**Overextending the mundane**

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In Christianity, the divine and the mundane combine. Jesus was both a god and a human. The clergy in a church is sacred so, they too are divine. Churches that carry sacraments are sacred as well. The pope is sacred. And, historically, once sanctioned by the church, the ruler too is sacred. In all these instances, what is material, worldly and mundane gets intertwined with what is sacred. In Islam, the two are not the same. The Imam is not sacred, the message in the Quran (the words of God) is. So, he has no spiritual authority unless his instructions are exactly in line with the Quran. In a famous historical anecdote, Umar, the second Khalifa was once challenged by a woman on a declaration he had made on women’s inheritance during his caliphate. As the story goes, the woman had insisted that Umar, who was both the spiritual and political leader of the ummah, had instructed against what was written in the Quran. Umar subsequently, not only changed his opinion but also publicly accepted his mistake. Similarly, the Prophet, was a man; a human. A blessed, special human but a human nonetheless. His actions and words held authority not because they were attributed to his being but because he was connected to God via the angel Gabriel. Hence, his actions and words were seen as orchestration by the lord himself. The Prophet, himself emphasised his non-spiritualness in his lifetime, especially in his last sermon. After his demise, the same was insisted upon by his companions. As the famous tale goes, the first caliph, Abu Bakr, explicitly stated that the divine lay in the Quran which was the word of God. And, that divine was not limited to the mundane condition of death.
Of course, this is not to say that some elements in either religion work differently. As in, there are indeed segments within each religion that challenge the aforementioned descriptions. The protestant ethic for one is rooted in the conception that religion is a private affair and does not require validation or structuration by institutions and authorities beyond the self. Indeed, the protestant churches are not sacred. But, these very beliefs stem out of the protest against the enmeshing of the divine and the mundane. Luther was reacting against this very assumption when he laid foundation for the protestant movement. The protest translated into the European religious wars that, even today, orient how religion is understood in these societies. In comparison, because these conceptions were never an essential part of Islam, such protests and wars have never been part of Islamic history. The wars waged have been motivated by other dynamics: elitism, socio-political dimensions, the pursuit of power. Those fighting the wars have not sought a demarcation between the divine and the mundane. Anyways, given in the case of Christianity, the divine and mundane was (and continues to be) embedded into each other, conflict between religion (divine) and mundane (science) is inevitable. For, each tries to usurp the same seat; to supersede another. Hence when Galileo insisted on science, he was challenging the church and the latter, in return, attacked what he marketed.
In Islam, the two are separate. There is the ilm of ghayb (the unreachable knowledge) that is attributed to the divine and there is aql (reason) that is attributed to the mundane. Once again, this does not mean that there are no instances today where the two are intertwined. In fact, the contrary is obvious in geographies and circumstances where the religious leader/identity is offered the literal and metaphorical pulpit to instruct forms of being. However, I speak of the canons here. How they’re translated, paraphrased, and evolved is a historical and social question. At least, in terms of the canons, conflict only arises when either, the divine or the mundane, tries to respond to a question that is beyond its realm. Although the organizations, ritual and at times, the hymns resemble what can be seen in more organized religions, the meditators insist that they are not religious but spiritual. Such oxymorons occur because there seems to be an understanding that both meditative spiritualism and the Christian religion respond to the same question. For these people science is the preferred ontology now. And hence their preference replaces religion and what it means as being religious.
Muslim countries all over the world have latest technologies deeply embedded in their social and private existences. From phones, internet, or PlayStations, when financial conditions allow, the uptake of technology is as advanced in these geographies as in the ‘west’. However, at the same time when Muslims are adopting all new forms of technologies, their uptake of meditation as a spiritual escape is still (and I contend, will always be) almost non-existent. This is because the answer to spirituality lies in the realm of divine and not the mundane. The latter’s response falls short when it comes to catering to the spiritual needs of a Muslim. In other words, the assumption that science can respond to spiritual whims makes no sense for these are two different ontologies. And, while one can get some aqal-relief through meditation, the ghayab-relief would always have to be through the divine. Think about it: why does the call to prayer, the qirat, a hamd/naat, the qawwali still soothe people who have otherwise forsaken the concept of religion? This is because these indulgences cater to something beyond a relaxation of the brain and one’s nerves. They relax the soul and the mind. Something, one can argue, is in the realm of the divine (whatever it means to the person themselves).