

# **In the Name of God, Islamic View about Christianity**

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Mr. Chairman,  
Distinguished Guests,

## **First and Formost**

First and formost, I would like to express my gratitudes to organizers of the seminar. I am glad to see this seminar is being held in a city that Islam and Christianity meet and I hope that the deliberations during the seminar would increase the correct understanding of Muslim and Christian nations regarding the real ties that exist between two great and divine religions of Islam and Christianity.

As you know the expansion of communications as well as astonishing advancement of mass media in the new world, on one hand have provided unique opportunities for nations to enhance their understanding and awareness about various traditions, thoughts and cultures. On the other hand, it is unfortunate to see some media have been used as an instrument to gain political objectives and the existing inequalities among nations in accessing the media and information

technologies, have paved the way for misunderstanding and wrong approaches towards other religions and cultures. True or false as a reality, Western world is considered as symbol of Christianity and a sort of link has been established between Christianity and behavior and policies of Western governments. It is under such circumstances that the idea of Islamic approach towards Christianity and also correcting the mentalities of Muslims and Christians about each other and reminding of large number of commonalities that exist among monotheistic religions becomes more important.

Correct understanding of Christians about genuine look of Islam to Christianity and Jesus Christ on one hand, and differentiation of real concept of Christianity and Western policies *vis-à-vis* world of Islam in the past and in Present on the other hand, are two basic element for creating psychological and mental grounds to develop and expand friendship and understanding between Islam and Christianity which plays a vital role in promotion of peaceful coexistence among nations as well as enhancement of peace and international security and also promotion of morals and human rights in the current world.

The world is in dire need of peace, stability, morals and justice and in fact, justice and morals are the essence of monotheistic religions. Therefore, cooperation among religions can create the hope in mankind about a peaceful and stable world. In order to have cooperation and understand-

ding of religions about each other and to reach an inter-religion common strategy for promoting global human values, there is no other way but “dialogue.”

### ***Historical Background***

To study the approach of Islam towards Christianity, it is better to have a historical review in the past and study the status of Christianity just before the prophecy of the holy prophet (P.B.U.H.). Basically, mentality of people of Hejaz before accepting Islam, were closer to Christianity in comparison with followers of other religions. Names of those idol worshipers, who had converted to Christianity, have been recorded in history and “Waraghat Ibn Nofel”, uncle of the wife of holy prophet Mohammad (P.B.U.H.), is one of them.

Verses of the Holy Quran have endorsed religious believers prior to Islam as criteria for unity among mankind and nations and have addressed followers of other religions and have stated that is ready to establish friendship and understanding with them. The Holy Quran not only has respected and endorsed other divine religions, but also has called their followers to commonalities that their religions have with Islam<sup>1</sup> and at the same time has urged the Muslims to have the best attitudes towards followers of divine religions.<sup>2</sup> Other holy books have been numerously mentioned in Holy Quran in good manner.<sup>3</sup>

The approach policy and behavior of Holy Prophet as a religious leader and head of the Islamic government have been very good and friendly with regards to Christian governments and in particular to Christians residing in Arabian Peninsula. Six years after the migration from Mecca to Medina, when muslims faced too much pressure by infidels of Quraish the holy prophet sent a group of Muslims to Abyssinia that had a Christian ruler and had good relations with Roman Emperor.

Najashi the ruler of Abyssinia asked Jafar Ibn Abi Talib about the features of the new religion and by a realistic, unbiased and generous behavior and giving them shelter, left a sweet memory in the minds of Muslims and in practice endorsed the words of holy Prophet about himself. A 20 members group from Abyssinia had gone also to Mecca to find out more about Islam and was highly impressed by behavior of holy prophet and teachings of Islam.

After migration of prophet (P.B.U.H.) to Medina, his invitation letter to Emperor of Rome to Islam was not a war declaration but a call to religious unity. After all, the attitude of Islam towards devine religion specifically Christianity has been a positive attitude in this connection, Quran refers to the followers of this religions as follow:

Say: O followers of the book! Come to an equitable proposition between us and you that we shall not serve any but Allah and (that) we shall not associate ought with Him, and (that) some of us shall not take others for lords besides Allah, but if they turn back, then say: Bear witness that we are Muslims.<sup>4</sup>

Based on Quranic teaching it means, worshiping a unique being and avoiding polytheism (in thinking) and working for social justice (in practice) bond Islam and other divine religions together.

Considering the common originality to Abraham (A.S), Muslims and Christians enjoy of common heritage. For more than fourteen centuries in Iran, the two faithful communities with religious understanding and peaceful life, have enjoyed together and followed common objectives. Diversity of religious communities are the will of God. Quran says: if Allah had pleased he would have made you a single people/society, but the existence of diversified religious communities are to try you the believers.<sup>5</sup>

Quran stipulates that, “in Islam there are no reluctance and compulsion”<sup>6</sup> and approves the peaceful coexistence.<sup>7</sup> However the followers of the divine religions are addressed that for understanding monotheism (Towhid) and performing their worship “a common world.”<sup>8</sup>

By studying Quranic verses, shows that Islam has presented a beautiful image from Christianity to the world.

Islam is a religion that has admired Mariam and has given her a sublime position.

And when the angels said: O Marium! Surely Allah has chosen you and purified you and chosen you above the women of the world.<sup>9</sup>

In Islam, the Christians who live under the Islamic law should receive a good treatment and be honoured.

## **Dialogue among Islam and Christianity from Quranic point of view**

Quran instructs its prophet to invite the follower of divine religions to construct dialogue based on common points and excludes the differences, by doing so the ground for harmony and cooperation for materialization of prosperity and blessing of all mankind is paved and in this regard the Quran says:

Say: O followers of the book! Come to an equitable proposition between us and you that we shall not serve any but Allah and (that) we shall not associate ought with Him, and (that) some of us shall not take others for lords besides Allah.<sup>10</sup>

Also, the Almighty has forbidden the prophet from negative approach which is dealing with the matters related to the differences in views and ignoring common points. The reason is that such approach is not in the benefit of human society, and the outcome of it would be nothing other than clashes and disputes.

## **Dialogue among Islam and Christianity in the Contemporary Time and its Challenges**

As it is understood muslims always had a concurrence with Christians and confrontation between European Christians with Muslims started from inconformity but gradually converged to conformity.

Differences of the Catholic Church and Indolesian Muslims followed by the crusades. After their failure in the

crusades, the leaders of the Catholic Church engaged in cultural and scientific activities with Muslims which put them in closer touch with Islamic teachings and the culture of Muslims. After the Renaissance, when non-church scientific institutes were established, a realistic approach towards Islam developed and, as a result, some fair works were written at the time in light of the developments of the enlightenment era. The church was also, influenced this atmosphere.

After World War II, following the developments which unfolded in the east-west relations, the church, admitting its past mistakes, started peaceful coexistence with the Muslims. This significant change of approach toward Islam was explicitly enshrined in the statement of the second council of the Vatican in 1965.

In addition to fostering a climate of optimism and mutual understanding, dialogue between religions in recent decades has encouraged the two sides to strive to remove the irritants in their relations and start a joint cooperation in intellectual, social and political fields.

In the mean time, such dialogue has also helped forge friendly ties between the scholars and intellectuals of both sides which has, in turn, expanded the climate of understanding, friendship and peace across the globe. The existence of wrong stereotyped impressions towards the religion and civilization of the other side, particularly, in societies which are overwhelmed by a spirit of ignorance and prejudice has caused such differences to turn into violence and conflict.

A clear example of the existing challenges is the intensification of the campaign of slander and calumny against Muslims aimed at smearing of this faith through propaganda means which is pursued by certain decision making centers in the west.

There is no doubt that todaym the Christian world, should not held to be responsible for such campaign, but unfortunately, the campaign against Islam is launched and directed by some Western Circle. In this context, it is propagated that Islam is the cause of violence while Muslims themselves have suffered most from this abhorrent Phenomenon.

Of course, its obvious that the wrong behavior of some Muslims towards the western societies has had a role in the formation of such a false perception, because this wrong behavior has been associated with violence and Muslim societies have done little to clarify their positions. Thus, there is a need for people of good faith from both sides to sit together and shed the distorted image portrayed of Islam and polish this tarnished picture.

Fundamentalism has long existed in Western societies but it had not been regarded as a threat to the new civilization, while the picture painted of Islamic fundamentalism for the Western world is horrible. This is a phenomenon which must be differentiated from Islam itself as we should understand that the image depicted of the other side, too, is associated with ambiguity.

In some European countries, there are challenges such as racial discrimination and rightist extremism. In these countries, social ills have caused a rift in the entire values of the Western Christian civilization, such as family and social values. On the other hand, the show business and propaganda media, too, have launched an extensive campaign against the church with an aim to distort the image of Christianity and cast doubts about its divine teachings.

Another challenge which negatively affects Islam-Christianity relations and require our cooperation is the issue of human rights among the members of the human family and regulation of the relationship among these members.

We know that all divine religions are of the same essence and root and Islam and Christianity have brought precious teachings for human guidance which include values, traditions and guidelines which can benefit our present world.

There is no doubt that there is a common moral and value approach between Islam and Christianity in which they both call upon human beings to observe common values as necessities. Perhaps, these fundamental characteristics in Islam and Christianity have prevented the emergence of dual values and moral relativism.

## **Future Approach**

We do not intend to take up, once again, the question whether its necessary or useful to have a dialogue between

Islam and Christianity, since there has been ample debate about such a need in the second half of the past century and the themes and goals of such dialogue have already been determined. It has also been stated that the world should reach such a degree of civility as to settle the misunderstanding between the west and Islam which may entail drastic consequences for both sides.

What is to be done to ensure a productive and conclusive dialogue in the future? The first point to be indispensably noted is the creation of a climate of understanding and co-operation to promote the culture of healthy dialogue based on common beliefs and cultures between Islamic and Christian civilizations. Some of the themes and subjects which can be debated within the framework of such a dialogue are as follows:

1 – The establishment of institutes for Islam-Christianity dialogue in the spheres of religion and common religious values and also between the civil societies in such sectors as education, social pursuits, sports, etc.

2 – Understanding the religious aspect of inter-state conflicts and launching collective efforts among countries to prevent religion from being abused in such conflicts.

3 – Making efforts to put an end to any racial and religious discrimination and violence, and any act of sacrilege against other faiths.

4 – Concentration on common values and objectives rather than on differences and divisions.

5 – Trying to learn how to listen to and learn from each other.

We hope that experts and scholars of Islam and Christianity will redouble their efforts to polish the tarnished images of these two faiths among their followers and forge closer ties, understanding and cooperation between them.

### ***Notes***

1. Ale-Omran, Verses-64
2. An Kabout, 46.
3. Maedah, 43.
4. Ale-Omran, Verses-64.
5. Maedah, 48.
6. Baqbrah, 256.
7. Quraish, 1 to 4.
8. Ale-Omran, 64-Nesa, 171-Maedah, 82 & Ankabout-46.
9. Ale-Omran, 42.
10. Ale-Omran, 64.