

## **Peace in The Islamic Thought and Culture\***

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### **Summary**

Some Western scholars, who have written on Islamic culture in general and on Islamic law in particular, have skipped the original reliable authorities and have depended on minor sources of reference. They were led sometimes to follow the easy path of generalizing particular opinions, and thus to reach erroneous or superficial conclusions. Worse still, their generalizations were sometimes imitated and copied by other publicists as real proven facts and propagated as such. This method of reasoning led to many fallacies facts and propagated as some modern writes on Islamic international law.

The author intends to present a true of Islam on the basis of Islamic original texts, that is, the Holly Book and the Tradition. This helps to eliminate the existing misunderstandings, especially after those pertaining to the September 11 event. In this connection, the following topics will be briefly discussed: Islam and Salam, Principle of equality, Religious and social applications, Principle of Tolerance & Universal Brotherhood in Islam, Precedents in Religious Collaboration, An Appeal for peace, Controversy with the people of the Book, Religious Brotherhood, Universal Brotherhood.

**Keywords:** Islam, peace, tolerance, religious brotherhood, justice, people of book

### **1. Introduction**

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Some Western scholars, who have written on Islamic culture in general and on Islamic law in particular, have skipped the original reliable authorities and have depended on minor sources of reference. They have sometimes been led to follow the easy path of generalizing particular opinions, and thus to reach erroneous or superficial conclusions. Worse still, their generalizations have been imitated and copied by other publicists as real proven facts and propagated as such. This method of reasoning has led to many fallacies which have been spread by some modern writers on Islamic international law.

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\*This paper is written for the oral presentation at the CISMOR International Workshop Feb. 20-21, 2004.

## 2. Islam and Salam

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One of the fallacies is that Islamic law on the conduct of the state in international relations is mainly a law of war. This viewpoint may be supported partly by the practice sometimes followed by certain Muslim statesmen.

However, the original and only reliable texts of Islam expressly advocate the contrary view, namely, that Islam favours peace as a fundamental basis of its legal framework. These texts regulated war only in the exceptional cases in which it was deemed lawful. No contrary practice, if any, can overrule such explicit divine texts.

In the first place, the word Islam itself is derived from the same root as peace (*silm, salm, salam*). It implies a similar meaning of surrender to God's Will, with the consequent connotation of serenity, contentment and peace of mind. In a Quranic verse, Islamic guidance is depicted as the light which leads from darkness to the paths of peace (*subul as-salam*) and safety<sup>1</sup>).

One of the Holy Attributes and Best Names of God is Peace (*Salam*). It is mentioned in the Quran itself and persists in many Traditions<sup>2</sup>). It is recited several times a day during Muslim prayer.

A well-known Islamic invocation addresses God by the words: "O God, Thou art peace, and from Thee comes Peace. Be Blessed and High Exalted, O! August and Glorious."

"Peace be upon you" (*Assalam 'Alaikum*) is the usual salutation used daily amongst Muslims and Arabs up to the present time. Whenever the Prophet Muhammad, Jesus or any other prophet is mentioned his name is immediately followed by the phrase: "Peace be upon him" (*Alaihis-salam*). Paradise is designated as the "Abode of Peace" (*dar es-salam*) in many Quranic verses<sup>3</sup>).

The word "peace" and its derivatives are cited in more than one hundred verses of the Quran, while the word "war" and its derivative verb are mentioned in only six verses<sup>4</sup>). Examples of such verses will be quoted later on.

## 3. Principle of Equality

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Liberty and equality are the two fundamental pillars of human rights recognized by classical democracy.

Besides liberty in all its forms, equality constitutes the other scale in the balance of fundamental human rights. It merits a special mention because of its close relation to peace and the brotherhood of mankind.

The principle of equality constitutes one of the sacred and prominent axioms of Islam. Islam considers that all mankind are equal before the law, in their rights as well as in their obligations, without any distinction of race, nationality, colour, family or creed. Piety alone is

the measure of dignity in Islam.

This touchstone is brought out in the following Quranic verses:

“O Mankind! We have created you of one male and one female, and have divided you into peoples and tribes, that you may become mutually acquainted.

The most dignified (noblest) of you, in the sight of God, is the most pious (of you)<sup>5)</sup>.

“O Mankind! Fear your Lord Who created you on one single soul, and from it created its mate, and from them both has propagated many men and women<sup>6)</sup>.

Your creation and your resurrection are but as those of a single soul<sup>7)</sup>.

Similarly, many Traditions of the Prophet confirm this equalitarian principle. The following may be cited in this connection:

“All of you are the descendants of Adam, and Adam was created from earth; so let no people boast of their forefathers<sup>8)</sup>.

“I am the brother of every pious man, even if he were an Abyssinian slave, and I disclaim every wicked man, even if he were a noble Koreishite<sup>9)</sup>.

“No superiority has an Arab over an alien, nor a white man over a negro, save in piety<sup>10)</sup>.

These divine texts are sufficient evidence that equality is a basic principle in Islamic law. This point does not need any further proof, and it cannot be impaired by any contrary historical practice. Such practice, if it exists in some exceptional cases, could be classified as a mere violation of the law.

#### **4. Religious and Social Applications**

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In the first place, the principle of equality bears upon religious duties. These duties bind all Believers on the same footing, without any discrimination between a citizen and an alien, a man and a woman, a white man or a negro. For this reason, Muslims in their congregational prayers in the mosque and in their pilgrimage to Mecca stand side by side, the rich beside the poor, the Arab near the non-Arab and the ruler near the ordinary subject, without any distinction whatsoever.

Secondly, this principle applies also to worldly relations. All people are equal in regards to rights and duties, and they are viewed equally by a uniform system of law and jurisdiction. This rule applies to Muslims wherever they reside and to non-Muslims permitted to reside in Islamic territory but not to non-Muslims living in enemy territory.

#### **5. Principle of Tolerance & Universal Brotherhood in Islam**

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The cooperation among religions and different religious communities in different historical ages can be briefly sketched in four successive stages: 1- Fanaticism and lack of tolerance, 2- Negative tolerance, 3- Mutual understanding and communication, and finally 4-

positive cooperation.

The first stage, which historically comes first, is ruled by indiscriminate prejudice, bigotry and lack of tolerance, which result from ignorance and blind faith in general. This stage is specifically characterized by obstinacy, stubbornness and hardness of relations to prejudice, bias, hatred, rancour, and personal grudges, sometimes bursting into riots, revolutions and wars. Many examples, can be given both from ancient and medieval history: for example, the Roman persecution of Christians, the religious wars in Islamic Spain, the Crusades and so on.

Sometimes this religious fanaticism occurs among the different sects or denominations of a single religion, which frequently causes internal strife and sometimes sectarian wars, as was the case with the Protestant movement in its early phase, or with the denominational wars among different sects in Christianity or Islam.

Examples of religious intolerance and fanaticism are not lacking in contemporary modern history. We can see religious fanaticism and bigotry in the Zionist movement in Palestine and in its semi-political aspect between the Catholics and Protestants of North Ireland today.

Nevertheless, one cannot deny the change of attitude which has taken place in the Modern Age, although despite the tendency to discard this extreme form of fanaticism, to adopt a kind of religious freedom and its concomitant behaviours such as tolerance, there still remains resistance at first, because the environment is marked by caution, circumspection, lack of confidence and fear of cooperation.

Then in the next stage various racial and ethnic developments necessitated mutual understanding, communion and rapprochement between different religions and creeds, and this was due to the diffusion and propagation of science and the advances made in the means of transportation and communication, as well as commercial and cultural relations, all resulting in the establishment of rational discourse and peaceful dialogue among nations.

Finally, in the last stage, this dialogue, in its turn, ushered in an essential change in the situation. The stage of negative tolerance based on reserved caution, suspicion, and fear, gradually gave way to a kind of positive cooperation based on mutual understanding and good intentions.

This fact is indisputably in accord with the spirit of true religion, which commands love, friendship, righteousness, charity, and mutual cooperation among human beings. From what we have said, it is evident that the points of agreement and convergence among diverse religions are much greater than the points of disagreement and divergence and that the way of mutual understanding and cooperation is much easier than that of discord and dissension.

The danger confronting all religions does not come from any other single religion. It rather comes from the modern materialistic schools of philosophy which challenge all religions. Therefore, it is incumbent on all religions to preserve their common heritage and their purity and originality.

Islam and Christianity, in particular, should collaborate in order to follow a common path which unites them in their precious spiritual ideals and values, so that they may serve humankind under the banner of one single God, Lord of all creatures.

## **6. Precedents in Religious Collaboration**

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The world congresses held to realize and promulgate these exalted and lofty objectives provide decisive proof of the justness of the latter stage, which is one of mutual love and universal cooperation.

Recent developments in the dialogue between religions are best depicted in the papal declaration issued on 28 October 1965 by the second Vatican Assembly concerning the relations of the Catholic Church with non-Christian religions. It aims at “strengthening the ties of unity and love among all people,” because “all nations make one single family.” It summons all “to avow the spiritual, literary, social and cultural values found among the devotees of other religions, to promote and cultivate them by way of dialogues and cooperation and in accordance with love and wisdom.”

In this declaration it is emphasized that the church “esteems highly all the Muslims, who worship one all-living, self-subsistent, merciful, compassionate, omnipotent and omniscient God, who created the heavens and the earth and has spoken to men through revelation. They submit themselves with all their souls to the commands of God, even if they do not understand His hidden intentions, as Abraham in whom the religion of Islam takes honour, and to whom it affiliates itself, surrendered himself to the command of God. Muslims, even if they do not confess the divinity of Jesus, honour him as a Messenger and honour in extreme the Virgin Mary, to whom they supplicate in prayer with faith. Moreover they believe in the Day of Judgement in which all the dead are resurrected and are rewarded or punished according to their merits. Therefore, they highly appreciate the eternal life and worship God, particularly through prayers, almsgiving, charitable deeds and fasting.”

The declaration also states that: “even if in the course of history there have been many dissensions and enmities between Christians and Muslims, the Assembly requests them all to forget the past and to work earnestly to achieve mutual understanding among themselves and to protect and procure for all people, social equity, spiritual values, peace and liberty”<sup>11</sup>).

This is a very clear example of repudiating fanaticism and religious bigotry and encouraging tolerance and understanding and cooperation among all people who were created by one single God as members of a single family.

As for the Islamic Shariah (Divine Law), it admits the freedom of thought, free expression of opinions, and exercise of independent judgment in religious matters. It also acknowledges tolerance among religions, religious communities, nations and tribes and commands mutual understanding and cooperation among all people, as we shall demonstrate with clear proof.

Scholars of Muslim jurisprudence have applied these principles in their treatments of non-Muslim believers in the Islamic community, and the pioneers of modern jurisprudence, such as Al-Afghani (Asad Abadi) and Muhammad Abduh, among others, have declared them openly.

Jamal-ad-Din –Afghani abhorred the Sunnite-Shi`te dichotomy and said that there was no cause for such division in the Islamic community. He maintained that this division was brought about by the covetousness and avarice of the rulers and the ignorance of the common folk<sup>12</sup>. What he said harmonizes well with the following verse in the Holy Quran: “As to those who sunder their religion and become schismatics, no concern at all hast thou with them.”

Moreover, Al-Afghani held that the three religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam were unanimous in their objectives and intentions and that their scriptures were in agreement concerning their essential doctrines. In his opinion, differences between different religions do not rest in their doctrines, nor in their scriptures. They are the fabrications of religious scholars who make religions a sort of merchandise and sell the verses of God cheaply<sup>13</sup>.

In the same spirit of humanity, Sheikh Muhammad’ Abduh fought against blind dogmatism and summoned all people to friendship and cooperation as in a single community.

He said: “What a calamity has befallen man! He has changed his natural institutions. He has altered his peaceful habits. He has dissolved his natural relations. Man comes from one single origin, from which a single family has descended, whose members are united through common habits and morals. This situation has had tremendous influence upon the majority of reasonable men who tend to serve humankind without showing prejudice to a particular race or religion or sect. So when man turns back to his primordial centre he regards the totality of mankind as the inhabitants of a single mansion who share their common interests equally and who find the boons and blessings of the earth enough to protect them from fanaticism and make them desist from dissension and discord”<sup>14</sup>.

## **7. An Appeal for Peace**

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We should reiterate here once more that an appeal for the cause of Islam should follow the way of persuasion and exhortation which are emphasized in the numerous verses of the Holy Quran: “The Messenger has no other charge than to deliver the manifest message (Quran 24:25). “Then remind them, thou art only a reminder, thou art not charged to oversee them” (Quran 88:21). “Call thou to the way of the Lord with wisdom and good admonition, and dispute with them in the better way, surely the Lord knows very well those who have gone astray from His way and He knows very well those who are guided” (Quran 16:125). “Thou art not a tyrant over them, therefore remind by the Quran him who fears My threat.” (Quran 50:45)

Then the Holy Quran clearly prohibited any kind of coercion or compulsion in conveying

the message of religion: “No compulsion is there in religion, verily truth has become clear from error” (Quran 2:255). “And if the Lord has willed, whoever is on the earth would have believed, all of them, all together. Wouldst thou then constrain the people until they are believers?” (Quran 10:199). “Say, the truth is from your Lord; so let whoever will believe, and let whoever will disbelieve” (Quran 18:25).

Moreover, the Holy Quran has emphasized, time and again, the diversity of religions and God’s judgement concerning them: “To you your religion and to me my religion”. (Quran 109:5). “But had God willed, He would have gathered them to the guidance. So be not thou one of the ignorant. Answer only those who will hear” (Quran 6:35). “Truly to Us is their return; then upon who will hear”. (Quran 6:35). “Truly to Us is their return; then upon Us shall rest their reckoning” (Quran 88:25). “Surely those who believe and those of Jewry, the Sabceans, the Christians, the Magians and the idolaters, God shall distinguish between them on the day of Resurrection; assuredly God is witness over everything” (Quran 22:17). “Say! O God, thou the Creator of the heavens and the earth who knowest the Unseen and the Visible, Thou shall judge between the servants concerning what they are at variance” (Quran 39:47).

From the quoted verses and many other verses of the Quran, it is evident that the Holy Prophet was ordered to convey His message by giving glad tidings and warnings and by way of reminding rather than through domination and compulsion. But as to belief in His message, it depends on the free choice of man, and there can be no sense in a faith which is contaminated with coercion. In any case, the reckoning of men’s deeds depends on God, who will gather all together on the Day of Resurrection and will reward or punish them according to what they have done.

## **8. Controversy with the People of the Book**

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When talking about religious freedom, tolerance toward the followers of all creeds, and dialogue and cooperation among them, we should make particular reference to the veneration and respect which Islam shows to the people of the Book (*ahl-al-kitab*) such as Christians and Jews, who believe in one God and in the hereafter and do righteous deeds. This is evident from the following verse: “Those who believe (in that which is revealed to thee) and those who are Jews and Christians and Sabceans –Whoever believeth in God and the last Day and doeth right-Surely their reward is with their Lord and there shall no fear come upon them, neither shall they grieve” (Quran 2:62).

The Holy Quran has admonished the believers to treat the people of the Book in the best manner possible and if they happen to be their neighbours, to be kind and genial to them. “And dispute not with the people of the Scripture, unless it be in a way that is better, except for those of them who do wrong”(Quran 39:4). “Say: O, people of the Scripture! Come to an agreement between us and you: That we shall worship none but God and that we shall ascribe

no partner unto Him and that none of us all take others for lords besides God. And if they turn away then say: Bear witness that we have surrendered ourselves unto Him” (Quran 3:64). “And if they dispute with thee, O, Muhammad, then say: I have surrendered my face to God and so have those who follow me. And say unto those who have received the scripture and those who read not: Have you surrendered? If they surrender, then they are rightly guided and if they turn away, then it is the duty to deliver the Message (unto them) and God sees His servants” (Quran 3:20).

The Holy Quran has especially commended Christians and particularly referred to their leniency and compassion and the high spiritual rank of their divines due to their humility and lack of conceit and arrogance: “Then we sent, following in their footsteps, our Messengers: and we sent, following Jesus, son of Mary, and gave unto Him the Gospel. And we set in the hearts of those who followed him compassion and mercy” (Quran 57:27). “And thou wilt surely find the nearest of them in love to the believers, those who say, we are Christians; that is because some of them are priests and monks and they wax not proud, and when they hear what has been sent down to the Messenger, Thou seest their eyes overflow with tears because of the truth they recognize...” (Quran 5:82).

## **9. Religious Brotherhood**

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On the basis of the equality of all men, and of religious cooperation and tolerance, Islam has emphasized the religious brotherhood of all believers on the one hand and the human fraternity of all people on the other. The brotherhood of Muslims is of a total and perfect type. It is based on the unity of faith and religion. The congregational prayers of Muslims and their orientation toward a single direction (Ka’bah); their fasting in a single month at an appointed time, their Holy pilgrimage to Mecca in a determined period with an equal pace; the payment of tithes by the well-to-do in the interest of the poor, are all practical examples of Muslim unity and fraternity, this in addition to the love, affection, mutual confidence and cooperation which religion demands.

Muslims all over the world are considered one single community, whose pillar is religious solidarity and the spiritual brotherhood which the Holy Quran has so strongly emphasized: “The believers are indeed brothers...” (Quran 49:10). “Surely this community of yours is one single community, and I am your Lord, so worship Me” (Quran 21:92).

This bond of brotherliness is confirmed by the following Holy Tradition of the prophet: “Muslims have but one dhimmah (covenant, responsibility, debt): None of you is a true believer unless he loves for his brother, what he loves for himself.” “The believers, in their sympathy, mercy and affection are like the organs of a single body; when one limb suffers from pain, the other limbs are overtaken by sleeplessness and fever.” “Believers are like unto pillars which support each other.”

## **10. Universal Brotherhood**

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We should stress the fact that the religious brotherhood in Islam is an aspect of a more general one, that is, the universal brotherhood of humankind. This universality is based on three pillars which are first the universality of Muhammad's Message, second the Unicity of God and therefore the unity of religions, and third the unity of mankind.

### **10.1. The Universality of Muhammad's Message**

This universality is confirmed by the Holy Quran and the prophetic traditions. The Message of Islam is not confined to the Arab race, nor to a particular nation; it is a universal message addressed to all men. "And we have not sent thee (O, Muhammad) save as a bringer of good tidings and a Warner unto all mankind; but most of mankind know not" (Quran 34:28).

### **10.2. The Unicity of God and the Unity of Religion**

Islam teaches the doctrine of the unicity of God and veneration and respect for all prophets and faith in all sacred books. It considers all people to make one single community which is broader in scope than the community of believers, where belief in one God unites them all.

This is all clear from the preceding and the following verses; "And hold you fast to God's bond, together and do not scatter; remember God's blessings upon you when you were enemies and He brought your hearts together so that by His blessing you became brothers" (Quran 3:103). "Unto this call thou, and go straight as thou hast been commanded; do not follow their caprice. And say, I believe in whatever Scriptures God has sent down. I have been commanded to administer justice among you. God is our Lord and your Lord. We have our deeds, and to you belong your deeds. There is no argument between us and you; God shall bring us together and unto Him is the return" (Quran 42:15). "Dispute not with the people of Scripture, save in a way that is better, except for those of them that do wrong; and say: we believe in what has been sent down to us and what has been sent down to you; our God and your God is one and to Him we have surrendered" (Quran 29:46).

We have the same meaning reiterated in the holy saying of the Prophet: "O, you people! Verily the Lord is one, the Father is one and the religion is one<sup>15</sup>." "O, ye our Lord and the Lord of everything, we are witness that your servants are all brothers.

So God the Almighty shall bring together all people to His one single religion and by His mercy shall protect them from division and separation. He will bring their hearts close together and will shower upon them the blessings of brotherhood and his other boons and blessings and in the end will all return to Him.

### 10.3. The Unity of Humanity and Justice

Islam has unambiguously declared the equality of all men without discriminating between them with regard to religion, nationality, race, colour and lineage. This is one of the consequences of the unity of mankind which binds them all, and the unity of universal justice which organizes all their relations.

In addition to the above proof which corroborates this fact, it is also well expressed in the following verse: "...For each we have appointed a divine law and a traced-out way. Had God willed, He could have made you one community. But that He may try you in that which He hath given you (He hath you as you are). So vie you one with another in good works. Unto God you will all return and He will then inform you of that wherein ye differ" (Quran 5:48). In the same vein, the following tradition (prophetic saying) has come down to us: "He is not one of us who calls people to '*asabiyyah*' (tribal partisanship and bigotry); he is not one of us who fights for '*asabiyyah*'; he is not one of us who dies in '*asabiyyah*'<sup>16)</sup>"

Moreover, the Holy Quran has alluded to the unity and solidarity of human beings in their humanity and considers the saving of one life to be the same as saving all lives and to transgress one is to transgress all: "Who so slays a soul not to retaliate for a soul slain, nor for corruption down on earth, shall be as if he had slain mankind altogether; and who so gives life to a soul, shall be as if he had given life to mankind altogether..." (Quran 5:32).

Islam does not permit racial discrimination, narrow tribal chauvinism, or blind sectarian religious partisanship. It does not recognize any kind of enthusiasm except the consolidating and unifying religious enthusiasm. It does not accept any competition, except in the arena of charity and good works. It does not impose any limits thereto, except the limits imposed by the all-comprehensive essence of humanity which embraces all men and gathers them in the field of good works and vouchsafes for them absolute justice.

The unity of human nature and justice, together with the universality of Islamic revelation, the unity of God, and the unity of the divine religions, forms the foundation of the universal brotherhood of men, which alongside the fraternity of religious faith has been so strongly emphasized in Islam. There is no doubt that this brotherhood is the ideal archetype which international laws should imitate.

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#### NOTES

- 1) S 5:15-16.
- 2) S 59:23
- 3) S 6:127; 10:25.
- 4) S 2:279; 5:33; 64; 8:57; 9:107; 47:4.
- 5) S 49:13.
- 6) S 4:1.
- 7) S 31:28.

- 8) Suyuti, *al-Jami' al-Saghir*, No. 6368.
- 9) Cited by Abdurrahman Azzam, in *Al-Risalah al-Khalidah* (Cairo, 1946), 143.
- 10) Cited by M.R. Rida, in *al-Wahi al-Muhammadi* (Cairo, 5th edit., 1267 A.H.), 226.
- 11) *The Acts of the Second Vatican Assembly*, Pauline Press, Beirut, 1966, Vol. 1, pp.185-8.
- 12) *The Memories of Jamal al-Din al-Afghani*, edited by Muhammad Pasha al-Makhdhuni, Beirut, 1931, p.167.
- 13) *Ibid*, pp.217 and 213-14.
- 14) Muhammad Rasheed Rida, *History*, Cario, 1913, 3 volumes, vol.2, p.203.
- 15) Muhammad Rasheed Rida, *al-Wahyal-Muhammadi (The Muhammadan Revelation)*, p.231, quoting from Ibn Asakir). In the Holy tradition about Hajjat al-Wida' (The last pilgrimage of the Holy Prophet to Mecca) we have the following version: "Verily your Lord is one, All of you come from Adam and Adam is made of clay." See, *Al-'Iqd al-Farid*, vol. 2, pp. 357-59.
- 16) *al-Jami' al-Saghir*, vol. 2, No. 7682, quoted from the Sunan of Abu Dawud