

# Quranic Perspective on the Relationship with Other Faiths

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Nowhere is the agenda for an inter-religious dialogue more pressing than between adherents of the two largest religious communities, the Christian community and the Muslim community. Together, these two communities encompass nearly one-half of the world's population. From a pragmatic point of view, to say nothing of theological reasons, the pressing issues facing our increasingly interdependent world should stimulate all Christians and Muslims to review and reconsider their relationships toward one another.

The present dialogic relationship between Islam and Christianity occurs on at least two major levels. The first level is that of the politico-religious discussions and their acceleration in various countries. On the more traditional second level are the actual attempts at a theological dialogue between representatives of both the Christians and Muslim faiths. In this study, I will emphasize the second level, focusing on Muslim perceptions regarding their relationship with other faiths.

One of the most influential factors which affect Muslim-Christian relations is the Quran. Since the Quran is central in determining Muslim attitudes, it is important to know what the Quran says about

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other faiths. What it says specifically about Christianity is particularly significant for the Christian-Muslim dialogue.

For the committed Muslim, the Quran represents the word of God as revealed, or “sent down,” to his prophet Muhammad. As God’s own words, Quranic statements are normative for the thoughts and behavior of Muslims. It is the central reality in the life of a Muslim and it is the world in which he or she lives. This world encompasses their entire life. The first sentence chanted in the ears of a newly born Muslim child is the Shahadah, which is contained in the Quran. A Muslim learns certain sections of the Quran as a child and begins to repeat some of its formulae from the moment he or she can speak. He or she reiterates some of its chapters in his or her daily prayers. Sections are read from the Sacred Book when he or she is married, and when he or she dies the Quran is read over him or her. “The Quran is the tissue out of which the life of a Muslim is woven; its sentences are like threads from which the substance of his soul knit” (Nasr 1966:42). Therefore, any effort to comprehend Islamic understanding of Christians and Christianity must begin within Quran itself.

### **What Does the Quran Say about the Religious Other?**

A Muslim scholar, Farid Esack, responds to this question very clearly: “The Quran presents a universal, inclusive perspective of a divine being who responds to the sincerity and commitment” (1998:146).

Kate Zebiri also says that dating back to the earliest period, the concept of religion was a highly reified one for Muslims. The Quran itself has, among other religious scriptures, a uniquely developed awareness of religious plurality, at one point even appearing to offer a rationale for the existence of competing religions (Zebiri 1997:16). “. . . To each among you We have prescribed a Law and an Open way. If Allah had so willed, He would have made you a single people, but (His Plan is) to test you in what He has given you: so strive as in a race in all virtues” (Surah<sup>1</sup> 5:48). But, seemingly contrary to the above remark, the following verses from the Quran also proclaim the intolerance of other religions:

The Religion before Allah is Islam (submission to His Will);

If anyone desires a religion other than Islam (submission to Allah), never will it be accepted of him; This day have I perfected your religion for you, completed My favour upon you, and have chosen for you Islam as your religion (Surah 3:19, 85; 5:3).

The majority of Muslims have understood these verses in a manner which leads them to conclude that their way, the way of the Prophet Muhammad, is the one and only way to God.

As shown above, the statements by the Quran are not fully consistent. Rather they reflect the various situations that Muhammad found himself in. He received a different reception from the Jews and the Christians. The Jews, as a closed group, were his political opponents, whereas for a long time he knew Christians only as individuals. That is why “the Jews are morally condemned on account of their refractoriness and other reasons,” while the Christians are reproached “more on account of certain dogmatic assertions and errors” (Van Ess 1986:101).

Unlike the Jews, the actual behavior of Christians comes close to being praised. God says to Muhammad, “Strongest among men in enmity to the Believers will you find the Jews and pagans; and nearest among them in love to the Believers will you find those who say, ‘We are Christians’: because amongst these are men devoted to learning and men who have renounced the world, and they are not arrogant” (Surah 5:82).

Toward the end of his political career, when Muhammad concluded treaties with partly Christianized tribes, only the pagans had to accept Islam, while the Christians were allowed to keep their churches and priests (Van Ess 1986:102). J. D. McAuliffe believes that there are two general categories of statements that pertain to Christianity within the Quran. The first speaks of the Christians as a particular religious group. The second includes allusions to Christian figures, especially Jesus and Mary, and to the theological indictments that have fueled the long-standing quarrel of Muslim-Christian polemic (1991:1-2).

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1. *Surah* means chapter in the Quran in Arabic

A commensurate degree of attention, however, has not been paid to those statements in the Quran that refer to Christians as a social and religious group. Most obvious is the Arabic noun *al-nasara*, the common Quranic term for Christians, which is found seven times in Surah 2, five times in Surah 5, and once each in Surah 9 and 22. Less direct designations are those that highlight the common scriptural heritage of Jews, Christians, and Muslims. Of most frequent occurrence is the phrase *ahl al-kitab* (People of the Book), which is found more than thirty times in the Quran. This usually signifies, unless otherwise qualified, both Christians and Jews.

An additional category of designation includes the verses that refer to Jesus and then subsequently mention his “followers” by such phrases as “those who follow you” or “those who follow him.” These verses fall into several categories and direct or indirect criticism of Christians constitutes the largest categories.<sup>2</sup> These verses condemn Christians for being untrustworthy and internally divisive. Christians are further criticized for their boasting, for deliberately or inadvertently corrupting their scripture, for trying to lead Muslims astray, and for being unfaithful to Jesus’ message. A second grouping can be made of those verses that seek to prescribe Muslim behavior toward Christians both socially and economically, such as reference to the collection of a special tax, the *jizyah*, levied on Christians, and reference to the protection of existing churches and cloisters.

Verses that apparently make positive remarks about Christians compose the final category. These positive allusions to Christians are scattered throughout the Quran and a number have been persistently extracted to serve as proof-texts of Muslim religious tolerance. Several contemporary examples should suffice to convey the range of such efforts. One traces

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2. For a list of such Quranic criticism see Abdelmajid Charfi, “christianity in the Quran Commentary of Tabari” (1988:134-138).

3. William Stoddard (1976:35). Stoddard omits from his citation of this verse the condemnatory statement about Jews, presumably because to include it would contradict his interpretation of the verse. Drawing upon the work of Rudi Paret, Josef Van Ess distinguishes between the Quranic condemnation of the Jews for moral reasons and of

Islam's "age-old tolerance to Christian and Jewish communities" to the Quranic praise of Christians in Surah 5:82.<sup>3</sup> Other scholars state that there are "certain passages in the Quran which might be regarded as conciliatory towards Christians."<sup>4</sup> Two Muslim scholars draw upon these verses to emphasize that "the tolerant spirit of Islam is apparent in its recognition of other religions" and that in "times of prosperity and security from external dangers, this tolerant attitude was the hallmark of Muslim-Christian relations."<sup>5</sup>

A final quote proves yet more emphatic: "These passages recognize the worth of other religions, if they had scriptures and believed in one God. They have been valuable in inculcating tolerance among Muslims in the past, and in modern times they have guided thought and action in the closer relationships that now obtain between all religions" (Parrinder 1995:154).

Such claims for a Quranic message of religious tolerance, whether made by Muslims or by those presenting Muslims' views, find their correlate in a predominantly Christian use of this same body of material. A contemporary Christian scholar noted: "A number of well-known Quranic texts, quoted frequently especially by Christians, seem to point in a different direction, as they supposedly substantiate the thesis that Christianity remains a way of salvation even after the coming of the Seal of the Prophets" (Bijlefeld 1974:94). Similarly Kimball cites Surah 2:62 to support the assertion that "the Quran makes clear the salvific value inherent in at least some of the religious traditions" (1993:31).

McAuliffe suggests seven citations which are crucial to understand Quranic perspective about Christians; Surah 2:62; 3:55; 3:199; 5:66; 5:82-83; 28:52-55; 57:27. These verses prompt several central questions: How have Muslims understood this apparent divine praise of Christians? What have

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Christians on dogmatic grounds. With this in mind, he finds in 5:82 an instance where "the actual behavior of Christians comes close to being praised." See "Islamic Perspectives" in Hans Kung (1986:101), cited in McAuliffe (1991:4, Note 7).

4. Kenneth Cragg, *The Call of the Minaret* (1956:260).

5. Abdul Ali, "Tolerance in Islam" (1982:110); Mahmoud M. Ayoub, "Roots of Muslim-Christian Conflict," (1989:31).

these verses meant to Muslims in both the classical and modern periods of Islamic history? Do these verses justify the assertions and claims made on their behalf?

The most comprehensive answer to such queries lies in a close examination of that body of Islamic literature to which allusion has already been made, Quranic commentary or exegesis (tafsir). The Quran presents itself as the ultimate source of moral guidance and social harmony among its devotees and between them and other scripture-based faith communities. Muslims throughout history have taken the challenge to comprehend the Quran and ponder its verses so seriously that they have dedicated their best minds to the interpretation of their sacred book and elucidation of its meanings.

Consequently, in Islamic religious sciences the particular study and activity known as tafsir al-Quran is one of the earliest and most important religious sciences, whose beginnings go back to Muhammad and his immediate companions. By the eleventh century, tafsir had become a highly developed literary genre with a number of ancillary linguistic, legal, theological, mystical, and sectarian disciplines (Ayoub 1997:145).

Throughout Muslim history, and particularly in the twentieth century, Quran commentaries have served as an effective platform for the propagation of diverse beliefs and ideologies.

It is no exaggeration to say that exegesis of the Quran provides one of the best indicators of the ideological and religious moods of Muslim societies today: “While the Quran speaks to the hearts of pious Muslims through its reciters, it speaks to the socio-political and religious situation of the Muslim community through its interpreters” (Ayoub 1997:146).

## **The Quranic Call for Dialogue**

According to Ayoub, the Quran maintains that universal faith in God encompasses, but at the same time, transcends all religions. In this framework of the universality of faith within a great diversity of religions, the Quran calls upon faithful Christians and Muslims to live in amity and engage in a genuine dialogue of faith (1997:156).

This call, however, has for fourteen centuries been drowned by the

clamor of religious, political, economic, and military rivalry. In the remaining pages, I will briefly examine the answers to this call. In order to achieve this goal I will first look at the concrete and vivid pictures which the Quran presents of Christians, the ones with whom Muslims are called upon to engage in fair and fruitful dialogue.

The Quranic term for dialogue is jidal, which means “to be intimately engaged with someone in discussion or debate” (Ayoub 1997:156). In the Quran, this intimate and purposeful dialogue is called “the best of fairest debate” (al-ji’ dal al-ahsan). It requires wisdom and fair exhortation, as the Quran charges Muhammad to: “Invite (all) to the Way of your Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching; and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious: for your Lord knows best, who have strayed from His path, and who receive guidance” (Surah 16:125). This fair dialogue, moreover, must be based on common and sincere faith in God and his revelation:

And you do not dispute with the People of the Book, except with means better (than mere disputation), unless it be with those of them who inflict wrong (and injury): but say, “We believe in the Revelation which has come down to us and in that which came down to you; our God (Allah) and your God (Allah) is One, and it is to Him We bow (in Islam)” (Surah 29:46).<sup>6</sup>

According to the Quran and prophetic tradition, the reality of faith is ultimately known to God alone. Therefore, Muslims must judge the faith of any person or community by its manifestation in worship and good deeds. In accordance with this principle, the Quran presents a graphic description of the faith and righteous works of Christians with whom Muslims must live harmoniously with and have a fellowship of faith.

These Christians, those with whom the Muslims must live in harmony, were monks and other pious men and women who lived as hermits and in

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6. See also Surah 3:64, where this faith commitment is called “common terms as between us and you.”

small communities in the Arabian Desert. Muhammad and other early Muslims must have observed them first-hand. The verses describing them belong to both the Meccan and Medinan periods of revelation. The Quran states:

Those to whom We sent the Book before this?they do believe in this (Revelation); And when it is recited to them, they say: We believe therein, for it is the Truth from our Lord: indeed we have been Muslims (bowing to Allah' s Will) from before this" (Surah 28:52-53).

The passage under discussion then describes these People of the Book as steadfast and magnanimous people who avoid vain and contentious talk. Hence, "Twice will they be given their reward, for that they have persevered, that they avert Evil with Good, and that they spend (in charity) out of what We have given them" (Surah 28:54). Their peaceful temperament and deep piety are depicted thus: "And when they hear vain talk, they turn away therefrom and say, 'To us our deeds, and to you yours. Peace be on you: we do not seek the ignorant' " (Surah 28:55).

Although there is no specific reference to the Christians either by name or designating phrase, McAuliffe concludes that from the exegetical tradition itself comes the association of these verses with Christians and their scriptural heritage (1991:257). Ayoub asserts that these verses no doubt refer to Christians. This is because they clearly echo other verses which extol their piety and humility (1997:157). It should also be noted that these verses closely resemble verses describing the piety and humility of "God' s faithful servants" among the Muslims.<sup>7</sup> By depicting such common piety, the Quran aims at establishing a fellowship of faith among the faithful of the two communities. The verses just referred were revealed in Mecca, and thus explicitly indicate the permanence of this Quranic view of Muslim-Christian relations (Ayoub 1997:157).

The verse I will now discuss belongs to a crucial period of the Prophet' s Medinan political career. It confirms and completes the picture which the

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7. See Surah 25:63-67.



previous verses present. The verse is one of the concluding verses of Surah 3 which deals at length with the relations of the nascent Muslim commonwealth with the People of the Book after the painful experience of the defeat of Uhud in the third year of the hijra. It reads:

And there are certainly, among the People of the Book, those who believe in Allah, in the revelation to you, and in the revelation to them, bowing in humility to Allah: they will not sell the Signs of Allah for a miserable gain! For them is a reward with their Lord, and Allah is swift in account (Surah 3:199).<sup>8</sup>

Ayoub clearly asserts that verses 82-85 of Surah 5 and verse 199 of Surah 3 cannot be regarded as isolated statements. Rather they described in

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8. Many commentators have attempted to negate this verse by assigning it to a specific group of Christians, or questioning whether it can at all be applied to non-Muslims. Like many early commentators, Wahidi refers the verse to al-Najashi of Abyssinia. Mujahid, Ibn Jurayj, and Ibn Zayd held that the verse, "was sent down concerning all the people of faith among the people of the Book." Tabari reports on the authority of Qatadah that when the Prophet asked his companions to pray over al-Najashi, they protested, "shall we pray over a man who is not a Muslim!" When the verse was revealed they again countered, "He did not pray facing the qibalah." But God sent down, "To God belongs the east and the west. Wherever you turn, there is the face of God" (Surah 2:115). According to another view ascribed to Ibn Jurayj and Ibn Zayd, the verse was revealed concerning Abd Allah b. Sallam and his fellow Jewish converts to Islam. Mujahid interpreted the verse to refer to the Jews and Christians whom he called "the muslims of the people of the Book." Tabari agrees with this view, arguing that "God has included in His saying 'There are among the people of the Book' all the people of the book. He did not intend only the Christians or only the Jews." Tabari questions the soundness of the traditions which relate the verse to al-Najashi. But even if they were true, he continues: "they would not contradict what we have said. This is because Jabir, and those who agreed with him simply said that the verse was sent down concerning al-Najashi. A verse may be sent down concerning a specific matter, but it would apply to all other similar matters. God may have, therefore, rendered the rule which he decreed concerning Najashi applicable to all His servants who follow the Messenger of God and accept what he brought from God, and yet they follow what God had enjoined in the Torah and the Gospel" (Ayoub 1992:414-415).

concrete terms an ideal relationship of amity and harmony between Muslims and Christians (1997:157). Furthermore, he says that this relationship is not limited to a particular time or place, but applies to Christians of all times whose life of faith complies with the conditions these and other verses present (1997:157). An important verse which supports this general thesis is: “Then, in their wake, We followed them up with (others of) our Messengers: We sent after them Jesus the son of Mary, and bestowed on him the Gospel; and We ordained in the hearts of those who followed him compassion and mercy . . . (57:27).

Just like the previous verses, these new verses confirm the People of the Book as having their own religious identities and expect from them no more than the recognition of Muhammad as a messenger of God and of the Quran as a genuine divine revelation. Verses 82 and 83 of Surah 5, with which we are primarily concerned, read:

Strongest among men in enmity to the Believers will you find the Jews and Pagans; and nearest among them in love to the Believers will you find those who say, “We are Christians”: because amongst these are men devoted to learning and men who have renounced the world, and they are not arrogant.

And when they listen to the revelation received by the Messenger, you will see their eyes overflowing with tears, for they recognize the truth: they pray: “Our Lord! We believe; write us down among the witness.

These verses affirm the faith of these humble Christians and their hope of being included among the righteous. These verses also promise Christians eternal bliss in Paradise for their faith and humble submission to God.

According to most classical and contemporary commentators, these verses were revealed concerning the Abyssinian ruler al-Najashi (the Negus), who with a group of his bishops and monks accepted Islam.

In Mecca, Muhammad had advised a number of Muslims who had no tribal or clan protection against increasing Meccan persecution by seeking refuge, and turning themselves over to a Meccan delegation that was expressly sent by the hostile men of the Quraysh to bring them back to Mecca. Al-Najashi instead brought the two contending groups together and

asked Ja'far bin Aib Talbi, the spokesman of the Muslims, to explain their new faith in the presence of his learned bishops and monks. In the course of his explication of the basis principles of Islam, Ja'far recited the beginning of Surah 19 which recounts the story of Mary and the miraculous birth of Jesus. As they listened, al-Najashi and his fellow Christians are said to have wept till their beards were soaked with their tears. He then exclaimed: "By God, this and what Jesus brought from God issue from one niche" (Ayoub 1997:158).

In order to accord even more closely the occasion of revelation of these verses with their actual text, more elaborate versions of this and similar hagiographical tales have been related. These tales have generally been uncritically accepted by contemporary commentators. An obvious problem with the Najashi tradition with all its variants, for example, is the fact that the Abyssinian migration happened in Mecca, many years before the revelation of these late Medina verses.<sup>9</sup>

Sayyid Qutb, for instance, repeats the fanciful tale that seventy Christian men, clad in ascetic woolen garments, accompanied Ja'far bin Abi Talib on his return from Abyssinia. Among them were eight Syrian Christians, including the famous monk Bahira. Muhammad recited the Quran to them, their eyes were filled with tears, and they accepted Islam. In the same breath, Qutb also reports another variant of the same tale, namely, that after hearing Ja'far's Quranic recitation, al-Najashi sent a delegation of thirty of the most learned Christians to the Prophet in Mecca to learn more about the new faith. They wept when they heard Surah 36, acknowledged it as the same truth that was revealed to Jesus, and became Muslims. Qutb relates still another tradition about a group of men of the Christian community of Najran who voluntarily came to the Prophet in Medina, again to learn about Islam. The Prophet recited to them the same surah, and they likewise wept as they heard the truth and accepted Islam (Ayoub 1997:158).

Sayyid Anwar Ali, a Pakistani scholar, offers an unusual interpretation of these verses. It should first be observed that he adopts a generally traditional

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9. See McAuliffe (1991, chap.7), where these traditions are examined critically.

view of both the two verses discussed in the previous section and those under consideration here. This he does in spite of the fact that in his commentary he relies on the Bible, as well as general works on Christianity and other religions in English (Ayoub 1997:159).

Ali asserts that the followers of Christ were originally all known as nasara. They then split into two fractions, the followers of Christ's true vicegerent, Simon Peter, and the followers of Paul. The former were called nasara, and the latter came to be known as Christians. The nasara, or true followers of Christ, eventually believed in the Prophet Muhammad and became Muslims. It was concerning them that the verse, "and you will find nearest in amity to those who have faith those who say we are nasara" (Surah 5:82) was revealed (Ayoub 1997:159).

In spite of his familiarity with Christian sources, Ali's remarks on the formative period of Christianity bear no relation to historical facts. According to Ayoub, he presents an essentially traditional Shii view of Jesus as a prophet and his true successor, or imam after him, who was Simon Peter. He also repeats the usual Islamic polemics against Paul as the one who distorted Christ's origin and salvation through Christ's death. This means that since those who were true followers of Christ became Muslims fourteen centuries ago, all Quranic verses dealing with Christians have since that time been irrelevant.

Some commentators have rendered the generally positive Quranic approach to Muslim-Christian relations irrelevant to the historical realities of the two communities. They did this by denying outright the continued applicability of Quranic verses enjoining such an approach. Or they limited these verses to a small number of Christians with whom Muhammad had direct contact, and who consequently accepted Islam. The primary motivation behind this approach has been the continued religious, political, social, and economic rivalry between Western Christendom and the world of Islam.

### **Modern, Liberalist View about Religious Others**

In our modern, or postmodern, pluralistic age, there are many Muslims who know that attempts to do away with other religions through aggressive

da' wa (mission) strategies have failed. The arrogant and sovereign rule of one religion over other religions is nearly dead. They recognize that all over the world, there is growing awareness that adherents of different religions must come together in peaceful co-existence and in mutual respect with a readiness for dialogue.

In light of this fact, most Muslims try to find a way to live with people of other faiths without offending them, and they look to find an answer to the following question: Within the religiously pluralistic context of our world, how should Muslims understand the above Quranic verses which literally seem to exclude ways other than that of the Prophet Muhammad? Through their reflections on this question they try to show how Muslims can understand the Quranic teaching in a way that allows them to remain faithful to the Quranic teaching and, at the same time, truly open to authentic conversation and co-operation with people of other faiths.

They think that the Quran gives a wide and inclusive perspective about the religious Other, but that Muslims have narrowed this inclusiveness through the course of time by arguing that only those who acknowledge the prophet-hood of Muhammad and follow his message in the Quran are acceptable to God and thus deserve to go to Paradise (Aydin 2000:150). Therefore, they believe that a new Islamic theology of religions can be created through a paradigm shift of their attitudes towards the religious Other.

As Fazlur Rahman has emphasized, in order to accomplish this, it is necessary to return and look to the Quran "more than to the historic formulations of Islam" (Aydin 2000:150) in order to prepare the foundation of the proper Muslim attitude toward the religious Other in our pluralistic age.

In its opening chapter, the Quran strongly emphasizes that Allah is not the Lord of one nation or one religious community, but the "Cherisher and Sustainer of the worlds" (Surah 1:2). It then informs us that he created different nations and different communities in this world (Surah 5:51), and sent various prophets to them in order to inform them how they could attain his grace and salvation. Furthermore, the Quran points out that the messages of the prophets were given different names such as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, while in reality all of them proclaimed the same message, islam,

which means “to adore One God and to worship Him alone.” In other places as well the Quran strongly warns its followers not to make distinctions between prophets whose messages are the same (Surah 2:285; also see 4:163, 3:131-133, 5:112).

Moreover, the Quran states that Allah gave us different laws and ways of conduct through his prophets to encourage us to encourage each other in goodness (5:48). However a serious question must be raised: The Quran argues on the one hand that all the prophets brought the same religion, but states, on the other hand, that Allah appointed different laws for each one of us. How, then, are we to understand or reconcile these two Quranic arguments within the context of God’s oneness? In an attempt to answer this question Aydin suggests an interpretation: He maintains that all the different laws and ways of conduct which Allah gave are based on the one principle of tawhid (“Oneness of God”).

The differences in the forms of social laws and worship result from the fact that in the course of time Allah made gradual changes in the religions in accordance with the needs of their communities. For example, some food customs which were prohibited by one prophet were made lawful by a later one (Ates 1989a:8ff; see also Ates 1989b, as cited in Aydin 2000:151). Two Muslim scholars of the inter-religious dialogue make the following remarks. Hasan Askari highlights, “I said yes to more than one religion because if God is transcendent, if He is Subhan (“Glory”), then His mystery cannot be exhausted in one religious form” (Siddiqui 1997:113): Mohammad Talbi, too, suggests that, “It is not impossible to admit the plurality of paths of salvation, both in and outside the Islamic tradition, providing people are both sincere and righteous” (1995:63).

Further, Esack asserts that “the Quran explicitly and unequivocally denounces the narrow religious exclusivism” which appears to have characterized the Jewish and Christian communities encountered by Muhammad in Hijaz (1998:158). In 2:111 and 113 the Quran condemns Jews and Christians who make exclusive claims about the uniqueness of their own religion by emphasizing the fact that to be acceptable to God is not based on claims alone but on genuine faith and good action: “Nay, whosoever submits his whole self to Allah and is a doer of good, he will get his reward with His Lord; on such shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve”

(2:112).

Aydin says this Quranic rejection of all notions of exclusivism concerning the superiority of one religion over others is very striking to Muslims, since it reminds and teaches them that if Muslims make the same exclusive claims about the superiority of their religion over others, they may deserve the same condemnation from Allah (Aydin 2000:152). Unfortunately, the majority of Muslims today are making the same exclusive claims by allocating paradise to only those who follow the message of the Prophet Muhammad.

Esack asserts that “the Quran is explicit in its acceptance of religious pluralism” (1998:159). Esack uses a socio-religious approach to prove his assertion. He states that the Quran acknowledges the *de jure* legitimacy of all revealed religion in two respects: It takes into account the religious life of separate communities coexisting with Muslims, respecting their laws, social norms, and religious practices, and it accepts that faithful adherents of these religions will also attain salvation and that “on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve” (Surah 2:62). Esack says these two aspects of the Quran’s attitude towards the Other may be described as “the cornerstones of its acceptance of religious pluralism” (Esack 1998:159).

The Quran specifically recognizes the People of the Book, as Christians were called, as legitimate socio-religious communities. This recognition was later extended by Muslim scholars to various other religious communities living within the borders of the expanding Islamic domain. The explicit details, restrictions, and application of this recognition throughout the various stages of the prophetic era, and subsequently in Islamic history, point to a significant issue in dealing with the Other (Esack 1998:160).

Esack suggests a number of indications in the Quran of the essential legitimacy of the religious Other. First, the People of the Book, as recipients of divine revelation, are recognized as part of the community. Addressing all the prophets, the Quran says, “And verily this Brotherhood of yours is a single Brotherhood” (Surah 23:52). The establishment of a single community with diverse religious expressions was explicit in the Charter of Medina (1998:160).

In two of the most significant social areas, food and marriage, the generosity of the Quranic spirit is evident: The food of those who were given to the Book was declared lawful for the Muslims and the food of the

Muslims lawful for them. Likewise, Muslim men were allowed to marry “the chaste women of the People of the Book” (Surah 5:5). If Muslims were permitted to coexist with others in a relationship as intimate as that of marriage, then it seems to indicate quite explicitly that enmity is not to be regarded as the norm in Muslim-Other relations (Esack 1998:160).

Second, in the arena of religious law, the norms and regulations of Jews and Christians were upheld (Surah 5:47) and even enforced by the Prophet when he was called upon to settle disputes among them (Surah 5:42-43).

Third, the sanctity of the religious life of the adherents of other revealed religions is underlined by the fact that the first time permission for an armed struggle was given, it was done so to ensure the preservation of this sanctity (Esack 1998:160): “But for the fact that Allah continues to repel some people by means of other cloisters, churches, synagogues, and mosques, in which the name of Allah is commemorated in abundant measure, would be razed to the ground” (Surah 22:40). Esack interprets that this preservation of the sanctity of places of worship was because God, who represented the ultimate for many of these religions and who is acknowledged to be above the diverse outward expressions of that service, was being worshipped in them.

Mahmut Aydin argues that the Quran is open to all the people through analyzing the meaning of its use of the term islam. The term islam is used in the Quran to refer to the submission to God’s will, authority, and commands. Thus, as a verb, islam indicates an attitude and conduct expressed by human beings to God. Within this context, Aydin says, “The islam can be understood as a faith sent by God first of all through Abraham to all humankind and then approved by later prophets such Moses, Jesus and Muhammad” and, “We may conclude that the term islam embraces all those who submit themselves to the will of God” (2000:155).

In light of this argument, the term islam in Surah 3:19 can be understood to refer to a reified conception of Islam, since it informs the Prophet Muhammad to tell his opponents that his way is “simply one of submitting his being/attention to God and that this is also the path required of them” (Esack 1998:126).

Another verse, Surah 3:85, supports this argument by stating that “if anyone desires a religion other than Islam (submission to Allah), never will it



be accepted of him; and in the Hereafter he will be in the ranks of those who have lost (all spiritual good). So the term islam in both verses does not indicate the legal identity of Muslims but the way of total submission to God, which is open to all people (Aydin 2000:155).

On the question of whether the term islam in the Quran is a personal act or institutional religion of the Prophet Muhammad, Wilfred Cantwell Smith states, "If we look at the Quran, we find, first of all, that the term islam there is relatively much less than are other related but more dynamic and personal terms, and second, that when it is used it can be, and on many grounds almost must be, interpreted not as the name of a religious system but as the designation of a decisive personal act" (1991:110).

Then, how did the term become used by Muslims as the special name of the institutionalized religion of the Prophet Muhammad? Smith says that there were two main reasons of this transformation:

First was an external force, an evolution in the Middle East chronologically prior to the emergence of the Muslim community and operating upon it from the outside as an historical pressure acting to mould the new tradition into a pre-established form. The second process . . . has been rather an internal development, by which Muslims themselves have tented over centuries to reify their own concept of their faith (Smith 1991:108-109).

Based upon the above interpretations, Smith defined islam as follows: Islam is obedience or commitment, the willingness to take on oneself the responsibility of living henceforth according to God's proclaimed purpose; and submission, the recognition not in theory but in overpowering act of one's littleness and worthlessness before the awe and majesty of God (1991:112).

Through the examination of the meaning of islam in the Qu'ran, Aydin concludes that the general Quranic teaching concerning religious pluralism is as follows:

There is only one way to God and it is called islam, submitting oneself to the will of God. Allah revealed this way to us through His prophets under different names and different structures. This means

that a religion whose objective is to call its followers to submit to Allah without associating anything with Him can be accepted as a different version of this one religion (2000:156).

Aydin also says that the Quran, far from eliminating the differences between various religious traditions, invites their followers to come together for mutual understanding and mutual discussion (2000:157). For, as Fazlur Rahman argues, the Quran informs us that the differences between various religious traditions will go beyond this world and that they will finally be settled on the Day of Judgment (1980:10, as cited in Aydin 2000:157). Rahman comments further that the Quran envisages some sort of close cooperation between Judaism, Christianity, and Islam and invites Jews and Christians to join Muslims in such a goal with the aim of balance" (1980:321).

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# 이스라엘-팔레스타인 갈등을 통해 본 이슬람의 '정의(adl)' 이해

- 하마스의 지하드(Jihad)를 중심으로 -

정상률<sup>1</sup>

## 1. 서론

1948년 이스라엘 건국 이후, 팔레스타인 지역(고대 가나안 지역) 내 유대인과 아랍인(팔레스타인인, 또는 팔레스타인 아랍인) 간에는 끊임없이 갈등과 전쟁을 해 왔다. 팔 지역에서의 갈등과 전쟁은 오랜 역사성과 다양한 원인에서 그 기원을 찾을 수 있다. 그런데 이러한 갈등과 전쟁이 이슬람 또는 무슬림의 입장에서 정의(正義)로운 것인가?

팔레스타인에서 아랍인과 유대인 간 갈등은 1880년대부터 시작되었다. 1880년대에 프랑스의 드레뤼스 사건, 러시아의 짜르2세 암살 사건으로 인해서 반유대주의(anti-Semitism)가 부상하면서 유대인이 동서 유럽에서 탄압과 차별을 받게 되었다. 위 두 사건은 인종주의의 산물이었다. 그리고 당시 유럽에서 민족주의와 사회주의가 부상하면서 유대인들은 시오니즘(유대인 민족주의)을 구상하고, 근대 국민국가(nation-state)를 건설하기로 결정한 후 팔레스타인 지역으로 이주하기 시작했다. 유대인과 팔레스타인인 갈등은 이때부터 시작되었다.

유대인의 이주와 국가건설, 4차에 걸친 이스라엘-아랍국가 간 전쟁 과정에서 팔레스타인인들은 PLO의 '팔레스타인 민족주의'와 무슬림형제단의 팔레스타인 지부 및 하마스의 '정치이슬람(political Islam)'을 대 이스라엘 투쟁의 이념으로 설정했다. 특히 팔레스타인 민족주의를 기반으로 독립투쟁을 해온 PLO를 비판하는 일부 지식인들은 정치이슬람을 새로운 국가건설 이념으로 설정하고 팔레스타인 땅에 '이슬람 국가(Islamic State)' 건설이라는 목표를 세웠다. 대이스라엘 독립투쟁의 양대 세력인 PLO와 하마스의 무장독립투쟁은 정당한가? 정의의 전쟁인가? 본 글에서 필자는 '이슬람 교리에 기초하여 보았을 때, 팔레스타인인들의 대표적인 정치이슬람 세력인 하마스의 대이스라엘 투쟁이 정의로운가' 라는 질문에 답하고자 한다.

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