

## **Coexistence and tolerance throughout the Islamic ages**

By

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### **Abstract**

Islam is the religion that Allah Almighty revealed to His Prophet and Messenger Muhammad bin Abdullah, peace and blessings be upon him when the Qur'an descended upon him confirming what is in the Torah and the Gospel. It is Heaven's final and comprehensive message for what is good for man, in this world and the Hereafter, until the Day of Judgment. Allah sent Muhammad, peace and prayers, messengers of the world, and did not send him to his Muslim people only. Coexistence in Islam is based on a belief base and is rooted in faith. Therefore, the concept of coexistence from the perspective of Islam is not among the modern positivist concepts from which the rules of international law were formulated. The Muslim believes that divine guidance came through a long series of messages and prophecies, the last of which are Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. It is therefore natural that these three religions are closer to each other than they are to all other religions, and the Qur'an calls Christians and Jews (People of the Book), because Allah Almighty revealed the Torah to Moses and the Gospel to Jesus, peace be upon them, before Muhammad, peace, and blessings are upon him, received the message in its completeness, confirming what was before it, correcting and detailing matters of Sharia and law beside worship and morals. So, the Noble Qur'an was revealed, and it is the only one remaining in its original language.

The most prominent results of the research are:

1. Coexistence was based on the foundations of love between human beings without regard to ethnic backgrounds or color.
2. The manifestation of religions was the urging for peace and cooperation based on the acceptance by the other religiously different, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam of those divine laws, whose concern was to create harmony and love among human beings.

### **Chapter one**

*Islam is a universal message*

Islam is the religion that Allah Almighty revealed to His Prophet and Messenger Muhammad bin Abdullah, peace and blessings be upon him, when the Qur'an was revealed to him confirming what was before him of the Torah and the Gospel. It is the final message of heaven that gathers what is good and righteous for man, in this world, and the hereafter, until the Day of Judgment. Allah sent Muhammad, peace and prayers, messengers of the world, and did not send him to his Muslim people only. (We have not sent you except as a giver of glad tidings and a warner to all mankind) (1), (O Prophet, we have sent you as a witness, a bearer of glad tidings, and to bear warning) (2), (Say: "O men! I am sent unto you all, as the Messenger of Allah) (3). (4) The Islamic message emphasized human unity with equality between human

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racés, their peoples, and their tribes (O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other (not that ye may despise (each other). Verily the most honored of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) the most righteous of you) (5). The Prophet, may Allah's prayers and peace be upon him and his family, delivered this message during the Farewell Pilgrimage, so he recited the verse, and said what it summed up: "An Arab has no virtue over a Non-Arab, nor does a Non-Arab have virtue over an Arab, a red-skinned person is not more virtuous than a dark-skinned person nor is a dark skinned person more virtuous than a red-skinned person except through Taqwa."(6) . This unity of humanity includes the call for harmony by mutual familiarity and mutual tolerance to left conflict (7).

Islam had enjoined belief in all the messengers and the non-discrimination between them, "The Messenger has believed in what was revealed to him from his Lord, as did the believers. They all have believed in Allah, His angels, His scriptures, and His messengers: "We do not differentiate between any of His messengers." (8).

The universality of Islam makes Islamic culture and civilization open to the civilizations of nations and responsive to the cultures of peoples, influential and affected. Islam denies (civilizational centrality) that the world wants a single civilization and takes the means of a clash of civilizations to coerce the world into a single cultural pattern because Islam wants the world (forum of civilizations) to be multiple and distinct, but it does not want multiple civilizations to replace intolerance with the compulsory cultural centrality, but Islam wants these multiple civilizations to interact and support everything common to a general human being. (9)

Islam denies this religious centrality, when it sees the plurality of religious laws as one of the laws of Allah in religious assembly, with no alteration or transformation (For each of you, we have assigned a law and a method. Had Allah willed, He would have made you a single community, but He tests you through what He has given you. So, compete in righteousness) (10). (And if your Lord had willed, He could have made mankind one community; but they will not cease to differ, except whom your Lord has given mercy, and for that He created them) (11). He, Glory be to Him, has created them for diversity and difference (12), but He wants for all denominations, laws, and religions a unit that encompasses their diversity, and a link that controls their differences, a unity in the monotheism of the Creator, and belief in the unseen, and righteous deeds. These are the foundations of the one divine religion, on which all the laws, prophecies, and messages are agreed upon, from Adam to Abraham, to Moses, to Jesus, to Muhammad, May prayers and peace be upon them all.

The principle of universality of the message is one of the well-established principles of Islam, and it is the firm foundation upon which the Muslim's relationship with the people of the heavenly religions is based. From this principle stems the vision of Islam to deal with non-Muslims. A Muslim's belief is not complete unless he believes in all of the Messengers and does not differentiate between any of them. This is the human dimension that gives tolerance in Islam-wide areas. Almighty says (He revealed the Torah and the Gospel. Before, as guidance for the people. And He revealed the Qur'an) (13). The Almighty says (I am sent to you by Allah to confirm the Torah that was before me) (14).

It is not permissible to understand this human tolerance, which Islam has made a solid foundation for the relationship of a Muslim with a non-Muslim, as dissolution, or a willingness to dissolve into any of the entities that do not agree with the essence of this religion. This tolerance does not eliminate the difference, but it establishes the human relations that Islam

wants to permeate people's lives. The emphasis on ideological, civilizational, and cultural specificities cannot be abolished, but Islam does not want these peculiarities to prevent acquaintance between nations and peoples and cooperation among them.

The undoubted fact is that Islam affirms the supremacy of the religious bond over every other bond, whether it is a relative, regional, racial, or class bond. The Muslim is the brother of the Muslim, and closer to the Muslim than any infidel in his religion, he seeks to protect them from the lowest, and they are a hand against others, and this is not in Islam alone, but it is the nature of every religion, and every faith. (15)

## Chapter two

### *Islam and coexistence*

There is no more eloquent and better than the dignified verse (Say: "O People of the Book! come to common terms as between us and you)(16) . In an indication of the depth of the principle of coexistence in the concept of Islam. That is because the common space between Muslims and the People of the Book is a wide area, and if Islam has made in the hearts of Muslims a space for coexistence with all human beings, then, a fortiori, there is room for coexistence between believers in Allah, although this coexistence does not mean that we agree in everything. I stipulated that I would only do good to someone who was exactly like me (Muslim or non-Muslim). This means that I love only myself, and that difference means enmity. (17)

Coexistence in Islam stems from an ideological base, and it is rooted in faith. Therefore, the concept of coexistence from the perspective of Islam is not among the modern positivist concepts from which the rules of international law were formulated. The Muslim believes that divine guidance came through a long series of messages and prophecies, the last of which are Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. It is therefore natural that these three religions are closer to each other than to all other religions. The Qur'an is called Christians and Jews (People of the Book), because Allah Almighty revealed the Torah to Moses and the Gospel to Jesus, peace be upon them, before Muhammad, may Allah's prayers and peace be upon him, received the message in its completeness, confirming what was before it, correcting and detailing matters of Sharia and law, in addition to worship and morals. So, the Noble Qur'an was revealed, and it is the only one remaining in its original language (18).

One of the most prominent manifestations of coexistence that has prevailed in Islamic civilization throughout the ages is that Islam counts Jews and supporters as the people of a heavenly religion, even if this consideration is not mutual, even though not believing in the prophethood of Muhammad, peace, and blessings are upon him, is a great matter and a dangerous affair, Islam has understood this disagreement, Islam may understand this disagreement, not by underestimating, or by doctrinal appeasement, but by dealings with teachings that allow communication and compassion despite the conflict of belief. (19)

Tolerance in the Islamic perspective is the result of the Islamic perception of man based on two criteria; The first is to identify the goal of human existence, which man takes the reasons for achieving, thereby adhering to the causes that are compatible with this goal and do not confront, and the second is to raise awareness of human existence beyond the inferior, short and mortal life, to the immortal life that remains. Allah created man for purposes other than the one for which he created the animal, and his creation was not merely adding a new animal to the list of animals, but rather the creation of another race of creation, Allah created him with

his ability, to worship Allah with awareness, and populate the earth according to the divine approach. For this purpose, he was endowed with privileges, and books were sent down for his guidance at the hands of the honorable messengers, may Allah's prayers and peace be upon them, and one of the goals of sending messengers and sending down books was to make people do justice (20)

One of the forms of equity is that coexistence prevails between nations and peoples, in the refined sense of coexistence that is based on justice in treatment and equality in the relationship. In this sense, Muslims understand the justice in the Almighty's verse (Indeed We have sent Our Messengers with clear proofs and revealed with them the Scripture and the Balance (justice) that mankind may keep up justice) (21).

Muslims have applied justice at the level appropriate to a person, whether in the treatment of those who do not believe in Islam and its principles, in the cleanliness of society from immorality, in the humanitarian services provided to people, or in cooperation in righteousness and piety. History attests that the treatment of Muslims to non-Muslims in the conquered countries was a wonderful example of tolerance unparalleled in history, and the extent of its nobility becomes clear in comparison with the situation of Islamic minorities that fall under the control of Jews, Christians, and polytheists in general. (22)

What happened when Caliph Omar, may Allah be pleased with him, entered Jerusalem, is a shining image of Islamic tolerance that established the basis of religious and cultural coexistence. Omar Ibn Al-Khattab entered Jerusalem, so the Patriarch met him and toured with him throughout the city until he entered the Church of the Resurrection, when the time for prayer came, he said to the patriarch: I want to pray, so he said to him: Pray in your place, and he was in the center of the church, but he refused, fearing that Muslims would follow his example, and say here Omar prayed, and the matter may lead to them taking over the church, violating what was stipulated in the Omar age covenant (23) of respecting their churches on the assumption that what Omar did with the approval of the patriarch, an amendment to what was stipulated in the covenant. Rather, Omar Ibn Al-Khattab went out and prayed on the steps of the church door, and after he finished his prayer, he wrote an order that no group prayer be held in this place. Then Omar came to the rock and built the Mosque of the Rock on it. (24)

As previously indicated, the lesson from the narration of this aspect of the history of Islamic-Christian relations lies in enlightening the mind with a very clear historical fact, which is that tolerance in Islam is a fixed belief and refined behavior. Rather, it is a way of life that Muslims applied in their private and public lives, and their interaction with other followers of other religions was a fine example of coexistence which confirms beyond any doubt that Muslims are pioneers of coexistence, and that they possess, in all cases, a self-willingness to coexist with those of the people of religions, laws, and creeds who wish to coexist with them, without this willingness, to neglect one of the characteristics of their identity, or to abandon one of their beliefs, or to waive one of their rights. Rather, it is a coexistence that serves lofty human purposes, through understanding, cooperation, and joint action in the fields that achieve these purposes.

### ***Coexistence among non-Muslims:***

Whatever the virtue of forgetting the past, and our control of religious feelings in response to the imperatives of objective abstraction in the research, we cannot deny that the history of Muslim-Christian relations, through the prolonged times, did not know the Christian side of tolerance meaningfully, and its interaction with Muslims did not rise to the level of coexistence. It is neither scientific research nor historical honesty to overlook this historical

phenomenon recorded in the most correct references, without referring to it for consideration, under the pretext of impartiality, lack of fanaticism, or forgetting the disadvantages of the past altogether.

The religious tolerance that Europe knew with the emergence of the religious reform movement was tolerance between the Christian sects, and this tolerance did not include coexistence with non-Christians. In England, for example, the call for tolerance was promoted by three prominent thinkers: Harrington, Milton, and Taylor. The first of them realized that political freedom is not upright without absolute religious freedom, because religious freedom includes freedom of conscience, which includes civil freedom. Freedom of conscience is achieved when a person can practice his worship and practice the teachings of his religion according to the dictation of his conscience alone, without obstruction or interference from the government. Milton established his defense of tolerance on the basis that the establishment of the right does not require persecution, in addition to the fact that persecution hinders the discovery of the truth (25).

Even among Christians, tolerance did not apply to everyone when it appeared in Europe. Milton, however, was excluding Catholics in his application of the principle of tolerance, arguing that their worship is pagan, and that (the Old Testament) forbade the worship of idols (26). Today in Europe there are deep deposits of traces of limited religious tolerance that no sects among Christians, let alone non-Christians have enjoyed.

However, we do not deny that the Catholic Church examined its traditional position on Islam and corrected it, as it has been very new since the days of Urban II in 1099 AD. Let us read the position of the Catholic Church in the document (*Nostra aetate*) issued by the Second Ecumenical Council during the reign of Pope Paul VI in 1965 AD. Concerning the Church's attitude towards non-Christians, he said about Muslims: ((The Church looks with appreciation on Muslims who worship the One Allah, the Living, the Subsisting, the Compassionate, the Merciful, the Almighty, the Creator of the heavens and the earth, who spoke to mankind, and who owe obedience even to the hidden commands of Allah, as Abraham declared, to whom the faith of Muslims belongs. They venerate Jesus as a prophet, even if they do not recognize him as a god, and they honor his mother, the Virgin Mary, in piety and humility. On top of this, they are waiting for the Day of Judgment when Allah will send people to judge them, glorify moral life, and perform worship to Allah, especially through prayer, almsgiving, and fasting." (27)

However, we find in a recent papal document, what makes us stop at the idea of (inter-religious dialogue), or (inter-religious coexistence), not to withdraw from the application of the principle of dialogue and coexistence but let us reflect on the depth of the significance of this position and its repercussions on the overall moves undertaken by the Western Catholic Church in the direction of calling for dialogue and coexistence.

This example is illustrated in our approach to the concept of coexistence among non-Muslims, who are here specifically Christians, or, more precisely, the Nazaris who are followers of the Western Church to differentiate between them and the Muslim Christians who share with us living in the confines of Islamic civilization for centuries. I opened the subtitle: "Dialogue with Brothers of Other Religions". In chapter V of Al-Fadi's letter (28), that letter, which Pope Paul II said: "It contains his opinion and attitude towards Islam and Muslims, we know the following: "Interreligious dialogue is part of the missionary church's mission. It is a method of mutual knowledge and enrichment, which does not conflict with the message to the nations. On the contrary, it is linked to it, and expresses it." Then he goes on to emphasize:



“Salvation comes from Christ, and dialogue does not exempt from preaching the Gospel.” Rather, “the Church does not consider that there is any conflict between the preaching of Christ and dialogue between religions” (29).

If this text does not need to be interpreted, because it is very clear in determining the meaning of the dialogue in the view of Pope John Paul II, which is nothing other than an area for the continuation and consolidation of the process of preaching, then another text contained in the apostolic sermon entitled: “Communicating Religious Education.” of Pope John Paul II, which was broadcast in 199. He said: “The message of the evangelization is included in the evangelical culture, from which it should not be separated. It is transmitted through an apostolic dialogue that is necessarily included in a specific cultural dialogue. The power of the Gospel is capable of change and renewal. Therefore, the Gospel should not be changed or affected when it comes into contact with cultures. (30) Then, on the fifth of October 1993 AD, Cardinal Ratzinger, head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, declared the New Apostolic Address to the whole world, and it is the tenth discourse of Pope John Paul II since he assumed the papacy in 1978 AD. Religious education will be rooted in different cultures and impart the perfection of Christ to their legitimate values” (31)

If the dialogue between cultures, and therefore between followers of religions, is in this concept with the Vatican, then this means that coexistence among them aims to Christianize the world. This is in contrast to the humanitarian concept that allowed coexistence among Muslims. What increases the clarification of this concept is that the aforementioned apostolic discourse stresses with complete clarity the importance of Christianizing the world, especially in post-communist countries for fear of continuing in atheism, or of their conversion to Islam. Hence the necessity of striking Islam as the only refuge for those who disbelieve in their Christianity when they discover all the distortions made in their faith and cannot live in atheism (32).

Perhaps one example of religious coexistence and tolerance is the letter sent by Imam Khomeini (Jerusalem Sirh) to Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev, who pointed out that the great conspiracy against the Soviet Union is in the process of tearing him from the inside and at the time warned Imam Khomeini about this in this letter:

Khomeini’s message, “which came in the wake of the end of the first Gulf War,” carried a call to Gorbachev to abandon the communist faith, join Islam, and stop trying to erase the Islamic identity of the citizens of the Soviet Central Asian republics. In clarifying his view, Khomeini used several references to Arab-Islamic philosophy and Islamic mysticism to claim the superiority of Islam as a belief and an intellectual method over materialist Marxism. Therefore, we find that there is some difficulty in understanding the meanings of the sentences and expressions used by Khomeini in this letter.

At the beginning of the letter and in its first paragraph, Khomeini refers to the path of survival of the Soviet Union and says:

“The first issue that will surely be a reason for your success is to reconsider the policy of your predecessors which centered on fighting Allah and eradicating religion from society. This policy undoubtedly inflicted the greatest and most important blow on the body of the Soviet people, and know that dealing with global issues can only acquire a realistic character through this way”

In the following paragraph, Khomeini directs the speech to the need to reconsider the

material and divine philosophies:

“Mr. Gorbachev, when the call of “God is Great” and the declaration of martyrdom with the message of the Seal of the Prophets (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him and his family) rose from the minarets of the mosques in some of your republics, he blew tears of longing in the eyes of all the supporters of authentic Muhammadan Islam, which compelled me to remind you of the need to reconsider the two philosophies material and divine.”

Perhaps the following paragraph is considered one of the most important paragraphs of this letter, in which Khomeini refers to hearing the voice of communism shattering bones, as he says:

the governments allied to you, whose hearts beat for the interests of their countries and peoples, will no longer be willing to waste their wealth of all kinds, underground and other, to prove the success of communism after the creak of the bones of communism shattering reached the ears of the people of those countries.”

In the following, Khomeini calls Gorbachev to investigate Islam as a means to save people and solve all human crises:

Mr. Gorbachev...Now...I ask you to investigate carefully and seriously about Islam; Not because Islam and Muslims need you; Rather, it is because Islam contains lofty values, and what is characterized by its comprehensiveness so that it can be a means to comfort and save people and solve all the basic crises that humanity suffers from. Contemplation and a serious approach to Islam can save you from your problems in Afghanistan and similar ones in the world.” (33)

This letter indicated that Islam did not stop at the advice and guidance of Muslim leaders only, but also expressed its viewpoint towards world events and Imam Khomeini's expectations for what would happen in the following years. The Soviet Union disintegrated as a force equivalent to the United States of America, and the world became one pole. This is a measure of religious coexistence and tolerance. Khomeini is an Islamic leader and Gorbachev is from the other side. However, in Khomeini's view, there is imminent humanity that prevails over religions. This prompted him to send this message to the Russian President, extrapolating events before they occurred.

This became the slogan to calm the situation, stop the fighting, and ease Arab pressures until the papers were arranged and the strategic goals reorganized. This has been done and it has become clear to the public that coexistence and tolerance are nothing but a slogan for purely political goals, especially after the American hegemony and the world's submission to unipolar hegemony. (34) Here, a new phase of coexistence began that differs from its image during the Cold War, as it became an intellectual call that carries with it intellectual, cultural, civilizational, and social implications under the influence of several factors as follows (35):

1. The presence of the Zionist entity in the land of Jerusalem and the complicity of Western powers with it. The intervention of the United States to save Israel from defeat in 1973 CE had an impact on Muslims feeling bitterness towards this policy.
2. The influence of pressure forces represented by the Zionist lobby, pushes the United States to sacrifice its national interests by providing all support to Israel at the expense of its Arab opponents (36).
3. The emergence of armed resistance groups as a means of protesting against Israeli

injustice, based on objective reality and a legitimate basis of consensus among Muslim scholars, in all their political affiliations, that fighting jihad against Israel is a definitive duty.

4. The absence of a strategic equation for Western supremacy as represented in the Soviet Union, and the emergence of the Islamic world as a civilization that possesses the elements of power, and which represents a threat to the Western world (37).
5. Western media distort the image of Islam and attack it as a religion of extremism and violence, which made Muslim thinkers defend it as a religion of tolerance and coexistence.

## Conclusion

After this research, we find that coexistence is a human phenomenon that has accompanied man since his appearance on Earth. There have been no major problems with man's home in their primordial lives. They have adopted cooperation and solidarity to promote peace and security throughout the Earth.

Coexistence was based on the foundations of love among human beings without looking at ethnic backgrounds or color. After the emergence of religions, the urge for peace and cooperation was based on the acceptance by the other religiously different, Judaism, suggestion, and Islam of those divine laws, whose concern was to create harmony and love among human beings.

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