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ISLAM and OTHER RELIGIONS
Religious Diversity and 'Living Together'

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A 'theory of the other' is but another way of phrasing a 'theory of the self'.

Today, even after nearly five centuries of the rise of secularism in the West, there are more Christian churches in present day Muslim world than there are mosques in all of Western Europe. At the same time, in most of the Islamic world today there is as much freedom of worship for non-Muslims as there is freedom of worship for Muslims in the West not to speak of the much greater influence that minority non-Muslims exercise on Muslim authorities in *Dar al-Islam* than vice-versa.

Muslims have been aware of the existence of other religions since the beginning of Islam, and at the height of Islamic civilization between the eight and fourteenth centuries A.D. much information was brought together about these religions. After the *Fihrist* of *Ibn an-Nadeem* (written 987) the work of scholars like *Ibn Hazm* (d. 1064), *al-Biruni* (d. after 1050), and *as-Shahristani* (d.1153) provides evidence of the relatively high state of knowledge available in medieval Islamic civilization about other religions than Islam. Then, from the fourteenth century onwards, there was a sharp decline of interest in them, and it is only in the last thirty years that books of 'comparative religion' have been written again by Muslim authors. The interest by Muslim scholars in the study of 'other' religions is a natural outcome of Islamic conception of religion. Islam is unique in its conception of religion in that there is one primordial religion which has existed from the beginnings of humanity and is given with man's innate nature (*al-Fıtrah*). The history of the many religions is basically the history of the primordial religion through the prophets from Adam to Muhammad and of the response of the prophets' communities to their warnings and revealed books. The differences between the religions are due not so much to difference in revelation as to specific historical factors and in particular to the different peoples' distortions of their prophets' fundamentally identical teachings.

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I) Truth, Revelation, and Manifestations

The subject of '*Islam and Other Religions*' first requires the question of the relationship between the concepts of *Truth* and *Manifestations* to be addressed.

"— Why", someone asks Nasreddin Hoca[1], "do some people go in one direction and some go another way?". "— Because", replies Hoca, "if we all went in the same direction, the world would lose its balance and topple."

It is not as easy as Hoca's answer when it comes to the question of Truth, Revelation and Manifestations since those are not absolutely equivalent terms. Truth is situated beyond forms, whereas revelation, or the tradition and its manifestations which derive from it, belong to the formal order; but to speak of form is to speak of diversity, and so of plurality. The grounds for the existence and nature of form are: expression, limitation, differentiation. What enters into form, thereby enters into repetition and diversity; the formal principle confers diversity on this repetition (— as far as the Divine Possibility is concerned).

The apparent differences between traditions and manifestations of Truth are like differences of languages and symbol; contradictions are in human receptacles, not in God. If revelations or rather their manifestations, more or less exclude one another, this is so of necessity because God, when He speaks, expresses Himself in absolute mode; but this absoluteness relates to the universal content rather than to the form; it applies to the latter only in a relative sense, because the form is a symbol of the content. It cannot be that God should compare the diverse revelations from outside as might a scholar; He keeps Himself so to speak at the centre of each revelation, as if it were the only one. Revelation speaks an absolute language, because God is absolute, not because the form is; in other words, the absoluteness of the revelation is absolute in itself, but relative qua form.

II) The Religious Other

This understanding of the relationship between truth-substance and Revelation-manifestation emerges from the Qur`anic approach to the 'religious other'. To start with, we can quote a verse from the Qur`an which reflects how Muslims should approach to religious other. It is already known that the Qur`an does not permit Muslims to treat with injustice even such enemies as had committed aggression against them due to religious enmity. We now turn to the category of those non-believers who were not known to have taken any active part in hostilities against Muslims. Referring to them, the believers are told in the Holy Qur`an:

[1] Nasreddin Hoca (Hoca meaning teacher or preacher; pronounced Ho-dja) has been the dominant figure of humor and satire in Turkey since the 13th century. His anecdotes and tales with their unique wisdom still represent the solutions that the collective imaginations of the Turks has brought to bear upon life's diverse and complex problems.

"It may be that Allah will bring about friendship between you and those of them with whom you are now at enmity; and Allah is All-Powerful and Allah is Most Forgiving, Merciful. Allah forbids you not, respecting those who have fought against you on account of your religion, and who have not driven you out of your homes, that you be kind to them and deal equitably with them; surely, Allah loves those who are equitable." (Ch. 60: Al-Mumtahanah: 8-9)

Where did this all started? It was the habit of a certain Muhammad ibn Abdullah to meditate alone for a month at Mount Hira in western Arabia. One night, towards the end of Ramadan, when the seventh century of the Common Era had reached a tenth of its span, the angel Gabriel, tradition relates, disturbed the solitude of this aging Arabian and ordered him to recite some words. These words, held sacred by subsequent Muslim tradition, were destined to transform not only Muhammad's Arabia but indeed the course of universal history.

The message vouchsafed to Muhammad by his supernatural visitor on that fateful night in 610 today retains the loyalty of about a sixth of the human race. The modern disciples of the Arabian Prophet see themselves as inheritors of the Abrahamic tradition. For Muslims, the prophetic tradition effectively begins with Abraham before branching off into the two separate sacred histories of the descendants of Isaac and Ishmael respectively. The former history traces the vicissitudes of the favored House of Israel: a series of Hebrew Patriarchs - including Moses, David and Solomon - culminating in the appearance of Jesus the Messiah in first-century Palestine. The Ishmaelite line finds its terminus in Muhammad - the Gentile messenger who arose among 'the common folk' (Q:62:2). The appearance of the Arabian Prophet is seen by Muslims as the last major event in sacred monotheistic history. His ministry is interpreted as having unified the two branches of sacred lineage, stabilized and completed the Abrahamic religious edifice, and thereby completed God's favour on mankind. The content of Muhammad's preaching was, like that of his prophetic predecessors, uncompromisingly monotheistic. There exists, he told his Meccan detractors, a remarkable being - Allah - who both created and continues to sustain the universe and all that is in it including man. This is what we call TAWHID—Unity. There is a direct relationship between this 'strict monotheism' and the love of God which is the result of His divine justice:

"And indeed we have created man,... and We are nearer to him than his jugular vain." (the Qur'an 50: 16)

" Verily, my Lord is Most Merciful (ar-Raheem), Most Loving (al-Wadood)." (the Qur'an 11: 90, 85;14)

This love of God comes from faith, and that is why the Prophet Muhammad said:

"You will not go to Paradise unless you have the faith, you will not have faith unless you love each other." (the Sahih of al-Bukhari)

It is again this Qur'anic Tawhid that is linked to God's forgiveness:

"Truly its is only associating others with Allah in His Divinity that Allah does not forgive, and forgives anything besides that whomsoever He wills." (the Qur'an 4:116)

a) Where the real conflict lies: the secular world-view and theism

A few significant details apart, the Muslim vision is identical with the vision of Judaism and Christianity, Islam's ethical monotheistic predecessors. As is reminded to us by Dr. Shabbir Akhtar in his *A Faith for All Seasons*[2], this theistic outlook is no longer fashionable in the advanced industrialized communities of the western world and their satellites and colonies. Belief in the existence of a divine being has been identified with extraordinary tenacity from antiquity down to the Age of Reason. Ever since the European Enlightenment, however, it has become a genuine question whether or not belief in the God of the Christians and Jews, and indeed of the Muslims, is intellectually defensible or even morally necessary. Many modern thinkers believe that recent advances in secular scientific and rational thought have exposed much of the monotheistic tradition to be making claims that are embarrassingly fantastic and indeed barely credible, if not wholly false. In effect, the Near eastern religions of revelation are no longer seen as offering a metaphysically plausible world-view for modern enlightened man. The emergence of the New Age movements is also another but relevant part of the story but we do not have space to go into this subject.

Theism is currently facing an unprecedented crisis in urbanized secular society. There has been a mass leakage from the vessel of belief: the Christian communities increasingly face apostasy, and the exodus from strictly Orthodox Judaism is not inconsiderable. I agree here with Shabbir Akhtar when he says that in the case of Islam, although the number of defiantly orthodox exceptions remains surprisingly large, the secular attitudes that inform modern intellectual and popular culture have certainly influenced many members of the sizable Muslim communities now settled and found mostly a safer haven in western societies.

b) Secularity in the realm of Islam

In contemporary Muslim societies, despite the phenomenon of what we can term a large-scale Islamic Resurgence, secularity is becoming more and more pronounced even in the most traditional Muslim countries. Once secularity, as a specific matrix for intellectual and popular culture, becomes prevalent, however, it affects all religion: it threatens to plunge transcendent religion itself into crisis. Thus, Kenneth Cragg, one of the few ablest Christian scholars on Islam, is surely right to counsel religious believers that

[2] Shabbir Akhtar (1991) *A Faith for All Seasons*, London: Bellew Publications, p. 11.

"—wherever its incidence may strongly fall, the burden of the secular condition is with us all."[3]

Secularity rejects the very category of the 'transcendent' (muta'aal) as illusory. From militant humanism to atheist secularism, secularity is not some isolated heresy invented by western intellectuals seeking to tear themselves away from their traditional Christian roots; it is rather a challenge to monotheistic conviction as a whole, indeed to all transcendent religion. It is true of course that historically the challenge was first formulated in western Christian lands and remains to this day directed in the first instance largely towards Christians. But, although Professor Ernest Gellner, an eminent Jewish scholar rightly said that *'Islam in contemporary society is the most markedly secularization-resistant'*, the flood of secularity could and in fact partly did engulf Muslims too. It would therefore be wise to take seriously the warning of some sympathetic critics of Muslims. Thus the Rev. Don Cupitt is surely right in his assessment of the dangers of secularity for all faiths including Islam. Cupitt warns:

"—The slow process of secularization, the impact of science and then of biblical and historical criticism, the shift to an ever more man-centered, outlook, the encounter with other faiths, and then finally the awesome and still incomplete transition to modernity - all this makes up a story which for Christians has extended over some three or four centuries. There are people in other traditions, and most notably in Islam, who say that the story is a purely Christian one that reflects only Christianity's weakness in controlling developments in its own culture and its failure to resist the corrosive effects of skepticism. They flatter themselves that they will be able to escape the fate that has overtaken Christianity. They are, I fear, mistaken."[4]

Shabbir Akhtar asks the right question here in his *A Faith for All Seasons*, "Can Muslims, then, honestly believe that secularity is only someone else's problem? Now then the question is this: Would it not be sensible therefore for all members of the so-called western faiths — Judaism, her offspring Christianity, and Islam— to put up a united intellectual front against the 'canonized western secularity'?" Would it not be wise to become partners in adversity, to tread the same path, if only for this part of the journey? I think the question or rather the tone of the question itself gives the answer, and places the current discussion in its all-important context. In the words of Prof. S. Hussain Nasr, the understanding of how the "kingdom of man" came to replace the "kingdom of God" in the West is a matter of the greatest import for all future religious dialogue between Islam and the other.[5]

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[3] Cragg, K. (1985) *Jesus and the Muslim: An Exploration*, London: Allen and Unwin, p.296.
[4] Don Cupitt (1984) *The Sea of Faith : Christianity in Change*, London: BBC, paperback 1985, p.7.
[5] S.H. Nasr (1998) *"Islamic-Christian Dialogue –Problems and Obstacles to Be Pondered and Overcome"*, The Muslim World, v.88, No: 3-4, p. 226.

III) Islam and Other Religions

Islam is not at all disturbed theologically by the presence of other religions. The existence of other traditions is taken for granted, and in fact Islam is based on the concept of the universality of revelation. The Qur'an among all sacred scripture is the one that speaks the most universal language in this context: '*And for every nation there is a messenger*'(10:47) "*wa likulli Ummatin rasoolin...*" and Muslims believe in the existence of a large number of prophets sent to every people. In the Qur'an although generally only the Abrahamic tradition has been considered, the principle of the universality of revelation applies to all nations, and Muslims applied it outside the Abrahamic family when faced with Zorastrianism in Persia and Hinduism in India. The spiritual anthropology depicted in the Qur'an makes of prophecy a necessary element of the human condition. According to Islam, man is truly a man only by virtue of his participation in a tradition which is shaped by revelation. Adam was also the first prophet. Man did not evolve from polytheism to monotheism.[6] He began as a monotheist and has to be gradually reminded of the original message of unity which he is ever in danger of forgetting. This is how Islamic revelations see the history of revelation.

Human history consists of cycles of prophecy, with each new prophecy beginning a new cycle of humanity. Islam considers itself to be the reassertion of the original religion, of the doctrine of Unity. That is why Islam in the Qur'an is called the primordial religion (*Deen al-Haneef*); it comes at the end of this human cycle to reassert the essential truth of the primordial tradition. It is thus like the *sanatana dharma* of Hinduism, and on the metaphysical plane has a profound affinity with this tradition. Some of the most authoritative Muslim scholars of the sub-continent called the Hindus *'ahl-al-kitab'* (which, in practice, means that they were allowed to pay jizya -the tax for the protected non-Muslim population-, and were tolerated in their 'idolatrous' practice), belonging to the chain of prophets preceding Islam and beginning with Adam. They even agreed to accord the status of *ahl al-dhimma* to all non-Muslims with the exception of apostates (*murtadds*). For example, the point of view of the Hanafis and the Malikis, which is of particular importance for us because the Hanafi madhhab (school of law) came to be predominant in India, is that these two schools of law differentiate between the idolators (*mushriks*) with regard to their origin. Jizya may not be accepted from Arab idolators; these must become Muslims or be killed. As for the idolators who are not Arabs ('ajam), they may pay be allowed to pay jizya and, consequently, retain their religious beliefs. Malik b. Anas is reported to have said that jizya may be accepted from "(*the then*) faithless Turks and Indians" (*man la dina lahu min ajnas al-turk wa al-hind*) and that their status is similar to that of Zorostrians (*hukmuhum hukmu al-majus*). Abu Hanifa is

[6] This is in itself an important subject to deal with separately in that the theories (Tylor, Frazer, Durkheim) of the early 20th century on the 'origin' of religion, and the so-called 'evolution of religion from polytheism to monotheism' are as dead as mutton, and today are chiefly of interest as specimens of the thought of their time. (see, E.E.Evans-Pritchard's *Theories of Primitive Religion*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961) These theories are no longer sustained by either ethnography or history. Essentially there is much to be said in favor of the monotheistic origins of religion from anthropological and ethnographical perspectives.

reported to have adopted the same view.[7] The exception made regarding the Arab idolators was hardly of any practical importance, as no such people were in existence after the early Islamic conquests. There are also traditions according to which Malik was willing to accept jizya from all non-Muslims regardless of their racial origins, excluding the apostates only.[8] So the inclusion of Hindus and of the other idolators in the category of ahl al-dhimma constitutes the final stage in the gradual expansion of the concept, which originally involved Jews and Christians only. It was soon extended to the Zorostrians and finally came to denote practically all unbelievers living under Muslim rule. In the case of Hindusim, al-Biruni helps us to understand why possibly Muslim scholars accorded the status of *dhimmi* to them. He says in his famous *Kitabu't-Tahqiq ma li'l-Hind* that there is a difference between the common people and those who march on the path of liberation, or those who study philosophy and theology, and who desire abstract truth which they call *(sam)sara.* According to al-Biruni, the latter are entirely free from worshipping anything but God alone, and would never dream of worshipping an image manufactured to represent Him. He makes it clear that whatever absurd Hindu beliefs he is about to recount in his book, they belong to the common people only.[9] Muslims have always had an innate feeling and belief of possessing in their purest form the doctrines that all religions have come to proclaim before.

Islam has a long experience of encounter with other 'revelations'. Through its own arts and sciences and intellectual perspectives, through its own schools of theology (*Kalâm*), philosophy (*falâsifah*) and theosophy (*hikmah*), through its own historians, scholars, and travellers, through all of these channels Islam has encountered other religions, and the profoundity of the encounter has depended each time on the perspective in question.

If we exclude the modern period with its rapid means of communication, it can be said with safety that Islam in its past 14 centuries has had more contact with other traditions than any other of the world religions. It encountered Christianity and Judaism in its cradle and during its first expansion northward. It met the Iranian religions, both Zoroastrianism and Manichaeism, in the Sassanid Empire. It gradually absorbed small communities in which remnants of late Hellenistic cults continued, especially the Sabaean community of Harran which considered itself the heir to the most esoteric aspect of the Greek tradition. It met Buddhism in north-west Persia, Afghanistan, and Central Asia, and Hinduism in Sind and later in many parts of the Indian sub-continent. There was even contact with Mongolian and Siberian Shamanism on the popular level, mostly through the Turkish tribes who

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[7] Al-Tabari, *Ikhtilaf al-Fuqaha'*, ed. Schacht, Leiden, 1933, p. 200; Abu Yusuf, *Kitab al-Haraj*, Cairo, 1352, pp.128-129 (and pp. 201-215, in *Kitabü'l-Haraç* trans. by Ali Özek, İstanbul, 1970); al-Sarakhsi, *Sharh Kitab al-Siyar al-Kabir,* Cairo 1957, vol. I, p.189; al-Sarakhsi, Kitabu'l-Mabsût, v.10, p.119, Beirut: Dar al-Ma'rifah, 1978(1938); Abd al-Karim Zaydan, *Ahkam al-Dhimmiyyin wa al-Musta'miniin*, Baghdad, 1963, pp. 25-28.

[8] Al-Qurtubi, *al-Jami' li-Ahkam al-Qur'an*, Cairo, 1939, vol. VIII, p.110; Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir al-Qur'an*, vol. II, p. 347, 11. 21-22.

[9] Al-Biruni, *Tahqiq ma li'l-Hind min maqula maqbula fi al-'aql aw mardhula*, Hyderabad, Deccan, 1958, p. 85.

had followed Shamanism before their conversion to Islam. Moreover the Muslims of Sinkiang were in direct contact with the tradition.

In fact, of all the important religious traditions of Asia —putting aside Shintoism which was limited to Japan— there is none with which Muslims have had no early intellectual contact, except may be for the Chinese tradition with which contact on a religious and intellectual level by the main part of the Muslim world happened only after the Mongol invasion. As for the Chinese Muslim Community, it remained more or less separated from its coreligionists further West so that its knowledge of the Chinese tradition was not generally shared. Only an occasional traveller like Ibn Battutah provided the Muslim intelligentsia with a knowledge of things Chinese. Yet even with regard to the Chinese tradition the Muslims preserved a sense of respect. The prophetic hadith 'Seek knowledge, even in China' was known by all and some Persian Sufis have made specific reference to the Divine origin of the Chinese tradition. Farid al-Din Attar in his *Mantiq al-Tayr*[10] is an example of this. He speaks of the *Simurgh* who symbolizes the Divine Essence and his feather which symbolizes divine revelation.

a) Judaism and Christianity

The encounter of Islam with the Judaeo-Christian tradition has persisted throughout nearly fourteen centuries of the history of Islam. Islam considers itself as the final affirmation of the Abrahamic tradition of which Judaism and Christianity are the two earlier manifestations. Similarities between these three manifestations do not come from a historical inter-religious borrowing as some orientalists and Jewish scholars have sought to show, but they come only from the common transcendent archetype of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. As Islamologist Fredercik Denny reminds the non-Muslim reader, Islam is not some kind of by-product of Arabian Judaism; that kind of thinking is no longer relevant or sound.[11]

Islam's positive approach to 'religious other' was also reflected through an immense literature on other religious traditions written by Muslim scholars from the 8th century onwards. Usually most of the early Muslim works on the history of religion (books of *al-Milal wa'l-Nihal*) contain chapters devoted to Judaism and Christianity, some of which like *al-Mughni*[12] (vol. 5) of Qadi 'Abd al-Jabbar are precious documents for present-day knowledge of certain aspects of the eastern Church and of the eastern Christian communities. The figures of Moses and Christ appear in nearly every Muslim religious work. Nearly every major experience undergone by these prophets, such as the vision of the burning bush by Moses, or

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[10] Farid al-Din Attar (published in English 1984) *Conference of the Birds* (*Mantiq al-Tayr*), London: Penguin.

[11] Frederick Denny in his Preface to *G.D. Newby (1988) A History of the Jews of Arabia, Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, p.x.*

[12] I would like to thank my colleague Yrd. Doç. Dr. Cağfer Karadaş (*Kalâm*) for bringing this particular volume of al-Mughni to my attention. I was only familiar with Qadi 'Abd al-Jabbar's *Tathbît Dalâ'il Nubuwwat Sayyidinâ Muhammad* for it refers to *Jewish Christian* tradition which was the topic of my doctoral research. Dr. Karadaş has reviewed the volume 5 of *al-Mughni* in a brief but useful essay in the Bulletin of *Bilim ve Sanat Vakfı*, September&October 1992, pp. 46-47.

Christ's miracle of raising the dead to life, are mentioned with full respect as part of the divine plan in most of the classical Muslim works on the history of religions.[13] Needless to say, all these sources rejected the ideas of divine filiation and incarnation in Christianity, neither of which ideas are in conformity with the Islamic perspective, and occasionally works were written with the express purpose of refuting these doctrines. An outstanding example of a work of this kind is al-Ghazzali's refutation[14] of the divinity of Christ in which, using the text of the Gospels, he argued that Christ was given special permission by God — a permission that is unique among prophets— to use the type of language that he employed concerning his union and filial relationship with God, but that in reality he never attributed divinity to himself as is commonly understood by Christians.... this is what he argued from Islamic perspective.

It must not be thought that contact between Muslims and the Christian and Jewish communities, has been constant over the ages. After the Crusades the bitterness brought about by political events caused the Muslim and Christian communities in the Near East, where their physical contact is closest, to be completely isolated from one another. The same situation is now developing in regard to the relationship between Muslims and Jews in the occupied lands. According to the worldwide Muslim ummah, this tension is the result of Muslims being expelled from their homes, being oppressed, forced to live in tents, deprived of their basic human rights under Jewish occupation in *Palestine.* The main problem that is relevant to our consultation is that if this occupation and persecution is justified by Jews as based on their faith and religion, which seems to be the case, then it means we all have a problem regarding the future of relationship between the members of different faith communities. Because, says Prof. Prior :

> "the rhetoric of the sacral discourse of the achievement of Zionism is undermined by the reality of the catastrophe for the indigenous population. The establishment of a Jewish state involved the eviction of the majority of the Palestinians, the destruction of most of their villages and the continual use of force and state terrorism, wars and military operations. The daily humiliation of the indigenous people and the litany of other atrocities casts a dark cloud over the achievement of the ethno-centric dream of nineteenth-century Jewish nationalist colonialists. What is most distressing from a moral and religious perspective is that the major ideological support for Zionist imperialism and the principal obstacle against treating the indigenous people with respect come from religious circles for whom the biblical narratives of land are normative. Already in 1913, the bad behaviour of Zionists towards the Palestinian Muslims made

[13] Ibn Hazm's *KitabFasl fi- al-Milal wa'n-Nihal,* Ibn Nadim's *al-Fihrist.*

[14] Abu Hamid al-Ghazzali, *ar-Raddu'l Jameel li Ilahiyyeti Isa bi Sarihi'il-Inceel,* ed. by M.A. ash-Sharqawee, Cairo: al-Maktabatu z-Zahra, 1990. See also, Prof. Mehmet Aydın's *Müslümanların Hıristiyanlara Karşı Yazdığı Reddiyeler* on the question of the attribution of this *Raddiyah* to al-Ghazzali.

> Ahad Ha'am fear for the future if Jews ever come to power: 'If this be the "Messiah": I do not wish to see his coming'"[15]

Yet in other parts of the Muslim world where socio-political events did not bring about lasting friction, study of both Christianity and Judaism continued, often with much sympathy, and there have been occasional contacts of a theological and spiritual order between these various communities.

Islam's relation to other religions has been both ideational and practical, that's to say, linking the worldview of Islam, its view of God, of reality, of man, of the world and history to the other religions. Islam's approach to other revelations provides a modus vivendi for Muslims and adherents of other religions to live and work together, but each group according to the values and precepts of its own faith.[16] In the case of Judaism, Christianity, and Sabaeanism, the relation was crystallized first by God through direct revelation (the Qur'an 2:62), then by the Prophet Muhammad (pbuH) himself working under divine authority provided by revelation. In that of Zoroastrianism, the same relation was extended by the Prophet's companions-ashaab (raa) three years after his death (13 A.H./ 635 A.C.) when Persia was conquered and brought into the fold of Islam. As for Hinduism and Buddhism, the same extension took place following the conquest of the lower region of the Indus Valley in 91 A.H./711 A.C. In all of these cases, Islam has maintained a long history of cooperative interaction with the other religions under the category of the People of the Book: fourteen centuries long with religions of the Near East; and thirteen centuries long with those of India. Therefore when we speak of Islam's approach or relation to other revelations, we need to remember this historical experience of Islam. It has developed an ideational base for that interaction which is constitutive of the religious experience of Islam, and is hence as old as Islam itself.

So what is the point about all this summary of intellectual and cultural encounter of Islam with other religions? The point is simply that Islam sees, for example, Judaism and Christianity not as "other views" that it has to tolerate, but as standing de jure as truly revealed religions from God. Although Islam's view is that rather than a factual history of the founders, all that we have is, whether in the case of the Hebrew prophets or of Jesus, simply a representation by later adherents that, for a number of reasons, only happened to become normative, the legitimate status of Jewish revelation and Christian revelation as neither socio-political, nor cultural or civilisational but religious, are ultimately recognised as revelations from God. But Muslims know that Islam is not recognised by Jews and by most of the Christians as a revelation from God... The honour in which Islam regards Judaism and Christianity, their founders and scripture, is not courtesy, but acknowledgement of religious truth, it is in the Qur'an. I do not know any other religion in the world that has yet made belief in the truth of other religions a necessary condition of its own faith and witness. As far as Judaism and Christianity are concerned, Islam accords to

[15] Michael Prior, 1997, *The Bible and Colonialism*, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, p. 172-3

[16] One cannot help but notice that today in contemporary Western society a handful of sincere and honest intellectuals and 'men of God' struggle against what is commonly referred as '*Islamophobia*' in Western society.

these two religions special status. First, each of them is the religion of God, and their adherents are the People of the Book. Their founders on earth, Abraham, Moses, David, Jesus, are the prophets of God. What they have conveyed — the Torah, the Psalms, the Evangels— are revelations from God. To believe in these prophets, in the revelations they have brought, is integral to the very faith of Islam. To disbelieve in them —nay, to discriminate between them— is blasphemy. "Our Lord and your Lord is indeed God, the One and Only God" (20:88, 29:46, 42:15) God described His Prophet Muhammad and his followers as "believing all that has been revealed from God;" as "believing in God, in His angels, in His revelations and Prophets;" as "not-distinguishing between the Prophets of God."(2:285).[17] Consistently Islam pursues this acknowledgment of religious truth in Judaism and Christianity to its logical conclusion, namely, self-identification with the truth that was sent them in terms of '*Abrahamic line*'.[18] Identity of God, the source of revelation in the three religions, necessarily leads to identity of the revelations and of the religions in their essence. Islam sees itself as reaffirmation of the same truth presented by all the preceding prophets of Judaism and Christianity.[19] In the light of this explanation we can say that evidently Islam has given the maximum that can ever be given to another religion. It has acknowledged as true the other religions' prophets and founders, its scripture and teaching. Islam has declared its God and the God of that religion as One and the same. Hence, believe Muslims, there is a series

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[17] Addressing to Jews and Christians who object to this self-identification and claim an exclusivist monopoly on the prophets, the Qur'an says: "*You claim that Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob and their tribes were Jews and Christians (and God claims otherwise). Would you claim knowledge in these matters superior to God's?*"(2:140*)* Another verse "*Say[Muhammad], 'we believe in God, in what has been revealed by Him to us, what has been revealed to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, the tribes; in what has been conveyed to Moses, to Jesus and all the prophets from their Lord.' *"(3:84). Another verse " *It is God indeed, the living and eternal One, that revealed to you Muhammad the Book confirming the Evangels as His guidance to mankind.....* " (3:2-4) Another verse " *Those who believe [in you, Muhammad], the Jews, the Christians or the Sabaeans—all those who believe in God and in the Day of Judgment, and have done the good works, will receive their due reward from God. They have no cause to fear, nor will they grieve.* " (5:69)

[18] Islam regards Judaism and Christianity as religions of God, and it differentiates them from their historical forms present in the faiths of this Christian or that Jew. The Muslim is very careful here. He does not attribute any falsehood or deficiency to Judaism or Christianity as such, but to their manifestations and applications. It is legitimate to criticize actual people: this or that Jew for failing to live by the revelation that came to Moses, or this or that Christian for failing to live by the revelation that came to Jesus, or this and that Muslim for failing to live by the revelation came to Muhammad.

[19] In the Qur'an, the Christians are exalted for their asceticism and humility, and they are declared the closest of all believers to the Muslims. " *Truly among the people of the book* (Jews and Christians) *are those who believe in God and what was sent down to you and what was sent down to them, submissive before God. They do not sell the verses of God for a small price. For them is their reward near their Lord. Surely God is quick to reckon.* " (3:199) "*O Muhammad, you and the believers will find closest in love and friendship those who say 'We are Christians' for among them are ministers and priests who are truly humble.* " (5:82) If, despite all this commendation of them, of their prophets , of their scriptures, Jews and Christians persist in opposing and rejecting the Prophet Muhammad and His followers, then God commanded all Muslims to call the Jews and Christians in these words: "*—O People of the Book, come now with us to rally around a fair and noble principle common to both of us, that all of us shall worship and serve none but God, that we shall associate none with Him, that we shall not take one another as lords besides God. But if they still persist in their opposition, then say to them that 'We Muslims will not give up our faith-in our affirmation.*"(3:63-64) " *O Ye who believe! Choose not your fathers nor your brethern for friends if they take pleasure in disbelief rather than faith. Whoso of you take them for friends, such are wrongdoers.* " (9:23)

of prophets who, although they established religions by different names, were in the profoundest sense Muslim. Questioned about its own historical origins, Islam answers that its predecessor was *Hanifiyyah* (tradition of the hanifs), with which it even identified itself (Qur`ân, 10;105, 2:135). That is why the Qur`ân refers to Abraham as musliman hanîfan, that is, Muslim and **follower of the primordial religion-religio naturalis**, although he lived millennia before the Prophet of Islam and the advent of the Qur`ânic revelation. *'Hanif'* is a Qur`ânic category, and Islam does not see itself as coming to the religious scene *ex nihilo* but as reaffirmation of the same truth presented by all the preceding prophets of Judaism and Christianity. Different manifestations of the same ultimate truth in different times of humanity. Islam has called the central religious tradition of the Semitic peoples "*Hanifism*" and identified itself with it as the last manifestation of it. Abraham as a 'hanif' is Muslim in person: trusting surrender to the will of God. Abraham may be the beginning of all prophecy; through his son Ishmael Muhammad is its 'seal'. Not only the Hebrew Bible made significant statements about Ishmael both biographical and also theological, even St.Augustine had mentioned the promise of God through Ishmael in *the City of God* (I will make the son of the maidservant a great people'; Gen.21,13). And yet Islam, believes Muslims, teaches that the Qur`ân of the Prophet cannot simply be replaced with Abraham. Though the Qur`ân may not contain anything other than the religion of Abraham, this book is nevertheless necessary to make this religion of Abraham concrete for a new faith community against all deviations from this original religion, and its instructions for concrete life are indispensable.

If, after all this, differences persist, Islam holds them to be of no consequences here in our worldly life, sure it is God who will judge these differences in the Hereafter. Such differences must be not substantial. They can be surmounted and resolved through more knowledge, goodwill and wisdom. Islam treats them as domestic disputes within one and the same religious family. And as long as we all recognize that Allah/God with His Mercy (ar-Raheem) and Love (al-Wadood) and Justice (al-`Adl) alone is Lord to each and every one of us, no difference and no disagreement is beyond solution. Our religious, cultural, social, economic and political differences may all be composed under the principle that God alone is God — not our egos, our passions, or our prejudices under a new name of 'the clash of civilizations'.

There is also much to say about the *historical* nature of the encounter of Islam with Judaism and Christianity. Evil rulers cannot be denied to have existed in the Muslim world any more than in any other religion and culture. Where they existed, Muslims suffered as well as non-Muslims. *However, if here and there in the history one finds occasional attacks and cases of persecution against non-Muslims, it is almost always based not on religious issues but on political and economic factors derived from the fact that local Jews or Christians have often sided with Western ruling powers against the Muslim populations in the past two centuries and today, although a minority, they enjoy much more economic and political power than their numbers would warrant.*[20] This is not an apologetical stance but a historical fact.

[20] One can remember several events in Pakistan, Indonesia, Iran, and Sudan.

Nowhere in Islamic history, however, were non-Muslims singled out for persecution or prosecution.[21] Since the very beginning of Islam, the relationship with non-Muslims took the form of granting them the status of *ahl al-dhimmah* ("the protected people"). Thanks to this, they have enjoyed certain rights which were sancrosanct and inviolable since they had been granted in the name of God and God's Messenger. What is most important, however, is not the actual set of terms and conditions which regulated this relationship in the past (for these terms are of a contractual nature and hence variable within the framework of certain in broad principles), but the spirit which motivated that relationship. A good model was provided by the Holy Prophet himself who had attempted to develop fellowship with the Jews of Medina. This document has come to be known as the "Constitution of Medina"[22], which regulated the relationship among the different elements of the population of the nascent city-state of Medina. Western scholars have spent considerable energy trying to determine the nature of the document, try to prove that it is not authentic. The best summary of this scholarship can be found in Moshe Gil's, a Jewish scholar himself, article, "The Constitution of Medina: A Reconsideration."[23] Gil argues convincingly that for the essential unity and authenticity of the document, citing facts that others had observed previously, that non-Muslims, mainly Jews were included in the ummah (community of peace), that Muhammad under his authority gave freedom to Jews in Medina. The provisions of this document are a good mirror of the attitude of the Holy Prophet — his readiness to welcome fellowship and friendly co-existence with those who did not share with him his religious convictions, yet were prepared not to act with hostility. Later on unfortunately three main Jewish tribes out of seven or eight Jewish tribes which were mentioned in the Medina Document, namely Banu Nadir, Banu Qaynuqa, and Banu Qurayza, abrogated the agreement between them and the Muslims by helping the Quraysh Arabs who were constantly looking for an opportunity to wipe out Muslims. As Gordon Darnell Newby, a scholar of Jewish history, explained in his A History of the Jews of Arabia,

> "that the Jewish tribe of B. Nadir and their chief Salam b. Mishkan made a secret deal with Abu Sufyan one of the leaders of the Quraysh to kill Muslims first through raids and then, if they could, through an open war. B. Nadir helped the Meccans in their Raids attacking and killing Muslims. At about the same time another Jewish tribe B. Qaynuqa also broke the peace agreement, and according to the historical sources a few Jews of the B. Qaynuqa pinned the skirt of a Muslim woman while she was seated in the market of Medina so that when she stood up, her prudendum was exposed. A Muslim who was present fought with the Jew and killed him. The Jews immediately killed the Muslim. The Jews continued their campaign against Muhammad and Muslims, one of their leaders, Ka'ab b. al-Ashraf, who

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[21] Gordon Darnell Newby *(1988) A History of the Jews of Arabia, Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, pp.84-96.*

[22] see, Muhammad Ibn Ishaq, *Sirat RasulAllah*, p. 342, in A. Guillame (trans. And ed.), The *Life of Muhammad,* London, 1955, p.232-3.

[23] Moshe Gil "The Constitution of Medina: A Reconsideration", Israel Oriental Studies 4 (1974): 44-65.

was from B. Nadir, a propaganda campaign against Muhammad, the Muslims, and, in particular, the Muslim women. Poetry served the function of journalism in Arabia, informing, inciting, and molding public opinion. Ka'ab's poetry was intended to be vulgar and insulting Muslim women. Other Jews of B. Nadir, B. Qaynuqa and B. Qurayza supported Ka'ab and this added on the tension between Muslims and B. Nadir Jews. Following these events and two unsuccesful attempts to kill Muhammad which were considered by Muslims as treachery and betrayal, the Jewish tribes of B. Nadir and B. Qaynuqa were expelled from Medina after being allowed to collect their debts and leaving their arms. This was a punishment not because they were Jews but they were treacherous and betrayed against the Medinan people."[24]

As Prof. Newby indicates, it is clear that 'the underlying policy was not anti-Jewish, because Jews remained in the city of Medina and in the territories until after Muhammad's death.'

Jews and Christians lived as not only 'tolerated' but also 'protected (*dhimmi*) communities' throughout the history of Islam during the Abbasid, the Spanish and the Ottoman Islamic periods, with a few exceptional cases under which not only Jews and Christians but Muslims as well were oppressed by 'Muslim' rulers. For example, Spain's history under Islam, as W. T. Arnold tells us in his book Preaching of Islam, appears strikingly free from religious persecution.[25] In fact throughout the Islamic history, 'religious tolerance' has always been the pattern for Jews and Christians under Muslim rule. There have been occasional exceptions to this pattern, like the Almohad Berberi persecution of not only Jews but Muslims too in Spain. The Encyclopedia Judaica tells us that

> "the zealous Almohades (1160) initiated inquisitions which led to persecutions of Muslims and non-Muslims in Africa and Spain... after the Almohads lost their power (1212) the Jews resumed the open practice of their religion ."[26]

Again the same Encyclopedia Judaica refers to this period particularly as 'the Berber conquest' not as 'Islamic invasion' in the relevant articles.[27] A similar situation happened in Fez in Morocco. After these unfortutane individual events during which local Muslim population suffered as well "the community lived in freedom and prosperity.."(ibid.) One also has to remember that for a considerable period in Spain and Morocco there were separate 'Muslim princehoods' which ruled different territories. Hence mainly in Morocco, "during different periods, as well as in different parts of the country, various patterns of relations existed, exhibiting

[24] Gordon Darnell Newby, *A History of the Jews of Arabia*, p.93
[25] T.W. Arnold (1935) *Preaching of Islam: A History of the Propagation of the Muslim* Faith, London: Luzac, p. 234.
[26] "*Almohades*", Encyclopedia Judaica, vol. 2, p. 662-3.
[27] "*Cordoba*", Encyclopedia Judaica, vol. 5, p.963; "*Fez*", Encyclopedia Judaica, vol. 6, p.1256.

different types of co-existence."[28] The above Almohad period in Morocco and Spain was an invasion of Berberi 'Muslims' whose Islam was considered heretical by the then Sunni Muslims, and it was an invasion for Muslims too in Spain which lasted nearly not more than 50 years. Even the data about this Almohad persecution of Jews, as another Jewish scholar Prof. Hirschberg clearly indicates, "shows defects which detract from their value as historical data. They are extremely general and indefinite, replete with poetical flourishes and lacking the precision needed to determine facts."[29] As Marshall Hodgson puts it clearly,

> "The unfortunate wholesale massacres that Christians so often perpetrated against the Jews in their midst were not paralelled in Islamdom. Some persecution occured occasionally even as early as the time of al-Mutawakkil in the High Caliphate, but it usually took place only in later periods, ...Rarely can any substantial amount of conversion to Islam in a broad area be ascribed to direct persecution."[30]

Even an author like A. S. Tritton whose approach to the history of Islam is known to be subjective says in his Conclusion to *The Caliphs and the Their Non-Muslim Subjects* that

> "Jews and Christians were always found in public service, indeed they sometimes held the highest posts."[31]

which could only be possible in a society where there is a religious tolerance and 'protection'. This was a continuous pattern in Islamic history. For example, in the Ottoman Empire,

> "The Christian and Jewish religious authorities had, within their *millet*, exclusive control of worship, schools and the judicial system... Outside the *millet* system the Ottoman sultans were content to respect Qur'anic precepts towards non-Muslims. In their favourable interpretation, these precepts guaranteed that, where the People of the Book were concerned, all compulsion in religion and forced conversions were forbidden."[32]

One can give a long list of examples of Islamic tolerance and protection of the Religious Other, but this pushes the limits of this paper. As far as 'conversions' are concerned, one agrees with Jewish author Nehemia Levtzion in that

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[28] M. Shokeid, *'Jewish Existence in A Berber Environment'* in Jewish Societies in the Middle East ed. by Sholomo Deshen & W. P. Zenner, University Press of America, p. 107.

[29] H. Z. Hirschberg, (1974) *A History of the Jews in North Africa, -translated from Hebrew-*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, vol. I, p.127.

[30] Marshall G. S. Hodgson (1974) *The Venture of Islam*, London: The University of Chicago Press, vol. 2, p.538.

[31] A. S. Tritton (1970) *The Caliphs and the Their Non-Muslim Subjects*, London: Oxford University Press, p.231.

[32] Y. Courbage & P.Fargues (tr. By J. Mabro) (1997) *Christians and Jews Under Islam*, London: I.B. Taurus, p.100.

> " The sharia recognizes the existence of a non-Muslim population within the Muslim state. A military conquest was not, therefore, necessarily followed by widespread conversion. The process of Islamization progressed and matured over decades and centuries largely as a result of the creation of an Islamic ambiance and the development of Muslim religious and communal institutions.....Although it is difficult to assess the relative importance of forced conversions in the general process of Islamization, they seem to have weighed less than is implied in non-Muslim sources and more than is admitted by Muslims "[33]

As we can see even Jewish sources tell us that Jews mostly lived in a relative freedom, if not in 'paradisio', under Islam. The life of the Jews in Islamic history were certainly better off than it is today for Muslims who live under 'Jewish' occupation in Palestine. For example as far as Jewish communities under Islam are concerned, the fact of the matter, as the Jewish scholar S. M. Wasserstrom remindes us that

> " ...Muslims had provided the Jewish community with the social and cultural means to keep on keeping on. As Goitein bluntly declared in another context, "it was Islam which saved the Jewish People." Leo Baeck could not put this case in more direct terms, nor with more direct implications: "The Jewish People incurred a debt of deep gratitude to Arabian culture. This people, for whom gratitude is a commandment from God, must never forget this." And, from the other side of the bargain, the intellectual fruits of Islamic philosophy —Ibn Bajja, al-Farabi, Ibn Tufayl, Ibn Rushd, and many more— were preserved, translated, transmitted, and reverently studied by Jews." [34]

b) Buddhism and Hinduism

Islam based on the Qur`ân and the Tradition of the Prophet dealt with Judaism, Christianity, and Sabaeans in a certain way as 'People of the Book'. Although in the Qur`ân there seems to be no specific reference to Buddhism, or indeed Hinduism for that matter, this category 'People of the Book' was extended to these religions as well Muslim scholars. Even so, from the Islamic point of view the question of understanding and penetrating into religious forms becomes more difficult, and although non-Judaeo-Christian communities may have had received revealed guidance, there seems scarcely any trace of it at the present. This difficulty is brought about not only because of the mythological language of the Indian traditions which is different from the 'abstract' language of Islam, but also because in going from the one tradition to the others one moves from the background of the Abrahamic traditions to a different spiritual climate. Nevertheless Islam has had profound contact with the religions of India on both the formal and metaphysical

[33] Nehemia Levtzion, (ed.), (1979) *Conversion to Islam*, New York: Holmes&Meier, p. 9-11

[34] Steven M. Wasserstrom (1995) *Between Muslim and Jew: The Problem of Symbiosis under Early Islam*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, p. 227.

planes. Already through the Indian sciences which had reached the Muslims both through Pahlavi and directly from Sanskrit, some knowledge had been gained of Indian culture during the early Islamic period. Thanks to the incomparable *Kitabu't-Tahqiq ma li'l-Hind of Biruni* (d.453/d.1061), a work unique in its exactitude of its compilation, that medieval Muslims gained a knowledge of Hinduism, especially the Vishnavite school with which Biruni seems to have been best acquainted.[35] He was also responsible for the translation of the Patanjali Yoga into Arabic, and in fact inaugurated a tradition of contact with Hinduism which, although interrupted by several gaps in time, continued after him. Just approximately 60 years after Biruni another Muslim scholar of comparative religion in the 10th century, al-Shahristani (c. 1076-1153) gives us precise accurate descriptions about Indian traditions concerning the Buddha (al-budd). Prof. Eric Sharpe says

> "The honour of writing the first history of religion in world literature seems in fact to belong to the Muslim Shahrastani, whose Religious Parties and Schools of Philosophy (al-Milal wa'n-Nihal) describes and systematizes all the religions of the then known world, as far as the boundaries of China...".[36]

With respect to the Buddhist path, al-Shahrastani depicts it positively enough; as **'a search for Truth'** inculcating patience, giving, and detachment. This is then followed by a precepts-type listing of 'ten errors that are avoided', and 'ten virtues that are practices', like a version of Buddhism's silas (ethics, precepts) and paramitas ('perfections'). Particularly intriguing is al-Shahrastani's comment that such teachings "can be very near to the teachings of the Islamic spirituality within the Sufi tradition".

CONCLUSION:

(i) Deen al-Fitrah / Primordial Religion

The true religion is innate, a religio naturalis, with which all humans are equipped. Behind the dazzling religious diversity of mankind stands an innate religion (deen al-fitrah) from human nature. This is the primordial religion. This is what one can understand from the Qur'anic approach to religious other and definitions of imaan and kufr. Everyone possesses the innate faith unless acculturation and indoctrination, misguidance, corruption or dissuasion had taught him otherwise. Perhaps this 'innate faith' is what Rudolph Otto meant by "the sense of Numinous".

(ii) Muslims and Other Faiths

One challenging and practical question for the Muslim in understanding the Qur'an is whether or not the Muslim should apply any historical dispute as a model

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[35] For a summary of Biruni's views on Hinduism see A. Jeffery, 'Al-Biruni's Contribution to Comparative Religion', in *Al-Biruni Commemoration Volume, Calcutta, 1951*, pp.125-60; also S.H.Nasr, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines*, Chapter V.

[36] Eric J. Sharpe (1992) *Comparative Religion*, Duckworth: London, p.11.

to any contemporary conflict between religious communities in different parts of the world.

But, on the other hand, the most challenging and direct question for Religious Other (namely Jew, Christian and other) that cannot be avoided is, if s/he wants to convince Muslims that his/her 'inter-faith' intentions are sincere and genuine, is the question 'whether Muhammad is to be recognised as the Messenger of God or not. It is very important to note that Muslims not only recognize but also believe in the prophetic missions of God's Messengers like Moses, and Jesus within a the Qur`anic framework. That is neither a mere courtesy nor a diplomatic gentleness of 'inter-faith' trialogue. It is an integral element in the Islamic faith. Muslims salute those Messengers whenever their names are mentioned.

Karen Armstrong in her A Biography of the Prophet puts the question quite clearly:

> "— If Muslims need to understand our traditions and institutions more thoroughly today, we also need to divest ourselves of some of our old prejudice. Perhaps one place to start is with the figure of Muhammad: .....who had genius of profound order and founded a religion and a cultural tradition .....whose name 'Islam' signifies peace and reconciliation."[37]

Professor Montgomery Watt in his Religious Truth for Our Time also affirms that

> "...— the profound knowledge shown by the Qur'an of many truths about God's being must have come to Muhammad by divine inspiration. This would support Muhammad's own declaration that the Qur`an was not the product of his conscious mind, but came to him from beyond himself, a declaration which non-Muslims must evaluate."[38]

In line with this, Watt goes onto vouchsafe that

> "...Muhammad was a prophet, though his function was somewhat different" and "Non-Muslims should also see the hand of God in the spread of Islam..."[39]

What follows this is that if the Qur'an is the word of Allah, as Muslims sincerely believe, then there is no alternative to the recognition of the sincerity and righteous deeds of others, and their recompense on the Day of Requital. Thus the Qur`an says:

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[37] Karen Armstrong (1992) *Muhammad – A Biography of the Prophet*, London: V.Gollancz, p. 266.
[38] W. Montgomery Watt (1995) *Religious Truth for Our Time*, London: One World, p. 79.
[39] Watt, *Ibid.*, p.80.

" And of the People of the Book there are those who have faith in Allah and in that which has been revealed to you and in that which has been revealed to them, humbling themselves before Allah, they take not a small price for the messages of Allah. They have their reward with their Lord. Surely Allah is swift to take account." (3:199)

(iii) Islam and Religious Pluralism

The following text is one of the two texts that are most explicit about the legitimacy of religious diversity:

"Surely those who have faith and those who are Jews and the Christians and the Sabeans, whoever has faith in Allah and the Last Day and does good, they have their reward with their Lord, there is no fear for them, nor shall they grieve." (2:62)

The Qur'an also makes several references to the theological difficulties of religious pluralism and of kufr. If God is One and if Deen originates with Him, why is it that humankind is not truly united in belief? Why do some people persist in rejection when 'the truth is clearly distinguished from falsehood'? (2:256, 23:90)

Why does God not 'will' faith for everyone?

" God is your Lord and our Lord: Unto us our works and unto you your works; let there be no dispute between you and us. God will bring us together and to Him we shall return." (42: 15, 2:139)

As for those who persist in *kufr*, the Qur'an says:

If your Lord had willed, all those on earth would have believed together. Would you then compel people to become believers. (10:99)

" If God had so wanted, He could have made them a single people. But He admits whom He will to His grace and, for the wrongdoers there will be no protector nor helper." (42: 8)

Notwithstanding this recognition of the legitimacy of the other revealed scriptures, Muhammad is still asked to proclaim: "O humankind (ya ayyuha`nnaas)! I am the Messenger of God unto all of you" (7:158). Muhammad thus had a task of proclaiming and calling in addition to that of challenging (16:125, 22:67).

There is a legitimate ground for the religious variety in history. In His Mercy (*Rahman*) and Love (*Wadood*), Allah/God had taken due account of the particular conditions of each people. He has revealed to them all a message which is the same in essence; but He has conveyed to each one of them His law in a prescriptive form relevant to their particular conditions, to their own grade of development on the

human scale. In other word revelations in the form of different religions are direct manifestations of the Divine in the human order.

Religion, which should have played a leading role in establishing peace, removing misunderstanding between adherents of different sects and religions, cultivating decency, and promoting the principle of live and let live, has unfortunately, in the contemporary world which is described as McDonaldized[40] global village ruled by "de facto world government (the IMF, World Bank, G-7, GATT, and TNC - transnational corporations) led by those countries trying to impose their 'values and aspirations' on 'others' in a new imperial age"[41], seems to have played a very minor and insignificant role, if any at all, in the promotion of peace anywhere in the world. Yet in creating disorder and bloodshed and in causing misery and immense suffering, it still is a very potent and dynamic force which should not be under-estimated at all. No global peace can be visualised without addressing this vital problem and redressing its faults - faults of the adherents.

(iv) Recaputilating and Affirming

To recapitulate the Islamic approach as to how such problems should be resolved, I would like to conclude by pointing out that:

1) All religions of the world need to conform to the underlying Islamic principle of not permitting the use of force and coercion in any manner as an instrument in resolving inter-sectarian and inter-religious strife. The choice of religion, the freedom to profess, propagate, practise and exercise, or to denounce or to cease to believe or change one's belief must be protected absolutely.

2) Even if other religions cannot agree with the Islamic concept of universality of truth and even if, for instance, from the vantage point of Judaism, Christianity, Buddhism, Confucianism, Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, etc. other religions are all false and have nothing to do with God, then despite this negation of truth elsewhere, all religions must conform to the Islamic principle of showing respect and reverence to the Founders and Holy personages of other faiths. In pursuance thereof, they do not have to compromise their principles. It is simply a matter of fundamental human rights. The right of every human being that his religious sensibilities and sentiments shall not be violated and offended must be recognised.

3) It should be remembered that the above principle cannot be enforced by any national or international law. It should be understood in conjunction with the principle that *blasphemy*[42] does not warrant man-made punishment but that it should

[40] G. Ritzer (1993) *The McDonaldisation of Society*, Newbury Park, Calif.: Pine Forge Press.

[41] For a detailed and critical analysis of this, see Noam Chomsky (1994) *World Orders, Old and New*, London: Pluto Press.

[42] It is important to note here that In Islamic teachings, 'apostasy' in Islam does not mean 'blasphemy' / or 'conversion' to another religion as such. 'Apostasy' (as changing one's religion as a faith) is mentioned in the Qur'an in thirteen verses contained in different chapters, but in none of these verses can one find any mention of punishment to be carried out in this world. On the contrary, all that these verses contain

be decried and discouraged by promoting public opinion for condemning such acts as indecent, imprudent and loathsome.

4) Interfaith programs on this pattern should be widely encouraged and promoted. The soul and spirit of such conferences can be summed up by the following characteristics:

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is the assurance that the apostate will be punished in the Hereafter.(For example, II: 217; III: 90-91; and V: 54, also see the Encyclopedia of Islam: 'In the Qur'an, the apostate is threatened with punishment in the next world only.' v.III-p.736 under 'murtadd'.) The Qur'anic principle is 'No compulsion in Religion' (II: 256), and is very clear. Muslim jurists, when they referred to 'apostasy' as a crime, refer to one particular Prophetic Saying in which Muhammad (pbuH) says: "The life of a Muslim can be taken in the cases of one who has killed a human being (qatala nafsan), and of one who forsakes his religion and separates himself from community (*al-murtaddu 'an dinihi al-mufariqu lil-jamaa'a*)" (Bukhari, Muslim, and Abu Dawood). On the basis of this hadith and the later version which describes an apostate as "a man who went out from the community to fight against God and His Prophet, and should then be put to death or imprisoned" (Al-Sunan, vol. IV, p.IV -the commentaries on Bukhari, Muslim, and Abu Dawood) Muslim jurists, even Ibn Taymiyyah who is known as a strict scholar, concluded that the 'apostasy' which the Prophetic statement refers has nothing to do with the case of simple 'conversion from Islam to any other religion'. It is an 'apostasy which is accompanied by active public attack, insult, conspiracy and fighting against Islam and Muslims'. This is why Islam knows of no death penalty for apostasy in the sense of simply changing one's faith unless the apostate joins forces with those who have active hostility and enemity towards Muslims. One of the evidences of this juristic rule by Muslim scholars is that the four traditional schools of law which are still operative in Sunni Islam are unanimous in applying the above rule to male apostates only because in their view, it is the male apostate who is in position to fight against Islam, not simply by changing his faith. Nevertheless the accused has to be tried by an Islamic court. Another important point to bear in mind is that the Prophet himself never had an apostate put to death, despite the fact that there were some cases in which people apostatized after converting to Islam, but the Prophet never ordered them to be punished. (Shawkani, Nayl-al-Awtar, vol.: VII, 192; also see, Ibn Hajar, *Fath al-Bari*; and Nawawi's commentary on the text of *Muslim*, vol. IX, p. 391) On the contrary, Bukhari and Muslim related that

> *" an Arab came to the Prophet and accepted Islam; then fever overlook him while he was still at Madina, so he came to the Prophet and said, 'Give me back my pledge,' but the Prophet refused; then he came the next day and said to the Prophet 'Give me back my pledge', and the Prophet refused. The man afterwards left Madina unharmed"*

The report makes it very clear that this was a clear case of apostasy in which there was no punishment. It is clear from the words of the report that the Bedouin was seeking to return to his old religion, or at least to leave Islam, but in spite of this he went away unharmed. (Ibn Hajar, *Fath al-Bari*; also Nawawi's commentary on the text of *Muslim*, vol. IX, p. 391, where he quotes Qadi 'Iyad, a well-known jurist, as saying that this Bedouin was definitely an apostate, and he was not punished.) Another case of apostasy is reported in which the apostates were a group of Jews who had accepted Islam and then returned to their original religion; the case is mentioned in the Qur'an III: 72-73. These Jews would pretend that they had accepted Islam in the first part of the day and show that they did not believe it at the end of the day. This was done, according to the Qur'an, in order to undermine the confidence of newly-converted Muslims. At that time the Prophet Muhammad was the ruler of Madina. Consequently, one cannot imagine how such people could have done this under a government which punishes apostasy with the death penalty, while they were not, in fact, punished in any way.

To put it simply, the concept of 'apostasy' in Islamic law does not mean 'simply a change of religion' and 'conversion' but is like 'treason' which is accepted as a crime and punished by the modern legal systems as well. Therefore, the statement of *'Islamic law prescribes the death penalty for anyone who converts from Islam to another faith'* is simply not an accurate one because, as explained in the above, 'apostasy' does not mean simply conversion.

a) All participants should be encouraged to highlight the good points and attractive and distinctive features of their respective faiths without maligning other faiths.

b) Indeed, speakers, preferably, belonging to one faith should genuinely try to discover the good features of other faiths, speak on them and explain why they are impressed by them.

c) Speakers belonging to different faiths should pay tribute to the nobility and character of the leaders of other faiths. For instance, a Jewish speaker could speak on the distinctive features and moral example of the Holy Prophet Muhammad which can be appreciated by all human beings without compromising their religious dogmas. Similarly, a Muslim speaker could speak of Krishna, a Hindu speaker on Jesus Christ, a Buddhist on Moses, and so on and so forth. Inter-religious exchange of views must not be condemned as attempts to sabotage religious peace. It is the manner of dialogue which, if wrong, should be condemned and not the dialogue itself. The free flow of ideas is the most important of fundamental human rights, essential for the survival of the fittest. It may not be compromised at any cost.

d) To narrow the areas of differences and enlarge the possibility of agreements, it is highly essential that all religions accept the principle of limiting their debates with followers of other faiths to the sources of their respective religions. The Qur`anic declaration that all religions are the same at their sources should not be treated lightly. It comprises a world of wisdom which should be examined and explored by all religions to their own advantage as well as to the advantage of mankind as a whole.

5) Co-operation in all good plans and schemes for the mutual benefit of mankind should be promoted and encouraged. For instance, philanthropic projects should be undertaken jointly between Christians, Muslims, Hindus and Jews etc. Only then can we hopefully realise the time old Utopian dream of past sages and thinkers, namely that of uniting man under one flag in all spheres of human activity - whether they be religious, social, economic or political fields and all that really matters.

6) Finally the Qur`an affirms clearly that

"Let there be no compulsion in Religion; Truth stands out clear from Error." (Qur`an 2:256)

and that

"To you your religion, to me mine" (109: 6).

The Muslim, as a matter of fact, does not have anything to loose in sharing the Truth with the 'Other'. Eric Hoffer, the author of *The True Believer*, is right in saying that

"To be in possession of an absolute truth is to have a net of familiarity spread over the whole of eternity...The true believer is without wonder and hesitation."[43]

[43] Eric Hoffer (1951) *The True Believer*, New York: Harper&Row, p.80.