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TOLERANCE BETWEEN CHRISTIANS AND MUSLIMS IN AMERICA

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"Islam is strict as regards apostasy...punishment is death for a person who, after having adhered to these dogmas, rejects them." Dr. Niaz Faizi
Kabuli in Democracy According to Islam.

Pluralism and tolerance are highly valued in American society. In the context of these values, how can Muslims and Christians live together while retaining their beliefs?

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MUTUALLY EXCLUSIVE RELIGIONS

Christianity and Islam are mutually exclusive religions. This can be understood by examining a few of the core beliefs of each faith. Both religions claim to have,

- a) A particular messenger from God – exclusive prophets – Jesus vs. Mohammed.
- b) Special revelation from God – exclusive books – the Bible vs. the Quran.
- c) Exclusive access to God and seek conversions to their faith.

Exclusive prophets.

Jesus proclaimed that he is the only way to God. Several scripture verses clearly state this exclusivity.

- In John 14:6 Jesus says he is the only way to God, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me.”
- In Acts 4:12 Peter proclaims that Jesus is the only way of salvation, “And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved.”
- In Philipians 2, Paul writes that Jesus is supreme over all and that one day every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

No allowance is made by Jesus and his disciples for ideas that would even suggest another way to God other than through Jesus.

Islam teaches that Mohammed is the only way to God.

The one sentence creed of Islam proclaims that there is only one God and that Mohammed is the prophet of God:

“There is no deity except God and Mohammed is the apostle of God.”

This statement is the creed of Islam. This belief in the oneness of God and that Mohammed is a prophet of God is the foundation of Islam.

The Quran clearly states the exclusive nature of Mohammed's role in bringing God's message to people.

- 47:2 – And those who believed, and did good works, and accepted that which has been sent down to Mohammed – and it is the very truth from their Lord – Allah removed their sins from them and set their condition right.
- 48:29 says that “Mohammed is the messenger of Allah.”
- 33:40 - Mohammed is not the father of any man among you, but he is the messenger of Allah and the Seal of the Prophets.

Another body of writings revered by Muslims is called the Hadith. The Hadith are filled with references about Mohammed being an Apostle of God. In one Hadith Mohammed says of himself:

“I am the most fearing of Allah, and know in Allah (the exalted and almighty) better than all of you.” (Bukhari, vol. 1, #20.)

One Muslim scholar of the Quran, Maududi, writes,

“To become a true Muslim it is necessary to have complete faith in Muhammad.”¹[1]

The Quran, the Hadith, and the orthodox teachings of Islam allow no room for any other way to God than through Mohammed.

Exclusive books.

The exclusive nature of both Christianity and Islam rests firmly on the claim that each one has received special revelation from God.

Christians claim that the Bible is the word of God, while Muslims claim that the Quran is the word of God.

The Bible says, "But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God."

(1 Peter 1:20-21)

The Quran says, "This Quran could not have been invented (by one) apart from Allah."
(Sura 10, verse 37)

Although Muslims believe that God gave revelation to previous prophets, such as Moses, David, and Jesus, they also believe that the records of these revelations as recorded in the Bible are not accurate. The Muslim believes that the Bible has been changed by Jews and Christians.

Muslims do not look to the Bible as a source of revelation from God. While recognizing that God did give revelation to other prophets, the Bible is not considered an authoritative source to learn of that revelation. The Bible cannot be trusted as a source of revelation for the Muslim today.

Islam teaches that the Quran was given to Mohammed by God through the angel Gabriel. The Quran is the perfect, unchangeable, and in some Islamic beliefs, the eternal word of God. It contains no errors whatsoever and is not to be questioned by any Muslim.

Christians look to the Bible as the final source of divine revelation and have never viewed the Quran as a source of revelation from God.

Seeking converts.

Christianity and Islam are also religions which seek to make those outside of their faith aware of the teachings of their faith and to invite others to join their faith. A few of the biblical passages regarding this point include the following:

- Jesus told his followers, in Matthew 28:19, to go all over the world and make disciples of all nations. His followers have been doing this for the last two thousand years.
- In Acts 10 the Apostle Peter is directed by God to go and speak with a non-Jew named Cornelius. In verse 42 Peter says to Cornelius, "And He ordered us to preach to the people, and solemnly to testify that this is the One who has been appointed by God as Judge of the living and the dead."
- Peter later writes to followers of Christ saying, "sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence." (1 Peter 3:15.)

Several similar passages are found in the Quran, including these:

- In 41:33 of the Quran it is stated, "And who could be better in speech than one who calls others to Allah, does what is right, and says: 'I am one of the Muslims.'"
- 16:125 of the Quran says, "Invite (all) to the path of your Lord with wisdom and kindly exhortation, and reason with them in the most courteous manner. For your

Lord knows best those who have strayed from His path, and those who are rightly-guided.”

- “Let there arise from you a nation who invite to goodness and enjoin what is right, and forbid evil.” Quran 3:104.

Christianity and Islam are both religions which are exclusive in their teachings about the way to God and the revelation of God. They are also religions which seek to win converts among non-believers.

Both teach they have the true prophet, the true revelation, and call others to join with them on their one true path.

TOP

INTOLERANCE

America is a pluralistic society. That is, American society is made up of a wide diversity of ethnic groups, religions, and cultures. Americans are taught in the public education system to tolerate this wide diversity. Diversity and tolerance are valued in modern American life.

Pluralism and intolerance.

Most cities in America today are pluralistic. It seems most world religions are practiced in every American city. Throughout America there are even various denominations of each religion. America has been ethnically diverse since its founding. Many urban centers reflect a vast mosaic of cultures, languages, and religions among its population.

The development of pluralization within America has been leading toward an intolerance of ideas that would be exclusive of all other ideas. The process of pluralization has virtually removed the exclusive teachings of Christianity out of public discourse.

Most view points about life and religion and a wide variety of lifestyles are not only tolerated in American society, but many times certain ideas and lifestyles that are believed and practiced receive special attention. Americans are expected to not only be tolerant in their attitudes but to promote the ideas of others through praise and affirmation.

Many Christians feel that the one idea which is not really tolerated in America today is the idea that Jesus may indeed be the only way to a right relationship with God and that the message of Christ is exclusive. The one who promotes the Christian message today is considered to be forcing their ideas on the those who don't believe in Christ. One Christian writer commenting on the issue states that intolerance is considered to be a sin in America today and that the greatest sinners are Christians. (Daniel Taylor, Christianity

Today, January 11, 1999.)

An example of this intolerance toward Christians is shown in the response to Franklin Graham's prayer at the inaugural ceremony for President George Bush in 2001. Mr. Graham prayed in the name of Jesus. In response to this prayer, Harvard Law School professor, attorney Alan Dershowitz wrote in the Los Angeles Times,

Invoking "the Father, the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ" and "the Holy Spirit," [Franklin Graham] excluded the tens of millions of Americans who are Muslims, Jews, Buddhist, Shintoists, Unitarians, agnostics and atheist from his blessing by his particularistic and parochial language.....This was surely not the first time in our long history that Jesus has been invoked at an official governmental assembly. But we are a different and more religiously diverse nation than we were in years past. There are now many more Muslims, Jews, Buddhists and others who do not accept Jesus as their savior. (LA Times, Jan. 24, 2001)

According to Professor Dershowitz, Christian prayer in the name of Jesus should no longer be tolerated because there are now more non-Christians who will hear the prayer and feel excluded than there used to be in earlier times of American history.

Tolerance without substance.

In order to accommodate the advancement of pluralization, Christian and Muslim leaders are suggesting new forms of their religions. These new forms of Christianity and Islam seek to diminish the exclusive teachings of Christ and Mohammed. Instead, attempts are made to highlight the inclusive nature of each religion.

American mainline protestant denominations in particular have been developing a form of Christianity which seeks earnestly to discover areas that they can agree with those of other faiths. The Episcopal Church, for example, seeks to explore areas of agreement with other religious traditions rather than focus on that which is exclusive to the Christian message. [<http://www.episcopalchurch.org/ecumenism/interfaith/princip.html>, accessed November 6, 2002 or a similar page, http://www.episcopalchurch.org/71796_ENG_HTM.htm, accessed April 21, 2006]

Some evangelical Christian groups who seek to train Christians to evangelize Muslims, such as the Caleb Project, highlight the similarities between Islam and Christianity and even speak about a "deep debt that all modern societies owe to Islamic civilization" and "encourage Christians to apologize sincerely for wrongs carried out against Muslims" by Christians. The Caleb Project also gives thanks to Muslim groups, such as the Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia, for trusting the Caleb Project to include their articles in the Caleb Project's training course in Muslim evangelism while "clearly

presenting our desire to obediently share our faith in Jesus Christ with Muslims." [<http://www.encounteringislam.org/index.php?YToyOntzOjQ6InBhZ2UiO3M6NDoiYm9keSI7czoyOiJpZCI7czoyOjIzNiI7fQ%3D%3D>, accessed April 21, 2006]

In November 2005 the Prince of Wales visited the White House and met with President Bush to "plead Islam's cause".. In a speech given at the opening of the Jameel Gallery at the Victoria and Albert Museum, South Kensington, London, Prince Charles spoke of "the huge debt we in the West owe to Islam" [http://www.princeofwales.gov.uk/speeches/religion_18072006.html, accessed October 29, 2006]. Prince Charles has moved beyond tolerance and actively promotes Islam. In this particular case, according to the Prince, Islamic art serves to show us in the West just how great Islam is as an ideology. Prince Charles has given various speeches emphasizing the point the the West should look to Islam for answers to important issues afflicting Western society (see Prince Charles Promotes Islam to President Bush).

The Catholic Church recognizes that such approaches have little value. Samir Khalil Samir, S.J., a Jesuit priest, writes,

[Pope Benedict XVI] has never fallen into the behaviour found in certain Christian circles in the West marked by "do-goodism" and by guilt complexes. Recently, some Muslims have asked that the Pope ask forgiveness for the Crusades, colonialism, missionaries, cartoons, etc. He is not falling in this trap, because he knows that his words could be used not for building dialogue, but for destroying it. This is the experience that we have of the Muslim world: all such gestures, which are very generous and profoundly spiritual, to ask for forgiveness for historical events of the past, are exploited and are presented by Muslims as a settling of accounts: here, they say, you recognize it even yourself: you're guilty. Such gestures never spark any kind of reciprocity. [<http://www.chiesa.espressonline.it/dettaglio.jsp?id=53826&eng=y>, When Civilizations Meet: How Joseph Ratzinger Sees Islam, accessed September 15, 2006]

In another article, entitled "Islam and Christianity: encounter/confrontation, but also conversion," Samir writes about the conversion of Muslims to Christianity and speaks of his experience with Christian clergy who seem to demonstrate a type of tolerance without substance. He writes,

A conversion to Christianity is something desirable, a choice which is worthy and full of value. Unfortunately, I come across clergy figures and even some bishops who fear thinking of such a thing, counting it out as a possibility, in the name of a false religious respect. [<http://www.asianews.it/view.php?l=en&art=4129>, accessed September 15, 2006]

Christian presentations to Muslims which diminish the exclusive nature of Christ in the name of dialogue is a type of tolerance without substance. The result is actually a presentation of another Jesus. But Muslim leaders have also been trying to present Islam in a new light since the violent actions of some Muslims in America on September 11, 2001. These Muslim leaders seek to de-emphasize the Median Suras of the Quran and the Hadith in an attempt to create a form of Islam which is compatible with Western civilization. This is a presentation of another Mohammed.

Shortly after that event President George Bush issued Ramadan greetings to

American Muslims, invited Muslim leaders to a special ceremony at the White House, and visited the Islamic Center of Washington. President Bush made a number of declarative statements including:

“These acts of violence against innocents violate the fundamental tenets of the Islamic faith and it’s important for my fellow Americans to understand that....The face of terror is not the true faith of Islam.” (MSNBC September 17, 2001)

“[Islam’s] teachings are good and peaceful, and those who commit evil in the name of Allah blaspheme the name of Allah” (Washington Times, September 22, 2001)

In late 2001 the President of the United States seemed to become a spokesman for what the American people should accept as fair representations of Islam. Islam, we are told, conforms to American ideals of goodness and peace.

The toleration of Islam in America is leading to the actual promotion of Islam in America. Expressions of Islam and tolerant brands of Christianity are emerging which conform to the culture in America today. These new forms sometimes strip out the core historical, orthodox teachings of one or more religions. These new religious forms require one to put aside any intellectual affirmation to orthodox teaching and to instead highlight perceived common ground. Religious tolerance in America expects no substantive difference in one religion to the next. Americans are expected to equally affirm all religions because in their new forms they all fit in perfectly with modern American society.

The practical result of this tolerance without substance in Christian - Muslim interfaith dialogue virtually eliminates an effective presentation of the Lord Jesus Christ to the Muslim while Islam is promoted and advanced in America.

TOP

EXCLUSIVITY AND INCLUSIVITY IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

In the Old Testament portion of the Bible, the nation of Israel and the Jewish people are said to be God’s chosen people. Access to God could only be gained by associating with the Jewish nation. Although God revealed himself to the Jews and instituted the priestly caste among one of the tribes of Israel, this access was open to all nations and was not exclusive for the Jews only.

The nation of Israel was not to compromise their faith by the influence of other religions which were found among the nations at that time. Much is said in the Old Testament of how Israel was not to associate with the other nations because of the danger of the Jews being influenced by their religions and being turned away from God.

However, the nation of Israel was expected to be a light to the other nations about the one true God.

Solomon mentioned this inclusion of the nations in worship during his prayer of dedication for the temple in Jerusalem. (1 Kings 8:43)

The Psalms of David are filled with references of God's glory among the nations and their worship of him.

- All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the Lord, And all the families of the nations will worship before Thee. Psalms 22:27.
- God be gracious to us and bless us, And cause His face to shine upon us-- Selah. That Thy way may be known on the earth, Thy salvation among all nations. Psalms 67:1-2.
- Let the nations be glad and sing for joy; For Thou wilt judge the peoples with uprightness, And guide the nations on the earth. Selah. Psalms 67:4.
- All nations whom Thou hast made shall come and worship before Thee, O Lord; And they shall glorify Thy name. Psalms 86:9.
- Tell of His glory among the nations, His wonderful deeds among all the peoples. Psalms 96:3.
- So the nations will fear the name of the Lord, and all the kings of the earth Thy glory. Psalms 102:15.
- Praise the Lord, all nations; Laud Him, all peoples! Psalms 117:1

The nation of Israel in the Old Testament was exclusive in its adherence to the revelation of God while inclusive of anybody from any ethnic group or nation who wanted to join with Israel in the worship of God.

TOP

JESUS AND PLURALITY

In the New Testament, examples of religious and ethnic tolerance can be seen in the life of Christ.

When Jesus spoke with the Samaritan woman in John 4, he departed from several cultural expectations of how a Jewish man should interact with others. Jesus took time to discuss religious ideas with a woman, and one who was living what would have been considered an immoral lifestyle. In addition, she was a Samaritan, an ethnic group with whom the Jews did not associate. For these reasons, his disciples were surprised to find Jesus speaking with her.

In his discussion with the Samaritan woman, Jesus tells her, “you worship that which you do not know; we worship that which we know, for salvation is from the Jews.” In this statement, Jesus proclaims what was clearly taught in the Old Testament. The Samaritans were a race of people comprised of Jews who had intermarried with other nations. They had formed their own system of worship, independent of the Mosaic law.

Jesus is telling the woman that salvation is from the Jews and points out that her worship falls short of true worship. In this encounter with the Samaritan woman, Jesus is demonstrating the exclusive nature of true worship. But he does not stop with this exclusiveness.

Jesus tells the Samaritan woman that the true worship of God is not limited to the temple in Jerusalem. He says that the time has come " when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers.” (John 4:23)

A certain kind of tolerance can be seen in this encounter which Jesus has with the Samaritan woman. Although the nature of true worship is exclusive, true worship is open to all people who wish to worship God. The Samaritan woman responds to Jesus by telling other Samaritans about him and leading them to him.

Another time a Canaanite woman came to Jesus seeking healing of her daughter who was possessed by a demon. The response of Jesus was first to ignore the woman. His disciples were asking him to send her away. His answer to the disciples is that he “was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”

Jesus, once again, is declaring the exclusive nature of the revelation of God, that it has been given to the Jews. As the messiah, he is being sent to fulfill that which the prophets of God spoke about to the nation of Israel. Jesus is focused on the exclusive nature of being sent to the Jews as their messiah.

Jesus, using vivid language, tells the woman that it is not good for him to take that which is for the Jews and give it to another people. The woman impresses Jesus with her understanding of the exclusiveness of his message to the nation of Israel and she impresses Jesus with her faith in his message. It is precisely on the point of her understanding about who Jesus is and her understanding about the exclusive nature of his message that Jesus recognizes her as a woman of faith. Jesus then heals the woman’s daughter.

But He did not answer her a word. And His disciples came to Him and kept asking Him, saying, "Send her away, for she is shouting out after us." But He answered and said, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." But she came and began to bow down before Him, saying, "Lord, help me!" And He answered and said, "It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." But she said, "Yes, Lord; but even the dogs feed on the crumbs which fall from their masters' table." Then Jesus answered and said to her, "O woman, your faith is great; be it done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed at once. Matthew 15:23-28

Jesus probably had the most difficulty with the religious Jewish leaders when it came

to the exclusiveness of his message. The Pharisees and Sadducees challenged the authority of Jesus and his teachings.

At times it seems that Jesus verbally abused the Pharisees and Sadducees in his response to them. A more careful examination reveals that Jesus had no tolerance for the teachings of the religious leaders which twisted the law of Moses in order to advance their own power and prestige in the community.

During one particularly intense exchange with the Pharisees, Jesus says to them,

You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature; for he is a liar, and the father of lies. But because I speak the truth, you do not believe Me. (John 8:44-45)

The religious leaders are denying the truth about Jesus and in response Jesus is saying that they are of the devil. He is declaring that they do not believe him because they do not believe the truth.

In another encounter with the Pharisees, Jesus is issuing warning after warning to them because of their hypocrisy. In Matthew chapter 23, Jesus warns them about the eternal consequences of their false teachings and how they are leading others toward judgment.

Jesus says that they are refusing to enter God's kingdom and preventing others from entering as well. He is declaring that in all their missionary journeys they convert people into the way of hell. Jesus is condemning their religious oaths and describing their hypocrisy as white washed tomb stones which look good on the outside, but inside are full of death and uncleanness.

Of those who would cause others to stumble from the truth Jesus is saying that it is better for that person who is the cause of the stumbling to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied to his neck. (Luke 17:2)

By his actions Jesus demonstrates his intolerance toward those who are making a mockery of the holy temple and the sacrificial system of worship ordained by God for the nation of Israel.

And He found in the temple those who were selling oxen and sheep and doves, and the moneychangers seated. And He made a scourge of cords, and drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen; and He poured out the coins of the moneychangers, and overturned their tables; and to those who were selling the doves He said, "Take these things away; stop making My Father's

house a house of merchandise." (John 2:14-16)

In this encounter in the temple and in all the other encounters with the religious leaders, Jesus demonstrates his lack of tolerance toward those who should understand the truth about God and yet twist the truth and defame the character of God.

In all of these encounters Jesus went right after the core of deception and hypocrisy of those who should have understood the real meaning of the Mosaic law and the teachings of the prophets.

Although Jesus spoke directly against the religious leaders, he never told his followers to attack them physically or to hate them. Jesus warned his disciples of the false teachings of the Pharisees but never commanded them to fight with them.

Jesus effectively combated the false teachings of the religious leaders by exposing their lies and by proclaiming the truth.

The tolerance of Jesus toward those who reject him is seen in the story about a rich young man who comes to Christ and asks how he could follow Jesus. Jesus answers and tells him to obey the commandments. When the man tells Jesus that he has obeyed the commandments, Jesus then tells him to sell all his possessions and give to the poor. This young man, when he hears the words of Jesus, turns away and leaves Christ.

It should be noted that Jesus allows this man to leave. He allows the young man the freedom to turn away. (Matthew 19:16-22.)

Another example of Jesus' tolerance occurs toward the end of his ministry when he is focusing on the purpose for which he came into the world. Jesus is going to Jerusalem to suffer and die. He sends some of his followers ahead of him to a Samaritan village. When the village hears that Jesus is determined to go further on to Jerusalem, they do not welcome him.

James and John react to the rejection of the Samaritan village by asking Jesus if they should command fire to come down upon the village and consume them. Jesus rebuked James and John for this suggestion.

Jesus taught the disciples not to react violently against those who reject him. Although Jesus spoke of the eternal consequences of those who reject him, he allowed people the freedom to reject him.

And it came about, when the days were approaching for His ascension, that He resolutely set His face to go to Jerusalem; and He sent messengers on ahead of Him. And they went, and entered a village of the Samaritans, to make arrangements for Him. And they did not receive Him, because He was journeying with His face toward Jerusalem. And when His disciples James and John saw

this, they said, "Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" But He turned and rebuked them, and said, "You do not know what kind of spirit you are of; for the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them. " And they went on to another village. Luke 9:51-56

TOP

IRRECONCILABLE DIFFERENCES

Christianity and Islam clash on a number key of issues. No matter what common ground is sought, there are some hurdles that simply can not be overcome.

- Islam denies the deity of Jesus.
- Islam denies the death and resurrection of Jesus.
- Christianity refuses to acknowledge Mohammed as a prophet of God.
- Both Christians and Muslims claim that their book is the word of God.
- The way of salvation is not the same in both religions.
- The nature of God is different in Islam and Christianity.
- The characteristics of a true prophet of God are different.
- The condition of human nature is perceived differently by Muslims and Christians.
- Beliefs about life after death are different in Islam and Christianity.

These differences are contradictory and cannot be reconciled with one another.

Either Jesus is God Himself who took on a human body or he is not God.

Jesus either was crucified on the cross or he was not.

Mohammed is a prophet of God or he is not.

Since the Quran and the Bible contradict one another, both cannot be true at the same time and therefore both cannot be the word of God.

It makes no sense for both ways of salvation to be true while both also claim to be the only way of salvation.

Islam and Christianity are conflicting belief systems. Both cannot be true at the same time. The fundamental theology between the two religions are in opposition to one another and any hope for reconciliation of the two belief systems is an illusion.

The best hope for the Muslim and the Christian living together in America is for each to recognize the equality of convictions each has, to keep the discourse civil, to actively learn more about each other's faith, and to openly ask relevant questions.

Equality of convictions.

Christians and Muslims in America need to recognize the exclusive nature of each religion and the conflict between the two if they are to develop an honest view and greater understanding of each others core convictions.

1. Christians are as sincere in their belief Jesus is the only way to God as Muslims are sincere to their belief that Mohammed is a prophet of God and that his teaching are the only way to God.
2. The Christian believes the Bible is the word of God while the Muslim believes that the Quran is the word of God; the text of each book being contradictory to the other.
3. Christians and Muslims equally believe in the conversion of one another and practice doing so.

In America, this equality of conviction is held within boundaries.

For example, Christians accept the limitations placed upon them regarding preaching the gospel of Jesus in certain locations, such as public schools. Although many are not happy with this limitation, it is recognized that in certain public forums no one particular religion or particular denomination has exclusive rights to proclaim their message.

Likewise, Muslims have to recognize and accept the fact that Islamic shariah law is incompatible with the United States Constitution.

Muslims and other non-Christians in America must recognize the strong conviction which the Christian has toward his beliefs. Likewise, the Christian in America must recognize the strong conviction which Muslims have toward their beliefs.

Civility in conversation.

This mutual recognition of one another's convictions can help the public discourse between Muslims and Christians to be one characterized by civility.

Muslims and Christians in America should not be shocked with the idea that one may want to engage in dialogue for the purpose of conversion. How is the Christian to engage in such a dialogue?

The following verses in the New Testament give the Christian some guidelines to follow:

Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity. Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned, as it were, with salt, so that you may know how you should respond to each person.
(Col. 4:5-6)

Likewise urge the young men to be sensible; in all things show yourself to be an example of good deeds, with purity in doctrine, dignified, sound in speech which is beyond reproach, in order that the opponent may be put to shame, having nothing bad to say about us.

(Titus 2:6-8)

Muslims and Christians in America who recognize and honor the rights of each other to preach their message publicly and to seek to win converts, even among each other, will be more prepared to engage in the dialogue with courtesy, politeness, and civility.

Mutual learning.

In preparation for this civil dialogue, Muslims and Christians can read each others books and learn about Mohammed and Jesus.

The Christian who reads the Quran, learns first hand about the beliefs of Muslims and the teachings of Mohammed.

Christians in America should go deeper in their study of Islam by learning about the life, character, and teachings of Mohammed so that they are more prepared for the discussion. To learn about Mohammed one will need to read the Hadith, the other body of writings, besides the Quran, which is revered by the Muslim.

The Christian who becomes a student of Islam is one who is able to sort through the various comments which are made by Muslims and non-Muslims about this religion. The Christian student of Islam is able to understand the various comments being made publicly about Islam and Mohammed in a more informed context.

A report from ABC News declares that most Americans “do not feel they have a good basic understanding” of Islam. The report goes on to say that a recent survey suggests additional information which Americans have recently seen about Islam “has confused more than clarified.” 2[2]

Confusion about the nature of Islam is diminished in the mind of the Christian when time is taken to study the Quran and the life, teachings, and character of Mohammed directly from the Quran and the Hadith.

There seem to be many voices today from non-Muslims in America who either advocate tolerance toward Muslims or demonstrate a great disrespect toward Muslims. In many cases, it seems, those who either call for tolerance or those showing disrespect are ignorant about the teachings of the Quran in it’s full context and ignorant about the life, teachings, and character of Mohammed. This can equally be said regarding the ignorance of Muslims about the teachings of the Bible and what the New Testament says about

Jesus.

The uninformed commentator who speaks about Islam and the Quran or Christianity and the Bible adds nothing of practical value to the public discourse about these religions. This is true for both those who would support either religion as well as those who would seek to diminish either religion in some way.

The defender of Islam who merely repeats what Muslims say about Islam is actually adding as much confusion to the discussion as the attacker of Islam who also merely repeats what others say. The same can be said for those who either defend or attack Christianity when it is done by those who have never studied the Bible or the life, teachings, and character of Jesus in the New Testament.

Just as Christians demonstrate their tolerance toward Muslims by reading the Quran and studying about Mohammed, Muslim leaders in America should demonstrate this same level of tolerance by encouraging their followers to read the Bible and study the life, teachings, and character of Jesus.

Muslims are like Christians in this regard. As most Christians have never studied the Quran, most Muslims have never taken the time to read the Bible and study what it says about the life, teachings, and character of Jesus.

The challenge is for Christians and Muslims in America to read and study the Bible and the Quran and to learn about the lives, teachings, and characters of Jesus and Mohammed.

Relevant questions.

Questions that could be addressed include questions about the relevance of the lives of Mohammed and Jesus to American society today.

- Does the life of Mohammed serve as an example for Americans to live by today?
- Does Mohammed's teachings about tolerance toward others with different beliefs demonstrate a model for Americans?
- How did Mohammed behave toward those who refused to follow him and how does this compare to the behavior of Jesus?
- Does the life of Jesus serve as an example for Americans to live by today?
- Do the actions and teachings of Jesus give Americans a role model to follow?
- Do the teachings of Jesus have any relevance for the Muslim?
- Can Christians benefit by the teachings and example of Mohammed?
- Are there applications in the teachings of Mohammed and Jesus for Muslims and Christians while not applying to the non-Muslim and non-Christian segments of American society?

TOP

TRUE TOLERANCE AND OPEN CONVERSION

As Christians and Muslims in America, let's be committed to presenting our beliefs publicly and privately to one another. And let's openly call others to join us in our own particular faith and state the reasons why we believe that's the best option for those to whom we present our message.

Speaking freely.

As Christians and Muslims living together peacefully in America, let's honor the religious traditions of America by openly tolerating the proclamation of one another's message.

Our level of tolerance will be measured by our acceptance of one another to speak freely even at the expense of having our own religion publicly dishonored.

Making accusations about someone else's intolerance is easy but it is difficult to actually demonstrate true tolerance by allowing others the right to speak to our core convictions.

Christians must tolerate the freedom of non-Christians to speak about the Bible and to explain why they believe Jesus is not the son of God.

Likewise, Muslims in America must tolerate non-Muslims who speak out openly about the Quran and the Hadith and why they believe Mohammed is not a prophet of God.

In the midst of this tolerance, some Muslims and Christians in America are leaving their own religion. They are either converting to another faith or leaving religion altogether.

The Law of Apostasy.

Do Muslims and Christians agree that conversion to and from each faith should be tolerated? Too many examples of conversion suggest that some would answer no, that conversion from one's religions should not be tolerated.

There are many examples, of course, about people who have left or dishonored their religion and who have then been shunned by their community of faith. Although some might make the accusation of intolerance in these cases; shunning, in some forms, such as excommunication, is a norm practiced and accepted in religious communities. Furthermore, it is not a particular problem in regards to the issue of tolerance in America.

The specific problem about conversion lies in leaving Islam. Christianity tolerates

conversion out of Christianity in America. Remember the quote from Dr. Kabuli at the beginning of this chapter?

“Islam is strict as regards apostasy...punishment is death for a person who, after having adhered to these dogmas, rejects them.” Dr. Niaz Faizi Kabuli in *Democracy According to Islam*.

Islam does not truly tolerate Muslims leaving the fold.

It should be noted that many moderate Muslims have in fact left Islam. That is, they no longer really believe Mohammed is a prophet of God and that the Quran is the revelation of God. But for practical reason they still call themselves Muslims. They are, for the most part, secular atheists or agnostics. But they dare not ever say that they are no longer Muslims. These moderates, more than anyone, fully understand what Islam teaches about one who has become a *murtad*^{3[3]}.

This brings up one other point. This is the idea that moderate forms of Islam will tolerate many different types of behaviors and life styles as long as one continues to call him or herself a Muslim.

Sexual promiscuity (including homosexuality), drunkenness, secular lifestyles, abortion, pornography, visiting strip clubs, and other activities are all tolerated by moderate Muslims, even though Islam in general prohibits most of this kind of behavior. The tolerance of these behaviors in the Muslim community is cited as proof that moderate Muslims are Western in their orientation, democratic in their values, and open minded about change. One can get away with anything being a moderate Muslim in America, but the greatest crime, even among moderates is for one to leave Islam and follow another way.

So the Muslim who lives a deviant lifestyle will be tolerated, while the former Muslim who follows Christ and lives a godly lifestyle is one who should be put to death.

There are many examples of former Muslims in America who have taken drastic measures to avoid getting caught by the Muslim community in their attempts to leave Islam. These drastic measures include changing names, moving away from a Muslim community, and even leaving the United States. Most former Muslims are well aware of the law of apostasy in Islam.

Muslim leaders in America are silent about the law of apostasy in Islam. They are saying nothing about rejecting this ultimate form of intolerance.

On the other hand, are there former Christians in America living in hiding with new names for fear of death? If there are, Christian leaders in America will lead the charge in combating such intolerance.

Clearly the law of apostasy in Islam has no equivalent in biblical Christianity. Muslims in America must address the ultimate long-standing intolerance against former Muslims who no longer believe Mohammed is the prophet of God.

The silence of Muslim leaders in America is unacceptable regarding the intolerant Islamic law of apostasy.

Honoring and protecting tolerance.

True tolerance in America for Christians and Muslims must include:

- Allowing others to speak freely even at the expense of having one's own religion and prophet publicly dishonored.
- Recognizing the right of anyone to choose their own religion without the threat of death.

A truly pluralistic society with this high level of tolerance is one which should be honored and protected at all costs.

TOP

[41] Sayyid Abul a'la Maududi, *Toward Understanding Islam*, translated by Khurshid Ahmad, page 87, Idara Tarjuman-ul-Qur'an, Lahore, third printing by Islamic Teaching Center, Indianapolis, Indiana.

[52] Oct. 28, 2002, *Unease with Islam: Public opinion shifts, as religious leaders speak out*. ABC News web site.

[63] *murtad* is an Arabic term for an apostate who has left Islam. It is distinct from the word *kafir*, which is used to refer to non-believers in general.

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