

The Absence of Freedom in The Lands Governed by Sharia

Posted by [Jacob Thomas](#) on 9/30/09 • Categorized as [Modernism & Reformism](#)

By **Jacob Thomas**



On 7 July, 2009, the daily online *Al-Awan* published an article by a reformist Algerian intellectual unmasking the hypocrisy of the Islamic propaganda machine that seeks to paint a rosy picture of the human rights conditions in the “**Lands Governed by the Sharia.**” He began, with tongue in cheek, to quote a paragraph written in a flowery Arabic style that sang the praises of the superlative tolerance and magnanimity shown to the various religious and ethnic minorities living within *Daru’l Islam*. Then he proceeded to list certain actions taken by Muslim governments that contradicted the empty claims enumerated in the propaganda piece. I must confess that I was fascinated with his sarcasm and wit which comes through especially forcefully in Arabic!

Here are excerpts from the article, followed by my analysis and comments.

“We are a tolerant people. With us, there is no ‘compulsion in religion.’ We don’t punish apostates, or force them to return to Islam. Buddhists living among us are free to build their temples. As to our Christian brothers and Jewish cousins, they have all the freedom to build their houses of worship without any hindrance. [Among us] you are as free to change religion as you are to change your shirt. There is true freedom in Daru’l Islam. A Copt is a citizen, and not a dhimmi. A Shi’ite enjoys the same privileges as a Sunni in a Sunni majority land; the same thing obtains for a Sunni living in a Shi’ite majority country. The Ahmadis 1 and the Bahais 2 are well-treated. In fact, all religions are properly treated in our Arab-Muslim world. May Allah protect us from the evil designs and calumnies of the West who are very jealous on account of our blessings, the blessings of justice, peace, and Islam.”

“Now, anyone who takes seriously such propaganda, [referring to the words of the paragraph above] is a fool for believing such lies! The meetings that take place, and the funds that are spent to present Islam as a tolerant religion, are nothing but smoke-screens.

“The facts gleaned from the Islamic world don’t reveal an idealistic and tolerant Islam. How can a genuine spirit of citizenship prosper in the Muslim world, where the Sharia mandates not only discrimination against non-Muslims, but their ultimate elimination?

“Any keen observer of the condition of human rights in the Muslim world is able to dismantle meaningless discourse that seeks to present to the world an idealistic Islam. Such an observer cannot but take note of the total lack of individual freedoms and human rights in all those countries where their laws are based on Sharia, and not on human reason.

“It is necessary to dismantle the very structures of Islamist discourse based, as we know, on purely verbal formulations and vapid eloquence. Doing so would reveal the true nature of that miserable and imagined “*glorious Islamic past*,” a past that the Islamists are trying to resurrect, which can only mean that entire Muslim societies will continue to remain underdeveloped!

“Let us observe realistically the present state of affairs in the Arab-Islamic world so that we may not be duped by the empty claims of the Islamists. Where is that vaunted justice when a young Algerian woman is brought to trial, simply because she chose to embrace Christianity in a country with a constitution that guarantees freedom of belief? The Algerian Government claims that there is a widespread evangelization movement taking place in the country. But what exactly is the problem with that? Should the State be responsible for the conscience of its people and their inner convictions? Why do we forbid others to engage in activities which we allow ourselves? What’s the difference between “*da’wa*” and “*tabshir*” (evangelism?) 3. And can there be harmony between the Sharia as the basis of legislations and the principle of religious freedom?

“In the final analysis, it is only when we adopt a secular outlook as the basis of our laws that we can arrive at a just solution to the problem of religious, ethnic, and racial minorities who are at present “submerged” in the sea of an intolerant Muslim majority throughout the Arab world.”

Analysis

The author of this brief article locates the source and foundation of discrimination against non-Muslims in the very Islamic Sharia as based on the sacred and normative texts of Islam, namely the *Qur’an*, the *Hadith*, and *Sirat* (Life of) *Muhammad*. Most if not all the “Constitutions” of Islamic states begin with a clause that makes Islam the source of legislation.

Comments

The discriminatory teachings of Islamic Sharia classify people living within *Daru'l Islam* according to several categories such as, **Muslims, Dhimmis or People of the Book** (i.e. Christians and Jews), and **pagans**. While Muslim propagandists never cease to claim that Islam respects the rights of non-Muslims to worship and live according to their own beliefs, the facts reveal an entirely different reality.

The author is known for expressing views about the necessity of the separation of religion from politics in the Arab-Muslim world. His remarks reflect his belief that as long as the Sharia remains the foundational source of all legislation, there can be no genuine equality among the citizens of an Arab country. **The very source of discrimination is the Sharia itself. Since it is based on a Divine revelation, it follows that no mere humans may alter any of its provisions.**

We should never forget that the presence of Islam outside the Arabian Peninsula took place by force. This fact is often forgotten or glossed over by Western intellectuals. In the **Introduction** to his book, *“Islamic Imperialism: A History”* published in 2006 by Yale University Press, Professor Ephraim Karsh, head of Mediterranean Studies at King’s College, University of London, made this contrast between Christianity and Islam:

“The worlds of Christianity and Islam, however, have developed differently in one fundamental respect. The Christian faith won over an existing empire in an extremely slow and painful process and its universalism was originally conceived in spiritual terms that made a clear distinction between God and Caesar. By the time it was embraced by the Byzantine emperors as a tool for buttressing their imperial claims, three centuries after its foundation, Christianity had in place a countervailing ecclesiastical institution with an abiding authority over the wills and actions of all believers. The birth of Islam, by contrast, was inextricably linked with the creation of a world empire and its universalism was inherently imperialist. It did not distinguish between temporal and religious powers, which were combined in the person of Muhammad, who derived his authority directly from Allah and acted at one and the same time as head of the state and head of the church. This allowed the prophet to cloak his political ambitions with a religious aura and to channel Islam’s energies into ‘its instruments of aggressive expansion, there [being] no internal organism of equal force to counterbalance it.’” (P. 5)

A thorough study of the plight of minorities under Islam has been done by Bat Ye’or. In her book, *“The Decline of Eastern Christianity under Islam: From Jihad to Dhimmitude,”* she documents the condition of Eastern Christians throughout the Middle East, since the early years of the seventh century. **4**

It was the imposition of the *Jizya* tax and other harsh discriminatory measures on the majority populations during the successive Arab, Seljuk, and Ottoman regimes that ultimately led to a drastic demographic change. The subjects who were originally in the majority became a despised and barely tolerated minority. The results of this Islamic intolerance are realistically described by the author of *Al-Awan* article in these strong

words, ***“The facts gleaned from the Islamic world don’t reveal an idealistic and tolerant Islam. How can a genuine spirit of citizenship prosper in the Muslim world, where the Sharia mandates not only discrimination against non-Muslims, but their ultimate elimination?”***

The writer also makes reference to ***“that miserable and imagined glorious Islamic past.”*** These words point to the era of the early caliphs and the subsequent caliphates that witnessed the expansion of the Muslim world. The first caliphs are called, ***“Al-Khulafa al-Rashidoon,”*** i.e. ***“The Rightly Guided Caliphs.”*** Their era (632-661) was marred by a series of assassinations. ***Umar***, the 2nd caliph was murdered in 644, and was succeeded by ***Uthman*** who was assassinated twelve years later. Then ***Ali***, cousin and son-in-law of Muhammad, was murdered by one of his own disgruntled soldiers!

The list of horrors that mar the history of Islam goes on. The martyrdom of ***Husain***, the son of ***Ali***, and leader of the Shi’ites, took place in 680, at ***Karbala***, Iraq. Seventy years later, the ***Umayyad Caliphate***, responsible for the killing of ***Husain*** and his entourage, ended in a blood-bath! What the author decries is the undue praise that is heaped on that period in the history of Islam by present-day Islamists.

Finally, our author turns to the subject of freedom of religion, and refers to an Algerian woman who, after being converted to the Christian faith, was hauled before the courts. He considers this the height of intolerance. Furthermore, he remains skeptical about the Algerian Government’s claim of the existence of a widespread evangelistic activity in the country. And even if such a campaign did exist, why should it be considered a subversive movement! He abhors the shocking asymmetry that exists in Islam’s relations with the rest of the world and boldly asked: ***“What’s the difference between ‘da’wa’ and ‘tabshir’”*** 3

While any attempt to spread the Christian faith in the vast Islamic world is looked upon with alarm and considered a crime, Muslims in Europe and the Americas encounter no hindrances in the practice of their faith, nor are they forbidden to engage in ***Da’wa***, i.e. calling non-Muslims to embrace Islam. In several of my previous articles on this website, I called attention to the total absence of a ***quid pro quo*** in the relations between Islam and the West.

Not only do Muslims enjoy freedom of religion in the West, but Muslim governments and institutions subsidize chairs of Islamic Studies at major American universities. For example, ***Dr. John L. Esposito***, of Georgetown University in Washington, D.C., is a ***“Founding Director of the Prince Alwaleed bin Talal Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding.”*** His position at this Catholic university is funded by a member of the Saudi Royal family. A perusal of his writings and various texts from his speeches indicates a consistently revisionist exposition of Islam. On the other hand, it is unimaginable to expect the existence of a “chair” for Christian Studies at any Islamic university.

The reason for this shocking anomaly is that, through their actions, Muslims declare the finality and superiority of their faith and worldview over all other major world civilizations. Thus, they see no inconsistency at all in demanding freedom to exercise and propagate their faith wherever they have settled outside *Daru'l Islam*. After all, **Muhammad is Allah's** last messenger, the *Qur'an* is His completed revelation, and therefore the Sharia must rule the entire world. To allow a witness for other faiths within Islam's homelands is utterly inconceivable.

The author of the article in *Al-Awan*, who has challenged the uniqueness and superiority of Islam, must be congratulated for his courage, honesty, and integrity. I can never be thankful enough for the Internet that allows his opinions to appear and spread. I hope more Arabs would not only read his contributions, but would adopt his reformist worldview, and pave the way for a peaceful coexistence between a reformed Islam and the rest of mankind.

Note: The picture of a veiled woman and the crucifix accompanied the Arabic text of the article as was posted on *Al-Awan*.

1. *Ahmadis* are followers of the "**Ahmadiyya Movement**" which was founded in 1889 in India, by a Muslim scholar, **Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad**. He claimed that he received revelation from Allah "to disclose the true spirit of Islam." Since both Sunni and Shi'ite Islam do not recognize any new prophet after Muhammad, the followers of this movement are regarded as heretics, and quite often, are persecuted in Muslim countries.

2. *Bahais* follow the teachings of a 19th century Persian religious leader who took the name of **Baha'ullah** (Splendor of Allah). He sought to unite all three theistic religions, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Persecuted by the Shah, he sought refuge within the Ottoman Empire. He died in 1892, and is buried on **Mt. Carmel**, near Haifa, Israel.

3. **Da'wa** and **Tabshir** The effort to propagate Islam is known as **da'wa**, i.e. **calling** people to accept Muhammad as Allah's final messenger. **Tabshir** is an Arabic word based on **Bishara**, i.e. Good News or Gospel. **Tabshir** refers to Christian missions.

4.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Decline_of_Eastern_Christianity:_From_Jihad_to_Dhimmitude