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## **CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE'S *DOCTOR FAUSTUS* AND THE ISLAMIC MORAL IMPLICATIONS**

**By**

**Woud Adnan Majeed**

**Alemam-Alaadm College**

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### **Abstract**

This research paper is mainly concerned with the study of Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* with special reference to the relevant Islamic implications that are reflected in it. The paper is to concentrate on those satanic aspirations of Faustus that are implied in his bond with Satan, and at the same time the paper will make particular touches upon those Quranic signs that explain man's relationship with Satan and the powers of evil. The examples chosen are those ones which share similarities between the play's concepts of good and evil and their counterparts found in the Holy Quran. They are chosen in order to illustrate full understanding of Marlowe's treatment of his themes.

The character of Faustus can be interpreted according to the Renaissance perspective and point of view which show that Faustus rebels against the limitations of medieval knowledge and the restrictions laid upon mankind, decreeing that he must accept his place in the universe without challenging it. Because of his universal desire for enlightenment, he makes a contract with the Satan for the sake of obtaining knowledge and experience and satiating his desire for

science. His desire is to transcend, according to the Renaissance perspective, the limitations of the individual man and raise him to greater achievements and heights.

In order to achieve his aims, Faustus has found his relief in magic which he considers to be the ultimate source of knowledge, and in order to learn all the secrets of this field of knowledge, he has to ally with Satan who will give him all he wants in this regard. From the historical perspective, Faustus is an astrologer with disreputable reflections as a magician that is mainly known in German inns. He has got a B. A. degree in divinity at Heidelberg University in 1509, in spite of the so many legends that tell about his reputation and career. The legends usually focus on the idea that Faustus is obsessed by the sin of pride and arrogance which are inevitably to befall man. This trait is abhorred by God as stated in the Holy Quran in Sura *Luqman* which shows that "the earnest seekers after righteousness receive guidance, unlike the seekers after vanity, who perish."<sup>1</sup> The relevant idea to this point of weakness—pride and arrogance—that is found in man can be explained by the following sign taken from Sura *Luqman*:

"ولاتصعر خدك للناس ولا تمش في الارض مرحا إن الله لا يحب كل مختال فخور"  
(الآية 18 من سورة لقمان، ص: 1084).

Marlowe attempts in *Doctor Faustus* to envision his message which focuses on man's ability to use his mind freely to achieve illegal and forbidden aims, which is in line with the Islamic idea doctrine that man is created to be free doing whatsoever he wants and that will bear his burden in this regard. This is shown in the following sign taken from Sura *Dahr* Alinsan: سورة الانسان:

"إنا هديناه السبيل إما شاكرا وإما كفورا" (الآية 3 من سورة الانسان، ص: 1655): يعني جل ثناؤه بقوله (إنا هديناه السبيل) إنا بينا له طريق الجنة، وعرفناه سبيله، إن شكر أو كفر. كما قال سبحانه وتعالى: "إما يعذبهم وإما يتوب عليهم"

التي تعني إما شقيا وإما سعيدا، اي ننظر اي شيء يصنع، أي لأطريقين يسلك، وأي الأمرين يأخذ، وهذا هو معنى الآية، يعني جل ثناؤه بقوله "إنا هديناه السبيل إما شاكرا وإما كفورا" بينا له طريق الخير وطريق الشر .

As it is indicated in the play, Faustus has a free will which is one of the characteristic features of the Renaissance. To Fulfill his ambitions for knowledge and experience, Faustus has chosen the way of evil and follows the dictations of Satan and becomes spiritually blind. This is in line with what the people of *Thamood* have done when God has sent them a prophet for their salvation:

وهذه الفكرة موضحة في الآية الكريمة ألتالية: "وأما ثمود فهديناهم فأستحبوا ألعى على ألهدى فأخذتهم صاعقة العذاب ألهون بما كانوا يكسبون" (الآية رقم 17 من سورة فصلت، ص: 1291). ويعني ذلك بقوله تعالى هذه الآية ان قوم ثمود أختاروا طريق الشر واصبحوا مثل الدكتور فوستس الذي فقد بصيرة الأيمان وفضل ألعى أروحي على نور الأيمان والتقوى والطريق المستقيم .

The original German *Faust* book has been dominantly theological in tone, whereas the text of Marlowe's play concentrates on the human aspects of Faustus's career. The medieval tragedy *Everyman* shows man's preparation for death whose moral is indicated by the idea that man takes nothing with him after death except his good deeds which may provide him with salvation. However, *Doctor Faustus* should be interpreted according to the Renaissance man's restless desire for freedom and knowledge and experience and his dissatisfaction with the constraints and limitations of the time. Interestingly enough, the desire for getting knowledge and experience is highly approved in the Holy Quran, as indicated in the following passage:

لعل الميزة الكبرى التي ميز الله بها الانسان على سائر مخلوقاته هي العلم والعقل، وان كل من العلم والعقل مرتبط احدهما بالآخر غير منفصل عنه، ولقد خص الله سبحانه وتعالى سيدنا آدم أبا ألبشرية كلها بالعلم، وقد تمثل ذلك المعنى في قوله عز وجل: "وعلم آدم ألسماء كلها" (سورة ألبقرة، الآية 31، ص: 24)، وذلك في مجال

تفضيله على الملائكة وحواره جل وعلا معهم واستخلافه إياه وأبناءه في الارض، ولما كان الإسلام هو الرسالة الخاتمة، ومحمد صلى الله عليه وسلم هو خاتم الأنبياء والمرسلين، فقد اقتضت المشيئة الألهية بأن تكون هذه الرسالة شاملة لجميع الاحكام والتكاليف التي لم تتوفر في الرسالات والكتب التي سبقت الإسلام: فجاءت الرسالة الخاتمة متضمنة جميع التعاليم وسائل ألوان المعرفة التي تسعد الإنسان في دنياه وآخرته، وتجعله مؤهلاً لخلافة الله في الارض. والمميزات التي تميزت بها الرسالة الخاتمة—وبالتالي تميز بها الإسلام—كثيرة لاتكاد تحصى، ولكن الميزة الكبرى في هذه الرسالة تتمثل في العلم والحضن عليه، والسعي في طلبه، وألزام المسلمين في الأقبال عليه والأستمسك به، ومن ثم فقد كرمه الله بأن أستفتح به كتابه الكريم في أول قوله عز وجل سورة نزل بها جبريل على محمد صلى الله عليه وسلم: "اقرأ باسم ربك الذي خلق، خلق الإنسان من علق، اقرأ وربك الأكرم، الذي علم بالقلم، علم الإنسان ما لم يعلم" (سورة العلق، الآيات 1-5، ص: 1661-1662) وهكذا كان العلم والتعلم أخذاً مكان الصدرة في القرآن الكريم الذي هو آخر الكتب السماوية، وفي رسالة الإسلام خاتمة الرسالات ألى يوم يبعثون وتأكيداً على ألزام المسلم بالأخذ بأسباب العلم والمعرفة جاءت السورة الثانية في ترتيب نزول القرآن، مرتبطة أسبابها بالعلم الذي زاده الله تشريفاً في تلك السورة فجعل استهلالها قسماً به وذلك في قوله عز وجل: "نون والقلم وما يسطرون" وجعل جواب القسم تشريفاً لرسوله وثناء عليه وذلك في قوله تعالى: "ما انت بنعمة ربك بمجنون، وان لك لأجراً غير ممنون، وانك لعلى خلق عظيم" (سورة القلم، الآيات 1-4 ص: 1585)، فألله سبحانه وتعالى يقسم في مطلع هذه السورة بالحرف الذي تتكون منه الكلمة التي منها تتكون الكلمة ألتى منها تتكون الجملة، والجملة كما نعرف هي حاملة العلم ثم يكون ألقسم ألتاني بالقلم الذي يكتب به العلم ويقيد، كل العلم، وليس علماً بذاته، وهكذا نرى السورتين الأولى والثانية من القرآن الكريم—خاتم الكتب السماوية—موضوعهما الأساسي في ألعلم—كل ألعلم—سواء كان هذا ألعلم دينياً سماوياً أم كان دنيوياً مصدره ألعقل أأنساني.

At the beginning of the play, it is made quite clear that Faustus have already learned many and various kinds of knowledge and experience; yet he wants to learn more and more about fields of study which he has not yet explored. He faces the inner conflict whether he chooses magic as a new source of knowledge or not. He eventually decides that magic will reward him whatsoever he

wants in life, and thus he studies magic in an attempt to have the kind of power that allows him to govern the world. He says: "A sound magician is a mighty god) <sup>2</sup> ".Scene 1: L: 60). Here is the point of weakness of Faustus because he chooses magic which is considered Satanic disciplinethat will inevitably distance him from the word of God. His over-ambition will lead him to dangerous consequences, which indicates that man in certain moments becomes very weak whose power of mind is limited. This idea is made clear in the Holy Quran and as follows :

"يريد الله ان يخفف عنكم وخلق الأنسان ضعيفا"

) سورة النساء، الآية 28 ص: 188

وفي سورة الروم يقول الله سبحانه وتعالى: "الله الذي خلقكم من ضعف ثم جعل من بعد ضعف قوة ثم جعل من بعد قوة ضعفا وشيبة يخلق مايشاء وهو أعلم القدير" (سورة الروم، الآية 54، ص: 1066-1067).

This indicates that it is God who has the absolute power over man and the universe and that is made weak whose powers are limited. But Faustus, because of his shortcoming in this respect, has ignored this fact and decides to have more and more powers by means of magic. Thus, he rejects the will of God that has already endowed him with the knowledge he now possesses. Besides, he rejects the fact of his being a human with limited powers. The following lines show his dissatisfaction with the fact that he is human andrejects the fact that he does not have omnipotence and omniscience:

And necromantic books are heavenly;  
Lines, circles, scenes, letters, and characters;  
Ah, these are those that Faustus most desires.

O, what a world of profit and delight,  
 Of power, of honour, of omnipotence  
 Is promis'd to the studious artisan:  
 All things that move between the quiet pole  
 Shall be at my command.

(Scene 1: L: 48-55)

Thus, Faustus desires to have things that are beyond his capacity as a human being. His weakness is clearly shown in his belief that "A sound magician is a mighty god" (Scene 1, L: 60). He, therefore, decides to learn magic and practice it. To do so he should ally with Satan throughout the latter's messenger Lucifer. Of course, to deal with Satan and devils is something prohibited by both Islam and Christianity. The Holy Quran shows God's standing in this regard, and as follows:

"واتبعوا ماتتلوا الشياطين على ملك سليمان وما كفر سليمان ولكن الشياطين  
 كفروا يعلمون الناس السحر وما أنزل على الملكين ببابل هاروت وماروت وما  
 يعلمان من أحد حتى يقولوا إنما نحن فتنة فلا تكفر فيتعلمان منهما ما يفرق به بين المرء  
 وزوجه وما هم بضارين به من أحد إلا بإذن الله و يتعلمون ما يضرهم ولا ينفعهم  
 ولقد علموا لمن اشتراه ماله في الآخرة من خلاق ولبئس ما شروا به انفسهم لو كانوا  
 يعلمون" (سورة البقرة، الآية 101 ص: 44-45).

During his attempts to ally with Satan, Faustus faces the Good and bad Angels. The Good Angel advises him to return to the word of God. But the Bad Angel allures him to make a bond with Satan. Of course, Faustus then has to face an inner conflict so that he can decide what to choose—good or evil. Because of his ambition to learn more than what he has already learned he decides to choose the evil path. Thus, he has to reject all the theological sciences which he has learned at the university, which he considers useless and damned. He finds his relief in magic which is something satanic. He says :

But his domination that excels in this  
 Stretcheth as far as doth the mind of man  
 A sound magician is a demi-god;  
 Here tire my brains to get a deity!

(Scene I, L: 58-61)

Furthermore, the Angels appear whose remarks well illustrate the theological bias. The Good Angel opposes Faustus's aspiration and advises him to read the scriptures; yet Faustus has already asserted their inadequacy. The Good Angel encourages him to read the scriptures:

O Faustus, Lay that damned book aside  
 And gaze not on it lest it tempt thy soul  
 And heap God's heavy wrath upon thy head.  
 Read, read the scriptures; that is blasphemy.

But the Bad Angel encourages him to learn the art of magic:

Go forward Faustus in that famous art  
 Where in all nature's treasury is contained:  
 Be thou on earth as Jove is in the sky,  
 Lord and commander of these elements

(Scene I, L: 68-75)

Marlowe presents Faustus as being a great man of knowledge, but because of his pride, ambition, and unlimited thinking his character starts to change into an evil one. He deceived himself by thinking that black magic is the best way to lead him to greatness and immortality. Consequently, Faustus's tragic flaw is over ambition that obliges him to sell his soul to the devils. The inner conflict between good and evil can explicitly shown in the Holy Quran, and as follows:

"ونفس وماسواها فألهمها فجورها وتقواها" (سورة الشمس، الآية 8، ص: 1743) فقولته تعالى "ونفس وماسواها" اي خلقها سوية مستقيمة على الفطرة القويمة كما قال تعالى "فأقم وجهك للدين حنيفا فطرة الله التي فطر الناس عليها لا تبديل لخلق الله وقال النبي محمد صلى الله عليه وسلم "كل مولود يولد على الفطرة فأبواه يهودانه أو ينصرانه أو يمجسانه..." أخرجاه من رواية ابي هريرة وفي صحيح مسلم ... عن رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم قال "يقول الله عز وجل إني خلقت عبادي حنفاء فجاءتهم الشياطين فأجتالتهم عن دينهم. قوله تعالى "فألهمها فجورها وتقواها" اي فأرشدنا فجورها وتقواها اي بين لها وهداها ألى ما قدر لها...بين لها أليها وألي الشر. وقال تعالى "قد أفلح من زكاها" (سورة الشمس، الآية 9، ص: 1743) يحتمل ان يكون المعنى قد أفلح من زكى نفسه اي بطاعة الله كما قال قتادة وطهرها من الأخلق ألدنيئة والردائل. نرى في هذا السياق ان فوستس قد فضل الفجور على التقوى ولم يزكي نفسه ابدا<sup>3</sup>.

The climax of the play occurs when Faustus has signed the bond with Satan, using his own blood, which is a turning point in both Faustus's life and the play itself, and thus his gradual deterioration starts, forgetting the fact that he will be damned and sent to hell after death:

This word Damnation terrifies me not,  
For I confound hell in Elysium:  
My ghost be with the old philosophers!

(Scene iii, L: 59-61)

This indicates that Faustus has become spiritually poor and blind, and at the same time he is going to lose everything when the time of the bond is over. This is well expressed in the Holy Quran:

"الشيطان يعدكم أفقر ويامرکم بالفحشاء وألله يعدكم مغفرة منه وفضلا." (سورة البقرة، الآية: ، 268ص: 109). ان هدف أليشيطان هو إبعاد بالشر وتكذيب بالحق، وأما هدف أله تعالى فهو إبعاد بالخير وتصديق بالحق.



In the Holy Quran, God emphasizes several times that magicians never succeed to overcome the powers of good. In Sura Ta Ha, Allah gives his orders to the prophet Moses to throw his own stick to become a beast that is able to devour what the magicians have already created by means of magic, for what they have done is not true:

"إنما صنعوا كيد ساحر ولا يفلح الساحر حيث أتى" (سورة طه، الآية، 69 ص: 803)

Faustus believes that he will get everything in this life: delight, treasures, enlightenment, beautiful women like Helen of Troy and the like, but it is to be made clear that he will gain nothing but a world of loss, regret and darkness. This idea is clearly expressed in the Holy Quran, and as follows :

"الله ولي الذين آمنوا بخروجهم من الظلمات إلى النور والذين كفروا أولياؤهم أطاغوت يخرجونهم من النور إلى الظلمات" (سورة البقرة، الآية 257 ، ص: 103-104). يعني ذلك ان الله تعالى يخرج الذين آمنوا من الظلمات إلى النور—نور الأيمان، وانما عنى "بالظلمات" في هذا الموضع الكفر، لأن الظلمات حاجبة للابصار عن إدراك الأشياء وإثباتها وكذلك الكفر ابصار القلوب عن إدراك حقائق الأيمان والعلم بصحته وصحة اسبابه.

Faustus thinks that he has gained something great by selling his soul to Satan, and that he has done something good for himself.

This idea is made clear in the Holy Quran:

"فريقا هدى وفريقا حق عليهم الضلالة انهم اتخذوا الشياطين أولياء من دون الله ويحسبون أنهم مهتدون" (سورة الأعراف، الآية 30 ص: 347 ).

According to Omar Suleiman Al-Ashqar ,the evil desire to learn magic is tremendously mingled with his psychological motif in order to control the world with the aim in mind to harm and destroy others<sup>4</sup> ,and eventually Faustus will harm and destroy himself .

When alone, Faustus realizes that he is going to face his damnation, but he seemingly hears a particular voice asking him to quit that damned art of evil which is magic and return to the word of the Almighty Allah:

Faustus: .... O, something sounds in mine ears,  
Abjure this magic, turn to God again!  
Any and Faustus will turn to God Again.  
To God? He loves thee not,  
The god thou serv'st is thine own appetite  
Wherein is fix'd the love of Belzebub.

(Scene V: L: 7-12)

But Faustus will not gain any kind of safety. Mephistopheles, the messenger of Satan, tells him that he lives in hell because he has been denied the mercy of God. W. W. Greg declares that Faustus has turned into a fool since he is thinking of gaining the mercy of God,<sup>5</sup> for there is no turning point since he has served the devil till the end of his life: "...Who but a fool, such a clever fool as Faustus, would dream that any power but evil could be won by a bargain with evil, or that truth could be wrung from the father of lies."<sup>6</sup> it may be suggested by Waheed Abid Al-Salam Bali that the devils will be in a position to serve those who commit blasphemy and sacrilegious acts and who say things against God and goodness, and because Faustus the magician disobeys his creator the devils will serve him and be nearer to him.<sup>7</sup>

At the end of the play, Faustus reveals his inner conflict which reaches its climax in the last scene, the death scene, which shows that Faustus in a most pathetic soliloquy expresses his urgent desire to free himself from the chains of the devil. He longs for God's mercy, has visions of Christ's blood, and desires

the time to come to be endowed with mercy, but in vain, because it is too late. God will not accept his repentance because of his persistent impenitence as far as the powers of evil and disobedience are concerned. His situation is similar to that of Pharaoh when he tries to return to the word of God but in vain because of his impenitence and absolute disobedience:

"ءألآن وقد عصيت قبل وكنت من المفسدين) "سورة يونس، الآية 91، ص: 507).  
 أي أهذا الوقت تقول، وقد عصيت الله قبل هذا فيما بينك وبينه، وقد قبح الله صنيع  
 فرعون أيام حياته وإسائه إلى نفسه أيام صحته، بتماديه في طغيانه، ومعصيته ربه،  
 حين فزع إليه في حال حلول سخطه به ونزول عقابه، مستجيرا به من عذابه الواقع  
 به، لما ناداه وقد علتة امواج البحر وغشيته كرب ألموت .

### Conclusion

It must be concluded that there is in man, generally speaking, both powers—the powers of good and the powers of evil. They fight each other until one of them overrides the other and achieves victory. The powers of evil in the character of Faustus are triumphant and thus he is to be taken to hell. He has been allured by Satan in this regard. This is not to deny that Faustus does not show any merits. He is to represent the Renaissance aspirations for knowledge and experience. This research paper unfolds the affinities between the Satanic concepts referred to by the dramatist and those one contained in the Holy Quran. Most important is the postulation that Marlowe might have been influenced by the comprehensive illustration of good and evil as revealed in the Holy Quran.

### Notes

1. Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Quran: Text Translation and Commentary*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., (Kuwait: That Es-Salasil, 1989), p. 1079. All

subsequent quotations of the Quranic Suras will be taken from this book and are indicated by the title of the Sura and the page number of this book. Other references like interpretations and explanations will be indicated by the name of the translator and the page number.

2. Christopher Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*, ed., Harlod Osborne (London: University Tutorial Press, Ltd., 1967. This quotation and all other subsequent ones will be taken from this book and are indicated by scene number and line number.

3. تفسير ابن كثير / سورة الشمس – ويكي مصدر. <https://ar.m.wikisource.org . wiki>.

4. Omar Suleiman Al-Ashqar, *The World of Theurgy and Bewithcment* (Kuwait: Al-Falah Library for Publishing and distribution, 1989), p. 83.

5. W. W. Greg, "The Damnation of Faustus," as quoted in *Christopher Marlowe: A Collection of Critical Essays.*" Clifford Leech, ed., (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1964), p. 96.

6. Ibid.

7. Waheed Abid-Al-Salam Bali, *Preserving Man from the Jinn and the Devils* (Cairo: Al-Jawzi House, 1987), p. 47.

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