

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the Name of Allah, the Benificent, the Merciful

*al-Azhar
al-Sharif*

“Lichter des Islam”

الازهر
الشريف

Tolerance in Islam

Islam and other Religions

By Prof. Dr. Ahmad Mohammad Al-Tayyeb
President of Al-Azhar University, Cairo, A.R. Egypt

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Islam and Other Religions

Islam is the normal extension of previous heavenly religions. It is the last part of its system. It is the last religion that God ordained, the last for all humanity till the end of worldly life, and is historically the last religion to be revealed in the world of reality. Hence it comprises detailed and illustrating aspects of issues of belief as well as legislative and moral judgement. Those aspects that are not found in previous heavenly messages.

In this context there are two facts that should be taken into consideration:

First: All revealed religions are the same within the Qur'anic perspective. Differences among revealed religions are legislative rather than moral. Consequently, all revealed religions from the Qur'anic viewpoint are one and the same. In essence all prophets and messengers beginning from Adam (peace be upon him) till the last Prophet, Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessing be upon him), preached one religion, carried one message and collaborated in conveying one Call namely, inviting people to worship God alone. They preached submission to God and fear from Him alone rather than other creatures, be those creature animate or inanimate objects, apparent or hidden, natural or man-made. They also preached and asserted the existence of unseen facts that despite their being currently impossible for human perception- are realities that will be actualized at a certain Day, when men can never rationalize their occurrence.

As prophets preached one religion and one belief, they also preached one moral system and a framework of established values that are invariant within all divine messages and among all prophets. On top of these values comes justice, equality and charity top and among people in such a way so as to render "oppression" and "transgression" against people the worst moral crimes to which God denies Himself and prohibited among His people. All revealed religions and legislations deplored unanimously this forbidden crime.

The Qur'an says: "Allah commands justice, the doing of good" (Qur'an 16: 90). In the divine hadith Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) says: "My worshippers! I denied myself oppression and prohibited it amongst you, so do not oppress one the other."

The Qur'an asserts the fact that the religion of God sent to humanity is "one" religion. Islam as one of the revealed religions preached by Muhammad (pbuh) the last of the Prophets, is an ordinary extension to previous revealed religions and comes as the most complete and integrated form of religion that God wanted humanity to follow till the end of the world. Muslims believe that Islam as preached by Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) is a message complementary to other messages, i.e. it is the final Word that perfected the framework of "religion". Amidst its previous peers Islam is never discordant. It never abrogates any of their tenets nor refutes any of their constants.

As long as it is one source wherefrom came all these messages, as regards its aims and orientations, Muslims believe, then, that these divine messages should necessarily unanimously reach agreement. It is impossible - in Islamic belief- that they disagree, contradict or oppose each other in their constants.

The Qur'an stresses this fact to the Prophet (Pbuh) on 'Hijjat Al Wadaa' (the Farewell Hajji), which witnessed the last massive gathering between the Prophet (pbuh) and Muslims, through the following verse: "This day have I perfected your religion for you, completed My favour upon you, and have chosen for you Islam as your religion" (Qur'an 5: 3).

Second: The word "Islam" as used in many Qur'anic verses does not refer in most places to the "Message" revealed to Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), rather it denotes-as explained above- the divine "religion" God designated to guide humanity on the whole since the beginning of the creation till the end of both time and place. Hence, the Qur'an, in more than one verse, refers to prophets previous to Muhammad (pbuh) as "the Muslims" based on the fact that Islam is not only the message revealed to Muhammad (pbuh) but rather it is the common, general message preached by all prophets.

Accordingly, the Qur'an emphasises that Abraham (peace be upon him) was neither Jewish, Christian nor a polytheist and that he was a "true Muslim". The Qur'an says: "Abraham was not a Jew nor yet a Christian; but he was Upright, and bowed his will to Allah. And he joined not gods with Allah." (Qur'an 3: 67).

This verse was revealed to prove the untrue allegations of some of the followers of other religions and denominations who claimed that Abraham adopted Christianity, Judaism or paganism. The verse rectifies this false assumption and states that Abraham was a 'Muslim'. Obviously, when this Qur'anic text described Abraham as being 'Muslim' it was not referring to the fact that Abraham was a follower of "Islam" (Muhammad's (pbuh) Message), which was revealed far later after Abraham's time, because, then, how could Abraham believe in this prophet's message? The usage of the word "Islam" (meaning to submit to Allah) in the Qur'an asserts and proves that "Islam" from a Qur'anic perspective is a general and comprehensive term for all the Messages of prophets previous to Muhammad. This word is also used to denote the last divine Message revealed to Muhammad (pbuh) which is "Islam" as it is commonly known. Hence the Qur'an, argumentatively, protests against the allegations that Abraham- and other previous prophets- belonged to the Torah or Gospel. It refutes such claims and proves their untruthfulness through intuitions of mind, science and history, for it is impossible and illogical that a person follows a creed or believes in a holy Book that came many centuries after him. The Qur'an openly states this fact, it says: "Ye People of the Book! Why dispute ye about Abraham, when the Torah and the Gospel were not revealed till after him? Have ye no understanding?" (Qur'an 3: 65)"

When the Qur'an states that Abraham was a Muslim, and that his Islam came before the Torah and Gospel and the Qur'an itself centuries ago, then we can reach one conclusion, namely that "Islam" was well-known and existed before Muhammad for times and centuries only God knows how long and how many and that the word "Islam" is not used in the Qur'an as a "title" or by way of specification for a particular defined religion, rather it is a label for a common religion among all prophets. Moreover, Islam as a common religion must have been revealed, completed and perfected over a sequence of consecutive episodes; one following and completing the other and that the final episode of that religion is the Message revealed to Muhammad (pbuh) the last of the prophets and messengers.

This is the concept that we Muslims understand from our reading of the Qur'an, and we know that:

- a) Abraham was a 'Muslim' and that he supplicated for God to render him and his son Ismail 'Muslims' and also their progeny. The Qur'an says: "O Lord! Make of us Muslims, bowing to Thy (will), and of our progeny a people Muslim bowing to Thy (Will)" (Qur'an - 2: 128).

- b) Both Abraham and Jacob commended their sons to be 'Muslims'. The Qur'an says: "And Abraham enjoined upon his sons and so did Jacob; "Oh my sons! Allah hath chosen the faith for you; then die not except in the state of submission." (Qur'an 2: 132).
- c) Jacob's sons replied to their father saying: "We shall worship thy God and the God of thy fathers, of Abraham, Ismail, and Isaac, the One God to Him do we submit." (Qur'an 2: 133).
- d) Noah proclaimed his Islam to his people as in the verse: "I have been commanded to be of those who submit to Allah's Will". (Qur'an 10: 72).
- e) And so did Moses to his people, he said: "O my People! If ye do (really) believe in Allah, then in Him put your trust if ye submit (your will to His)." (Qur'an 10: 84).
- f) The disciples of Jesus said to him that "We are Allah's helpers, we believe in Allah and do thou bear witness that we are Muslims." (Qur'an 3: 52).

Based on the verses quoted above we can confirm that "Islam" as a religion adopted by many people east and west is a message deeply-rooted in and linked to other revealed religions. Islam - in its essence - does not protrude from revealed religions, on the contrary, Islamic Shari' ah is in many of its facets the same as theirs. The Qur'an stresses this fact in God's saying to Muslims: "The same religion has He established for you as that which He enjoined on Noah - the which We have sent by inspiration to thee - and that which We enjoined on Abraham, Moses, and Jesus: Namely, that ye should remain steadfast in Religion, and make no divisions therein: to those who worship other things than Allah, hard is the (way) to which thou callest them. Allah chooses to Himself those whom He pleases, and guides to Himself those who turn (to Him)." (Qur'an 42: 13).

We scholars of Islamic creed and theology adopt and follow the juristic rule that says: "The revelation of our ancestors is ours, unless there is an abrogation."

This organic unity between Islam and other divine messages is not confined to the origins and precepts of the messages. It extends to the relation of the prophet to other prophets and the Qur'an to other heavenly Books. The prophet of Islam believes in all his fellow prophets, proceeds with their call and concludes the message they have been sent with. God speaks of His Prophet Muhammad saying: "The Messenger believeth in what has been revealed to him from his Lord, as do the men of faith, each one (of them) believes in Allah, His angels, His books,

and His Messengers. We make no distinction between one and another of his Messengers." And they say: "We hear, and we obey: (we seek) Thy forgiveness, O Lord, and to thee is the end of all journeys." (Qur'an 2: 285)

Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) expressed this organic unity and solidarity among him and his fellow prophets and messengers in a wonderful statement where he says: " I am the closest of people to Jesus in the world and in the Hereafter. Prophets are brothers in the cause; their mothers are different and their religion is one and the same." In this statement the prophet figuratively portrays all prophets as brothers to the same father and different mothers. Their father would be their unifying religion and their different mothers are the times and places particular to each of them.

This same type of relation applies to the glorious Qur'an and other divine books. The Qur'an authenticates and asserts divine books in their earliest forms of revelation when they did not divert from their divine source. The Qur'an informs us that the Gospel supports and authenticates the Torah and so does the Qur'an. It supports and authenticates both the Gospel and the Torah and all other divine revelations. God says:

"It is He Who sent down to thee (step by step), in truth, the Book, confirming what went before it; and He sent down the Torah (of Moses) and the Gospel (of Jesus)". (Qur'an 3: 3).

"It was We who revealed the Torah (to Moses): Therein was guidance and light. By its standard have been judged the Jesus, by the Prophets who bowed in Islam to Allah's will, by the Rabbis and the Doctors of law." (Qur'an 5: 44)

and,

"We sent Jesus the son of Mary, confirming the Torah that had come before him: We sent Him the Gospel: Herein was guidance and an admonition to those who fear Allah." (Qur'an 5: 46).

Thus we can confirm in confidence that Islam as a religion attests to and believes in all the former prophets and messengers and that the Qur'an was revealed to Muhammad (pbuh) in confirmation of the Gospel that was sent down to Jesus, which in its turn confirms the Torah that Moses received as a revelation from God.

These are the Qur'anic tenets that dominated the concepts of Muslims which left deeply-rooted imprints on their relationship with the followers of ether heavenly religions since their early times.

Muslims believe equally in Moses and Jesus as they do believe in Muhammad. They believe that both the Torah and Gospel are divine Books and that both are revealed as forms of guidance and enlightenment to people.

The Qur'an speaks very favorably and pleasantly about Jesus (peace be upon him). Within the Qur'anic perspective both he and his mother Mary (peace be upon her) are considered one of God' s greatest evidences. God says: "And We made the son of Mary and his mother as a Sign: We gave them both shelter on high ground, affording rest and security and furnished with springs." (Qur'an 23: 50)

The Qur'an gives us wonderful and sympathetic portrayal of the pain and suffering of Mary. It has one whole sura (chapter) speaking of and about her. There is not such a sura in the Qur'an for any of the prophet's wives or daughters.

One of the earliest Meccan suras in the Qur'an is Surat Al-Buruj (85). This sura involves high praise to the Christians of Najran because they preferred being burnt to death to abandoning their faith in God as the Qur'an informs us.

There is another Meccan sura in the Qur'an (Surat Ar-Rum) where the first verses depict the sympathy of Islam with Roman Christians at their defeat on the hands of the Magians (Persians). The reason behind the revelation of this verse was that Meccan people rejoiced in the victory of paganism over Christian belief and reviled Muslims because they and the Christians are followers of revealed religions whereas the Magians are polytheists just like them. When Muslims could not withstand these actions any longer they went to the Prophet (pbuh) who assured them saying " O' for them (Romans), they will win it over", immediately after this reassurance of the prophet, God revealed to him averse confirming his statement and asserting that the Romans will be victorious within years and that the believers (Christians and Muslims) will rejoice in the victory God conferred on them. God's promise was fulfilled and the Romans defeated the Persians back.

The Qur'an in this context portrayed both Muslims and Romans as relatives and co-brothers united through the ties of friendliness and divine belief.

It is important to point out that this close relationship which Islam emphasized between its followers and Christians is not an adopted approach dictated by political imperatives or by the desire to maintain peaceful coexistence. It is rather a genuine attitude and cornerstone in this religion and one of its constants in various circumstances. An illustration for this attitude of trust and friendliness is the emigration of early Muslims to Ethiopia which was a Christian country, at that time, governed by a Christian king. Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) did not entrust any King or country over his followers except for this Christian King. They fled away from the persecution of the tribe of Quraysh and their harm and torture and sought peacefulness and security under the custody of its king. Hence he took the chance and said to the believers: "Would you go to Ethiopia! It is a land of truth and there is just a king nobody is subject to oppression under his rule. Depart to this land till God destines an end and a relief to your suffering." Strangely enough, early Muslims emigrated more than once to the land of this particular king. Ruqayah, the Prophet's (pbuh) daughter, and her husband Othman were amidst those who immigrated to Ethiopia, as well.

This recurrent emigration to a Christian country ruled by a Christian king represents a practical application of the Qur'anic tenets referred to above. It also reflects the great trust that Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) had in the followers of Jesus and that he dealt with them as among brothers at time of need. It also depicts the feelings of nobleness and love this noble king had towards Muslims; those feelings which Om Salama (one of the emigrants) gratefully referred to saying : "We departed (to Ethiopia) ... till we gathered there and were lodged in a good place to the best neighbor who secured us with ourselves and religion and we feared no oppression whatsoever."

Another situation that confirms the solidarity, peacefulness and tolerance of Islam towards Christianity occurred at the Prophet's mosque in Medina. There came the Christians of Najran in a delegation of sixty men to converse with him about Islam. The Prophet (pbuh) received them at his mosque in Medina. Their time of prayer coincided with Muslim's prayer of Al-Asr (Afternoon Prayer). They said to the prophet: "You Mohamed! It is the time for our prayer and we want to perform it!" He (pbuh) said: "Yours is that side of the mosque, pray there." Thus Muslims prayed with the Prophet (pbuh) as their Imam at one side of the mosque and Christians also performed their prayers at the other side of the same mosque.

This incident provides the legislative source for those jurists who license non-Muslims to practice their ordinances at the mosques of Muslims. In this context we have to remember the attitude of the Prophet (pbuh) towards Jesus (peace be upon him) and his mother the Virgin Mary when he conquered Mecca in the tenth Hijri year. He found there at the walls of Kaabah pictures of the prophets, angels, and trees. Amongst those were a picture of Jesus and his mother. He ordered one of his companions to wipe away all the pictures except that which he covered with his hand. While lifting his hand up, it was seen to be that of Jesus and his mother. That picture of Jesus and the Virgin Mary remained there on one of the interior pillars of Kaabah before being washed out while renovating those pillars. Al-Dhahaby - one of the greatest Muslim historians - quoted in his book Biographies of the Most Famous Noblemen, the statement of Ataa' bin Abi Rabah who said in reply to the question: "Did you see the picture of Jesus and Mary?" Ataa' said: "Yes, I witnessed the decorated picture of Mary with Jesus lying on her lap. There was six pillars in the house (Kaabah), that picture was engraved on the pillar adjacent to its door."¹

Another feature that exemplifies the broad-mindedness of Islam towards Christianity and Judaism is embodied in lawful fight of the Muslim to marry a Christian or a Jewish woman.

It is commonly known that spouses share such mutual transcendent emotions as kindness and love. Islam tolerantly permitted and legislated the Muslim to give and offer his Christian or Jewish wife such emotions as he could afford and to allow her to adhere to her religion and its tenets, being at the same time his soul mate, the mother of his children and his homemaker.

¹ Adopted from News of Mecca, Abi Al-Waleed Muhammad Al-Azraqi.

The Treaty of the Prophet (pbuh) with the Christians of Najran

The Prophet (pbuh) held a treaty between Muslims and the Christian tribes of Najran. This treaty provides an example for Islamic tolerance and broad-mindedness. The text goes as follows:

"A treaty for Najran and its suburbs, people and to whoever adopts Christianity east or west, near or far, Arab or non-Arab, giving them the safe and secure neighborhood of God and of his Messenger Muhammad. Whereby here they are to be safe and secure in themselves, their money, their religion, their relatives, their merchandise and all their possessions the present of them and the absent. A bishop is not to be displaced from his bishopric, nor a monk from his monastery. They are not to be mobilized nor taxed by the tenth as with foreign merchants. Their land is not to be trodden by an army. Whoever of them seeks his justified right, it is to be given to him duly. They are to be protected and their churches, land and houses of worship are to be defended. And so are the monasteries and monks wherever they are: at a mountain, valleys, caves, or hills. They are to be safe and protected in their religion and its rituals wherever they are in land or sea; east or west, the same way I defend myself, my people and Muslims. Nothing of their land is to be confiscated or enclosed into the houses or mosques of the Muslims ... None of them is to pay taxes or 'kharag' except when they have a due inheritance of land, in that case they pay the same amount as Muslims do. They are not to overpay taxes or be oppressed. They are not be overloaded in physical work (agriculture or craftsmanship). None of Zimmis is to be sallied with Muslims into war against their enemies. Zimmis are not to be burdened with fighting. They were given out our Zimmah not to be involved into war. Muslims would be their armor of defense and to offer protection and security. They are not to be enforced to arm any of the Muslims going to war with weapons or horses unless they willingly volunteer to donate such things. Whoever of them donates any object for the Muslim army, he is to be rewarded. Christians are never to be coerced into Islam. God says: "And dispute ye not with the People of the Book, except with means better". (Qur'an 29:46).

“Zimmis are to be treated mercifully and relieved from any hurt or offence wherever and whenever they are. They are not to be pressured into a marriage to a Muslim. If a Christian family refuses, he is not to be persecuted. Intermarriage cannot be except through the willingness and acceptance of their minds and hearts. When a Muslim takes a Zimmi wife, he has to accept her religion and let do the rituals and perform the practices of her religion. He is not to prevent her from her worship and whoever does otherwise and coerced her out of any of her practices, then he has disobeyed and violated God' s pact and the pledge of His Prophet, and he is to be reckoned a liar to God.

Whenever a Zimmi should become in want of assistance by Muslims in their merchandise, repairing their churches or hermitages, or for anything concerning their religion, or in any of their worldly interests they are to be given free, unpaid help and support. They are not to pay for this help because when Muslims offer it, they do so to help them with their religion in fulfillment of the Zimmah (pact) of God and as an act of charity from God and His Messenger to them because I gave them the Zimmah of God that they have the same rights and duties of Muslims and through this treaty they are entitled to live safe and secure and to be defended against any harm or evil so as to ensure their full equality with Muslims."

The Openness of Islamic Civilization to other Cultures

Islamic civilization is based on three pillars: The Revelation, reason and ethics. This fact enabled it to place itself out from within its geographical territories as a balanced and liberal civilization to the needs of man, and his spiritual and physical aspirations.

Fortunately enough, we do not have to go into details and enumerate the great number of non-Arab scientists, men of letters, philosophers and thinkers who both had an impact upon Islamic Civilization and were influenced by it. They formed scientific and cultural circles that enriched Islamic civilization and occupied a large area of its internal canvas. A quick overview on the publications of the Imams: Bukhari, Tirmidhi, Abi Hanifa, Sibawayh, Al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, Al-Ghazali, Ar-Razi, Shirazi, etc. would undoubtedly prove that Islamic civilization encompassed various trends of eastern and western cultures after handling and modifying them to adapt to the religion of Islam. Islamic Civilization had proved that Islam is an international religion that is verily open to all elements of truth, goodness and beauty no matter their origin is nor the plurality of their resources. Islamic civilization has dealt open-mindedly with other religions and cultures revealing in the meanwhile a greater part of respect, interaction and intercommunication.

It was influenced by the cultures it came into contact with and it had also an impact on them in such a way that it presented them with a cultural input they were never to attain were it not for it. It is not the place here to speak about the influence and impact of Islamic civilization on western culture, which has been denied by many western researchers, who referred the origins of their civilization to two sources which are: the Greek source and the Jewish-Christian source². Those of western historians and researchers who were just and fair proved and documented the influence of Muslims, their sciences, philosophies and arts in the drafts and indexes, of European culture, sciences and civilization.

Islamic civilization has never confiscated nor over-dominated any other culture at any phase of its growth. It is strange that same ungrateful westerners historians described Islamic civilization as being translated and adopted from other cultures. They say that it was not a culture newly-born at the bands of Muslims etc. and many alike allegations of "those fanatics who like to denude non-European nations off any privileged thought or creativity"³ Those historians deny Islamic

² Islam and the West, Samir Suliman, P.46. Beirut, 1995.

³ The Influence of Arabs in European Civilization, Aqqad pp. 28-29, Beirut, 1978.

civilization the capabilities of interaction and interrelationship with foreign cultures. However, they fallaciously, claim that Islamic civilizations was translated and adopted from other cultures! They also allege that Islamic civilization is a composite of neighboring cultural trends. Lately, they have come to refer to it as a civilization of terrorism, rejection and annihilation of the other. The fact that these allegers fluctuate in their descriptions perhaps denotes that they are patching up a hostile approach that frames illogical and untrue charges and allegations against Islam. On the one hand those people are keen on underestimating Islamic civilization by veiling its aspects of creativity. Hence came the falsehoods that, for example, Islamic Sufism is Christian or Buddhist in nature that Islamic jurisprudence is Roman in essence etc. On the other hand, they are very zealous and enthusiastic about slandering Islam by reiterating that is a fundamentalist, introvert, terrorist and recondite religion that poses a threat to other cultures and civilizations etc. Those contradictory charges are fashioned by ill-intentioned purposes away from scientific reality.

We do not know then which group to believe: the great historians of the last century in their talk about Islamic civilization being heavily influenced by it neighboring cultures, or between new orientalists who refer to this civilization as a recondite fundamentalism that should be resisted and rectified? Or should we then, discard both opinions in compliance with the fact that both are false allegations framed for diverse purposes that bear no relation to science, history or reality?

We do believe that Islamic scientific, philosophical and literary legacy had a favorable impact and role in European Renaissance in the Modern Age. This Islamic legacy - with trends of other cultures incorporated into it - established in Arabic, then in Latin, the cornerstones of this renaissance, which would never reach the zenith if it was not for its interaction and interrelationship with Muslim culture on two different planes. First: The interaction with Islamic Culture in Europe (Spain) for almost eight centuries that were poignant in their cultural immensity in a way that was greatly beneficial to Europe its Renaissance⁴.

Second: Through translating Islamic philosophy from Arabic into Latin. An example for the impact of these translations is the interest the German author and philosopher Goethe developed in Islamic literature and based his reading of the Glorious Qur'an in some translated forms of it. It is often quoted that he said: "It is a human folly in this world that each of us should vehemently stick to his viewpoint. If

⁴ The Relation between Islam and the West: Dialogue or Conflict? Dr. Mahmoud Hamdi Zaquq. A paper from the "Islam and the West" Conference held in the Faculty of Dar Al-Ulum , Cairo University. P.5, 2002.

Islam denotes surrendering and submission to God, then we will all live and die Muslims." ⁵

Speaking of the influence of Islamic Culture we can never disregard the fact that Islamic civilization received over its course of development many elements that were not originally shaped by Muslims whose Tale was to re-forged them so as to engraft them within the Islamic conceptualization of the human world and of the cosmos on the whole. "It is remarkable that Muslims authenticated every scientific tool, methodological approach or branch of science they employed admitting the quotations or adaptations they did and referring them back to their originators." ⁶

A clear evidence of this scientific honesty is the statements of Muslim scientists and philosophers whereby they expressed their solidarity and humane attitude towards the cultures and civilizations of other people and their accreditation of the forms of which that were sound and original. Muslim scientists and philosophers did praise thinkers and scientists of other cultures who referred to the truth. They also excused and tried to justify those who could not identify such values. The Muslim philosopher, Averroës (Ibn Rushd) says: "We should examine and verify that which they said and transcribed in their books. If it was in compliance with the truth, and then we readily accept them, praise and thank them for this. Otherwise, we should pinpoint it to them, warn them against it and excuse their mistakes." ⁷

Islamic civilization never accepted nor legalized plagiarism from the cultures of others nor ungratefully exploiting it because the ethical and cultural fabric of Islam does not allow such alien morals. The genuineness of this ethical fabric ensures "the ability of the Islamic East to grasp and comprehend previous cultural legacies and civilizations, reformulate them, then embody and enact the truths they incorporate so as to serve the belief of the civilization of *tawhid* (oneness of God) and entrench the unification of civilizations." ⁸

⁵ ibid

⁶ Islam and the West, Samir Suliman, p.57, Beirut, 1995.

⁷ A Distinction between Wisdom and Shariah (Fasl Al-Maqal fi mabayn Al-Hikmah wa AlShariah min Itissal), Dr. Mahmud Zaquq. P.12 Beirut, 1978.

⁸ Islam and the West, Samir Suliman, p.59, Beirut, 1995.

Islamic Civilization is a Peaceful Civilization not an Aggressive or Belligerent One

Peacefulness and security remain the truest and most prominent characteristic of Islamic civilization despite the continual attempts to defame and distort the image of Islam as a religion and a civilization as well. The Glorious Qur'an defined the relation between Muslims and non-Muslims in one word; that is "recognition". We can say that the philosophy of Islam in this respect is built on two closely-knit facts.

First: That diversity and multiplicity among people is a matter-of-fact as revealed in the Qur'an, "That Divine Will-early at the beginning of creation-ordained that people be "different" each from the others in religion, morals and deeds. If He willed otherwise, he would have rendered humanity an equal. But He did not and instead he willed variety, diversity and multiplicity. God said: "If the Lord had so willed, He could have made mankind one people: but will not cease to dispute. Except those on whom thy Lord hath bestowed His Mercy: and for this did He create them" (Qur'an 11:118-119).

This Qur'anic text is clear evidence that God's dispensation is to render people, instinctively, dispersed into tribes and nations and that they are different in their concepts, languages, religions, and legislations. Hence, conflicts come about common felicity and divergent interests."⁹

Exegetes differed around the referent of the demonstrative in the phrase "for this did He create them". Many of them state that its referent is the "difference" implied in the clause "but they will not cease to dispute". The implicit meaning of the verse is "for difference and disagreement He created them".¹⁰ Accordingly, it can be said that the Qur'an asserts the fact of disagreement and difference in the beliefs, ideas, emotions and conduct of people.

⁹ Al-Manar Exegesis, Muhammad Rashid Reda, vo1.12, p.p.160, 198, Cairo, 1978. . The Great Exegesis. Fakhr Al-Din Al-Razi. Vol. 18, p.80. Beirut, 1981.

¹⁰ See ⁹

Second: That in the same way the Qur'an asserted difference and disagreement in creating human kind; it stressed their fraternity in humanity and the desired "recognition" among them. It says: "O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other (not that ye may despise each other)." (Qur'an 49:13).

It is intuitive that "recognition" and familiarity amongst people and nations is a Divine Will. If this Divine Will ordained difference among people in thought, nature and inclinations, then the basis of the international relations of Muslims with non-Muslims is necessarily "peacefulness". History gives us examples and evidence that Islamic civilization has adopted this attitude in its interactions with other cultures. The Prophet (pbuh) also faithfully abides by this rule in all his dealings with the others. Even the wars that took place in the early years of the Islamic state were reactions undertaken to repel an actual or expected transgression from the enemies rather than being actions of invasion or aggression. The order in the Qur'an to fight back transgressors is an intuition that an legislations of justice and truth sanctify. God says: "Fight in the cause of God those who fight you, but do not transgress limits; for God loveth not transgressors." (Qur'an 2:190). This verse also denotes prohibition against unjustified transgression over others.

The first verse in Islam that was revealed to legalize the fight to fight back and repel transgression, says: "To those against whom war is made, permission is given (to fight), because they are wronged; - and verily, God is Most Powerful for their aid; - (They are) those who have been expelled from their homes in defiance of right, - (for no cause) except that they say, "Our Lord is God". Did not God check one set of people by means of another, there would surely have been pulled down monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques, in which the name of God is commemorated in abundant measure. God will certainly aid His (cause); - for verily God is full of Strength, Exalted in Might, (able to enforce His Will)." (Qur'an 22: 39-40). These two verses indicate that the only reason to initiate a fight in Islam is to relieve the oppressed and enable them to live as peacefully as others which is a justified and legalized cause. It also indicates that war has been legalized to defend revealed religions against the aggression of polytheists and disbelievers. It is interesting to know that war and fighting have been legalized not only to defend freedom of Islamic worship but also to secure religions freedom in the same degree for followers of other revealed religions. Ibn Abbas (may Allah be pleased with him) says that the previous two verses stipulate that Islam and Muslims should defend Zimmis.¹¹ Exegetes searched for the wisdom behind incorporating

¹¹ Imam Al-Razi, *ibid* pA!.

monasteries, synagogues, mosques and churches within the Islamic strategy for defense. They concluded that these places in their totality are places for the believers however different are their worships. Imam Al-Razi says that defending those places was not confined to the days of the prophets Moses and Jesus (peace be upon them). He states that the wisdom behind defending these places against destruction at the time of the Prophet (pbuh) is that they were places "where the invocation of God was maintained and consequently they have a rank superior to the houses of idolaters." The previous two verses explicitly preach defending places of worship of the non-Muslims.

Islam does not invite to war if there is any other alternative. For example, Muslims are commanded to accept offers of peace if their enemies resorted to and preferred it. The Qur'an says: "But if the enemy incline towards peace, do thou (also) incline towards peace, and trust in God: For He is One that heareth and knoweth (all things)." (Qur'an 8:61).

Along with the conditioned legalization of war came the stipulation and enforcement of such principles as mercy, commitment to pacts and the prohibition of trickery and deception. These are constants in the Islamic civilization which specifies peacefulness as the basis of its relationships with other nations. This same principle of peacefulness was specified as the basis for the relation between Muslims and people of other revealed religions within the Islamic state itself so as to make Zimmis attest to the unprecedented tolerance they have enjoyed under the rule of Islamic civilization. Mr. Adam Mitz, Professor of Eastern Languages in Basel University in Switzerland stated that the tolerance Muslims exhibited towards people of other religions has preceded and been applied long before the principles of peaceful coexistence and tolerance modernist reformers call for. He argues that the tolerance of Islamic civilization has never been known in Europe of the Middle Ages and that this tolerance stimulated the establishment of the science of competitive theology and the great interest it revived to study Islamic civilization. This unprejudiced professor says: "There was nothing in Islamic legislation to deter Zimmis from adopting any profession... They were well-established, particularly in profitable craftsmanship... The Patron of the Christians in Baghdad was the doctor of the Caliph and the rabbis of the Jews were his wise men... The life of the Zimmi in the creed of Abu Hanifah and Ibn Hanbal equals that of the Muslim and his wergild is of the same amount... The Muslim government did not interfere in or meddle with the rituals of the Zimmis... Some Caliphs even attended their feasts and ceremonies. ... There were not in Islamic cities districts confined to the Jews or to the Christians.. .Monasteries were so scattered all over Baghdad that almost

every district had one.¹²

Durant also explains in his book The Story of Civilization how the Muslims, at that time, professed more perfection than Christians. They were more committed and faithful to their pacts and agreements, and more merciful to the oppressed. Very rarely did they use or resort to brutality as the Christian did when, for example, they seized Bethlehem in 1099. The Christian law was still applying the method of divine arbitration with fire or fight at a time when Islamic Shariah was establishing a set of sublime legislative principles to be applied by enlightened judges.

Those are the statements of enlightened western historians about the attitude and tolerance of Islamic civilization towards people of other revealed religions at the time when it was the most powerful and glorified civilization in the world. If it was not built on a religion such as Islam, this civilization could have imposed its belief on others, resorted to ethnical cleansing or demolished places of worship of other religions. It could have also annulled and invalidated other beliefs and forms of worship the same way some civilizations did in the past and still do in the present.

Speaking about the tolerance of Islam and with credence to other revealed religions is a long talk on the levels of Qur'anic and prophetic texts and on the level of examples for practical application of such tenets in the Sira (biography) of the Prophet of Islam himself and in the approach of Islamic civilization towards other civilizations that opened up to them and had reciprocal effects and interrelationships with it.

¹² Islamic Civilization in the Fourth Hijri Century. Vol I, p.68. Muhammad Abu Reida (trans.), Cairo, 1957.