

“Call to the path of thy Lord with wisdom and goodly exhortation,  
and argue with people in the best manner.” (Holy Quran, 16:125)

# *The Light* AND **ISLAMIC REVIEW**

Exponent of Islam and the Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement  
for over eighty years

**July – September 2011**

In the spirit of the above-cited verse, this periodical attempts to dispel misunderstandings about the religion of Islam and endeavors to facilitate inter-faith dialogue based on reason and rationality.

Vol. 88

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Published on the World-Wide Web at: [www.muslim.org](http://www.muslim.org)

احمدیہ انجمن اشاعت اسلام لاہور

◆ Ahmadiyya Anjuman Isha'at Islam Lahore Inc., U.S.A. ◆

P.O. Box 3370, Dublin, Ohio 43016, U.S.A.

*The Light* was founded in 1921 as the organ of the AHMADIYYA ANJUMAN ISHA'AT ISLAM (Ahmadiyya Association for the Propagation of Islam) of Lahore, Pakistan. *The Islamic Review* was published in England from 1913 for over 50 years, and in the U.S.A. from 1980 to 1991. The present periodical represents the beliefs of the worldwide branches of the Ahmadiyya Anjuman Isha'at Islam, Lahore.

ISSN: 1060-4596

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The main objective of the A.A.I.I.L. is to present the true, original message of Islam to the whole world — Islam as it is found in the Holy Quran and the life of the Holy Prophet Muhammad, obscured today by grave misconceptions and wrong popular notions.

Islam seeks to attract the *hearts and minds* of people towards the truth, by means of reasoning and the natural beauty of its principles.

Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (d. 1908), our Founder, arose to remind the world that Islam is:

**International:** It recognizes prophets being raised among all nations and requires Muslims to believe in them all. Truth and goodness can be found in all religions. God treats all human beings equally, regardless of race, nationality or religion.

**Peaceful:** Allows use of force only in unavoidable self-defence. Teaches Muslims to live peacefully under any rule which accords them freedom of religion.

**Tolerant:** Gives full freedom to everyone to hold and practise any creed or religion. Requires us to tolerate differences of belief and opinion.

**Rational:** In all matters, it urges use of human reason and knowledge. Blind following is condemned and independence of thought is granted.

**Inspiring:** Worship is not a ritual, but provides living contact with a Living God, Who answers prayers and speaks to His righteous servants even today as in the past.

**Non-sectarian:** Every person professing Islam by the words *La ilaha ill-Allah, Muhammad-ur rasul-ullah* (There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah) is a Muslim. A Muslim cannot be expelled from Islam by anyone.

Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad taught that *no* prophet, old or new, is to arise after the Holy Prophet Muhammad. However, *Mujaddids* will be raised by God to revive and rekindle the light of Islam.

#### About ourselves

Ahmadiyya Anjuman Isha'at Islam Lahore has branches in many countries including:

U.S.A.	Australia
U.K.	Canada
Holland	Fiji
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Suriname	India
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#### Achievements:

The Anjuman has produced extensive literature on Islam, originally in English and Urdu, including translations of the Holy Quran with commentaries. These books are being translated into other languages, including French, German, Spanish, Dutch, Russian, Chinese, and Arabic. The Anjuman has run several Muslim missions around the world, including the first ever in Western Europe.

#### History:

**1889:** Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad founds the Ahmadiyya Movement.

**1901:** Movement given name *Ahmadiyya* after Holy Prophet Muhammad's other famous name *Ahmad*.

**1905:** Hazrat Mirza appoints central body (Anjuman) to manage the Movement.

**1908:** Death of Hazrat Mirza. Succeeded by Maulana Nur-ud-Din as Head.

**1914:** Death of Maulana Nur-ud-Din. Ahmadiyya Anjuman Isha'at Islam founded at Lahore as continuation of the original Anjuman. Maulana Muhammad Ali elected as Head.

**1951:** Death of Maulana Muhammad Ali after fifty years of glorious service to the cause of Islam. Maulana Sadr-ud-Din (d. 1981) becomes Head.

**1981–1996:** Dr Saeed Ahmad Khan, an eminent medical doctor and religious scholar, led the Movement, at a time of intense persecution.

**1996–2002:** Prof. Dr Asghar Hameed, a distinguished retired University Professor of Mathematics, and learned Islamic scholar, served as Head.

**2002:** Prof. Dr Abdul Karim Saeed Pasha elected Head.

## Tolerance and Mutual Respect in Islam

By Sheikh Omar El Bastawisy  
(Al-Azhar Al-Sharif, Cairo, Egypt)

*[This article is a transcript of a speech delivered at the Symposium titled “The Quran: A Response to Recent Controversies Concerning Islam’s Holy Book”, held in conjunction with the Lahore Ahmadiyya Islamic Society’s 2011 International Convention in Columbus, Ohio on July 9, 2011. Sheikh Omar El Bastawisy is a scholar from the prestigious and most respected Al-Azhar Al-Sharif in Cairo, Egypt. Sheikh Bastawisy held the esteemed position of Director and Head of the Office of the Grand Imam. Sheikh Bastawisy is a close friend of the U.S. branch of the Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement and, in particular, has been an incredibly valuable resource for Samina Malik (the Vice-President of the U.S. based Lahore Ahmadiyya Islamic Society), in her collaborative works with Al Azhar. In this article, Sheikh Bastawisy very eloquently canvasses the landscape of tolerance and mutual respect in Islam. His presentation at the Symposium was appreciated by all, especially the members of the various interfaith groups in attendance.]*

Assalamu aleikum (May Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon you). The topic I will speak on today is titled “Tolerance and Mutual Respect in Islam”.

### Freedom of Belief and Conscience

One of the manifestations of tolerance in Islam is the *freedom of belief* that Islam guarantees for human beings. This is clearly stated in the Holy Quran when Allah, the Most Exalted, says: “There is no compulsion in religion...” [The Cow 2: 256]. Compulsion to renounce one’s religion and convert to another religion is forbidden, for belief is based on the freedom of choice. This is clearly emphasized in the Holy Quran; Allah, the Most High, says: “...so let him who please believe, and let him who please disbelieve...” [The Cave 18: 29].

Tolerance is exemplified by The Holy Prophet [May Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him] in his declaration of religious freedom in the first constitution of the Islamic State in Madinah when he acknowledged that the Jews and the Muslims together formed one nation. Based on the religious freedom and tolerance guaranteed by Islam, the Second Early Caliph, ‘Umar Ibn Al-Khattab, [May Allah be pleased with him] granted the Christians of Jerusalem an assurance of safety for their lives, churches and crosses, assuring them that none of them would be harmed nor compelled on account of his religion.

### Freedom of Thought and Expression

Tolerance of Islam is also evident in the fact that Islam grants freedom to conduct religious discussions on an objective basis, far from abuse or ridicule. In this regard, Allah, the Most Exalted, says in the Holy Quran: “Call to the way of thy Lord with wisdom and goodly exhortation, and argue with them in the best manner...” [The Bee 16: 125]. Based on these tolerant principles, the dialogue should be conducted between Muslims and Non-Muslims. The Holy Quran invites the People of the Book to this. Allah, the Most High, says: “Say: O People of the Book, come to an equitable word between us and you, that we shall serve none but Allah and that we shall not associate aught with Him, and that some of us shall not take others for lords besides Allah. But if they turn away, then say: Bear witness, we are Muslims.” [The Family of ‘Amran 3: 64]. This means that should the dialogue between both parties fail to accomplish its aim, every person has his own religion in which he believes. This is expressed in the last verse of the Chapter entitled “The Disbelievers” which is concluded by the Divine revelation to the Holy Prophet Muhammad [May Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him], addressed to the disbelievers: “You have your religion, and I have my religion.” [The Disbelievers 109: 6].

### Liberal View of Other Religions

Muslims honor and revere all prophets and messengers of Allah. They make no distinction between any of them, for it is a fundamental article of faith in Islam that a Muslim cannot be a true believer until and unless he believes in all messengers of Allah [Mighty and Majestic be He], not only in Muhammad [May Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him]. Allah, the Most High, says: “And those who believe in Allah and His messengers and make no distinction between any of them, to them He will grant their rewards. And Allah is ever Forgiving, Merciful.” [The Women 4: 152]. The Messenger of Allah [May Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him] lauded his fellow Messengers of other religions. About Jesus [May Allah’s peace be upon him], he said: “Both in this world and in the Hereafter, I am the nearest of all the people to Jesus, the Son of Mary. The Prophets are all paternal brothers; their mothers are different, but their religion is one”. Prophet Muhammad [prayers and peace be upon him] so venerated Moses [Peace be upon him] that when the Prophet came to Madinah and found the Jews fasting the day of ‘Ashura’, he asked them: “Why are you fasting this day?”. They said: “This is a righteous day; it is the day when Allah saved the Children of Israel from their enemies, so Moses fasted on this day.” He said: “We have more right to Moses than you,” so he fasted on that day and commanded [the Muslims] to fast on that day.

Messenger Muhammad [May Allah's peace and blessings be upon him] spoke of his fellow Prophet Joseph [Peace be upon him] in laudatory terms: "The honorable, the son of the honorable ... (was) Joseph, the son of Jacob, the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham [Peace be upon them all]".

### No Compulsion in Matters of Faith

Thus, we find that Islam's tolerance is well reflected in the fact that Islam has never coerced its opponents to enter into it. Rather, it grants Non-Muslims the full freedom to retain their own religion and does not force them to convert to Islam. This is clearly stated in the Holy Quran and traditions of the Holy Prophet. Allah, the Most Exalted, says: "And if thy Lord had pleased, all those who are in the earth would have believed, all of them. Wilt thou then force men till they are believers?" [Jonah 10: 99]. The Messenger of Allah, Muhammad, [May Allah's peace and blessings be upon him] gave Non-Muslims the option either to accept Islam or to retain their faith. He even concluded with Non-Muslims covenants of protection for their religion, honor and property. According to US Professor Edon Calgerily, the Quran contains a holy verse abounding in truth and wisdom. This verse is well known to all Muslims and must also be known to Non-Muslims. It runs as follows: "There is no compulsion in religion". This verse was revealed regarding some men of Al-Ansar (the Helpers) whose children embraced Judaism or Christianity. With the advent of Islam, they tried to force their children to convert to the new religion. So, this verse was revealed to forbid them from forcibly converting their children to Islam.

Allah, the Most Exalted, says: "And say: The Truth is from your Lord; so let him who please believe, and let him who please disbelieve..." [The Cave 18: 29]. Therefore, Muslims offered Non-Muslims conversion to Islam without compulsion or coercion. When King Al-Mansour Qalawun had mistakenly forced *ahl al-dhimma* [People of the Covenant] to accept Islam in 680 A.H, and such people had forcibly converted to Islam, this sparked the fury of Muslim religious scholars and judges in his time. Six months later, the board of religious scholars was held and resolved that such people forcibly converted to Islam and that forced conversion to Islam is disallowed, therefore they are allowed to revert to their old religion. So, the majority of such people reverted to their religion. Is it not a tolerance displayed by Islam and a respect for other religions? The Italian Dr. Laura Veccia Vaglieri says: "Once the Muslims concluded agreements with peoples, they granted them the freedom of religion and did not force them to enter into Islam. Furthermore, Muslim armies were not followed by a great multitude of undesirable,

importunate missionaries nor did they place Muslim missionaries in privileged positions in order to propagate or defend their religion. In a certain period of time, Muslims stipulated that whoever wishes to accept Islam must take a certain measure that undoubtedly would not facilitate the propagation of Islam. They required that whoever wishes to embrace the new religion must appear before the judge and declare that they accepted Islam without any pressure and that their conversion is not motivated by any worldly gain". It is also tolerant that Islam has not only granted Non-Muslims the freedom to retain their religion, but also its tolerant Shari'a has allowed Non-Muslims to practice their religious rituals and granted protection for their places of worship. Allah, the Most High, says: "... And if Allah did not repel some people by others, cloisters, and churches, and synagogues, and mosques in which Allah's name is much remembered, would have been pulled down..." [The Pilgrimage 22:40]. When commanders of Muslim armies conquered any country, the caliphs advised them to display such tolerance. Abu Bakr Al-Siddiq [May Allah be pleased with him] commanded Usama Ibn Zayd as follows: "I command you to do 10 things: kill no woman, no child, nor an elderly person; do not cut down fruit trees, or vandalize homes, or wound a sheep or camel except if you must eat it; do not drown a palm tree, or burn it, do not be treacherous; do not be cowardly; and you will pass by people who have devoted themselves to monastery life; leave them alone to their devotions".

### Historical Examples

Including the people of Illyaa "Jerusalem" in his covenant, 'Umar Ibn Al-Khattab [May Allah be pleased with him] said: "This is an assurance of peace and protection given by the servant of Allah 'Umar, Commander of the Believers to the people of Illyaa. He gave them an assurance of protection for their lives, property, church and crosses as well as the sick and healthy and all its religious community. Their churches shall not be occupied, demolished nor taken away wholly or in part. None of their crosses nor property shall be seized. They shall not be coerced in their religion nor shall any of them be injured."

Covenants and pacts with Non-Muslims were translated into practical behavior, namely respecting their beliefs, shari'as [religious laws] and customs and not compelling nor coercing them to convert to Islam. Such freedom had a wonderful impression on Non-Muslims, for they were not accustomed to such noble virtues.

Muslims protected and did not cause any harm to the places of worship of others. In a letter sent to Simeon, Metropolitan of Rev-Ardashir, Primate of Persia, the Nestorian Patriarch, Isho-yabh III says: "The Arabs, to

whom God at this time had given the empire of the world, behold, they are among you as you know well; and yet they attack not the Christian faith, but on the contrary, they favor our religion, do honor to our priests and the saints of the Lord and confer benefits on churches and monasteries”.

The Unbiased Western historians acknowledged this great tolerance of Islam. Gustav Le Bon said: “The tolerance of Muhammad towards the Jews and Christians was truly grand; the founders of other religions that appeared before him, Judaism and Christianity in particular, did not prescribe such goodwill. His caliphs followed the same policy, and his tolerance has been acknowledged by some European skeptics and believers alike when they study the history of the Arabs in depth”. The Italian Laura Veccia Vaglieri said: “... such people known as *ahl al-dhimma* [People of the Covenant] were granted as much protection as the Muslim community”. Given the fact that the deeds of the Messenger [May Allah’s blessings and peace be upon him] and the Early Caliphs later became a law followed by Muslims, it is not exaggeration to insist that Islam does not only preach religious tolerance, but also makes tolerance an essential part of its Shari’a. Non-Muslims have been shown by Muslims such tolerance as not displayed by opposing denominations of their faiths. The Christians in Syria wrote to Abu ‘Ubaidah ‘Amer Ibn Al-Jarrah [May Allah be pleased with him], the commander of the Muslim army during the conquest of Syria in the camp called “Fahl”, saying: “Oh Muslims, you are more beloved to us than the Romans, even though the Romans share our religion. You are more true to your covenants, more accommodating to us, and you don’t oppress us, and you are just rulers, but Romans, they would oppress us and take away our homes.”

Thus, we find out that when Islam made its appearance more than fourteen centuries ago as the seal of all divine messages and the last link in the chain of divine revelation, of all the religions that man has ever known, whether they are divine or earthly, it has been distinguished by tolerance and mutual respect. It has conveyed to people the last revealed Word of God on earth. Islam has not denied any of the previous prophets and messengers of Allah nor their revealed divine scriptures. It has not forced any of the followers of previous divine religions to convert to Islam. Rather, it has made belief in all prophets of Allah and their revealed scriptures a fundamental article of faith in Islam without which faith is invalid. This tolerant attitude of Islam towards previous religions should be met with similar tolerance and reduce the number of opponents of Islam. Allah, the Most Exalted, says in the Holy Quran: “The Messenger believes in what has been revealed to him from his Lord, and (so do) the believers. They all believe in God

and His angels and His Books and His messengers. We make no difference between any of His messengers. And they say: We hear and obey; our Lord, Thy forgiveness (do we crave), and to Thee is the eventual course.” [The Cow 2: 285].

### Contemporary Attitudes

Today, Islam is the recipient of many fierce campaigns against it. No religion in the world today is exposed to as much flagrant oppression and calumny in the international media as Islam. This shows that there is a lack of understanding surrounding the religion of Islam and a misunderstanding of its tolerant teachings, whether deliberate or intentional. Moreover, there is an evident confusion between Islam as a religion and some foolish actions which are committed by some Muslims in the name of Islam and which the religion is innocent of. To confront this, we should double our scholarly efforts in order to present and widely spread the true picture of Islam. Thanks to Allah, the discerning Non-Muslims are well aware of, and bear witness to, these effects. Never in the history of Islam have Muslim religious scholars failed to fulfill their duty to present the tolerance, ease and moderation of Islam. Fairness requires that Islam should be judged on the basis of an objective and unbiased study of the fundamentals of Islam, not on the basis of rumors, false accusations and groundless, preconceived judgments.

### Importance of Bonds of Fraternity

In its primary sources, Islam invites Muslims to unity and solidarity and warns them against disunity and disension. Allah, the Most High, says: “And hold fast by the covenant of Allah all together and be not disunited ...” [The Family of ‘Amran 3: 103]. It also calls for sympathy with others and alleviating their pains and compares all Muslim people to one human body. The Messenger of Allah [May Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him] said: “You will see the believers in their mutual kindness, love and sympathy just like one body. When a limb complains, the whole body responds to it with wakefulness and fever”.

Islam places bonds of faith and fraternity on an equal footing. Allah, the Most High, says: “The believers are brethren...” [The Rooms 49: 10]. This establishes the foundations of Islam that achieve peace and security all over the world. Mutual respect among followers of different religions means that followers of different religions should not have contempt for each other and symbols of religions should be respected, so that this concept prevails among all people.

Whoever wants to understand Islam should communicate with prestigious religious organizations such as

the more than 1000-year-old Al-Azhar Al-Sharif. Dialogue and communication should be conducted on matters of mutual interest, not on the core of belief, for, as we have already said, every person has the freedom to choose his religion. As it is always said, compulsion in matters of religion does not produce true believers, but rather hypocrites.

Tolerance and mutual respect are displayed in the salutation of *Assalamu 'Alaikum* [peace be upon you]. Islam admits that all humans are brothers or sisters in humanity and that they originated from a single father, Adam, [peace be upon him] and a single mother, Eve. Difference in faiths does not prevent cooperation among all humans. Allah [Exalted be He] says: “O mankind, surely We have created you from a male and a female, and made you tribes and families that you may know each other. Surely the noblest of you with Allah is the most dutiful of you...” [The Rooms 49: 13].

### Islam and the Foundation for Peaceful Relations

The word “Islam” means submission to the Will of Allah and sincere devotion to Him [Glorified and Exalted be He]. Islam is the religion of all prophets. All prophets were sent down with the same message, namely to sincerely worship Allah and possess noble virtues.

Islam is peace. The term “Islam” is derived from the word “*salaam*” [peace]. These two terms -Islam and *salaam*- concur in that they carry the sense of bringing about safety, serenity and cooperation among all people in righteousness and piety, these people being all descendents of one and same origin, as Allah, the Most High, says: “O people, keep your duty to your Lord, Who created you from a single being and created its mate of the same (kind), and spread from these two many men and women...” [The Women 4: 1]. The word “*salaam*” occurs more than thirty times in the Holy Quran. The recurrent use of this word, in various situations and in different styles, attracts attention to this lofty basic principle. Peace opens hearts, minds and sentiments up to planting the virtue of brotherhood among all humans and exchanging among men the bounties that Allah made permissible for them, and spreads a sense of safety and serenity among individuals and communities. One of the virtues of the term “*salaam*” is that it is one of the magnificent names of Allah, as Allah, the Most High, says: “He is Allah, besides Whom there is no God; the King, the Holy, the Author of Peace, the Granter of Security, Guardian over all, the Mighty, the Supreme, the Possessor of Greatness. Glory be to Allah from that which they set up (with Him)!” [The Banishment 59: 23]. *Al-salaam* is also the greeting that is exchanged among the people of faith. When meeting a fellow Muslim, the Muslim says: *Assalamu 'Alaikum* [peace be upon you], i.e. may you

and us be safe. In the Noble Hadith, the Messenger of Allah [May Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him] said: “Allah made “*salaam*” the greeting of our *ummah* [community], and a profession of peace towards our *dhimmis* [People of Covenant]”. When the Muslim finishes his prayer, he salutes to his right, saying: “May peace and Allah’s mercy be upon you” and to his left, saying: “May peace and Allah’s mercy be upon you”. The greeting that the believers receive from their Creator in Paradise is *al-salaam*. Allah, the Most High, says: “Their salutation on the day they meet Him will be, Peace!...” [The Allies 33:44]. The greeting that Angels bestow upon believers in Paradise is *al-salaam*. Allah, the Most Sublime, says: “... and the angels will enter in upon them from every gate. Peace be to you, because you were constant — how excellent is then the final Abode!” [Thunder 13: 23-24]. The greeting that the believers in Paradise exchange is *al-salaam*, as Allah says: “They will hear therein no vain discourse, but only, Peace! And they have their sustenance therein, morning and evening.” [Mary 19: 62].

*Dar Al-Salaam* [Abode of Peace] is one of the names of Paradise, as Allah, the Most High, says: “And Allah invites to the abode of peace, and guides whom He pleases to the right path.” [Jonah 10: 25]. This means that the Almighty invites His servants to enter Paradise through faith and good deeds and guides whom He pleases to the right path. A frequently invoked prayer of the Messenger [May Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him] is: “O Allah, You are the Peace and from You comes peace, so greet us with the salutation of peace”.

Thus, it becomes clear to any rational person that the Islamic Shari‘a considers peace among people as the basis of all human relations. When minds are safe from perversion, souls free from greeds, hearts purified from sins and emotions filled with true faith, then goodness will prevail among people and they will cooperate with each other in righteousness and piety, not in sin and aggression. In order for the rhythm of life to be regulated, prosperity to be promoted and goodness to prevail among people, people should cooperate with each other to fulfill their interests and needs and provide aid and help to the needy. The Arabic poet says:

*Whoever does good will be recompensed for it*

*Allah will not waste the reward of those who do good deeds.*

Our meeting today in this Special Conference presented by the Lahore Ahmadiyya Islamic Society and participation with such elite scholars, thinkers and researchers make us look forward with great hope to the future, the events of the conference to be organized and

the resolutions and recommendations to be made. We are all required to cooperate and work together in order to achieve security, peace and tolerance.

We ask Allah, the Most Sublime and All-Powerful to grant us success to do what benefits the whole mankind and what Allah, the Mighty and Majestic, loves and is pleased with. Verily Allah is All-Hearing and Responsive. He is the best Protector and best Helper. ■

## Islam in America

### Reflections on Being Muslim in America in a Post-9/11 World

By Fazeel S. Khan, Esq

In March of this year I was asked to speak at Capital University's week-long conference on "Islamophobia". In particular, I was asked to give my impressions on being Muslim in America post-9/11. Later in the year, in September, I was asked to speak at the Broadway Methodist Church (in Columbus, Ohio) during a series of weekly events it was conducting in commemoration of the 10 year memorial of 9/11. In this event, I was asked to speak about the same issue, but focusing on Columbus, Ohio specifically. Below, I present some topics that were discussed at both events and my opinions and thoughts on them. Although incidents of peaceful collaborative work and bridge-building were discussed, the points included in this article are the more prominent issues that gained national and even international media interest. As pointed out below, despite these more prominent issues being generally negative in nature, they provided the opportunity for positive outcomes.

#### "Ground Zero Mosque" Controversy

This controversy, that captured national and international media attention, concerned the building of a community center (which also happened to have a prayer area included therein) in downtown Manhattan. The opposition to the continued construction of the community center/mosque was based on the view that, despite Muslims having a constitutional right to build a place of worship in that location (especially since there is a church and a synagogue in the vicinity as well), the plans should be thwarted because it offends the sensibilities of Americans.

At first glance, the argument may seem somewhat benign. But, as a Muslim in America, the following thoughts come to mind:

What about the *sensibilities* of the 7 million American Muslim who are being told it is okay to

be treated as second-class citizens – that it is okay to have a church or a synagogue in that location, but not a mosque. How is this different from saying: well, although African Americans have a right to sit at the front of the bus, but because it offends the sensibilities of some, we'd prefer they sit at the back?

Clearly, whether consciously done or not, this view is based on holding all Muslims collectively guilty for the crimes of a handful of terrorists. There is nothing to suggest that those involved in the Park51 Project have anything to do with any type of extremist acts or beliefs for that matter. To the contrary, those involved in this project have a history of promoting "moderate" Islam and working collaboratively with other faith groups.

And if Park51 is just too close, what is far enough? New York wasn't attacked on 9/11, America was. Should there be no mosques in the entire country? Apparently, the fear of such a slippery slope is a reality, as we already see challenges to the construction of mosques in Tennessee, Texas, and many of other states.

And what is really intriguing is the fact that we were inundated with this controversy every day leading up to the 2010 elections, but now, after the elections are over, no one hears about this anymore, as if the issue has just disappeared. Why is that? What can we learn from this?

#### Representative King's Congressional Hearings

There has been media frenzy over Rep. King's congressional hearings titled "The Extent of Radicalization in the American Muslim Community and that Community's Response". Many believe the hearings are fair and balanced, and focus on a serious threat to the nation. Others view the hearings as discriminatory, targeting one group of citizens for political purposes.

Acknowledging that extremism among some segments of the Muslim community is real, the issues I have with the hearings are as follows:

Again, rather than focus on radicals, the terrorists, those who pose a threat to America, the entire American Muslim community is lumped together as being the problem.

Would it make sense to hold congressional hearings about the extent of radicalization in the Christian community based on the crimes of the KKK or other white supremacist groups? Obviously not, for we can all appreciate that all Christians cannot be held collectively guilty for the wrongs committed by a few.

The fact of the matter is that there are more terrorist acts or attempted terrorist acts in America by non-Muslims than Muslims. But this “fact” was not presented at the hearing because no one was called to testify on this crucial point. Nor were any law enforcement officials called to testify about the extent of participation by the American Muslim community in combatting terrorism. How is the response from the American Muslim community to be assessed without this pertinent information?

Because of the absence of crucial testimony and evidence, it appears the hearings do nothing to address the real problem of threats of terrorism in America. Rather, the publicized hearings are having the effect of creating fear and distrust among citizens of the country and, as a consequence, doing much more to foster radicalization than to deter it.

### **Pastor Jones’ “Burn the Quran Day”**

Another event that took place recently that gained national and international attention concerned the Pastor in Florida who declared September 11<sup>th</sup> of last year “Burn the Quran Day”. This event, quite ironically, I believe, was a positive one, for the following reasons:

Despite the ill intentions of the Pastor, who most probably hoped to spark a war of sorts between Muslims and Christians all around the country, the response from Churches throughout the country in opposition to this campaign was overwhelming. Churches publicly condemned the Pastor’s program and even held “Read the Quran” events in opposition to his campaign. Locally, the Universalist Unitarian Church in Clintonville held an event titled “Burn No Sacred Books”, which brought in approximately 500 people, including myself, to stand in solidarity against the message of hatred promoted by Pastor Jones.

Here at home, we also had Reverend Deborah Lindsay of the First Community Church give a sermon on “Islamophobia” in response to the “Burn the Quran Day” campaign that went viral on the internet. Hundreds of thousands of people viewed the sermon, most of them from the Muslim world. The sense of appreciation and respect that was generated by Rev. Lindsay’s sermon calling out Pastor Jones and his offensive tactics was unparalleled. Rev. Lindsay, who is a very good friend of mine, has since been asked to speak on Christian-Muslim relations throughout the country and even internationally. Her sermon provided a much-needed gesture of good-will that

many Muslims had been searching for, and was produced as a direct result of Pastor Jones’ hate-filled campaign.

### **Pastor Rod Parsley**

During the 2008 Presidential Campaign season, Republican presidential candidate John McCain received the endorsement of local Christian personality, Pastor Rod Parsley of the World Harvest Church. This was seen as a critical achievement for Senator McCain, a platform from which to obtain the evangelical vote. However, shortly afterwards, some of Pastor Parsley’s extreme views on a host of issues, including Islam and Muslims, became known to the general public. In his book “Silent No More”, Pastor Parsley states that:

Islam is an “Anti-Christ” religion;

The underlying spirit of the faith is “one of hostility”;

Muhammad “received revelations from demons and not from the true God”.

America “was founded, in part, with the intention of seeing this false religion destroyed”.

And that “9-11 was a generational call to arms” against Muslims.

The following impressions were relayed:

Pastor Parsley symbolized the type of extreme views Muslims had heard about from different parts around the country and had come to fear. For Muslims in the Columbus area, it was quite shocking to witness these views coming from our own back yard.

In response to Pastor Parsley’s views, the Lahore Ahmadiyya Islamic Society offered to engage in discussion with him about his views on Islam and even publicly debate the legitimacy of such views. Unfortunately, despite his book title being “Silent No More”, once challenged to debate his views, Pastor Parsley became completely silent. Nevertheless, thousands of people became aware of the shallowness of Pastor Parsley’s understandings and commenced their own study of the Quran (and related literature) to learn for themselves what this religion entailed.

### **Rifqa Barry Case**

Another local incident that received much media attention concerned a young girl of Sri Lankan origin who lived in New Albany (suburb of Columbus) with her Muslim family. Her name was Rifqa Barry, and Wikipedia states the following:



Rifqa Barry drew international attention in 2009 when she ran away from her Ohio home at age 16 saying that her parents were going to kill her for becoming Christian. Her story was broadcast on TV and discussed on partisan blogs. It became a focal point in a culture clash between Evangelical Christians and Muslims.

The points discussed were as follows:

During the legal proceedings and the investigation by Jobs and Family Services of Ohio, it was determined there was no threat to the life or safety of Rifqa Barry from her family. What should have been a simple child custody case, turned into a media circus fueled by far-right religious groups using this matter as a catalyst for advancing other political issues.

The most prominent person in this campaign was Pamela Ghellar, a blogger and political activist, from Florida, who co-founded the group “Stop the Islamization of America”, and who was also an integral force behind the opposition to the establishment of Park51 (the “ground zero mosque”, as she coined the term) in lower Manhattan. The campaign to support Rifqa Barry, unfortunately turned into a campaign to demonize the Muslim community of Columbus and its local institutions, like the Noor Islamic Cultural Center. Quite fortunately, the local media was very fair in its reporting on the subject, not giving into the sensational issues introduced by Pamela Ghellar and counterparts.

On a positive note, this controversy presented the opportunity to discuss the topic of “apostasy” in Islam and educate both Muslims and non-Muslims alike about what the religion of Islam mandates (if anything) when a Muslim converts to another faith. The Lahore Ahmadiyya Islamic Society published a brochure outlining provision of the Quran and Hadith that unequivocally prove no punishment whatsoever can be administered to someone leaving the faith, all matters of faith being solely between God and the individual.

Other prominent Islamic organizations were also compelled to address this issue and a general consensus was forged around this issue in the Muslim American community, despite differing views existing in other parts of the world.

## Conclusion

A general theme emerges from analyzing the events discussed. These controversies, normally presented and viewed as religious conflicts (or inherent tensions

between Islam and the West), are all based on underlying political motivations. Eliminating the practice of using religion to influence political agendas is needed in order to prevent inter-faith clashes and foster peaceful cohabitation. The doctrine of “separation of church and state” is well established; what needs to be encouraged further by all faiths is the “separation of church and hate”. When people apply the principles of peace and tolerance fundamental to all faith traditions, we see that destructive plans can yield positive results. ■

## Trials and Tribulations and the Duty of Muslims

**A prescription for dealing with the maladies of distress and suffering, and advice on the goal to which Muslims must direct their efforts**

**by Maulana Muhammad Ali**

*[This article is a Jummah Khutba (Friday Congregational Prayer Sermon) delivered by Maulana Muhammad Ali ninety years ago on March 18, 1921. The Khutba is based on verses 186 through 189 of Chapter 3 of the Holy Quran. Maulana Muhammad Ali explains how patience and guarding against inequity is required in times of distress and suffering. Using the early history of Islam as an illustration, he applies these lessons to the condition of contemporary Muslims. In doing so, he offers the valuable lesson that the goal to which Muslims must direct their efforts is to understand the Quran and propagate its true and pure teachings to the world. The pursuit of expanding the Islamic faith through force and military means, which many Muslims believed was their true calling, he further clarifies, is contrary to the teachings of Islam. History bears testimony to the fact that the objective of spreading Islam through educational means was lost sight of by the masses, resulting in extremism being fostered that is causing much havoc in the world today. Maulana Muhammad Ali ends this Khutba by reminding members of the Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement not to lose focus of this objective, that its very existence hinges on it, and it is to this goal that it must remain steadfast.]*

I bear witness that none deserves to be served besides Allah and I bear witness that Muhammad is the servant and messenger of Allah. After this I seek the protection of Allah from the accursed devil.

*In the name of Allah the Beneficent the Merciful.*

*You will certainly be tried in your property and your persons. And you will certainly hear from those who have been given the Book before you*

*and from the idolaters much abuse. And if you are patient and keep your duty, surely this is an affair of great resolution. And when Allah took a covenant from those who were given the Book: You shall explain it to men and shall not hide it. But they cast it behind their backs and took a small price for it. So evil is that which they buy. Think not that those who exult in what they have done, and love to be praised for what they have not done — think not them to be safe from the chastisement; and for them is a painful chastisement. And Allah's is the kingdom of the heavens and the earth. And Allah is Possessor of power over all things. (Holy Quran, 3:186-189)*

Two statements are made in the first verse: 1) **You will certainly be tried in your property and persons**, and 2) **hear much abuse from those who have been given the book before you and the idolaters**. Upon cursory examination this does not appear to be an unusual announcement. One quite often has to face insult and injury from those in opposition. During the time of the Holy Prophet, the Muslims suffered great losses of life and property. Even before the battles in Makkah their wealth and property was pillaged and plundered and many lost their lives. They were subjected to all kinds of torture and there were hardly any who did not face adversity. These included both the rich and poor. Hadhrat Uthman, who was a rich man, suffered much grief and also the poor slaves underwent bitter persecution. The battles present an even worse and more painful scenario.

Let us examine the battle of Uhud. The Holy Prophet and his companions suffered tremendously during this engagement. The Holy Prophet was bleeding from his head and had fallen into a pit. All forms of insult and abuse had been hurled at him by the disbelievers. This verse was revealed at such time of great affliction in the year 3 A.H. after the battle of Uhud. A period of great distress had just ended when he was informed of further trials and tribulations in the form of loss of property and person. Before the battle of Uhud the Muslims had been subjected to much verbal abuse. The disbelievers of the Quraish were experts in composing such invectives in their poetry. The Jews of Medina also joined them in slandering and composing sexually explicit lyrics against the chaste Muslim women. They also tormented the Holy Prophet by use of malicious language. For example, they would address him in a gathering and instead of using the word *ra 'i-na* (as stated in Quran, 2:104), meaning *excuse us*, with a slight change of accent they would use the word *ra'ina*, which had the connotation of *ignorance or stupidity*. Similarly, instead of saying, *Asalaamoalaikum* (meaning *peace be upon you*), they would say *Asaamoalaikum* (meaning *death*

*be upon you*). Those who openly manifested such insolent behavior were certainly capable of secret acts of malice and persecution. Loss of life and property had occurred before the battle of Uhud and certainly during it.

One can therefore conclude that the loss of property and person and abuse referred to in this verse was prophetic in nature. By mentioning the coming of such tribulations after the great losses of Uhud, attention is drawn towards tribulations of a much larger proportion that were to occur in the future. What could be the reason for mentioning these future events in relationship with the battle of Uhud? In fact the verses relating to Uhud occur in the chapter *Al Imran*. It is also generally accepted that the first eighty verses of chapter *Al Imran* relate to Christianity, and the Holy Prophet used these verses as a reference point in his discussions with the Najran delegation. His challenge of the Deprecatory Prayer (*Mubahila*) to this delegation is also mentioned in verse 3:61 of the Holy Quran. Chapter *Al-Baaqarah* refers a lot to the Jewish faith while *Al Imran* has a specific connection with Christianity. The chapter *Al Imran* begins with mention of Christianity and also ends with verses related to Christianity. In the middle of this chapter we have verses related to Uhud. In this battle the disbelievers had brought along with their army the famous Christian Monk Abu Amir. He was the first one to come forward in the battle of Uhud wearing the raiment of piety and chastity. The idea was to try to delude the *Ansar* (people of Medina who had accepted Islam), because Abu Amir was well respected amongst the *Ansar*. This Chapter, and this battle, therefore has a special relationship with Christianity. Mentioning Christianity along with losses of life and property indicate that in the future Muslims will have to suffer even greater tribulations at the hands of those professing this faith. When Abu Sufyan (leader of Makkah disbelievers) finding the Muslims in dire straits during the battle of Uhud called out in a loud voice, "Is Muhammad amongst you?", the Holy Prophet instructed his followers not to answer him. He then asked the same question about Hadhrat Abu Bakar and Hadhrat Umar, two of the Holy Prophets most venerable companions. The Holy Prophet again gave the same instructions not to reply. Abu Sufyan proclaimed "indeed they must have all been killed, were they alive they would have answered." Upon hearing this Hadhrat Umar could no longer remain silent and responded, "O enemy of God we are all alive so that you may be humiliated."

From these statements one can conclude that as a result of this battle, great loss of life had occurred amongst the Muslims. Islam survived these great losses, though the enemy believed it had succeeded in destroying it. It will manage once more to survive if it has to

face these trials and tribulations again. The opponents may once more be under the impression that they had succeeded in destroying Islam but they will not succeed. Islam cannot be destroyed through their efforts, just as it succeeded after the battle of Uhud, so will it once more be successful. If these verses prophecy that Muslims will face loss of property and lives at the hands of the people of the book, alluding to the followers of Christianity, they also tell us that though Islam maybe in dire predicament, this time of darkness may also be the harbinger of its acceptance and the shining of the light of its sun.

**“You shall explain it to men and shall not hide it...”**

The grief and loss that the Muslims have had to face in this age at the hands of the followers of Christianity have exceeded the losses they suffered in the past. How many Muslims lost their lives and belongings? Hundreds and thousands of them were killed, and their countries and personal properties were taken over by others. After the loss of lives and property, the Holy Quran mentions Islam and Muslims being subjected to abusive and hurtful language. Though they had to face verbal abuse during the time of the Holy Prophet, the disbelievers of the time, despite their enmity and envy, were more fair-minded in comparison with the opponents of Islam today. Abu Sufyan, when he was called into the court of Heraclius of Rome, did not give false testimony against the Holy Prophet. The adversaries of this age, however, subject the person of the Holy Prophet to vituperations of the worst kind which is extremely hurtful for the Muslims. They also give them widespread publication in their newspapers and magazines. From this it appears that the Quranic prophecy, **“And you will certainly hear from those who have been given the Book before you and from the idolaters much abuse,”** is applicable to this day and age.

After this we are given the prescription for this malady, **“And if you are patient and keep your duty, surely this is an affair of great resolution.”** Patience encompasses two different meanings. One type of patience is to face difficult circumstances with forbearance and fortitude and not to give up hope. In terms of *Sharia*, patience also means submitting to Allah’s commandments and keeping away from what he has forbidden with exemplary steadfastness. This verse implies both of these meanings. Remain steadfast in difficulties and accept what Allah has commanded and what he has forbidden.

**Keeping your duty (tataqu)** under these circumstances means guarding against violation of human rights. Fulfill your duty towards Allah and abide by the rights of other human beings with due diligence. You do your work and let them follow their undertakings.

The next verse also refers to the People of the Book, **“And when Allah took a covenant from those who were given the Book: You shall explain it to men and shall not hide it. But they cast it behind their backs and took a small price for it. So evil is that which they buy.”** All the material wealth is a mere meager return in comparison with Divine guidance. The Holy Quran tells us, **“Say the enjoyment of this world is short.”**(4:77). Some of the commentators have interpreted this verse as an indication that the People of the Book kept secret those prophecies of the Bible which spoke of the advent of the Holy Prophet Muhammad. Other commentators hold the view that it refers to the ordinary commandments which were given in their book. In any case it does not make a difference. They were obligated by Divine command to explain and expound what they had been given and not to hide it. This also includes the prophecies about the Holy Prophet Muhammad.

All this contains a profound lesson for Muslims, and in fact is an illustration of their condition. Whosoever receives Divine guidance, it is with the stipulation that the recipient should manifest and explain it. Muslims, however, did not follow this. In the early period of Islam they propagated it with great fervor. When they became affluent, they became deeply absorbed in the comforts of life and focused all their energies towards material acquisition. After the death of the Holy Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, they started including stories and fables in their commentaries of the Holy Quran and did not pay attention to the commandments and prohibitions. As a consequence of this they became oblivious of the real purpose of Divine guidance. This was equivalent to **‘hiding it’** (i.e. the revelation of the Holy Quran) though they had made a covenant not to hide but clearly explain and manifest its teaching. There is much outward pretence of respect in their actions. They wrap the Holy Quran in coverings of silk and brocade and display gestures and recite words indicative of reverence while opening or closing the Holy Book. They do not, however, read and try to understand its meaning.

By using the words, **“You shall explain it to men (an-naas),”** the Holy Quran has indicated that this explanation should be for both the Muslims and for those who are not Muslims and follow other religions. The Arabic word *an-naas* includes both Muslims and non Muslims. The spiritual life of the Muslims depends upon the Holy Quran. It contains guidance in all matters. Leaving aside the ordinary Muslims, even those who lecture on Islam may have a lot of other references in their talks. They, however, hardly make any mention the Holy Quran or seek guidance from it. If you look at those in charge of the spiritual endowments, they have also given up the Holy Quran and have replaced it with

repeated recitals of their self created formulas of worship. The Holy Quran which was in reality revealed for the reformation of the Muslims has been entirely discarded. The purpose of explaining it to men in the words of the Holy Quran is to carry out its clear exposition amongst Muslims and people of all other faiths. The Muslims can succeed by following its teachings and can also guide others towards the way of truth. If this covenant to explain and manifest and not to hide the book was taken from the People of the Book, Muslims are meant to be the immediate recipients of it otherwise what would be the purpose of mentioning it in the Holy Quran? The intent of this is that: *You should abide by this covenant, explain and propagate it to Muslims and people of all other faiths. If you study it carefully, you will find within it resolution of all your problems. If you reject it, your action will bring all forms of dilapidation upon you.*

People frequently make tall claims but fail to act upon them. Many would say that if there were a battle today with the disbelievers they would readily sacrifice their life and property. They, however, pay no attention to the greater *jihad* which is presenting the truth and peaceful propagation of religion.

War and fighting (*Qital*) are limited by specific terms and conditions which arise only infrequently, as mentioned in the following verses of the Holy Quran:

*Permission (to fight) is given to those on whom war is made, because they are oppressed. And surely Allah is Able to assist them. Those who are driven from their homes without a just cause except that they say: Our Lord is Allah. And if Allah did not repel some people by others, cloisters, and churches, and synagogues, and mosques in which Allah's name is much remembered, would have been pulled down. And surely Allah will help him who helps Him. Surely Allah is Strong, Mighty. (22:39, 40).*

*And fight in the way of Allah against those who fight against you but be not aggressive. Surely Allah loves not the aggressors. (2:190).*

These verses make it abundantly clear that this permission for defensive warfare is only when the need arises, that is under the specific circumstances mentioned and with no other alternative available. The greatest *jihad* is propagation of the Holy Quran as stated in the following verse: ***“So obey not the disbelievers, and strive against them a mighty striving with it (25:52).*** Fighting (defensive warfare under limited circumstances) is the lesser *jihad*. Propagation of the Holy Quran is the greater *jihad*.

The Hadith also tells us that after returning from a

battle, the Holy prophet said you have just returned from the lesser *jihad* towards the greater *jihad*. To convey the message of the Holy Quran to followers of other religions is part of the covenant taken from the Muslims and referred to earlier. Defense of Islam can be accomplished through defensive warfare, and by replying to the objections raised against Islam. Propagation of Islam can be carried out in one way only, and that is by means of the Holy Quran - to explain clearly the limitations of defensive warfare outlined by the Holy Quran and by elucidation of the Quranic teachings. Propagation of Islam is therefore a very important and primary duty. Defensive warfare, the need for which only arises under special circumstances is only of secondary importance in comparison. That is why in the Quran and Hadith the former is called the greater *jihad* and the latter lesser *jihad*. For thirty years a person (Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad) has repeatedly drawn your attention to the fact that your success depends upon the propagation of Islam. Warfare and fighting under the present circumstances does not offer the remedy for your suffering. Muslims, however, have not paid attention to this. The day when your preachers, leaders, and those in charge of your spiritual endowments start following the teachings of the Holy Quran and seek guidance from it, will certainly be the day of your success.

After this Allah tells us: ***“Think not that those who exult in what they have done, and love to be praised for what they have not done.”*** On the one hand, we observe that those who are opposed to Islam gloat on whatever they have achieved, the condition of the Muslims is also such that they are happy with what little they have accomplished. This verse in fact describes the condition of the Muslim leaders today. They hardly do anything but desire excessive praise. If we compare this with the character of the companions of the Holy Prophet and Muslims of the early period of Islam, we observe that they appreciated criticism instead of praise. Hadith tells us that a believer serves as a mirror for another believer and makes him aware of his shortcomings. This is with the intention to create awareness so that the individual can reform his behavior.

The Holy Prophet has prayed for the disgrace of the one who encourages false praise and also for the one who gives false praise. In comparison with this attitude today we find that the revered religious leaders (*pirs*) and those in charge of spiritual endowments (*sajadanashreens*), except for a few, all desire praise and love to hear the poetic eulogies composed by their followers. They do not even ask for the evidence on which such glorification is based. Hadith describes a form of association with Allah (*shirk*) to be smaller than the head of an ant, meaning so subtle that it is easily overlooked.

Encouraging and giving such praise belongs to this subtle form of association with Allah (*shirk*). The followers say what their hearts desire and no one questions the reason for their eulogies. This is the kind of attitude which the Holy Quran describes as: “*love to be praised for what they have not done.*” The consequence of this attitude for the one receiving false praise and not discouraging it is that his spiritual progress is retarded and he is deprived of doing good.

We personally observed people listening to the speeches of Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (the Mujjadid of the 14<sup>th</sup> Century Hijra) and many of those participants were greatly influenced by them. Never did we hear him say, ‘I did this or that.’ Nor did he ever permit those speeches to be eulogized. Real praise is what moves the hearts of people. Those who desire and love to listen to self praise are never praised behind their backs, in fact they are denigrated.

I want to mention something else in this matter. In fact, we (members of the Lahore Ahmadiyya Society for Propagation of Islam) have also failed to fulfill our duty in propagating the message of Islam. Even now we are not meeting this obligation to the extent it deserves. There is no doubt that when the whole Muslim nation is oblivious of this responsibility, what can a small organization do in comparison? Anyhow, in terms of real work we have made very little progress. You are competing against the Christian propaganda! Is there any language in which they have not translated the bible? This was your work; in fact you were commanded to explain the Quran to all people (‘*You shall explain it to men*’). In obeying this commandment, it was your duty to have undertaken translations and commentaries of the Holy Quran in all languages. The Muslims shirked their duty in this matter. The Turks in their five hundred years of rule did not even publish a translation of the Holy Quran in the Turkish language neither did they try to familiarize themselves with this book. Allah is not iniquitous towards anyone. They were unmindful of the word of Allah the most High and are facing the consequences of their error. There is no doubt that they defended the holy places and staunchly rose up in their defense. They however neglected the goal of propagation of Islam. If they had performed this duty, they would not have had to face this tribulation. If we, the Lahore Ahmadiyya Society for Propagation of Islam, also neglect our duty and do not publicize the Holy Quran, our very existence may be in jeopardy. Only that community will survive that spreads the word of God in the whole world. ■

## On Being Fair with Islam and the Muslims

### A Qur-anic Framework of Gender Equity

By Prof. Henry Francis B. Espiritu<sup>1</sup>

[The author of this article, Prof. Henry Francis B. Espiritu (Assistant Professor VII in Philosophy at the University of Philippines – Cebu College) provides an insightful analysis on the issue of gender equality in Islam. Prompted by an inquiry from a student, Prof. Espiritu discusses the Islamic prescriptions on gender rights and relations by examining the primary sources in Islam, and distinguishing these religious principles from cultural influences and media representations. Prof. Espiritu will be addressing the issue of Women’s Rights in Islam in more detail in a forthcoming article, to which we very much look forward.]

Islam is the world’s most misunderstood religion—misunderstood both by its zealous adherents as well as by its fiercest foes (*sic*)... Ignorance of the *Qur-an* is the real cause of this misunderstanding and a thorough knowledge of the *Qur-an* drives away ignorance as the light of the sun drives away the darkness of the night.<sup>2</sup>

No other religious book and no other reformer has done one-tenth of what the Holy *Qur-an* or the Holy Prophet Muhammad has done to raise the position of women. Read the *Qur-an* and you find good and righteous women being given the same position as good and righteous men. Both sexes are spoken of in the same terms in the *Qur-an*.<sup>3</sup>

Some years ago, I had a fruitful discussion with one of my very insightful students of Philosophy in my university. She asked me whether Islam has provisions for women’s rights and gender equity and, if it has, why is it that Muslim countries are apparently anti-women in their cultural expressions as proven in the way mass media portray the customs and traditions of these Muslim countries. This perceptive question of my student deserved a candid and thorough response. The question is actually two pronged. First, it asked whether Islam has anything to offer for gender fairness specifically to the womenry. My categorical answer to this query is a resounding “Yes!” In forthcoming articles I will (*Insha’Allah*) extensively demonstrate why I responded affirmatively to the first part of the query by quoting pertinent provisions provided by the *Qur-an* for the emancipation of women. But for the mean time, in this present article, let me respond to the second part of my student’s question: assuming that there are Islamic provisions for women’s rights, why are Islamic coun-

tries apparently perceived by the media and by non-Muslims as anti-women?

### **Cultural Patterns Prevalent in So-Called Muslim Countries are not Necessarily Islamic**

First, it should be made clear to us that the so-called “Islamic culture” prevalent in many “Islamic countries” may not be truly and authentically Islamic! This may sound ironic, but this assertion is true! Upon their conversion to Islam, these countries may still have carried with them pre-Islamic customs and traditions that are not only un-Islamic but may even be outright anti-Islamic. Hermeneutically speaking, these pre-Islamic cultural expressions and idiosyncrasies persisting in so-called Islamic countries may even inform, dictate and influence the aforesaid societies’ understanding of Islam. For instance, although the Maranaws of southern Philippines are nominally referred to as Muslims, it does not follow that their customary laws on revenge-killing (i.e., *rido*) are Islamic. Similarly, although the Bangladeshi population is predominantly Muslim, it does not mean that their traditions or customs regarding dowry is Islamic. My point is this: there must be clear delineation in identifying what is a culture-bound custom and what is truly an Islamic provision as found in the *Qur-an*. This is the problem of both Muslims and non-Muslims alike; when they judge Islam, both tend to haphazardly label the cultural patterns of Muslim countries as Islamic cultural patterns without investigating whether or not these patterns have any warrant in the Qur-anic revelation.

At this stage of my discussion, let me say that the canons of the *Qur-an* are the normative and regulative authority by which one should base one’s judgment on whether a particular custom is Islamic since the *Qur-an* is the pristine source of the Muslim *Shariah* (*Divine Law*) from which a given conduct is determined as either “Islamic or un-Islamic”. It is imperative that we stop judging Islam as “anti-women” by simply basing this judgment on our observations of the cultures of these so-called Muslim countries. Only by going back to the authoritative standard of Islam, which is the *Qur-an*, can we see that far from being anti-women, genuine Islam contains sufficient provisions for gender fairness and equity.

### ***Western Media’s Portrayal of Islam May Not Necessarily Be the Complete Picture of Reality and May Unduly Condition Our Prejudices Against Islam***

Some people may say; “But pictures do not lie! Muslim women crouching behind thick veils are powerless to assert their rights in an Islamic country.” Let me say that pictures seemingly cannot lie but they can be outrightly

selective and partial in their portrayal of things and events because they are shot in angles based on slanted or sometimes twisted frames of focus chosen by the person taking the pictures, for whatever purpose the pictures may serve him or her. Likewise, news reports can be selective, slanted, twisted, skewed and downright unfair. How can one judge Islam and the entire Muslim population when one has only a limited angle or a twisted spectacle from which one bases one’s judgment? Islam is both a universal and cosmopolitan way of life since Islam embraces plurality and diversity of cultures. The geographical, cultural and racial terrains of Islam’s domains are very diverse indeed! Islam’s realm stretches from the archipelagic Southeast Asia to the Indian Subcontinent; from the Afghanistan highlands to the Iranian steppes; from the well-watered lands of Tigris and Euphrates to the deserts of the Arabian Peninsula; from the heart of the Nile to the wastelands of African Sahara and from thence to Turkey, Albania, Bosnia in Eastern Europe and up to the various Central Asian Turkic republics. Presently, Islam is the fastest growing religion in Great Britain, Continental Europe and the United States. It is indeed stupefying to take into account all these cultural diversities found in the world of Islam; for instance, an Indian Muslim is culturally different from a Bulgarian Muslim as a Malaysian Muslim is culturally different from an Algerian adherent of Islam. Lest one misunderstands me: I am not minimizing the fact that there are so-called Muslim countries that discriminate and oppress women. I think we should denounce these countries which in their patriarchalism, oppress and marginalize women. However, the point that I want to emphasize here is this; we should be fair to take into account the cosmopolitan world of Islam when making generalized adverse judgments on Islam as a *weltanschauung*.

By showing this great diversity, I venture to say that it is indeed unfair for the Western media to hastily judge Islam without taking into consideration this overall picture of Islam’s cosmopolitan pluralism. It is the media’s solemn duty in the name of fairness to exhaust all angles of representation in as far as Islamic diversity is concerned before the media ventures to ascribe undesirable judgments on Islam and Muslims.

### ***Present Interpretations of Islamic Precepts or Principles Implemented in “Islamic Countries” May Be Misinterpretations or Misunderstanding of the Original Qur-anic Intents and Purposes***

The third point that I would like to raise in response to the second part of my student’s query is this: there are interpretations of Islamic principles that are accepted as normative in a particular “Islamic” country that may well be a misinterpretation of the Qur-anic intents and

purposes as envisioned by the Prophet of Islam. What I mean by this is that there are Qur-anic verses that are interpreted in terms of rigid anti-women cultural patterns prevalent among Islamic countries which upon closer scrutiny are in fact misrepresentations of the egalitarian intents of the Prophet Muhammad. Let us take the issue of *hijab* as an example. *Hijab/hijb* is an Arabic word which means to cover, to conceal, to put things in privacy; when used in relation to Islamic *adab* (ethics), *hijab* means modesty, propriety and prudence in one's dealings with the opposite sex.<sup>4</sup> Presently, in many Islamic countries, *hijab* is unanimously taken to mean the veiling of women as in actual veiling from head to foot. However, in the original contextuality of the *Qur-anic* pronouncement, *hijab* essentially refers to the virtue of modesty in ones' dealings with the opposite sex; a command which according to Maulana Muhammad Ali, an eminent Qur-anic exegete and translator, is not only limited to women but to men as well.<sup>5</sup>

Maulana Muhammad Ali points out that the mandate for *hijab* does not primarily refer to the rigidified custom of veiling or seclusion (*purdah*) nor is its implementation limited to female believers only; *hijab* is a moral call to sexual modesty, prudence, and moderation aimed at all Muslims, men and women alike.<sup>6</sup> The egalitarian basis of *hijab*, a gender-neutral mandate is found in the *Qur-an*; however, it is the interpretation or implementation of the *hijab* principle among Muslim countries that is faulty and anti-women.

Now, let us try to look at the Qur-anic text exhorting for *hijab* and let us pay attention to the intent and purpose of this specific Qur-anic text:

Say to the believing men that they cast down their looks and guard their private parts; that is purer for them. Allah is aware of what they do. Say to the believing women that they cast down their looks, and guard their private parts and not display their ornaments as what appears thereof; and let them wear their head-coverings over their bosoms (*Surah Nur:30, 31*).<sup>7</sup>

Notice that in these verses, the command for *hijab* is given to both Muslim men and women. The verses exhort "believing men" as well as "believing women" the virtues of modesty and sexual propriety in their dealings with each other. In the course of time however, the exhortation to modesty mutates itself into a set of rigid commandments pertaining to inflexible dress codes governing women alone, i.e., wearing of thick *chador* (veil) that covers a woman's face down to her ankles! What is very disturbing in this interpretation is that the dress-code implementation is not applied to nor enforced on the "believing men" who are likewise required to observe *hijab* as stated in the above-men-

tioned verse. In so-called Islamic societies, the interpretation of the Qur-anic verse is skewedly and arbitrarily implemented with extreme rigidity solely on the "believing women." This situation is a sorry example of misinterpreting the spirit and the egalitarian intention of the *Qur-an* and of the Prophet of Islam.

It is in the spirit of Islamic modesty for women to dress modestly and to wear a simple head-veil that adequately covers her body except her hands and face, in the same way that males are to wear prudent clothing for modesty's sake. Both are required by the *Qur-an* to manifest reserve and modesty in their conduct with each other. But to discomfort women by unnecessarily insisting that they cover their whole faces, thereby impeding their movements, is altogether a strange matter which is against the very purpose of the egalitarian exhortation of the *Qur-an* for *hijab*. A simple veil on the head for the woman and a simple *fez* for the man, together with modest clothing for both, adequately fulfill the Qur-anic exhortation for *hijab*; but to go beyond this simplified and uncomplicated exhortation is already an excessive and unwarranted burden which the Prophet did not impose upon Muslim women!

Maulana Muhammad Ali strongly emphasized that the ethical imperative for *hijab* does not in any way mean hampering the movement nor does it mean inconveniencing the life of the womenry. To forcefully bring home this historical fact, a direct quote from Maulana Muhammad Ali is appropriate. The Maulana says:

As regards the seclusion of women, the *Qur-an* never prohibited women from going out of their houses for their needs. In the time of the Prophet, women went regularly to mosques, and said their prayers along with men, standing on separate row. They also joined their husbands in the labour of the field; they even went with the army to the field of battle, and looked after the wounded, removing them from the field if necessary, and helped fighting-men in many other ways. They could even fight the enemy in an emergency. No occupation was prohibited to them, and they could do any work they chose.<sup>8</sup>

Therefore the directive for *hijab* does not mean seclusion of women from public affairs (*purdah*) as practiced in some so-called Muslim countries. Women during the time when the Prophet of Islam was still alive and even during the periods of the Rightly Guided Caliphs were very active in the public life of the Muslim *Ummah* (faith-community). A concrete example to prove this point is the fact that the blessed wife of the Prophet, Hazrat Aishah Siddiqah was a teacher of Islamic sciences to both male and female Companions. Hazrat Aishah Siddiqah was considered to be the very

first *mufti* (legal luminary) of Islam from whose legal, ethical and spiritual directives the Holy Companions derive rulings for the *Ummah* after the Holy Prophet's demise.<sup>9</sup> It must be plainly pointed-out that the Holy Companions, in consulting Hazrat Aishah's legal rulings and theological opinions in the affairs of the Islamic community simply followed the Prophet's command found in the *hadith sharif*: "Learn your religion from Aishah, my *Humeyra* (the fair-one). Listen to her words like a bee attending to his beehive."<sup>10</sup>

### ***Understanding Islam According to the Qur-an and the Intention of the Prophet: The Basis for Genuine Gender Fairness and Equity***

As of this juncture, let it be said that the essential ethical intention of the Holy *Qur-an* is to provide social equity and equal rights for both men and women. Almighty Allah clearly showed His unmistakable intention of treating women as equal with men by mentioning both men and women in many verses in the *Qur-an*. For instance, the *Qur-an* says:

And the believers, men and women are friends of one another. They enjoin good and forbid evil and keep up prayer and pay the poor rate, and obey Allah and His Messenger. As for these, Allah will have mercy on them. Surely Allah is Mighty, Wise (*Surah Bara'at*:19).

The abovementioned verse clearly articulates equity between the male and female gender in that Almighty Allah considers women and men as protectors (*waliyyun*) to each other; both men and women are required to do pious acts by Almighty Allah as a proof of their essential equity and their intrinsic value as human persons.

Another proof of the intrinsic equity between male and female gender is the fact that men and women have their innate autonomy as persons of free volition to follow or not to follow the commands of Almighty Allah. Both males and females are tasked with ethical and spiritual responsibilities by the Divine Will, and in the Hereafter, both will be given just requital of their deeds without taking into consideration their gender differences. The *Qur-an* explicitly declares the following verses:

Whoever does evil, he is requited only with the like of it; and whoever does good, whether male or female, and he is a believer, these shall enter the Garden, to be given therein sustenance without measure (*Surah Mu'min*: 40).

Whoever does good, whether male or female, and he is a believer, We will certainly make him live a happy life, and We will certainly give them their

reward for the best of what they did (*Surah Nahl*:97).

Men shall have the benefit of what they earn and women shall have the benefit of what they earn (*Surah Nisa*:32).

The eminent translator of the Holy *Qur-an*, Maulana Muhammad Ali, noted that the *Qur-an* practically manifests ontological equity between males and females in its pages. The Holy *Qur-an* declares that there is no difference between men and women and both can reach the highest station if they practice righteous deeds pleasing to Allah.<sup>11</sup> Likewise, the highest gift that God can bestow to humanity is His Divine Revelation and women were likewise recipients of this extraordinary grace of God to humankind.<sup>12</sup>

### ***A Call for Societal Advocacy and Engendered Activism: Towards a Genuine Islamic Understanding of Gender Equity according to the Egalitarian Intention of Prophet Muhammad***

Now, let us go back to the most important question: given the unequivocal commitment of the Holy *Qur-an* for the intrinsic equity between men and women, why is the Islamic *Ummah* (faith-community) lagging behind in acknowledging gender equity? Why is it that all we see are the pitiful conditions of the womenry happening in so-called Muslim countries? Let me begin answering this question by quoting a prophetic saying or *hadith sharif* of our Holy Prophet Muhammad. The Holy Prophet was reported to have said:

...the guilt of the oppressor is not lesser than the guilt of the oppressed. The oppressor is certain to be punished severely due to his injustice and cruelties committed towards the oppressed (*sic*). But the oppressed is likewise accountable for not exerting his utmost to fight against oppression... Similarly, ignorance is a great sin and an appeal to be excused from the law on account of ignorance is unacceptable (*sic*).<sup>13</sup>

Based on the abovementioned Prophetic Tradition (*hadith sharif*), ignorance can be a cause of oppression. Ignorance of the real teachings of Islam, specifically ignorance of the *Qur-an* in its textual and historical contexts can lead to oppression and those who are ignorant of their rights as given in the *Qur-an* are the ones likely to be oppressed. This important point strongly calls for Muslims to know intimately their religion and likewise exhorts non-Muslims to sympathetically understand and seriously research the historical contextualities of Islamic practices as found in the *Qur-an*.<sup>14</sup>

It is unfair to blame Islam for the misconduct of its adherents in the same manner that it is wrong to blame



the whole of Christianity for the cruelty and bloody excesses of medieval papism or for the barbarism of the Catholic Counter-Reformation that produced the blood-thirsty Spanish Inquisition. On the other hand, while it is justified to claim that Western media, cultural patterns among Muslim countries, and faulty interpretations of the *Qur-an* wrongly shape our views on Islam and women, this claim should not be used as a flimsy excuse for both Muslims and non-Muslims to absolve themselves from their responsibilities. It is indeed high-time now for all of us to break these chains of ignorance and oppression by empowering ourselves to seriously study, research and ascertain what the pristine source of Islam, i.e., the *Qur-an* itself has to say about women. We, likewise, have a duty to inform others who are ignorant of these liberative provisions on the equal rights of women as found in the *Qur-an*.

Furthermore, we need to zealously endeavor to implement the egalitarian teachings of the Prophet, right were we are, i.e., in our own immediate cultural milieu. We need to be reminded that the social teachings of Islam are clear on this matter: *viz*, oppression and ignorance go hand in hand, hence in order to fight oppression it is incumbent to first empower oneself with knowledge. Therefore, our advocacy for women's emancipation and gender equity should be global, all-inclusive and educative, since it is not Muslim women alone but women in general who are enslaved by sexist prejudices, patriarchal oppressions, and chauvinist discriminations.

It is quite cliché to say that knowledge is power, but I feel that we need to be reminded of this fact, time and again. We also need to be reminded that evading our responsibility to correct erroneous notions about Islam and women is a manifestation of weakness and cowardice. My student's perceptive query that prompted me to write this article was indeed a preliminary but vital step in the right direction—religious dialogue towards gender sensitivity. Yes, Muslims and Christians, or any persons of goodwill for that matter, can respect, cherish and celebrate their creedal differences while cooperating in the lofty goal to free women from the bondage of chauvinism, sexism and gender inequity. The issue of gender fairness can indeed be a cooperative venture towards human understanding, international amity and global solidarity among peoples of the world whatever their religions and beliefs may be. Let us cooperate with each other to make this advocacy for women's empowerment a living reality in our midst. ■

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The following quotations are from the writings and speeches of Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, the founder of the Ahmadiyya Movement in Islam. These quotations provide a true perspective of the beliefs of Hazrat Mirza Sahib and demonstrate how inaccurate the perceptions of many, including some of his followers, are concerning him and his views. These quotations (and many others) were presented as evidence in the South Africa court case, in which members of the Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement prevailed against the bigotry of extremist Muslims who were intent on excluding them from the fold of Islam. The entire compilation of evidence submitted in the South Africa court case can be viewed online at: <http://www.muslim.org/sa-case/evidence/contents.htm>. A Special Issue of the Light and Islamic Review commemorating the 25th year anniversary of the South Africa Case was published in Oct-Dec 2010 and can be viewed online at: <http://www.muslim.org/light/light104.pdf>.

“Our Kalima is: *There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah*. I believe in Allah, the angels, the apostles, the revealed Books, paradise and hell and the Day of Resurrection. I accept the Holy Quran as the Book of Allah, and Muhammad (on whom be peace and blessings of Allah) as the true Prophet. I lay no claim to prophethood. And I do not allege (God forbid) that there is any addition or subtraction to the Holy Quran as given to us by the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be on him). And I bear witness that he is the last of the Prophets and the greatest of all the prophets, and an intercessor for the sinners.”

(*Anwar al-Islam*, p. 34)

“Our religion is the same Islam. It is not new. There are the same prayers, the same fasts, the same pilgrimage, and the same *Zakaat*. But there is this difference that these duties had [by now] assumed outward forms only, without any true spirit in them; we want to infuse in them the spirit of sincerity. We want that these duties be performed in a manner that they produce results which are missing at the moment.”

(*Ruhani Khaza'in* No. 2, vol. ix, p. 312)

“And brothers, you know that the pronouncements of disbelief [against me] were not based on proper investigation and did not contain even an inkling of truth. Rather all those declarations were sheer fabrication based on deceit, injustice and falsehood, out of person-

al jealousy. These people know very well that I am a believer and they have seen with their own eyes that I am a Muslim, that I believe in the One God with Whom there is no associate, that I profess the *Kalima: There is no god except Allah*, that I accept the Book of Allah, the Quran, and His Messenger Muhammad (on whom be peace and blessings of Allah) as the last of the Prophets, and I believe in angels, the Day of Resurrection, heaven and hell, that I offer prayers and keep fasts, that I belong to the *Ahl-i Qibla* [those who face the Muslim direction of prayer], that I consider unlawful all that the Holy Prophet had declared unlawful and lawful all that he had declared lawful, that I have neither added, nor taken away anything from the *Shari'ah*, not even to the extent of an atom, and that I accept all that has reached us from the Messenger of Allah (on whom be peace and blessings of Allah), whether I understand its secret or not, and that by Allah's grace, I am a believer and believe in the unity of God.”

(*Nur al-Haq*, vol. i, p. 5)

“People did not understand my saying and said that this man claims prophethood. But God knows that this saying of theirs is clear falsehood. There is not a grain of truth in it, nor any basis for it. They have concocted this calumny to incite people to declare me *kafir*, to abuse me, to curse me and to show hostility towards me, and to create dissension among the believers. By Allah, I believe in Allah and His Messenger, and I believe that he is the last of the Prophets.”

(*Hamamat al-Bushra*, p. 81; new edition p. 289)

“In the end, I again declare before the general public that I swear by Almighty Allah that I am not a *kafir*. My belief is: There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah. And regarding the Holy Prophet, I believe [the verse of the Quran]: He is the Messenger of Allah and the *Khatam an-nabiyyin*. I swear to the truth of this statement of mine as many times as there are holy names of God, and as many times as there are letters in the Holy Quran, and as many times as there are virtues of the Holy Prophet in the sight of God. None of my beliefs is contrary to the commandments of Allah and the Holy Prophet. Whoever thinks otherwise is himself under a misunderstanding. Whoever considers me a *kafir* even now and does not desist from *takfir* [calling a Muslim a *kafir*], let him remember for certain that he shall be questioned after death. I swear by the Exalted Allah that I have such faith in Allah and the Holy Prophet that if all the beliefs of this age were placed in the balance against my belief, then by the grace of the Exalted One, my belief will be the heavier.”

(*Karamat as-Sadiqeen*, p. 25; public declaration on May 25, 1908, one day before his death) ■

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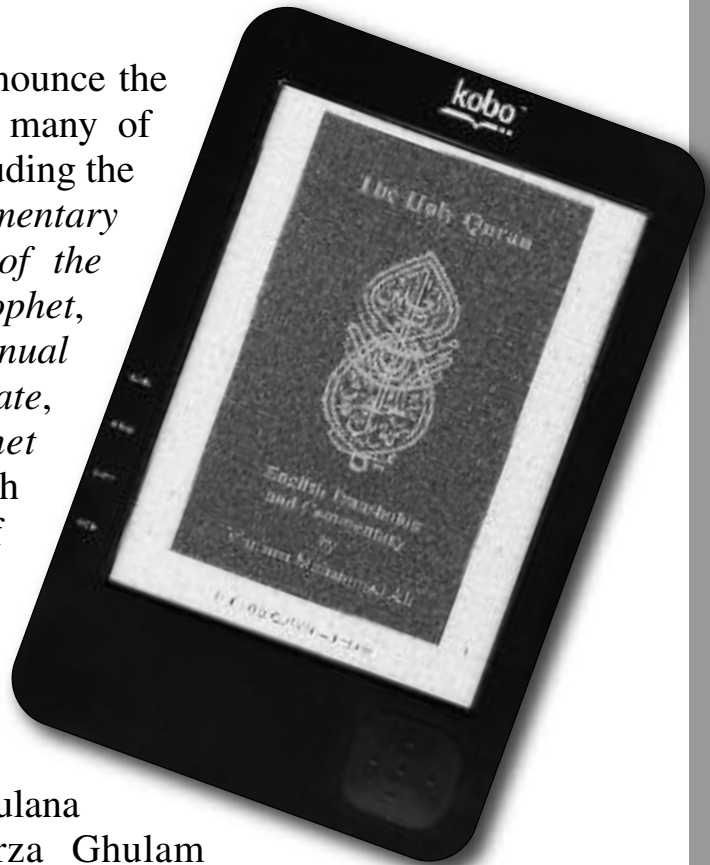
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