my mom lived in Hawaii, and I have always been a very shy mommy's girl. The movement was in its earlier stages, and the devotees were fanatical – beyond fanatical. I mean, they would give us a bowl of hot milk at night, so I would, of course, pee in my bed. Then as punishment they would spank me very hard and make me wear the contaminated panties on my head. In general, at that time, because I was so young, I was so spaced out and confused. I would cry ... for my mom, but that wasn't allowed, so I would say I was crying in devotional ecstasy. I really regret Seattle because I had a dire need for my mother's warmth and reassurance at that time in my life.

I remember dark closets filled with flying dates (large 3-inch, flying cockroaches) and such, while beatings and "no prasādam" [spiritually blessed food] for dinner became everyday affairs.

The teacher used to say, "Oh, you don't know when you are going to die. You could die in your sleep." And one day I was really bad and one of my teacher said, "Who knows you might die tonight. Krishna might be punishing you. He might be taking away your life."... And from that night on I used to pray every night, "Krishna, please don't kill me. I promise I will be a good girl tomorrow. Please let me get fixed up enough so I can go back to Godhead. Don't take me in my sleep." And for years I had insomnia. I was too afraid to go back to sleep.<sup>48</sup>

Another frequently discussed question was Prabhupāda's responsibility for the situation in the ISKCON Gurukulas – in some of his preserved letters, he explicitly approved of the *āśrama Gurukulas with their difficult life conditions*. Prabhupāda's words and their diverse interpretations by temple and *āśrama authorities were in*

<sup>47</sup> BHARATA SHRESTHA DASA, "ISKCON's Response to Child Abuse: 1990–1998" (online), *ISKCON Communications Journal* VI (1/1998), available online at [http://content.iskcon.org/icj/6\\_1/6\\_1bharata.html](http://content.iskcon.org/icj/6_1/6_1bharata.html).

<sup>48</sup> E. BURKE ROCHFORD, *Hare Krishna transformed*, p. 76.

*turn used as arguments against the parent's active involvement in the functioning of the Gurukulas and to silence their criticism of the conditions the Gurukula children lived in. For example, in one of the letters Prabhupāda writes the following:*

That is a good proposal, that parents should not accompany their children. Actually that is the gurukula system. The children should take complete protection of the Spiritual Master, and serve him and learn from him nicely. Just see how nicely your brahmacharies are working. They will go out in early morning and beg all day on the order of the guru. At night they will come home with a little rice and sleep without cover on the floor. And they think this work is very pleasant. If they are not spoiled by an artificial standard of sense gratification at an early age, children will turn out very nicely as sober citizens, because they have learned the real meaning of life. If they are trained to accept that austerity is very enjoyable then they will not be spoiled. So you organise everything in such a way that we can deliver these souls back to Krishna – this is our real work.<sup>49</sup>

And in another letter:

Regarding Gurukula, it is not required that parents live there with there [sic] children. We can take care of the children, but not the parents. Any parents there must be engaged preaching and selling books, and going on the Samkirtan party.<sup>50</sup>

At the beginning of the 1970's, the number of the movement's members steeply grew and there was already an institutional structure standing between Prabhupāda and the common devotees; at that time consisting of Prabhupāda's more advanced pupils. His schedule was therefore too busy for him to observe the situation in the Gurukulas. Moreover, tendencies to avoid informing Prabhupāda of some matters slowly started to appear. Even though Prabhupāda was a man brought up in a different cultural tradition, for which the most important objectives of education are obedience and self-control, he nevertheless apparently condemned physical as well as psychological abuse of the pupils. The following Prabhupāda's letter dated to November 1972 proves this. It was addressed to a Gurukula ex-teacher by the name of Bhanutanya Dasi, who informed him about her experience with how the children are treated in the Gurukulas and about her decision to leave the movement permanently:

Now the thing is, children should not be beaten at all, that I have told. They should simply be shown the stick strongly. So if one cannot manage in that way then he is not fit as teacher. If a child is trained properly in Krishna Consciousness, he will never go away. That

<sup>49</sup> "Letter for Satsvarūpa Dāsa no. 71-11-39 (25. 11. 1971)", in "Letters from Śrīla Prabhupāda Vol. III, 1970–1972" (online), The Vaishnava Institute, Culver City 1987, p. 1808, available online at <http://www.krishnapath.org/free-ebooks-audiobooks-of-srila-prabhupada/prabhupada-letters/>.

<sup>50</sup> "Letter for Satsvarūpa Dāsa no. 73-4-20 (19. 4. 1973)", in "Letters from Śrīla Prabhupāda Vol. IV, 1972–1975" (online), The Vaishnava Institute, Culver City 1987, p. 2268–2269, available online at <http://www.krishnapath.org/free-ebooks-audiobooks-of-srila-prabhupada/prabhupada-letters/>.

means he must have two things, love and education. So if there is beating of child, that will be difficult for him to accept in loving spirit, and when he is old enough he may want to go away – that is the danger. So why these things are going on – marching and chanting japa, insufficient milk, too strict enforcement of time schedules, hitting the small children? Why these things are being imposed? Why they are inventing these such new things like marching and japan like army? What can I do from such a distant place? They should run and play when they are small children, not forced to chant japa, that is not the way.<sup>51</sup>

Prabhupāda’s insufficient effort to correct the child abuse in the ISKCON Gurukulas is often explained by the movement’s growing organizational structure and institutionalization. Nevertheless, apparently even if the devotees informed him personally, he decided not to intervene – another case documented by Rochford attests this fact. A Gurukula ex-pupil explains how her father tried to draw Prabhupāda’s attention to the situation in the school:

When I was 5 and ½ years old, I’d been in gurukula [Dallas] since its [inception] (about 3 years). My dad had come to Dallas (against the wishes of his temple authority, who only cared about my dad’s money-making ability on sankirtan) after discovering bruises all over my body on Rathayatra<sup>52</sup> [festival] visit. After much discussion with the school authority, he found that he could not get them to change the policy of daily beatings. He removed me from the school. Very disillusioned, he nearly left ISKCON. On hearing that Prabhupada would be in L.A. [Los Angeles], we went there. When Prabhupada saw me he asked why I was not in the gurukula. My father told him that he’d removed me because of the daily beatings. Prabhupada told him that I belonged in gurukula and that if my dad had a problem with the treatment he should work to resolve it ... [Prabhupada] did nothing to resolve the situation. Instead of going himself or sending one of his top people to resolve the problems he sent my dad, who had never had any power. Needless to say, when my dad returned do Dallas nobody listened to him. If a problem arose at some temple or other, Prabhupada was more than willing to go or send someone effective to handle the situation, but for the kids he sent my dad, who was effective at getting people to give him money.<sup>53</sup>

Question remains: did those parents, who didn’t want to get rid of their children or who knew about the situation in the Gurukulas, even have a choice? Were they granted the possibility to keep the children and educate them at home or use the Gurukula as a day school? Apparently, Prabhupāda’s written instructions as documented in his letters differ from ISKCON’s usual practices. However, it is also possible that Prabhu-

<sup>51</sup> “Letter for Bhanutanya Dasi no. 72-11-21 (18. 11. 1972)”, in “Letters from Śrīla Prabhupāda Vol. IV, 1972–1975” (online), The Vaishnava Institute, Culver City 1987, p. 2155, available online at <http://www.krishnapath.org/free-ebooks-audiobooks-of-srila-prabhupada/prabhupada-letters/>.

<sup>52</sup> A big Hare Kṛṣṇa festival consisting of a procession with a chariot, several meters high, carrying Prabhupāda (today it carries his statue).

<sup>53</sup> ROCHFORD, *Hare Krishna transformed*, p. 87–88.

pāda's standpoint changed as he received more and more parents' petitions and news about the situation in the Gurukulas. This is Prabhupāda's answer to Tirthanga dasa dated to 14<sup>th</sup> of March, 1975:

Regarding sending children to Gurukula, that is also optional, not compulsory. The most important things are that you follow very carefully all of the rules and regulations such as rising early, and having mangala arati and classes, etc. and that you chant at least 16 rounds daily without fail. These things are most essential for your spiritual advancement and then everything will be alright.<sup>54</sup>

On the other hand, the actual practice of the movement strongly differed from this picture – again, we know this thanks to the devotees' experiences documented in Rochford's research. They confirm that the parents were under constant pressure to send their children to Gurukulas. A long-time teacher's memory follows:

I remember in New York the Temple President told one woman, "You don't send your kid to the gurukula you don't live in temple."<sup>55</sup>

A Hare Kṛṣṇa mother recalls the following:

We did try the asrama for a week but she was very upset and unhappy. So you see that and think, you want your child to be happy. And even though there were various devotees around us saying this and that. Because I am a social person I was worried about what everyone was thinking. And even my spiritual master was saying, giving hints, "Why isn't she here (in the gurukula)?" ... And believe me, it would've been easier just to send my child out to the gurukula. Much easier. But intuitively, I just thought it's not right. I just can't do that.<sup>56</sup>

Other parents that wanted to keep the children and only send them to the Gurukula during the day, met with this type of argument:

Prabhupada made this point strongly, even though we forget. Gurukula means residing. Jagadisha [ISKCON's Minister of Education] asked him: "What if a parent wants to keep a child outside and bring them just during the day?" Prabhupada said: "I've already told you. Gurukula means residing. We have room for children, not for parents."<sup>57</sup>

<sup>54</sup> "Letter for Tirthanga dasa no. 75-3-18 (14. 3. 1975)", in "Letters from Śrīla Prabhupāda Vol. V, 1975–1977" (online), The Vaishnava Institute, Culver City, 1987, p. 2777, available online at <http://www.krishnapath.org/free-ebooks-audiobooks-of-srila-prabhupada/prabhupada-letters/>.

<sup>55</sup> ROCHFORD, "Family Formation, Culture and Change in the Hare Krishna Movement", p. 68.

<sup>56</sup> ROCHFORD, "Family Formation, Culture and Change in the Hare Krishna Movement", p. 68.

<sup>57</sup> ROCHFORD, "Family Formation, Culture and Change in the Hare Krishna Movement", p. 68.

Nevertheless, the parents did not remain deaf to the Gurukula problems – instead of sending their children there, more and more of them preferred state schools. In 1992, approximately 75% of ISKCON children went to non-ISKCON primary schools and 95% of the teenagers attended state high schools.<sup>58</sup> It was probably these numbers that forced the ISKCON leaders to focus on the Gurukula problem: this also led to re-opening old abuse cases.

### **The 1990's: solving the abuse problem**

The first step towards a solution was the Resolution 90-119 accepted in 1990 at the Mayapur meeting of the GBC.<sup>59</sup> This document suggested the communities should appoint 2–3 persons to investigate suspicions of child abuse and to report to the authorities. Subsequently, they had to inform local ISKCON leadership about those cases. Persons suspected of child abuse were immediately suspended from the projects they participated in; this was often solved by transferring the person to another community. Meanwhile, the “suspect” was assigned to another type of service; sometimes he or she was expelled from the movement. Those who were “proven” guilty of child abuse could never return to their community of origin, unless a written agreement was presented signed by more than 75% of the parents.<sup>60</sup>

Since the resolution had the form of a suggestion and established no penalties for those who wouldn't comply, it was not mandatory and it took some time until temple directors started acting in accordance with it. Then the schools and communities started establishing Child Protection Teams (CPT). The biggest problem of the resolution was that it did not take into account past cases that had already been discovered. It also omitted the question of care for the abused children, leaving it up to their parents and the temple authorities, as well as prevention against future child abuse.<sup>61</sup>

On the other hand, the Resolution had its positive effects – at least it opened the way to solving the child abuse problem. It is true that neither the 1990 international meeting of the GBC in Mayapur nor Resolution 90-119 admitted that the situation was deeply rooted in the way ISKCON worked and in its chief priorities. At this point, the movement didn't consider it necessary to fundamentally change the way ISKCON worked. Nevertheless, it was the first time the Hare Kṛṣṇa realized that this state of affairs was not the result of individual teachers' personal failure – instead, it was a universal and widespread problem that troubled the whole movement. The ISKCON leaders gave a clear sign that a matter of such a general and complex nature could not be left to the local temple authorities to resolve and the movement's central

<sup>58</sup> *Preventing Child Abuse in ISKCON: A Manual for ISKCON Schools and Communities*, ISKCON Board of Education [undated], p. 42.

<sup>59</sup> Governing Body Commission, the movement's executive office founded in 1970.

<sup>60</sup> BHARATA SHRESTHA DASA, “ISKCON's Response to Child Abuse: 1990–1998”, [http://content.iskcon.org/icj/6\\_1/6\\_1bharata.html](http://content.iskcon.org/icj/6_1/6_1bharata.html).

<sup>61</sup> BHARATA SHRESTHA DASA, “ISKCON's Response to Child Abuse: 1990–1998”, [http://content.iskcon.org/icj/6\\_1/6\\_1bharata.html](http://content.iskcon.org/icj/6_1/6_1bharata.html).

management (GBC) were deal with it instead. Even though the 1990 meeting did not lead to an effective solution or to prevention of further abuse, at least it brought an impulse to start investigating and punishing the cases and took first steps towards it.

The second step was the meeting of the North-American GBC in May 1996. The management invited a group of adult Gurukula ex-pupils who experienced child abuse during their stay in the ISKCON schools. I quoted some of their testimonies in the last chapter. During the meeting the management already established a group by the name of Children of Krishna with the following objective:

To support, further, and protect the education, economic, emotional, and spiritual advancement of the children of the Hare Krishna Movement.<sup>62</sup>

The group was basically a fundraising team of first and second generation devotees that assisted young people with financing their higher education and arranged therapeutic help for those who experienced any kind of abuse.<sup>63</sup>

At more or less the same time, the movement launched the VOICE webpage. The site's purpose was to provide access both to the results of North-American GBC meetings and to information regarding the abuse cases, as well as their solutions and consequences. This led to a new breakthrough – those activities made it clear that the situation required a personal engagement of each and every ISKCON member:

In other words, the mood changed from “they [meaning ISKCON authorities] ought to do something” to “we [meaning local communities and parents] ought to do something”.<sup>64</sup>

In 1998, another GBC meeting in Mayapur accepted Resolution 98-305, which established a child protection policy and standards that every person working with children should meet. At the same time, Resolution 98-305 made reopening and solving the old cases possible, establishing the rules of inner ISKCON court proceedings including penalties for proven crimes and misdemeanors. In April 1998, the movement founded the Central Child Protection Office, today known as the Association for the Protection of Vaisnava Children.<sup>65</sup>

Clearly, after some time the problem of child abuse was fully put into spotlight. Some articles published in ISKCON Communications Journal also attest this turn of the events. This refers to the writings of E. Burke Rochford, who was invited to help

<sup>62</sup> BHARATA SHRESTHA DASA, “ISKCON’s Response to Child Abuse: 1990–1998”, [http://content.iskcon.org/icj/6\\_1/6\\_1bharata.html](http://content.iskcon.org/icj/6_1/6_1bharata.html).

<sup>63</sup> BHARATA SHRESTHA DASA, “ISKCON’s Response to Child Abuse: 1990–1998”, [http://content.iskcon.org/icj/6\\_1/6\\_1bharata.html](http://content.iskcon.org/icj/6_1/6_1bharata.html).

<sup>64</sup> BHARATA SHRESTHA DASA, “ISKCON’s Response to Child Abuse: 1990–1998”, [http://content.iskcon.org/icj/6\\_1/6\\_1bharata.html](http://content.iskcon.org/icj/6_1/6_1bharata.html).

<sup>65</sup> MARTIN FÁREK, *Hnutí Haré Kršna*, s. 121.

resolve the situation, as well as the testimonies of the victims themselves and general reflection of Gurukula-style education and its usefulness in adult life.<sup>66</sup>

Nevertheless, the preventive measurements are not always respected and followed. Even though the countries of Western Europe and North America keep an open approach and try to fight child abuse as much as they could, the rest of the world may not follow suit. Communities of these countries sometimes fail to establish the Groups for the Protection of Vaisnava Children and the ordinary members have no access to information about child abuse. This applies specifically to Eastern and Central Europe, Russia, and Latin America. Some of these communities lack their own websites and it is very hard to penetrate into their internal affairs. At the same time, in cases where the suspected party enjoyed high status in the movement, even the local leading ISKCON authorities may try to slow down or even sabotage the investigations.<sup>67</sup> These facts naturally cast some doubt on the ISKCON leaders' sincere intentions to solve the problem of child abuse and to reform the Gurukulas.

### **Gurukulas today**

According to available documents, there are currently 27 active Gurukulas.<sup>68</sup> In most cases, these are day schools; the pupils keep living with their families. They often offer education for children from pre-school years up to the end of the compulsory education (this in most of the world's countries means up to 14 or 15 years of age). Some Gurukulas also offer high school studies and some even adult education. The day Gurukulas also have the same range of services as state schools – that is, school buses, meals, school hobby clubs, and other leisure activities. And even though they are intended for ISKCON members, they accept other children as well. As such, they offer an alternative to a standard type of education.

### **Contemporary Gurukula schooling**

The Gurukulas' internet pages allow us to survey at least to some extent the organization and methods of the contemporary Gurukula education. I base my conclusions on the information available on the online websites of the following Gurukulas: Bhaktivedanta Manor Primary School,<sup>69</sup> Bhaktivedanta Gurukula & International School

<sup>66</sup> See p. e. GABRIEL DEADWYLER, "Fifteen Years Later: A Critique of Gurukula", *ISKCON Communications Journal* (1/2001): p. 13–22. The author is a former Gurukula pupil and the article describes his school experiences and subsequent problems he had to wrestle with as an adult.

<sup>67</sup> BHAKTIN MIRIAM, "The Persistent Child Abuse Problem in the Hare Krishna Movement" (online), *Chakra Discussions*, August 2004, accessed February 2016, available online at [http://www.chakra.org/discussions/GurAug01\\_04.html](http://www.chakra.org/discussions/GurAug01_04.html).

<sup>68</sup> The actual list of the available Gurukulas can be found on ISKCON's website dedicated to education (See "Schools" (online), *ISKCON Ministry of Education*, accessed February 2016, available online at <http://iskconeducation.org/category/schools/>). Only some of those Gurukulas have their own websites – some only offer contact e-mail addresses.

<sup>69</sup> *Bhaktivedanta manor: Home of the Hare Krishna* (online), accessed February 2016, available online at <http://www.bhaktivedantamanor.co.uk/home/?tag=gurukula>.

Vrindavan,<sup>70</sup> Sri Mayapur International School,<sup>71</sup> Bhaktivedanta Academy Mayapur,<sup>72</sup> Bhaktivedanta Swami Gurukula Australia,<sup>73</sup> and Sri MayapurNew School – Escola Bhakti ISKCON Franco da Rocha Brasil.<sup>74</sup>

The day programs largely differ, depending on whether the Gurukula belongs to a specific community (with only very few children from outside of it), or it is a Gurukula that serves for all the children from the surrounding neighborhoods or a boarding (āśrama) Gurukula. In any case, the basic organizational and didactic methods remain the same. The actual learning schedule is organized according to a typical ISKCON's daily program.

Both the children and the adults wake up around 4 A.M. and together with their parents attend the morning devotion. Around 5 A.M. they leave for the school club, where they engage in leisure activities supervised by a teacher. A typical example of these activities would be chanting, reading of Bhagavad-Gītā or other texts the community accepts, practicing theatrical performances intended for the parents, drawing, and narrating stories from the life of Kṛṣṇa, Caitanya, or other important personalities. Then they have a breakfast (prasādam) together, which usually takes place between 7 and 8 A.M.

The actual learning begins at an hour which is considered typical by the local custom – in other words, it differs according to the country of the Gurukula. Since we can find most of the Gurukulas in English speaking countries, the learning system is based on the Anglo-Saxon model and the first lesson thus usually starts between 8 to 10 A.M. Younger children spend 3 to 4 hours a day learning, the older 4 to 6 hours. The core goal of the education is acquiring the knowledge both of Vedic literature and Prabhupāda's writings. However, the Gurukulas also have to offer the usual curriculum – this applies specifically to Western countries, in which the Gurukulas must fulfill the local requirements in order to be included into the system of state approved schools which are allowed to offer compulsory schooling. Some Gurukulas also organize international exams. For example, Sri Mayapur International School offers its students the possibility to study according to the curriculum of Cambridge International Examinations.<sup>75</sup>

At the moment, the available materials suggest that the abovementioned schools conceive their education in such a way as to transmit academic information adapt-

<sup>70</sup> *The Bhaktivedanta Gurukula and International School* (online), accessed January 2018, available online at <http://www.bgis.org/>.

<sup>71</sup> *Sri Mayapur International School* (online), accessed January 2018, available online at [www.mayapurschool.com](http://www.mayapurschool.com).

<sup>72</sup> *Bhaktivedanta Academy* (online), accessed January 2018, available online at <http://bhaktivedantaacademy.com/>.

<sup>73</sup> *New Govardhana Australia* (online), accessed February 2016, available online at [www.newgovardhana.net/gurukula](http://www.newgovardhana.net/gurukula). At this point, the website is out of order and apparently wasn't replaced by a different one.

<sup>74</sup> "Fundacao Bhaktivedanta", (online), *Facebook.com*, last updated January 2012, accessed January 2018, available online at [https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story\\_fbid=28469558244334&id=151919578188600](https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=28469558244334&id=151919578188600).

<sup>75</sup> "Curriculum" (online), *Sri Mayapur International School*, accessed January 2018, available online at <http://mayapurschool.com/curriculum/>.

ed to the age of the pupils, but at the same time to allow the children to use this knowledge in their practical life. The goal is not to make the children memorize encyclopedic knowledge and leave its application in daily situations up to them. On the contrary – the schools only teach those things that help the devotees in their practical life – meaning, as I have sufficiently demonstrated, a devoted service to Kṛṣṇa. The following comparison illustrates the situation.

In a standard school, the mathematics lessons are conceived in such a way that the pupil would proceed from concrete tasks (such as counting apples, pears etc.) to working with symbols (numbers) and formulae and then to applying these formulae to a concrete problem that can appear in practical life. This means that standard school education proceeds from the general (symbolic) as it appears in schoolwork to concrete problems as they appear in practical life. The Gurukula, on the other hand, does not teach the pupil to work with formulae and symbols – instead, it emphasizes solving practical-life situations right from the start. As such p. e. calculate the total price of a shopping list or the quantity of money the shopkeeper returns them after paying with a big note, create a home budget, compare the size of crops, etc. In other words, the school's objective is to teach children to solve basic situations of life. Making general or abstract conclusions is secondary and the school leaves it to the child. Thus, in effect, the schools proceed the other way: from the concrete to the general.

The Gurukulas' schedule is not always divided into different subjects arranged to blocks of time – specifically the little children learn in a different way. The education uses various methodical and didactic forms and emphasizes the connection of relationships, phenomena and situations that have something to do with the discussed problem. Instead of gaining empirical understanding of the problem by means of intellect and encyclopedic knowledge, the goal is to experience and perceive the lesson's content as a reality of life. We might say that it is a kind of project-based learning.

In practice, the teaching may look like this: instead of teaching math one hour, biology the next hour, literature the third and music the fourth, the teacher unites all of them into a single-themed project dedicated, for example, to cattle. The biology part is filled with information regarding anatomy, typical traits, food and the uses of the animals. To learn math, the children may calculate the costs of raising cattle, milk production, etc. Part of the program may be dedicated to reading literature, discussing assigned texts and chanting hymns, since in Hindu traditions, cow is considered sacred. This is how the learning program is built.

After the lessons, the Gurukula returns to the same type of program which took place in the morning. That is, mantra chanting, reading from the movement's scriptures, discussions, theatre, and lunch (prasādam). In case of the day Gurukulas, the pupils proceed to return back home to their parents to participate in individual activities according to the customs of their family and/or community.

In the *āśrama Gurukulas*, the program remains set until evening. The children study Bhagavad-Gītā and Prabhupāda's writings, meditate and fulfill their "housework"

duties. This last point refers to the fact that the pupils are required to help with the Gurukula housework, which is distributed according to their age. During the work, they are under a constant supervision of one of the *āśrama teachers*. *Websites usually agree on in the ratio of ten pupils on one teacher.*

While the standard schools have two months of summer holidays and the school-year is divided in two semesters of five months each, the Gurukulas use trimesters of three months of learning followed by exams and a month-long holidays.

## Conclusion

Although all the generations of Hare Kṛṣṇa devotees insist they derive their teachings from the tradition of Caitanya Vaishnavism, this tradition was gradually transformed by Western needs and lifestyle. The clash of cultures and slow building of the movement's organizational structure (which is not part of the tradition but reacts to modern needs) created different problems and conflicts. In his book, Martin Fárek analyzed this situation according to Thomas O'Connell's concept of soft, middle, and hard institution, examining their influences on the movement's development and the emergence of theological, social and political conflicts.<sup>76</sup> I believe that the problems connected to the transfer of an Indian tradition to the West and the difference between the founder's thoughts and ideas on the one hand and their subsequent interpretation as offered by his pupils is the first reason why all three types of problems emerged. Most important of them are the social problems – that is, the low status of marriage and family, which is seen as something that only diverts the devotees' attention from service to Kṛṣṇa. This creates a low status for women and children, opening the way to abuse.

The organization of learning in ISKCON Gurukulas has significantly diverged from its Indian model. Contrarily to it, the Gurukulas resembled big Anglo-Saxon boarding schools that housed hundreds of children (the *āśrama gurukulas*). *Even though the founder's origins lay in the tradition of Caitanya Vaishnavism, he didn't manage to apply the traditional style of education in the Western environment and it's highly unlikely he even intended it.* With all probability, his missionary orientation played a crucial role in all this, due to which everything in the movement and its devotees' life was considered inferior to the struggle to expand the movement as much as possible. The fact that the movement's chief objective was to spread Kṛṣṇa consciousness also meant that children and childcare occupied a marginal place. In fact, children were seen as a burden that hinders the parents' dedication to a devoted service. The most prestigious activities in the movement were public mantra chanting and book selling, since they brought money that could be used for temple construction and publishing more literature. Unsuccessful sellers were relocated to other forms of service, such as teaching in a Gurukula. In other words, the teachers had no previous training and

<sup>76</sup> FÁREK, *Hnutí Hare Kṛṣṇa, passim*.

lacked a positive attitude towards children. They had no necessary personal traits, no experience, and their character wasn't formed by a long service to a spiritual master required by the tradition. In other words, they couldn't give the children what they lacked themselves. Moreover, they were often frustrated by the fact that their service was not bringing money to the movement and was thus considered inferior. Their low social status contributed to their attitude towards the children.

At the same time, the concept of education itself changed. At first, it was aimed to teach tradition, attitudes and habits that were supposed to lead to freedom from suffering by means of devoted service to Kṛṣṇa. Nevertheless, it quickly transformed into raising docile and effective missionaries who need to earn their salvation by absolute subordination to the ISKCON organization. During the first two decades of their existence, the Gurukulas used quite controversial methods to reach this goal. Unfortunately, the problem of both psychological and sexual abuse of children was ignored for a long time. The children were sent to distant Gurukulas far from their home, having little or no contact with their parents. If their families found out about the abuse, they could hardly accomplish any change without the leaders' support. Although Prabhupāda condemned some of the Gurukulas' practices during his life, he neither personally engaged in the problem nor tried to solve the situation actively. After his death, the situation in the Gurukulas kept getting worse. Testimonies gathered by E. Burke Rochford attest to the way the Gurukulas worked; at the same time, technical problems and hygienic standards contributed to the life the children led there. The movement's leadership refused to pay for the reconstruction and preferred to close them or merge them together. Consequently, the children may have ended up living in a different country, sometimes even on a different continent than their parents.

The first intents to face the abuse cases date to the 1990's. Resolution 119 opened the way to monitoring the situation both in the Gurukulas and the communities and to prevent new cases of abuse; however, it did not address past cases or punish the culprits. It was just a kind of recommendation which was only actively pursued in North America and Western Europe. Step by step, other projects emerged which intended to spread information about the problem of child abuse in the ISKCON – these were, among others, the VOICE website and Children of Kṛṣṇa group. Finally, the 1998 Resolution 305 cleared the way to prosecuting past offences.

Because of confirmed cases of abuse, all of the Western *āśrama Gurukulas transformed into day schools*. The only āśrama Gurukulas that remain today are in Vrindavan and Mayapur. In order to supervise the current Gurukula education, the movement established the Association for the Protection of Vaisnava Children. However, the available information applies mostly to North America, Australia, Northern and Western Europe and India. As for the countries of East Europe and South America, the situation is unknown and probably unchanged.

Between the years 1995 and 1997, the Czech ISKCON community of Kršňův Dvůr near Městečko u Benešova tried to establish its own Gurukula as well. In order to be able to offer compulsory schooling, Gurukula Kršňův Dvůr would have to be officially recognized by the Czech Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports and included in its

list of schools and educational institutions. With the help of Agneta Kempe, a former Swedish Gurukula headmaster, the Czech devotees created a project and submitted an application which planned to open the school on the 1<sup>st</sup> of September, 1995; however, the Ministry turned down the application. Even though leading Czech specialists in Pedagogy and Philosophy actively supported the project, the application was denied again in the following year. The reason for the Ministry's decision was that the expected number of the pupils was too small – while the law required a minimum number of 13 pupils to start a new school, only 4 children were expected to study in the Gurukula. Even though the law allowed for an exception to be awarded, the Ministry decided against it, which provoked public discussion of its possible undeclared motivation. The struggle for the Gurukula founding finally ended in 1997 when a huge breach of regulative principles was discovered, the guilty party being the leader of the farm. Consequently, the Kršňuv Dvůr community practically dissolved. Since then, no further intents to found a Czech Gurukula have been made. Czech devotees either engage in homeschooling (available only for the first four grades of elementary school) or send their children to foreign Gurukulas.

As of yet, no Czech children's experiences with Gurukulas are available. A systematic and longitudinal research of the Czech Hare Kṛṣṇa movement may also contribute to a better understanding of situation in other countries, especially in Great Britain and India, since these are the places to which Czech devotees most frequently send their children. The Gurukula websites give only little concrete information on their state of affairs and teaching methods. However, the available documents suggest that those Gurukulas included in the list on ISKCON's Ministry of Education's website focus mostly on teaching practical knowledge. Their character is probably only controversial in the context of Western tradition and its preference for Cartesian and encyclopedic knowledge. It will take a few years to see if the current system of Hare Kṛṣṇa education has changed enough to give the children a better perspective than it did in the past.

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# A Feeble Folk to whom No Concern is Accorded: “Apocalyptic Responses” to ISIS and their Contextualization

Bronislav Ostřanský

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## Abstract:

Apocalyptic rhetoric has become a symptomatic expression of the so called Islamic State (hereinafter ISIS). This article provides the reader with a quite different perspective on the apocalyptic visions of ISIS than usual. “A Feeble Folk to whom no Concern is Accorded” (this title is a borrowed quotation from an apocalyptic prophecy recorded by Nu‘aym ibn Hammad in his *Kitāb al-Fitan*) discusses, above all, how the activities of ISIS are placed into an apocalyptic context by their Muslim opponents. Perhaps it is not surprising that such opposing perceptions can be found mainly within the contributions belonging to those Muslim groups and strands that currently feel mortally threatened by the ISIS inspired terror, namely Shiites, Sufis, liberals, etc. This paper elaborates pivotal Sunni patterns as well as specific examples of such a fighting against ISIS “in eschatological terms.”

**Keywords:** ISIS; apocalypse; millennialism; jihadists; Sufis

## Abstrakt:

Apokalyptická rétorika se stala příznačným projevem tzv. Islámského státu (dále jen ISIS). Tento článek však nabízí čtenáři především poněkud jiný pohled na apokalyptické vize ISIS, než je obvyklé. „Ubohý lid, jenž nikoho nezajímá“ (tento titul je výpůjčkou z jedné apokalyptické předpovědi zaznamenané Nu‘ajmem ibn Hammád v jeho *Kitāb al-fitan*) rozebírá zejména to, jak jsou aktivity ISIS „apokalypticky kontextualizovány“ jeho odpůrci. Není divu, že takovéto odmítavé vnímání můžeme nalézt především u příspěvků náležejících k těm muslimským skupinám a proudům, které se v současnosti samy cítí smrtelně ohroženy terorem inspirovaným ISIS; konkrétně jde o šíity, súfije, liberály atd. Tento článek rozebírá stěžejní sunnitské vzory, jakož i konkrétní příklady, které lze „eschatologickými prostředky“ bojovat proti ISIS.

**Klíčová slova:** ISIS; apokalypsa; milenialismus; džihádisté; súfijské

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PhDr. **Bronislav Ostřanský**, Ph.D., research fellow, Oriental Institute, Czech Academy of Sciences.  
E-mail: [ostransky@orient.cas.cz](mailto:ostransky@orient.cas.cz)

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**Motto:**

*As the Hour approaches, it becomes important to reflect upon the fabricated accounts of future events, as they will undoubtedly play a role in actions taken up by various deviant sects. Of these accounts is that of the 'Mahdī' of the Rāfidah who wages war against Islam and the Muslims, contrary to the just and rightly guided Mahdī of the future described in the Sunnah. The closer the Hour approaches, the more the Rāfidah fall in line with the Jews in preparation for the appearance of this awaited evil leader.*

The *Dabiq* magazine<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps not surprisingly, the ISIS' explosive apocalypticism<sup>2</sup> has already triggered countless responses all over the "Muslim world". Based on a broader consideration related to the very phenomenon of the "apocalyptic response", this article primarily focuses on the specific Sunni reactions to ISIS End-time agenda and propaganda.<sup>3</sup> In fact, diverse approaches of Muslims towards End-time issues can be hardly generalized into one single pattern and the same comment should be made about Muslim reactions to the ISIS apocalyptic rhetoric and visions. There is definitely no single "Islamic response" but, at the same time, the very existence of more general shifts of attitudes towards the millennial agenda, traceable throughout the current Islamic discourse, cannot be simply denied.

## Apocalyptic responses and their context

The chief point to be made here is that the very act of questioning the ISIS apocalyptic message does not automatically mean the questioning of apocalypticism as a way of thinking. In fact, most opponents of ISIS have no ambition to contest the relevance of the supposedly approaching End itself, but only the way of its alleged abuse by the group's propaganda. This fundamental point should be emphasized again and again. When discussing various reactions to the ISIS End-time presentations, it is necessary to first summarize certain broader overlaps of the Muslim apocalypse itself: On one hand, when Muslim apocalyptic authors strive to include other religions in their own

<sup>1</sup> "The 'Mahdī' of the Rāfidah: The Dajjāl", *Dabiq* (11), p. 16, September 2015, accessed November 2017, available online at <https://azelin.files.wordpress.com/2015/09/the-islamic-state-e2809cd-c481biq-magazine-11e280b3.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> For introduction to Islamic apocalypticism, see, for example, DAVID COOK, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, Princeton: The Darwin Press 2002; DAVID COOK, *Contemporary Muslim Apocalyptic Literature*, New York: Syracuse University Press 2008; JEAN-PIERRE FILIU, *Apocalypse in Islam* (transl. M. B. DeBevoise), Berkeley: University of California Press 2011; RICHARD LANDES, "Enraged Millennialism", in RICHARD LANDES (ed.), *Heaven on Earth: The Varieties of the Millennial Experience*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2011, p. 421–466. In Czech, see also BRONISLAV OSTRĀNSKÝ (ed.), *Konec tohoto světa: Milenialismus a jeho místo v judaismu, křesťanství a islámu* [The End of this World: Millennialism and its Place in Judaism, Christianity and Islam], Prague: Dingir 2012, p. 115–151.

<sup>3</sup> For the ISIS apocalypticism, see WILLIAM McCANTS, *The ISIS Apocalypse: The History, Strategy, and Doomsday Vision of the Islamic State*, New York: Picador 2016, p. 99–120.

visions of the End-time, on the other hand, when their own “scenarios” related to apocalyptic events become part of other, non-Islamic narratives.

In the former case, Muslim apocalyptic authors, in general, include all of humanity into their End-time visions, not only Muslims. Non-Muslims are mostly relegated into the role of enemies within the final battles leading to their defeat and subsequent conversion to Islam. However, there is another remarkable approach, to which Abbas Amanat aptly refers: The resemblance between Islamic (more Shiite) messianic prophecies and the Jewish and Christian traditions seemingly posed a theological challenge to the Shiite apocalyptists; a problem that is tackled in this messianic output by empowering the Mahdī beyond the Islamic space and as the saviour whose Advent is anticipated in all religions.<sup>4</sup>

With regard to the latter case, Islamic visions of the End-time have become a part of wider eschatological fictions of some non-Muslim authors, among them Christian fundamentalist opponents of Islam, for whom eschatology is an appropriate arena where the real nature of this “religion of evil” can be truly unveiled. An illustrative example of such a view can be found in the book by Joel Richardson, eloquently entitled *The Islamic Antichrist: The Shocking Truth about the Real Nature of the Beast*, skilfully presenting Islam as the fulfilment of a Biblical prophecy and advocating the thesis that Islam’s saviour, the Mahdī, and the Antichrist, as described in the Bible, “are actually one and the same.”<sup>5</sup> As can be easily observed on the Internet, a plethora of apocalyptic and Islamophobic agenda is currently combining within works by numerous authors, for instance Walid Shoebat, an US-based Islamophobic activist. This can be interpreted also as a trend of instrumentalization of apocalypse within the framework of the contemporary anti-Islamic discourse in West.

Nonetheless this challenging subject is far beyond the limits of this study. An apocalypse as a continuation of a worldly struggle by “other means” can actually be found not only within the “Jihadists versus anti-Jihadists framework.” The nature of the problem has been accurately expressed by Richard Landes as follows: “The normal dynamic of apocalyptic thinking is a zero-sum game, i.e., ‘I win, you lose’. One person’s messiah is another’s Anti-Christ. In normal time, this translates into theocratic imperialism – my religion is right because it has replaced yours, and the proof lies in my religion’s political dominion.”<sup>6</sup>

As we already know, the final days’ perspective can offer a meaningful approach not only for those who are going to fight with their earthly opponents against the backdrop of the end of days but, especially, for those who fail in such a real conflict. In any case, the idea of using millennial ammunition against its own promoters can be,

<sup>4</sup> ABBAS AMANAT, *Apocalyptic Islam and Iranian Shi’ism*, London: I. B. Tauris 2009, p. 234.

<sup>5</sup> JOEL RICHARDSON, *The Islamic Antichrist: The Shocking Truth about the Real Nature of the Beast*, Los Angeles: WND Books 2009, book cover.

<sup>6</sup> RICHARD LANDES and MANFRED GERSTENFELD, “Jihad, Apocalypse, and Anti-Semitism: An Interview with Richard Landes” (online), *Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs*, September 2004, accessed November 2017, available online at <http://www.jcpa.org/phas/phas-24.htm>.

in fact, a very understandable method for common Muslims to effectively face ISIS ideological supporters, especially within the cyberspace.

Unlike the struggles of this world, success or defeat within an apocalyptic realm is never a result of real power and strategy, but – primarily, but not exclusively – of the media appeal of ideas and interpretations. Moreover, various apocalyptic expectations – or, at least, loud declarations – as creative renditions of quite earthly wishes can be found not only among Muslim responses to the atrocities committed by ISIS, but also within a more universal framework of modern Muslim apocalyptic creativity.

Essentially, an attempt to depict one's own enemy as being on the side of metaphysical evil within the apocalyptic battlefield is nothing new, as we can follow on the pages of countless pamphlets written by modern Muslim apocalyptic authors, some of which are introduced in the following interpretation.

Apocalyptic expectations, either allegedly fulfilled or declared as just approaching, can ultimately serve as a mighty tool to justify one's own ambitions and the soundness of one's own conduct. This remark applies not only for Muslim radicals but, in general, for the belief in one's own allegiance to the powers of good within the expected final day clashes can, in a surprisingly easy way, transform any "scholarly" apocalyptic scenario into a potential spiritual battlefield. The expected role in an apocalyptic drama can be also supported by identifying current enemies with supposed eschatological adversaries.

Speaking about the persuasiveness of apocalyptic rhetoric, we should mention that its most effective manifestations usually contain three core components: its diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational features. This point fully applies for the ISIS millennial message but also for the group's opponents. Essentially, the diagnostic frame defines the problem and who is to be held responsible for it. In our context, it could be identifying the foretold phenomena of medieval prophecies with the contemporary Middle-Eastern geopolitics and the unflattering state of Muslim societies. Then, the prognostic frame can offer a solution which means, in apocalyptic terms, whom the reader (listener, spectator, etc.) can trust and whose advice and recommendations he is to follow. Finally, the motivational frame provides incentives to inspire action, in our case either to support ISIS or to reject it. Thus, framing this as a process serves to convince the target audiences by using well-rehearsed arguments that appeal to the scripture, authoritative interpretation, and prioritisation of action to elicit support and participation.<sup>7</sup>

Convincing the audience about their own role in final days' agenda is definitely not a privilege of ISIS. The following interpretation provides the reader with a completely different perspective, depicting how the activities of ISIS can be placed into an apocalyptic context by their opponents. Nevertheless, the tool to attract Muslim audiences, either opponents of ISIS or its supporters, remains, in both cases, the same. In the words of Sabine Damir-Geilsdorf and Lisa Franke: "Through the ex-

<sup>7</sup> SADEK HAMID, *Sufis, Salafis and Islamists: The Contested Ground of British Islamic Activism*, London: I. B. Tauris 2016, p. 94.

PLICIT identification of ‘good’ and ‘evil,’ as well as dualistic friend and foe concepts, these narratives provide a simple orientation scheme that supports the call to action. They call for a moral-ethically defined individual reorientation on the part of Muslims, reminding them of their transnational unity or asking them directly to take up arms against the perceived enemy. Political conflicts are being declared sacral in such narratives and thus the use of force is legitimized in the binary-termed holy action.”<sup>8</sup>

No wonder that such opposing perceptions can be found mainly among the apocalyptic outputs of those Muslim groups and strands that currently feel mortally threatened by ISIS, among whom Shiites and Sufis should be mentioned in the first place. The apocalyptic imagination always reveals, at least to a certain degree, the nature of the thinkers and the millennial content can often reflect their worldly worries and concerns. An effort to support one’s own argumentation on an apocalyptic level often results in the use of means that are usually considered absolutely inappropriate, for example weak *ahādīth*<sup>9</sup> or even forgeries. In principle, if a doubtful narration depicts a future event and the event plays out exactly as recorded in the narration, then the narration can be strengthened. Whether this narration is sound according to the Islamic standards or not can be left for scholars to discuss. In modern apocalyptists’ views, everything that can support argumentation is simply welcome.

## Key themes and notions

Regarding the “apocalyptic responses” to ISIS, the group’s very deployment on the side of evil in apocalyptic drama has been facilitated by the possibility of identifying the group’s followers (as well as all Jihadi-Salafists) as Kharijites (*Khawārij*), since this designation often appears among the apocalyptic portents. The main reasons for such an accusation are their violent rebellion against Muslim rulers and their application of *takfīr* on the basis of ‘mere’ major sins without verbal confirmation of sinful intention, thereby – in effect – excommunicating people on the basis of minor unbelief, just like the Khawarij did.<sup>10</sup> This *takfirism* has enormous apocalyptic potential. Zarqāwī’s ideological legacy enabled ISIS to achieve great territorial gains, but it has also prevented the group from achieving global domination. Nonetheless, as Brian Fishman has aptly noted, the ‘Zarqawism’ that limits the group’s broad appeal will help it remain resilient.<sup>11</sup> And from the perspective of ISIS opponents, precisely this schismatic nature of ISIS can be easily put into End-time narratives as fulfilling foretold *fitnas*.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>8</sup> SABINE DAMIR-GEILSDORF and LISA M. FRANKE, “Narrative Reconfigurations of Islamic Eschatological Signs: The Portents of the ‘Hour’ in Grey Literature and on the Internet”, *Archiv Orientalní* (3/2015), p. 433.

<sup>9</sup> I.e. unreliable.

<sup>10</sup> JOAS WAGEMAKERS, *Salafism in Jordan: Political Islam in a Quietist Community*, Cambridge University Press 2016, p. 196.

<sup>11</sup> BRIAN FISHMAN, *The Master Plan: ISIS, Al-Qaeda, and the Jihadi Strategy for Final Victory*, New Haven: Yale University Press 2016, p. 248.

<sup>12</sup> I.e. schism, dissension, apocalyptic trials and tribulations.

Among obvious apocalyptic arguments against ISIS, references to *ahādīth*, mentioning black banners, can be found in numerous sermons and lectures on YouTube or in statements made by laymen in other social media, but they also appear in newspapers, and even in the writings of prominent religious scholars. In any case, the spectrum of the eschatological forces and representatives of evil with whom the ISIS can be identified is actually manifold and the Internet mirrors these opinions online.<sup>13</sup> With regards to the black banners, the same sign can play different roles while seen from a completely opposite perspective than the ISIS propagandists employ. It can mean not a justification of the group's claims but a proof of it belonging to the side of evil. Essentially, the *ahādīth* referring to black flags coming from the East are considered as being fabricated in order to support Abbasids' claims to power and despite all doubts regarding their authenticity, they are often quoted throughout Internet discussions, mostly associated with the Mahdī or the introduction of inter-Muslim warfare.<sup>14</sup>

As can be seen on the Internet, some opponents also consider ISIS either *jaysh al-khasf* (the army that should, according to the classical traditions, disappear or be swallowed by the ground in the desert of the Arabian Peninsula)<sup>15</sup> or even the Dajjāl's partisans. In both cases the group's supporters are on the side of evil in apocalyptic drama. In such a context, the Dajjāl is often presented as a depersonalized force and is projected onto anything un-Islamic. The irrevocable apocalyptic dualism thus manifests itself through a discussion between 'Islamic' and '*dajjālistic*,' whereas the 'Dajjāl-system' is portrayed not necessarily as one incorporating social and moral decay, but rather as one that contains the connotation of an adversary political force that is setting out to control the world.<sup>16</sup>

## General patterns

In search for the portents of the Hour<sup>17</sup> that could be easily incorporated into any apocalyptic offensive against ISIS, a long list of suitable items appears (mentioned here in the wording used by the renowned Egyptian preacher Muḥammad al-Sha'rāwī):<sup>18</sup> the appearance of the *khawārij* (*zuhūr al-khawārij*), the authority of fools (*imārat al-sufahā'*), the arbitrary treatment of the Koran (*ittikhādh al-qur'ān mazāmīr*), a lot of

<sup>13</sup> DAMIR-GEILSDORF and FRANKE, "Narrative Reconfigurations of Islamic Eschatological Signs", pp. 423–425.

<sup>14</sup> DAMIR-GEILSDORF and FRANKE, "Narrative Reconfigurations of Islamic Eschatological Signs", p. 423.

<sup>15</sup> See NU'AYM IBN HAMMAD AL-MARWAZI, *The Book of Tribulations: The Syrian Muslim Apocalyptic Tradition: An Annotated Translation*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 2017, pp. 378–388.

<sup>16</sup> DAMIR-GEILSDORF and FRANKE, "Narrative Reconfigurations of Islamic Eschatological Signs", pp. 415–416.

<sup>17</sup> I.e. the End.

<sup>18</sup> See MUḤAMMAD AL-SHA'RĀWĪ, *Aḥdāth nihāyat al-'ālam* [The Events of the End of the World], Cairo: Dār al-tawfiqiya li-l-turāth 2011, *passim*.

killing (*kathrat al-qatl*), a lot of writing (*kathrat al-kitāba*), knowledge will be taken away and ignorance will spread (*raf‘ al-‘ilm wa intishār al-jahl*), ignorant leaders (*al-ru‘ūs al-juhhāl*), demanding knowledge from the little ones (*iltimās al-‘ilm ‘inda al-asāghir*), for instance. Despite different expressions, most of them refer to three fundamental directions: The increase of violence; the decline of genuine Islamic knowledge and the extension of splits (*fitan*).

(1) The staggering increase of violence, as a common denominator of many signs of the Hour, fits into the conditions of the Last Days when everything shall be taken to extreme. For apocalyptic opponents of ISIS, precisely this group is the embodiment of the given characteristic. Apocalyptic authors often mention the related spike in cruelty. In this respect, Hisham Kabbani explains that “leaders will be engaged in widespread torture and human rights abuses to keep themselves in power. (...) People will be tyrants in order to hold onto their positions. (...) They will find any way and use any method or system to maintain their hold on power.”<sup>19</sup> Classical sources actually contain a lot of signs pointing in this direction, including beheadings as a certain “hallmark” of ISIS: “The Messenger of God said during the Farewell Pilgrimage: ‘After me, do not return to being unbelievers, cutting each other’s heads off.’”<sup>20</sup>

(2) The second symptomatic point, the decline of genuine Islamic scholarship belongs to the most favourite subjects of Muslim apocalyptists, including the opponents of ISIS whose task is made even easier by the fact that ignorance and arbitrariness of the ISIS leaders in religious affairs have been repeatedly documented and criticized by Muslim scholars. In this respect, medieval apocalyptic prophecies speak a clear language that needs no commentary, since the Prophet Muḥammad said: “The Hour will not arise until the most felicitous of the people is an idiot son of an idiot.”<sup>21</sup>

(3) The third item, the extension of the *fitan* (singular *fitna*) as a recurring segment of all apocalyptic scenarios belongs to the most convincing arguments in the hands of ISIS’s critics. According to medieval traditions, the Last-days *fitan* should not juxtapose only Muslims and non-Muslims but, above all, rightly led Muslims and Muslims led astray. These final *fitan*, overwhelming military encounters between Muslims and Western powers as well as various inter-Muslim clashes (including also the so called Arab Spring), shall culminate, as viewed by both supporters and opponents of ISIS, by the emergence of this sinister group. In predominantly general ways of formulations, Muḥammad Ḥisān, an Egyptian apocalyptic writer, dared to be specific when he identified the appearance of Abū Bakr al-Baghdādī with *fitnat al-iḥlās wa al-duhay-māʿ*, two particular forms of *fitna*. In their critical perspectives to the ISIS self-presentation, Muslim opponents of this group often note that even Antichrist can quote God’s Scripture to suit his own purposes.

<sup>19</sup> MUHAMMAD HISHAM KABBANI, *The Approach of Armageddon? An Islamic Perspective*, Washington, DC: Islamic Supreme Council of America 2003, p. 119–120.

<sup>20</sup> NUʿAYM IBN HAMMAD, *The Book of Tribulations*, p. 89.

<sup>21</sup> NUʿAYM IBN HAMMAD, *The Book of Tribulations*, p. 102.

## Scholarly responses of Muslim authorities

After outlining the thematic compositions of apocalyptic responses to ISIS, a brief overview of main critical voices can be suggested. They can be, essentially, divided into three imaginary branches: (1) responses of authoritative institutions or scholars; (2) traditionalist Muslims' responses; and (3) Sufi responses. Aside of them, millennial speculations of Harun Yahya are briefly introduced here to indicate the diversity of the current Muslim End-time disputes.

Starting with the first "category", al-Azhar University, as the Sunni authority number one, has repeatedly criticized ISIS, discussing various non-Islamic items in the group's statements and activities. At the same time, al-Azhar was not able to denounce ISIS as un-Islamic, even if the group committed so many atrocities, which is the point that has been denounced by a long list of other Muslim scholars and authorities.<sup>22</sup> The theological polemics related to such a vigilant approach to the practice of *takfīr* are beyond the scope of this paper. However, as far as the End-time agenda of ISIS is concerned, the situation is considerably clearer. The group's apocalyptic self-presentation, as a separate topic, has been criticized by Aḥmad Ma'bad 'Abd al-Karīm, a member of the scientific board of the university, who stated that the ISIS End-time narratives are based on lies since there is no reliable *ḥadīth* appointing what time remains to this world or what the date of the Day of Resurrection is. His speech, in which 'Abd al-Karīm designated ISIS as 'one of the signs of the Hour' was delivered within a framework of a congress organized by al-Azhar for its foreign scholarship holders, eloquently entitled *Tafnīd awhām dā'ish fī qaḍiyat nihāyat al-'ālam* (Refusal of the delusive imagination of ISIS related to the matters of the end of the world); a fact that needs no comment.<sup>23</sup>

Another illustrative example of using the apocalyptic weapon against ISIS has been offered by authors of *Open Letter*, signed by many prominent Muslim authorities and addressed to the leader of ISIS, Abū Bakr al-Baghdādī. This text has been reproduced on numerous websites and can be found in many languages. Following a long account of the supposedly non-Islamic activities of ISIS, this document, as an appendix, contains also an exegesis of the *ḥadīth* recorded by Nu'aym ibn Ḥammād,<sup>24</sup> considered by the authors of the letter as an insightful prediction of ISIS's emergence. This prophecy has already inspired and encouraged a lot of the group's Muslim critics; among them, for example, Abdul Aziz Suraqah, an American convert and translator from Arabic, well-versed in Islamic traditions.<sup>25</sup> The following translation of the related

<sup>22</sup> MAHER GABRA, "The Ideological Extremism of al-Azhar" (online), *The Washington Institute*, March 2016, accessed November 2017, available online at <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/the-ideological-extremism-of-al-azhar>.

<sup>23</sup> 'ALĪ, LU'AY, "Lā yūjad ḥadīth yuḥaddidu nihāyat al-'ālam" (online), *al-Yawm al-sābi'*, May 2015, accessed November 2017, available online at <http://www.youm7.com/2181801>.

<sup>24</sup> NU'AYM IBN HAMMAD, *The Book of Tribulations*, p. 107.

<sup>25</sup> USTADH ABDUL AZIZ SURAQAH, "ISIS and the End of Times" (online), *Splendid Pearls*, July 2014, accessed on November 2017, available at <https://splendidpearls.org/2014/07/04/isis-and-the-end-of-times/>.

*ḥadīth* comes from the official English version of the *Open Letter*: “When you see the black flags, remain where you are and do not move your hands or your feet. Thereafter there shall appear a feeble insignificant folk. Their hearts will be like fragments of iron. They will have the state. They will fulfil neither covenant nor agreement. They will call to the truth, but they will not be people of the truth. Their names will be parental attributions, and their aliases will be derived from towns. Their hair will be free-flowing like that of women. This situation will remain until they differ among themselves. Thereafter, God will bring forth the Truth through whomever He wills.”<sup>26</sup>

The interpretation of this prophecy shows an almost unbelievable conformity in several apparent details and that is why precisely this argument emerges so often in Muslim on-line debates concerning ISIS. Suraqah explains, point by point, how the mentioned references apply to ISIS.<sup>27</sup> Not to mention the already discussed black flags, the feeble folk to whom no concern is given (from whom the title of this paper has been borrowed) refer to the newcomers to the fight in Syria who were, in fact, nobodies until they became famous by their military success and, above all, by their violence and cruelty. The third point, the hearts like fragments of iron, refers to the same utmost brutality. “The State” might have been unclear in the Middle Ages when the Arabic term *dawla* referred primarily to “dynasty”; however, in the present, this item looks different since the official name of ISIS is “al-Dawla al-islāmiya” (the Islamic State). Nonetheless, such an updated reading should always be compared with scholarly translations where *dawla* does not necessarily mean state, as for example in the version of David Cook: “... their hearts like iron anvils, they are the soldiers of the turn (*dawla*)...”<sup>28</sup>

The predicted breaking of agreements should also be read literally because ISIS refused Sharia arbitration; a fact that was repeatedly contested by Sunni scholars.<sup>29</sup> The sentence “They will call to the truth, but they will not be people of the truth” then refers to the above-discussed perception of ISIS as the *Khawārij* of today, as well as to the group’s alleged ownership of truth. “The parental attributions” together with “aliases derived from towns” point to the forms of names preferred by ISIS leaders and fighters, generally following traditional premodern patterns, starting with ‘Abū’ (Father) and concluding with local, ethnic or religious adjectives (*nisba*). “Towns”, in this case, should be read as toponyms, in general (e.g. al-Miṣrī, al-Zarqāwī, al-Bagh-dādī). The last item, “free-flowing hair like that of women” so favourite among the ISIS fighters, can be easily verified by a glimpse at the group’s visual propaganda, for example at the *Dabiq* magazine.

<sup>26</sup> “Open Letter to Dr. Ibrahim Awwad Al-Badri, alias ‘Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi” (online), p. 17, September 2014, accessed November 2017, available online at <http://lettertobaghdadi.com/14/english-v14.pdf>.

<sup>27</sup> SURAQAH, “ISIS and the End of Times”, <https://splendidpearls.org/2014/07/04/isis-and-the-end-of-times/>.

<sup>28</sup> NU’AYM IBN HAMMAD, *The Book of Tribulations*, p. 107.

<sup>29</sup> For example, through the “Open Letter” of Muslim authorities addressed to Abū Bakr al-Baghdādī.

In any case, the idea that the emergence of ISIS on the apocalyptic side of evil was already prophesied 1,400 years ago has been supported not only by anonymous debaters on the Internet but also by official Muslim authorities, for example by Sheikh ‘Alī Jum‘a, the former Egyptian Grand Muftī, who, in his *khutba* delivered on 19 September 2014, has cited the above-discussed apocalyptic *ḥadīth* as evidence that the emergence of ISIS has been foretold by the fourth Caliph ‘Alī. In his sermon, Jum‘a criticized the group’s arbitrary selective approach to the Islamic heritage, supposedly documenting the bankruptcy of religious knowledge. He has concluded that “they and those of their kind are the *khawārij* of today.”<sup>30</sup>

## Responses of ‘Traditionalists’

Within the spiritual framework of the contemporary tendency with the working title “traditional Islam,”<sup>31</sup> the voice of Hamza Yusuf, an influential author, originally an American Muslim convert, belongs to the most respected ones.<sup>32</sup> Among other occasions, Yusuf expressed his irreconcilable attitudes towards ISIS in his *khutba* entitled *The Crisis of ISIS – A Prophetic Prediction*,<sup>33</sup> in which he warned of ISIS and its fans. On YouTube, this sermon has more than half million views<sup>34</sup> and its author has been enlisted by ISIS among those “imāms of the *kufr*” who deserve to be killed,<sup>35</sup> which was also the case of another influential Western Muslim authority of the “traditionalist profile,” Suhaib Webb.

Yusuf directly calls the supporters of ISIS “Satan” or “people of the Devil.”<sup>36</sup> In his texts and speeches, this group is clearly identified with *khawārij*, whose appearance has been foretold as a portent of the End. Relying on the above-mentioned apocalyptic *ḥadīth*, Yusuf adduces that these people recite the Koran, but they do not understand it, because they do not have the proper tools, meaning the real religious education. This ultimately refers to the expected End-time regress of knowledge, so

<sup>30</sup> “‘Alī ibn Abī Tālib hadhdhara min ‘Dā’ish’ mundhu 1,400 ‘ām” (online), *al-Miṣrīyūn*, September 2014, accessed November 2017, available online at <https://www.almesryoon.com/story/559453>.

<sup>31</sup> By “traditional Islam”, I mean mainly various contemporary responses to the reductionist and purist tendencies in Islam, represented mostly by the Salafists, promoting a return to the pluralism and spiritual multiplicity of classical Islamic heritage. Besides traditional Muslim scholars, Hamza Yusuf is an excellent example of a contemporary influential voice of Western convert defending traditional Muslim values.

<sup>32</sup> For more information about Hamza Yusuf, see HAMID, *Sufis, Salafis and Islamists*, p. 78–81.

<sup>33</sup> HAMZA YUSUF, “Transcript for Crisis of ISIS” (online), October 2014, accessed November 2017, available online at <http://shaykhhamza.com/transcript/Crisis-of-ISIS>.

<sup>34</sup> “The Crisis of ISIS: A Prophetic Prediction – Sermon by Hamza Yusuf” (online), *YouTube.com*, September 2014, accessed November 2017, available online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hJo4B-yaxfk>.

<sup>35</sup> “Kill the imams of kufr in the west”, *Dabiq* (14), pp. 8–17, April 2016, accessed November 2017, available online at <https://clarionproject.org/docs/Dabiq-Issue-14.pdf>, pp. 13–14.

<sup>36</sup> HAMZA YUSUF, “Transcript for Crisis of ISIS”, <http://shaykhhamza.com/transcript/Crisis-of-ISIS>.

often employed as a decisive argument for the rejection of ISIS claims.<sup>37</sup> Mentioning once again all the details in the given tradition (concerning their names and long hair etc.) to illustrate that this, once so mysterious, prophecy has been fulfilled by the emergence of ISIS.

In order to put current affairs into an appropriate apocalyptic framework, Hamza Yusuf also refers to the bloody suppression of the civic protests that took place in the south Syrian city of Dar‘ā in March 2011,<sup>38</sup> generally considered as the unofficial beginning of the Syrian civil war that quickly became internationalized. In this regard, Yusuf discusses the tradition related to the *fitna* which shall be introduced by the black flags: “Satakūnu fitna fī al-Shām, awwaluhā la‘ibu šibyān,”<sup>39</sup> which – in David Cook’s translation – means: “There will be a tribulation in Syria, of which the first will be child’s play.”<sup>40</sup> The authenticity of this *hadith* is highly disputed and, moreover, Yusuf translates it slightly differently: “It begins with children playing in Dar‘a.” In doing so, he ultimately stresses the reference to the particular tragedy when local teenagers were tortured and executed for having written “The people want the regime to fall” as graffiti on walls.<sup>41</sup> To summarize, the rise of ISIS – as seen by Hamza Yusuf – should be undisputedly understood as a great *fitna* preceding the End.

## Sufi “apocalypses light”

Within our brief survey of the apocalyptic responses to ISIS, the Sufi “apocalypses lite” would form the last imaginary category. For Sufi authors, the very idea of waging their ideological battle in eschatological terms is by no means new. The rivalry between Sufi and Salafi authorities belongs, within the broadest Islamic discourse, to the most acrimonious examples. The tireless resistance of Hisham Kabbani, an influential U.S. based Sufi author, against Salafism, seen as a distorted form of Islam and – as such – projected into his visions of an approaching End, is just one example of many. This case of multilateral usage of the apocalyptic theme can be found in the Ḥaqqānīya spiritual environment, one of the many branches of the important Sufi *tariqa* (order, brotherhood) *Naqshabandīya*, whose inclination towards Mahdism can be, at least in part, a reaction to Salafism.<sup>42</sup> The coming of the Mahdī, as well as apocalyptic issues belong to the favourite subjects of its sheikhs’ speeches and, fur-

<sup>37</sup> See DAMIR-GEILSDORF and FRANKE, “Narrative Reconfigurations of Islamic Eschatological Signs”, p. 426.

<sup>38</sup> CHRISTIAN CLANET, “Inside Syria’s Slaughter: A Journalist Sneaks into Dara’a, the ‘Ghetto of Death’” (online), *Time*, June 2011, accessed November 2017, available online at <http://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2076778,00.html>.

<sup>39</sup> YUSUF, “The Crisis of ISIS – A Prophetic Prediction”, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N05w3I5oU9U>.

<sup>40</sup> NU‘AYM IBN HAMMAD, *The Book of Tribulations*, p. 191.

<sup>41</sup> DAMIR-GEILSDORF and FRANKE, “Narrative Reconfigurations of Islamic Eschatological Signs”, p. 426.

<sup>42</sup> TIMOTHY R. FURNISH, *Ten Years’ Captivation with the Mahdī’s Camps: Essays on Muslim Eschatology, 2005–2015*, Timothy R. Furnish 2015, p. 203.

thermore, this branch can serve us as a good example of a successful connection of the traditional message with a modern context and means of communication.<sup>43</sup>

The chief point to be made here is that this order is, within the contemporary Sunni framework, exceptional by its consistent emphasis on the Mahdī, the Signs of the Hour and the End of this world.<sup>44</sup> Of course, the apocalyptic message can have various functions. Through a broader context of such a discourse, the collective identity of *tariqa*'s members can be strengthened. This is done primarily by constructing borders between "us" who are on the right path and "them", including the condemned *salafiya*, for instance. Finally, the visions of the End may serve as a kind of mental support for followers, trapped in bad living conditions or disagreeing with the actual state of society.<sup>45</sup> The *Naqshbandi-Haqqāni* apocalyptic message has been successfully promoted by the two most important representatives of this order; sheikhs Hisham Kabbani and Muḥammad Nāzīm 'Ādil al-Ḥaqqānī al-Naqshbandī.

Both had authored their below-discussed books before ISIS has appeared. Nonetheless, both of them were mentioned in the *Dabiq* in an article entitled *Kill Imams of Kufr in the West*<sup>46</sup> where the deceased sheikh Nāzīm is depicted as "an extreme Jahmī Murji'ī" but, primarily, as the master of Kabbani who was considered, together with a number of other Muslim leaders, as an apostate that should be killed. This call for killing was broadly medialized. Being known as an ardent opponent of Salafism (in his own words "Wahhabi sect"),<sup>47</sup> Hisham Kabbani ranked this sort of Islamic purism and revivalism among those portents of the Hour that are being fulfilled now as part of a broader spiritual decline, manifested by the destruction of Islamic pluralism. In his opinion, today's Salafists are the fulfilment of a prophecy about the appearance of the *khawārij*, whose most distinguishing mark, as seen by Kabbani, is their *takfirism*.

Undoubtedly, the comparison of Wahhabites to Kharijites has a long tradition within the Sunni discourse of the last two centuries and Hisham Kabbani was definitely not the first one able to utilize it. His original contribution, however, was the "deployment" of his attacks against the Wahhabites in an updated apocalyptic framework: "The Khawārij of today are the followers of the Wahhabi/ 'Salafi' sect. They are actively promoting the falsehood of their cult with massive propaganda campaign whether by speakers in mosques, via the Internet, on television, or through the massive distribution of videos, newspapers, books, magazines, and

<sup>43</sup> DANIEL KŘÍŽEK, "Millennialism in Sufi Perspective: The Case of Naqshbandiyya Haqqaniyya", in ZDENĚK VOJTÍŠEK (ed.), *Millennialism: Expecting the End of the World in the Past and present*, Prague: Dingir 2013, p. 184.

<sup>44</sup> DAVID DAMREL, "A Sufi Apocalypse" (online), *SIM (International Institute for the Study of Islam in the Modern World) Newsletter* (4/1999): p. 1, December 1999, accessed November 2017, available online at [https://openaccess.leidenuniv.nl/bitstream/handle/1887/17326/ISIM\\_4\\_A\\_Sufi\\_Apocalypse.pdf?sequence=1](https://openaccess.leidenuniv.nl/bitstream/handle/1887/17326/ISIM_4_A_Sufi_Apocalypse.pdf?sequence=1).

<sup>45</sup> KŘÍŽEK, "Millennialism in Sufi Perspective", p. 192.

<sup>46</sup> "Kill the imams of kufr in the west", <https://clarionproject.org/docs/Dabiq-Issue-14.pdf>.

<sup>47</sup> For example MUHAMMAD HISHAM KABBANI, *The Approach of Armageddon? An Islamic Perspective*, Washington, DC: Islamic Supreme Council of America 2003, p. 160–161.

pamphlets. All the while they are suppressing and concealing the truths of mainstream classical Islamic teaching, conspiring to silence anyone who speaks against their extremism.”<sup>48</sup>

In terms of his teaching, the Prophet Muḥammad has accordingly described the final period of history when those firmly adhering to the Tradition will be condemned because of alleged undesirable innovation and, vice versa, the real innovators will be praised as the protectors of the genuine tradition. Such a time, according to Kabbani, has already come.<sup>49</sup> In any case, the Wahhabites also can be found in other Signs of the Hour, for example in the prophecy about the destruction of Medina. In Kabbani’s innovative interpretation, this destruction should be read as a hasty and devastating modernisation of the city recently conducted by Saudi authorities irrespective of the traditional values.<sup>50</sup> However, Islam, as Kabbani adduces, was perfect at a time when it was revealed and that is why there is no reason for any “improvement” of this religion. The purification of the original spirit of Islam, so loudly declared by the Wahhabites, actually means total destruction of centuries of Islamic scholarship that has been replaced by a reduced misinterpretation of the genuine Prophet’s legacy.

The devastating impact of the Wahhabites has been, once again, addressed in Kabbani’s exegesis devoted to the “spiritual dismantlement of Kaaba.” The related traditions narrate about soldiers of the apocalyptic warrior al-Ḥabashī that will grasp the Ka‘ba and take them apart stone by stone and throw them into the Red Sea. Kabbani suggests the following interpretation: “The Ka‘ba is the focal point from whence Islam originated. Unfortunately, the physical structure of the building is all that remains today from that time. All the relics of the Ka‘ba from the time of the Companions and their Successors have been removed by the followers of the Wahhabi ideology. There was even an attempt to remove *Maqam Ibrahim*. The Wahhabi sect has also dismantled the ideological foundations of Islam and destroyed the Ka‘ba’s essence, which is the authentic understanding and teaching of Islam.”<sup>51</sup>

Previously unthinkable visions of a war in Syria were foretold, in 1985, by Sheikh Muḥammad Nāzim ‘Ādil al-Ḥaqqānī al-Naqshbandī (1922–2014), the spiritual teacher of Hisham Kabbani. In his collected lectures published under the promising title *Mystical Secrets of the Last Days*, Nāzim primarily discusses the Armageddon, the Antichrist and, above all, the coming of the Mahdī and Jesus. By the Armageddon, Nāzim understands a devastating global war between the East and the West in which the East will be crushed. With regards to the Antichrist, he is, in the sheikh’s opinion, already physically present on Earth, although he is still chained and imprisoned on an unknown island. The alleged purpose of the Armageddon, therefore, is “to separate the chaff from the wheat, since those denying existence of the Creator and cruel

<sup>48</sup> KABBANI, *The Approach of Armageddon?*, p. 163–164.

<sup>49</sup> KABBANI, *The Approach of Armageddon?*, p. 168.

<sup>50</sup> KABBANI, *The Approach of Armageddon?*, p. 171.

<sup>51</sup> KABBANI, *The Approach of Armageddon?*, p. 249.

or envious people will pass away, meanwhile genuine believers and good-doers will survive.”<sup>52</sup>

Being a genuine Sufi author, sheikh Nāzim does not omit the general parallelism between eschatological notions and various modes of human psyche since Sufis usually believe that the Last Things and the Hereafter, instead of their original ontological status, are already present here on Earth, primarily as an inner experience which is actually very personal and should be tasted by sincere believers during their earthly existence. Nevertheless, what makes Nāzim’s considerations related to the final war truly beneficial for our context, are the particular geopolitical settings explicitly depicted in his apocalyptic visions:

“The Mahdi is going to appear after 101 hindrances. (...) Now only two of them are remaining. When these have appeared, the third will be the coming of the Saviour, peace be upon him. One of them was that the red-coloured people came to Afghanistan. They will then go to Pakistan and then to Turkey. They must come to Turkey. They will come up to Amuq near Aleppo at the west of Aleppo. The plain of Amuq will be the place of the great slaughter. So that is the first sign, Russians coming to Turkey. (...) After this, World War III will come. It is impossible for the end of the world to come until the whole world will be in two big camps. It will be eastern and western military camps and there will be the greatest fighting between them.”<sup>53</sup> Paradoxically, this last point could be signed by ISIS propagandists as well.

Although sheikh Nāzim foretold the coming of the Mahdī to the range of two year after 1990<sup>54</sup> and his speculations thus might appear as an illustrative example of a failed prophecy, his main contribution to the Sufi apocalypticism is actually his engagement of the particular geopolitical facts into his End-time visions. In this regard, Sufis have contributed to the creation of what may be, by words of David Demrel, called an “ecumenical apocalypticism,” since they “employ this shared apocalyptic vocabulary to poignantly emphasize how Islam and Islamic spirituality are vital to the lives of even their non-Muslim listeners.”<sup>55</sup>

Another noteworthy approach of a respected Islamic scholar, sympathetic with Sufism and opposing ISIS, is that of Muḥammad al-Ya’qūbī (born 1963). His book *Refuting ISIS* contains a lot of apocalyptic references. Its fundamental thesis, considering ISIS as *khawārij*, cannot be, as we have already seen, fully understood without the knowledge of its End-time connotations. In his own words, “although the historical sect of the *Khawarij* does not exist today, we have clear proofs in the Prophetic Traditions that it would re-emerge at various times throughout the centuries of Islam.”<sup>56</sup> No

<sup>52</sup> MUHAMMAD ADIL AL-HAQQANI NAQSHBANDI NAZIM, *Mystical Secrets of the Last Days*, Chicago: Kazi Publications 1994, p. 53.

<sup>53</sup> NAZIM, *Mystical Secrets of the Last Days*, p. 126–127.

<sup>54</sup> NAZIM, *Mystical Secrets of the Last Days*, p. 127.

<sup>55</sup> DAMREL, “A Sufi Apocalypse”, p. 1.

<sup>56</sup> SHAYKH MUHAMMAD AL-YAQOUBI, *Refuting ISIS*, Herndon (Virginia): Sacred Knowledge 2016, p. 4.

wonder that Ya‘qūbī’s name can also be found on the list of the recommended targets to be killed, published in the fourteenth issue of the *Dabiq* magazine.<sup>57</sup>

## Variable apocalypse of Harun Yahya

A separate section in our overview should be devoted to Harun Yahya<sup>58</sup> and his limitless millennial creativity.<sup>59</sup> To introduce him, Harun Yahya is the pen-name of Adnan Oktar (born 1956), a prominent Turkish thinker and author, well-known, above all, for his promotion of Islamic creationism. The Apocalypse, essentially, belongs to his very favourite subjects, to which he devoted a number of texts.<sup>60</sup> As well as other modern Muslim apocalyptists, Yahya does not hesitate to utilize the End-time backdrop for occasional coping with his worldly enemies, in his specific case the Darwinists, atheists, communists and so on.

The Mahdī, in Yahya’s opinion, has several distinctive features and warfare settings, so symptomatic to other Muslim eschatological surveys, are almost missing, replaced by mostly ideological rivalry. The Mahdī supposedly has three other fundamental tasks to fulfil: 1) elimination of philosophical systems denying the existence of God and promoting atheism; 2) intellectual struggle with superstition and hypocrites who have corrupted Islam and introduction of genuine morals based on the Koran; 3) social and political strengthening of the whole world of Islam and establishment of peace, safety and prosperity.<sup>61</sup>

In his work, the Mahdī is depicted as a leader of all Muslims. However, main stress is placed on economic welfare as well as the most advanced technological conveniences that are, for Yahya, a never-ending source of fascination.<sup>62</sup> In his predictions concerning the Mahdī, Yahya initially followed his spiritual inspiration, an influential Turkish Sufi thinker Said Nursi (1877–1960) who foretold the Saviour’s coming to hundred years after his own death, meaning 2060. By the way, numbers and dates frequently occur in Yahya’s works, based mainly on Nursi’s numerological speculations.<sup>63</sup> The idea of establishing an “Islamic union” containing all the world and justly governed by the Mahdī himself is nothing new. However, what seems to be rather

<sup>57</sup> “Kill the imams of kufr in the west”, <https://clarionproject.org/docs/Dabiq-Issue-14.pdf>.

<sup>58</sup> For Harun Yahya’s apocalyptic teaching, see ANNE ROSS SOLBERG, *The Mahdi Wears Armani: An Analysis of the Harun Yahya Enterprise*, Stockholm: Södertörn University 2013, pp. 145–184.

<sup>59</sup> For modern Turkish Mahdism, see FURNISH, *Ten Years’ Captivation with the Mahdi’s Camps*, pp. 235–242.

<sup>60</sup> For an account of his apocalyptic works, see SOLBERG, *The Mahdi Wears Armani*, pp. 152–153.

<sup>61</sup> HARUN YAHYA, *The End Times and Hazrat Mahdi (as)*, Istanbul: Global Publishing 2012, pp. 35–36.

<sup>62</sup> HARUN YAHYA, *The Golden Age*, Kuala Lumpur: A. S. Noordeen 2003, pp. 28–45.

<sup>63</sup> HARUN YAHYA, *The Prophet Jesus (as), Hazrat Mahdi (as) and the Islamic Union*, Istanbul: Global Publishing 2012, pp. 92–125.

original are Yahya's expectations related to the dominion of Islam based on the "Turkish-Islamic union."<sup>64</sup>

This remarkable idea has been developed by degrees. At the very beginning, Yahya decisively rejected the principles of Turkish nationalism. He even, according to some of his followers, considered Kemal Atatürk himself the Antichrist. Later, he adopted the ideology of the so-called Turkish-Islamic synthesis associated with Prime Minister Turgut Özal who was able to promote a vital interconnection of Islam and the Kemalist doctrine. President Atatürk, the former archenemy, suddenly became the hero and an alleged opponent of Darwinism which is, from Yahya's perspective, the highest praise. In his modified conviction, Turkey should be the centre of an eschatological "golden age" and Turks should become the decisive Muslim vanguard leading other nations of Islam.<sup>65</sup>

To summarize, Yahya's considerations devoted to the Mahdī have undergone contradictory development; from the abovementioned belief in his coming in a distant future (2060) up to the assumption that he has already appeared on Earth, specifically in Istanbul, the last seat of the Caliphate. The date of his coming, settled by Yahya, was the first year of the fifteenth century of Hijra (1979). Looking carefully at the portrayal of the Mahdī depicted in Yahya's texts, a lot of similarities with their author are undisputed. The fundamental question of why he, on one hand, was loudly refusing to be the deemed Saviour, while, on the other hand, doing everything to support such an assumption, remains unsolved. Nonetheless, this point has ultimately lost its relevance since the rise of ISIS has brought another shift to Yahya's innovative apocalypticism.

The merciless stage of the Syrian war provided Yahya with a lot of impulses that can be contextualized within an apocalyptic framework. For example, the Sufyānī, as an apocalyptic predecessor of the Antichrist, has been identified with President Bashār al-Asad, while the Dajjāl himself has been, according to Yahya's interpretation, embodied by the international freemasonry, having as its distinctive symbol the one eye in the triangle, which fact, again according to Yahya, clearly refers to "the one-eyed master of evil" as traditionally depicted in Muslim medieval sources.<sup>66</sup> Although Yahya also points in his apocalyptic speculations to violent events across the Middle East, the ultimate confrontation between good and evil shall be an ideological one, not a military one.

From a geographical perspective, inappropriately limited attention in Yahya's work is paid to Palestine and most importantly to Jerusalem, as a focus of attention of almost all apocalyptic authors. On the other hand, Istanbul and Turkey figure in his

<sup>64</sup> For Turkish-Islamic union as an important theme of Harun Yahya's apocalypticism, see SOLBERG, *The Mahdi Wears Armani*, pp. 164–168.

<sup>65</sup> YAHYA, *The Prophet Jesus (as), Hazrat Mahdi (as) and the Islamic Union*, pp. 35–38.

<sup>66</sup> HARUN YAHYA, "Our Prophet (saas) Foretold the Current Events in Iraq and Foretold ISIS 1,400 Years Ago" (online), *Harun Yahya*, December 2014, accessed November 2017, available online at [http://www.harunyahya.com/en/Articles/195270/our-prophet-\(saas\)-foretold-the](http://www.harunyahya.com/en/Articles/195270/our-prophet-(saas)-foretold-the).

End-time scenario, as key apocalyptic places.<sup>67</sup> In fact, Yahya was able to incorporate many events into his apocalyptic narratives; for instance the Iranian revolution, the Iran-Iraq war, the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, the Keban Dam (the halting of the river Euphrates) or even an episode of a Romanian oil tanker burning in the Bosphorus in 1979 (as a sign of a flare in the east). Being so charged with historical points, they undoubtedly look more credible.

Yahya's apocalyptic teaching is still evolving. According to his current opinions (i.e. 2016), ISIS is now so strong that the only power that can defeat this sinister force is the Mahdī.<sup>68</sup> His eschatological reading of the current affairs in Iraq and Syria, thus, does not reflect only his resistance to ISIS but also his belief in the geopolitical sense of the Mahdī's coming.

## Conclusion

Perhaps not surprisingly, among speculations devoted to the real motives and objectives of the ISIS apocalyptic rhetoric, a set of certainties is rather limited. However, nobody can deny that ISIS has pushed the discursive employment of the Muslim apocalypticism to a completely new level. The method for dealing with the group's own enemies within the imaginary framework of eschatological battlefields is definitely not an innovative one (the leaders of the Abbasid revolution from the eighth century could be one example of many), but what is actually new is the massive public utilization of such an approach.

Being a pioneer of unbound *takfirism*, ISIS was not restrained in using this effective ammunition within the End-time context as well. Responses to the ISIS apocalyptic delusions had to be inventive as well. This paper introduced their diversity and offered also some specific examples from several completely different spiritual environments (official Muslim authorities, followers of the so called traditional Islam; Sufis and, last but not least, the hard-to-classify contemporary Turkish thinker and author Hārūn Yahya).

This approach, using Muslim apocalyptic ammunition against its instigators, can also be applied in much broader terms of a general Muslim resistance against ISIS. As Abdel Bari Atwan has aptly suggested, "any effective counterbalance to ISIS and radical Islam in general would have to be rallied behind another powerful Islamic figure or popular movement."<sup>69</sup> The proper answer to defeating this group rests not in denying the Islam in "Islamic State", but rather rejecting the interpretation of Islam promoted by them.

<sup>67</sup> See also *Interview With Harun Yahya (January 10, 2009)* in JOEL RICHARDSON, *The Islamic Antichrist: The Shocking Truth about the Real Nature of the Beast*, Los Angeles: WND Books 2009, pp. 252–254.

<sup>68</sup> DAMIR-GEILSDORF and FRANKE, "Narrative Reconfigurations of Islamic Eschatological Signs: The Portents of the 'Hour' in Grey Literature and on the Internet," p. 422.

<sup>69</sup> ABDEL BARI ATWAN, *Islamic State: The Digital Caliphate*, London: Saqi Books 2015, p. 221.

The ISIS apocalypse, in particular, cannot be counterbalanced by a mere rejection of the Muslim apocalypticism as such. In the current restless atmosphere all over the Muslim world, such step would be, furthermore, hardly conceivable. The ISIS way of the Final-days episodes should be overcome by another, “friendlier” or “softer”, manifestation (“counter-apocalypse”) for which we have already used a metaphorical designation “apocalypse lite.” In doing so, the apocalypticism of ISIS would not be denounced for being “apocalyptic” but would rather be targeted – “in apocalyptic terms” – for being a misleading interpretation within a generally respected Muslim apocalyptic framework. The specific above-mentioned “apocalyptic responses” to ISIS might show us some viable patterns.

A convincing and generally acceptable “Last days’ scenario(s)”, lacking anti-Western or anti-Jewish ethos and conspiracies, that can ultimately offer hope to Muslims otherwise than through exhausted sectarianism and expected retaliation full of bloodshed would be the mightiest possible weapon against the frightening End-time nightmares of ISIS.

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## In the Shadow of Islam (review)

Barbara Oudová Holcátová

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*In the Shadow of Islam: Minority Religions in the Middle East* is a monograph on the topic of non-Islamic religions that can be found in the Middle East, with particular focus on the recent history of these religious groups and their current situation. The book is intended as an overview for an educated non-expert audience, however, it does not disguise that it is not exhaustive or even entirely representative of the situation of religious minorities in the Middle East.

There is generally very little idea among Czech laymen about non-Islamic religions in the Middle-East. Presently there exists a great mistrust of Islam, which sometimes generates sympathies for these groups, which they would otherwise not garner given a degree of negativity with which anything Middle-Eastern tends to be viewed in Czech society. At the same time, there is often little other information about these groups among the Czech public, other than the mere fact that they are being persecuted by either Muslim governments or radical and terrorist organizations in the area. In this light, a book like this is an invaluable contribution to the available Czech writing on the topic of both religious studies and the Middle East. Simultaneously, by its mosaic nature and detailed explanation of historical backgrounds, it also contributes to the frequently over-simplified image of the Middle East that tends to prevail in the general Czech idea of the region. In some ways, there is no better way to break the image than exploring how the situation of different religious groups is interconnected and tied to every aspect of the region's political and religious landscape. In this sense, its importance cannot be overstated.

Nevertheless, a reader looking for more than widening their knowledge of the Middle East can on occasion be disappointed. The book would benefit from a clearer conception, or a more unified execution. The foreword declares that given the different realities of the different communities, there was no point in creating one universal framework the individual chapters would follow. That is certainly true, and the very different religions that can be found in the Middle East require very different approaches. Still, this does not fully explain the vast differences where some chapters are focused purely on history, and chiefly recent history, while other speak much more of religious teachings and sometimes religious practice of the said groups. This does not detract from the erudition displayed in these chapters, but it makes the book less coherent as a whole, and the image of the Middle East it presents is a little less complete for this.

The choice of which religious groups to include is sometimes a little questionable as well – the claim that Judaism was excluded because of the very complicated relationship of politics and religions related to that in the Middle East is perhaps acceptable, but the exclusion of Baha'i or Zoroastrism is difficult to explain away, particularly in light of the inclusion of much more marginal communities. Any publication that includes the Shabak and the Yaresan but excludes Baha'i skews the picture of the Middle East it presents, however much it is declared in the beginning that the reason for the choice of the included religions lay chiefly in the availability of Czech experts on the topic. Perhaps the fact that the book is aimed at least partly at the public makes it the most problematic – after all, experts do not need to be informed of the existence of the Baha'i faith. Still, this book remains the only one to let the public know about many of the other religious groups included, and no omissions, however marked, take away from that.

The book is divided into sections of general introduction, Christian groups in the Middle East, religions related to Islam, and other relevant religions in the region. In the general introduction, **Bronislav Ostránský's** chapter concerns the relationship of Islam to minority religions, both in the theory of theology and Sharia and in practice. This provides crucial context for what we find later in the book, and in fact the publication could have benefited from a little longer exposé on this topic, but all the key points were covered in the short space.

**Stefano Taglia's** piece about religion in Ottoman Empire is much longer. It covers the Empire's approach towards its religious minorities, as well as a rather detailed history of the realm in relation to them. As a sort of long addendum, there is a recapitulation of post-Second World War Middle-Eastern history. This is the chapter that perhaps shows the unclear goal of the book best. While fascinating in itself, it goes into great detail and has the character of an original journal article more than a summarizing piece in a monograph. The addendum about the early 20<sup>th</sup> century is much needed, though it is so different in style from the first part that it can effectively be considered a separate chapter.

**Michal Řoutil** is the author of the introductory chapter on Christianity in the Middle East, which provides a historical summary as well as an overview of the relevant denominations. It is succinct and exhaustive, though his own personal sympathies towards Christianity show through rather markedly in some places. Řoutil is also the author of a very detailed article about the Assyrian Church of the East and its branches, which focuses mainly on its history, though it does provide a more detailed overview of the theology towards the end. It is perhaps a little confusing for non-expert readers, especially given that it uses different names for the same religious organization.

**Petra Košťálová** introduces the readers to the Armenian Church, which focuses almost exclusively on its history, but does it in a beneficent and clear manner that makes it easy for non-experts to follow, without the information contained suffering in any way.

**Viola Pargačová** writes about Coptic Christianity, uniquely covering very many aspects – from history through teachings and practice to the current situation both in Egypt and in the diaspora. Some parts are a little unclear and confusing, but the current situation is examined with a great deal of detail and written in an accessible manner. The value of the examination of ritual practice in this chapter, too, cannot be overstated, since it is so rarely found in any resource on Christianity.

**Monika Langrock**'s chapter on Maronite Christianity gives an overview of the demographic situation and then focuses on modern history, which is deeply interlinked with the history of Lebanon as a whole. The text is a little inaccessible to non-theologians, since she uses theological terms without clear explanations at times, but offers detailed information and context especially for the modern situation.

The next section of the book deals with minority religions that relate to Islam. The first chapter is **Luboš Kropáček**'s contribution on the Alawis. It offers a balanced and accessible overview of the theology and history, though there is little mention of religious practice. There is a focus on modern history, and at times the lack of explanation of specific terminology can be a little confusing for non-experts too. Kropáček's chapter about the Druze shares the positive qualities of his first one, and additionally includes some essential information on religious practice.

**Kateřina Vytejková**'s chapter about the Alevis is among the best contributions of this book. It offers a very balanced and accessible account of the religious group in question, and in this case the section about religious practice deserves special attention, for the author's fieldwork in the area shows, without a doubt, the invaluable nature of such expertise. The more theory-focused parts of the article are not lacking in any way, however, and the section on identity stands out as worthy of any reader's attention.

**Petr Kubálek**'s contribution about the Shabak and the Yaresan is perhaps a little unstructured and confusing in places, but it is also unique in being one of the very few pieces written about these religious groups in Czech, and deserves a high degree of attention for this alone. Additionally, it is a well-balanced account of the teaching and history of said religious groups.

The last section concerns religions unaffiliated with any major tradition, and contains two articles. The first is **Petr Kubálek**'s piece about the Yazid, which, just like his previous piece, deserves attention for being a well-balanced overview and provides good information about the Yezidi religious practice.

The last article is by **Jiří Gebelt**, and focuses on the Mandaean community. It provides a good (though a little compressed) introduction into teachings and religious practice, and a detailed account of modern history and contemporary situation. Attention should be called to the analysis of recent changes in ritual practice as the community reacts to its changed living conditions.

There is also a photography section to be found in the book, containing pictures which perfectly complete the image presented by providing the readers with a visual guide to different religious groups, something that is without a doubt an extremely

important aspect in understanding the richness of these traditions. All in all, while perhaps not wholly balanced or entirely comprehensive, this book is an absolutely crucial contribution to the available Czech literature on the Middle East and on smaller religious communities in general.

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