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Konsep Kemaksuman Paus dalam Agama Kristian dan *ḤIsmah* (Bebas Daripada Dosa) dalam Islam: Satu Perbandingan

Muhammad Zamir Syahmi bin Zainudin* and Thameem Ushama**

Abstract

The issue of papal primacy remains debated among Christian churches. The definition of papal infallibility made in the First Vatican Council through Pastor Aeternus has been an obstacle to the unification of churches. The doctrine of *'ismah* of prophets has been crucial concerning the concept of prophethood. Both papal infallibility and *'ismah* of prophets denote that Pope and prophets were being preserved from sins and errors. This study, therefore, examines concepts of papal infallibility and *'ismah* of prophets in understanding, theory and practice. Similarities and differences in these concepts are examined based on how the adherents of religions perceive them. Debates from selected denominations and theological schools in both religions: Catholicism, Protestantism and Eastern Orthodox for Christianity and Shiites, Mu'tazilites and Ash'arites for Islam are focused. Since the study is theoretical, it relies on materials from classical to contemporary sources. Although both concepts seem similar, the findings convey that many differences are found, with few similarities between the two concepts.

Keywords: Church, Christianity, Islam, Infallibility, *'Ismah*, *Kalām*, Pope, Prophet.

Abstrak

Persoalan keutamaan Paus masih lagi diperbahaskan dalam kalangan gereja-gereja Kristian. Definisi kemaksuman Paus yang dibuat dalam Perhimpunan Vatikan Kali Pertama menerusi Paderi Aeternus telah menjadi penghalang kepada penyatuan gereja. Pada masa yang sama, doktrin *'ismah* para nabi juga penting dalam konsep kenabian. Kedua-dua kemaksuman Paus dan *'ismah* para nabi memberikan makna bahawasanya Paus dan para nabi terpelihara daripada melakukan dosa dan kesilapan. Justeru, kajian ini meneliti konsep kemaksuman Paus dan *'ismah* para nabi daripada sudut kefahaman, teori dan pengamalan. Persamaan dan perbezaan antara kedua-dua konsep diteliti berdasarkan kefahaman penganut agama masing-masing. Perbahasan dalam kalangan kumpulan-kumpulan dan aliran-aliran teologi terpilih dalam agama

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Kristian dan Islam; Katolik, Protestan dan Ortodoks Timur daripada agama Kristian, dan Shi'ah, Mu'tazilah dan Ash'irah daripada Islam menjadi fokus kajian ini. Oleh kerana kajian ini bersifat teoretikal, kajian ini bergantung kepada sumber-sumber dari zaman dahulu sehingga masa kini. Walaupun kedua-dua konsep kelihatan sama, dapatan kajian menunjukkan terdapat banyak perbezaan berserta beberapa persamaan yang dapat dikenalpasti di antara kedua-dua konsep tersebut.

Kata kunci: Gereja, Kristian, Islam, Kemaksuman, 'Ismah, Kal'ım, Paus, Nabi.

Introduction

Infallibility is a concept or belief requiring to consecrate something related to religion, especially regarding jurisdiction. Etymologically, infallible is a combination of words originating from medieval Latin terms, which are *in* - that brings the meaning of not and *fallibilis*, which means liable to err or deceitful.¹ Thus, the word infallible means something is never wrong or preserved from the possibility of erring. This concept of infallibility is endowed with the highest authority in religion, making it perceived as a constructed religion.

In Christianity, papal infallibility is the most debated among different denominations. It was dogmatically defined during the First Vatican Council. Although Catholicism upholds it in its practices and the Catholic Church officially declared it, its followers hardly accept it. The most obvious is the outstanding yet controversial Catholic priest and theologian Hans Küng.

On the other hand, objection to this doctrine by Protestants makes sense as they rejected Roman Catholicism's doctrine of papal supremacy from the inception of Protestantism. The objection to the doctrine did arise among Protestantism and was also expressed by the Eastern

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¹ *Online Dictionary Etymology*, s.v. "Infallible," accessed November 10, 2020, <https://www.etymonline.com/word/infallible#etymonline_v_6428>

Orthodox Church. Thus, we can infer that only Catholicism accepts papal infallibility among these three major churches.

On the other hand, infallibility in Islam is known as *‘iṣmah* (sinlessness). The word derives from *‘a-ṣa-ma*, ' meaning to hinder, preserve, or guard. Contextually, *‘iṣmah* refers to an infallible quality possessed by prophets from committing sins and errors. Muslims accept the concept of *‘iṣmah* of prophets. The debates that arose among *al-mutakallimūn* (theologians) focussed only on the level of prophets' infallibility. In other words, it questions the extent to which infallibility is conferred to prophets. It includes arguments by schools of *kalam*: 'Ash'arites, Mu'tazilites and Shi'ites on whether or not prophets could commit sins and errors. The majority of theologians did not reject the infallibility of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) in his speech, as it is mentioned in the Qur'ān that the word of the Prophet (pbuh) is a revelation, and it is used as an argument to issue specific laws in Islamic tradition through *aḥādīth*.² In contrast, others believe that the infallibility of the Prophet (pbuh) as the leading authority in religion ended with the Prophet (pbuh). However, Shiites believe that the endowment of sacrosanct has continued to their Twelve *imāms*.

Infallibility is discussed in different contexts. Some may think infallibility is only conferred to a human, as in the priest. Infallibility in religion is not restricted only to that but also includes the supreme authority of God through His words. The sacred text is also considered infallible by some religions. Although different denominations believe in different versions of the Bible, rejection of biblical infallibility has never been clearly expressed. Christians believe that Bible is infallible and inerrant.³ It is the same with Muslims. They believe that the Qur'ān is infallible and never to be wrong because it is the word of God revealed to Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) through the Archangel Gabriel. Alternatively, Christians believe in the Church's infallibility, especially in Catholicism.

² Qur'ān, *al-Najm*: 3-4.

³ Dave Jenkins, "What Does it Mean that the Bible Infallible? What is Biblical Infallibility?" Christianity.com, < <https://www.christianity.com/wiki/bible/what-does-it-mean-that-the-bible-is-infallible-what-is-biblical-infallibility.html>> (accessed 24 November 2020).

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However, apart from all of these contexts on infallibility, this paper studies and compares it with the doctrine of '*iṣmah* in Islam as both denote the same purpose. It provides a relatively comparative discussion of the concepts. Although the concept of papal infallibility and '*iṣmah* seem identical and have the same purpose, the way it is perceived and practised in each tradition is different.

Although the doctrine of papal infallibility was officially defined during the First Vatican Council, this belief had originated from the teaching of Christ when he said to Peter that he would build his church, as mentioned in the New Testament.⁴ Christians believe that the doctrine of papal infallibility under the theme of papal supremacy is a part of Church magisterium, and Pope exercised primacy of jurisdiction over the whole Church.⁵ So, Christians, especially Catholics, believe that papal infallibility is not what they call innovation in religion. However, this concept creates confusion and raises many questions on this issue. Among them is whether Pope has the qualification to be infallible as God did not choose him. Instead, he is chosen through an election of the College of Cardinals and to what extent is his infallibility valid?

On the other hand, almost a similar doctrine in Islamic tradition called '*iṣmah* brings a different interpretation. This concept is applied only to prophets and not to their followers. Although Muslims accept this concept, a proper discussion by scholars of schools of *kalam* (Theology) have rarely articulated it. Furthermore, the absence of comparative analysis between concepts confuses both religions' followers. For example, Muslims tend to look at the idea of papal infallibility in the way they understand '*iṣmah* and vice versa. Hence, this study examines the understanding of the two concepts: papal infallibility and '*iṣmah*. Debates on these two traditions are concentrated. A comparison is made between them to see how far the followers of both religions understand them.

The doctrine of infallibility is one of the critical theological aspects of both religions. Many works discuss the concept of papal infallibility alone without engaging it comparatively with an almost similar concept in Islam - '*iṣmah*. Therefore, the study is significant. It opens a new horizon hardly found in previous works, a comparative discussion of the

⁴ Matthew, 16:18, <https://www.esv.org/Matthew+16/>, accessed 20 July 2022.

⁵ Gerald O' Collins and Mario Farrugia, *Catholicism: The Story of Catholic Christianity*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 314.

two concepts that seem identical in Christianity and Islam. It may help people understand the concept of papal infallibility and *'iṣmah* in structure and practice and how these are similar and different. It is also significant to inspire an intellectual inter-faith engagement between Muslim and Christian communities to understand both religions better.

The paper applies qualitative content and comparative analysis methods to select writings of both religions. It relies on the data collected through library research. In studying papal infallibility, debates between denominations and the objections to this concept are focused on. For the concept of *'iṣmah*, positions from different schools of *kalām* are examined. Thus, the authors examine the previous works of both religions and seek explanations regarding definitions, historical backgrounds, and the doctrines' development.

Papal Infallibility among Selected Churches

The Papacy's role is significant among the vital doctrines and features that developed Catholicism. It cannot be denied that nothing is more apparently distinctive from other churches.⁶ The discussion regarding the Christian system of the Papacy in this study focuses on Catholicism without taking off the position of other churches.

The Concept of Papacy in Christianity

It is claimed that the Papacy is the oldest living institution in the West due to its ancient history. It can be traced back almost two thousand years when the Pope was first held by Saint Peter, one of Jesus' closest disciples.⁷ In the primary teachings of Catholicism, the Pope is seen to have supreme authority over the Church in matters of faith and morals.⁸ Some Christians debated whether or not Peter was considered the first pope since he was an apostle that ranked higher than a Pope.⁹

⁶ Michael Walsh, *Roman Catholicism: The Basics*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005), 50.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 51.

⁸ O' Collins & Ferugia, *Catholicism: The Story of Catholic Christianity*, 315.

⁹ John W O'Malley, *A History of the Popes: From Peter to the Present*, (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publ. 2011),11.

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Notwithstanding the arguments, it is mentioned in the Gospel of Matthew, 16:17-19, which proves that Jesus gave Peter the authority of power in his Church:

...Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but My Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock, I will build My Church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.¹⁰

In its primary teaching, the authority system in the Catholic Church recognizes whoever is elected to be the bishop of Rome as the Pope, the head of the Roman Catholic Church. Irenaeus claims in *Against all Heresies* that the Papacy had gone through unbroken succession connected back to Saint Peter. These verses are used to argue that Peter, an apostle, held the highest position in Church. Since it is believed that Peter was the first to hold the position as the bishop of Rome, he was considered the first pope.¹¹

Etymologically, the word 'pope' derives from a Greek word, *Pappas* means father, while the office of the Pope is called Papacy.¹² Initially, in the early Christian era, the title of the Pope was applied to any bishop, as all bishops were considered equals. Only during the Middle Ages, in the late eleventh century, was the title officially endowed to the bishop of Rome. Pope Gregory VII instructed the title to be applied to the bishop of Rome alone.¹³ Nevertheless, it has been recorded that the reservation of the title started in the fifth century.¹⁴ Apart from the title of Pope, the bishop of Rome is also known by various designations like

¹⁰ Matthew, 16: 17-19.

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+16&version=KJV>, accessed 20 July 2022.

¹¹ Walsh, *Roman Catholicism*, 52.

¹² *Online Dictionary Etymology*, s.v. "Pope," accessed April 3, 2021, <https://www.etymonline.com/word/infallible#etymonline_v_6428>

¹³ Walsh, *Roman Catholicism*, 51.

¹⁴ Klaus Schatz, *Papal Primacy: From Its Origin to the Present*, (Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1996), 29.

Vicar of Christ, Patriarch of the West and Supreme Pontiff or *Pontifex Maximus*. Some of them are no longer used today.

The Pope is chosen through an election process or usually called Papal Conclave. It is a gathering of the College of Cardinals to elect a bishop of Rome. By the decree made in Canon 1 during the Third Lateran Council, only cardinals have the right to choose the next Pope and two-thirds of the majority in the election is required to appoint the next Pope.¹⁵

History of the Doctrine of Papal Infallibility

In early Christianity, the role of the bishop was initiated before the beginning of the Middle Ages due to the quest for an authority to define the actual teachings of Jesus. From this, the method of apostolic succession emerged by tracing the lineage and the continuous line of the bishop back to the apostles to maintain the validity of the teaching.¹⁶ As the tradition that regarded the bishop of Rome as the most important Christian leader began to flourish in the West, it paved the way for the emergence of the concept of papal primacy directly connected to the development of the doctrine of papal infallibility. Papal primacy recognized the bishop of Rome as the supreme Christian leader and that all Christian followers were to be submissive to him.¹⁷

In Catholicism, papal infallibility is constructed in such long processes before being officially defined and accepted as an official doctrine in the First Vatican Council in a document called *Pastor Aeternus*. These processes can be observed through significant Christian historical scenes, especially during the Middle Ages and the First Vatican Council.

¹⁵ Lateran Council III, accessed April 3, 2021,
<<https://www.papalencyclicals.net/councils/ecum11.htm>>

¹⁶ Peterson, R. Dean, *A Concise History of Christianity* (United States: Thomson Wadsworth, 2007), 80-81.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 121.

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The defenders of papal infallibility affirmed that the Christian texts cited that the doctrine has been implicitly held since the beginning of the Church. The debate over the papal power's legitimacy peaked in the Middle Ages, indirectly leading to its inauguration as a doctrine in the First Vatican Council. The development of papal infallibility can be traced back to 1150 – 1250, when the canonist played a significant role in influencing the emergence of the doctrine. As Brian Tierney discussed, the canonist emphasised the papal power, its magisterium, and sovereignty and later attributed him a pre-eminent role as head of the Church.¹⁸

On the other hand, Georges asserted that the canonist had exaggerated the Pope's authority and tended to devalue the scripture.¹⁹ Nonetheless, Tierney explains that the canonist understanding of the Pope's sovereignty is far from what it means by infallibility. Still, he also asserted that its jurisdiction, power and right to decide disputed issues concerning matters of faith played an essential basis for the doctrine of infallibility.²⁰ From this point of view, it can be seen that the canonist, even though they did not explicitly teach that the Pope is infallible, the emphasis they place on the authority of the Pope in the whole Church has opened the door for the development of this doctrine.

The events during the Middle Ages were related to the development of the doctrine of papal infallibility. The mendicant friars introduced a new way of life considered heretical, for some others, called apostolic poverty. The Franciscan, as one of the mendicant orders, emerged in the twelfth century through the legacy of its founder, St. Francis Assisi, who defended the ascetic way of life that they adopted as it claimed it was closer to the life of the apostle and to live in poverty is how Jesus's life was all about. Such tradition was getting much opposition from others, especially the secular master of the University of Paris. However, the Franciscan friars defended their practice by having a close relationship with the Pope. However, the canonist who had opened the way in the emergence of the doctrine, the Franciscan, played

¹⁸ Brian Tierney, *Origins of Papal Infallibility, 1150-1350: A Study on the Concepts of Infallibility, Sovereignty and Tradition in the Middle Age*, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1972), 29.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 22.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 32.

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the most significant role in shaping the idea of the infallibility of the Roman Pontiff.²¹

The two most influential Franciscan figures played a significant role in constructing the doctrine of papal infallibility, St. Bonaventure and Peter Olivi. Although the new tradition had received much opposition from others, the Franciscans firmly claimed the tradition solely originated from the scripture. Through his argument defending the tradition, St. Bonaventure had succeeded in gaining the trust of Pope Nicholas III, which in turn led to its recognition by the Church and written in the Bull, *Exiit qui seminat*.²² Although the decree was published after his death, St. Bonaventure maintained that the Church is infallible in matters of faith and that the Pope was not in error in their teaching. Although it sounds like St. Bonaventure favoured the notion of the infallible Pope, it was never explicitly mentioned that he believed in the Papacy's power in such a way.²³

Peter Olivi, on the other hand, like St. Bonaventure, defended Franciscan wholeheartedly. Indeed, the promulgation of the papal bull, *Exiit* had its contribution by Olivi.²⁴ Furthermore, he also emphasized papal power and its magisterium. By believing the indefectibility of the Church's doctrine, he stressed that it also implied the existence of an infallible pope. In addition, Olivi felt the need to develop the concept of papal infallibility due to his concern that a pseudo-pope would emerge who would challenge Franciscan poverty.²⁵ By introducing papal infallibility, the Pope is bound by the decree made by the previous Pope. Thus, it is irreformable. From this point of view, it can be seen that Peter Olivi is the one who explicitly introduced the doctrine of papal infallibility and put the foundation stone for the development of the doctrine.

The further discussion of the development of the doctrine of papal infallibility brings us to the most significant event, which marks the

²¹ Ibid., 58.

²² Nicholas III, *Exiit qui seminat*, accessed April 25, 2021, <<https://www.papalencyclicals.net/nichol03/exiit-e.htm>>

²³ Tierney, *Origins of Papal Infallibility*, 92.

²⁴ Ibid., 97.

²⁵ Tierney, *Origins of Papal Infallibility*, 126.

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beginning of the official acceptance of the doctrine in the Catholic Church. Pope Pius IX convened the First Vatican Council in 1868 after more than 300 years since the Council of Trent's last council. The purpose of the council gathering was to deal with problems related to the faith and the authority of the Roman Pontiff. O'Malley discussed that there were only two things that the First Vatican Council dealt with: the issue of the relationship between revelation and reason and the matter related to primacy and infallibility of the Pope.²⁶ *Dei Filius* and *Pastor Aeternus* addressed both problems in the two constitutions decreed. This discussion focuses on *Pastor Aeternus*; a dogmatic constitution was passed to define the papal infallibility doctrine explicitly. It is stated in *Pastor Aeternus*:

It is a divinely revealed dogma: that the Roman Pontiff, when he speaks *ex Cathedra*, that is, when in the discharge of the office of Pastor and Teacher of all Christians, by virtue of his supreme Apostolic authority, he defines a doctrine regarding faith or morals to be held by the Universal Church, by the divine assistance promised to him in blessed Peter, is possessed of that infallibility with which the divine Redeemer willed that His Church should be endowed for defining doctrine regarding faith or morals: and that therefore such definitions of the Roman Pontiff are irreformable of themselves, and not from the consent of the Church.²⁷

The excerpt shows that the Pope is infallible whenever he wants to define teaching related to faith and morals when he speaks *ex-cathedra*. That definition is considered irreformable. Nevertheless, some conditions must be emphasized that this applies only to revealed faith and morals.²⁸ Therefore, not all teachings declared by the Pope are considered infallible. To validly declare infallible teaching, it is necessary to include an *ex-cathedra* statement in word of mouth or writing.²⁹

²⁶ O'Malley, *A History of the Popes*, 247.

²⁷ First Vatican Council, *Pastor Aeternus*, accessed April 25, 2021, <<http://catholicplanet.org/councils/20-Pastor-Aeternus.htm>>

²⁸ O' Collins & Ferugia, *Catholicism*, 315

²⁹ S. M. Brandi, When is the Pope Infallible? *The North American Review* 155 (433), 1892, 654

In the Second Vatican Council, this doctrine was further strengthened with the affirmation made by the Church through the statement made in the dogmatic constitution, *Lumen Gentium*, which Pope Paul VI promulgated in 1964. In the third chapter of the constitution, the council follows the footsteps of the First Vatican Council closely in explaining the hierarchical structure of the Church by recognizing the primacy of the Roman Pontiff and its infallible magisterium.³⁰ It is stated in the document:

Moreover, all this teaching about the institution, the perpetuity, the meaning and reason for the sacred primacy of the Roman Pontiff, and his infallible magisterium, this Sacred Council again proposes to be firmly believed by all the faithful.³¹

Debates among Christian Churches

As expected, the declaration of the doctrine of papal infallibility in the First Vatican Council received many responses from Christians. This part looks at the debates between the three major churches in Christianity and their position regarding the doctrine of papal infallibility.

Catholicism

Although this doctrine is accepted by the followers of the Roman Catholic Church, especially after its definition in the First Vatican Council, there is opposition among the followers. Among the obvious yet brave ones were expressed by Hans Küng in his *Infallible? An Enquiry*. By the word 'infallibility' and its definition in the First Vatican Council, Küng refers to it as something which leads to misunderstanding. He

³⁰ Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, accessed April 25, 2021, <http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vatii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html>

³¹ Ibid.

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questioned whether the Pope could be infallible alone or its infallibility is attached to the episcopate, as in Christianity, the Church is also considered infallible. For Küng, the Church remains in the truth while individuals are prone to error, and the Pope does not possess absolute infallibility. Thus, he suggests a better term to replace it with 'indefectibility', which he regards as the perpetuity in truth.

Furthermore, as Küng recalls, the doctrine has no foundation in the scripture, and Luke 13:18 is doubtful to refer to the infallibility of the Roman Pontiff.³² He argues that the historical background of the development itself is problematic.³³ It can be seen in Brian Tierney's writing, where the Franciscans play a significant role in developing papal infallibility. Another argument opposing this doctrine, as discussed by Tierney, is related to the Pope's sovereignty. Declaring the Pope's infallibility decreases the Pope's authority in the Church as the decree made by the Pope is irreformable. Therefore, the successor is bound by the doctrinal decisions of his predecessor.³⁴

Protestantism

Protestantism emerged in the 16th century as an expression of opposition to the Roman Catholic teaching of indulgences. Martin Luther, the pioneer of the protestant reformation, published his Ninety-Five Theses to the Catholic Church's practice of selling indulgences that are seen as taking advantage of the laity.³⁵ Thus, it is clear how the Protestant Church rejects the doctrine of papal infallibility. Indeed, Protestantism's rejection of papal infallibility can be seen from its foundation theology, the five *sola*. As prescribed by Luther, the *Sola Scriptura* acknowledges the scripture as the sole source of authority, thus rejecting the ultramontanism or intense stress on the Papacy practised by the Church.³⁶ He believes people can directly connect with God without an intermediary. Not to mention, Luke 13:18, which is being used as the ultimate support for the doctrine, is debatable.

³² Ibid., 109-110.

³³ Hans Küng, *Infallible? An Inquiry*, (New York: Doubleday & Company, inc., 1971), 94.

³⁴ Tierney, *Origins of Papal Infallibility*, 55.

³⁵ Peterson, *A Concise History*, 198.

³⁶ Ibid., 206.

Furthermore, Mark E. Powell evaluates the doctrine from a protestant perspective. He discusses it from a different angle by looking at it through an epistemological lens. He argues that papal infallibility is not giving any religious epistemic certainty. However, as Powell claimed, papal infallibility fulfils the desire for epistemic certainty in Christianity, especially Catholicism.³⁷ For him, the papal infallibility hinders the ecumenical relations between churches in Christianity.³⁸

Eastern Orthodox

The Great Schism that split the two most extensive branches of Christianity, the Roman Catholic Church and Eastern Orthodox Church, has impacted its belief and theological construction. Both traditions remain dissent from each other until now. More important to understand that the papal primacy practised in the western Church was one reason for this separation. However, Eastern Orthodox Church accepts that the Pope is the most honoured bishop of the Christian world but rejecting the idea that he possesses a supreme primacy over all churches clarifies that they reject papal infallibility.³⁹ For the Eastern Orthodox church, the infallibility practised by Roman Catholics is wrong. For them to decree infallible teaching, it must be agreed upon at the gathering of the bishops and not by the decision made by the Pope alone.⁴⁰ Besides, Patriarch Bartholomew criticized the Roman Catholic's interpretation of Luke 13:18, which was full of controversy. He affirmed that the Pope's authority has no foundation and that the divine power in the Church was that of the bishops and their collegiality.

'Iṣmah and Debates among Schools of Kalām

The Qur'ān states:

³⁷ Mark E Powell, *Papal Infallibility: A Protestant Evaluation of an Ecumenical Issue*, (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.,2009), 3.

³⁸ Ibid., 83

³⁹ Stephen F. Brown and Khaled Anatolios, *Catholicism & Orthodox Christianity*, (Facts on File: New York, 2002), 55.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 112

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And We indeed sent into every nation a messenger, [saying], "Worship Allah and avoid *ṭāghūt*." And among them were those whom Allah guided, and among them were those upon whom error was [deservedly] decreed. So, proceed [i.e., travel] through the earth and observe how was the end of the deniers.⁴¹

Belief in God's prophets is one of the pillars of the articles of faith in Islam. One cannot be considered a Muslim unless he adheres to these pillars. Belief in prophets is essential in the Islamic tradition. The prophets have played a prominent role in upholding Islam's central teaching, preaching God's Oneness. In this section, a study is made on the role of prophets in Islam and how 'iṣmah is perceived.

The Concept of Prophethood in Islam

There are twenty-five names of prophets mentioned in the Qur'ān explicitly. Apart from that, it is also believed that the number of prophets is higher. To be sure, God had sent to every nation a prophet. This is what is stated in *sūrat al-Naḥl* mentioned above. God further confirms this, "And [We sent] messengers about whom We have related [their stories] to you before and messengers about whom We have not related to you."⁴² Nevertheless, the actual number of prophets is still debated by scholars.

Although the prophets and messengers are the carriers of divine revelation, they are human and live like normal humans with desires and emotions. What is vital for understanding the concept of prophethood is distinguishing between *rasūl* and *nabī*. These two titles are usually associated with the idea of prophethood in Islam or Arabic, called *nubuwwah*. For *rasūl*, it can be loosely understood as a messenger, while *nabī* can be understood as a prophet, but in reality, the meaning of both titles are used interchangeably. Initially, both are Arabic words, with *rasūl* coming from the word *rasala*, which means to send, while *nabī* originates from *naba'*, which means news.

⁴¹ Qur'ān, *al-Naḥl*: 36.

⁴² Qur'an, *al-Nisā'*:164.

Fazlur Rahman discusses that the *nabī* in Qur'ān does not mean the one who gives the news about the future but the information from God. The news about the good tidings promised by God for those who are good and the news about God's warning for those who do evil deeds. Hence, prophets are usually referred to as 'warners' and 'the givers of good tidings' in the Qur'ān.⁴³ While for *rasūl*, its use in Qur'ān signifies two meanings: first refers to the angel whom God sends to the prophets by bringing revelations and second refers to the messenger of God on earth in human form.⁴⁴ There are debates about the reasons for the distinction between the two terms. Indeed, there is no doubt about recognizing these two terms, even though some scholars believe that the two terms are just the same in meaning. The distinction is made in the Qur'ān: "And We did not send before you any messenger or prophet."⁴⁵

One famous view on the distinction between *nabī* and *rasūl* is that *nabī* is the one who was sent with the revelation by God but was not obligated to convey it to the people. In contrast, *rasūl* is the one who received the revelation from God and conveyed it to people.⁴⁶ However, this idea was debated and rejected by some scholars. Ibn Taymiyyah's views seem plausible, which denotes that the *rasūls* were sent to the infidels to preach the Oneness of Allah, while *nabī* was sent to a group of people who already had faith in Allah as their guidance for them.⁴⁷ Fazlur Rahman mentions, "*rasūl* does signify something weightier than *nabī*, for a *nabī* can be auxiliary to a *rasūl* as Aaron was to Moses."⁴⁸ Thus, there is a distinction in terms of the role played by the prophets and messengers. Many scholars agree that the *rasūl* are considered *nabī*, but not all *nabī* are considered *rasūl*. Nevertheless, about the article of faith, belief in all of the *nabī* and *rasūl* is compulsory for every Muslim.

It is important to note that among the twenty-five names of prophets mentioned in the Qur'ān, it ends with Prophet Muḥammad

⁴³ Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an*, (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 1999), 81.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 82.

⁴⁵ Qur'ān, *al-Hajj*: 52.

⁴⁶ Muḥammad 'Aqil ibn 'Alī al-Mahdalī, *Dirāsah fi al-Nubuwwāt ('ilm al-Kalām)*, (Brunei: Dār al-Hadīth, 1991), 9-10.

⁴⁷ Ibn Taymiyyah, *Kitāb al-Nubuwwāt*, (Riyadh: Maktabah Aḍwā' al-Salaf, 2000), 714.

⁴⁸ Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes*, 82.

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(pbuh). Muslims believe that the Prophet (pbuh) is the closure of the prophethood in Islam with the last revelation revealed to him. Apart from their role in bringing humankind back to God, they were a role model for behaviour and guidance in understanding the revelation. Thus, it can be argued that the best way of living is by following the path of the prophets. Prophet Muḥammad (pbuh) also mentioned, "I was sent to perfect the good character."⁴⁹ This *ḥadīth* indicates that ethics is one of the central teachings of the prophets.

Development of the Doctrine of 'Iṣmah

'Iṣmah, in its literal meaning, is hindered or reserved or guard. Thus, contextually, the concept of 'iṣmah of prophets connotes the idea that prophets of God were protected from sins and errors. However, the doctrine of 'iṣmah is not mentioned explicitly in the Qur'ān. Nevertheless, what needs to be understood is that the Prophet (pbuh) has never gone astray and never erred and that his speeches are considered a revelation.⁵⁰ Logically, the revelation should be infallible as it is the knowledge from God. Historically, 'iṣmah has not been discussed during the Prophet's or the Companion's era. Perhaps, it is shared among the Companions that the Prophet (pbuh) has always spoken the truth; thus, he never made a mistake.

The earliest discussion on 'iṣmah was started by the Shiites.⁵¹ It can also be traced to the writing of a Shiite scholar, Sharīf Murtaḍā', who wrote the whole account to elevate the idea of the sinlessness of prophets.⁵² It is also claimed that this doctrine is a later development among Sunni Muslims because such a discussion is not traceable to early Islamic literature. The emergence of this doctrine among Sunni Muslims

⁴⁹ Saḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, *al-Adab al-Mufrad*, Translated by Rafiq Abdur Rahman, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al- 'Ilmiyyah, 2015), 228.

⁵⁰ Qur'ān, *al-Najm*: 3-4.

⁵¹ Ḥasan Ḥamīd 'Abīd al-Gharbāwī, *al-'Iṣmah fī al-Fikr al-Islāmī* (Damascus: Dār Ṭaybah, 2008), 27.

⁵² Al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā', *Tanzīh al-'Anbiyā'*, (Najaf: al-Maṭba'ah al-Ḥaydariyyah, 2nd edn., 1960).

has also resulted from the debates between Sunnis and Shiites.⁵³ Initially, it emerged altogether with the principle of Imamate in Shiism. Most Shiite theologians agreed that all the twelve Imams were considered *ma'sūm* or preserved from sins.⁵⁴

Shiites believe that verse 124 of *sūrat al-Baqarah* proves the need of the *imām*, and *he* needs to be *ma'sūm* for his role as ruler in religion and state.⁵⁵ It has been laid down as the fundamental teaching in Shiism. Donelson mentions that this idea emerged during the era of Imām Ja'far al-Sādīq.⁵⁶ It is shown that the claim of *'iṣmah* is significant in Shiism in their belief - mentioning Hishām ibn al-Hakam, a prominent Shiite scholar. According to him, the *imāms* need *'iṣmah* more than *nabī* because *nabī* has received the revelation from God while *imāms* did not get the revelation. As religious leaders, they need recognition of *'iṣmah* more than a *nabī*.⁵⁷

Some say the idea of the sinlessness of prophets is heretical and innovative in the Islamic tradition since the concept was not discussed during the era of the Prophet (pbuh). Perhaps, it was never an issue during the Prophet's era. Besides, the development of the idea in the Islamic theological discussion was relatively a late addition. Nor can the debate on *'iṣmah*, specifically in al-Ash'arī's works can, be found. Instead, it hit its peak discussion in Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's *'Iṣmat al-Anbiyā'*.⁵⁸ Some argue that al-Rāzī held an extreme position regarding *'iṣmah*. According to al-Rāzī, the issues in the doctrine hovered around four main points. First, it is related to their belief. Second, about their preaching of the *sharī'ah* and the laws. The third is associated with issuing a *fatwā* (related to the religious matter), and the last relates to their character.

Al-Rāzī explains that Muslims agreed they were preserved from infidelity, disbelief, and heresy in the Prophets' faith. Regarding their

⁵³ Ahmad Hasan, The Concept of Infallibility in Islam. *Islamic Studies*, 11 (1), 1972, 1-11, 2.

⁵⁴ Dwight M. Donelson, *The Shiite Religion: A History of Islam in Persia and Iraq*, (London: Luzac & co., 1933), 320.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 306.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Al-Gharbāwī, *al-'Iṣmah*, 27.

⁵⁸ Kemal Faruki, Tawḥīd and The Doctrine of *'Iṣmah*, *Islamic Studies*, 4 (1), 1965, 36.

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work in preaching the *sharī'ah* laws, the consensus was that they could not do wrong in conveying it to the people. As for the third discussion, the agreement was that they could not intentionally commit a mistake in issuing fatwā. Still, it is debated among scholars whether they could do wrong inadvertently. As for the last, scholars argued whether they could commit grave and minor sins regarding prophets' character.⁵⁹

Another question associated with the doctrine of 'ismah is the status of free will. If the prophets were to be preserved from sins, did they affect their free will? One of the important parts of Islamic theology is that man is given the ability to make choices in the world with the faculty of reason bestowed by God. Furthermore, He will question every choice made by man in the hereafter based on the good and evil choices.⁶⁰ It seems that the 'ismah deprived the free will, which contradicts the nature of a human itself. The Qur'ān stresses that the prophets are just human, except for their high rank among all humans chosen by God to preach His divine messages to humanity.⁶¹ Indeed, God stresses the mortality of prophets, saying, "Muhammad is not but a messenger. [Other] messengers have passed on before him. So, if he was to die or be killed, would you turn back on your heels [to unbelief]?"⁶²

More importantly, Ahmad Hasan mentions that the question "if prophets were just as human as others, why do people need to obey them?" was the starting point for developing the doctrine of 'ismah.⁶³ On the other hand, Wilfred Madelung claims that this doctrine emerged to fill the absence of a divine authority after Prophet's death.⁶⁴ Previously, a similar idea was introduced by Abū Ḥanīfah that the prophets were protected from sin by God, but the term used is *tanazzuh*, which means purity. It is believed that Abū Ḥanīfah was the first Muslim to introduce such an idea. Still, the idea was never systematized and formalized until

⁵⁹ Fakhr al-Dīn al-Razī, *Ismat al-Anbiyā'*, (Cairo: Maktabat al-Thaqāfah al-Dīniyyah, 1987), 39-40.

⁶⁰ Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes*, 23-24.

⁶¹ Qur'ān, *al-Kahf*: 110.

⁶² Qur'ān, *Al 'Imrān*: 144.

⁶³ Ahmad Hasan, *The Concept of Infallibility*, 5.

⁶⁴ Reyhan Erdoğan Başaran, "For the Sake of An Infallible Authority: An Analysis of Sectarian Approaches to The Belief In 'ismah," *Usul İslam Araştırmaları* 34, (2020): 143.

after Prophet's death, right after Shiite claims the sinlessness of Imamate.

Debates among Schools of *Kalām*

The issue of *ʿiṣmah* has been a theological debate among Muslim scholars concerning the reality of prophets. One of the examples and the most imperative topic is the condition of prophets on their possibility of committing a grave or minor sin. On the other hand, as stated by al-Rāzī, the consensus of Muslims noted that the prophets were preserved from infidelity and heresy except for Fudayliyyah, one of the branches of Kharijites. This is because they regarded every sin as a sign of infidelity. Perhaps, the different methods used by other schools of *kalām* led to the distinction in opinions on *ʿiṣmah*. Thus, this part looks at the position of selected schools of *kalām* related to the issue of *ʿiṣmah*.

The Shiites

Shiism was the first school of *kalām* to discuss the doctrine of *ʿiṣmah* profoundly. Its discussion sparked the need for this doctrine in other schools of *kalām*. Shiites held that prophets were intentionally or inadvertently free from all sins, whether grave or minor, before and after the prophethood, including being preserved from infidelity and heresy. They were also being preserved from making mistakes in conveying the revelation. However, according to al-Rāzī, the Rafidites believed that prophets might profess infidelity in the form of *taqiyya*. Thus, the doctrine of *ʿiṣmah* is considered one of the fundamental teachings in Shiism.⁶⁵

Furthermore, Shiism's apparent distinction in developing this doctrine from other schools of *kalām* is that they appended a portion of the *ʿiṣmah* to the twelve *imāms*. Sharīf Murtaḍā has discussed it in *Tanzīh al-Anbiyā'*.⁶⁶ Shiites believe that the Imamate was the continuation of prophethood. Thus, it carries the duty of prophets. As to how they think the *ʿiṣmah* of the Prophet (pbuh), they lay the same condition to the

⁶⁵ Al-Rāzī, *ʿIṣmat al-Anbiyā'*, 39.

⁶⁶ Al-Murtaḍā, *Tanzīh al-'Anbiyā'*, 169.

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imāms, preserved from sins and heresy from childhood until death.⁶⁷ Shiites believe that God divinely made the appointment of an *imām* through the selection of the previous *imām*.⁶⁸ The necessity of the position of *imām* could be found in the writings of Shiite scholars that denote a manifestation of God's kindness. It is necessary to appoint an *imām* as the leader.⁶⁹ Although most Shiite theologians agreed on the 'iṣmah of prophets and *imāms*, some like Ibn Bābawayh and Muhammad ibn Walīd held the view that prophets might fall into minor sins out of forgetfulness and an *imām* could make a mistake before his appointment of Imamate. Nevertheless, these views were rejected by later Shiite theologians.⁷⁰

The Mu'tazilites

The Mu'tazilites refer to the meaning of 'iṣmah as *lutf* or divine kindness. 'Abd al-Jabbār, a Mu'tazilite scholar, discusses that divine kindness is every choice humans make to do the obligatory and abandon the sinful. He mentions that this meaning is sometimes also referred to as *tawfiq*.⁷¹ Mu'tazilites believe that it is a must for God to send prophets for humanity. 'Abd al-Jabbār argues in *Sharḥ Uṣūl al-Khamsah* that God must send the miraculous Prophet (pbuh) to prove his truth to society. He further explains that prophets (pbut) must be immaculate from repulsion. Thus, God must preserve prophets (pbut) from the said condition.⁷²

In delivering the message from God through the revelation, Mu'tazilites agree that the prophets never lied nor made mistakes in it.⁷³ Mu'tazilites also concur that the prophets were being preserved from infidelity and heresy. Nevertheless, in terms of committing grave and

⁶⁷ Muḥammad Riḥā al-Muzaffar, 'Aqā'id al-Imāmiyyah, (Najaf: Maktabat al-Amīn, 1968), 67.

⁶⁸ Donalson, *The Shiite Religion*, 314.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 307.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 321-322.

⁷¹ 'Abd al-Jabbār ibn Aḥmad, *Sharḥ Uṣūl al-Khamsah*, (Cairo: Maktabah Wahbah, 1996), 519.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 573.

⁷³ Al-Gharbāwī, *al-'Iṣmah*, 71.

minor sins, most Mu'tazilites held that the prophets could not commit the grave sins intentionally or inadvertently but could engage the little trifling evil.⁷⁴

The Ash'arites

The issue of *'ishmah* of prophets was not discussed among the Ash'arites in the era of its founder, Abu al-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī. It is said that the later Ash'arites started the discussion on *'ishmah* as a result of the debates with Shiites⁷⁵ because Shiites began to discuss the idea of *'ishmah* to justify their doctrine of Imamate.⁷⁶ As a result, the issue of *'ishmah* of prophets has become one of the most critical aspects of discussing the concept of prophethood, according to the Ash'arite School.

The Sunnites have two main views on the *'ishmah* of prophets (pbut). The first group believes that the *'ishmah* is applied before and after the prophethood. The second group believes that the *'ishmah* is exclusively after the prophethood because humans are commanded to follow them only after it. Concerning this, Muḥammad 'Alī al-Sābūnī states that the consensus favours the second view that the prophets were protected from major and minor sins after their prophethood. Regarding their condition before prophethood, some minor sins that were not significant might occur that did not detract from the nobility.⁷⁷

The Ash'arites held that prophets were being preserved from grave sins, including infidelity and heresy. According to al-Rāzī, this has been the consensus of Muslims.⁷⁸ They also believe that prophets (pbut) have never lied when preaching the revelation and transmitting the messages from God.⁷⁹ This means that they were being protected from falsehood in communicating the revelation. In another case, there are differences of opinion among Ash'arite scholars regarding the immunity

⁷⁴ Al-Rāzī, *'Iṣmat al-Anbiyā'*, 40.

⁷⁵ Aḥmad Hasan, *The Concept of Infallibility*, 2.

⁷⁶ Al-Gharbāwī, *al-'Iṣmah*, 28.

⁷⁷ Muḥammad 'Alī al-Sābūnī, *Nubuwwah wa al-Anbiyā'*, (Damascus: Maktabat al-Ghazālī, 1985), 54.

⁷⁸ Al-Rāzī, *'Iṣmat al-Anbiyā'*, 39.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 39.

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of prophets from minor sins. Most Ash'arites believed that prophets were being preserved from the grave and minor sins. Nevertheless, some Ash'arites held that prophets could commit minor sins. This view was held by al-Juwaynī.⁸⁰

In contrast, Ash'arites have a different position on the mistake, not vile committed by prophets inadvertently or caused by forgetfulness. They agree that the Prophets might commit such a mistake inadvertently so long it did not affect their honour and dignity.⁸¹ This is the view held by the majority of Mu'tazilites. It is based on the *ḥadīth*, "I am a human being like you and liable to forget like you. So, if I forget, remind me."⁸²

Papal Infallibility and 'Iṣmah

The discussion on understanding both concepts of papal infallibility and 'iṣmah has been illustrated above. The basic understanding of the Papacy in Christianity and the prophethood in Islam has been highlighted to obtain a vivid picture. In this section, a comparison of both concepts depicts the similarities and differences in both traditions. Since papal infallibility is being rejected by the other churches apart from Catholicism, its discussion focuses on the Catholics' point of view.

Looking at the concept of papal infallibility and *iṣmah*, it is evident that each religion has a similar view on the general and basic understanding of infallibility or 'iṣmah. However, differences emerge in how they perceive these concepts and their applicability in both traditions. Therefore, this section provides a comparative analysis of papal infallibility and 'iṣmah.

The Concept of Papacy and Prophethood

Since this section discusses the quality held by both the popes in Christianity and prophets in Islam, it seems imperative to compare them.

⁸⁰ Imām al-Ḥaramayn, *al-ishrāf ila qawāti' al-Adillah fī uṣūl al-I'tiqād*, (Cairo: Maktabah al-Khānjā, 1950), 357.

⁸¹ Al-Gharbāwī, *al-'Iṣmah*, 105.

⁸² *Sahīh al-Bukhārī*, Vol. 1, Book 8, Chapter 31, Ḥadīth 401, (Trans) Muhammad Muhsin Khan, (Riyadh: Darussalam, 1997), 263.

Generally, the concept of the Papacy in Christianity and prophethood in Islam are two different, apparent concepts. Nevertheless, one aspect that could be linked between both concepts is the idea of infallibility applied to the supreme authority in both religions, namely the authority of the Pope and prophets (pbt). In this case, *'iṣmah* for Islam.

In the case of Islam, although the belief in other prophets (pbt) besides Prophet Muḥammad (pbh) is compulsory, only the sayings and actions of Prophet Muḥammad (pbh) and the scriptural text of the Qur'ān are considered the primary sources of the Islamic law or *Sharī'ah*. However, the main idea of prophethood in Islam is that all the prophets were sent to convey the same message of creed, the oneness of God. Although the Papacy's role is overtly emphasized in Christianity, the idea of prophethood was also visualized in the Bible through the narrations in the Old and New Testaments. Some stories are similar to what has been narrated in the Qur'ān, while others contain different narratives. Both religions held the same position regarding the idea of the prophets as individuals chosen by God to convey His message to humankind.⁸³

From another perspective, the concepts of Papacy and prophethood differed regarding succession. Generally, the Pope is chosen by the people, particularly the consensus of the College of Cardinals, through the election process named Papal Conclave. This position was linked through generations until the succession chain could be linked back to the first Bishop of Rome, Peter. Consequently, that is why the Papacy institution is considered the longest-living institution that ever existed in the western world and remains in practice to this day. On the other hand, the appointment of prophets in Islam does not involve the intervention or intercession of others except directly from God. The prophets themselves did not have the right to pass their position to anyone. God chose the best among humankind to be appointed as His prophets and messengers to convey the message of oneness or *tawḥīd*. Therefore, to compare both concepts, the Pope's role is continuous and succeeded by the successor.

In contrast, the role of prophets in Islam stopped after Prophet Muḥammad's death as he was considered the final Prophet (pbuh) sent

⁸³ Peterson, *A Concise History*, 12.

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by God. Muslims believe that religion has been completed. Thus, there is no further revelation from God.

As mentioned previously, all the prophets and messengers in Islam were ultimately human beings born with desires and emotions. It is the same case in Christianity, where the prophets mentioned in the Bible were also humans. The difference is that Islam perceives Jesus or 'Isā as a mere prophet or messenger; thus, he was a mere human. While in Christianity, there is a debate whether Jesus is considered as fully God or fully human until now, it was concluded in the Council of Chalcedon that Jesus is one with two natures, the divine and human. Therefore, the mainstream belief in Christianity is that Jesus is fully God and fully human.⁸⁴

In comparing the concept of the Papacy and whether some practices in Islam are similar to the concept of the Papacy, perhaps it can be compared with the concept of the caliph or *khilāfah*. In the Muslims' minds, the caliphs were considered the successors of the Prophet Muḥammad (pbuh) in handling the welfare of the Muslims, especially the first four caliphs. At some point, the caliphs were also called the leader of the *Ummah* as it is being called during the reign of Caliph 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, and this position was more to the political aspect. Nevertheless, assuming the caliph to hold an office of prophethood in Islam is compared with the Pope's position as a supreme authority in Christianity is far from the basic idea. The caliphs only led the Muslim community after the Prophet Muḥammad's era and did not possess any quality of 'iṣmah as prophets did.

From a different perspective, the Shiites believe that the *imām*, a role that seemed identical to the concept of the *khilāfah* in Sunnite, was the successor of the prophets. Unlike the Sunnites, that does not regard the caliphs as *ma'ṣūm* and stress that the condition of 'iṣmah is only endowed to the prophets; the Shiites take a step further by accepting the *imām* to have an 'iṣmah quality.⁸⁵ Since the Shiites do not differentiate between the state of 'iṣmah of the *imām* and the state of 'iṣmah of the Prophet (pbuh), it can be seen that the understanding of 'iṣmah in Islam

⁸⁴ O'Collins & Ferrugia, *Catholicism*, 153.

⁸⁵ Fazli bin Adam, "The Concept of Khilāfah According to Selected Sunni and Shi'i Qur'anic Commentaries," (PhD. thesis, University of Leeds, 2001), 20-21.

is different from the understanding of infallibility in Christianity in its practice.

One similarity between the Pope in Christianity and prophets in Islam is that both are responsible for guiding humankind and upholding ethical life. From the Islamic perspective, Prophet Muḥammad (pbh) emphasized his role in shaping good behaviour when he mentioned, “*I was sent to perfect good character.*”⁸⁶ Likewise, as the supreme authority in Christianity, the Pope plays a role in decreeing teaching related to faith and morals, as explained in *Pastor Aeternus*.

The Nature of both Practices

A proper comparative analysis of the concept of papal infallibility in Christianity and *‘iṣmah* in Islam cannot be done if an emphasis is not made on the fundamental element, which is the definition. Therefore, a comparison between the definition of both doctrines and how Christians and Muslims understood both concepts is needed. In this context, it can be seen that there is a slight difference between the way Christians understand the concept of papal infallibility and the way Muslims understand the concept of *‘iṣmah* of the prophets.

In general, Christians, especially Catholics, understood the term infallibility as the inability of the Pope to fall into error, or the Pope, in his position as the supreme authority of the Church, was being preserved from decreeing false teaching.⁸⁷ Meanwhile, some other Christians discussed that infallibility only plays as an assistant to the Pope, so he did not declare an error to be the truth.⁸⁸ In continuation, Christians still believe that the Pope may fall into error and make mistakes in his capacity as a private individual. The Pope was only considered infallible in his official capacity as Pope, the supreme authority in Church.⁸⁹ While in Islam, the general understanding of the definition of *‘iṣmah* includes every aspect of a prophet’s life. Scholars propose various definitions for

⁸⁶ Saḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, *al-Adab al-Mufrad*, 228.

⁸⁷ Walsh, *Roman Catholicism*, 57.

⁸⁸ Brandi, *When is the Pope Infallible?*, 652.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 653.

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the term 'iṣmah, which leads to the same understanding. For example, al-Jurjāni defined iṣmah as the faculty that refrains one from ma'āṣin (sins) although capable of committing it.⁹⁰ Ma'āṣin is an Arabic word that means disobedience. It is a broad term that includes all types of sins and disobedience acts. Al-Jurjāni made a clear definition of 'iṣmah where he did not neglect the human quality in the prophets, which is the freedom of choice, by asserting that they could commit sins, but because of some other quality, they were being refrained from committing it. On the other hand, al-Sābūnī discusses the definition of 'iṣmah, which denotes Allah was preserving the prophets from falling into sins, disobedience, committing evil deeds and prohibited acts.⁹¹ Therefore, to compare both concepts, the definition of 'iṣmah of the Prophet in Islam is broader than the definition of the infallibility of the Pope in Christianity, including all the harmful elements that may be attributed to the prophets.

In terms of the way it is being practised, both concepts differ. As discussed, infallibility was only applicable when the Pope declared teaching taken from the ex-cathedra announcement for the concept of papal infallibility. *Ex-cathedra* is a Latin phrase with a literal meaning of "from the chair."⁹² Thus, Christians believe that the only way the Pope can speak infallibly is when he speaks *ex-cathedra* as the head of the Church and not in his capacity. Nevertheless, the infallible papal pronouncement is valid when the Pope proclaims a doctrine limited only to faith and morals.

Compared to the concept of 'iṣmah of the prophets in Islam, it applies to every aspect of prophets' lives, including their speeches and actions. As a matter of fact, in the Islamic tradition, everything that is related to Prophet Muḥammad (pbuh) is regarded as a ḥadīth, the second major source in religion. The verses further strengthen it in *Sūrat al-Najm*, "Nor does he speak of his own whims. It is only a revelation sent down to him."⁹³ Although this verse mainly talks about the Qur'ān that

⁹⁰ 'Alī ibn Muḥammad al-Sayyid al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī, *Mu'jam al-Ta'rīfāt*, (Cairo: Dār al-Fadīlah, n.d.), 127.

⁹¹ Al-Sābūnī, *Nubuwwah*, 54.

⁹² *Online Dictionary Etymology*, s.v. "ex-cathedra," accessed June 24, 2020, <<https://www.etymonline.com/word/ex%20cathedra>>

⁹³ Qur'ān, *al-Najm*: 3-4.

was revealed, Prophet Muḥammad (pbuh) further emphasized in a narration that was narrated by ‘Amr ibn al-‘Āṣ:

I used to write everything which I heard from the Messenger of Allah. I intended (by it) to memorize it. The Quraysh prohibited me, saying: Do you write everything that you hear from him while the Messenger of Allah is a human being: he speaks in anger and pleasure? So, I stopped writing and mentioned it to the Messenger of Allah. He signalled with his finger to his mouth and said: Write, by Him in Whose hand my soul lies, only right comes out from it.⁹⁴

This narration illustrates the position and authority of Hadith Literature in Islam and why it is regarded as a significant religious source. In short, the concept of *‘iṣmah* of the Prophet (pbuh) can be understood as preserving him from all harmful elements attributed to him in speeches and actions. It is different from how papal infallibility is being practised in Christianity.

Conclusion

This paper has analyzed and compared the concept of papal infallibility in Christianity and the *‘iṣmah* of the prophets in Islam. Generally, infallibility and *‘iṣmah* are two inseparable concepts from the concept of the Papacy in Christianity and prophethood in Islam. Although these concepts sound identical in their understanding, they consist of complex structures and discussions. Thus, a comparative method was applied to analyze both concepts to unveil similarities and differences regarding understanding and application. It can be inferred that although there are some similarities between the two concepts, the differences are more apparent.

In Christianity, the Papacy tradition is considered the longest-living institution in the West, rooted in Peter's practice as the first pope.⁹⁵ Although it is accepted widely by the Catholics, the Papacy remains a significant barrier separating different denominations in

⁹⁴ *Sunan Abu Dawūd*, Vol. 4, Chapter 3, Ḥadīth 3646, (Trans) Nasiruddin al-Khaṭṭāb, (Riyadh: Darussalam, 2008), 209.

⁹⁵ Walsh, *Roman Catholicism*, 51.

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Christianity. History also recorded that the Franciscans enormously contributed to putting the Pope in his position these days. Plus, the practice of papal infallibility, although some claim it has been implicitly practised since the beginning of the Church, was officially made into a doctrine in the First Vatican Council. The great schism that split between the Eastern Church and the western Church resulted from the theological conflict in the early Middle Ages.⁹⁶ This separation lasted until the present time, and the leading role of the Papacy in the western Church magnified the schism between them.

On the other hand, the concept of *iṣmah* in Islam, although generally accepted by the Muslims, except for the Kharijites, still occurs among different schools of *Kalām* in discussing the absoluteness of the prophets to possess such quality. What needs to be clear is that the prophets were ultimately human beings, inseparable from ordinary human qualities. However, what also needs to be emphasized is that the prophets were the best among humankind chosen by God to lead humanity and were characterized by noble qualities and honours. Thus, the honours possessed by the prophets hindered them from sin. Most theologians agree that prophets were being preserved from the grave sins, including infidelity, heresy and delivering false messages. At the same time, there are different opinions among different schools of theology concerning the *iṣmah* of the prophets about the minor sins and small mistakes.

Finally, it can be concluded that the concept of papal infallibility in Christianity and the *iṣmah* of the prophets in Islam. However, it seems to be a similar notion. The followers of both religions can see the distinction between the concepts and how they are practised to avoid confusion in understanding the meanings. It is complex to understand the applications and practices. Therefore, a proper understanding of the comparison of both concepts is essential. More research can be conducted to discuss this issue.

⁹⁶ Peterson, *A Concise History*, 119.

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