

Prophet Muhammad's Model of Interfaith Dialogue

(Based Islamic Perspective on Standing Against
Violence and Extremism)

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Abstract

Violence and extremism are of the most important topics in current research on religion and interreligious studies. The New World Order and the global peace, justice and ethics, cannot be understood without accounting for the role of religion and religious organizations and among the topics dealing with religion is the matter of violence done by the excuse of religion's orders. There is increasing research looking at and beyond religious causes of violence, as well as a hope that religion could offer genuinely effective tools to control violence. The question of control of violence is discussed in relation to the spheres of ethics (regulation of affect), theology (legitimacy of violence), and government (integration via religion). It is shown not only that religion offers possibilities for controlling violence, but also that control of violence via religion. This paper emphasizes on the impact of interreligious and intercultural role on peace and conflict resolution, as well as the role of "Global Ethic" and I will shortly note to one of the important Islamic proofs narrated from Prophet Muhammad (S), called "The Promise of Muhammad to the Christians till the end of the World". Sublime morality is also one point noted here as the resolution for war and conflict.

Introduction

- No peace among the nations without peace among the religions.
- No peace among the religions without dialogue between the religions.
- No dialogue between the religions without investigation of the foundations of the religions².
- And there will be no life on the earth without Global Ethics

The history of the past decade contains many examples of human suffering and conflict that may fairly be laid at the feet of certain religious people and their understanding of how religion plays a role in their lives. And yet, religion cannot be avoided in any attempts to pursue peace and social justice among the people of the earth. Religion has failed to disappear as predicted by Marx, Freud, Nietzsche or any of the other Enlightenment theorists who tended to view religion as a crutch that would be thrown away as scientific knowledge progressed. Between just the two major religions we are considering at this article, more than two billion people continue to orient their lives (at varying degrees of depth and commitment) around the meaning they find in Christ or the Qur'an³.

In this stream, Islam and Christianity are two of the most numerous and the most influential of the world religions today. They share many points in common as religions. Most important of all they trace their lineage to one common ancestor, Abraham, who is the Divine Patriarch of the religions, called after him as the Abrahamic religions. Knowing this, for any religious person among these two, it is a must to endeavor for approximation of them more and more, due to the world's today's situation filled with challenge and tension. Based on this mentality, having attracted scholars in the current situation, there are important reasons for Christian theology to deal with Islam. They have something to do with striving for insight and with the belief that Christianity and Islam have to say each other something. Relevant

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² Hans Küng, *Islam, Past Present & Future* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2007), p. xxiii

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³ Richard H. Morgan, Professor, School of Social Welfare, Stony Brook University

issues are the conception of God, the God-man relationship and the formation of religious identity. Dialogue, or peaceful negotiation, is the path prescribed by Islam. Islam is based on the principle of *dawah*⁴, which is another name for peaceful negotiation manifests that violence is totally forbidden in Islam. The Prophet of Islam started His mission which was to communicate his ideology to people by talking to them, listening to their objections and trying to convince them of his viewpoint by means of arguments. In the situation which Many people are under the impression that Muslims are close-minded and unwilling to engage in discussion with people of other faiths, dialogue and effective communications based on tolerance, respect and love, is very constructive; this is while, the holy Qur'an offers very clear guidelines and encouragement for Muslims to engage in interfaith dialogue.

So, as one conflict resolution, for Christians and Muslims in particular, it would seem that there is much room and much need for this kind of dialogue to come to a better mutual understanding and appreciation as demonstrated in K ng's⁵ review of the foundations of each faith. Starting this process of dialogue from the point of view of a Global Ethic or from the mutual concern for social justice and the promotion of peace seems like a particularly important place to begin because it allows the dialogue to occur between the two faiths at many levels.

Religion and globalization

Today, in the conditions of the modern process of globalization, we have become much closer to each other. And due particularly to this development, the dialogue between nations, cultures, and religions is becoming more significant. By developing this dialogue, by supporting it, we can facilitate the definition of the sources serving to create terrorism, and, by doing this, we can destroy its very roots. Unfortunately, today, in some cases, terrorism

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⁴ invitation

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⁵ Richard H. Morgan, Professor, School of Social Welfare, Stony Brook University

hides itself under the screen of religion and different spiritual developments. It nevertheless should not deceive us into diverting our attention from its actual meaning. There was a period when terrorism tried to obscure its real intentions by using the beautiful slogans granted to humankind by the great French Revolution. The commissars implementing “the red terror”⁶ into life were executing this under the flags of communist ideology. Today, the terrorist forces, in order to achieve their provocative political targets, are using values that are sacred for all of us and are trying to justify terror to protect the interests of certain groups. While hiding under the cover of various religions, terrorism very skillfully is trying to hide its destructive purposes. No cover, no excuse or pretense should mislead us, since one can easily disclose the real face of terrorism under all false covers.

Islam and faith-based terrorism

In his response to Huntington’s ‘clash of civilizations’ article (1993), Edward Said (2001) replacing the term of “Clash of Ignorance”⁷ argued that not only political leaders, but even academics can fall into the trap of simplification by basing their arguments on a perception of static, rather than dynamic relations between social and religious groups. He points out that the use of labels for groups, rather than groups themselves, are driving factors of conflict. For him, the political and academic discourse on religious identities that distinguishes between ‘**the West**’ and ‘**Islam**’ promotes and amplifies conflict (Said 2001).

The escalation of violence carried out in the name of Islam must be attributed to a combination of factors where contextual variables, individual psychologies and opportunity structures in a society are central⁸ Looking at entire processes rather than examining individual factors, ideas or actors appears to be more productive in capturing the shifting role of religion, band

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⁶ Levent Tezcan, Religion and Control of Violence.

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⁷ Said, E. (2001) ‘The Clash of Ignorance’. The Nation 273(12): 11–14.

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⁸ Hafez 2003; Jackson and Gunning 2011; Mandaville 2007; Wiktorowicz 2005a).

of Islam more specifically, in the current challenges of conflict and terrorism that the international community faces.

Islamic Views of Peace and Violence

Contrary to stereotypes of Islam, Islam advocates numerous nonviolent and peacebuilding values and expects Muslims to live by them. These values are supported by the Quran and the Hadith (the Prophet's sayings). One of these values is the duty to pursue justice

O believers, be you securers of justice, witnesses for God. Let not detestation for a people move you not to be equitable; be equitable -- that is nearer to godfearing. And fear God; surely God is aware of the things you do.

(Quran 5:8). Another is the necessity of doing good by struggling against oppression and helping those who are in need. A third such value is that all humans are God's creation, have sacred lives, and thus are all equal (7:11). Islam grants no special privileges based on race, ethnicity, or tribal affiliation. Moreover, all Muslims are to respect and preserve human life (5:32). Islam also calls for the quest for peace, which is a state of physical, mental, spiritual, and social harmony (5:64). Other verses stress the importance of tolerance and kindness to other people (16:90). Looking at the life of the Prophet, one notes his use of nonviolent methods to resist those who persecuted him; the Prophet never resorted to violence or force. Peace making and negotiation are considered more effective than aggression and violent confrontation. In fact, the Arabic meaning of the word Islam itself connotes peace. Another virtue in Islam is forgiveness (23:96). Muslims are urged to live in harmony and peace with all fellow humans.

The promise of Muhammad (S)

In Makatib al-Rasoul, by Ahmadi Miyanaji⁹, a letter is narrated from the holy prophet of Islam (s) the (Nestorian) Christians of Najaran. This letter

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⁹ Makatib al-Rasoul (Makātīb al-Rasūl) is a book by Ayatollah Ahmadi Miyanaji consisting the letters and written documents ascribed to the Holy Prophet (s). Apparently, the idea for such a book came to the

which verbalized by Prophet Muhammad (s) and is written down by Imam Ali (a)¹⁰ in the month of Muharram, in the year 624 (A.D. or the 3rd year A.H.) contains very important notions. The letter is as follow:

In the Name of God, the Compassionate the Merciful. This is a covenant from Muhammad bin Abdullah, the Messenger of God, to all Christians. I write this letter to be a proof after me indicating that Allah is Almighty and All-Wise. This is a covenant to all Christians in east and west, Arab and non-Arab, known and unknown. Do not break this covenant, or it would be the violation from the covenant of God and mockery to the allegiance of God. If you break it, will be cursed by Him; No difference that you are a governor, a believer or a Muslim. All the rights which belong to me, my people and my relatives, are alike for Christians. They are my citizens and "the people of the dhimma¹⁴".we prohibit any kind of bothering and annoying them... no bishop is enforced to discard his Episcopal position, no monk is needed to abandon his position. Those who are in Monastery can stay there and those who are in trip can come back. No church and no business place of the Christian must be destroyed and no property (confiscated) or use in building the mosques, if one violate it, had certainly broken God's covenant and stood against the holy Prophet (s); we do not want any ransom (*Jeziyah*) or reparation from monks and bishops. Wherever they are, are under my support. In desert or faraway land, in east or west, in north or south, they are under my covenant and promise and all devils is away from them. Anyone from them who are in mountains or holy places worshiping God are under my support. There is no tax or *Zakat* for their crops and harvests... do not dispute them but with good polemics.... Whoever violates this covenant and acts against

author's mind as he was amending a book by al-Fayd al-Kashani, known as Ma'adin al-hikma fi makatib al-a'imma.

it undoubtedly has violated the covenant of God and His prophet...till when this world is alive must not violate it till the end of the world.

In Sunnite narrations the letter is as follows, having many things in common with the Shi'ite version:

According to the Sunnites narration, the same letter is narrated by the name of "the Promise to St. Catherine". In 628 AD, a delegation from St. Catherine's Monastery came to Prophet Muhammad (s) and requested his protection. He responded by granting them a charter of rights, which I reproduce below in its entirety. St. Catherine's Monastery is located at the foot of Mt. Sinai and is the world's oldest monastery. It possesses a huge collection of Christian manuscripts, second only to the Vatican, and is a world heritage site. It also boasts the oldest collection of Christian icons. It is a treasure house of Christian history that has remained safe for 1400 years under Muslim protection:

The Promise to St. Catherine:

"This is a message from Muhammad ibn Abdullah, as a covenant to those who adopt Christianity, near and far, we are with them. Verily I, the servants, the helpers, and my followers defend them, because Christians are my citizens; and by Allah! I hold out against anything that displeases them. No compulsion is to be on them. Neither are their judges to be removed from their jobs nor their monks from their monasteries. No one is to destroy a house of their religion, to damage it, or to carry anything from it to the Muslims' houses. Should anyone take any of these, he would spoil God's covenant and disobey His

Prophet. Verily, they are my allies and have my secure charter against all that they hate. No one is to force them to travel or to oblige them to fight. The Muslims are to fight for them. If a female Christian is married to a Muslim, it is not to

[®] The first infallible Imam of Shi'a Muslims and the fourth caliph in Sunnites perspective.

take place without her approval. She is not to be prevented from visiting her church to pray. Their churches are to be respected. They are neither to be prevented from repairing them nor the sacredness of their covenants. No one of the nation (Muslims) is to disobey the covenant till the Last Day (end of the world)."

This letter, which also famous for being as the "Peace Manifestation of Muslims" clearly shows the guidelines and it show that the prophet issued the letter as if predicting today clashes done against Christian by the name of religion and Islam. Moreover, the first and the final sentences of these two letters are critically important. They make the promise eternal and universal. Muhammad (s) asserts that Muslims are with Christians near and far straight away rejecting any future attempts to limit the promise to St. Catherine alone. By ordering Muslims to obey it until the Day of Judgment the charter again undermines any future attempts to revoke the privileges. These rights are inalienable. Muhammad (s) declared Christians, all of them, as his allies and he equated ill treatment of Christians with violating God's covenant.

A remarkable aspect of the charter is that it imposes no conditions on Christians for enjoying its privileges. It is enough that they are Christians. They are not required to alter their beliefs, they do not have to make any payments and they do not have any obligations. This is a charter of rights without any duties!

The document is not a modern human rights treaty but even though it was penned in 628 A.D. it clearly protects the right to property, freedom of religion, freedom of work, and security of the person.

Human Unity on the Basis of Sublime Spirituality

Human being has three types of unity: National unity, religious unity and humane unity. The best type of unity is the humane unity which itself is based on Fitrah (Human Nature) which is intrinsic spirituality.

God, the Almighty, has given man intellect and made him a creature that thinks and differentiates between good and evil. He shows him what is the best and what is the worst and what is the most desirable and what is the most disliked among deeds. Man indeed knows that injustice, lying and tormenting others are hateful while justice, truthfulness and being benevolent are good. His ability to think makes him distinct from animals; to love good, praiseworthy and moral behavior and dislike bad and immoral conduct.

We believe that all divine religions including Islam which is monotheistic and Abrahamic religion, teaches us that whatever is humanistic and based on *Fitrah* (Human nature), is also religious and whatever is religious in total congruity with *Fitrah* and humanity. And based on all the mentioned points, The Holy Qur'an aptly and precisely describes and praises such people by saying: *وَأَكْثَرُهُمْ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ* "And most surely you conform (yourself) to sublime morality." (68:4). One of the best ways to convey this message is also interreligious and intercultural dialogue which paves the way toward human unity.

What is Religious based Global Ethics

It will not make the specific ethics of the different religions and philosophies superfluous; it would be ridiculous to consider Global Ethic as a substitute for the Torah, the Sermon on the Mount, the Qur'an, the Bhagavad-Gita, and the Discourses of the Buddha or the Sayings of Confucius. By a global ethic we do not mean a global ideology or a single unified religion beyond all existing religions, and certainly not the domination of one

religion over all others. By a global ethic we mean a fundamental consensus on binding values, irrevocable standards, and personal attitude.

4- Ethics in Christian Perspective

4-1 Christian Golden and Silver Rule ("Do unto others")

In Christianity there is one rule which is called Golden Rule: -Love the Lord thy God and Love thy neighbor as thyself?. Leviticus 19:18 represents but one of several versions of the Golden Rule. The following verses are included in this rule which has founded the basis for interfaith dialogue in Christian perspective. The Golden Rule or ethic of reciprocity is a maxim, ethical code, or morality that essentially states either of the following:

‡Golden Rule: One should treat others as one would like others to treat oneself.[1]

‡Silver Rule: One should not treat others in ways that one would not like to be treated.

This concept describes a "reciprocal", or "two-way", relationship between one's self and others that involves both sides equally, and in a mutual fashion.

This concept can be explained from the perspective of psychology, philosophy, sociology, and religion. Psychologically, it involves a person empathizing with others. Philosophically, it involves a person perceiving their neighbor as also "an I" or "self." Sociologically, this principle is applicable between individuals, between groups, and also between individuals and groups. (For example, a person living by this rule treats all people with consideration, not just members of his or her in-group). Religion is an integral part of the history of this concept.

According to the Biblical verses, loving God, the Almighty, and loving the neighbors are the signs of having faith; neighbors, according to Christian interpreters is not necessarily the physical one, rather, it is generalized to the neighbor in faith

humanity and dignity. Accordingly, these verses from different versions of Gospel denotes to the fact of interfaith dialogue.

Dr.Terry Nichols' declaration

Professor Dr.Terry Nichols, the head of Muslim Christian Dialogue Center (MCDC) in St. Thomas Catholic University in Minnesota, in a conferencevi

coordinated by him and me, on behalf of al-Mustafa International University and cooperating with Muslim Christian Interfaith Dialogue association (MCID)vii, in a lecture stated as very important points in regard with MCID asfollow:

This is my own view also, yet I would go one step further. In a world besieged by atheism, materialism, secularism, nationalism, militarism, and a host of other idolatries, I would foresee a time when we, Christians and Muslims, Muslims and Christians, would witness together to the sovereignty of the one true God, the Creator of heaven and earth, the judge of human kind on the Last day, the Lord to whom we will all return. As the Qur'an puts it, in a beautiful verse, -If God had so willed, he could surely have made you all one community. But his purposes required that he test you by means of what he has given you. So vie with one another in doing good works. To Allah shall you all return, and he will inform you about that which you used to differ.? (Qur'an 5:48)

The greatest enemy of religion in our day, and the greatest cause of Godlessness, is the strife between religious believers, not only between religions, but within the religions themselves. One does not need to read far in the works of the so-called 'new atheism', like Richard Dawkins' The God Delusion, to realize that while much of their atheism is rooted scientific materialism and naturalism, much of it also is a reaction to the violence and strife among religions people. I have often thought, and sometimes said, that if I were Satan, and wanted to destroy the worship of the true God on earth, I would set religious believers against one another. Divide and Conquer: it always seems to work. But this is not the will of God. God's will. Which will one day triumph, is that all true believers in God love each other and work together in common witness to God's lordship. This is the ultimate aim of interreligious dialogue, and in this we ought to be confident that we are indeed doing the will of the one God whom we worship in common.

Some Qur'anic Verses on Communal Peace

According to the main teachings of Islam and Qur'an, freedom of religion, equality, justice, rationality, being pious and loving other humanbeings are

mentioned in the verses of Qur'an which I bring some of them which all need contemplation.

- you who believe! Enter into peace and all and do not follow the footsteps of Satan surely he is your open enemy **(2:208)**

- When Allah said," O Jesus, I shall take your soul, and I shall raise you up toward Myself, and I shall clear you of] the calumnies of [the faithless, and I shall set those who follow you above the faithless until the Day of Resurrection. Then to Me will be your return, whereat I will judge between you concerning that about which you used to differ **(3:55)**

- Had not Allah repulsed the people from one another, ruin would have befallen the monasteries, churches, synagogues and mosques in which Allah's Name is mentioned greatly. Allah will surely help those who help Him. Indeed Allah is all-strong, all-mighty **(22:40)**

- Say," We have faith in Allah, and in what has been sent down to us, and what was sent down to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob and the Tribes, and that which Moses and Jesus were given, and the prophets, from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and to Him do we submit**(3:84)**

- The Messenger believes in what has been sent down to him from his Lord, and [so do] believers; everyone believes in God and His angels, His books and His messengers. We do not differentiate between any of His messengers. They say:" we have heard and obey; [we beg]Your pardon, our Lord! Toward You lies the Goal!

- Indeed the faithful, the Jews, the Christians, and the Sabaeans those of them who have faith in Allah and the Last Day and act righteously they shall have their reward near their Lord, and they will have no fear, nor will they grieve **(2:62)**

- mankind! Indeed We created you from a male and a female, and made you nations and tribes that you may identify yourselves with

one another. Indeed the noblest of you in the sight of Allah is the most God wary among you. Indeed Allah is all-knowing, all-aware. **(49:13)**

•Muslims! Be ever steadfast in upholding equity without partiality, bearing witness to the truth for the sake of ALLAH, even though it is against your own selves or your parents and kinsfolk. Whether the person concerned is rich or poor, ALLAH's claim takes precedence over both the cases. Do not follow personal inclination, lest you not be just. And if you will try to distort or refuse to testify, indeed ALLAH is aware of all that you do!” **(4:135)**

•“For you, your religion, and for me, my religion.” **(109:6)**

•“There must not be any compulsion in religion.....” **(2:256)**

•“O Muslims! Stand out firmly in your devotion to ALLAH as witness to fair dealing, and let not the ill will of anyone lead you into the sin of deviating from justice. Be just and impartial: this is closest to being God-conscious. And remain conscious of ALLAH: verily, ALLAH is aware of all that you do.” **(5:8)**

•“O You who believe! Enter absolutely into peace (Islam). Do not follow in the footsteps of satan. He is an outright enemy to you.” **(2, 208)**

•“You cannot guide those you would like to but God guides those He wills. He has best knowledge of the guided.” **(28: 56)**

For more elaborations and more verses, refer to my following article: “Islamic Approaches for Developing Muslim-Christian Interfaith Dialogue and Communications”

Conclusion

Referring to the very time of the emergence of Islam, we see it vividly that the invitation toward the new religion by the Holy Prophet of Islam and His Infallible *Ahlulbayt* (Prophet Muhammad’s Progeny-PBUT), had never been resorted to any kind of force, violence or any other type of uncivilized

matters, rather, scientific discussions, negotiations and agreements were the only prescribed way toward dealing with non-Muslims. Following this method, during the history, many Shi'a scholars had taken the way of dialogue as the only constructive method for establishment of peace and justice and history shows as well that the most constructive and influential services to the religiosity had always done by the peace makers and the people of dialogue. Believers and religious communities, based on their faith in God, have a specific role to play in society, on an equal footing with other citizens; moreover, Believers are called to cooperate in the search for common good, on the basis of a sound relation between faith and reason; It is necessary for Christians and Muslims as well as all believers and persons of good will, to cooperate in answering modern challenges, promoting moral values, justice and peace and protecting the family, environment and natural resources. Faith, by its very nature, requires freedom. Therefore, religious freedom, as a right inherent to human dignity, must always be respected by individuals, social actors and the State. The cultural and historical background of each society which is not in contradiction with human dignity should be taken into consideration in applying this fundamental principle. Besides, Religion has an inherent social dimension that the State has the obligation to respect; therefore, also in the interest of society, it cannot be confined to private sphere;

Qur'an, as mentioned before, very strongly insist on the unity of the Divine religions, Books and the followers of them. Qur'an proclaims that the origin of the revealed Books and Holy scriptures is one before God, the Almighty and that Origin is called *-Ummol Kitab?* (Mother of the Books) or *Luhe Mahfudh*, namely, the Preserved Tablet which only God and His Messengers are aware of.

...Give good news to My servant (17) who listen to the word(of Allah) and follow the best(sense) [of it. They are the ones whom Allah has guided, and it is they who possess intellect (Qur'an-39:17-18)

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