

ISLAM AND THE WEST:
TOWARDS A BETTER UNDERSTANDING

by

Dr. Muhammad Abdo Yamani

To my parents and to all those who are committed to love truth, peace, tolerance and the human family; and to all those who are striving tirelessly to establish a better world for our future generations.

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Comming back to his country , Dr Yamni taught in Riyadh University and King Abdul Aziz University (Jeddah).

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- Teach Your Children To Love The Messenger Of Allah.
(translated into three foreign languages)
- Africa, Why For ?
- A Boy From Makkah (in English)
- a Girl From Hail
- Farewell Halley Comet

These as well as dozens of other titles and articles.

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Preface

Since the recession of Communism and the Soviet Union, the West seems to have seen Islam and the Muslim world as the only enemies left to be subdued. Evidence of this attitude abounds. It need hardly be said that this cannot be in the best interest of humanity.

Some speakers and writers have drawn attention to the fact that this attitude is not only wrong, but very dangerous. On a number of occasions I have had the opportunity to address gatherings of intellectuals and representatives of the media in the United Kingdom, France, and the U.S.A. on subjects related to this issue.

Inasmuch as my audiences have varied, I have been speaking to groups of differing interest and backgrounds. Taking into account the time limitations, the talks were conceived to meet the needs of each. This book has been compiled to contain the facts mentioned in a number of these addresses.

It is my sincere hope that I can enable more people to understand the Muslims and their religion better, and thus help them abandon those stereotypes, the propagation of which can only increase mistrust. The East and West have mutual interests and concerns which have brought them together with increasing frequency over the years. In addition to the intertwining of the goals of nations, individuals from the Western World and the Muslim World are moving through, and into, each other's societies in growing numbers.

Every humanitarian recognizes that, in order to eradicate painful situations between two parties, emphasis absolutely must be laid upon tolerance and mutual respect. Such only comes with understanding. We Muslims have, in recent history, experienced the great teaching ability of the West. Through such auspicious ties as are forged from scholarship

programs achieved in Western countries, contractual alliances, and Western-guided training programs carried out in Arab lands, we have greatly benefited from the scientific and technological progress of the modern world. Moreover, we feel a great sense of brotherhood with our teachers.

It may be that, as man lives not by material progress alone, the favor can be returned. Perhaps, understanding of the spiritual fulfillment which lies embedded in the deepest roots of Islam, a fulfillment which takes its true meaning in the soul's peace (and which has nothing to do with radical, sinister-countenanced stereotypes!), will interest and enrich more than a few. At the very least, an elucidation of such will explain the rapid spread of Islam in the West today. Even better, it may nurture respect and compassion for Muslims, and help non-Muslims understand that the former are human beings just like them, more alike than different, provoked to tears or laughter by much the same things, and just wanting what any kid in the neighborhood wants - to be friends!

It seemed appropriate in this text, that exists to help bring about a rapprochement between Islam and the West, to use the English translation of the Qur'an as executed by that distinguished British convert to Islam, Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall.

As the year 2000 rolls forward, two contenders for the minds of men are on stage: the first is Truth itself waiting quietly for recognition, and the second, falsehood: represented by blatant lies in some cases, and innuendos and misconceptions in many others. So much of the media expresses its desire for sensationalism. The public's own appetite spurs this on, and word of mouth perpetuates this. Truth is God Almighty, the Lord of Creation. Falsehood is but a shabby veil of pretense, which can never entirely block out the light of truth. Those who seek truth with sincerity know that a time will come when the Inimitable Creator will cause Truth to shine forth, obliterating falsehood forever after.

I pray that Allah ¹ the Exalted accepts this humble effort as a worthy service done for His sake.

Dr. Muhammad Abdo Yamani

London, April 1995

¹ The names 'Allah' and 'God' will be interchangeably used in this text to demonstrate that they both refer to the same Being : the Sole Creator and Sustainer of mankind, Who sent His prophets to humankind throughout time in order to guide us.

Towards a Better Understanding

The address given by H.R.H. Prince Charles in November 1993, as Patron of Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies, on the subject of "Islam and the West", came as a bold step intended to promote greater understanding between the Western and Muslim Worlds. The commendation of Islam by the Prince of Wales came as a pleasant surprise to many. I, too, am motivated by this strong desire for understanding and cooperation between East and West in this world created and sustained by the One God.

Coming from a person in such a high position in the West, the prince's favorable portrayal of the theological, cultural, educational and historical merits of Islam, as well as its invaluable contributions to the emergence of modern Western civilization, was indeed an indication of better future relations between our two worlds. It is obvious that the Prince of Wales has rushed in where no royal has been before, for to start discussions on Islam and the West usually means to tread on thin ice!

In examining the relations between Islam and the West, the Prince of Wales had to confront entrenched prejudices, hatred, distrust and ignorance sometimes over a thousand years old, and on both sides. What then impelled him in his speech at Oxford to step into what he himself describes as a path "strewn with minefields"? It cannot be a desire to adopt Islam, or even a new cause, as some writers have suggested. It is equally wrong to believe that it is some deep-rooted impulse in the prince's personality to flirt with danger!

The answer from Prince Charles himself is convincing: it lies in his firm belief that the Islamic World and the West have not only "much to offer each other," but "much to do together," and that "what binds them is more powerful than anything that creates misunderstandings between them."

The words of the Prince of Wales regarding Islam are a hopeful development for millions of Muslims all over the world. His speech was greeted with a standing ovation from a powerful audience of 800 invited guests to Oxford University. Thirteen Islamic ambassadors, the Aga Khan, and a number of renowned figures were among those who warmly applauded him. However, if the prince's comments are remarkably special because of his royalty, he is by no means a lone voice in the West to appreciate the merits of Islam. Besides those people in the West who have come to embrace Islam, there are numerous others who have shown some sympathy, appreciation and are friendly.

Yet it has been a long, hard road. There seems to be far more hope in modern scholarship than ever existed heretofore, mainly because the recent modern Western scholar is more objective and less emotional, and does not seem compelled to join the Crusades, as it were. Nevertheless, there were some shaky attempts, as far back as the Middle Ages, and for other reasons than simple unity of mankind, to bring about better understanding. One of the earliest attempts to develop a somewhat more objective view of Islam might be considered that work undertaken by Peter the Venerable (1092 - 1156), Abbot of Cluny in southern France. His treatise *The Apology of Al-Kindi* gave people in Europe the chance to form some idea of Islam for the first time, however dubious.² Peter's treatise made a show of addressing the Muslims gently and with affection: "I approach you, not as men often do with arms, but with words; not with force but with reason, not in hatred but in love. I love you; loving you I write to you; writing to you, I invite you to Salvation."

² Peter the Venerable also had the Qur'an translated into Latin, as will be noted in the text. Unfortunately, Peter's ulterior motive was to show inconsistencies in the Qur'an and try thus to make converts to Christianity. As the American Muslim historian, T.B. Irving writes, "Peter the Venerable chose to fight truth with falsehood." *The Tide of Islam*, Revised Edition (Cedar Rapids, IA.: Igra Press Ltd., 1982), p.6.

Peter the Venerable lived at a time when Christians in Europe had been accustomed, for several centuries, to be in awe, fear, admiration and envy of the great Islamic Empire. The Islamic presence had been keenly felt in Peter's vicinity. Through the 8th, 9th and 10th centuries, a "Frank" (as Muslim chroniclers referred to a Western European Christian) could certainly not travel from the Asturias (the northernmost mountains of Spain) into southern France and even up into Switzerland without running smack into a Muslim garrison or the scouts from such an outpost.³

Almost a century before Peter, such was the appeal and safety of the Islamic world that Gerbert the monk Auvergne (who later became Pope with the title *Sylvester II* [999-1003]), went to Spain to study physical and mathematical sciences. Gerbert imbibed so much knowledge that he was later thought, by his countrymen, to know the ways of magic.⁴

Likewise, ailing Christian nobility were known to seek medical treatment from their sometime "enemies." Sancho, Prince of Leon, requested a safe conduct to Cordoba from the Caliph Abdul Rahman III around 960 A.C.⁵ He was so pleased by his treatment, both medically and socially, that he remembered it forever with gratitude.⁶

³ These Muslim outposts and colonies dotted southern France, northern Italy and Switzerland. With the death of the great Al Mansur Ibn Abi 'Amr in 1002, these garrisons lost their last vigilant protector and were soon after abandoned.

⁴ Haroon Khan Sherwani, *Muslim Colonies in France, Northern Italy and Switzerland*. (Lahore, Pakistan: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1964), See Chapter IV.

⁵ In this text, "A.C." has the same connotation as "A.D."; it means "After Christ."

⁶ Ibid.

It was in this long established era of Islamic tolerance that Peter the Venerable commissioned Robert of Ketton, Herman of Dalmtia, and others, to translate the Qur'an⁷ into Latin. These and other translations ended up, sadly, undermining understanding because - usually in the interest of promoting the Christian religion - they included pejorative, fictitious stories about Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him)⁸ and Islamic doctrine. Yet it is indicative of the tolerant spirit of Islam that scholarly disputations flourished under Muslim sovereigns, both between nations and inside the Muslim realm itself.

In 1840, Thomas Carlyle (Scottish-born historian and social critic) somewhat defended the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) in a manner before then unknown, and perhaps by comparison, objective. While impressed with Muhammad (pbuh) as a suitable 'hero,' and depicting him as a man of real vision, Carlyle nevertheless fell back upon traditional prejudices, especially when it came to evaluating the Holy Qur'an. It is almost as if he couldn't possibly have read it, calling it "a wearisome confused jumble, crude, incondite; endless iterations, long-windedness, entanglement; most crude, incondite - insupportable stupidity, in short".⁹

Clearly the path to mutual understanding has been strewn with near-fatal encumbrances, given such grudging

⁷ Inasmuch as Arabic is the mother tongue and God's Word, I am sure you will also be desirous of reading the Qur'an which has come miraculously by the mouth of an unlettered Arabian of Makkah (Prophet Muhammad). The Qur'an contains every single root-form of the great Arabic language, and it is set forth in grammatical perfection so much so that even the most scholarly writers in Arabic refer to it to prove their own correct usage of Arabic by its model presentation. Also the Arabic Qur'an is mysteriously set forth in an almost poetic form rhythm that has enabled even children to memorize its complete message from cover to cover which remarkably, in itself, contains all of God's directives and guidelines.

⁸ From this point on, " pbuh " will be the abbreviation for this term. Muslims are asked to pray for peace upon all of God's prophets. Likewise "pbut" will mean ' peace be upon them ' in reference to more than one prophet.

⁹ Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* (New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1841, reprinted. 1906), p.63. This reference note taken from Edward Said's own research in *Orientalism*, (New York: Vintage Books, Random House, Inc., 1979.)

'defenders.' In the next century, another Scotsman by the name of Montgomery Watt did substantially better at celebrating the contributions of Islam to Western Civilization.¹⁰ However, Watt still evinces that pernicious Orientalist trait of insisting on Muhammad's falseness as a prophet, however great a man the historian compliments him on being. Like countless other Orientalists who have found the Muslim world thrilling enough to study an entire lifetime, Watt-with a finesse that almost, but not quite, hides a snidely contemptuous undertone, insists on explaining just why and how Muhammad (pbuh) manipulated Islam for political ends.

This has traditionally been the downfall of the Orientalist. Scholarship, by definition, should not be derisive. It is ironic that the same scholars who insist on Muhammad(pbuh) having been a coldly calculating 'hero,' never take into account why he never rewarded himself with financial gain once his mission became so successful. Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) lived in such voluntary poverty, although he generously and fairly doled out property to his people, that his own shield was in hock to a local Jew when he died, and had to be redeemed by his heirs after his death. Surely such conduct cannot be compared to normal humans, but only to other prophets! Could not the Orientalists have asked themselves why Muhammad (pbuh) was so forgiving to his enemies? Indeed, if he fabricated the Qur'an (as Orientalists say or intimate) why would he admonish *his own self* therein? What was it all for?

Similarly, Orientalist scholars of Arab literature love to disparage that same literature, and one is forced to ask: if Arabic poetry is so simple, so "unable to build up a consistent image,"¹¹ how do these supercilious scholars find it interesting

¹⁰ As Professor of Arabic at Edinburgh University, Watt authored such books as *A History of Islamic Spain*, (1965). The latter was co-authored by Pierre Cachia, who at the time held a chair of Islamic Studies at Columbia University.

¹¹ Montgomery Watt and Pierre Cachia, *A History of Islamic Spain*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1965),P.74

enough to devote thereto a lifetime of study? Little wonder that, in his in-depth study of Western European works on Islam, Norman Daniel calls for a comprehensive change of attitude!

Still, a number of modern historians, Muslim and non-Muslim, writing in English on Islamic topics, deserve special recognition for the honest, serious and tradition-defiant manner in which they have not only approached Islamic subjects but insisted upon bringing them to publication; and, in the case of academic writers, upon bringing these subjects into university curriculums. In the face of apathy, derision, and passive aggression from colleagues (including, ironically, those Muslim-born Western university-based scholars who write vitriolic literature about their birth-places and actually oppose Western students' open-minded research into Muslim history), these historians have opened new doors to understanding, thanks to their own sheer fascination with their subject matter. Among these courageous scholars have been, notably, Edward Said, a Christian Palestinian who has lived his life in the West and has held a chair of English and Comparative Literature at Columbia University; Anwar Chejne, a Muslim who has been a professor of Middle Eastern and Hispano-Arabic studies at the University of Minnesota, and T.B. Irving, an American Muslim historian who actually founded the Near Eastern Studies program at the University of Minnesota. Irving was also Professor of Spanish and Arabic at the University of Tennessee, and retired as Professor Emeritus in 1980. In the latter part of the twentieth century, there have also finally been scholars with no religious or racial ties to the Islamic World who have depicted it without prejudice and with grace. Such is the case, for instance, of Professor Ross Dunn of San Diego State University, California, a leading expert on the life of Ibn Battuta, the famed 14th century traveler from Tangier in North Africa. In *The Adventures of Ibn Battuta*, (1986), Dunn's excellent

commentary on Ibn Battuta's *Rihla*, Dunn observes that his subject:

traveled in the circles of world-minded men for whom the universalist and cosmopolitan institutions of Islam - the mosques, the colleges, the palaces - were more important than the parochial customs and loyalties that constricted the cultural vision of the great majority.¹²

Such unprejudiced insight, exceedingly rare a half century ago, is becoming more and more common. This single comment not only demonstrates that the researcher understood that worldly Muslims in long-ago times *could* distinguish the forest from the trees, but that he (the former) does, too. Moreover, Dunn did not manifest any Crusader compulsion to "explain" how Islam could actually have come to exist.

We can only hope and pray that prejudiced and unfriendly analyses are in the past. Perhaps Michael H. Hart, author of *The 100: A Ranking of the Most Influential Persons in History* has one of the most remarkable views about the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) to be found in the West. Not for any religious reasons, but for the Prophet's positive influence on humanity, Hart rates him number one among all those identified who have influenced mankind!

Of other scholars who deserve commendation for attempting to break down the barriers of prejudice Karen Armstrong, author of *Muhammad, a Western Attempt to Understand Islam*, and John L. Esposito are two examples. In his work entitled The Islamic Threat: Myth Or Reality? John Esposito wrote that:

For many Muslims, Islamic revivalism is a social rather than a political movement whose goal is a more Islamically minded and oriented society,

¹² Ross E. Dunn, *The Adventures of IBN Battuta*. (London & Sydney : Croom Helm, 1989) P.xi.

but not necessarily the creation of an Islamic state. For others, the establishment of an Islamic order requires the creation of an Islamic state. In either case, Islam and most Islamic movements are not necessarily anti-Western, anti-American, or anti-democratic.

In reference to other contemporary non-Muslim Western writers, it is worthwhile mentioning the tremendous efforts exerted by Prof. Francis Lamand, President of the French association, "Islam and the West." For two decades Dr. Lamand has been and still is fighting vigorously, with very few supporters, to build a bridge of mutual trust between Western and Islamic countries. For him, the basis of rapprochement is the idea of defending the values of society. He stresses that the West of technology and science is a West that has lost, to a large degree, the important sense of moral values that Islam, as an unchanging ideology, will forever preserve.

In his own words, Dr. Lamand contends that:

Islam can contribute to the rebirth, in the West, of three essential values: the sense of community in a part of the world that has become too individualistic, the sense of the sacred, and the legal sense. This can be the contribution of Islam to Western societies.

We should also admire and applaud the efforts of other organizations that work tirelessly in the United Kingdom, France, the U.S.A. and elsewhere to promote good community relations. The Islamic Foundation of Leicester, the aforementioned French association, "Islam and the West" the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies, the Centre for the Study of Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations, Iqra Trust, London; the Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs, London; the Islamic

Society of North America (ISNA), Indiana, U.S.A. and the IIT are but a few of the notable and successful examples.

Muslim writers also make their share of mistakes. In a recent article, a Muslim writer gave the impression that the West as a whole is against Islam. Nothing could be further from the truth, or more misleading! On the contrary, those who delight in attacking Islam or portraying it falsely are likely to become isolated in due course. If one accuses certain Western writers of ignorance when they portray Islam in a bad light, then writers in the Muslim world who make sweeping accusations against the West are even more guilty, for they themselves are committing the same error for which they blame others:

Enjoin ye righteousness upon mankind while ye yourselves forget (to practice it)?

(Qur'an, The Cow, 2:44)

﴿ أأمرؤن الناس بالبر وتنسون أنفسكم
وأنتم تلوون الكتاب أفلا تعقلون ﴾

(البقرة : ٤٤)

I am utterly convinced that mutual understanding, respect and dialogue will continue to improve our situation. Muslims need to continue this dialogue with open-minded and educated Westerners. I agree entirely with Prince Charles that: " ... tolerance and understanding must be two-way," and that the two worlds, Islamic and Western, are at something of a crossroads in their relations. As the Prince of Wales noted, "the Islamic and Western Worlds can no longer afford to stand apart," but must come together "in a common effort to solve their common problems." Prince Charles observed correctly that "we cannot afford to revive the territorial and political confrontations of the past." We have to share

experiences, to explain ourselves to each other, to understand and to tolerate, and build on those positive principles which our two cultures have in common. The world is fast becoming a global village as communication among the various parts is increasingly facilitated by new media technologies. What is happening in one hemisphere of the world affects the thinking and actions of people in the remotest parts of the other hemisphere, either positively or negatively.

We should educate the young generation in the West correctly about Islam and the Muslim way of life, just as there is a need to give the youth in the Muslim World balanced and positive information about the West! Equally important is the need for dialogue between adults from both sides. Mutual understanding will lead to economic and cultural cooperation, which are no less important than cooperation in the field of education. If the two worlds succeed in cooperating at all these levels irrespective of differences in colors or religious backgrounds, that will eventually lead to the creation of a more empathetic world community and one world system. After all, the whole of humanity is but one family and “*our God and your God is One*” (Qur’an, *The Spider* 29:46). This is a cardinal teaching of Islam, emphasized more than once:

O mankind! Lo! We have created you male and female, and have made you nations and tribes that ye may

﴿ يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَى
وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ
عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَاكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ ﴾

(Qur’an, *Private Apartments* 49:13)

(الحجرات: ١٣)

It is the duty of those who speak out about Islam to do so in a way that will facilitate much-needed understanding. Allah says:

Call unto the way of thy Lord with wisdom and fair exhortation, and reason with them in the better way.

﴿ ادع الى سبيل ربك بالحكمة والموعظة
الحسنة وجاد لهم بالتي هي احسن
ان ربك هو اعلم بمن ضل عن سبيله
وهو اعلم بالمهتدين ﴾

(النحل: ١٢٥)

(Qur'an, The Bee, 16 :125)

Prince Charles said:

I am delighted that the dialogue has begun, both in Britain and elsewhere. But we shall need to work harder to understand each other, to drain out any poison between us, and to lay the ghost of suspicion and fear. The further down the road we can travel, the better the world that we shall create for our children and for future generations.

The Prince has touched on the truth; and his message, without doubt, must surely have reached the hearts of all the faithful who heard it. I admire him for his courage.

Calling for a More Objective Portrayal of Islam

A decisive factor in relations among peoples is often their lores, especially their religious lores. A people's religious literature - oral and written - is a sacred source and proof of their origins as a group. It provides adherents an additional exclusive identity, and frequently identifies their adversaries.

If territorial conquests and imperialism created the mutual suspicion that has separated the West and the Muslim World for such a long time, it is now in the interest of both peoples to establish genuine mutual trust, and advocate cooperation. By the very nature of being human, we are far more interdependent than self-sufficient. Inter-dependence calls for cooperation and this can be achieved *only* in an atmosphere of mutual understanding, mutual trust and mutual respect.

In the past, prejudices arising from belligerence and ignorance led most writers on Islam to portray the religion negatively. Yet there were others who recognized the need to be objective in forming opinions about the Muslims, their faith and their way of life. Objectivity seems to have increased incrementally. Such scholars know and uphold the truth that the right sources of information about the faith of Islam are the Qur'an, the Sunnah or model practice of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), and the authentic records of the lives of the early Muslims, and certainly not the actions of "extremists"¹³ of former and modern times.

¹³Extremism most commonly declares itself, in its fervor, by some aspect of abandoning mercy towards mankind.

Sadly, however, the views of objective and serious writers are hardly ever taken into consideration when the lore of the “adversaries” is called into play. That is, when an influential party - such as the Western media - deems it useful to once again wield their own version of Islamic lore, determined, it seems, to portray Islam in terms of tragic wars, senseless killings and bombings perpetrated by illiterates and/or extremists in some parts of the Muslim World. As His Royal Highness, the Prince of Wales has noted, and rightly so, the West’s “judgement of Islam has been grossly distorted by taking the extremes to be the norms.” But the Prince warned at the same time that it was like “judging the quality of life in Britain by the existence of murder, rape, child abuse and drug addiction.” Using such extremes as a basis to judge a society is unfair, as it blows things out of proportion.

Historically, Muslim-Jewish and Muslim-Christian relations should be considered on two levels: the official level, which includes the views of political and religious officials; and the mass or common people's level. No matter which level we consider, it is practically a prerequisite in discussion to first deal with the theory that Islam was propagated ‘by the sword.’ Many movies still portray Islam as a religion of ‘the sword,’ indeed unfairly, as repeatedly in history Muslims have had no recourse to survival but to fight or submit quietly to mass extermination. Such an attitude, the reasonable may agree, is but another form of extremism - all so that another group of people in the world might just might be inclined to have a good opinion of them.¹⁴

Defense is one form of ‘*jihad*’. Western lore has it that Islam is a religion of ‘*jihad*’ (by which they mean what is often described as ‘holy war’), violence and oppression. The concept of *jihad* in Islam is a noble one, contrary to

¹⁴ The case of Bosnia-Herzegovina exemplified this dilemma perfectly. The people there were forbidden arms, were chided by the international media if they tried to defend themselves, and had to be killed in massive numbers before Western countries - whose sympathy and help they wanted - would even pay attention.

stereotypes. The first and foremost definition of *jihad* means to exert oneself in a positive way in order to do what is right and avoid or prevent what is wrong. Thus, it obviously starts with the self. It can be as simple as being kind to one's own family, visiting the sick, and being tolerant of other people. It takes the form of fighting only as a last resort and when all peaceful means have failed, and only in defense of self or in defense of what is right. Fighting should stop as soon as the aggressor refrains from aggression, and Muslims should *not* be the aggressors. How could a Muslim fight against a person in order to make him accept Islam when Allah says unequivocally in the Qur'an:

"There is no compulsion in religion "

﴿ لا إكراه في الدين قد تبين الرشد من الغي ﴾

(البقرة : ٢٥٦)

(Qur'an, The Cow 2:256).

On the strength of this and many other injunctions in the Qur'an as well as the sayings and conduct of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), coercing a non-believer to accept Islam is unthinkable! For Muslims, conversion is absolutely a matter of conviction and not valid otherwise. There never has been nor will be anything of the Inquisition about it.

Still, those who have read about the spread of Islam may contend that it was, indeed, spread through battles. How can this be so when Muslims must not be the aggressors?

Quite simply, Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam (pbuh), was specifically commanded by God to carry the message of Islam to mankind. As in the case of most prophets, his words were often met with scorn and derision, especially from prominent men who could not stand to see people from their

tribes believing in the revelations. This derision frequently escalated to bodily harm inflicted against believers.

Finally the believers were commanded to defend themselves. This is where what is known as the 'lesser' *jihad* comes into play, or in other words, a call to arms in defense of believers. (The 'greater' *jihad* is the lifelong struggle to be a good Muslim and keep one's duty to God in daily affairs.)

When the local tribes in Arabia had been subdued - after these battles of defense-and often with overwhelming odds *against* the Muslims, the Prophet (pbuh) continued his carrying of God's message (the revelation of the Qur'an, which basically commands people to worship the only One God, to believe that Muhammad was the final messenger and Prophet, and to do works of kindness and mercy towards each other, with promise of great reward in the Hereafter) to neighboring peoples. That was his mission, commanded by God. He accepted no money for it, and indeed, lived in great poverty and humility, by choice, during his entire lifetime. There was certainly a lot of riches to be had, and he was repeatedly offered the same, but he had unparalleled faith, and wished for his reward in the Hereafter. He was noted, moreover, for the profound sweetness of his temperament, and made everyone, no matter how insignificant, feel that they were very special.

When the Prophet (pbuh) carried the message of Islam to neighboring peoples, whether they were tribes or empires, he used to send letters with messengers. The correspondents were given the choice of embracing the religion, or simply acknowledging and submitting to the Muslims' already formidable and unquestionable ascendancy. This state of being is very similar to Europe in medieval times when a small ruler would submit to a greater ruler, paying a tribute and receiving his protection in times of war.

Yet sometimes a recipient did not want to submit, and in that case the reaction was hostile and inevitably betokened a

state of war. Said recipient would refuse to recognize the new Islamic state, much less Muhammad's mission to mankind, and far from paying a tribute generally responded with insults and/or outright attacks.

Once a state of war became evident, the Prophet (pbuh) commanded that no old man, woman or child from the hostile people should be hurt. No animal on enemy territory could be maimed or killed, nor any tree cut down for vengeance. Moreover, if an opponent was wounded or maimed in the course of battle and could not defend himself, it became unlawful to kill him. Rather, he had to be taken alive as a prisoner. Lastly, if any opponent suddenly uttered the words of belief, "I witness that there is no god but God (Allah), and I witness that Muhammad is His Messenger," he was no longer considered an enemy, but a believer, even if it seemed like he might be saying those words only in order to save his life.

Many were the humanely-treated prisoners who realized that such standards of behavior were extraordinary, and could only come from a true prophet ordained by God. Submission from a non-Muslim people basically meant payment of a yearly tax (while Muslims pay a tax as well, though it carries a different name), and their peaceful cooperation with Muslim rule.

The conduct of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) and his successors (especially those known as the 'rightly-guided Caliphs') clearly depicts the tolerance of Islam towards people of other faiths. The Prophet (pbuh) guaranteed the Jews of Madinah complete religious freedom in the constitution of the Islamic State established by him, and this was afterwards extended to the Christians of Central Arabia and Yemen, as the Islamic State began to spread. The caliphs after him followed his example in this matter as in others. Omar, for instance, wrote to the Christians of Jerusalem assuring them of their freedom to practice their religion, wear their crosses

and keep their churches, which Muslims would never touch (i.e., never tamper with, or harm).

Muhammad's (pbuh) concern for the welfare of non-Muslim citizens living in the Islamic state and the protection of their rights is evident in his popular saying that he would be the prosecutor, on the Day of Judgement, of anyone who wronged a *dhimmi* (one of the 'People of the Book' living in the Islamic state) or placed on him a burden greater than he could bear. The Prophet's justice is likewise evident in the instance of the time when he once had to pass judgement between a Jew and a Muslim, and he found the Muslim guilty, ruling in favor of the Jew. He also checked Omar when the latter was annoyed with a Jew who showed an awful disrespect for the Prophet (pbuh). Similarly, a judge under the government of the Caliph Ali gave a verdict against Ali in favor of a Jew who was the defendant. In his book, *The Preaching of Islam*, Sir Thomas Arnold testifies to the spirit of tolerance which Islam teaches its followers, and their love and respect for freedom of opinion and freedom of belief for all people. He notes that the tolerance and freedom of religious life enjoyed by the various Christian churches under Muslim rule in the first century Hejira (Islamic calendar which started with the immigration of Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh) from Makkah to Madinah in about 622 CE) was such as had been unknown for generations under the Byzantine governments. There is no real justification for accusing Islam of oppression. The explanation for the violence of 'extremists' must be sought elsewhere, not in the teachings of Islam.

A little information can go a long way in the quest for mutual empathy and tolerance. Most non-Muslims are, for instance, totally unaware of the great respect that Islam accords to the Prophet Jesus (pbuh), and indeed, to every one of the other prophets of Allah (pbut). Nor do most non-Muslims know that for Muslims, Islam did not start with Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), but that 'Islam' was, according to

Islamic thought and teaching, the religion of *each and every one* of the previous prophets! That is because "Islam" literally means *Surrender or Submission* to the One God.

About Jesus the Qur'an says:

(And remember) when the angels said: O Mary! Lo! Allah giveth thee glad tidings of a word from Him, whose name is the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, illustrious in the world and the Hereafter, and one of those brought near (unto Allah).

He will speak unto mankind in his cradle and in his manhood, and he is of the righteous.

She said: My Lord! How can I have a child when no mortal hath touched me? He said: So (it will be). Allah createth what He will if He decreeth a thing, He saith unto it only: Be! and it is.

And He will teach him the Scripture and wisdom, and the Torah and the Gospel.

And will make him a messenger unto the children of Israel, (saying): Lo! I come unto you with a sign from your Lord. Lo! I fashion for you out of clay the likeness of a bird, and I breathe into it and it is a bird, by Allah's Leave. I heal him who was born blind, and the leper, and I raise the dead, by Allah's leave. And I announce unto you what ye eat and what ye store up in your houses. Lo! herein verily is a portent for you, if ye are to be believers

(Quran, the Family of Imran, 45-49).

﴿ اذ قالت الملائكة يا مريم ان الله يشرك

بكلمة منه اسمه عيسى ابن مريم وجيها

فى الدنيا والآخرة ومن المقربين ..

قالت رب انى يكون لى ولد ولم

يسسنى بشر قال كذلك الله يخلق ما يشاء اذا

قضى أمرا فانما يقول له كن فيكون

.. ويعلمه الكتاب والحكمة والتوراة والانجيل ..

ورسولا الى بنى اسرائيل أنى قد

جتكم بآية من ربكم أنى أخلق لكم

من الطين كهية الطير فانفخ فيه

فيكون طيرا باذن الله وأبرىء الأكمه

والأبرص وأحيى الموتى باذن الله

وأنبىكم بما تأكلون وما تدخرون فى

بيوتكم ان فى ذلك لآية لكم ان

كنتم مؤمنين ﴿

آل عمران : ٤٥-٤٩)

As such, and in the context of Allah's revelation to Muhammad (pbuh), every recognized Scriptural prophet (of both Old and New Testaments) did indeed bring the truth; and as for God's commandments to mankind, they have never changed in spirit or principle but only in details, which right Allah gives unto Himself. Even during the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), Allah abrogated certain rules for believers: for instance, wine-drinking was in the beginning tolerated, and later forbidden, as the number and faith of the adherents grew.¹⁵

Muslims themselves are warned, in the Qur'an, to avoid basing their opinions and actions on potentially false information, for they may hurt people in error:

O ye who believe! If an evil-liver brings you tidings, verify it, lest ye smite some folk in ignorance and afterward repent of what ye did.

(Qur'an, The Private apartments, 49:6).

﴿ يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِن جَاءَكُمْ فَاسِقٌ بِنَبَأٍ فَتَبَيَّنُوا أَن تُصِيبُوا قَوْمًا بِجَهَالَةٍ فَتُصِحِّحُوا عَلَىٰ مَا فَعَلْتُمْ نَادِمِينَ ﴾

(الحجرات : ٦)

More than half a century ago, Thomas Carlyle gave a similar warning in a lecture delivered at the University of Edinburgh. He said, among other things, "The lies, which well-meaning zeal has heaped round this man [i.e. Prophet Muhammad (pbuh)] are disgraceful to ourselves only."¹⁶

¹⁵ There is so much excellent literature available nowadays in Western European languages about Islam and its history, written by both Muslim and non-Muslim empathetic Western scholars, that it is very possible to read and discover a great deal on these subjects without being subject to the feeling of being preached at, or suffocated by overweening pedantry. *Islam and the Destiny of Man* by Charles Le Gai Eaton (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1985) is one such book, which intriguingly, and without insult, clarifies the differences in perception of Muslims, Christians, Jews and atheists.

¹⁶ *Heroes and Hero Worship*, 1890, p.52.

There is no ground whatsoever to regard Islam as a threat to the West. On the contrary, the West and the Muslim World can, and should, be partners in progress. In terms of modern technology and managerial skills, the Muslim World has gained, and continues to gain, from the West. Conversely, the West may have something to ponder, and gain if it so chooses, from the Muslim World in terms of spiritual goals and moral values.

Even in terms of the past, Muslims and 'People of the Book' have benefited each other. While Muslims ruled Spain for almost 800 years, between the 8th and 15th centuries, their scientific and cultural influence on non-Muslim Europe was enormous, and helped bring about an end to the Dark Ages and usher in a new age of art and learning.

Hopefully, the remaining part of this decade may usher in a twenty-first century CE¹⁷ of greater appreciation and understanding between the two Worlds for the good of both and of humanity at large.

¹⁷ CE = Christian Era

Peace and Progress Through Better Understanding and Cooperation

The Unfriendly Attitude

A lot has been said and written on the subject of Islam and the West, and many conferences have convened. Still, much remains to be done towards bringing about a rapprochement and dampening the assault on Islam and Muslims in the Western media. As H.R.H. the Prince of Wales noted in his speech at Oxford in 1993:

The depressing fact is that, despite the advances in technology and mass communications of the second half of the 20th century; despite mass travel, the intermingling of races, the ever-growing reduction (or so we believe) of the mysteries of our world, misunderstandings between Islam and the West continue. Indeed they may be growing.

Misrepresentation of Islam, once insidious only on the printed page, has now mushroomed to all forms of mass communications. The entertainment industry, news telecasts, radio shows, the movie industry, children's television programs and even commercials on billboards have all become vehicles of propagating the misrepresentation of Islam in the West. Literary fiction and non-fiction remain among the most damaging vehicles in the attempts to permanently distort the image and concept of Islam in the minds of non-Muslim readers. This is true despite small inroads having been made on a positive, non-aggressive portrait of Islam in Western literature, even in such places as children's school textbooks. Unfortunately, these are only drops in a bucket slosh-full of continuing misrepresentations based on old Western lore. Likewise, with the virtual monopoly of satellite stations, the

West's misrepresentation of Islam and the Muslims is beamed internationally and is received in the Muslim world without facing any form of counter-balance. Naturally, this is the fault of Muslim societies themselves. Nevertheless, said imbalance. A growing number of Muslims feel frustration and despair when the traditional hostility is reinforced at a time when Muslims are defenseless victims of genocide and wars in their own homelands.

A. Religious Dimension

The relations between the Muslim World and the Christian West can be analyzed on two basic levels: the religious and historical, and the economic and cultural. Western communities would like to deal with the Muslim World primarily on the latter level, yet it is at the first level where the bond is much stronger than most people in the West realize. However, it is also at the first level that traditional animosities (usually based on misconceptions and misrepresentations, i.e., ancient lore) break open old wounds, causing reason, logic and empathy to fly out the window.

In fact, religion should be the corner-stone for any Muslim-Christian-Jewish relationship that may evolve. Together, we three are all People of the Scripture. We worship the same God: the One, True God Who Created mankind and Holds us accountable in the life to come for our beliefs and actions in this present earthly life.

Islam, which means total submission to God, is also the religion of all the prophets before Muhammad (pbut). All of them preached the same principle of total submission to God. Noah, Abraham, Jacob, Jonah, Isaac, Ismael, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad (to name some, and there are others mentioned in the Scriptures, peace be upon them all) received the same Divine Message: that there is no deity except God,

and that all humankind should worship none but Him. Muslims recognize Islam as the seal of this universal religion sent for the good of all humanity.

The messages of the prophets Moses and Jesus, (pbut), for Judaism and Christianity, came before that of Muhammad (pbuh), but the word 'Judaism' is not even mentioned in the Torah nor in the Mithna. It was created by the non-Jews in Palestine who were saying disparagingly that the religion followed by the Jews in Judea was 'Judaism.' Moses did not mention the term, nor did David or Solomon use it at all (pbut). Likewise, the term 'Christianity' is never mentioned in the Bible, nor did Jesus (pbuh) ever say that he was 'Christ.'

The point here is that the common message of all prophets sent by God is that mankind should worship none but God, submitting only and totally to Him. That is the precise definition of the word 'Islam.' Thus 'Islam' as taught by the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) is not a new innovation in history, nor is it a distortion of the accumulated teachings of Jews and Christians, for it does not deviate from any original Scriptural monotheistic principle. The Qur'an, which is the Divine message revealed to Muhammad, (pbuh) ('the Prophet who could neither read nor write' as prophesized to come by earlier messengers); exquisite in its syntax and content, preaches nothing but the same fundamental commandments that were sent with the earlier prophets, which originate and culminate in the same essence of faith : that the One God is the Creator of all things, and that we should believe in Him and turn towards Him. Islam perfects this message through the miracle of the Qur'an, and through the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) in his capacity as the last successor and 'seal' of the prophets (peace be upon them all!) . Whether or not a Christian or a Jew wants to accept this belief as true is not at issue here, for neither do Jews accept the prophethood of he whom the Christians and Muslims regard as Jesus, the

Messiah (pbuh). Each group may privately find the others astray in some points, but they must, for the sake of logic and humanity, recognize that their beliefs come from the same tree of faith.

The Qur'an confers a special status on Christians and Jews, referring to them as the 'People of the Scripture' (or 'People of the Book'). In that holy book, Allah instructs Muslims to deal gently and respectfully with them:

And argue not with the People of the Scripture unless it be in (a way) that is better, save with such of them as do wrong, and say: We believe in that which hath been revealed unto us and revealed unto you; our God and your God is One, and unto Him we surrender.

(Qur'an, The Spider 29:46)

﴿ ولا تجادلوا أهل الكتاب الا بالتي هي
أحسن الا الذين ظلموا منهم وقولوا آمنا
بالذي أنزل الينا وأنزل اليكم والهنا والهكم
واحد ونحن له مسلمون ﴾

(العنكبوت : ٤٦)

Muslims are further instructed to assure the followers of earlier prophets of their faith in ,and respect for, those prophets, and the original revelations they brought, discriminating against none of them:

Say (O Muslims): We believe in Allah and that which is revealed unto us and that which was revealed unto Abraham, and Ishmael, and

﴿ قولوا آمنا بالله وما أنزل الينا وما أنزل الى إبراهيم
واسماعيل واسحق ويعقوب والأسباط وما أوتي

Isaac, and Jacob, and the tribes, and that which Moses and Jesus received, and that which the Prophets received from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and unto Him we have surrendered.

(Qur'an, The Cow 2:136)

موسى وعيسى وما أوتي النبيون
من ربهم لا نفرق بين أحد منهم ونحن له
مسلمون ﴿

(البقرة : ١٣٦)

Even when engaged in inter-faith dialogue, Muslims are to adopt a friendly and persuasive approach:

Say: "O People of the Scripture! Come to an agreement between us and you: that we shall worship none but Allah, and that we shall ascribe no partner unto Him, and that none of us shall take others for lords besides Allah. And if they turn away, then say: Bear witness that we are they who have surrendered (unto Him).

(Qur'an, The Family of Imran , 3 : 64)

﴿ قل : يا أهل الكتاب تعالوا الى كلمة سواء بيننا
وبينكم ألا نعبد إلا الله ولا نشرك به شيئا ولا يتخذ
بعضنا بعضا أربابا من دون الله فإن
تولوا فقولوا أشهدوا بأنا مسلمون ﴾

(آل عمران : ٦٤)

B. The Historical Relationship

Obedience to these Divine instructions is reflected in the early Muslims' relations with the Christians. Prophet Muhammad's mission (pbuh) began in 610 CE. The power struggle in the Near East was then still in its early stages. At that time the two main sovereign warring powers were the Eastern Christian Roman Empire, ruled by the Emperor Heraclius, and the Persian Empire under Emperor Khusraw Parwiz (Chosroes). By the year 611 CE, the Persians had made sweeping victories over the Romans, taking Aleppo, Antioch and Damascus. When Jerusalem fell to the Persians in 615, the city with its churches was burnt and pillaged, and the Christians were massacred. After taking Egypt, the Persians went westward as far as Tripoli in North Africa, while in the east their army was on the outskirts of Constantinople, the seat of the Eastern Roman Empire.

The Arabian Peninsula proper was never conquered by either of the two parties even though its outlying parts came under the control of one or the other at various times. As for Yemen, its coastal areas were contested between the Persians and the Abyssinians, the latter having had close cultural and political ties with Arabia for many centuries. In this contest for power and domination, the pagan Arabs of the tribe of Quraysh (which was the same tribe to which Muhammad (pbuh) belonged) sided with the Persians, who were Zoroastrians, and rejoiced at the defeat of the Romans, thinking that the destruction of the Christian power would check the growing message of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), as both religions were monotheistic. Economically, the Qurayshis benefited from the defeat of the Romans by taking control of trade within the Arabian Peninsula, from Yemen to Damascus and other parts of Arabia.

Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) and the Muslims sympathized with the Roman Christians, and were grieved by their setback. Everyone believed that the Roman Empire had finally been crushed, but the Qur'an predicted otherwise. In a revelation to Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), the Muslims were informed that the Persian victory would be short-lived, and that within a few years the Romans would rally and defeat the Persians:

The Romans have been defeated. In the nearer land, and they, after their defeat, will be victorious. Within ten years- Allah's is the command in the former case and in the latter-and in that the believers will rejoice.

﴿ غلبت الروم - فى أدنى الأرض وهم
من بعد غلبهم سيغلبون - فى بضع
سنين لله الأمر من قبل ومن بعد
ويومئذ يفرح المؤمنون ﴾

(الروم : ٢ - ٣ - ٤)

(Qur'an, The Romans 30:2-4)

This particular revelation brought ridicule from non-believers upon the Muslims and their prophet. Yet within seven years the prophecy was fulfilled and the Muslims rejoiced at the victory of the People of the Scripture (the Romans) over the Zoroastrian Persians.

That fraternal sympathy which the Muslims felt towards the Christians was disrupted when the Romans began to sense a threat to their political and economic interests from the emerging Muslim power in Madinah. In an attempt to stifle the Islamic state in its infancy, the Romans mobilized their troops near the city of Tabuk. Rumors spread in Madinah that the emperor Heraclius had advanced a year's pay to his army in view of a long campaign against the Muslims. In defense, the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) mobilized his own army of believers. While they anticipated each other's movements, a strange truth remained largely hidden - that Heraclius had, during his Persian campaign, seen a vivid dream in which a

“circumcised man” would triumph throughout Syria.¹⁸ Heraclius was so affected by his dream, he proposed to his generals that a treaty should be made with the Prophet (pbuh), giving him the entire province of Syria, on the condition that he should not advance beyond its northernmost frontiers. The Roman generals were shocked and angered by this proposal, whereupon Heraclius abandoned it.¹⁹

¹⁸ In Ibn Ishaq's *sira*, *The Life of Muhammad*, translated by A. Guillaume (Karachi: Oxford University Press, there is a rather lengthy and fascinating account of Heraclius' vision and its aftermath. A firsthand interview account is narrated (and thus quoted by Ibn Ishaq) by Arab merchants who, at the time, had no reason to wish to install fear of Muhammad (pbuh) in the heart of Heraclius, as they were enemies of the Muslims. Apparently Heraclius ordered his chief of police to turn Syria upside down in the effort to find this 'prophet' and bring him to the emperor. Instead of Muhammad (pbuh), the police came across the Arab merchants and brought them to the Roman ruler. The Arabs tried to belittle Muhammad, but Heraclius ignored these comments, and questioned them intently. Finally the Roman emperor summed up their interview by saying:

I asked you about his lineage and you alleged that it was pure and of your best and God chooses only a man of the noblest lineage as a prophet. Then I asked if any man of his family made similar claims and you said No. Then I asked if he had been robbed of dominion and made this claim to recover it, and you said No. Then I asked you about his followers and you said that they were the weak and poor and young slaves and women, and such have been the followers of the prophets in all ages. Then I asked if his followers left him and you said None. Thus is the sweetness of faith: it does not enter the heart and depart. Then I asked if he was treacherous and you said No; and truly if you have told me the truth about him he will conquer me on the ground that is beneath my feet, and I wish that I were with him that I might wash his feet. Go about your business. (p.655)

¹⁹ Ibid.. Following that interview, Heraclius received a letter from the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), inviting him to Islam and giving, as explained, a choice between being a Muslim with equal rights in the new Islamic State, or becoming a submissive tributary, with full rights as such. Heraclius consulted a scholar of Hebrew in Constantinople to verify that, indeed, the Scriptures foretold a prophet of Muhammad's description. The writer responded affirmatively and told Heraclius to believe in him. Thereupon followed a dramatic scene:

Heraclius ordered the Roman generals to assemble in a room and commanded that the doors should be fastened. Then he looked down on them from an upper chamber (for he was afraid of them) and said: "O Romans, I have brought you together for a good purpose. This man has written me a letter summoning me to his religion. By God, he is truly the prophet whom we expect and find in our books, so come and let us follow him and believe in him that it may be well with us in this world and the next." As one man they uttered cries of disgust and ran to the doors to get out, but found them bolted. He ordered that they should be brought back to him, fearing for his life, and said: "I spoke these words that I might see the firmness of your religion in face of what has happened, and I am delighted with what I have seen of your behavior." They fell down in obeisance and he ordered that the doors should be opened and they went off. (p.656)

The Muslim army remained between ten and twenty days in Tabuk. While the rumors about the imminent Byzantine menace proved to be unfounded; those Christians and Jews the Prophet (pbuh) did come across became second parties in peace settlements. In return for a yearly tribute, a Christian and Jewish community living at the head of the gulf of Aqabah and along its eastern coast were guaranteed protection by the Islamic state. Additionally, the Prophet's general Khalid Ibn Al-Waleed was sent to the northeast of Tabuk, to an important stronghold where he surprised the Christian ruler out on a hunting expedition. He brought him back to Madinah, where said ruler not only made an alliance with the Prophet (pbuh), but decided to enter Islam.

A close examination of this incident reveals that the main cause of the conflict was economic, compounded by suspicion and fear on the part of the Romans. The Romans made a second and far more serious attempt to crush the Muslim army during the reign of the second Caliph, Omar ibn Al-Khattab. They were defeated. After the Muslim conquest of Syria and Palestine, Omar came in person to receive the key to the city of Jerusalem. However, on entering the city he refused to pray in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre for fear that some Muslims, misinterpreting his actions, might want to build a mosque on the site of that great Christian church. Moreover, Omar followed the tradition of the Prophet Muhammad by giving orders for the protection of the Christian community, and that soldiers should hurt no individual, slaughter no animal, nor cut down any tree.

These are but a few glimpses of tolerance in the religion of Islam and its history; the best testimony of it being the peaceful coexistence of Christians, Jews and Muslims in the Muslim World, a coexistence that can be traced up to the present day. It is worth noting that, in some places like

Yugoslavia, it was the Muslims who wanted to preserve a multi-ethnic, multi-religious state. Under non-Muslim governments, however, Muslims have traditionally been shown little or no tolerance. For instance, when Ferdinand and Isabella took over Granada, the last Muslim stronghold in Spain, they promised many rights to the submitting inhabitants. Nevertheless, these were empty promises, soon broken. Ultimately, no Muslim was allowed to remain in Spain, although they had lived there *with* Jews and Christians (who, under them, had continuously commanded respect and often held high-ranking positions) for almost eight centuries in an enlightened and tolerant civilization that fascinated the rest of the world.

Since the formative years of Prophet Muhammad's mission (pbuh), Muslims have cherished a sense of fellowship with Christians. When persecuted by their fellow Meccans, a number of the Muslims, including Uthman ibn Affan who later became the third ('guided') Caliph, sought asylum, at the behest of the Prophet (pbuh), in Abyssinia under the Christian King Negus. As Karen Armstrong points out in her book, *A History of God*, Muslims never sought to proselytize Christians or Jews. Dr. Edward W. Blyden, who was ordained as a Presbyterian clergyman in Liberia and who served as Liberian Ambassador to the Court of St. James in London and President of Liberia College (1880-1888) bears out Armstrong's contention. In his book, *Islam, Christianity and the African Race*, he noted that:

Under the Moorish Governments of Spain, when Islam enjoyed political ascendancy, the large masses of native Christians were protected by wide toleration, not as a political expedient, but in conformity with the laws of Islam. The Christians were permitted to have their bishops, churches and monasteries, and to be judged by their own laws and tribunals, whenever the

*question at issue was one that related only to themselves. (P.123)*²⁰

Any psychotherapist will agree that it's better to focus on the positive rather than the negative aspects of a common history, if parties are to live together! Let's hope it is more in human nature to want to *live* together than the alternative which is horrifying. If we *want* to live together (about which we have no choice), then we will *try* to live together, and try successfully, to build on the positive relations between Muslims and non-Muslims as to develop a new harmonious relationship rather than focusing on the negative aspects of our common history.

²⁰ Dr. Edward W Blyden *Islam , Christianity and the African Race*
(City : Publisher, Yearot Poblication) , P.123

Western View of Islam and the Muslims

There should be no difficulty in achieving a better situation as the West has recently been in a position to know more and more about Islam and Muslims. H.R.H. The Prince of Wales ruled out ignorance on the part of the West as a cause of the continued misunderstandings between Islam and the West, arguing that:

There are one billion Muslims world-wide. Many millions of them live in countries of the Commonwealth. Ten million or more live in the West, and around one million in Britain. Our own community has been growing and flourishing for decades. There are nearly 500 mosques in Britain. Popular interest in Islamic culture is growing fast.

The way European writers and travelers of early modern times represented Islam and the Muslims is deeply embedded in today's complex and strained relations between the West and the Muslim World. Add to that the damaging influence of lore, both religious and self-laudatory, as well as that anti-Muslim lore, and you find a horrible delusion, which is pretty much what Prince Charles meant when he commented:

The corollary of how we in the West see our history has so often been to regard Islam as a threat, in medieval times as a military conqueror, and in modern times as a source of intolerance, extremism, and terrorism.

The foundation of a modern metropolis could be built on the number of books, in European languages, which have propagated this lore. Perhaps the best example from medieval times is the myth of the Cid which was propagated in the *Chanson de Roland* (the Song of Roland), an epic poem

penned at the end of the 11th century CE by an anonymous author. This poem tells of Charlemagne's war against the Moors (i.e. the Muslims) in Spain (which took place in the 8th century), and recounts the heroic death of Roland, allegedly the nephew of Charlemagne, who was at the head of the rear guard. This literary work is an example of both religious and patriotic lore. Not a single historian of today dares say but the truth about the legend of the Cid, as 'Roland' (whose Spanish name was Rodrigo) was also known. While even Hollywood has perpetuated the myth of the Cid²¹, Rodrigo Diaz de Vivar, a Castilian noble, actually was a mercenary who, in about 1081, after a quarrel with Alfonso VI, offered his services as a military leader to the Muslim king of Saragossa, who was at war with the Christians of Catalonia. Later on, while working for the Muslim king of Valencia, the Cid took advantage of a revolt against this king to seize Valencia for himself. The so-called "Cid" lived more than two centuries after Charlemagne! He obviously couldn't have helped Charlemagne one way or the other, even had he been the sort to stick to one side.

Western scholarship on Islam has been mainly motivated by politico-economic agenda creating certain negative images of Islam, which have become deeply ingrained in the Western subconscious mind. In the words of Karl Ellis, Director of the Insitute of Contemporary Arab and Islamic Sciences at Vilanova University in the USA:

The old tendency of Western Orientalists to deny Islam its originality and divine inspiration by attributing the major components of Islamic beliefs and practices to borrowings from Judaism and Christianity has given way to a new tendency, signalled by references to such terms as "Islamic revolutionaries," "Mullah regimes,"

²¹ The *Cid* came from the Arabic title *sayyid* or *sid* meaning "lord," a title of distinction connoting high lineage. In strict Arabic terms, it means one is descended from the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh).

and “Islamic Jihad,” to describe those seeking an Islamic identity as at best obscurantism and at worst as evil, backward, anti-Western fanatics.²²

These writings reveal a very clear amalgam between Islam and violence in the Western mind. We may illustrate this issue through the following two examples:

1. Concept of Jihad

The concept of *jihad* has been one of the most distorted doctrines of Islam in the past as well as the present time, for in Western parlance it has come to mean “*holy war against infidels.*” In point of fact, the term “holy war” was coined in Europe during the Crusades, meaning the war against the Muslims. It does not have a counterpart in the Islamic glossary, and *jihad* is certainly not its translation.

In Arabic, *jihad* means exertion of effort and means in what amounts to a verbal sense; to strive or exert an effort or struggle against the odds. *Jihad* is first and foremost an inner struggle, within one’s self, to rid the soul or psyche, if you will, of debased inclinations and actions and to exercise constancy and perseverance in achieving a higher moral standard. Islamic doctrine distinguishes between major *jihad* and minor *jihad*. Major *jihad* is the more important one, and it means self-control as just explained. Minor *jihad* means fighting in self-defense to repel aggression and injustice, and to offer Islam to people without compulsion.

²²Karl C. Ellis (ed.), *The Vatican, Islam and the West*. P.19

God instructed the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) (and by extension, the Muslims) simply to say to those who want them to compromise their faith:

“Unto you your religion, and unto me my religion.”

﴿ لَكُمْ دِينُكُمْ وَلِيَ دِينِ ﴾

(Qur'an, The Disbelievers
109:6)

(الكافرون : ٦)

Jihad is not a declaration of war against other religions, and is certainly not directed against Christians and Jews as some media and political circles would wish it to be perceived. However, this positive concept of *jihad* has repeatedly been distorted throughout history. Consider for example the following dissertation on *jihad* written by one Major Osborn, an Englishman who lived among Muslims in India:

The one common duty laid upon the faithful is to be agents of God's vengeance on those who believe not. These are to be slaughtered till they pay tribute, when they are to be allowed to go to hell in their own way without further molestation. When Muhammad interdicted the faithful to prey upon each other, he was compelled to find occupation for their swords elsewhere. Out of this necessity sprang the command to inherit heaven by fighting on the path of God. This is the doctrine which has rendered Islam so fascinating a faith to savage and barbarous races. It exacts from them no endeavors after a higher life. It tells them that

they can win an immortality of sensual bliss by merely giving free scope to their most imperious passions

The Muslim still conceives himself to be the elect of God. He regards not with compassion - that word is too humane - but with contempt unspeakable, as 'logs' reserved for 'hell fire,' the votaries of all other creeds. Wherever he has the power, he holds it to be his mission to trample upon them and persecute them. The ninth surah is that which contains the Prophet's proclamation of war against the votaries of all creeds other than Islam.²³

This is, of course, a blatant misrepresentation which no objective historian would ever accept.

Electronic media in the West, especially in the USA, is playing a damaging role with respect to Islam and the Muslims as it tends to reinforce old and new misunderstandings between the Muslim World and the West. In November 1992, a journalist whose anti-Muslim sentiments are well established, produced what was labelled a 'documentary' titled *Jihad in America* for the Public Broadcasting Station (PBS). Despite American Muslim protestations, PBS aired the film which it had partially funded. Muslims were denied the opportunity to pre-screen the film before airing and were only allowed to comment on it after the telecast, and in the presence of the producer who was afforded a second chance to rebut the Muslim charges. With the bombing of the World Trade Center being the opening scene of the film, the message and agenda of the producer were clear cut: to cast the pall of terrorism on Islam and the Muslims. Insensitivity to the feelings of Muslims was also shown when other reputable television networks featured the producer and his film.

²³ Edward W. Blyden, *Christianity, Islam and the African Race*, p.21.

In his *Necessary Illusions: Thought Control in Democratic Societies*, Noam Chomsky made it clear that international terrorism is, of course, not an invention of the 1980 s. In the previous two decades, its major victims were Cuba, Vietnam and Lebanon.

It is pertinent to mention conversely, at this juncture, the constructive approach of another American journalist, Stephen Barbosa, author of *American Jihad: Islam after Malcolm X*. In his book, Barbosa documents the *jihad* (striving) of some fifty American Muslims to create for themselves a Muslim identity.

He has courageously touched on the problem experienced by most of his contemporaries by commenting:

As we struggle to move beyond stereotypes and the tendency to confine our images of Islam and Muslims to demonstrators shouting, "Death to America," or "Holy war against the infidels," it is important to remember that men and women of every race and color, social class and educational background across the world and down through the ages have found in Islam a faith that nourishes and transforms their lives, one that offers a sense of community, solidarity and peace.²⁴

2. *Islam in France*

France is a country which has long held and cherished a deeply-rooted relationship with the Muslim World. No wonder, then, that it incorporates the largest Muslim community in Europe - one that, until recent times, enjoyed fair treatment and justice from the French government. Many

²⁴ Stephen Barbaesa, *American Jihad : Islam after Malcolmx* (city : Publisher, year of Publication) p.

of these Muslims, because they were permanent immigrants to France or were descended from such, were recognized French citizens through birth or naturalization, with all their rights duly respected.

Not so long ago, the situation of Muslims in France began deteriorating dramatically. A relentless war has since been waged against them. The attack on the wearing of the *hijab* (head scarf) by Muslim school girls is one clear manifestation of renewed prejudices. Yet the issue of *hijab* is a question of fundamental rights!

In September 1994, the French national Minister of Education issued a directive that effectively banned head scarves from the classrooms. On October 3, 1994, police were called in to prevent 22 Muslim girls from entering their school wearing the *hijab*.

Since then, polls have shown that 86% of the French populace support the Minister of Education's decree. The general perception is that *hijab* is a threat to secularism and separation of religion and state. In particular there was allegedly concern that the *hijab* was responsible for dividing Muslim and non-Muslim students. Some even claim that it is an Islamic plot to "demolish the secular public system" (*Le Point* magazine). Others worry that head scarves introduce religious influences into public schools and place undue strain on other students to conform to Islam's dress or moral code (one can only presume that this worry relates to other Muslim students who perhaps do not wear head scarves). Yet it is common in France for students to wear crosses or *yarmulkes* (the Jewish skullcap) and for Jewish students to be exempted from Saturday classes. Defending his discriminatory decision, Bayrou declared, "My instructions to school heads will be very clear. We will continue to accept discreet religious signs, as has always been the case. But we cannot accept ostentatious signs that divide our youth."

French Muslims say that the Gaullist government's decree is absurd because the nation's estimated 700 *hijab*-wearing

students could hardly be considered a threat. They point out that wearing of the *hijab* is protected in the French constitution under the Freedom of Religion and Rights of Individuals Act as amended in 1992.²⁵

The Federation of Islamic Organizations in Europe had another explanation for the French fury, commenting:

The French government is using the presence of Muslims as a political slogan to win votes. The French nation boasts about its Revolution of liberty, fraternity and equality. They should follow other European communities who accept Muslims as a nation and respect their faith and practice.

On the other side of the Atlantic, we see a similar pattern. In Trinidad and Tobago, two Caribbean islands that have large Muslim populations, the Catholic, Anglican, Presbyterian, Baptist and Hindu boards of education issued a joint statement prohibiting Muslim girls who are assigned to their state-supported schools from wearing head scarves to class. In the statement, the board justified the ban by explaining that "our boards of managements feel very strongly that there should be no exceptions to the rule of uniform. In fact this very term 'uniform' indicates that we are unwilling to allow any deviation from this." The Muslims have gone to court to fight the ban.

In the United States there have been several cases of such discrimination in the past few years. Suffice it to mention the case of the Virginia teacher who was removed from her post in 1989 when she started wearing a scarf.

²⁵ This discrimination against wearing of head scarves is so clear as to be absurd. Would the Queen of England be banned from entering a French school should she arrive on a foggy or rainy day? Does that also mean that any girl - Muslim or not - is forbidden to wear a scarf, even if it is merely to protect her hair from the elements? Would a nun not be allowed to teach a class, should she arrive wearing the old style of habit?

This current war against *hijab* is in sharp contrast with the principle of freedom upon which the edifice of the French Revolution (and indeed other nation's revolutions!) was founded. The ministerial ban on *hijab* is in contradiction to the freedom of conscience and religion act stated in the Declaration of Human Rights and the French Constitution. As Dr. Lamand comments:

The decision by the French Ministry of Education bans the wearing of "all ostentatious religious symbols" in public schools, but the controversial point is that, in this decision, the ministry assumes that wearing a head scarf is ostentatious in itself, as opposed to wearing a cross. Therefore, the Muslim girl who is wearing a head scarf has no possibility of showing her intentions: she is simply assumed to be provocative. This gives the impression that the French administration does not understand the meaning of the scarf, or *hijab*, as part of religious practice and not only as a religious sign.

These successive threats against Islam are due to what Dr. Lamand calls 'Islamophobia': a growing fear of Islam, accompanied by hostility towards Muslims.

Dialogue with the West on Human Rights in Islam

A series of conferences initiated in Riyadh and followed up in Paris, the Vatican City, Geneva and Strasbourg were held between 1972 and 1974 on the subject of Islam and human rights. The intention was to promote peaceful and productive relations between the West and the Muslim World.

Credit goes to the Franco-Saudi Association for initiating the first Conference on Human Rights in Islam, which was convened in Riyadh on March 22, 1972. The Conference engaged the Human Rights Division of the European Council, consisting of a number of European professors, intellectuals and jurists. They worked along with their counterparts in Saudi Arabia, and submitted a memorandum to the Conference on the subject of *Human Rights in Islam*, and the application concerning these rights in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Impressed with the findings of the Conference on Human Rights in Islam, the Council of Europe proposed to the government of Saudi Arabia the need to undertake further studies, and convene more conferences in European cities so as to enlighten Western opinion of what the European Commission had learned of the true facts about Islam and its protection of human rights. It was felt that this would lead to mutual understanding and a more active cooperation in the domain of human rights for the benefit of mankind.

The first of the subsequent conferences, entitled "Islamic European Dialogue," was arranged in the Vatican City between Pope Paul VI, with a group of clergy representing the European side, and a delegation of Saudi *'ulama*²⁶ (scholars and jurists including the late Scheikh Muhammad Al-Harkan, Sheikh Muhammad Bin Jubair, Sheikh Fadl Agile, Dr. Maruf Al-Dawalibi and myself). One of the issues discussed with

²⁶*'ulama* basically translates to scholars of Islam, as there is no clergy in Islam in the same sense as it exists in Christianity.

the Pope was the need to bring a halt to missionary work among the Muslims. The Pope responded in unequivocal terms:

We don't support sending missionaries to Muslim countries to proselytize, but may be we have some extremists, even as, I believe, you have in the Muslim world. What we say is that we should all cooperate toward educating those who do not know God at all. And indeed, there are a great number of them in the world, a fact which calls on us to cooperate so that we can draw them to worship God.

Two more conferences were subsequently hosted in Paris and Geneva, followed by the Strasbourg conference.

Strasbourg Conference on Human Rights in Islam

The Council of Europe hosted the Strasbourg Conference on Human Rights and Unity of Mankind in Islam at the premises of the Human Rights Division. The Islamic delegation expressed its appreciation for the work of the Council towards the unity of the European family and explained its desire to cooperate with the Council towards the larger unity of mankind and the need to safeguard the rights of all people. It was pointed out that this was in line with the Qur'anic injunction:

O mankind! Lo! We have created you male and female, and have made you nations and tribes that ye may know one another. Lo! the noblest of you, in the sight of Allah, is the best in conduct. Allah is Knower, Aware.

(Qur'an, The Private Apartments 49:13)

﴿ يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَاكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ ﴾

(الحجرات : ١٣)

Since the world is today witnessing violation of human rights on a scale unprecedented since the end of World War II, with Muslims being the main casualties, it is instructive to have an overview of what Islamic provisions are on human rights. Muslims view these provisions as sacred since they are ordained by the Creator in His Book, the Qur'an, revealed to His Prophet, Muhammad (pbuh), who confirmed them in word and in deed. For instance, the dignity of every human being has to be safeguarded in conformity with the Qur'anic verse:

Verily We²⁷ have honoured the children of Adam. We carry them on the land and the sea, and have made provision of good things for them, and have preferred them above many of those whom We created with a marked preferment.

(Qur'an, Children of Issrael ,17 : 70)

﴿ولقد كرّمنا بنى آدم وحملناهم فى البر والبحر ورزقناهم من الطيبات وفضلناهم على كثير ممن خلقنا تفضيلاً﴾

(بنى اسرائيل : ٧٠)

Righteousness and piety are the only measures of distinction according to Islam. Muslims are not great because they call themselves Muslims; they are great only because of their actions, when those actions are endeavored or accomplished for the sake of their love and concern for their relationship

²⁷ In the Holy Qur'an, the term "We" is often used when God Almighty refers to Himself; and this is understood in the context of Highest Sovereignty and Absolute Greatness. Kings of old sometimes adapted this manner when issuing edicts. All Muslims understand - for this is the crux of Islam - that God is One, and that He has no partners. In other parts of the Qur'an God Almighty uses first person singular.

with their Creator. Distinction on the basis of class, race, color, wealth or national origin, thus clearly, can have no place in Islam. Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) said: "There is no distinction for an Arab over a non-Arab, or for a white man over a black man, except it be on the basis of piety." He also said: "All men are God's people, and the one loved most by Him is the one who serves his people best."

Freedom of religious belief and prevention of coercion into a faith is also one of the cardinal teachings of Islam. As mentioned already, Islam teaches that everyone is free to follow the religion of his or her choice and that there should be no compulsion in the matter of faith. Muslims have an added responsibility for the protection of the lives and rights of non-Muslims in an Islamic state.

Islam gives special emphasis to the prevalence and maintenance of justice in all human dealings, as well as to the protection of the rights of the underprivileged. The following are a few Qur'anic instructions in this respect:

Lo! Allah commandeth you that ye restore deposits to their owners, and if ye judge between mankind, that ye judge justly. Lo ! Comely is this which Allah admonisheth you. Lo!Allah is ever Hearer, Seer.

(Qur'an , Women , 4:58)

﴿ إِنِ اللّٰهُ يَأْمُرُكُمْ أَنْ تَوَدُّوا الْأَمَانَاتِ إِلَىٰ أَهْلِهَا وَإِذَا حَكَمْتُمْ بَيْنَ النَّاسِ أَنْ تَحْكُمُوا بِالْعَدْلِ إِنَّ اللّٰهَ نِعْمَ بِعَظِيمٍ بِهِ فَانِ اللّٰهُ كَافٍ سَمِيعًا بَصِيرًا ﴾

(النساء : ٥٨)

﴿ يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا كُونُوا قَوَّامِينَ لِلّٰهِ ﴾
O ye who believe! Be steadfast witnesses for Allah

in equity, and let not hatred of any people seduce you that ye deal not justly. Deal justly, that is nearer to your duty. Observe your duty to Allah. Lo! Allah is Informed of what ye do.

شهداء بالقسط ولا يجرمنكم شنآن قوم
على ألا تعدلوا أعدلوا هو أقرب للتقوى
واتقوا الله إن الله خير بما تعملون ﴿

(المائدة : ٨)

(Qur'an, The Table spread 5:8)

Say: My Lord enjoineth justice.

(Qur'an, The Heights , 7:29)

﴿ قل أمر ربي بالقسط ﴾

(الأعراف : ٢٩)

It is worthwhile, at this point, to quote two extracts of special interest: the first is from *The Statement of the Conference on "Christian Mission and Islamic Da'wah"*, Chambesy, June 1976:

6. *The Christian participants extend to their Muslim brethren their full sympathy for the moral wrongs which the Muslim world has suffered at the hands of colonialists, neo-colonialists and their accomplices. The Conference is aware that Muslim-Christian relations have been affected by mistrust, suspicion and fear. Instead of cooperation for their common good, Muslims and Christians have been estranged and alienated from one another. After more than a century of colonialism during which many missionaries served the interests of the colonial powers, whether deliberately or unconsciously, the Muslims have felt reluctant to cooperate with the Christians whom they have fought as agents of their oppressors. Although the time has certainly come to turn a new page in this relationship, the Muslims are still reluctant to take the step because their suspicion of Christian*

intentions continues. The reason is the undeniable fact that many of the Christian missionary services today continue to be undertaken for ulterior motives. Taking advantage of Muslim ignorance, of Muslim need for educational, health, cultural and social services, of Muslim political stresses and crises, of their economic dependence, political division and general weakness and vulnerability, these missionary services have served purposes other than holy proselytism; that is, adding members to the Christian community for reasons other than spiritual. Recently revealed linkages of some of these services with the intelligence offices of some big powers confirm and intensify an already aggravated situation. The Conference strongly condemns all such abuse of diakonia (service).

7. The Conference strongly urges Christian churches and religious organizations to suspend their misused diakonia activities in the world of Islam. The Conference urges strongly that all material assistance donated by outside churches and religious organizations henceforth be distributed wherever possible through or in cooperation with the governments and local communities of people for whom they are intended, respecting the dignity and integrity of the people concerned.

The second excerption, from Vatican II, goes as follows:

Upon the Muslims, too, the Church looks with esteem. They adore the One God, Living, Enduring, Merciful and All-Powerful, Maker of heaven and earth and Speaker to Men. They strive to submit wholeheartedly even to His inscrutable decrees, just as did Abraham, with whom the Islamic faith is pleased to associate itself.

Though they do not acknowledge Jesus as God, they revere him as prophet. They also honour our Mary, his Virgin mother. In addition they await the Day of Judgement when God will give each man his due after raising him up. Consequently they prize the moral life, and give worship to God, especially through alms-giving, and fasting. Although in the course of centuries many quarrels and hostilities have arisen between Christians and Muslims, this most sacred synod urges all to forget the past and to strive sincerely for mutual understanding. On behalf of all mankind, let them make common cause of safeguarding and fostering social justice, moral values, peace and freedom.

Economic Dimension

The Muslim World, with a population of over one billion and command of considerable mineral and natural resources, offers great potential for increased economic and commercial cooperation with the West. The natural resources of Muslim countries are very rich, with two thirds of the oil and gas reserves of the world, an abundance of metallic and non-metallic minerals, rich tropical and equatorial forest reserves, huge hydro-electric potential and expansive oceans with enormous resources and strategic significance.

Despite all this, the inhabitants of much of the Muslim World spend their lives under extreme conditions of deprivation.

The West's dependence on oil supplies from the Muslim World is well recognized. Understandably therefore, the security of these supplies is a major concern of the West. Development in the Muslim World needs Western technology and know-how. The best way to make use of that potential and safeguard the interests of both parties is to create an

atmosphere of mutual trust and respect, thus removing the psychological barriers existing between the West and the Muslim World. Furthermore, the economic philosophy upon which Islam is based can be integrated in the philosophy of the new world economic order. Man, according to Islam, differs basically from the rest of the creations of God, because he is not a combination of electrons and protons, nor is he a product of the chemical laboratory, driven by mere sex and hunger. He is the paragon of creations, reaching an exalted status. In Qur'anic terms, he is known as 'Khalifatullah' - the viceregent of God on earth. While the world of nature has no choice, man alone in the universe is given the will to obey or disobey, conform or not conform.

Allah the Almighty, Creator of this universe and all things known and unknown to mankind, has made all the arrangements to fulfill the physical, material, intellectual and spiritual needs of man. Strange as this may sound to the Western consciousness, the spiritual and economic come full circle, and meet: in Islam, all things go back to the main goal, and the main goal is the return to God, The Absolute Truth. As the Muslims say, "We belong to God and We will return to Him."

Dr. Lamand beautifully summarizes the ties between the spiritual and the economic found in Islam:

Economic action is only one part of the whole, bound to Divine Oneness. It is just at the point where the West begins to discover that development cannot be restricted to the economic field and that the objectives for growth need equally to be defined in terms of cultural values - it is just at this point that Islam offers the world its conception of economics as indissociable

from its essential goal - which is not only profit, but man, God's creature.²⁸

The emerging economic and political trend in the Muslim world may be an additional force for shaping the development scenario on strong spiritual values. However, this is not being welcomed by the beneficiaries of the present world order. Former US Vice President Dan Quayle has, for example, called "Islamic Fundamentalism" America's worst enemy.

NATO proclaims the same. Further, history bears out that no real help can be expected from the West in bailing out the Muslim World from its underdeveloped state and its dependency. Nevertheless, Muslim-Western joint ventures may help to reduce the technological and scientific gap between the West and the Muslim World.

²⁸ Closing speech at the Conference on 'Facing the New International Economic order,' organized by Islam and the West Association, Paris, 1986.

Cultural Dimension: Crisis in Western Social Fabric

In our ever-shrinking, interdependent world, with an increasingly greater mobility of people, ideas and goods, social diseases are easily communicable over the entire globe. Therefore, when one speaks of a crisis in the Western social fabric, one does so not from the stance of a critic but as a concerned person who sees in the welfare of the West that of the Muslim World as well. For whatever good there is in any part of the world is for the well-being of humanity, and whatever evil there is exists to the detriment of all.

We are all too aware of the social crisis in the West, particularly in the USA as it relates to the culture of crime, violence and fear, drug and alcoholism, teenage pregnancy, children born out of wedlock, homeless and street children, and increasing racism. By way of illustration, one need only look to the cover stories of *Newsweek* magazine over the period of January to October 1994:

January 10, 1994	Growing Up Scared How American Kids are Robbed of their Childhood.
February 14, 1994	Bloodbath Can the West Stop the Horror (Marketplace Massacre in Sarajevo).
April 18, 1994	Spare the Rod Is the West too Soft on Crime? A Flogging Case in Singapore Whips up a Storm.
June 27, 1994	Trail of Blood An American Superstar is Charged with Murder.
July 4, 1994	Drugs in Europe

America's Scourge crosses the Atlantic.

August 15, 1994

Murder

A Week in the Death of America.

October 17, 1994

Suicide Cult

The Fiery End of the Order of the Solar Temple.

In its special cover story report, "Murder" on August 15th, 1994, *Newsweek* gives under the caption: "A Crime as American as a Colt .45" the following body count on homicides in the USA:

<u>Year</u>	<u>Homicides</u>	<u>Year</u>	<u>Homicides</u>
1970	16,000	1985	18,980
1975	20,510	1990	23,440
1980	23,040	1993	24,500

It is alarming to see that more young people are likely to kill today than before. A decade ago, young men between 18 and 24 were the most likely to kill. But now (1995) a much younger group, aged 14 to 17, has picked up its pace by 161%, making the group between 14 and 24 commit more than half of the crimes in the USA, a trend that started in 1992. We are told that what we are seeing is just a tip of the iceberg!

The recent allocation of 27 billion dollars by the American Administration to fight crime reflects the seriousness of the problem. Crime continues to lead in the polls as the most serious issue facing the country. Yet it is questionable whether gun control, hiring more police, building more prisons and midnight basketball courts can really stem the problem. The roots of the problem are much deeper. Consider the youngster who, at age 8 was selling dope, and at

age 14 was the killer of a person he did not know. Even as a child he knew that one day, inevitably, he would end up in jail. Everything pointed to it: everyone in his family had been to jail, including his mother. By the time he was selling dope, it was actually his mother who left him a supply of drugs to sell at night before she went to bed; indicating that whatever he made above a certain amount was his to keep. A judge sentenced him at the age of 14 to a Juvenile Correctional Complex for 7 years. He is 18 now (August 15,1995). The Question is, how can we save youngsters such as this one and arrest the growing crime waves ?

Granted, one should be aware that these inglorious statistics have been made available through the ardor of the American Press. It is a fact that, since the time of the commercialization of news itself, spearheaded by W.R. Hearst's newspapers, anything which can be alleged to be true and which at the same time will find buyers comes under the heading of news. Thus, America - being a big country - has come under the boomerang attack of its own media, and appears to be the most insalubrious of all societies that exist. *Appears* is a keyword here, but so is *concern*. While the American media hangs out its country's own dirty laundry better and more thoroughly than anyone else, it also shows concern to the same prolific - and thus commendable - degree.

The rest of the world can take America as something of a mirror of what may not be publicized (or may yet be worse) in their own countries. They might also consider prison conditions as they exist in a society where the accent is undeniably heavier on materialism than spiritualism. Malcolm X, remarking on his own seven years in American jails, writes:

Behind bars, a man never reforms. He will never forget. He will never get completely over the memory of the bars.

Malcolm X's years in jail run into a memory of nutmeg, semi-drugs, cursing guards, throwing things out of his cell, pacing like a caged leopard when put in solitary confinement, viciously cursing aloud to himself and other things of a vile nature. He was nicknamed "Satan" because of his anti-religious attitude! Malcolm X exposes his sordid past in detail in his autobiography:

because the full story is the best way I know to have seen it, and understood, that I had sunk to the very bottom of the American white man society when - soon now, in prison - I found Allah and the religion of Islam and it completely transformed my life.

He cites his example to show the power of Islam in healing some of the deep-rooted social problems in America. He says that he was sentenced in 1946 to ten years in Cambridge, Massachusetts, as a common thief who had never passed the eighth grade. The next time he went back to Cambridge was in 1961, as a guest speaker at the Harvard Law School Forum. It is indeed instructive to study the impact of the Muslim social programs in America, supremely contrary as it is to the image conveyed by certain unappreciative sectors. Since Malcolm X's time, Islam has become one of the strongest factors offering true rehabilitation and hope in the American prison system.

By the reckoning of one Muhammad Ali Hanafi, who was in 1986 the Imam of the Sunni Community at the Rockview State Prison in Pennsylvania (and who spent time in about nine different minimum and maximum security facilities up and down the East Coast, in Pennsylvania, Georgia,

Virginia and New York), the average percentage of Muslims among prison inmates even *then* was between 10 and 20 percent.²⁹ Since that time it is clear that Islam has offered a powerful balm to the downtrodden of both circumstance and spirit, whenever they have come face to face with it, alone, in the American prison system. The latest famous convert emerging from jail has been none other than Mike Tyson, only serving to demonstrate that man lives not by materialism alone.

²⁹ Julia Simpson. "Islam in the American Prison System, " Parts I and II, " *Saudi Gazette* newspaper [Jeddah], 27 April and 4 May, 1988. This estimate reflects the number of Sunni converts to orthodox Islam and has nothing to do with the old Nation of Islam, a subject dealt with substantially in *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. As Muhammad Ali Hanafi explained by written communication with the interviewer, his estimate was made after careful subtraction for those not really following the true, established principles of Islam that offer no place for bigotry or bitterness. He wrote: "When I came here [Rockview], I immediately encouraged the Sunni Muslims to participate in the activities of the Islamic community, because by right I felt that we were the true vanguards of Islam in the USA. "

Muslim Minorities: Not a Threat

Those who are in touch with the Western media have doubtless observed attitudes of unfriendliness towards Islam, Muslims, and Muslim minorities, wherever they are. It is regrettable that hostility towards, and persecution of Muslim minorities is growing day after day, and for no good reason.

It is obvious that some people in the West still nurse the old fear of an ever-expanding Muslim empire. This imaginary threat seems to make them look at Muslim minorities as a grave danger that threatens Western society. It also makes it difficult for Western Christians to be objective about Islam. It all seems to have started back in the days when Muslim lands were lost to Christian conquerors (and not vice-versa), at which point the new rulers simultaneously wove fearful fantasies about the Jews while evolving a distorted image of Islam. This less than chivalrous attitude (in an alleged age of chivalry) reflected buried anxieties. Many were the Western writers who at the time happily denounced Islam as a blasphemous faith and its Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) as the "Great Pretender" who had founded a violent religion of the sword in order to conquer the world. This distorted image became one of the received ideas of Europe, and it continues to affect Western perceptions of the Muslim World and Muslim minorities on both sides of the Atlantic. The hostile vision of Muslim minorities in the West has been further influenced by two major factors:

1. The misrepresentation of Islam and Islamic teachings by various Western writers, travelers, etc.
2. The fact that misconduct and odd actions committed by certain Muslim individuals are being placed in the limelight by the Western media.

The problem is compounded by the fact that, for the first time in the history of Islam, some Muslims have actually begun to 'cultivate' a passionate hatred of the West. This new development is a reaction to European and American behavior (usually government-engineered) in some parts of the Islamic World. It is a mistake to imagine that Islam is an inherently violent or fanatical faith, as some writers like to suggest.

Islam is a universal religion and a comprehensive pattern of life. There is nothing especially anti-Western about it, nor indeed particularly 'Eastern' although the term 'Orientalist' seems to connote one who studies Islamic culture and countries even more than he or she might study the Orient! The Muslim culture, hence, is of itself - one that, yet, did not ever hesitate to adopt good features of other cultures, even though they might be from conquerors, so long as said traits or features did/do not conflict with the principles and teachings of Islam, and so long as there was fair reason to incorporate the same. That is why the Muslim World has traditionally had such a vastly rich culture, one that has beckoned travelers far and wide. It is a culture that reflects the great variety of tribes and nations that have embraced Islam out of their true belief, while bringing their own personalities and lifestyles to add to that wondrous melting pot³⁰. It is not strange at all, then, that when the Colonial West made its first impressions on Islamic countries in the eighteenth century, many Muslims were impressed by Western civilization and tried to emulate it. The Muslims have always been urged by their religion to adopt all that is beneficial of knowledge and its gains.

³⁰ For instance, the Mongols - though being conquerors and in the obvious position of those who could dictate any terms they liked - became Muslim after they conquered Muslim lands. As Bernard Lewis, the renowned Middle Eastern expert writes:

despite all the efforts of Christian preachers to convert them and of Christian diplomats to recruit them, [the Mongols] opted for Islam. Their conversion to the dominant faith of the region they had conquered dealt a heavy blow to the hopes of the Christians and gave a new strength and vigor to their Muslim opponents. (*Cultures in Conflict* New York: Oxford University Press, 1995) p.61.

In recent years, however, that initial enthusiasm for Western civilization has given way to disappointment, with a patience that has finally collapsed. One should be astounded—the native Americans were far quicker to show hostility in the face of repeated betrayals. The Muslim World has demonstrated the patience of, well, Job - in the face of broken promises and double standards! In the meantime, the resultant breakdown has been in the Muslim culture itself - as may be well illustrated in the case of Palestine, where a once cultivated nation is now a throng of suppressed, semi-literate street people scrounging to eke a living. Their frustration and hostility understandably does not evince the dignity that a well-heeled, highly-cultivated nation would be able to demonstrate. This lack of refinement in demonstrating disappointment does not, however, mean that Muslims in Western countries are a serious threat to the governments there, or to the people of these countries in the future, as some politicians like to intimate. Ironically, it is the Muslims living in Western countries who are generally the most soft-spoken, well-read and easy to discuss issues with from different perspectives.

The alarmists from the West frequently suggest that the Muslim World will fall in the trap of 'extremists' or 'fundamentalists' Muslims who turn to terrorism as a means to enforce application of *Shari'ah* (Islamic Law) in Muslim countries.³¹ It is not strange therefore to see widespread newspapers and popular magazines like the *Chicago Tribune* and the *Daily News* bearing headlines designed to stir up hostility against Islam and the Muslims. In these publications we read headings such as: "Islam Fills the Gap Created by the Recession of Communism," "Aggressive Fires in the Islamic States," and "The Shadows of High-Rising Minarets," and so on.

³¹ Using terrorism to enforce Islamic Law is, of course, a contradiction in terms: rather like burning a field in order to encourage a healthy crop.

The majority of Muslims won't argue that there are so-called fundamentalists and extremists to be found here and there, but that does not mean that they are not opposed and disliked by that same majority! We should remember that the trend to fundamentalism and extremism has surfaced at one time or another in most religions; it seems to be just another way for man to delude himself and justify evil. To assume that fundamentalism or extremism is typical of the Muslim faith is a big mistake; why should that be assumed when it is not assumed of Hindus who take to the streets in defense of the caste system, thus ending in battles with Indian Muslims, and when it is not assumed of Jews who make illegal settlements on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, vowing to drive all Arabs from 'their' Holy Land?

If 'extremism' seems particularly rife in certain Muslim countries, this could be attributed to the population explosion. To give just one telling example, there were only 9 million Iranians before the Second World War; today there are more than 57 million and their average age is under seventeen. It is for this reason that some commentators say that radical Islam, with its extreme, moderate or 'black and white' solutions is a young person's faith.

Most Westerners do not know enough about traditional Islam to assess this new strain and put it in a proper perspective. When the Shi'ahs in Lebanon take hostages in the name of 'Islam,' people in the West feel repelled by the religion itself without realizing that this behavior contravenes a very important Islamic injunction in the holy Qur'an about the taking and treatment of captives.

Regrettably, the Western media does not give its audience the information it actually needs in order to comprehend situations. Facts are distorted, or blown out of proportion. For example, far more coverage was given to the Muslims who supported Ayatollah Khomeini's *fatwa* against the British author Salman Rushdie, than to the majority who opposed it. Islamic law; moreover, does not permit a man to be sentenced

to death without trial, and it has no jurisdiction outside the Islamic state. At the Islamic Conference of March 1989, 44 out of 45 member states rejected the Ayatollah's ruling. Nevertheless, that news received only cursory attention in the British press, leaving many people with the misleading impression that the entire Muslim World was clamoring for Rushdie's blood.

The Western media continues to promote the old tradition of hatred against Islam. That was particularly apparent during the OPEC 1973 oil crisis. The imagery used in cartoons, advertisements and popular articles was rooted in old Western fears of a Muslim conspiracy to take over the world.

To the multitude of peaceful worshippers, there is a definite sensation of hurt, for they feel as if Islam is being itself blamed for every misconduct of a Muslim individual or for any disorder in any part of the world. For example, Islam is held responsible for the practice of female circumcision, which has nothing to do with the religion, and is, in fact, a pre-Islamic traditional practice of various African tribes. It is not at all mentioned in the Holy Qur'an, not prescribed by three of the four main schools of Islamic jurisprudence, and was absorbed into the fourth school in North Africa where it was a fact of life. In Africa it has long been an unfortunate practice, one that they refuse to give up even when they profess to being Muslim - or Christian. It certainly is not prescribed in Islam: indeed, nothing is prescribed save that which leads to good hygiene and health. In fact, the majority of serious Muslim scholars worldwide condemn this horrible practice. Mutilation in order to deprive a human being of God-given senses in the alleged name of morality is just another form of ignorance and evil.

We live in an exciting time of easy access to foreign cultures, and in that almost all human beings on earth share in the good fortune. In the past, only those with family fortunes or government grants behind them had the ability to explore the world, and even while so doing they risked sometimes

fatal hardships. Today, acquisition of knowledge does not entail the same sacrifices as previously, save one: that the seeker foreswear bitter prejudice, opening his mind and heart to mankind. People all over the world are beginning to find inspiration in more than one religion, and solace in more than one cultural outlook. Many have adopted the faith of a culture other than their own: hence we see Buddhism, for instance, enjoying a great flowering in the West, where once Christianity reigned supreme. Yet even when people remain true to the faith of their fathers, they have sometimes been influenced, or inspired, by other traditions. For example, Sir Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (1888-1975) the renowned Hindu philosopher and statesman, who was educated at the Christian college of Madras, strongly influenced the religious thought of people both East and West. The barriers of geographical distance, hostility and fear, which once kept the various religions in water-tight compartments, are beginning to fall.

Although much of the old prejudices remains, these developments give some hope of better things to come. After centuries of virulent Christian anti-Semitism, it is normal now to see Jewish and Christian scholars attempting to reach a new understanding. There is an incipient perception of the deep unity of mankind's religious experience. The possible result of this has been compared to the revolution that science has affected in the outlook of men and women throughout the world. Yet one major religion seems to be outside the circle of goodwill and, in the West at least, continues to be maligned. People who are beginning to find inspiration in Zen or Taoism are usually not ready, not nearly so eager, to look kindly upon Islam, even though it is the true religion of Abraham and the prophets (peace be upon them all) who preceded him. Moreover, it is the second largest religion in the world, and more in tune with Judeo-Christian traditions than any other religion. It is ironic, indeed, that many who cherish knowledge have few scruples about attacking Islam even when they know little or nothing about it.

In her work, *Muhammad: A Western Attempt to Understand Islam*, Karen Armstrong comments:

The hostility is understandable, because until the rise of the Soviet Union in our own century, no polity or ideology posed such a continuous challenge to the West as Islam. When the Muslim Empire was established in the seventh century CE, Europe was a backward region. Islam quickly overran much of the Christian World of the Middle East as well as the Great Church of North Africa, which had been of crucial importance to the Church of Rome.

The positive influence of Islamic Civilization on European sciences and cultures is well acknowledged by many Western historians and other writers. In Anatole France's book, *La Vie en Fleur* (Life in Full Bloom) there is a passage in reference to the Muslim invasion of Spain that reflects what so many other writers have expressed in various ways:

Monsieur Dubois once asked Madame Nozie're what had been the most ill-fated day in history. Madame Noziere didn't know. "It was," Monsieur Dubois told her, "the day of the Battle of Poitiers, when, in 732, Arab science, art and civilization drew back in the face of Frankish barbarism.

This comment, in fiction, is in reference to the battle in Spain where the General Abdur Rahman al- Ghafiqi, coming back from a battle in Saint Martin-de-Tours, collided with the army of Charles Martel at Poitiers. That day marked the extreme limit of the Muslim advance into Western Europe. As the Arab writer, Dr. Hassan al-Warakly states:

The presence of Muslims in Spain goes back to the year 92 H³². This presence was, for almost eight centuries, a source of spiritual, intellectual and cultural inspiration - indeed, not just for Spain alone, but for all the regions of Western Europe.

Even traditional Orientalists, usually grudging where credit is due, admit this truth. In his *History of the Muslims in Spain*, Dozy writes:

The Arab conquest was good for Spain: it produced an important social revolution which caused a large portion of the ills under which the country had been groaning for centuries to disappear.

Spanish writers also support the contention of Islamic Spain as a peaceful, homogenous society where all Scriptural religions existed peacefully side by side. Blasco Ibanez writes as much in his work, *In the Shade of the Cathedral*:

Spain, slave of theologian kings and bellicose bishops, received its invaders with open arms. In two years the Arabs snatched up that which took seven hundred years to get back. It wasn't an invasion that was imposed by force of arms; it was rather a new society which pushed down vigorous roots on all sides. The principle of freedom of the conscience, cornerstone on which lies the true greatness of nations, was dear [to the new Islamic society]. In the towns and cities of which they were masters, the Arabs accepted the church of the Christian and the synagogue of the Jew.³³

³²H = hejira, by the Islamic calendar.

³³Given as *A l'ombre de la Cathedrale* in *Promesses de l'Islam* by Roger Garaudy, (Paris: Seuil, 1981.)

The inhabitants' had great pride in this peaceful, progressive atmosphere, and most would vehemently strive to 'belong.' Karen Armstrong points out just how much citizens desired to be part of the whole:

(In Cordoba) Christian-Muslim relations were normally good. Like the Jews, Christians were allowed full religious liberty within the Islamic Empire, and most Spaniards were proud to belong to such an advanced culture, light years ahead of the rest of Europe. They were often called Mozarabs or 'Arabizers.'

Indeed, emulation of the Muslims reached such proportions that a Christian counter-movement developed, perhaps simply because some segment of priests grew bored with so much peace, as has been suggested by both the famous Dutch historian Reinhart Dozy and later Desmond Stewart³⁴. One rich Spanish layman "of Jewish origin but impassioned belief in the Holy Trinity"³⁵ named Paul Alvaro complained ardently of the general love of the populace for the Arab culture:

My fellow Christians delight in the poems and romances of the Arabs; they study the works of Mohammedan theologians and philosophers, not in order to refute them, but to acquire a correct and elegant Arabic style. Where today can a layman be found who reads the Latin Commentaries on Holy Scriptures? Who is there that studies the Gospels, the Prophets, the Apostles? Alas! The young Christians who are most conspicuous for their talents have no knowledge of any literature or language save the Arabic; they read and study with avidity Arabian books; they amass whole libraries of them at vast cost,

³⁴Desmond Stewart, *The Alhambra*, (New York: Newsweek Book Division, 1974) p.55

³⁵Ibid. P.56

and they everywhere sing the praises of Arabian lore. On the other hand, at the mention of Christian books they disdainfully protest that such works are unworthy of notice. The pity of it! Christians have forgotten their own tongue, and scarce one in a thousand can be found able to compose in fair Latin a letter to a friend! But when it comes to writing Arabic, how many there are who express themselves in that language with the greatest elegance.

At that time, under the reign of Abdur Rahman II (822-852), the rather rare Christian 'martyrdom' movement that sprang up in Cordoba was practically a demonstration of spoiledness, for licence of talk had long been tolerated between the literate (and nearly everyone was). The only restriction made by the Muslims was that Christians or Jews not defame their Prophet (pbuh) in speech to them. As Islam was born in the religious pluralism of the Middle East, where various faiths had coexisted for centuries, Muslims were certainly not averse to hearing about other religions. There was no law against propaganda efforts by Christians in the Islamic Empire, provided that they did not attack the beloved personality of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). For the next six hundred years members of the three monotheistic religions were able to live together in a remarkable degree of peace and harmony. As a matter of fact, the Jews - who were hounded in the rest of Europe - were able to enjoy a rich cultural renaissance of their own in the Islamic State.³⁶ As another historian states:

³⁶When the Christians 'reconquered' Spain, the Jews faced a nightmare. Even then other Muslim countries offered them shelter and help, as the Jewish chronicler Eliyahu Capsali wrote in 1523:

Sultan Beyazid, the King of Turkey, heard of all the evil the King of Spain had done to the Jews, and that they were seeking a refuge, and he took pity on them. So he sent emissaries, and he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, that none of the governors of his cities was permitted to reject or expel the Jews, but that they must welcome them. And all of the people in all of the Kingdom welcomed the Jews, protecting them night and day. They were not abused, nor was any

Islam was a great world power at that time while Europe, overrun by barbarian tribes, was a cultural backwater. Later the whole world would seem to be Islamic, and Islam was a continuous challenge to the West until the eighteenth century. Now it seems that the Cold War against the Soviet Union has been replaced by a Cold War against Islam.

By the end of the 11th century, Europe was beginning to rise again under the Pope, and as it did so it pushed back the frontiers of Islam. By 1061 the Normans had started to attack the Muslims in Southern Italy and Sicily. In 1095, Pope Urban II summoned the knights of Europe to liberate the tomb of Jesus in Jerusalem in the expedition that became known as the First Crusade. The Franks managed to conquer Jerusalem and establish the first Western colony in the Near East. At that point it became apparent that Western Christians (i.e., the Franks, as being from Western Europe) were not going to be able to accommodate different religious communities within their own systems as successfully as the Muslims had done. There is no doubt that, immediately, Muslims were treated as aliens in their homeland. Perhaps one of the most interesting documents left to us from this time are the memoirs of Oussama ibn Munqidh, a Syrian knight who was born during the First Crusade, and who died in 1188, one year after Salah Ad-Din reconquered Jerusalem from the Franks. These memoirs have been rendered into a more modern language by Andre Miquel, who first had his historical rendering published in French (Fayard, 1986) and later in English.

hurt done to them. Thousands and tens of thousands of those who had been expelled from Spain came to Turkey, and the land was filled with them. Then the Jewish communities of Turkey did countless great deeds of charity, and spent money like water to ransom captives. (As cited by Bernard Lewis, *Cultures in Conflict*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995) p. 39.

The only way that the establishment seemed able to cope with those aliens was by imposing an official policy of apartheid, forbidding Christians to have any contact with their Muslim and Jewish neighbors.

In 1227, Pope Gregory IX added a decree that all Muslims and Jews must wear distinctive clothing, they must not appear on the streets during Christian festivals or hold public office in Christian countries, and the Mu'adhhdhin (Muezzin) was forbidden to ' offend ' Christian ears by summoning the Muslims to prayers in the traditional way. Pope Clement V declared that the Islamic presence on Christian soil was an insult to God.

By 1492, Islam's final stronghold in Spain was destroyed when Ferdinand and Isabella conquered Granada and all over Europe church bells pealed joyfully at what was thought to be a grand victory over the infidel ! Soon, despite contractual promises to the contrary, Spanish Muslims and Jews were given the choice of deportation or conversion to Christianity.

Even condescending Christian scholars of Islam will agree that Islam never did the same to Christians:

It is a common misapprehension that the holy war meant that the Muslims gave their opponents a choice "between Islam and the sword." This was sometimes the case, but only when the opponents were polytheists and idol-worshippers. For Jews, Christians and other "people of the book," that is, monotheists with written scriptures - and this phrase was very liberally interpreted - there was a third possibility; they might become a "protected group," paying a tax or tribute to the Muslims but enjoying internal autonomy.³⁷

³⁷Watt and Cachia, *A History of Islamic Spain*, p.7

Hitherto, Christians had been allowed to study, like their Muslim bretheren, at the feet of Muslim scholars in Spain, if they so chose. The first Christian kings living as neighbors to Muslim kings in Spain had been chivalrous, often tolerant, sometimes friends. Thus Christian, Jewish and Mozarabic scholars had cooperated in a vast translation project, bringing the learning of the Islamic World to the West, and thereby restoring to Europe the classical and ancient wisdom that had been lost in the Dark Ages, while passing along with it an entire new body of learning and philosophy to stimulate and inspire the Renaissance. Muslim scholars like Ibn Sina and Ibn Rushd (Avicenna and Averroes) were venerated by the learned of the West as luminaries.

Yet while the 'Franks' benefited from the Islamic World, sometimes traveling there for knowledge, sometimes including the painted images of renowned Muslims in their works, something went terribly wrong. It became increasingly difficult for people to accommodate the fact that these great scholars were Muslims - such was particularly the case with Ibn Sina and Ibn Rushd, both of whom are graphically shown in Dante's *Divine Comedy*: they are shown in limbo with virtuous pagans who had founded the intellectual culture that inspired the West.

The struggle has always existed, it seems. Those who know that the images depicted about Islam were distorted on purpose have had to speak up alone, for the simple love of truth. In about 1120, William of Malmesbury must have felt very alone when he simply tried to distinguish Islam from paganism: "The Saracens and the Turks both worship God, the Creator, and venerate Muhammad not as God but their prophet." Some Westerners are still genuinely suprised to hear that Muslims worship the same God as Jews and Christians, for they imagine that "Allah" is an entirely different deity, like Jupiter in the Roman pantheon. Others assume that "Muhammadans" give the same veneration and

position to their prophet (pbuh) as the Christians do to Jesus (pbuh).

In the Middle Ages, many Christians looked at Islam as a field version of Christianity, and created myths to show that Muhammad (pbuh) had been instructed by a heretic. Later, in the light of fresh internal divisions in Christendom, Westerners continued to see the Prophet (pbuh) and his religion in essentially Christian terms, seemingly unconcerned with the historical truth. Perhaps during the Renaissance others tried to acquire a more objective understanding.

There were those who did so because they were men of peace. Such was Bishop John (Juan) of Segovia (ca. 1400-1458), who did not believe that trying to wipe out Islam by war would ever result in anything other than a stalemate between Christianity and Islam. His solution was to work out a practical compromise through peace and understanding, and of course he hoped to make converts from Islam to Christianity. Like Peter the Venerable, he undertook a translation of the Qur'an, and commissioned Isa de Jabir, the Mufti of Segovia, to translate it - this time into Castilian. John of Segovia was joined by three other learned men, Nicholas of Cusa, Jean Germain and Aeneas Silvius (Pius II) in an attempt to convene a conference that could be used as an instrument to peacefully achieve political and religious aims: peace in itself, and to "make it clear to Muslims that Islam was just a misguided version of Christianity."³⁸

During the Renaissance, Arabic studies were instituted in Western colleges. It is necessary to backstep for a moment and note that, in fact, colleges were not even established in the West until the idea was taken from the Muslims. As George Makdisi of the University of Pennsylvania writes:

The earliest known college was founded in Paris. The founder was a certain John of London who had just

³⁸Said, *Orientalism*, p.61.

returned from Jerusalem where he had gone on pilgrimage. Founded that year, the college eventually took its name from the eighteen poor students who were its resident members; hence the name "College des Dix-Huit." Many other colleges followed this one in Paris.³⁹

Once Arabic studies became a choice of study in Western studies, it led some scholars to a more realistic assessment of the Muslim World and to the abandonment of the cruder Crusading attitudes. Nonetheless, it seems that, as in the Middle Ages, even the enlightened thinking and open-mindedness of the Renaissance (like the later Enlightenment and today's era of alleged open-mindedness) was not enough to neutralize the old image that sprang from hatred, and which had such a very powerful hold on Western thinking. The frustrated Muslim scholar must struggle, himself, to find a reason for this hatred: envy in a bygone age, enmity left over from clashes in battles? Yet at the end of the day, it seems as unreasonable as feuds that begin between neighbors and continue with no one understanding why.

This was very clear in the year 1697, when at the very beginning of the Enlightenment, Barthelmy d'Herbelot's *Bibliothèque Orientale* was published posthumously, another surge of European attention was awakened towards the land of Islam, although d'Herbelot's work was not restricted to Islam alone. The *Cambridge History of Islam* "considers the *Bibliothèque* [along with two other works, by George Sale and Simon Ockley that appeared within the next forty years] to be 'highly important' in widening 'the new understanding of Islam' and conveying it 'to a less academic readership.'⁴⁰ The just mentioned work by Simon Ockley, published in

³⁹ George Makdisi, "On the Origin and Development of the College in Islam and the West," *Islam and the Medieval West*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1980), Pp. 38-39.

⁴⁰ Edward Said, *Orientalism*, pp63-64.

1708, was titled *A History of the Saracens* and startled its European audience by making the “Islamic pre-eminence clear in his work,”⁴¹ while giving an account of seventh century *jihad* from the Muslim point of view. Nonetheless, like d’Herbelot, he made it perfectly clear and considered Islam to be an abominable heresy and Muhammad (pbuh) to be a calculating imposter. While Ockley was careful to disassociate himself from anything like warm admiration of Islam, there were sometimes others, like Ockley’s colleague William Whiston (Newton’s successor at Cambridge), whose Islamic enthusiasm caused him to be “expelled from Cambridge in 1709.”⁴²

At the very end of the eighteenth century, a telling incident showed the direction in which the new European attitude was tending. In 1798, Napoleon sailed to Egypt, accompanied by scores of orientalist from the ‘Institut d’Egypt.’ He intended to use this new scholarship and understanding to subjugate the Islamic World and challenge the British hegemony of India. Napoleon addressed the Egyptian crowd at Alexandria with the insincere exclamation: “*Nous sommes les vrais Musulmans.*” (We are the true Muslims) Napoleon used his acquired knowledge, and the knowledge of his traveling band of scholars in order to make the Muslims think he was fighting *for* Islam (i.e. against the Mamelukes, the rulers of Egypt at the period):

*Napoleon used Egyptian enmity towards the Mamelukes and appeals to the revolutionary idea of equal opportunity for all to wage a uniquely benign and selective war against Islam.*⁴³

⁴¹Ibid. p.75

⁴²Ibid., p.76.

⁴³Ibid. p.82.

Unfortunately, real knowledge of Islam was being used to cynically, condescendingly manipulate, for the sake of the colonial spirit which dominated Europe in the nineteenth century, and which gave it such an unhealthy sense of superiority over other races. This attitude literally saturated the Western view of Islam, as the French and British looked covetously toward the declining Ottoman empire. In 1830, the French colonized Algiers, and in 1839 the British colonized Aden. Thereafter, they took over Tunisia (1881), Egypt (1882), the Sudan (1898), Libya and Morocco (1912). In 1920, even though pledges were solemnly made to the Arab countries that they would have their independence after the defeat of the Turkish Empire, Britain and France carved up the Middle East between them into mandates and protectorates. Today some Muslims associate Western imperialism and Christian missionary work with the Crusades. Many historians say that they are not wrong to do so. When General Edmund Allenby arrived in Jerusalem in 1917, he announced that the Crusades had finally been completed, and when the French troops arrived in Damascus, their commander marched up to Saladin's tomb and cried: "*Nous revenons, Saladin!*" ("We are back, Salah al-Din!"). Christian missionary work supported the colonialists, attempting to undermine traditional Muslim culture in the conquered countries; and local Christian groups like the Maronites of Lebanon were given a disproportionate role in the running of the protectorate.

Muslims in America

Historical Records document that from 1492 through the early 1600's, an estimated 500,000 Jews and Muslims were exiled from Spain and Portugal through a religious witch-hunter known as the Spanish Inquisition. Hundreds of thousands of Muslim exiles escaped to Morocco, Algeria, Libya and Tunisia.

As the Inquisition grew in power and severity, even Christianized Moors (Muslims) and Jews were forced into exile. These *Conversos* (the name given to both Muslim and Jewish converts) were not trusted by either the new Spanish government or Church since most of them had converted to Catholicism only to avoid the death sentence.

The Spanish Inquisition, horrible as it was, accomplished something of great historical value for Islam. Though Western historians have generally ignored the evidence, there is very little doubt that Muslims played an early - and perhaps the earliest - role in the permanent settlement of North America. There is also little doubt that the Inquisition, with all its agonies, drove Spanish and probably Portuguese Muslims as well towards the New World.

American schoolchildren are not told the entire story of the discovery of the New World, though it was told by Columbus himself. It has been documented that he employed both Moorish and Spanish sailors, and there is speculation that he may himself have been Jewish. Neither are American schoolchildren told the story of the forty foot long ship, with a shaded pavilion in its center, which Columbus encountered somewhere off the island of Jamaica. On that strange ship, Columbus recorded that he saw about forty men and women. Unlike the Jamaican natives, these people wore clothing:

*sleeveless shirts with showy colors and designs like those Columbus had seen, in his own words, in Muslim Granada. Columbus' most striking observation was that the women aboard the ship "covered their faces like the women of Granada." In 1527, the first land crossing of the United States by a non-native American was achieved by Azemmouri, a Moroccan Berber - a Muslim.*⁴⁴

⁴⁴ "The Melungeons, An Untold Story of Ethnic Cleansing, by Brent Kennedy, Islamic Horizons Nov/Dec 1994, p24,25

This very Muslim was the first explorer from overseas to enter a Pueblo Indian village. Nevertheless, there is no mention of Azemmouri in American history books.

United States official relations with American Muslims are dictated by political and strategic interests. The government and people showed more sustained interest in Islam and Muslims during the three administrations of presidents Carter, Reagan and Bush than during any previous period of U.S. history. This was the result of the extremist activities of so-called militant Muslims (and flat-out terrorists), mainly in Iran and Lebanon, as well as of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait.

Although national television has presented a few programs on Islam, Muslims in the U.S.A. and elsewhere hardly see any of the productions shown by the major networks during prime time viewing. Perhaps this is because not only are Muslim groups not allowed previews, the networks usually broadcast these programs without prior fanfare, so that no one knows the show is on television unless they accidentally come across it. Eid prayers and the annual pilgrimage to Makkah are mentioned as news items in the media but fleetingly. Thus, although the Muslims are a substantial group, they are not given significance.

Treatment of Islam in American education is almost totally restricted to its basic beliefs and a sketchy account of Islamic art. Malcolm X, the most nationally known American Muslim since the mid-1960's, is almost totally removed from the Muslim religious context to one of African-American militant protest against racialism. The former heavy weight boxing champion, al-Hajj Muhammad Ali, is dealt with in the context of sports, famous African-Americans, and philanthropy. Indeed, whenever he wanted to say a word about Islam with interviewers, he was invariably cut off. The same thing is applicable to the famous basketball player, Abdul Kareem Jabbar, and so many others.

An estimated 5 million Muslims - about 2% of the total U.S. population - live in the United States. According to one census, a look at their ethnic background shows that:

- 42% are African-Americans
- 24% are South Asians
- 24% are Arabs
- 10% are Africans and others

Even this census certainly can't be including everyone, for it has left out the percentage of 'others' that would include Caucasian converts to Islam, of whom there are many.

In a paper presented to the conference held in Ontario on May 11, 1994, Ibrahim Hayani reported that:⁴⁵

It is our estimate that there are now well over 275,000 Canadians of Arab origin. And, Although Arabs in Canada are rightly proud of their heritage, they hold a very positive view about their life in Canada as well as their fellow Canadians. However, Arabs in Canada feel that other Canadians do not have proper understanding, let alone appreciation, of Arab culture, history and other issues in the Arab world. When it comes to the Arab-Israeli conflict, the Arabs have a feeling of alienation because they are always viewed as the villains, in spite of the fact that they are the victims. If the Arabs were to have Aladdin's lamp at their disposal, they would ask the genie for one which to come true, that is, to be better understood by their fellow Canadians.

A. Malik goes further to say:

Muslims were always familiar to America- in fact, they were one of the first groups who formed part of

⁴⁵ The Arabs in Ontario, A Misunderstood community

the American Scenario right from the time this land was discovered. The only development, if any, was the wide spread of Islam in America.

Some contemporary historians emphasize that Muslim seamen were indeed among the first to cross the Atlantic to land, and make settlements along the coasts of the New World. The exhibition held in Italy marking the 5th centennial of Columbus' birthday included an Arabic work that narrates the story of eight Muslim adventurers who sailed from Lisbon (Portugal) to South America. There also exist today Muslims who are fifth generation-born in the United States of America, descended from immigrants (and emigrants). There are records that show unequivocally that American Muslims have fought in the First World War, the Second World War, the Korean War, the Vietnam War and in Operation Desert Storm.

While it is true that Muslim immigrants in America feel some identification with the country they left, that does not mean that these Muslims (who live in America because of economic, political or religious reasons) are terrorists or anti-American any more than immigrants to America of any other ethnic group. On the contrary, Muslim immigrants undoubtedly feel a tremendous sense of relief and gratitude that they may finally live in peace in a country that does not conduct mass extermination, or any other such persecution policies that human beings have to flee from in terror of their lives! The sole purpose of this discourse is to reason with humane people in order to rid the world of the thorns of entrenched prejudices that hurt one and all, and have no sensible purpose.

There *are* those familiar with the Islamic World and Islamic society, who are themselves not Muslim and yet who are willing to refute the erroneous sweeping portrait of Muslims as hot-headed militants. As Yvonne Haddad, a

Christian professor of Islamic history at the University of Massachusetts, told journalist Sharon Shahid, in an interview with "USA Today" that: (Islam is about peace, not violence.) In the same interview, Prof. Haddad demonstrated why it is in her vested interest to speak out in defense of a people whom the Western media is frequently inclined to depict as her foe. Although she is Christian, she explained, *"Everybody thinks I am Muslim because my name is Haddad. There are over 2 million Arab Christians in the United States. They get based with the Muslims just because of their names."*

In all fairness, the impartial observer has to admit that even in the United States people are actually murdered everyday, and not by Muslims! In other parts of the world, the press does not say that Christians are killing people in the U.S.A. In fact, no one from the non-Christian international media even suggested that Waco, Texas stood for Christianity. The Middle Eastern media did not call Christianity a religion of violence because there was a crazy man in Waco, nor has it ever said that Christianity is a terrorist religion because there is a Klu Klux Klan which goes around with a cross saying "We are doing this in the name of Christ." We distinguish between the acts of terrorist 'Christians' and real Christianity.

Nevertheless, the tendency of the Western media to associate Islam with terrorism is undeniable, and unfair. The press "needs to sell stories," commented Prof. Haddad, "and Islamic terrorism sells." She added:

I am not a Muslim myself, but I find it is sort of unfair. If a Muslim man beats his wife, then they say, "Muslims beat their wives." When a Christian beats his wife, they say, "This man beats his wife." They do not say "Christianity teaches the beating of wives." The impression is that all women are beaten up. They

*are all oppressed. You look at American society and you see how many women get beaten. Nobody says that Christianity propagates the beating of women, but the press is drawing maps about terrorism, and the implication is that 'they' are here in the States and they are about to take over.*⁴⁶

There are anti-defamation groups in America that become instantly active should Christianity or Judaism be used in a derogatory manner. but unfortunately there is , as yet, an insufficient number of anti-defamation clamorings on behalf of the Arabs and / or Muslims to assure protection for these groups of immigrants or American citizens. Surely what is right and proper for one group in one place should be right and proper for all other groups living in the same area.

In his statement to the International Press Seminar held in Paris in October 1984, Mr Hamdy Kandil, Director of Division of Free Flow of Information and Communication Policies, Unesco, reported that:

" Reporting on the " Islamic fundamentalist movement", is often cited as a classic case in point. It supports what Edward Said refers to as " The institutionalized hostility to Islam." Tarzi Vittachi, a United Nations official from Sri Lanka also spoke of this hostility, " Muslims are angered. " He says, " when the Western press becomes so agitated by public manifestations of belief in Islamic values. The press describes this derogatorily as ' fundamentalism '- connotating a throw- back to a dead past-at the same time that they refer with respect to the Pope's consistent reiteration of such fundamental Catholic

⁴⁶ Ibid

principles as the ban on admitting women into the priesthood " I ask myself if such fundamentalism was Christian or Jewish, how it would have been reported in the Western press ?

I must say, however, that I am not one of those who believe in the "conspiracy theory " but I have no illusion that Western reporting on Islam , in general , has reflected both hostility and ignorance. It has in many cases been an example of what Mort Rosenblum called parachute Journalism: When reporters have very little time to imbibe the myriad intricacies of the political and cultural life of Muslim countries. In an article in the International Herald Tribune entitled the " Veil's Revival Reflects Women's Status in Islam ' a serious journalist surprisingly suggests that " the Qur'an gives advice on everything, even the proper position for sexual relations ". It promises, he says, "that in death a man will have sexual relations 72 times a day, and this may help to explain why many young Muslim men are eager to die and become martyrs". Obviously , the only thing the article helps to explain is the author's ignorance .

Before the *muezzin* could make the first call to prayer, the beautiful Yuba City mosque was burned down at the hands of an extremist. That same month, (October, 1994) another mosque in New York City met a similar fate. The burning down of mosques adds another twist to the atmosphere of hate and distrust that has been stirred up by the mass media in the West. As if enough damage had not already been done, the sensationalist film *True Lies* was followed on television by Steve Emerson's undocumented *Jihad in America*, telecast by the Public Broadcasting System (PBS) - an organization

funded by taxpayer money. The dark doings of the media stand in sharp contrast to the bridge-building work being rendered by true people of faith. Hate-mongering can never come from pure hearts. While the media continues on irresponsibly, without soul-searching, humanitarian communities continue their work of promoting understanding and compassion among humankind.

In *Pirates & Emperors - International Terrorism in the Real World*, author Noam Chomsky draws a parallel between the global attitudes of the United States and Alexander the great. Legend has it that once Alexander caught a pirate and demanded of him how he dared molest the sea. "How dare you molest the whole world?" retorted the pirate. "Because I do it with a little ship only, I am called a thief; you, doing it with a great navy, are called an Emperor."

Nonetheless, an emperor who is humane may be much loved. Let everyone who dreams and dares for peace bear in mind that we, mankind, merely group off into different sized ships, or fleets. The vestments of humanitarianism are best donned in relation to others, not just towards one's own people. Otherwise the emperor may find he has no clothes.

The pirate's answer was "elegant and excellent", Chomsky remarks. It captures with some accuracy the current relations between the United States and various minor actors on the stage of international terrorism.

The Gulf war of 1991 showed that, whether they like it or not, Westerners are deeply connected with the Muslim World. Despite temporary alliances, it is clear that the West has largely lost the confidence of many people in the Islamic world. If the west is to regain the sympathy and respect that it once enjoyed in the Muslim world it must examine its own role in the Middle East and consider its own difficulties vis-a-vis Islam.

But the picture is not entirely black.

In his article " Muslim Relations in the United States " Akbar Ahmad wrote that:

" While recent Christian and Muslim scholars have cited several medieval Christian treatises that are clearly anti-Islamic, it has not been proved that those had profound anti-Muslim effect on European masses. Despite my cursory understanding of European social and intellectual history, I am inclined to believe that the image of Muslims as a religious group among pre-colonial European masses was not significantly influenced by Muslim-Christian political differences. It remains to be shown that the term Muslims or Saracens ' Mohametans, etc, was a more popular, primary designation than ethnic (tribal) names of Muslim people " .

Human Rights: A Religious Teaching in Islam

Human rights are considered to be central and inalienable, a sort of categorical imperative for the promotion of the dignity and equality of man. They are seen as the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world. Human rights are civil, political, economic, social, legal, religious and cultural rights.

Thomas Jefferson offers a useful definition of human rights in his attempt at convincing James Madison on the need for a bill of rights: a bill of rights is what people are entitled to against every government on earth, general or particular, and what no just government should refuse or rest on inference.⁴⁷

The global focus on Islam in recent years has naturally provoked widespread curiosity about the way of life, beliefs and practices of Muslims. Muslims themselves have been moved by this attention to a re-examination of their own lives and practices in the light of the ideological imperatives of their faith. The world wants to know what place civil liberties and human rights have in Islamic society. The answer may be as startling to the democratic non-Muslim as it is to the deadened Muslim grown so accustomed to human error.

Dr. Khalifa Abdul Hakim, explained that Islamic society is founded on very clear-cut principles:

As humanity is one, so virtue is one, as Socrates emphasized in his dialectic. Customs and conventions might differ, but the fundamental laws of good and evil must be the same for all. Therefrom follows the concept of justice, which among other things means equality before the law. Division of humanity into privileged and underprivileged is wrong: society must be modelled so that it does not split up into masters

⁴⁷ See R.B. Lillich, and F.C. Newman, International Human rights; Problems of law and Policy (Boston and Toronto : Little Brown and Co, 1979).

and slaves, or haves and have-nots. Men have become high or low only by their character: all other criteria are false.

It follows from this also that the domination of employer over employee, master over servant, and of man over woman is unethical and must be abolished. For all purposes except those in which there are natural functional differences, men and women must be treated as equals in their rights as well as their duties. The distinctions between rulers and subjects too must be set aside. Everyone is a 'ruler' in one respect and ruled in another respect. We are all equally subject to the Divine laws. Sovereignty belongs only to God.

When we speak about human rights in Islam we really mean that these rights have been established and granted by God; they are not granted by any ruler or legislative body. The rights granted by man whether he is a president or a legislative body can be withdrawn in the same manner in which they are conferred. The same thing is applicable to rights granted by dictators. They can confer them when they please and withdraw them when they wish; and they can openly violate them whenever they like.

In Islam, human rights have been conferred by God, and neither legislative assembly nor government has the right or authority to make an ammendment or change concerning the rights conferred by God. No one has the right to abrogate or withdraw them. Nor, in fact, are these basic human rights only to be conferred on paper for the sake of show or exhibition and denied in actual life when the show is over. Neither should they be considered in the realm of philosophical concepts which have no sanctions behind them.

The charter, proclamations and resolutions of the United Nations cannot be compared with the rights sanctioned by God. The former are not applicable in all cases and countries while the latter apply to every believer, in every corner of the world. They are part and parcel of the Islamic faith. In our

present days we observe that in many cases U.N. resolutions are applicable only to powerless countries. In juxtaposition, Islam lays down fundamental rights for humanity as a whole, which are to be respected and observed under all circumstances. As we read in the holy Qur'an:

O ye who believe! Be steadfast witnesses for Allah in equity, and let not hatred of any people seduce you that ye deal not justly. Deal justly, that is nearer to your duty. Observe your duty to Allah. Lo! Allah is Informed of what ye do.
(Qur'an, Al-Ma'idah 5:8)

﴿ يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا كُونُوا قَوَّامِينَ لِلَّهِ
شُهَدَاءَ بِالْقِسْطِ وَلَا يَجْرِمَنَّكُمْ شَنَاَنُ قَوْمٍ
عَلَيْكُمْ أَلَّا تَعْدِلُوا أَعْدِلُوا هُوَ أَقْرَبُ لِلتَّقْوَى
وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ خَبِيرٌ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ ﴾

(المائدة : ٨)

Human blood is sacred in any case, and cannot be spilled without justification. If anyone violates the sanctity of human blood by purposefully killing a soul without justification, it is as if he killed all of mankind:

For that cause We decreed for the Children of Israel that whosoever killeth a human being for other than manslaughter or corruption in the earth, it shall be as if he had killed all mankind, and whoso saveth the life of one, it shall be as if he saved the life of all mankind.

(Qur'an, Al-Ma'idah 5:32)

﴿ مَنْ أَجَلَ ذَلِكَ كَتَبْنَا عَلَى بَنِي
إِسْرَائِيلَ أَنَّهُ مَنْ قَتَلَ نَفْسًا بِغَيْرِ نَفْسٍ أَوْ فَسَادٍ
فِي الْأَرْضِ فَكَأَنَّمَا قَتَلَ النَّاسَ جَمِيعًا
وَمَنْ أَحْيَاهَا فَكَأَنَّمَا أَحْيَا النَّاسَ جَمِيعًا ﴾

(المائدة : ٣٢)

It is not permissible under Islamic Law to oppress women, children, old people, the sick or the wounded. Women's honor and chastity are to be respected under all circumstances. The hungry person must be fed, the naked must be clothed and the wounded or diseased must be treated medically, irrespective of whether that person belongs to the Islamic community or if he/she is from amongst its enemies.

It would seem from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that the idea of human rights is a relatively recent one, belonging more or less to the twentieth century. But in fact, fourteen centuries ago, Islam laid down rules guaranteeing the basic human liberties, ones that Muslims are under a religious obligation to recognize. No such code has ever again been made, and nothing even approximates its completeness.

I will try to explain how Islam shows great concern for human rights. These rights have been set down in the holy Qur'an with abundant clarity. Therefore we cannot hold Islam responsible if people do not follow the path prescribed, nor can we hold it responsible for the malpractices and misunderstandings which have arisen. The practice of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) and that of the first *Khulafa* (Caliphs) show the emphasis that Islam has given to justice and human equality.

In the Qur'an, the criteria for respect towards people are neither race, wealth, aristocracy, color, nor sex: these are not distinguishing factors in the sight of God. Every thinking Muslim must cherish the fact that his equality to others is something that has been decreed by Allah. Therefore, it is his duty to observe and support the principles of human rights wherever he may find himself, and with whomsoever he may be dealing. Each human being, Muslim or non-Muslim, is entitled to these rights, which must be respected by all Muslims.

The equality of all human beings before God is emphasized repeatedly in the Qur'an and in the sayings and

actions of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). Allah says in the Qur'an, for example:

O mankind! Lo! We have created you male and female, and have made you nations and tribes that ye may know one another. Lo! the noblest of you, in the sight of Allah, is the best in conduct. Lo! Allah is Knower, Aware.

﴿ يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَاكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ ﴾

(الحجرات : ١٣)

(Qur'an, Al-Hujurat 49:13)

One of Prophet Muhammad's (pbuh) famous sayings is:

No Arab has superiority over a non-Arab; nor does a non-Arab have any superiority over an Arab; nor does a white man have any superiority over a black man, and a black man has no superiority over the white man. You are all children of Adam, and Adam was created from clay.

Besides the equality of human beings, the other basic human rights include the right to life, the right to protection of life, the right to freedom of religion, the rights of women, and the right to justice.

While Islam guarantees to all human beings these aforementioned rights, it should also be pointed out that God does differentiate between people in terms of the spiritual. A person whose faith is sounder and more sincere than another, and who performs more deeds that are good, righteous and merciful for God's sake, will be considered nobler in the sight of Allah. However, these distinctions are not made during this

life on earth, and they do not affect the Islamic designation of human rights, which are guaranteed to one and all.

The Right to Life and Property

Islam guarantees the protection of the life even of the unborn child:

*Slay not your children,
fearing a fall to poverty.
We shall provide for them
and for you. Lo! the
slaying of them is great sin.*

(Qur'an, Bani Isra-il, 17:31)

﴿ ولا تقتلوا أولادكم خشية إملاق نحن
نرزقهم وإياكم إن قتلهم كان خطأ كبيرا ﴾

(بنی اسرائیل : ۳۱)

Muslim scholars agree that this prohibition also applies to the unborn child and is thus regarded as a clear indication that abortion is forbidden: only when a choice has to be made between the life of the mother and that of the fetus may the latter be aborted. Otherwise, the right of even the child in the womb cannot be denied to it.

The Right to the Protection of Life

When already in existence as a full, identifiable human being, every person's right to the protection of his life is recognized even more emphatically. His life must not be taken unless it be in the due process of the law. Hence wilful murder is regarded as a most heinous major sin. God warns in the Qur'an:

whosoever killeth a human being for other than manslaughter or corruption in the earth, it shall be as if he had killed all mankind (Qur'an Al- Ma'idah 5:32)

﴿من قتل نفسا بغير نفس أو فسادا﴾

﴿فى الأرض فكأنما قتل الناس جميعا﴾

(المائدة : ٣٢)

The stipulation of the death penalty for wilful homicide is described as a means of deterring the prospective murderer from actually committing the crime, as he would himself not want to be killed as penalty. Yet the actual punishment of execution for murder or spreading corruption in the land (and this must be severe) can only be decided in a properly constituted court where the offense must be proven beyond any iota of doubt.

This is not to imply that Islam is a religion that harshly applies the prescribed penalties whenever and wherever possible. Aisha, the wife of the Prophet (pbuh) reported him as saying:

Avert the infliction of prescribed penalties on Muslims as much as you can, and if there is any way out let a man go, for it is better for a leader to make a mistake in forgiving than to make a mistake in punishing.⁴⁸

In the matter of the right to the protection of life, the Islamic state treats Muslims and non-Muslims equally. The life of a *dhimmi* (one of the People of the Scripture living in a

⁴⁸Abu Muhammad al-Husain Al-Baghawi, *Mishkat Al-Masabih*, Reprint Edition. English Translation by James Robson. (Lahore, Pakistan: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1991), Vol. I, P. 762.

Muslim State) is guaranteed protection, as we have already seen.

A non-Muslim - be he a *dhimmi* or even a non-believer - living in an Islamic state should not be exposed to threats by anyone, Muslim or non-Muslim. According to the instructions of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), it is the duty of the state to protect all who live or travel in Islamic territory. Therefore, the non-believer is guaranteed security in a Muslim state. Together with his family, he should be able to live in safety and security, not fear.⁴⁹

The famous scholar of the Maliki School of Islamic thinking Imam Al-Qaraifi, quoted Ibn Hamzah as saying:

If enemies at war come to our country, aiming at a certain *dhimmi*, it is essential for us that we come out and fight them with all our might and our weapons, since the *dhimmi* is under the protection of Allah and His Messenger. If we did anything less, it would mean that we had failed in our agreement for protection.

⁴⁹In *Cultural Side of Islam*, Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall tells a fascinating story illustrative of this point:

In Charles II's reign a young English woman became an active member of the Society of Friends and suffered persecution on that account. Twice she was flogged in England for protesting against Church customs of the day. She, with two other Quakers, went to preach in New England, as the American colonies were then called. There they were thrown into prison on a charge of witchcraft and released only after many hardships. After her return to England she set out with five other Quakers to convert the Grand Signior, as the Sultan of Turkey was called. In the journey across Europe her companions fell into the hands of the Inquisition, and only one of them was ever heard of afterwards. He returned to England after many years, a globering madman. She after much persecution and annoyance, pursued her journey quite alone, took ship at Venice and was put ashore in Muslim territory. From thence she walked all the way to Adrianople but she need not have gone on foot; for from the moment she set foot in the Muslim Empire persecution was at an end. Everybody showed her kindness; the Government Officials helped her on her way; and when she reached Adrianople and asked for audience of the Emperor, saying that she brought a message from Almighty God, the Sultan received her in State, according her all the honors of an ambassador. He and his courtiers listened with grave courtesy to all she had to say, and, when she finished speaking, said it was the truth, which they also believed. She [refused to stay as honored guest and departed] on foot and alone and so she reached Constantinople without the least hurt or hindrance pp94-95.

The head of a Muslim state must look after the *dhimmis* and the non-believers in an Islamic state just as he must look after the Muslims: he must protect their interests and rights as citizens. Clearly none but a Muslim can be head of a Muslim state, for the very laws of that state guaranteeing protection to all as well as those regulating all other affairs are based on the Qur'an and the *sunnah* (model practice of Prophet Muhammad [pbuh]), and only a ruler who believes in Islam is likely to be willing to apply them faithfully.

Right from its inception, Islam showed great concern not only for the rights of human beings, but for all other creatures. The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) spoke of a woman (who probably had lived in a former time) who was condemned to hell because she had tied up a cat and thus caused it to starve to death; he also spoke of an anonymous man who had been granted paradise simply because he had given water to a dog dying of thirst. Among the many other traditions from the Prophet (pbuh), he is known to have said: "If you slaughter a sheep, slaughter it in the right way, and do not make it suffer." and "The best among you are those who are kind to His creatures. These are the ones that God likes best." In many of his sayings, the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) stated in one way or another that all creatures on earth belong to Allah, and that He loves them.

Freedom of Religion

Islam insists on tolerance and respect towards people of other religions. Every human being has the right to make up his or her own mind about what to believe. That is why the Qur'an states:

There is no compulsion in religion. The right direction is henceforth distinct from error. And he who rejecteth false deities and believeth in Allah hath grasped a firm handhold which will never break. Allah is Hearer, Knower..

﴿ لا إكراه في الدين قد تبين
الرشد من الغي فمن يكفر بالطاغوت
ويؤمن بالله فقد استمسك بالعروة الوثقى
لا انفصام لها والله سميع عليم ﴾

(البقرة : ٢٥٦)

(Qur'an, Al- Baqarah 2:256)

No force should be used to make a person leave his religion. Islam only encourages its followers to call others to the faith with wisdom and gentle persuasion. In this regard, Allah says in the Qur'an:

Call unto the way of thy Lord with wisdom and fair exhortation, and reason with them in the better way

﴿ ادع الى سبيل ربك بالحكمة والموعظة
الحسنة وجاد لهم بالتي هي احسن
ان ربك هو اعلم بمن ضل عن
سبيله وهو اعلم بالمهتدين ﴾

(النحل : ١٢٥)

(Qur'an, Al- Nahal 16:125)

Even when a Muslim has to argue a point of religion with People of the Book, he should do so in as friendly a manner, avoiding quarrel.

In all injunctions concerning other faiths, Islam instructs its followers to respect other peoples' freedom of worship.

When they do try to call them to the right way, compulsion or violence should never be used.

This attitude of tolerance is inherent in Islam and naturally was adopted by (or taught to) the Muslims right from the beginning of Prophet Muhammad's (pbuh) mission. In view of the pressure exerted by the pagans of Makkah on Muhammad (pbuh) in the early years, Allah commanded him simply to say to them that they were free to follow the religion they chose for themselves if they would not listen to him - just as he, for his part, was free to maintain his faith in the One True God.

The Rights of Women in Islam

Islam's directives on women show that they must always be respected: as human beings, and as mothers, sisters, daughters, and so on, as well as in the role of wives and mates. In many passages of the Qur'an we find that God Almighty emphasizes the need for Muslims to love and take care of their mothers even more than they would their fathers. The mother is especially venerated through reference to her labor while bearing and rearing of her children:

And We have enjoined upon man concerning his parents - His mother beareth him in weakness upon weakness and his weaning is in two years - Give thanks unto Me and unto thy parents. Unto Me is the journeying.

﴿ ووصينا الإنسان بوالديه حملته أمه وهنا
على وهن وفصاله في عامين
أن أشكر لي ولوالديك إلى المصير ﴾

(لقمان : ١٤)

(Qur'an, Luqman, 31:14)

It is reported that a man once came to the Prophet (pbuh) and asked, "Messenger of God, who is the most deserving of good care from me?" The Prophet replied: "Your mother (which he repeated *three times*) then your father, then your nearest relatives in order." In other words, in a truly Muslim society, people have great respect for their mothers, and men have respect for women in general, and treat them with kindness and honor.

While a man is responsible for his mother and his sister (especially when his father has died), his sister is not at the same time responsible for him, unless of course she chooses to help him. It is for this reason that Allah has assigned to a male child twice the share as the female child in the inheritance of the estate of their parents.

God enjoins Muslims to take care of women as they have a special place in His sight. A woman should be respected regardless of her race, whether she comes from one's own tribe or clan, or from the enemy's; whether she is found in the wild forest or in the conquered city, and whether she is a Muslim or has no religion at all.

Islam grants women independence and free choice. It guarantees them the right to keep their personality and view of life, so long as such view does not contradict God's injunctions. Women do not lose their own family names when they marry: they remain known as the daughters of their fathers and the descendants of their own ancestors. The name becomes a symbol of independent identity and pride in their own heritage, which need not be given up simply because they are married. Women are to have control over their own wealth and may have business interests if they so choose.

In Islam a woman cannot be forced to marry anyone. When married, her husband must protect and take care of her children. She has the right to initiate divorce if it is written

into the marriage agreement. She may also protect herself from an unjust husband by appealing to the courts. She is given custody of her children when they are young because she is the one better suited to raise them and take care of them so long as the protection of the children's Islamic upbringing is guaranteed. There is one hadith (saying of Prophet Muhammad.) which also indicate that even later, as children get older, the choice of who has custody over them (or who they live with) is up to them (the children).

In conclusion, women enjoy the same civil rights as men, and no man can take her place as a witness in a court when it comes to matter relating to maternity.

The Right to Freedom from Slavery

Slavery was not invented by Islam. It existed for a long time before the Prophethood of Muhammad (pbuh) and was practiced among different peoples all over the world. Islam on the contrary did everything to limit the sources of slavery, to set slaves free, and to make the lives of those who were still slaves as humane as possible.

Islam abolished different forms of slavery that existed prior to the mission of Muhammad (pbuh). It prohibited slavery arising from the capture of civil war prisoners, and subsequently from wars among believers (although believers shouldn't do battle with one another). It forbade slavery resulting from piracy, and slavery of those who had committed crimes or could not pay their debts, as well as that slavery which comes about when parents sell their children or a person sells him or herself.

Only two sources of slavery remained: slaves who were inherited, and fresh prisoners of external wars fought legitimately by Muslims.

Islam also laid down rules governing the treatment of slaves: they were to be cared for and respected, properly housed and fed. The Prophet (pbuh) and his successors

showed examples of loving kindness in their own actions and were always of the utmost humanity in their dealings with slaves. Muhammad warned the believers about their treatment of slaves in his speech during his last visit to Makkah, in order to make the pilgrimage. In that speech he said:

And your slaves! See that ye feed them with such food as ye yourselves eat, and clothe them with the stuff ye yourselves wear; and if they commit a fault which ye are not ready to forgive, then part with them for they are servants of your Lord, and must not be ill-treated. The slaves who say their prayers are your brothers.⁵⁰

It could easily be argued that Islam only allows slavery as the most humane way of dealing with prisoners of war; it also is a religion that is set up to eradicate slavery. Over and above the restrictions that Islam placed on slavery, it set tremendous value and merit on the freeing of slaves. Freeing of slaves is recommended at every turn; it is part of worship and tradition to set slaves free, in all possible situations. Many a sin has been atoned for by freeing a slave! The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) is recorded to have said: "He who has a female slave, provides her with a good education, then sets her free and makes her his wife deserves from God a double reward." One can only add to that the fact that when a female slave gave birth to a child, she could never be sold to anyone else, and if her owner did not himself free her, she became free upon his death. As a matter of fact, becoming mother to a child gave her a station very similar to a wife, and she was no longer called a 'slave' but literally 'Mother to a child.'

⁵⁰ Ibid. p.52

The Right to Justice

Justice is Islam's highly valuable gift to humanity. As flippantly or frequently it is spoken of, justice is not so very common on earth, yet it is the cornerstone of true Islamic government. Muslims must be just and not let feelings color their judgement, not even towards enemies; and no one, whatever his religion might be, should be given cause to fear being treated unjustly at the hands of a Muslim.

All people are equal before the law; and the same laws are applied to all people, irrespective of their social status. Allah says in the Qur'an:

Lo! Allah enjoineth justice and kindness, and giving to kinsfolk, and forbiddeth lewdness and abomination and wickedness. He exhorteth you in order that ye may take heed.

﴿إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَأْمُرُ بِالْعَدْلِ وَالْإِحْسَانِ وَإِيتَاءِ ذِي الْقُرْبَىٰ وَيَنْهَىٰ عَنِ الْفَحْشَاءِ وَالْمُنْكَرِ وَالْبَغْيِ يَعِظُكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَذَكَّرُونَ﴾

(النحل : ٩٠)

(Qur'an, Al-Nahl (16:90))

No person should treat another in any way contrary to justice or humanity. In the *Surah* titled *Women*, God Almighty commands that, if Muslims must give judgement between people, they must do so with justice, contravening neither the rules of justice nor the dictates of conscience. Yet at the same time, rulers and judges have been encouraged, if they fear erring, to err on the side of mercy rather than punishment (but not to err on purpose); this would be for matter of uncertainty, and in order to encourage repentance.

The judge must be just. He must deliver his judgements without fear or favor, irrespective of whether the person(s)

involved has power, prestige, wealth or is poor and weak. He must not be influenced by consideration of family ties or animosity towards anyone. He must treat all those who come before him with impartiality, as equals before the law. Omar ibn Al-Khattab, the second 'guided' Caliph once wrote in a historic letter to his judge, Abu Musa Al-Ash'ari as follows:

First understand what is presented to you before passing any judgement. Full equality for all (litigants): in the way they take places in your presence, and in the way you look at them, and in your jurisdiction. That way, no highly-placed person would look forward to your being unjust, nor would a weak one despair of your fairness. The burden of proof is the responsibility of the plaintiff, and the oath is upon the denying party. Compromise is always the right of litigants except if it allows what (Islam) has forbidden or forbids what (Islam) has allowed. Yours is a role of seeking your way to the judgement that seems nearest to justice and apt to be the best in the eyes of God. Never succumb to anger or anxiety, and never get impatient or tired of your litigants.⁵¹

Naturally, Muslims and non-Muslims are to be treated alike before the law:

⁵¹ Said Ramadan, *Islamic Law*, (London: P.R. Macmillan Limited, 1961), P.35

" Lo! Allah commandeth you that.. if ye judge between mankind, that ye judge justly....

﴿ إِنْ أَمَرَكَ اللَّهُ أَنْ تَوَدَّوْا الْأَمَانَاتِ إِلَىٰ أَهْلِهَا وَإِذَا حَكَمْتُمْ بَيْنَ النَّاسِ أَنْ تَحْكُمُوا بِالْعَدْلِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ نِعْمًا يَعِظُكُم بِهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ سَمِيعًا بَصِيرًا ﴾

" (Qur'an An-Nisaa 4:58)⁵²

(النساء : ٥٨)

An illustration of this type of justice being carried out during the lifetime of the Prophet (pbuh) can be seen in the case study of the Jewish citizen who was acquitted of a false charge and a Muslim being condemned at the time of a dispute between the two. The Muslim had stolen a coat of mail, which he hid in the house of the Jew, and afterwards accused the latter of theft. The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) ruled in favor of the Jew while the following Qur'anic verse was revealed at the same time⁵³:

Lo! We reveal unto thee the Scripture with the truth, that thou mayst judge between mankind by that which Allah showeth thee. And be not thou a pleader for the treacherous

﴿ إِنَّا أَنْزَلْنَا إِلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ بِالْحَقِّ لِتَحْكُمَ بَيْنَ النَّاسِ بِمَا أَرَاكَ اللَّهُ وَلَا تَكُنْ لِلْخَائِنِينَ خَصِيمًا ﴾

(النساء : ١٠٥)

(Qur'an, An-Nisaa (4:105)

⁵² Ibid . as Ramadan notes:

⁵³ Ibid. p110

Addressing his companions, Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) also once said: "Help your brother, be he the doer of wrong or the one wronged." Asked how one could help a 'brother' when he was the doer of wrong, the Prophet (pbuh) explained that it was by admonishing him to stop doing wrong. Thus injustice, God Willing, might be curtailed before it ever occurs, and people will be less apt to hurt their own souls if they are part of a caring (i.e. righteous, not self-righteous) society.

The Protection of Honor

The Holy Qur'an lays down the injunction that one set of people should not be allowed to make fun of, mock or deride another set of people. It also warns against insult to the honor of any group or individual. In the same vein, Muslims must neither defame or insult anyone by using demeaning nicknames, nor backbite or speak ill of anyone. There are whole chapters in books devoted to sayings of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) that list nothing but admonitions about speaking ill of others, or of things that do not concern them, or about using coarse language. It would surely not be in the spirit of mercy and kindness towards mankind to suddenly revert to callous, inconsiderate language. To sum up the best advice, God's messenger is reported as saying, "He who keeps silent will be safe."⁵⁴

⁵⁴Al-Baghawi, *Mishkat Al-Masabih*, English translation by Robson, Vol II, p.1009.

The Qur'an is adamant on the subject:

O ye who believe! Let not a folk deride a folk who may be better than they (are), nor let women (deride) women who may be better than they are; neither defame one another, nor insult one another by nicknames. Bad is the name of lewdness after faith. And whoso turneth not in repentance, such are evil-doers.

O ye who believe! Shun much suspicion; for lo! some suspicion is a crime. And spy not, neither backbite one another. Would one of you love to eat the flesh of his dead brother? Ye abhor that (so abhor the other)! And keep your duty to Allah. Lo! Allah is Relenting, Merciful.

(Qur'an, Al- Hujurat (49: 11-12)

﴿ يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا يَسْخَر قَوْمٌ مِنْ قَوْمٍ عَسَىٰ أَنْ يَكُونُوا خَيْرًا مِنْهُمْ وَلَا نِسَاءٌ مِنْ نِسَاءٍ عَسَىٰ أَنْ يَكُنَّ خَيْرًا مِنْهُنَّ وَلَا تَلْمِزُوا أَنفُسَكُمْ وَلَا تَنَابَزُوا بِالْألقَابِ بِئْسَ الإِسْمُ الفسوق بعد الإيمان ومن لم يَتُب فاولئك هم الظالمون (١١) يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اجْتَنِبُوا كَثِيرًا مِنَ الظنِّ إِنَّ بَعْضَ الظنِّ إِثْمٌ وَلَا تَحْسَسُوا وَلَا يَغْتَب بَعضُكُمْ بَعْضًا أَيُّجِب أَحَدُكُمْ أَنْ يَأْكُل لَحْمَ أَخِيهِ مَيْتًا فَكَرِهْتُمُوهُ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ تَوَّابٌ رَحِيمٌ (١٢) ﴾

(الحجرات : ١١ - ١٢)

Sanctity and Security of Private Life

Besides the admonition not to spy upon one another, Muslims are taught that they may not enter any houses unless they are sure of their occupants' consent. The Prophet (pbuh) is reported to have said about the evils of spying: "If you seek out peoples' faults, you will corrupt them, or bring them very near to corruption."⁵⁵

Private family life is indeed that, quite sacred for one and all in the Muslim state, be they Muslim or not. Likewise property is sacred, so long as it is lawful, and Muslims are forbidden to take what does not belong to them, for Muhammad (pbuh) said : " It is unlawful for the Muslim to take (so much as) a stick without the consent of its owner."⁵⁶

Other rights secured under Islamic Law include:

- The right to participate in the cultural and social life of the community.
- Protection of religious sentiments
- The right to protest against tyranny
- Freedom of expression and thought
- Right to education
- Right to work and to have nationality.

Mankind is one large family created by Allah from a single pair of parents. Islam regards the welfare of the needy in this human community as the responsibility of the whole community. It thus recognizes the right of the individual to the basic needs of life. Islam recognizes the right of the poor and the needy. Muslims must help and assist them when their need

⁵⁵ Yusuf Al-Qaradawi, (Translation, Original Publication in Arabic, 1960) *The Lawful and the Prohibited in Islam*, (Indianapolis, IN.:American Trust Publications) p. 316.

⁵⁶Ibid. p.329.(Reported by Ibn Hibban in his *Sahih*)

is proven. The Qur'an refers to those who gain paradise as individuals who were, in this temporal life, aware of their duty to help the unfortunate:

Lo! those who keep from evil will dwell amid gardens and watersprings, Taking that which their Lord giveth them, for lo! aforetime they were doers of good; And in their wealth the beggar and the outcast had due share.

﴿إِنَّ الْمُتَّقِينَ فِي جَنَّاتٍ وَعُيُونٍ (١٥) آخِذِينَ مَا آتَاهُمْ رَبُّهُمْ إِنَّهُمْ كَانُوا قَبْلَ ذَلِكَ مُحْسِنِينَ (١٦) .. وَفِي أَمْوَالِهِمْ حَقٌّ لِّلسَّائِلِ وَالْمَحْرُومِ (١٩)﴾

(الذاريات : ١٥ ، ١٦ ، ١٩)

(Qur'an, AZ-Zariyat (51 : 15,16,19)

Through the Qur'an's instructions, Islam not only encourages Muslims to help needy people who ask for assistance, but also teaches that if a Muslim gets to know of a person who is without the basic necessities of life, then he should help him (or her) as best he can.

Islam also enjoins *Zakah*⁵⁷, and has made it the third pillar of the religion. *Zakah* is an obligatory tax paid by the well-off Muslim for the upkeep of the poor and the community. One need only pay two and a half percent of one's savings or stipulated property that have remained intact over the course of a full year. Thus Islam does not only depend on voluntary charity, and it also calls on the community of Muslims - in particular, the head of state - to support those who have no family relations to support them. In truth, a real Islamic state is also a real welfare state.

⁵⁷Also transliterated as *zakar*

To summarize, Islam recognizes the right of every citizen in the state to privacy and prohibits any interference with or invasion of that right. Thus at every possible twist and turn in human affairs, Islam protects the honor of humanity; moreover, it teaches precisely what that (i.e., the honor of humanity) *is* in its entirety! Yet if a believer should ever find himself mistreated by another, and chooses to overlook or forgive that fault, or if the said believer is misused and does not receive justice, his (or her) patience is guaranteed to bring joy in the Hereafter, so long as he chooses to be patient for God's sake, and not for some other reason.

There is much to be grateful for, and likewise much to calm the heart throughout the teachings of Islamic ideology. The principles of that ideology aim, at every junction, to preserve civilization and to protect the honor of humanity.

Islam has always taught and upheld these high standards of morality right from its inception. The religion was never modified, nor would it be consistent with its teachings to be modified, save only in the most technical calculations (such as what constitutes taxable wealth). However, after the time of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), and that of *al-Khulafa al Rashidun* (the Rightly-Guided Caliphs), people strayed or were led astray in various degrees. Even this general deterioration was prophesized by Muhammad (pbuh), so that the thinking Muslim may not ever be downhearted by what he finds in his society, but strives himself to emulate the best of guidance. Indeed, in the Qur'an and hadith are many, many further indications of what will come to pass, and the conscientious believer is ready for them, because God tells him to be ready!

Yet the visitor from the outside world will find in the Islamic World a manifest pride of the people in the human rights granted by Islam. He will find a great deal of importance attached to the rights of freedom, especially to freedom of expression. In an Islamic society, everyone enjoys freedom of conscience, freedom of creed and freedom of expression including the freedom to practice the religion of one's choice, and to worship God within the limits of decency. In a truly Islamic state every individual moreover has the right to choose his own vocation and to enjoy all civil rights. These rights are equally accorded to non-Muslims, who cannot be discriminated against. Islam teaches

that all human beings are brethren and equal before God, for all of them are His creatures, and the descendants of Adam and *Hawwa* (Eve).

Conclusion

No doubt, the points of convergence between Islam and the West are many, and both worlds are capable of offering their respective contributions towards dissipating the black clouds of misunderstanding, thus paving the way for a better mutual cooperation for the benefit of the human race. It is indeed the irony of the age that, despite the miraculous achievement in mass communications, the world is still so much a slave of unprecedented ignorance. One consequence of this ignorance is the wrong use of rich resources, not for the service of humanity, but to its detriment.

If common ground between the two worlds is to be found, people have to get rid of their prejudices and show tolerance, trust, and mutual respect with goodwill. This done, both sides would together be able to create a better world order for future generations, a world that is free of hatred, suspicion, fear, wars, social diseases, hostility, injustice and crimes.

Muslims know today, as in the past, that the Scriptural communities have always drawn near to each other. Fourteen hundred years ago, Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) advised his persecuted followers to seek refuge in Ethiopia where a Christian king ruled. Muslims are never oblivious of this historic event, and conscientious Muslim communities continue to enhance their involvement in interfaith development.

People of faith hold such interfaith dialogues dear, and will continue to foster and support the understanding of Abrahamic faith in all forums. It is only through drawing near to each other that the "faith" communities can stem the tide of mistrust.

It was the cooperation between Muslims and other Scriptural communities that helped water down some of the sinister and anti-family resolutions proposed by the secular

forces at the UN sponsored conference on 'Population and Development' in Cairo of December, 1994. It was also the understanding extended by the Scriptural communities to Muslims that contributed toward the recall of an offensive card produced by a Chicago-based company. The lights of sincere faith are like twinkling stars, and they do illuminate a path of hope for a more peaceful coexistence of mankind.

A week after the Oklahoma City bomb blast, a letter arrived at the ISNA headquarters. It said: " We Christians and American non-Muslims have been quick to judge Islam by our own misperceptions. For that I apologize . " ⁵⁸

A senior business executive called to say that he now realizes what Muslims experience every day. The voice-mail boxes of ISNA officials were packed with messages of support and apologies from ordinary non-Muslim Americans. They were neighbors from across the country who were apologizing for harboring ill-feelings against their fellow Americans. The apologies that continue to pour in are from people who are victims themselves. They are victims of the media's manipulations.

In its editorial of 24 April 1995 the Purdue Exponent, a campus newspaper, said: " The automatic blame placed on those of the Islamic faith is something that each of us, proud to live in a free nation, should be ashamed of. "

However , we need not wrestle with falseness. God is TRUTH.

His Creation is the only reality. Truth is its own authority , upheld by God, The Omnipotent, the Omnipresent. The

⁵⁸ Abu Amal Yamani's Oklahoma city: Stereotyping Muslims Again, Islamic Horizons, May/ June 1995, P.24.

Oneness of God, includes you and me and all Creation in His Truth.

A realization of His Oneness enables us all to focus on His Perfection and imbibe the realization of His limitless Creativity.

La ilaha illa Allah (There is no god but Allah).

Even as the blazingly brilliant aurora/ halo permits astronomers to detect a galaxy in the night sky. Even so, do the mysterious veils of this King of Kings, our God shields His Truth from our tender eyes until they attain the strength to bear it at last.

And now, having reviewed this digest of words, a collection prompted by the inspiring address by HRH Prince Charles, the Prince of Wales, at Oxford University in November 1993, I would like to imagine that all of us could proceed spiritward to that Universal Assembly Hall, bedecked gloriously with the beauty of the promised rainbow and gather together at the feet of our Creator rejoicing in the embrace of the loving God.

And the promised day that we have been yearning for, will perhaps have come at last. ... Insh' Allah !

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