

A Critical Appraisal of Interreligious Dialogue in Islam

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Abstract

This study evaluates the concept of interreligious dialogue and its relation to Islam. It engages in textual analysis and the historical interpretation of the Qur'an and Sunnah. The analysis includes the treatment of early Muslim rulers, especially the second caliph of Islam "Umar," for the followers of other religions in an attempt to understand the nature of interreligious dialogue in Islam. The research shows how Islam plays a unique role in promoting interreligious dialogue by providing justice, equal rights, and the freedom of religious beliefs and practices of any religion, culture, and civilization as well as accepting all previous prophets as the Prophets of Islam. The study concludes with the strongest emphasis that Islam is a comprehensive religion that advocates harmonious interreligious relationships. It can be taken as a model for mitigating interreligious conflicts and for promoting interreligious harmony and peaceful co-existence in this world of diverse faiths and traditions.

Keywords

Islam, Qur'an and Sunnah, "Umar", interreligious dialogue, co-existence, religious freedom

Introduction

An increasingly popular issue in today's world is the dialogue among the followers of different religions (Swidler, 2014a). Human beings are living in a world with diverse ethnic, religious, and cultural backgrounds (Wani et al., 2015). Every day, we interact with people of other religions in the form of neighbors, classmates, friends, and colleagues. Thus, the interreligious experience has become a part of our daily life experience (Vineeth, 1994). Interreligious dialogue is truly important for maintaining a harmonious relationship and peaceful co-existence among religious groups. There have been innumerable tragic events in the history of the world (Elius et al., 2019b). The 9/11 attacks, the Israel–Palestine conflict, conflict in the Middle East, Muslim–Buddhist conflicts in Thailand and Myanmar, and Hindu–Muslim clashes in India and Bangladesh are real and current scenarios plaguing the world (Elius et al., 2019b) and appear to be contrary to religious beliefs in general (Hasan, 2011). We know that every religion teaches universal love and preaches sympathy for other human beings, yet it is in the name of religion that we see many heinous crimes being perpetrated resulting in the deaths of many innocents (Human Right Watch, 2016). It is high time to realize the root of this problem and to find a solution that unites people of different religious and cultural backgrounds together to make a meaningful contribution

through interreligious dialogue for the greater interest of humanity. Interreligious dialogue is an essential tool for mitigating interreligious tensions that prevail among people in the world (Haque, 2010).

Dialogue is not a new concept; it is as old as the history of human beings (Wani et al., 2015). History has recorded many initiatives of interreligious dialogue. Today's interreligious dialogue is the reflection of the first Parliament of World's Religions at Chicago in 1893 (Al-Masud & Elius, 2016). It is sometimes regarded as the birth of interreligious movement (Swamy, 2012). Many interreligious organizations, such as the International Association for Religious Freedom (IARF, 2017), World Council of Churches (WCC, Forde, 2013, p. 5), United Religions Initiative (URI, 2017), Interfaith Centre for Sustainable Development, and King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue (KAAICIID, 2017), have been working on inter-religious dialogue.

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Islam, being a universal religion, teaches love, tolerance, and sympathy for humanity (Wani et al., 2015). Muslims have played a vital role in promoting interreligious harmony since the time of Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam (Peace be upon him) (Karim and Saile, 2009). The Holy Qur'an also contains various examples of dialogue and interreligious relationship (Al-Qur'an 49: 13; 5: 48; 16: 125). The dialogue between the Prophets and God, Angels and God, Prophets and their people, even dialogue with the devil are mentioned (Humaid, 2010, p. 25). The Prophet of Islam Muhammad (pbuh) was truly a model for positive engagement even before he achieved Prophethood. The replacement of the Black Stone (*Hajar al-Aswad*) is an example of the Prophet's positive engagement in solving tribal disputes in Mecca 5 years before beginning his Prophetic journey. For this reason, people used to call him *al-Amin*, "the trustworthy," and *al-Sadiq*, "the truthful" (Kurucan & Erol, 2012, p. 18).

Islamic history provides many examples of harmonious interreligious relationships (Karim, 2009). One such a historic example is Islamic Jerusalem under early Muslim rule (Nor, 2008). A Common Word initiative of 2007 signed by 138 renowned Muslim scholars is another example of Islamic attitude toward non-Muslims ("A common word between us you," 2009, pp. v–vii). Today, Islam has been misunderstood due to the lacking of proper Islamic knowledge. Research has already been conducted on this issue to eliminate misunderstandings (Al-Masud & Elius, 2016; Baker, 2006; Hasan, 2011; Humaid, 2010; Karim and Saile 2009; Kamali, 2009; Wani et al., 2015). Further research is needed to mitigate ambiguity regarding Islam's concept of interreligious dialogue. The purpose of this study is to analyze the concept of interreligious dialogue from the Islamic viewpoint. It will focus on the Qur'anic interpretation and prophetic practices toward other religions along with the historical relationship of early Muslim rulers especially "Umar," the second caliph of Islam.

Method

This research adopted the qualitative method in the form of contextual analysis. Data have been collected from the primary sources of Islam, that is, the Qur'an and Sunnah (Prophetic traditions) and scholarly articles and books have been reviewed. The opinions of contemporary religious scholars have also been analyzed to understand the nature of interreligious dialogue in Islam.

The Concept of Interreligious Dialogue

The word "dialogue" derives from Greek "*dialogos*." *Dia* means "through" and *logos* means "word." Thus, dialogue is something that happens "through word" (David, 2017). Dialogue is defined as discussion, talk, conversation, and consultation between two or more groups or individuals with

the intention to share and learn from one another to achieve a common benefit (Karim & Saile, 2009). It is a system of contact through discussion (Kimball, 1991, p. 86). Swidler (2014b) defined dialogue as a conversation "on a common subject between two or more persons with differing views." Interreligious dialogue refers to the positive relation with mutual and cooperative attitudes among the followers of different religions. It is an assembly of mind and heart between people of different religions for a common cause (Arinze, 1990, p. 162). It is not a debate because debate is mainly to win over the other while dialogue is to understand the other (Haq, 2014). Another study also highlights understanding and not winning over the other party.

It stresses on good communication among peoples of diverse cultures with a view to mitigating interreligious misunderstanding and ignorance. Interreligious dialogue is not a mutual imitation but a mutual understanding of each other's religion. There is no absolute agreement in dialogue. It is a sincere exchange of views to understand one another despite their differences in beliefs and practices (Kurucan & Erol, 2012, p. 20). In dialogue, every person will remain true to his or her faith and show respect to the rights of other individuals (Forde, 2013, p. 7). He or she will earnestly try to understand the position of others and correct many of their preconceived ideas as well as identify the common areas of each religion for making a bridge between them (Mandour, 2010). The common cause of interreligious dialogue is to gather the followers of diverse faiths and make a worthwhile contribution to interreligious harmony and co-existence. Hans Kung was quoted by Morgan (2011): "No peace among the nations without peace among the religions. No peace among the religions without dialogue between the religions. No dialogue between the religions without investigation of the foundations of the religions."

With a meaning of dialogue, the Arabic word *hiwar* has been used three times in the Qur'an (Al-Qur'an 18: 34; 18: 37; 58: 1). The word *hiwar* means any discussion between two or more individuals or groups aiming to correct mistakes, provide arguments, establish facts, and reply to wrong views (Humaid, 2010, p. 30). The prominent thinker Ismael Raji al-Faruqi characterizes dialogue as *Da'wah* and Mission which he considers as altruistic for Muslims and Christians (Al-Faruqi, 1998, p. 248). Some Muslim scholars also define dialogue as *Da'wah* which includes preaching Islamic teachings, promoting virtues and avoiding vices, diverting to a faith beneficial for them and helping them save divergence, transporting them from somewhere to somewhere else, and providing comprehensive knowledge to understand the purpose of life (Karim & Saile, 2009). *Da'wah* is not solely for promoting an Islamic way of life but also for promoting human values and preserving society from evil deeds while respecting the differences between humanity. In the Qur'anic language, it also means to call the people toward goodness and abstain them from evil deeds (Al-Qur'an 3: 104). Therefore, the purpose of interreligious dialogue is to foster

goodness including cooperation, understanding, respect, and unity among the people of different religions and culture.

Dialogue is divided into various forms. Ugwoji, as described by Sintang et al. (2012), classifies interreligious dialogue into four kinds, such as “dialogue of life, dialogue of collaboration, dialogue of theological discourse and dialogue of religious experience.” Diana Eck as described by Khambali (2015) divided it into six types: “parliamentary dialogue, institutional dialogue, and theological dialogue, dialogue of life, spiritual dialogue and inner dialogue.” Dialogue of life is described as an interaction between the followers of one religion and another in their daily life (Sintang et al., 2012) while working on a common project like a charity organization in a multi-faith community for a common cause is a dialogue of collaborative work (Majid, 2013).

Theological dialogue or dialogue of theological discourse includes meetings among the followers of different religions where the issues of theology and philosophy are the central theme of discussion (Khambali, 2015). Arinze, as described by Douglas Pratt (2010), argued that dialogue of religious experience is rooted in religious traditions where partners share their spiritual experience with each other, such as prayer, meditation, and so on. Parliamentary dialogue refers to the large assemblies made for interfaith discussion. The World Parliament of Religions held in Chicago in 1893 is an example (Swamy, 2012, p. 35) for interreligious dialogue. Institutional dialogue is an organized effort by religious institutions. Although the institutional interreligious dialogue is a critical aspect of interfaith encounters, it is beset with the problems of history and evangelization for Christians, and Da’wah for Muslims (Khambali, 2015). Spiritual dialogue is connected to the exchange of views of spiritual issues of different religious traditions, which is vital for spiritual development (Tan, 2001). Inner dialogue depends on our mental willingness, which occurs when we study religious texts of other religions and try to realize their inner meanings. It may also be called mental conversation (Lysack, 2006). There are many other types of interreligious dialogue in the form of lectures, seminars, symposium, conferences, and workshops to promote interreligious harmony in many parts of the world.

The Islamic Approach to Interreligious Dialogue

The world is diverse. This diversity, according to Islam, was not made by human beings but by Allah (God) for the greater benefit of humankind. The Qur’an states, “If God willed He would make you one community” (Al-Qur’an 5: 48). Another verse is that “If God willed, all human beings would believe. So will you (O Prophet) compel them to believe?” (Al-Qur’an 10: 99). It can be understood from these Qur’anic verses that diversity is the plan of God and Muslims have to maintain that some individuals or groups will not follow their religion. They

must have to live with these differences in love, cooperation, and mutual understanding (Kurucan & Erol, 2012, p. 37).

Islam promotes peace and harmony which is reflected in the greeting of the Muslims, *As al-salamu-‘alaykum*, (peace be upon you) (Tirmidhi, 1998, p. 349). The Prophet of Islam is known as *rahmatan lil-‘alamin* (mercy for the entire world) (Al-Qur’an 21: 107). God in Islam is also known as *rabbil-‘alamin*, (the cherisher of the entire world) (Al-Qur’an 1: 1). Muslim scholars accept the legitimacy of all revelations (Haq, 2014).

According to the teachings of Islam, there had not been one particular system for the entire humanity. God sent a Prophet to each community, and there were different Prophets for different communities. God revealed His Message in every part of the world and made no distinction between the Prophets (Al-Qur’an 22: 67; 2: 285). To have faith in all the Prophets is a fundamental belief in Islam (Al-Qur’an 4: 136; 4: 164). Islam advocates that if anybody disbelieves in God and His Prophets and discriminates between the Prophets of God, they merit a humiliating punishment (Al-Qur’an 4: 150–151). Islam considers itself as the continuation of all previously revealed religions. For example, Prophet Noah was called the submitter (Muslim) (Al-Qur’an 10: 72). Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) was also called a Muslim in the Qur’an (Al-Qur’an 3: 67). Thus, Islam accepted all previous Prophets as the Prophets of Islam. According to Cole (2019), the term “Islam” mentioned in Quran is a derived form of Aramaic *mashlmānūtā*, which was translated to the Greek as *paradosis* (Tradition) and Greek usage had a direct influence on Arabic. Islam in the Quran, therefore, refers to the prophetic tradition of monotheism in which all the monotheistic religions are included.

Christians and Jews are referred to, with special honor, as the people of the Revealed Book. The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) came from the same lineage as the descendant of Ibrahim (Abraham) through his son Isma’il (Nor et al., 2018). The inclusiveness of Islam manifests through the recognition of other people’s faiths, rights, and dignity. Islam included some laws of previous scriptures and certain pre-Islamic customs and local traditions as long as they are not against the Qur’anic teachings (Baker, 2006).

The Prophet of Islam put the Divine guidance into practice. He, for instance, visited the ill whether they were believers, unbelievers, or polytheists (Tirmidhi, 1975, p. 328). He was sympathetic toward the people of other faiths. He never compelled non-Muslims to be governed by Islamic laws in Madinah (Al-Masud & Elius, 2016). It is narrated by Abū Hurairah, a companion of the Holy prophet (pbuh), that “once a group of Jewish scholars came to the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) and declared that one of them committed adultery and they wanted him to judge. Then Prophet judged the matter according to Jewish scripture” (Al-Tabari, 2000, p. 303). The Prophet’s rule in Madinah is a living example of solidarity, peace, and interreligious harmony (Kurucan & Erol, 2012, p. 74). The companions of the Prophet also

grasped his ideals. History has produced evidence that non-Muslims were treated with justice and kindness in many Islamic societies (Kurucan & Erol, 2012, p. 85).

Abu-Munshar (2007) mentions the argument of El-Awaisi that Islamic teachings are not in favor of eliminating preaching of other faiths (p. 43). Islam is in favor of counterbalance (*tadafu'*) as a mean for creating a harmonious environment instead of confrontation. It also promotes provision of protection to the holy places of Islam and other religions. This is mentioned in the Qur'an: "And if God did not counterbalance (*daf'u*) the deeds of some people by others, monasteries, churches, and mosques where the name of God is remembered abundantly, would have been demolished" (Al-Qur'an 22: 40).

Islam Advocates Religious Tolerance and Justice

Robert Spencer (2007) condemned Islam as intolerant of other faiths by saying that Islam encourages its followers to kill non-Muslims if they refuse to accept it or force them to pay "*jizyah*." In addition, Rachel M. Scott (2010) also states that the Islamic policy is to convert all people to Islam either by force through jihad or by compelling them to provide *jizyah* (p. 17). The concept of jihad in Islam, however, is misinterpreted by many Muslims and non-Muslims (Kurucan & Erol, 2012, p. 57). The Arabic word jihad is derived from *juhd* which means endeavor and struggle. It is a struggle within oneself for the purification and promotion (Sa'di, 1988, p. 71). Al-Jurjany (1983, p. 80) explained *juhd* means "utilizing one's capacity and power in preventing the enemy to the best of one's capability, whether by word or by deed" (Abu-Munshar, 2007, p. 49). The space of physical jihad is restricted and maintained only in the case of self-defense (Nor et al., 2018). It is applied when non-Muslims fight Muslims (Al-Buti, 1993, p. 118). In Islam, physical jihad is allowed only when injustice and persecution reach extreme levels to establish justice.

Islam aims at making this world as a peaceful living place not only for the people of one faith but also for the people of different faith and culture hoping to promote peace, harmony, and interreligious co-existence for the greater interest of the society (Hasan, 2009; Nor et al., 2018).

A question may be asked as to why or how inter-faith relations deteriorated, and intolerance of non-Muslims became associated with Islam. Recent research on interfaith relations indicates that the main reasons of intolerance of some Muslim are (a) ideological politicization associated with the post-colonial advance of political Islam to develop social, economic, and political limitations of Muslim-majority countries particularly, the breadth of Islamist jihadism in reply to national political suppression and foreign military interference in the late 20th century (Mahood & Rane, 2017; Rane, 2019); (b) religious extremism associated with the

worldwide spread of so-called Salafism that encourages intolerant explanation of Islam since the 1970s; and (c) radicalization associated with the outcome of Western military invasion in Muslim-majority countries, namely, Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, and Syria, as well as Israel's occupation of Palestine with U.S. financial and military assistance. The huge death tolls and demolition caused by Western army interferences have generated circumstances that have created militant groups such as ISIS (Rane, 2019).

Moreover, respect and tolerance with different religions which is the universal teachings of Islam are mostly misunderstood or misconstrued by those with insufficient knowledge of Islam (Kamali, 2009, 37). It is relevant to mention here that there are a few Qur'anic verses which make harsh remarks against non-Muslims (Al-Qur'an 2: 191; 4: 89). It is very imperative to have a contextual knowledge of the revelation to understand those verses. Muslim scholars argue that there are no generalities in the Qur'an and hadith without exception (M. H. Hasan, 2009). Hence, it should not be justified based on a particular Qur'anic verse or a Prophetic tradition in isolation if there are other verses or traditions which provide an opposite or different meaning (Kurucan & Erol, 2012, p. 100). Further study could be conducted to understand the context of revelation of these verses to eliminate misunderstanding and to strengthen relationship among different religions and faiths.

There are many questions raised by critics regarding "dhimmi" system in Islam. The Arabic word "dhimmi" means covenant, contract ("al-aqd"), protection, guarantee, safety, custody, and so on (Al-Jurjany, 1983, p. 107). The classical Muslim jurists defined dhimmi as the indigenous non-Muslims from Ahl al-Kitāb and Zoroastrians who live in the Islamic territory permanently (Ezziti, 2018). It is a contract between Muslims and non-Muslims in an Islamic country for the safeguard of its non-Muslim citizens (Al-Zuhayli, 2010, p. 742). Robert Spencer (2007) critics that Islam marks non-Muslims second-class citizens in the form of dhimmis. According to Al-Buti (1993, p. 121), Islam does not distinguish among classes; consequently, all human beings are equal in the aspect of law and they have the equal space in the community to enjoy citizenship rights like others. Islam guides its followers to deal with all citizens based on principles of social justice (Kurucan & Erol, 2012, p. 88).

Furthermore, Penn (2015) and Ye'or (1985) urged the importance of writing the non-Muslim rights they have been deprived of over centuries in the name of so-called "dhimmi" protected system under Muslim rule. Islam does not support any discriminatory rule between Muslims and non-Muslims who live under Muslim territory. Donner (2012, p. 65) stated that the inhabitants of Madinah were totally different religiously and culturally, Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) established the first state in Madinah with a diverse community, particularly, with Jews. Following the time of the Prophet, the constitutional religious text and jurisprudence (Fiqh) have

been changed over time based on economic, political, and social considerations, mainly, medieval Islamic jurisprudence sources refer to a different version for dhimmi law (Ezziti, 2018; Rane, 2019). For this very reason, many contemporary Muslim scholars namely al-Qaradawi, Fahmi Howeidi, Salim al-'Aawa, and Rashid Ghannoushi have reviewed the contents of Document of Medina, and they found that the people of the book and non-Muslims enjoyed the rights of full citizenship in accordance with the Document of Medina. Thus, several Muslim jurists and scholars are attempting to rethink in classical dhimmi law to rewrite an updated fiqh that deals with the issue of dhimmi in today's context (Ezziti, 2018).

The Qur'anic Explanation of Interreligious Dialogue

We are not only responsible to God but also the phenomena around us including all other human beings regardless of their religion, language, and nationality. Dialogue is an integral part of the purpose of God (Kurucan & Erol, 2012, p. 36). The Qur'an teaches that every human being has the freedom to choose and follow his or her own religion. The Qur'anic injunction of religious freedom came when Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) was still living in Mecca. A group of idolaters in Mecca proposed to Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) that if he worships their gods for 1 year, then they will worship Allah the next year (Kamali, 2009). The 109th Qur'anic chapter was revealed in response to their proposal. The Qur'an says, "Your religion is for you and my religion is for me" (Al-Qur'an 109: 6). Another verse states that "truth comes from your God and those who want to believe—let them believe and those who do not, let them do so" (Al-Qur'an 18: 29). These are the true examples of religious freedom in Islam. In his Jami al-Qur'an, al-Qurtubi (1964) explains that we should not impose Islam on anybody (p. 281). They must enjoy freedom in choosing their religions. The Qur'an asks Muslims to behave with wisdom and beautiful words when dealing with the people of other religions. It encourages to argue with them in the best and most gracious manner (Al-Qur'an 16: 125). Wisdom, good words, and gracious conducts are vital to dialogue. God wants human beings to be involved kindly and respectfully with one another irrespective of their religion (Kurucan & Erol, 2012, p. 36). For example, "God does not prohibit you to show kindness to those who do not fight you because of your faith or drive you out from your houses" (Al-Qur'an 60: 8).

The Qur'an teaches that all human beings, regardless of their religious and cultural affiliation, came from the one and same origin, Adam and Hawwa (Eve) (Al-Qur'an 4: 1). A comprehensive idea of unity is expressed here by reminding man of the origin of humankind. Kamali (2009) argues that the unity of mankind's origin is the foundation of their equality in Islam irrespective of their linguistic and racial identity. In a renowned tradition of his farewell address, the Prophet (pbuh) said,

O People! You are created by one God, and you are also the descendants of the same father. So, the Arabs are not superior to the non-Arabs, neither white to the black nor the black to the white except by the degree of righteousness. (Albani, 1996, p. 449)

Therefore, nobody has the right to claim his or her superiority over others. Everybody should discuss with each other through mutual understanding but not with suspicion or hatred, and establish an environment of harmony (Yitik, 2004).

Islam maintains cooperative attitudes toward the people of other religions to achieve interreligious harmony. While Muslims are regarded as *ummatah wasathan* (middle or moderate community) (Al-Qur'an 2: 143), the Jews and Christians who uphold the law of their scriptures are regarded as *ummatah muqtashidah* (moderate or balanced community) (Al-Qur'an 5: 66). These two Qur'anic verses suggest a universal principle of common moral and ethical conducts which will help establish peaceful interreligious relationships (Afsaruddin, 2009). The Qur'an says,

Say (O Muhammad): O people of the Scripture! Come to a common word between us and you, that we worship none but Allah, and that we associate no partners with Him, and that none of us shall take others as lords besides Allah. (Al-Qur'an 3: 64)

Duran (2020) mentions the Qur'anic statement "come to a common word between us and you" provides a connotation of dialogue. He also argues that although the verse is specifically referring to the People of the Book, its application would be general and wider today. There are also verses in the Qur'an which highly encourage every man and woman to know and respect one another (Al-Qur'an 49: 11, 13). Interreligious dialogue is the preferred approach to know and respect other human beings.

The Qur'an prohibits insulting other religions, their gods, and their followers (Al-Qur'an 6: 108). The Qur'an also categorically prohibits ridiculing a community and prohibits referring to them with offensive terms (Al-Qur'an 49: 11).

The Prophet Muhammad's Dealings With the People of Other Religions

The life of Muhammad (pbuh) comprises numerous examples of dialogue and conversation between Muslims and non-Muslims (Haq, 2014). The Prophet (pbuh) spent his life in dialogue with believers, unbelievers, atheists, and idolaters. His life is a true example of dialogue for Muslims (Kurucan & Erol, 2012, p. 70). In consonance with the verses of the Qur'an, the Prophet of Islam is reported to have said, "All creatures of God are the members of the family of God, and he is the best loved of God who loves best His creatures" (Elius et al., 2019a). The Prophet loved all human beings equally. He did not like to curse even his enemies but sought for them the mercy of God. When the Prophet went to Ta'if

to preach Islam, people persecuted him as he was preaching to them a new religion. Although the persecution was beyond the limit of his tolerance, he never desired their destruction but prayed to God for their forgiveness (Galush, 2003, p. 500). The Prophet of Islam set an example of compassion, generosity, and excellent living. Abū Hurairah narrated that the Prophet of Islam said, “He who believes in Allah and the hereafter he must not be the cause of sufferings for his neighbour” (Al-Bukhari in Mawsu’ah al-Hadith al-Sharif al-Kutub al-Sittah, 2008, p. 6018). There are many other traditions regarding the rights and dignity of neighbors irrespective of their religious affiliation. For example, “He will not be a true believer, the Prophet repeated three times, from whose hand his neighbour is not safe” (Al-Bukhari in Mawsu’ah al-Hadith al-Sharif al-Kutub al-Sittah, 2008, p. 6016).

The Prophet also said, “Gibrael (Gabriel) used to advise me to treat my neighbor as though they are my heir” (Al-Bukhari in Mawsu’ah al-Hadith al-Sharif al-Kutub al-Sittah, 2008, p. 6014). A Muslim cannot be a true Muslim unless he considers his neighbor as himself and he cannot cause suffering to his neighbor in any circumstance. Islam includes everybody whether believers, unbelievers, atheists, idolaters, and so on, they will be included as neighbors in any Muslim society (Ibn Hamid, 2013). Therefore, Muslims must observe good conduct toward others without considering their religious affiliation. Jabir ibn Abdullah narrated another tradition that

Once we along with the Prophet were passing by a funeral procession of a Jew. When the Prophet saw this, he stood up, and we also stood up following him. Then we informed the Prophet that it was the dead body of a Jew. The Prophet responded that when you saw a funeral procession you would stand up. (Al-Bukhari in Mawsu’ah al-Hadith al-Sharif al-Kutub al-Sittah, 2008, p. 102)

According to another narration, “Once a funeral procession was passing by the Prophet of Islam (pbuh) and observing this he stood up. The Prophet was informed that the person was a Jew. Then he responded that he was a human being” (Al-Bukhari in Mawsu’ah al-Hadith al-Sharif al-Kutub al-Sittah, 2008, p. 102). These two traditions clarify the attitude of the Prophet (pbuh) toward the people of other religions. His respect for a funeral of non-Muslims shows how Muslims should deal with non-Muslims. To do otherwise is contrary to Islam and the Prophet (pbuh).

The Prophet praised good people and their deeds regardless of their religion. In the fifth year of the Prophethood, Muhammad (pbuh) ordered his companions to migrate to Abyssinia (Ethiopia) and informed them that there was a Christian king (Najashi) who was a fair ruler. Praising his rule, the Prophet said that he was not unjust to his subjects (Ibn Kathir, 1998, p. 85). The Prophet also took shelter of non-Muslims. For instance, after the tremendous oppression by the people of Ta’if, the Prophet returned to Mecca under

the protection of al-Mut’im, a non-Muslim (Al-Mubarakpuri, 2006, pp. 73–77). This indicates that the Prophet not only showed equal treatment to non-Muslims but also trusted them.

The Prophet guaranteed teaching religious education for non-Muslims. He visited Bayt al-Midras, the religious schools of the Jews, many times during his lifetime. Abu Bakar, the first caliph of Islam, also visited the same Bayt al-Midras several times and ensured freedom of their religious education (Al-Qurtubi, 1964, p. 50). The Prophet warned against those who treat a non-Muslim living in an Islamic state unfairly. According to a reliable tradition, the Prophet said, “He who is unjust to a *dhimmi* or belittle him or impose anything upon him beyond his ability or take something from him without his permission I will be the witness against him in the Day of Judgment” (Abu Dawud, n.d., p. 170). In line with this, El-Wakil (2019) described the prophetic tradition “whoever harms a *dhimmi* I shall be his foe on the Day of Judgment” is authentic and can be considered as an end clause to covenants that the prophet (pbuh) delivered to Christian, Jewish, and Magian communities.

According to Donner (2012), early in his stay in Madinah, the Prophet (pbuh) signed an agreement with various clans of Madinah including Jewish, polytheistic and ethnic groups (p. 65). The agreement guaranteed all of them to be considered as members of a single nation (Ummah). This agreement is called The Charter of Madinah (Haque, 2010). For maintaining a peaceful co-existence between the groups, there was a common legal, economic, military, and political goal in this charter (Kurucan & Erol, 2012, p. 74). The charter aimed to protect the lives and properties of its inhabitants in Madinah, fight against hostilities and injustice irrespective of religious or tribal affiliation and ensure religious freedom. Muslims and Jews lived side by side in harmony (Abu-Munshar, 2007, p. 41). Husain (2010) elucidates that the Charter of Madinah is the first written and modern constitution in history. He says that the charter made the “formation of a pluralistic and tolerant polity in Madinah which can be regarded as the ‘contemporary parlance of good governance.’”

The Prophet made many more Covenants with the inhabitants of Madinah. His accord with the Christians of Najran is another example of religious freedom and interreligious harmony. The Prophet allowed the Christians to pray in his mosque (Kurucan & Erol, 2012, p. 79). According to this agreement, complete protection of Christians, their wealth, nationality, and religion will be ensured. In addition, their churches and priests will be protected. No priest will lose his post, and nobody will be refused to travel. Their churches will not be turned into a mosque. They will enjoy total freedom in practicing their religion. No taxes will be levied on them, and nothing will be imposed beyond their means. No Christians will be forced to convert to Islam. Muslims’ treatment with Christians will be with compassion and cooperation. If Christians need any support for repairing churches or other religious and worldly need, Muslim must help them unconditionally. This agreement had

been maintained throughout the Prophetic and Khilafat periods from Abu Bakar to Ali (Yaqub, n.d., pp. 84–87). Islamic history proves that interreligious dialogue started through this agreement between Prophet Muḥammad (pbuh) and the delegation of Najran Christians in the first century of the Hijrah (Karim & Saile, 2009).

The agreement with Ibn Harith ibn Ka'b and his people is another example. It says that they will enjoy freedom in their religious affairs. Their lives, properties, and places of worship will remain protected by God, His Prophet, and the believers. None will be compelled to accept Islam. If anyone is subject to any injustice, Muslims will come to help (Kurucan & Erol, 2012, p. 80). There were also agreements with the people of Yemen and Bahrain of the same kind, ensuring the freedom of their religion and protecting their religious institutions and priests (Kurucan & Erol, 2012, p. 80). In his book review on John Andrew Morrow's *The Covenant of the Prophet Muhammad With the Christians of the World*, Sanni mentioned that the Prophet's accords with the priests of Mount Sinai, the Assyrian Christians, the Persian Christians, the Armenian Christians, and the Christians of the world provide testimony for his attitude and relationship toward Christians (Sanni, 2015).

The Prophet made many other accords between Muslims and non-Muslims during the period of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). In every agreement, the Prophet guaranteed the security of lives, property, and the freedom of faith for non-Muslims. If we evaluate the letters sent by Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) to non-Muslim leaders, we see that he emphasizes importance of treating them as shared beliefs, rather than treating them as differences. In his letter to Negus, King of Abyssinia, and Heraclius, King of Byzantium, the Prophet mentions the same Qur'anic verse:

O People of the Book! Come to common terms as between us and you: that we worship none but God; that we associate no partners with Him; and that none of us shall take others as lords besides God. If then they turn back, say ye: "bear witness that we are Muslims." (Abū-Munshar, 2007, p. 45)

Provided here are seven authentic Covenants that can be traced back to the prophet Muhammad (pbuh), even though earlier researchers raised many questions about authenticity of Covenants as apocryphal or pious forgeries. These are the covenants of the Prophet with (a) the Christians of Najran, (b) the Monks of Mount Sinai, (c) the Armenian Christians, (d) the one written on Monday 29 Rabi al-Thani 4 AH, (e) the 1538 reproduction with the Christians of the World, and (f) with the Jews of Khaybar and Maqna, and (g) with the Samaritans (El-Wakil, 2016).

Muslim Ruler's Treatment of the People of Other Religions

There are many records that non-Muslims were well received with their cultural and religious identities and provided a

secured life in many lands under the rule of the four rightly guided caliphs, the Umayyads, Abbasids, Seljuks, and Ottomans (Kurucan & Erol, 2012, p. 85). Abu Yusuf narrates that during the period of Caliph Abu Bakar, "Umar," "Uthman," and "Ali," there were many agreements between Muslims and non-Muslims which none of them were violated by any of the Caliphs. Their churches, temples, and synagogues were protected, and they practiced their religions freely (Yaqub, n.d., p. 160). During the reign of "Umar," the second caliph, when Abu "Ubaydah ibn al-Jarah" was the governor of Damascus, there was an agreement among Jews, Christians, and Muslims that "their churches and synagogues would not be changed. No party will insult others and fight against one another. No party will harm one another. The violation of the agreement will be considered as punishable" (Hamidullah, 1987, p. 428). One example of granting religious freedom to non-Muslims is "Umar's" treatment of Christians in Islamic Jerusalem. "Umar" provided them safety and security of their lives, their possessions, their places of worship, and their religious symbols, and did not impose taxes beyond their means (Abu-Munshar, 2007, pp. 91–92). The assurance given by "Umar" to those living in Aelia (Islamic Jerusalem) is a historic example of tolerance toward non-Muslims. El-Wakil (2016) stated that the covenants of "Umar" with the Christians of Jerusalem and the Christians of Mesopotamia and, Ali's covenant with the Armenian Christians have been proven authentically by the recent study.

"Umar" was always strict on justice regardless of religious or cultural affiliation. For example, when the son of "Amr ibn al-As," governor of Egypt, hit a Coptic Christian saying that he was the son of a noble man, and it was reported to "Umar" and he called "Amr ibn al-As" and his son from Egypt and ordered the Coptic man to hit Muhammad, the son of "Amr ibn al-As," in return (Abu-Munshar, 2007, p. 79). Thus, the rule of "Umar" was a milestone of peace, security, and justice. One day "Umar" was passing by an old "*dhimmi*" who was begging from one door to another. "Umar" told him that we could not allow you to beg in your old age when we collected *jizyah*, from you in your youth. Then he ordered to provide him with a pension from the state treasury and made it open for all those who were needy among *dhimmis* (Al-Jawziyyah, 1997, p. 144). Similarly, "Umar" was walking along the streets of Damascus and found a group of Christians suffering from leprosy. On seeing this, "Umar" ordered to give them donation from the treasury. He also ordered to provide them food on a daily basis (Al-Baladhuri, 1987, p. 177). This represents Muslims' concern for all humanity, regardless of their beliefs.

When "Salah al-Din" conquered Islamic Jerusalem after 88 years of Crusader rule in 1187 CE, he followed "Umar's" footsteps. He ordered the churches to be reopen after 3 days of closure and granted them freedom of worship (Abu-Munshar, 2007, p. 156). He made Islamic Jerusalem an open place for all Christians and allowed them to practice their rituals. "Walid ibn Abd al-Malik," the "Umayyad" caliph, demolished a Christian church close to the Damascus mosque

while he was expanding the mosque. After the succession of “Umar ibn Abd al-Aziz” as caliph, the Christians complained about the incident. “Umar ibn Abd al-Aziz” demolished the extension of the mosque despite the local Muslims’ protest (Kurucan & Erol, 2012, p. 89). Thus, Muslim rulers’ treatment shows that they maintained Islamic teachings of religious freedom and interreligious harmony throughout their rule. If a ruler violated interreligious harmony during his reign, the next ruler, in most cases, restored it.

Conclusion

The study reveals that having different religions is not unusual. Muslims are obliged to maintain unity in differences as well as accept the differences with sincerity, love, and cooperation for the satisfaction of God. Islam, as a universal religion, recognizes dialogue between religions (Haq, 2014). The Qur’anic approach and the Prophet’s dealings as well as early Muslim rulers’ treatment of non-Muslims, especially “Umar,” prove that the people of other religions have received an equal opportunity as human beings. The dialogue between Muslims and non-Muslims is held in high regard in Islam. Despite differences between Islam and other religions, Islam has not had problems adjusting to a society of diverse religions and culture. For instance, when the Christians of Najran came to the Prophet and engaged in a theological discussion about the nature of Christ, they did not agree on the doctrinal issues but agreed to a peace treaty between them (Kamali, 2009). So, it is not necessary to discuss the theological issues of different religions in an interreligious dialogue program. It only requires to accept and respect the differences as to preserve the system of God and to follow the ideals of Prophet (pbuh) and engage positively with one another for promoting peace, harmony, and co-existence (Kamali, 2009). Islamic teachings do not encourage Muslims to harm the people of other religions but encourage helping and securing them and providing them with their due rights and dignity (Kurucan & Erol, 2012, p. 43). More people accepted Islam during the times of peace and through peaceful means (M. H. Hasan, 2009).

The treaty of “Hudaybiyyah” is the milestone of interreligious dialogue in Islam, which opened the gate for interaction and discussion between Muslims and different groups of non-Muslims. Muslim rulers especially the four righteous caliphs made many agreements with non-Muslims and provided them with due rights including the protection of their churches, temples, and synagogues (Yaqub, n.d.). The treatment of “Umar” for the people of other religions is a historical example of respect, tolerance, and interreligious harmony. “Umar” observed the principles of Islam in dealing with non-Muslims. His prescription for the people of other religions was always with justice and fairness (Abu-Munshar, 2007, p. 117). The concept of jihad in Islam is misinterpreted by many Muslims and non-Muslims. Following the time of the Prophet Muhammad (phub), the “Dhimmi” system has been changed

over time based on economic, political, and social considerations. There are relatively few examples of interruption in Islamic history, and based on them, it is not fair to say that Islam is a religion of sword or that Islam spread through violence (Kurucan & Erol, 2012, p. 85). In short, any violence, mistrust, and conflicts among faith groups could be eradicated through proper application of Islamic teachings regarding interreligious dialogues.

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