

The Importance of Peaceful- Co-existence with other Religions in Islam (with Particular Reference to Christianity)

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Abstract: Islam is a religion of peace; it is a religion to lead mankind from the depths of darkness and ignorance towards the path of light and knowledge. The literal meaning of Islam, derived from the Arabic word Salaam, means peace. The word “Islam” has another root derivation – Slim – which means surrender or submission. In short, Islam means peace acquired by humans by submitting their will to the Will of Allah. In the most serious note, one of God’s name and attribute is al-salam (The Most Peaceful), which means, peaceful co-existence and harmonious living are very important values that Islam urge Muslims to enjoy particularly with people of other faiths and religions, such as Christianity and others.. Based on this fact, the holy Qur’an is very serious in condemning any sort of ethnic or religious hostility towards other faiths, it instead promotes peaceful co-existence and religious tolerance; for the sake of humanity, love and human dignity. Thus, this humble paper by applying Quranic approach, aims to demonstrate the importance of peaceful co-existence in Islamic worldview, and how such peaceful living could be actualized in any pluralistic and multi-religious society. Finally, the paper will provide brief conclusion followed by some suggestions and recommendations.

Keywords: Islam, Peaceful co-existence. Interfaith dialogues, Christianity, other Religions, Qur’an

I. INTRODUCTION

Islam is a religion of peace, it preaches tolerance, universal brotherhood, and believes in principle of Peaceful co-existence. As a matter of fact, Islam recognizes the other religions that were established before the Qur’an’s revelation (with particular reference to Judaism and Christianity). It respects these two religions in their original form, and their prophets as its own, i.e Islam has high respect for these religions since they are also revealed from God. However, It is undeniable fact that before and after the emergence of Islam, world religions have been hostile to each other, and the historical bitter relation of Judaism and Christianity that reject each other violently is such an example of this hostility among the world religions. Yet, with the emergence of Islam as the seal of revealed religion, it accommodates vis-a-vis the importance of peaceful coexistence and tolerance with other faiths; for the sake of humanity, love and affection. Based on this tangible fact, this conference paper aims to investigate the importance of the peaceful coexistence of Islam with Christianity, and the way this core value of Islam can be

actualized between Muslims and Christians in this age of modernity and technology..

Definition

Peaceful Co-Existence

According to Random House Dictionary(1997) , peaceful coexistence is competition without war, or a policy of peace between nations of widely differing political systems and ideologies, esp. between Communist and non-Communist nations: peaceful coexistence between the U.S. and the Soviet Union¹

In fact, peaceful coexistence is a state in which two or more groups are living together while respecting their differences and resolving their conflicts nonviolently. Although the idea of coexistence is not new, the term came into common usage during the Cold War. The policy of 'peaceful coexistence' was used in the context of U.S. and U.S.S.R. Relations.. Initially, it was a cover for aggression, but then it developed as a tool for reframing the relationship between the two powers. In the late '80s, the policy of peaceful coexistence included principles such as “nonaggression, respect for sovereignty, national independence, and noninterference in internal affairs.

It also means to have a relationship between the concerning parties (especially the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims) in which none of the parties is trying to destroy the other’ properties or temples. Finally, it refers to the way both parties shall interact with a commitment to tolerance, and enjoy mutual respect, and the agreement to settle conflicts without recourse to violence.

II. ISLAM AND THE IMPORTANT OF PEACEFUL CO-EXISTENCE

Islam not only fosters love between fellow Muslims; rather it is a merciful for all humankind. The “peace” of Islam has got many dimensions: peace with Allah, peace with society and peace with all of mankind irrespective of caste, creed and religion. Islam guides people to the path of non-violence and tolerance and shows the path of righteousness and piety.

¹ Random House Unabridged Dictionary, Copyright © 1997, by Random House, Inc

However, a religion with such high values enshrined in its very name is misunderstood by the bulk of humans as violent and intolerant. If any Muslim commits a wrong, it is directly or indirectly attributed to Islam. The misinterpretation of many mischievous people has given a bad name to this “religion of peace”. But, at this critical point, people should know that Islam is not what X or Y says. It is not this scholar’s or that scholar’s interpretation; Islam is what the Holy Scripture – the Quran, says and what Muhammad– the Prophet of Islam conveys. They are the two primary sources of Islam. namely; Qura’an and Prophetic *Sunnah*.

Islam is against compulsion in religion

It is enshrined in the Holy Quran that there is no compulsion in Islam. As such, Muslims are prohibited to force people of other faiths to accept Islam. There is no tolerance for one who forces another person to submit to his/ her will and convert to the religion unwillingly. Allah says:

“Let there be no compulsion in religion: Truth stands out clear from Error: whoever rejects evil and believes in Allah has grasped the most trustworthy hand-hold that never breaks. And Allah hears and knows all things.”²

This is the foundation for tolerance in Islam towards any and every religion and their people. There is no force and no compulsion on any individual to accept Islam. If he or she wants to accept Islam, it has to be necessarily out of their own free will and not at the point of sword. This is the essence of Islam. Islam is an open invitation to mankind and they have the full right either to accept it or to reject it. Thus, a Muslim does not have any right to force a Christian to accept his creed

Islam is non-violent and tolerant

Violence is not in the dictionary of Islam. There is no place for violence, neither in the Holy Quran nor in the *Sunnah* (Prophetic traditions). As a matter of fact, it is mentioned at several places in the Holy Quran that Allah does not like those who spread mischief on this earth. One such verse is:

“...Allah does not love those who do mischief...”³ . “Mischief”, in Arabic is *Fasad*⁴ and it can refer to murder, corruption, evil and violence. So, when Allah does not like those who spread violence.

Moreover, the biggest violence – killing innocent people – is repudiated in such strong words the likes of which are found in no other religious scripture:

“...if any one kills a person - unless it be for murder or for spreading mischief in the land - it would be as if he killed the whole humanity: and if any one saved a life, it would be as if he saved the life of the whole humanity...”⁵.

This verse explicitly denounces any sort of killing, especially killing innocent people in the name of religion. even in retaliation or in war, Muslims are not supposed to kill innocent people. In a Hadith (Prophetic Tradition), Muhammad said: “Go out in the name of Allah and by the help of Allah, following the way of the Messenger of Allah. Do not kill any old man, infant, child or woman... spread goodness and do good, for Allah loves those who do good.”(Abu Dawood).

At other place in the Holy Quran, Allah asks the believer to keep the door for peace wide open. That means, the door of peace in Islam is opened all the time even in a battle field. Allah says, “... If the enemy inclines towards peace, you (also) incline towards peace, and trust in Allah...”⁶

Obviously, the above passages proves that peaceful co-existence with other religion is one of the core value of Islam. In this regard we will explore Islam’s invitation of his adherents to peaceful coexistence with Christianity.

III. ISLAM AND PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE WITH CHRISTIANITY

What is Christianity?

Christianity, according to Woodhead (2004)⁷ is an Abrahamic monotheistic religion based on the life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth. Its adherents are known as Christians, believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and the savior of all people, whose coming as the Messiah was prophesied in the Hebrew Bible, called the Old Testament in Christianity, and chronicled in the New Testament. It is the world's largest religion with about 2.4 billion followers.

This means, Christianity with its deferent denominations and sects is the largest religion on the surface of hearth followed by Islam. Hence, Peaceful coexistence between Islam and Christianity is in dire need in any society that dominated by these two religions. Therefore, in this junction we ought to investigate the Islam and peaceful coexistence with Christianity and how this peaceful co-existence can be achieved.

Islam and Peaceful coexistence with Christianity

This century, the fourteen century AH and twentieth CE, has witnessed the growth among humans of a new awareness, namely that mankind must live together in peaceful way and harmonious manner. It follows that the old clichés of inter-human relationship which was common in last half of century, and which is characterized by master- subject, citizen-foreigner, colon- indigene and home overseas have been eliminated and replaced by the unity of mankind. So, as far as peaceful co-existence of Islam with Christianity is concerned, Al-faruqi argued that, Islam accords to Judaism and Christianity special status. Each of them is the religion of

² Al-Qur’an, 2:256

³ Al Qur’an, 5: 64

⁴ *Al-Mawrid* (1989) Arabic- English Dictionary, *Darul ‘Ilm Lilmalayin*.

⁵ Al-Qur’an, 5:31

⁶ Al-Qur’an, 8:61

⁷ Woodhead, Linda (2004). *Christianity: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. pp. n.p.

God. Their founders on earth, Abraham, Moses, David, Jesus, are the prophets of God. What they have conveyed- the Torah, the Psalm, the Evangelists- are revelations from God. To believe in these prophets, in the revelation they brought is integral to the very faith of Islam⁸.

In this regard, Islam recognizes Christianity, its revelation and its Prophet in its original form. As such it enjoys peaceful Coexistence and harmonious livings with Christians since the same truth are concerned. Hence, there is no room for violence, hatred, hostility against Christianity or any other religions in the name of Islam.

Yet, how can we achieve such peaceful co-existence with Christianity in our modern world?

The answer of this Question will be the interfaith dialogue between Christians and Muslims.

What is Interfaith Dialogue?

According to the Random House Dictionary of the English Language, (2003)“dialogue” denotes semantically a discussion that is characterized by duality and reciprocity. It means to speak alternately. That means dialogue is an exchange of ideas or opinions on particular issue, especially a religious or political issue with a view to reaching an amicable agreement or settlement. Furthermore, dialogue has nothing to do with acceptance of the opposite view at all cost. Rather, it means recognition of the right of the opponent to express his own idea in an atmosphere of freedom of speech, tolerance and reciprocity. According to Shafiq and Abu Nimer, the word dialogue is derived from dia (across, through) and logos (conversation, word) simply, dialogue means conversation between two or more people.

Bidmos (1993), however, defined dialogue as different connotation depending on given context in which it used. In a general term, it connotes an exchange of ideas in which the participants make proportionately equal contributions. It simply refers to the discussions on religious matters. Yet, Paulos(2001) argued that dialogue means dia-leghe, which is all about speaking, discussing reasoning through all aspects of a problem, thereby correcting each other and moving forward. This in turn implies that dialogue is a rich platform that can build mutual beneficial relationship between discussants and which can lead to reciprocal understanding and peaceful co-existence. Based on observation of Jaco Cilliers,(2002) a practitioner of interfaith- dialogue, stressed: Engaging in interfaith dialogue does not in any way mean undermining one’s own faith or religious tradition, interfaith dialogue is constructive only when people become firmly grounded in their own religious traditions and through that process gain a willingness to listen and respect the beliefs of other religions.

As a matter of fact, inter-faith dialogue has nothing to do with neither conversion nor dilution of someone’s faith; instead, it

is able to strengthen participant’s understanding of other faith; because it demands honesty and sincerity from the participants of each religion. In this regard Mike Leterfield argued that the purposes of dialogue are to struggle against negative conditioning and fanaticism and to open the door for listening, communicating and respect.

In short, inter-faith dialogue is a platform or a sort of forum where people of different religions or faiths will come together in order to attain mutual reciprocal understanding of their respective religion for the sake of humanity, respect and peaceful co-existent of religion. Based on these various definitions, we ought to assess the interreligious dialogue in Quranic and biblical perspectives. Respectively, followed by guidelines of interfaith dialogue.

IV. INTER-FAITH DIALOGUE IN THE HOLY QUR’AN AND BIBLE

1. Inter-faith dialogue in the holy Qur’an

Islam and Christianity (and so also Judaism) have one thing in common, which is their monotheistic foundation. According to al- Faruqi (1998) “Islam’s potential contribution to world order to inter-religious dialogue, understanding and living to global religious interdependence can be very, very significant. With Judaism and Christianity, the two other surviving Semitic religions, Islam has built a relation of common origin, of one and the same God, of one and the same tradition of prophets and revelation, tantamount to self-identification with them”. Therefore, we ought to explore interreligious dialogue in the Qur’an and hadith of Prophet Muhammad(s.a.w). In fact, it is important to know that the closest word for dialogue in the Qur’an is Yuhawir (Qur’an 18:34, 18:37, 58:1), which denotes a conversation between two individuals or groups of people. For instance: “His companion asked him during an argument (Yuhawiru [argument, conversation]): Do you deny Him Who created you.....”. (Qur’an 18:37). Hence, the following are some verses from Qur’ an that encourage Muslims to engage with non- Muslims, (especially Christians) in interreligious dialogue.

Say, “We believe in Allah and in that which has been bestowed upon Abraham, and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and their descendants, and that which has vouchsafed to Moses and Jesus and that which has been vouchsafed to all the other prophets by their Sustainer: We make no distinction between any of them. And it is unto Him that we surrender”⁹.

In another chapter of the Qur’an Allah Stated that: “Say, O people of the Scripture, come to an agreement between us and you: that we shall worship none but Allah, and that we shall ascribe no partner unto Him, and that none of us shall take others for lords besides Allah. And if they turn away, then

⁸ Al- Faruqi, (1998) Islam and Other Faith, The Islamic Foundation, IIIT, USA

⁹ Al- Qur’an, 2:136

say: Bear witness that we are they who have surrendered unto Him”¹⁰.

Furthermore, Qur’an stated that: “Say, ‘O followers of the bible! You have no valid ground for your beliefs unless you truly observe the Torah and the Gospel, and all that has been bestowed from on high upon you by your sustainer”¹¹. Indeed, Qur’an also orders Muslims to respect other religions and be polite to their followers: “There is no compulsion in religion”¹².

Lastly, with regard to interreligious dialogue, Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w) said: “Souls are like recruited troops. Those who get to know one another will develop mutual understanding, and those who are strangers to each other are more likely to dispute” In another Hadith narrated by Bukhari, prophet Muhammad (s.a.w) as the last of the prophets, used to say with all sense of Humility: “ My example and that of prophets before me, is that of a man who built and completed a beautiful house, except for a single brick in a corner. People went round and admired it but said, should not that brick put in? I am that brick and I am the seal of the prophets” (Sahih Al- Bukhari).

The above verses and hadith indicate that Islam has a special regard and respect toward other religions and their adherents with particular reference to Christianity.

2. Inter- Faith Dialogue in the Bible

The issue of mutual beneficial relationship between Christianity and the followers of other prophets has been highly considered by bible which contains passages that are primarily intended to stimulate cordiality, respect, friendship, and good- neighbourliness. This is reflected in the bible in many ways: namely through the recognition of the various prophets and traditions and through specific instructions concerning the need to establish good neighbourliness with others. With regard to the recognition of other prophets and their traditions, the Sermon on the Mount is relevant: “Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil”.(Matthew 5:17)¹³

The message of the sermon is clear and obvious, as Jesus plainly recognized the existing prophetic traditions and declared that his mission was not to replace but to confirm and consolidate them. The declaration implies unity of message between him and others before him. In view of the principle of the unity of message among the prophets of Allah, Jesus also recognized and confirmed the coming of Prophet Muhammad (saw) and his messengership. According to Quranic account: “And when Jesus, the son of Mary, said: ‘O children of Israel! Lo! I am the messenger of Allah unto you confirming that which was (revealed) before me in the Torah and bringing glad tidings of a messenger who cometh after

me, whose name is the ‘Praised One’. Yet when he hath come unto them with clear proofs, they say: ‘This is mere magic’”¹⁴.

This prophecy of the coming of Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w) reminds us of a similar statement accredited to Jesus (a.s) in the Bible: “And I will pray the father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever”.

In another passage of John in this respect:

“Nevertheless I tell you the truth: it is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgement”¹⁵. The above passages are enough evidences that Jesus recognized the prophet Muhammad (s.a.w) and they are sharing many things in common such as message prophethood and relation.

With regard to the issue of friendliness and love to neighbour, like Islam, Christians also can not afford to be unfriendly with their neighbours; because it is a matter of fundamental principle in Christianity. For example when Jesus was asked ‘which is the greatest commandment in the law? He replied “You shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind’. This is the first and the greatest commandment. And the second is like unto it, ‘thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and prophets”.

A deep contemplation and analysis of the above Quranic verses and Biblical proofs, necessitate Inter-faith dialogue in any multi religious society in this globe for the purpose of mutual understanding and peaceful co-existence.

V. GUIDELINES FOR INTER- FAITH DIALOGUE

1. Sincerity of Intention of both Muslims and Christians

A successful dialogue relies heavily depends on the intention of the dialogue partners. Dialogue should be for mutual understanding and establish a good relation for future life. It is a process of learning; therefore, one must come with an open mind and pure heart so that learning can happen. A good dialogue will result in two sides winning. Sincerity in this context is to participants themselves, to their religion, to the opposite religion and to the society at large. Sincerity comes in when a situation demands some compromise that does not necessarily adversely affect the religious tenet of the participant, and which is not going to weaken or dilute one’s religion but instead will strengthen it. Al- Faruqi (1998) called this noble effort a “supremely ethical endeavor”⁶¹. Therefore, with this sincerity in the mind of the participants, dialogue should be held in a free and friendly manner. All efforts should be on brotherly relation rather than to be the winner or promoting the narrow interest of one’s own religion.

¹⁰ Al- Qur’an, 3:64

¹¹ Al- Qur’an, 5:68

¹² Al- Qur’an, 2:256

¹³ Matthew 5:17

¹⁴ Al- Qur’an, 61:6

¹⁵ John 16:7&8

2. Knowledge and practice of religion

It is important to participants to be knowledgeable about their respective religion that in turn can enable them to give adequate information to others on the philosophy, history and theology of their faith, they should be able to read and understand the material of their faith. Likewise, they should possess a solid background about the religion of their counterpart. I.e , both Muslims and Christian should be well knowledgeable about their respective religion as well as each other's religion. In this respect, Christians and Muslims should also reject any sort of politicization of religion for personal interest and ambition.

3. Sensitivity and respect for other's religion

In order to achieve mutual beneficial relationship between Christianity and Islam in this modern era, there is a high need of mutual respect between these two dominant religions of the globe. In fact, there is widespread remark and observation by many people, including the International media (especially after the incident of September 11 2001 in the U.S.A) that, Muslim –Cristian relation is unfriendly if not deteriorating. To eradicate this hypothesis, however, there should be indiscriminant respect among the participants of inter- faith dialogue. The venue should not be seen as an opportunity to insult adherents of other faiths or hurt their feeling, but, it should be perceived as a place to gain mutual understanding of each other's faith. Therefore, anything that implies and assault on the opposite group should not be entertained. For instance, discussion should not reach certain sensitive principle of the existence or identity of the religious tradition of either group. Christians participating in the dialogue undoubtedly will not accept subjecting the doctrine of the Holy Trinity to criticism as Muslim participants will surely reject the thinking that their sins have been washed away or have been redeemed by the death of one saint or prophet. Similarly, Muslims will not accept the concept of Original sin that all mankind inherit the sin from Adam and Eve, as such belief in Jesus Christ will redeem their inherited sins. Also Christian participants will not allow their counterparts to discuss issue concerning sacredness of Bible. Likewise, Muslim participants will surely feel uncomfortable if the Islamic doctrine of Tawhid (unity of Allah), or the finality of prophethood in Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) is questioned. This and other sensitive questions should be avoided during the dialogue in order to achieve the main objective of the inter-religious dialogue.

VI. CONCLUDING REMARKS

It is undeniable fact that Islam from its etymology is a religion of peace and harmony, as such it call its adherents to enjoy peace with each other, it also invites Muslims to build harmony with non-Muslims and other religions, which means Islam loves peaceful leaving and harmonious co-existence with other faith particularly Christianity in its pure form and which Islam regards as revealed religion by God to Jesus. Given this reality, the holy Qur'an is very concerned with

ending tribal, ethnics and religious feuds and promoting peaceful coexistence with other religions, it warns Muslims from using abusive language about other religions. According to , Qur'an, Allah said that "Do not revile those upon whom they call besides Allah, out of spite, revile Allah in their ignorance. Thus, have we made alluring to each people to own doings, in the end they will return to their Lor, and We shall then tell them the truth of all that they did"¹⁶ This verse proves that other faiths including Christianity deserve a full respect From Muslim. Indeed the peaceful co-existence of Islam and its tolerance are obvious in the constitution of al-Madinah that was established by wisdom of rasullullah, where Muslim Christian relation was based of fraternity, love, tolerance, mutual beneficial relation and peaceful co-existence. Lastly, there is no doubt that the effective method for the religious peaceful co-existence of Islam with other religions in this modern world, (particularly, the Christianity which is the dominant religion of our globe), is achievable via truthful interfaith dialogue between Muslim and Christians.

VII. SOLUTIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

1. Islam is a religion of peace, it is homogenous religion it urges the Muslim *ummah* to have peace among themselves and call them to extend the peace to other religions.
2. Peaceful coexistence with other religion is one of the core value of Islam, therefore, the violence, barbarism or terrorism in the name of religion is not tolerated by Islam at all.
3. It is undeniable fact that, Islam and Christianity are the most dominant religion in our cotemporary world, therefore, interfaith dialogue should be held in any pluralistic society especially, that society dominated by Muslims and Christians for the sake of peaceful living..
4. Indeed, interfaith dialogue with the aim of mutual understanding of participants' religion is the best platform for accomplishing peaceful co-existence, which also leads to love harmony and prosperity in any multi-religious society.
5. In Islam, the principle of peaceful coexistence is highly endorsed by the Qur'an and further recommended by the prophetic sunnah (which are the main references of Islam) this fact is obvious in the various passage of the holy Qur'an and the constitution of Madinah(the first comprehensive constitution in human history).that was founded by prophet Muhammad. (S.A.W).

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