

The Paradox of the Amman Message: Transnationalism, Authenticity, and American Power

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This paper will focus on a 2004 sermon delivered by Jordan's Chief Justice Shaykh Iz al-Din al-Tamimi, which became to be known as the "Amman Message" and continues to circulate, with a growing number of signatories, as an affirmation of peaceful coexistence. The Message acknowledged the diversity within Islam, affirmed the validity of all eight traditional schools of Islam (including Shi'is, Ibadis and Thahiris) and forbade declarations of apostasy (*takfir*) against adherents to any of these schools. Rather than giving voice to some existent rapprochement among the diversity of Muslims, the Message—which appeared amidst the growth of sectarian violence in Iraq and just as Sunni political and religious leaders were beginning to raise the specter of a growing Shi'i crescent—imagined a future Muslim unity as a counter to existing disunity and discord. At the same time, the text of the original speech, as well as the discourse surrounding its subsequent propagation, reveal an additional impetus and a wider audience for the Message: referred to variously as "the modern world," those fighting "the war against terrorism," and "non-Muslims." Based on a critical reading of the sermon and the various commentaries on it, interviews with numerous signatories to the published document—as well as with a few relevant individuals who did not sign on—I demonstrate the ways in which the Message was constructed in relationship to policies of the "war on terror" and to discourses emanating from the Bush administration. I argue that the paradox of the Message is that, just as it provides an example of transnationalism, it also reveals transnationalism's limits both through its participation in the competition over claims to be truly or authentically Muslim and in the way in which it produces that claim against the threat of American power in the region.