163107 - Statement of the Islamic Fiqh Council regarding the ruling on actors playing the part of Prophets and Companions

the question

The Islamic Fiqh Council of the Muslim World League, in its twentieth session held in Makkah 19-23 Muharram 1432 AH (25-29 December 2010 CE), noted that some cinematic production companies continue to produce movies and shows in which people act the part of Prophets and Companions, so they issued the following statement:

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

In confirmation of the Council’s statement issued during its eighth session that was held in 1405 AH, which was issued concerning this matter and affirmed the prohibition on depicting Prophet Muhammad (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him), other prophets and messengers (peace be upon them), and the Companions (may Allah be pleased with them) and affirmed that this practice must be banned,

and in light of the fact that some cinematic production companies are persisting in producing films and shows in which actors play the role of Prophets and Companions, the Council reaffirms its previous statement about the prohibition on producing such movies and shows and on distributing them, promoting them, owning copies of them, watching them, taking part in that and broadcasting them on channels, because that may lead to disrespecting them and undermining their status and the esteem in which they are held, and it is a means that may lead to mocking and ridiculing them.

There is no justification for the one who claims that these theatrical drama shows and movies will make people more aware of them and their stories, because the Book of Allah is sufficient in that

regard. Allah, may He be Exalted, says:

{We relate to you [O Muhammad] the best of stories, by revealing to you this Qur'an, of which you were unaware before} [Yusuf 12:3]

{In their stories there is a lesson for people of understanding. This [the Qur'an] is not a fabricated tale, but a confirmation of [the scriptures] that came before it, an explanation of all things, and guidance and mercy to people who believe} [Yusuf 12:111].

The Council quoted the statement issued by the Committee of Senior Scholars, the fatwa of the Permanent Committee for Academic Research and Ifta' in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the fatwa of the Islamic Academic Council in Cairo, and other Islamic councils in different parts of the world which are all agreed that it is prohibited for actors to play the roles of the prophets and messengers (peace be upon them), which leaves no room for any other individual to weigh in on this issue, as was mentioned in the statement of the Muslim World League on 16/11/1431 AH.

It is well established on the basis of the religious texts that Allah, may He be Exalted, has favoured the prophets and messengers above all other people, as He, may He be Exalted, says in His holy Book:

{That was Our argument that We inspired Ibrahim [to use] against his people. We raise in status whomever We will. Verily, your Lord is Most Wise, All-Knowing.

We bestowed upon him Is-haq and Ya'qub, both of whom We guided; before him, We guided Nuh, and among his progeny, [We guided] Dawud, Sulayman, Ayyub, Yusuf, Moosâ and Harun. Thus do We reward those who do good.

And [We guided] Zakariya, Yahya, 'Isa and Ilyas; each was among the righteous.

And [We guided] Isma`il, Alyasa`, Yunus and Lut; each of them We favoured above all other people [of their own times]} [Al-An`am 6:83-86].

The verse {each of them We favoured above all other people [of their own times]} indicates that

the prophets are superior to all other people, and Muhammad (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) is the best and most favoured of the prophets, as he said of himself: “I am the leader of the sons of Adam and no boast. I am the first one for whom the grave will be opened, the first to intercede and the first to be allowed to intercede.” Narrated by Muslim.

This divine favour that was bestowed upon the noble prophets – foremost among whom is our Prophet Muhammad (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) dictates that we should honour them and respect them. Therefore whoever does anything to undermine their status will be subject to doom and loss in this world and the hereafter. Allah, may He be Exalted, says regarding His Prophet Muhammad (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him):

{Those who offend Allah and His Messenger, Allah has cursed them in this world and in the hereafter, and He has prepared for them a humiliating punishment} [Al-Ahzab 33:57].

Thus offending the Messenger (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) is like offending Allah, may He be Exalted, and Allah has ruled that the one who offends Him will be cast far away from His mercy, and his will be a humiliating punishment.

The scholars have stated that offending the Messenger (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) includes any words or deeds that cause him offence.

Playing the role of the prophets of Allah opens the door to developing doubts about their character and telling lies about them, because the character of the actors can never be like the character of the prophets in the way in which they conducted themselves and behaved, and the way in which they – peace be upon them – lived in terms of dignified manners, physical appearance and practices. These actors may have played inappropriate roles previously, or may play them later on, which could give the impression to the one who watches them that that prophet had the same character as the actor who plays his role.

The ummah should carry out its religious duty of defending the prophets and upholding their status, and taking a stand against anyone who offends them in any way.

Allah honoured the noble Companions (may Allah be pleased with them) by making them companions of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him), and He singled them out for this honour from among other people, and because of their high status before Him, Allah praised them by saying:

{Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah, and those who are with him are firm and unyielding towards the disbelievers, compassionate towards one another. You see them bowing and prostrating [in prayer], seeking the grace and pleasure of Allah. Their mark is on their faces from the effects of prostration. Such is their description in the Torah, and their likeness in the Gospel is that of a seed which sends forth its shoot, then makes it strong; then it grows thick and stands straight on its stem, delighting the sowers – so that He may infuriate the disbelievers through them. Allah has promised those among them who believe and do righteous deeds forgiveness and an immense reward} [Al-Fat-h 48:29].

Actors cannot present the exact character of the Companions (may Allah be pleased with them) and reflect their dignified manner and attitude. Those who prepare the dialogue when depicting the Companions (may Allah be pleased with them) may base their writing on bad reports or good reports, and they are very keen to find reports that will help them to come up with some drama in shows and movies, to make it exciting for the viewers. They may even add things from their imagination and events that they think must have happened, when what really happened is different from that.

That may include some of the actors playing the role of the disbelievers who fought the Companions, tortured the weak among them, and spoke words of disbelief, such as swearing by al-Lat and al-`Uzza, or criticising the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) and the message he brought, which are words that it is not permissible to utter or approve of.

What some people say, that depicting the Prophet (peace be upon them) and the noble Companions in movies serves the interest of calling people to Islam and encouraging people to adopt good manners and attitudes and to observe good etiquette is not correct.

If we assume that it serves some interest, that interest is insignificant, because it is outweighed by the negative consequences that are greater than it, which are what we have mentioned above, namely that it may lead to undermining the status of the Prophets and the Companions and the esteem in which they are held.

One of the well-established principles in Islamic teachings is that an imaginary interest is to be dismissed. Another principle is that if an interest and its bad consequences are equal, then it is to be dismissed, because warding off evil takes precedence over serving interests. So how about if the evil is greater than the interest and outweighs it, as is the case with the issue of playing the role of the prophets and Companions? Moreover, calling people to Islam and promoting good manners and characteristics can be done through Islamically acceptable means that have proven to be successful throughout the history of the Muslim ummah.

We urge the media to contribute to publicizing the stories of the prophets and messengers (peace be upon them) and the Companions (may Allah be pleased with them) without using actors to depict them. Moreover, they should obey the divine and prophetic teachings when fulfilling their responsibilities, which include educating the masses so that they will adhere to their religion and respect their righteous predecessors.

May Allah send blessings and peace upon our Prophet Muhammad and upon all his family and companions.