

[Is Islam a Tolerant Religion Part III](#)

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On two previous occasions (9 July and 30 June, 2006,) I shared with the readers of this website a very timely topic that is being discussed on www.Elaph.com It is quite a courageous enterprise on the part of an Arab intellectual to write on such a sensitive subject as “**Is Islam a Tolerant Religion?**” The author has returned for the third time to the subject, being encouraged by the positive response of some of his readers.

The following are excerpts from my translation of this timely article, followed by my analysis and comments:

*At the request of several readers, I continue the debate about “**Islam and Tolerance.**” Through these discussions, we hope to render a service to Islam and save it from the evils of the **Fuqaha*** of death, and the theorists of **Irhab** (terrorism.) They have damaged Islam’s reputation, changing it in the sight of non-Muslims, into the ideology of Irhabis. Islam needs to be saved from radical fundamentalists, so it becomes a religion like the other religions. Its function then becomes to safeguard morals and human values; rightly ordering the relation between man and his Creator. Man alone must bear responsibility for his actions, while God remains the sole judge of man’s sins. It is no one’s business to enforce the worship of God on others, according to the principle, “**There is no compulsion in religion.**”*

A reader wrote from America, “Your excellent articles are more Islamic than those of the Islamists. I keep on reading them to digest their full meaning.” I want to draw attention to the fact that there are many honest people who read and understand my articles, and who don’t charge me with denigrating Islam!

*I am convinced that the worst enemies of Islam are those who thrust Islam into politics, such as **al-Qaradawi, al-Ghanoushi, Ali Khamanei, and Hassan Nasrallah.** Do we blame President Musharraf of Pakistan who said recently, “We have brought Islam to such a low level, that people throughout the world regard it as synonymous with illiteracy, backwardness, and intolerance.”*

*As to those who objected to my broaching this topic, they would have done better had they directed their criticisms at the preachers of violence and death. For they are the ones who have forgotten the Qur’anic verses that advocate mercy and tolerance, which descended on the Prophet while he was weak in Mecca. Unfortunately, these radical **Fuqaha** consider the Meccan verses as abrogated by the Medinan verses that proclaim harshness and violence, when Islam had achieved power. (See the article: “**The Islam of Mecca versus the Islam of Medina,**” posted on this website on 22 June, 2006. JT)*

Some of those who commented on my articles quoted Qur’anic verses that emphasized tolerance and peaceful coexistence with the followers of other religions. I don’t disagree

with them at all, having referred to the same texts in my previous articles. However, the real problem is not the absence of texts that advocate tolerance; **but the existence of other sacred texts (in the Qur'an and the Hadith) that advocate intolerance.** It is these texts that now function within the minds of the Fuqaha of death and the preachers of Irhab. They stuff the minds of Muslims with hatred and animosity toward all non-Muslims, calling for violence against the "Others," the "Different," and the followers of non-Muslim faiths.

"Here is a quotation from Chapter 3:85 (Al-Imran):

And whoso seeketh as religion other than the Surrender (to Allah) it will not be accepted from him, and he will be a loser in the Hereafter. Translation of Pickthall

If anyone desires a religion other than Islam (submission to God), never will it be accepted of him; and in the Hereafter He will be in the ranks of those who have lost (All spiritual good). Translation of Yusuf Ali

*At present, the practice of violence against all other religions is an exclusively Islamic phenomenon. This is an inconvertible fact that requires a proper remedy. For example, when Osama bin Laden addressed the West saying, "You love life, but we love death," he was basing his statement on similar texts that have deep roots in the Islamic heritage. When Tariq bin Ziyad, crossed the strait of Gibraltar**, he addressed the Spanish people saying, "I have come with men who love death much more than you love life." Unfortunately, most of our religious leaders spread a culture that despises life, and glorifies death.*

Nowadays, it is evident that Islamists are in confrontation with the whole world, and that most terrorists happen to be Muslims. Even those Islamic parties that claim to be moderate don't hesitate to practice violence against others, when circumstances happen to be in their favor. They enforce the practice of Shari'a, as is happening in Iraq. Armed Islamic militias, both Sunni and Shi'ite, persecute Muslim women who don't wear the veil, and religious minorities such as Christians, Sabeans, and Mandeans. Just as Iraq lost its entire Jewish population in the past, it won't be long before all Sabeans and Mandeans would disappear, even though they are the original inhabitants of the land! Not one Muslim leader has raised his voice against the crimes perpetrated against these innocent people. And when I raised this subject recently in a TV program, I was dubbed as a Crusader-Zionist propagandist!

*It is evident that Irhabi murderers have been influenced by those sacred texts that are frequently quoted by the imams who send the young to commit criminal acts against the innocents. There are well-known religious authorities like **Sheikh Youssef al-Qaradawi**, who have issued **fatwas** urging Muslims to go to Iraq and help their Sunni brothers in their fight against the occupying **Kuffar***** and those collaborating with them from among the Shi'ites. Several young Sunni responded to their appeals, and rushed to Iraq as suicide-bombers bringing death and destruction to thousands of Shi'ites gathered at mosques and markets.*

We know as well that **Sheikh Kazem al-Hairi**, a Shi'ite Ayatollah and the spiritual father of the popular leader, **Muqtada al-Sadr** (the leader of a militia known as **Jaish Al-Mahdi******) issued a fatwa threatening any Jew with death should he ever return to Iraq. Are these religious leaders oblivious of Islamic **Fiqh*** and tolerance, when they tell their followers to engage in such barbaric acts?

In the early years of the Islamic Revolution in Iran, **Ayatollah Sheikh Sadeq Khalkhali** sent thousands to their death after some show trials. A Western journalist enquired of him whether he had a clear conscience for his acts, as most of the condemned were innocent! Khalkhali responded sarcastically: "Those I condemn to death are either guilty or innocent. Should some have been guilty, they got what they deserved; and if others were innocent, I offer my congratulations to them and their relatives, since I dispatched them to Paradise."

I mentioned before that Zargawi and his followers waged a ruthless war against the Shi'ites, and based their murderous acts on the sacred texts of Islam. This is exactly what the Khawarej***** did when they rebelled against Imam Ali. Many of them were actually '**memorizers of the Qur'an;**' and justified their rebellion by referring to certain sacred texts. This led Ali to remind his cousin Abdallah ben Abbas, not to argue with the Khawarej about the meaning of Qur'anic texts, **as they could be interpreted in several different ways!**

Is Islam a tolerant religion?

Yes, we must not hesitate to pose this question, having witnessed the destruction, the killings, and the multitude of displaced persons that are found in Muslim lands. Notwithstanding all that, the Islamists insist on saying, "**Islam is a Tolerant Religion.**" They point to the testimony of history as a proof for that 'tolerance' by claiming that non-Muslim minorities have continued to live within Islam for fourteen centuries. However, is it true that the followers of non-Muslim religions have enjoyed true freedom, and were exempt of persecution? **The answer is, No.** In fact, discrimination was practiced against them; as they were classified as **dhimmis**. They were not allowed to take any part in the government of their lands as citizens. They had to pay the **jizya** (poll tax) while "humbling" themselves to the tax-gatherers!

How about the injunction of **Surat al-Ma'edah** (The Table, 5: 51) that tells Muslims:

O ye who believe! Take not the Jews and the Christians for friends. They are friends one to another. He among you who taketh them for friends is (one) of them. Lo! Allah guideth not wrongdoing folk. Pickthall

O ye who believe! take not the Jews and the Christians for your friends and protectors: They are but friends and protectors to each other. And he amongst you that turns to them (for friendship) is of them. Verily God guideth not a people unjust. Yusuf Ali
Does this verse teach tolerance vis-à-vis other religions?

And what about a woman's status in Islam? She is considered deficient in her mental capacities, her testimony is worth only half a man's testimony; the same pertains to her share in inheritance since she receives only one half of the portion allocated to her brothers. These rules are supported by Qur'anic texts that are totally authoritative.

*To sum-up our discussion: When we support our claim about intolerance in Islam by referring to Qur'anic texts, we are charged with ignorance. They claim that those texts should be interpreted within their historical context; since every text '**descended**' on the Prophet due to a specific problem that had surfaced about 1400 years ago. We agree with them and ask them to adhere to this principle. But when we go on to tell them that Islam came with solutions for the problems of a society that existed 14 centuries ago and that our present-day problems are different and require new solutions; they refuse to consider our point of view. They insist that when the Qur'an '**descended**' on the Prophet Muhammad, Allah was aware of the future, and that all Qur'anic rules are normative for all time and place.*

Analysis

The author's goal in the third part of this trilogy is to emphasize the fact that throughout history, Islam has been an intolerant religion; and that this attitude finds support in the sacred texts of the faith. While it is true that the early chapters of the Qur'an, known as the Meccan Surahs exhibited a spirit of tolerance towards Jews and Christians, this approach changed drastically when Muhammad moved to Medina. In fact, it is the Medinan Surahs (622-632) that proclaim and support the basic intolerant view of all non-Muslims.

Comments

The third article in this series does not add much more information on the subject. Its importance lies in the fact it summarizes forcefully the **thesis that Islam is not a tolerant religion**. Furthermore, that the author received positive responses to the first two articles is an indication that the critique is much needed within the Muslim world.

What I find very significant is the fact the author keeps on pointing to the source of the intolerance and militancy of Islam being non other the Qur'an, specifically the surahs that "descended" on the Prophet during his stay in Medina from 622 until his death in 632. There is no way to evade the significance of those Medinan verses that specifically forbid Muslims from entertaining any friendly or peaceful relations with the followers of Judaism and Christianity. The latter are considered as "**unbelievers**" or "**infidels**" having refused to believe in the mission and the message of Muhammad. Thus they have become, ipso facto, enemies of Muslims.

I have mentioned in my previous articles that it is impossible for a new hermeneutic to exist in Islam, that would authorize the rejection of the normative stature of the Medinan surahs. The belief that the Qur'an is *qadeem* (uncreated and therefore eternal) does not

allow for restricting its authoritative parts to the Meccan surahs, the latter being considered advocating a peaceful attitude towards Jews and Christians. The *Mu'tazilites'* attempt to approach the Qur'an as a historical document was popular for a brief period in Baghdad during the 9th Century. Eventually, it was rejected completely by the Muslim authorities so that **the orthodox doctrine of the Qur'an as Allah's final, complete, and authoritative revelation to mankind, has prevailed ever since.**

I am finalizing my work on this article on Friday, 11 August, 2006, the day after the plot to explode materials on several airplanes, bound from London's Heathrow Airport to the United States, was uncovered. The plotters have been identified as Muslims, or converts to Islam. My concern is to underline these points:

First, the men who planned their horrific acts were not mad men, but in full control of their faculties.

Second, the ability to silence totally their consciences and plan to perpetrate their horrific crimes on innocent travelers indicates they were infused with strong beliefs that their actions were serving a higher, yes even a divinely-sanctioned cause.

Third, the source of their thinking, while mediated through men, was ultimately a supernatural authority that was non-other than the commands of Allah, coming via specific Qur'anic verses.

In my sharing of the trilogy, "Is Islam a Tolerant Religion?" with the readers of this website, I did my best to let the author himself tell about the problems that are afflicting Islam, i.e., its inability to co-exist with the rest of the world. I hope that his efforts have impressed you with the crucial nature of the challenges we face, due to the continued intransigence of Islam vis-à-vis the rest of mankind. And with the news that keeps coming about the averted tragedy of 8/10/2006 over the Atlantic, can ordinary Muslims deny that they have a very, very serious problem with the source of their faith? If they desire to live at peace with the rest of us on this globe, they better jettison the intolerant baggage of their heritage!

**Fuqaha*: plural of *Faqih*, a Muslim legal scholar who gives official opinions on the meaning and application of the *Shari'a*; *Fiqh* designates Islamic jurisprudence. A *Faqih* is entitled to issue a *Fatwa*, a legal decision based on the *Qur'an*, *Hadith*, or the *Sunna*.

***Gibraltar* originates from two Arabic words, *Jabal* (mountain) and *Tariq* (the leader of the Islamic army that crossed from North Africa and conquered Spain).

****Kuffar*: plural of *Kafir*, an Infidel

*****Jaish al-Mahdi*: The Army of the Mahdi, the *Mahdi* is an apocalyptic Shi'ite figure who is to come near the end of time, to bring the whole world under the rule of Islam.

******Khawarej*: Some of the followers of the fourth *Caliph Ali* rebelled against him for having accepted arbitration with his foe, *Mu'awiya*. They murdered Ali in 661. Hussein,

the younger son of Ali, became the leader of the Party of Ali, in Arabic, *Shi'at Ali*. This term was abbreviated into the word, *Shi'ite*. The *Khawarej* represent the prototype of Islamic terrorists, and were notorious for their savagery against fellow-Muslims.