

The culture of peace and religious tolerance from an Islamic perspective

ABBAS YAZDANI*
University of Tehran (Iran)
a.yazdani@ut.ac.ir

Abstract

The subject of the culture of peace and non-violent communication is extremely important, even more so today than in the past. The contention of this paper is that Islam is a religion of tolerance, peace, and reconciliation. I shall argue that there are many principles of the culture of peace in Islam. However, this doctrine may be misunderstood in some Islamic societies due to the poor knowledge of Islamic teachings or wrong education. Therefore, we strongly need to have a true interpretation of religious teachings as well as a true approach to religious diversity to provide the culture of peace.

Key words: Peace, violence, Islam, religious teachings, religious diversity.

La cultura de la paz y la tolerancia religiosa desde una perspectiva islámica

Resumen

El tema de la cultura de paz y la comunicación no violenta es sumamente importante, especialmente en la actualidad. El argumento de este artículo es que el Islam es una religión de tolerancia, paz y reconciliación. Argumentaré que hay muchos principios de la cultura de paz en el Islam. Sin embargo, esta doctrina puede malinterpretarse en algunas sociedades islámicas debido al escaso conocimiento de las enseñanzas islámicas o la educación incorrecta. Por lo tanto, necesitamos tener una verdadera interpretación de las enseñanzas religiosas, así como un verdadero enfoque de la diversidad religiosa para difundir la cultura de la paz.

Palabras clave: Paz, violencia, Islam, enseñanzas religiosas, diversidad religiosa.

* Associate Professor in Philosophy of Religion, Department of Philosophy and Islamic Theology, University of Tehran, Iran. Author of the book *Evidentialism and The Rationality of Religious Belief* (2011).

INTRODUCTION

One of the social problems in the contemporary world is the social conflicts that arise from political, cultural, ethnic, racial, geographical, and religious conflicts. Nowadays, humans are tired of the heart-breaking, devastating and catastrophic struggles and conflicts, and are looking for a way to have a peaceful and non-violent society. While analyzing the concept of peace and, in contrast, expressing all forms of violence, this article claims that religion provides valuable foundations for the culture of peace and the realization of a non-violent society. This article, of course, emphasizes the teachings of the religion of Islam. I will argue that the basic principle of Islam, whether in relations with Muslims or non-Muslims, is interaction, peace, tolerance and friendship, and that war in Islam is forbidden except for defense. In other words, the nature of war in Islam is a defensive one, not an offensive one. Given that a large part of the world's population consists of followers of the world religions, their view of concepts such as tolerance, peace, and reconciliation is extremely important. Catholic theologian Hans Kung says: "There will be no peace among the peoples of this world without peace among the world religions" (1996). The number of people dying in war in recent years has been extremely high. Since the 1990s, millions have died in the Congo, Sudan, and other African countries, and hundreds of thousands in former Yugoslavia, Iraq, Yemen and Syria. The result is that more than 80 percent of the casualties are civilian, and the number of refugees and displaced persons has increased sharply. Therefore, the need for reconciliation, peace and tolerance is felt more than ever.

1. DEFINITION OF PEACE AND THE IMPORTANCE OF THE CULTURE OF PEACE

The key question here is that: what exactly do we mean by peace? "The term is highly emotive, historical, and is often abused as a tool of political propaganda" (Howard, 1971: 225). Galtung defines peace as "the absence of violence in every form" (Galtung, 1996: 9). To that end, he also points out that violence occurs in three modalities. The first modality is direct violence. Direct violence is manifested in various forms of intentional bodily harm, including killing, maiming, siege, and any other form of force to the body that causes harm and poses an affront to basic human needs. The second modality of violence is structural violence. Galtung argues that this form of violence results from the presence of social structures whose cornerstones are exploitation and repression (1996: 198).

Structural violence is manifested in acts that enable some actors in society to benefit from unequal exchange and the plight of the disadvantaged. Structural violence can be seen in social structures such as politics, education, religion, and media. The third type of violence is cultural violence. A society that does not respect the rights of others, a society that is racist, ethnic, monopolistic, ... is considered culturally violent.

Peace is more than the absence of war. It is also “the maintenance of an orderly and just society,” orderly in being protected against the violence or extortion of aggressors, and just in being defended against exploitation and abuse by the more powerful (Howard, 1971: 226). Gandhi spoke of non-violence rather than peace and emphasized the necessity of overcoming injustice. Gandhi’s meaning was deftly summarized by Jonathan Schell: “Violence is a method by which the ruthless few can subdue the passive many. Non-violence is a means by which the active many can overcome the ruthless few.” Yet the word non-violence is “highly imperfect,” wrote Schell (2003: 144).

Many writers distinguish between negative peace, which is simply the absence of war, and positive peace, which is the presence of justice. Peace can be slavery or it can be freedom; subjugation or liberation. Genuine peace means progress toward a freer and more just world (Cousins, 1946: 45-6). Johan Galtung developed the concept of “structural violence” to describe situations of negative peace that have violent and unjust consequences (Galtung, 1969).

For Muslims peace is not merely the absence of war or organized violence. It is also the presence of justice and the creation of conditions in which humans can realize their full potentials. Human beings' nature is inclined to peace, and the violence comes because of how we were educated, not because of our nature. Faulty education gets us disconnected from our compassionate nature. Wrong education describes humans as basically evil and selfish. That is the core of violence.

Building a culture of peace is an urgent task for our present age so more than the past. Culture of peace is contrasted with the culture of war and violence, and could be developed by education and enlightening people, especially the younger generation. The 1989 UNESCO international congress in order to encourage people to develop a culture of peace, acknowledged that “The congress recommended that UNESCO ‘help construct a new vision of peace by developing a peace culture based on the universal values of respect for life, liberty, justice, solidarity, tolerance, human rights, and equality between men and women.’” (UNESCO, 1989: 51).

The UN call for peace education suggests that education in general is important for the establishment of a culture of peace and that specific sorts of peace education may be of particular importance. These include the expectation that children, from an early age, should benefit from education about the values, attitudes, modes of behavior, and ways of life that can enable them to resolve any dispute peacefully and in a spirit of respect for human dignity and of tolerance and non-discrimination. (53/243, Declaration... in Salomon, 2009: 107)

2. WHAT REALLY RELIGIOUS EDUCATION TEACH, PEACE OR VIOLENCE?

The major world religions claim that their education systems teach peace. However, some people say that in practice history and religious education were used to promote war rather than peace. They point to the ethnic/religious conflicts in Burma, Sri Lanka, India, Sudan, Iraq, Yemen, Syria, Palestine and Israel, as well as the attacks on the Twin Towers of the World Trade Centre in New York on September 11, 2001, in the name of radical Islam, and subsequent attacks by Islamic extremists in Bali, Madrid and London. They argue that because religion is, and has been, the cause of so much violence and wars, religious education should be banned from schools and colleges in Islamic society.

While after September 11 George W Bush expressed that "Islam is a religion of peace", But Osama bin Laden¹ and his many followers had different view and believed that September 11 represented authentic Islam. In February 1998 Bin Laden remarked "The ruling to kill the Americans and their allies-civilians and military- is an individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible to do it." However, in this paper I take a very different view. My contention is that, taught sensitively and in the right way, religious education can in fact be a force for good, peace, understanding and reconciliation. The vast majority of Muslims and Islamic scholars believe that nothing in Muhammad's life or in the Qur'an or Islamic law justify terrorism.

There are many principles in Islamic teachings that provide a foundation for creative peacemaking. In Arabic salaam is translated as peace and is considered as one of the holy names of God. (Nasr, 2002: 217). Islam is a religion of universalism, tolerance, peace, and reconciliation. Islam teaches that life is sacred and that the believer has a duty to uphold truth and justice. Social justice is the core principle of Islam. Pursuing justice in the face of oppression and suffering is the personal and collective duty of

¹ Osama bin Laden traces his radicalism to the Wahhabism of his native Saudi Arabia, a movement that began with the reformer Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab (1703-87), and advocate of a puritanical reading of Islamic law and belief.

every Muslim. But Islam is often misunderstood as a religion of the sword that justifies the use of violence to spread the faith; while the principles of nonviolence are not well developed within Islam. Concepts of peace are at the core of the Islamic teachings. The term salaam envisions a peaceful, harmonious social order of justice towards all without violence or conflict.

3. THE PRINCIPLES OF THE CULTURE OF PEACE IN ISLAM

The primary principle in Islam is peace. Islam emphasizes on peace in communication with all Muslim and non-Muslim people in a society, and encourages its adherents to avoid war and violence. The Qur'an places limits on the use of force. The Qur'an acknowledges the right of retribution but states "those who forgive the injury and make reconciliation will be rewarded by God." (Qur'an 42: 40). There are many principles of peace in Islam, which are significant for creating the culture of peace that I shall point to some of them here:

The first and cardinal principle of culture of peace is the acceptance of religious faith is optional. According to Islamic teachings, people are free to accept religious belief. Qur'an says: "Let there be no compulsion in religion: Truth stands out clear from error: whoever rejects evil and believes in Allah has grasped the most trustworthy handhold that never breaks. And God hears and knows all things." (2: 256)

لَا إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ قَدْ تَبَيَّنَ الرُّشْدُ مِنَ الْغَيِّ فَمَنْ يَكْفُرْ بِالطَّاغُوتِ وَيُؤْمِنِ بِاللَّهِ فَقَدِ اسْتَمْسَكَ بِالْعُرْوَةِ الْوُثْقَىٰ لَا انْفِصَامَ لَهَا وَاللَّهُ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ

On this point, the Qur'an is unequivocal: "The truth is from your Lord, so whoever wills- let him believe; and whoever wills – let him disbelieve" (18:29).

قُلِ الْحَقُّ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ فَمَنْ شَاءَ فَلْيُؤْمِنْ وَ مَنْ شَاءَ فَلْيُكْفُرْ.

The message to non-Muslims is, "For you is your religion, and for me is my religion." (109: 6). These passages counsel tolerance and patience toward other faiths. Therefore, religious faith is a voluntary matter that individuals must choose freely and consciously and not compulsively. The message of such verses of the Qur'an is to respect dissenting beliefs and to recognize the freedom of others. This principle can in many cases prevent cultural violence and contribute to the realization of a culture of peace.

The second principle in creating a culture of peace and a non-violent society is Islam's emphasis on peace as the primary law and non-violence.

God invites people to peace: “Allah invites to the Home of Peace, and guides whomever He wills to a straight path”. (10: 25)

وَاللَّهُ يَدْعُو إِلَى دَارِ السَّلَامِ وَيَهْدِي مَنْ يَشَاءُ إِلَى صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ.

The Qur'an invites people to peace and life, and regards war and violence as the evil way. (2: 208)

يا ايها الذين آمنوا ادخلوا في السلم كافة ولا تتبعوا خطوات الشيطان انه لكم عدو مبين.

The Qur'an commands that if your enemies desire peace, welcome it.

وإن جنحوا للسلم فاجنح لها وتوكل على الله انه هو السميع العليم.

That means: But if they incline towards peace, then incline towards it, and put your trust in Allah. He is the Hearer, the Knower. (8: 61).

Moreover, except in limited cases, it does not permit the use of force. Although the Qur'an recognizes the right to retribution its adherents, it is also a reward for forgiveness. So in ash-Shura it says: The retribution of a bad action is one equivalent to it. However, whoever pardons and makes reconciliation, his reward lies with Allah. He does not love the unjust. (42: 40).

وجزاء سيئه سيئه متثلها فمن عفا وأصلح فأجره على الله.

Islam permits defensive jihad on a number of conditions:

1.- The occurrence of aggression. ‘And fight in the cause of Allah those who fight you, but do not commit aggression; Allah does not love the aggressors’ (2: 190).

وَقَاتِلُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ الَّذِينَ يُقَاتِلُونَكُمْ وَلَا تَعْتَدُوا ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ الْمُعْتَدِينَ.

2.- The principle of proportion. ‘Whoever commits aggression against you, retaliate against him in the same measure as he has committed against you. And be conscious of Allah, and know that Allah is with the righteous’ (2:194)

فَمَنْ اعْتَدَى عَلَيْكُمْ فَاعْتَدُوا عَلَيْهِ بِمِثْلِ مَا اعْتَدَى عَلَيْكُمْ ۗ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ مَعَ الْمُتَّقِينَ

3.- Observe the necessity. ‘And fight them until there is no oppression, and worship becomes devoted to Allah alone. But if they cease, then let there be no hostility except against the oppressors’ (2:193).

وَقَاتِلُوهُمْ حَتَّى لَا تَكُونَ فِتْنَةٌ وَيَكُونَ الدِّينُ لِلَّهِ ۚ فَإِنِ انْتَهَوْا فَلَا عُدْوَانَ إِلَّا عَلَى الظَّالِمِينَ.

4.- Adherence to human principles and values. This principle is so important in Islam that even if the enemy becomes cowardly, it does not endorse the deviation from human values. So after the conquest of Mecca, the Prophet of Islam said instead of revenge and bloodshed today is a day of mercy. Therefore, the distinction between aggression and defense must be distinguished; aggression is unlawful but defense is permissible under certain circumstances. The Qur'an has even forbidden Muslims from re-proaching. 'Do not insult those they call upon besides Allah, lest they insult Allah out of hostility and ignorance. We made attractive to every community their deeds. Then to their Lord is their return, and He will inform them of what they used to do' (6:108).

وَلَا تَسُبُّوا الَّذِينَ يَدْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ فَيَسُبُّوا اللَّهَ عَدْوًا بِغَيْرِ عِلْمٍ كَذَلِكَ زَيْنًا لِكُلِّ أُمَّةٍ
عَمَلُهُمْ ثُمَّ إِلَىٰ رَبِّهِمْ مَرْجِعُهُمْ فَيُنَبِّئُهُمْ بِمَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ.

In his defensive battles, the Prophet of Islam best practiced human and moral principles, even treating his most vicious enemies with humane behavior. During the Hunayn war, he granted the majority of captives mercy and returned their property to them. In the conquest of Mecca that some Muslims used to chant that today is the day of vengeance, but the Prophet said to them today is a day of mercy, then told the people of Mecca and the leaders of their war, you are all free and there is no worry for you. The Prophet of Islam during the wars never deprived the enemy of drinking water. In the Kheybar battle he was strongly opposed when he was offered the opportunity to close the waterway or poison the drinking water in the fortress, and forbade the spread of poison in the city of enemies and in general everywhere. During the war, the Prophet said: Do not kill women, children and the elders and do not burn palm trees and crops. Imam Ali (PBUH) also commands his soldiers: Never start a war with the enemy unless they start, do not kill the fugitives, do not attack the wounded, don't go into their homes, don't attack women, and don't scold anyone. (Ibn al-Jouzi, 1997: 91)

The teachings of Islam invite people to live a peaceful life based on theism, justice and purity. Therefore, peace in Islam is an eternal constitution. Even the nature of war in Islam is a defensive one, not an offensive one, because the principle of Islam is peace and coexistence, not conflict, violence and war. In many verses of the Qur'an, God has allowed Muslims to fight only for defense. Therefore, war in Islam is a secondary principle, not a primary one.

The third principle in creating a culture of peace and a non-violent society is to pay attention to the spiritual self-awareness inherent in our human nature that can move people away from violence. Human nature

has a tendency for peace and friendship. Enjoying compassion, and love for others is part of our human nature. Violence is not our nature. Basically, non-violent relationships can bring us closer to our nature and help us connect and return to what is truly a pleasing way of life, one that contributes to one another's well-being and comfort. Human nature tends to peace, and not violence; violence comes from how we learn, not from our human nature.

The Islamic teachings attempt to invite people to global peace and a peaceful life on the basis of theism, justice and piety. So, in Islam peace is an immortal and primary law. Lo! Allah loveth not aggressors." (2: 190). This interpretation of peace which is based on Qur'anic teachings can develop a widespread peace around the world and terminate conflicts in many places. "Invite (all) to the way of your Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching; and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious: for your Lord knows best who has strayed from His path, and who receives guidance." (16: 125)

4. THE ROLE OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

In spite of these principles of peace in Islamic cultural heritage, we question the reason behind the violence in some Islamic societies; violence in various dimensions of direct or structural violence or cultural violence. To respond to this question, I would say that since there are many types of interpretation of Islamic doctrines from different points of view, and within different Islamic communities, hence, we are faced with the conflicting voices in some fields. However, we should not forget that there are conflicting voices within other religions as well. "The problem lies with the way religion is understood and practiced. It must be stressed at this point that the problem is not with religion per se. It is not the philosophy or the doctrines, it is not the practices or the rituals, which are the issue. Rather, it is our interpretation of religion which constitutes the problem. It is the meaning we attach to certain doctrines and rituals which creates difficulties. Over the centuries, most adherents of most of the faiths have developed an exclusive view of their particular religious tradition. God is seen as the God of their particular group. Truth and justice, love and compassion, are perceived as values which are exclusive to their religion. The unity that they seek is invariably the unity of their own kind. Their religion—they are passionately convinced—is superior to other religions. (Haar & Busuttil, 2005: 72-73). This Islamic theory of peace culture is misused in some Islamic societies because of poor knowledge of Islamic teachings or due to wrong education. And there are different interpretations of religion and its foundations among Muslims and there are also misunderstandings

of Islamic teachings. There is no question that the problem is not with the essence of Islam but with the problem of understanding and interpreting Islam. As a result, people are drawn into violence, war and strife because of some misunderstandings and misinterpretations of Islam's teachings.

One of the main causes of misunderstandings and misinterpretations of the Islamic teachings, is Fundamentalism, and the avoidance of rationality. The use of reason in understanding, and interpreting religion, has always been the subject of serious disputes among scholars throughout the history of religion. As a result of Fundamentalism, and the avoidance of rationality in the religious teachings, the individual has adopted a religious exclusivist approach and considers himself just and salvable, and that all other religions are void and misleading. One prominent example is the idea of Salafist religious exclusivist.

There is no doubt that education in any society can play a key role in human development and consequently in the growth and development of that society. Education in any society will play an important role in the cultivation of knowledgeable people and in the development of culture, social order and cohesion, the development of civic institutions and thus the development, progress and excellence of society. The human factor is the most important factor in the development, growth and development of a society. Therefore, in our age of information explosion, education can be the most effective factor in solving political and social challenges. It is so important that some social science experts have said that without cultural and social development, economic development would not be possible. Experts believe that “the spread of education around the world is not due to functional requirements, and not because of labor market demand, but because of the world-wide citizenship process and the democratic belief that the development of education is a component of civil society”. (Sadovnik, 2007: 7)

My definite suggestion for the realization of a society free of violence and a culture of peace is primarily to teach peace discourse in society. It has to become a public culture. The discourse of peace must be incorporated as an approach to the educational system. As a matter of fact, some countries have incorporated the discourse of peace into their educational system literature. From kindergarten and elementary school to university level, where there should be a department of peace and conflict resolution. To avoid conflicts and violence in societies on the one hand, cultural and religious pluralism must be accepted, interactions and friendship must be pursued, and on the other hand to reject exclusivism. Religious tolerance, which is based on the teachings of Islam must be followed. We must learn to embrace cultural and religious pluralism on the one hand, and pursue

interactions, friendships and rejection of exclusivism on the other hand to tolerate dissent.

5. THE APPROACH TO RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE AND BUILDING A CULTURE OF PEACE

In our time, there is an urgent need for good philosophical arguments for religious toleration in the encounter with religious diversity. They might reinforce settled habits of toleration and justify teaching toleration to people in society. The Kantian response to religious diversity is the view that all religious claims are on a par with respect to truth, because all teach the same thing or make the same claim. Kant distinguishes between “pure religious faith”, which is ‘a plain rational faith which can be convincingly communicated to everyone’, and “historical faith”, which is intimately linked with particular historical forms. The essential content of the former, of pure religious faith, is the understanding of all moral duties as given by God. Kant held that this content -the claim that all moral duties are given by God- is present in all particular religions. Therefore, Kant maintained that the fundamental religious claim, the “plain rational faith” is always and everywhere the same. This fundamental religious claim is discoverable and justifiable by reason alone, unaided by revelation, scripture and the like. The Kantian strategy has two essential parts: one is the reduction of all religious claims to a single fundamental claim, and second is the view that the claims of all actual religious communities bear approximately the same relation to this fundamental claim. “They are all concerned with salvation/ liberation/ enlightenment/ fulfilment...” (Hick, 1994: 86-87). Kant’s position is the view that the major world religions relate to the Ultimate Reality, in different ways. There is no public evidence that any one religion is unique or superior to others and thus has closer access to Ultimate Reality. Christianity is simply “one paradigm of the divine-human relationship among many others,” and thus “arguments for the absoluteness, superiority or uniqueness of Christianity become difficult if not impossible.” (McFague, 1985: 381).

John Hick, a contemporary advocator of a broadly Kantian strategy on religious diversity holds that there are indeed genuine differences and (at least apparent) incompatibilities among the claims of different religious communities. He divides these differences into three categories: incompatibilities with respect to historical matters, quasi-historical or trans-historical matters, and the ways of conceiving and experiencing religious beliefs. Hick holds that these incompatibilities that different religions claim are not important in religious regards. They do not make an important difference to what religion is really all about, which is “the transformation

of human existence from self-centeredness to Reality-centeredness.” (Hick, 1994: 95). Hick holds that the differences of belief between traditions are best seen as “different ways of conceiving and experiencing the one ultimate divine Reality.” (Hick, 1984: 229). Hick describes the Real in terms of the following functions:

The Real is thus not experienced as it is itself, but is postulated to satisfy (a) the basic faith that human religious experience is not purely projection but is at the same time a response to a transcendent reality or realities, and (b) the observation that Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism etc, which are communal responses to these different gods and absolute, seem to be more or less equally effective contexts for human transformation from self-centeredness, with all the evils and miseries that flow from this, to a re-entering in the Transcendent as experienced within one’s own traditions. (Hick, 2010: 284-5)

Muhammed Legenhausen has argued that in the Qur'an we have a pluralist position that tries to explain contradictions, better than Hick does:

one of the major problems faced by any form of pluralism, including the form of pluralism accepted in the Qur'an, according to which various religions were sent by Allah to His messengers in different times and places, is what to make of the apparent contradictions among the creeds of the different religions...Various means to resolve the contradictions are suggested in the Qur'an itself. (See: (2:75), (3:78), (5:41)) It is also claimed that what was revealed to the different prophets was the same, so that contradictions among creeds must be due to content apart from what was revealed. (See: (2:136), (3:84), (4:150), (42:13-14)) Religious differences are generally explained in the Qur'an as having arisen from sin: from pride in the partial truth each of the different groups has possessed and from envy. (See: (3:18), (23:53), (30:32), (42:14)) (Legenhausen, 1999: 140).

According to Qur'an, God ordained other religions by means of His prophets prior to His final revelation. However, the teaching of Judaism and Christianity were not incorrect. They were different paths towards God in different circumstances. For this reason, all of the divine religions are called Islam in the general sense of complete submission to the commands of Allah. While Muhammdian Islam used for the final revelation which is a specific sense of Islam. The Qur'an contains the verse: “The religion before Allah is Islam (submission to His will)” (3: 19). This seems to articulate an exclusivist position but some theologians interpreted the verse as a form of Islamic pluralism and remarked that by Islam here

meant the general sense of complete submission to the commands of Allah; so all of the divine religions are called Islam.

“They saw the differences in rituals and modes of worship among the various religions as man-made distinctions. As one of them observed, “The lamps are different, but the Light is the same.” (Ponniiah, 1984: 81).² We shall now show how this spirit of universal unity exists within a particular religious tradition. Since the tradition we are most familiar with is Islam, we shall draw our arguments from that tradition, though it must be emphasized that most of the other religions have an equally strong commitment to a unity transcending the boundaries of class, community and creed.

The fact that the primary purpose of Islam is to achieve the unity of humankind is clearly enunciated in the Qur'an itself. The Qur'an declares for instance, “Mankind were one community” and “Lo! this your religion is one religion and I am your Lord, so keep your duty unto Me.” (23: 52 in Pickthall, 1994)

The reference to “one religion” is to that one universal divine truth revealed to humankind from the very beginning. The Qur'an says that this was the truth that was revealed to Abraham and to Noah and to Moses and to Jesus. (42: 13). In fact, it makes it very clear that every community on earth has received this universal truth. In the words of the Qur'an, there is not a nation but a warner has passed among them (35: 24). And what is this universal truth? It is belief in God and doing good. This is lucidly explained in a Qur'anic verse.

And they say none shall enter paradise unless he is a Jew or a Christian, these are their vain wishes. Say 'Bring your proof if you are truthful; yes! Whosoever submits himself to Allah and he is a doer of good, for him there shall be his reward with his Lord, on such shall be no fear nor shall they grieve. The Jews say.” The Christians have nothing [true] to stand on”. And the Christians say, “The Jews have nothing to stand on,” although they [both] recite the Scripture. Thus do those who know not [I.e., the polytheists] speak the same as their words. But Allah will Judge between them on the Day of Resurrection concerning that over which they used to differ. (2: 111- 113).

وَقَالُوا لَنْ يَدْخُلَ الْجَنَّةَ إِلَّا مَنْ كَانَ هُودًا أَوْ نَصَارَى تِلْكَ أَمَانِيُّهُمْ قُلْ هَاتُوا بُرْهَانَكُمْ
 إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ (111) بَلَى مَنْ أَسْلَمَ وَجْهَهُ لِلَّهِ وَهُوَ مُحْسِنٌ فَلَهُ أَجْرُهُ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِ وَلَا
 خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ (112) وَقَالَتِ الْيَهُودُ لَيْسَتِ النَّصَارَى عَلَى شَيْءٍ

² This is a quote from the great Persian mystic Jalaluddin Rumi.

وَقَالَتِ النَّصَارَى لَيْسَتِ الْيَهُودُ عَلَى شَيْءٍ وَهُمْ يَتْلُونَ الْكِتَابَ كَذَلِكَ قَالَ الَّذِينَ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ مِثْلَ قَوْلِهِمْ فَاللَّهُ يَحْكُمُ بَيْنَهُمْ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ فِيمَا كَانُوا فِيهِ يَخْتَلِفُونَ (113).

“And yet, the Qur'an notes with regret, humankind destroyed this universal truth and became divided into sects.” (6: 160). While the Qur'an is opposed to sectarianism, it accepts that there are different ways of reaching the universal truth. It says, “For each we have appointed a divine law and a traced-out way. Had God willed He could have made you one community. But that He may try you by that which He hath given you. So vie one with another in good works”. (5: 48).

According to the Qur'an, revelation is universal, so God sent a revelation to all human beings and the main message of all revelations was one thing and it was monotheism.

لكل جعلنا منكم شرعة و منهاجاً و لو شاء الله لجعلهم امة واحدة ...

It means that “We have prescribed for every tribe Shari'ah. If God wills, He could make them one and the same nation.” Tabatabaei said that the Qur'an says: If God had willed, He could have created human beings and talents uniformly so that they would have from the beginning to the end the only viability of a Shari'a, but God did not do it, providing a platform for human beings to grow and evolve, and bragging is not possible in geographical or linguistic or racial areas, but rather in the passage of time and the development of one's ability to accept the perfect law so that one can enter the realm of the great divine Test. (Tabatabaei, 1995: 252).

Therefore, the plurality and diversity were due to the will of God. Accordingly, the Qur'an has never criticized the prophetic messages; rather, it has criticized the misunderstandings of some followers. There is no verse in the Qur'an that annulled previous religions. According to the Qur'an, those who believe in God, believe in the Hereafter and do good deeds will be saved. The Qur'an also confirms that Jews, Christians and Sabians will be rewarded.

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَ الَّذِينَ هَادُوا وَ النَّصَارَى وَ الصَّابِئِينَ مَنْ آمَنَ بِاللَّهِ وَ الْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَ عَمِلَ صَالِحاً فَلَهُمْ أَجْرُهُمْ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ وَ لَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَ لَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ.

6. SEYYED HOSSEIN NASR AND RELIGIOUS PLURALISM

The prominent Traditionalist Seyyed Hossein Nasr is one of the Muslim scholars who proposes a pluralistic view to religious diversity. He is a proponent of the idea known as Perennial Philosophy³ (in Latin *philosophia*

³ The pioneers of Perennial Philosophy as a holistic traditional view are thinkers such as Guénon, Coomaraswamy, Schuon, and Burckhardt. Perennial Philosophy is eternal

perennis). Perennial Philosophy differentiates between inward and outward aspects of religions and believes in multiplicity of manifestations while considering the reality behind them as the same. In other words: “While truth is one, its expressions are many” (Nasr, 2005: 24). Perennial Philosophy is an eternal knowledge which forms the core of all true religions, and embraces the primal and the historical, the Semitic and the Indian, the mythic and the ‘abstract’ types of religions (Nasr, 2005: 30). According to Perennial Philosophy, wisdom is essentially of divine origin, and knowledge is a sacred thing that God has given to man. In addition, Perennial Philosophy considers spirituality, commitment, and morality as other aspects of knowledge. Nasr writes:

By *philosophia perennis* ... is meant a knowledge which has always been and will always be and which is of universal character both in the sense of existing among peoples of different climes and epochs and of dealing with universal principles. This knowledge which is available to the intellect is, moreover, contained at the heart of all religions or traditions, and its realization and attainment is possible only through those traditions and by means of methods, rites, symbols, images and other means sanctified by the message from Heaven or the Divine which gives birth to each tradition. (2005: 28)

The traditionalists distinguish between the external form and the essence which that form manifests, or form and substance, so the external forms of a religion are seen as “accidents” which are issued forth from and return to a substance that remains independent of all its accidents. (Nasr, 2005: 31). Accordingly, Nasr maintains inner unity and outer multiplicity of religions. He says: “The Absolute does not, however, manifest Itself in the same manner in different religious universes. The Ultimate Reality manifests Itself in multifarious sacred worlds sometimes in mythical forms and at other times as “abstract” monotheism. Sometimes It manifests Its Names and Qualities in the sounds and forms of a sacred language and at other times as divinities symbolizing the various divine forces; hence the distinction between a polytheism aware of the Divine Unity transcending multiple sacred forms.” (Nasr, 1996: 19-20).

He believes that what makes religions different is only the outward appearance not the Reality they all are issued from. The idea that reality of all religions is the same is what Frithof Schuon calls “Transcendent Unity

wisdom that is at the heart of all traditions, from Vedanta and Buddhism to Kabbalah and the traditional Christian or Islamic metaphysics, and is the highest finding of human life. This view holds that there is a fixed thing that is the essence of all religions and traditions and does not change with temporal and spatial changes. What changes is the theological form or expression of this wisdom.

of Religions”. Each religion depends on the area and location in which it appears and the characteristics of people it comes for. Nasr says:

Revelation is always given in the language of the people to whom God addresses Himself. As the Quran says, “And We never sent a messenger save with the language of his folk that he might make [the message] clear for them.” Hence the multiplicity of religions in a world with multiple “humanities.” The human state therefore gives a certain particularity to various revelations of the Truth while the heart of these revelations remains above all form. (Nasr, 1989: 158)

Hence, doctrinal language play a great role in religious diversity. “No religion, whether it be Islam or Christianity, Hinduism or Buddhism, can be without a doctrine as to what is Absolute and what is relative. Only the doctrinal language differs from one tradition to another. Nor can any religion be without a method of concentrating on the Real and living according to It although the means again differ in different traditional climates” (Nasr, 2000: 1-2). According to Nasr’s traditionalist view, and with regard to the Quranic verses, “not only is the multiplicity of religions necessary, but it is also a reflection of the richness of the Divine Nature and is willed by God” (Nasr, 2004: 16). This can be better understood in comparison with John Hick’s idea about religious pluralism. Hick looks at the matter through modern philosophy in which epistemology plays a central role and using Kant’s discrimination between noumenon and phenomenon he tries to explain the diversity of religions. According to Hick the origin of religious diversity is difference in experiences of the Ultimate Reality. Different people with different epistemic backgrounds have variant experiences of the Ultimate Reality; hence they form their own conceptions of god which are not the same as others. In this view, different understandings are not genuine, because they are human made. So, to reach consensus, religions should leave their dogmatic position aside and try to be more convergent. This is the key to peace.

But in Nasr’s thoughts, the difference between religions is as authentic as their inward unity, because they all are formed by the will of God. Religion is God’s reaction to human needs and as a whole is originated from God. So, all religions, by all their differences and as they are (i.e. in their traditional form), must be honored and accepted.

According to Nasr, modernity and globalization have brought us a situation where we should accept plurality of religions and respect them. People in the past used to live in religiously homogenous traditional societies and usually did not encounter beliefs different from theirs. Hence

they considered their own beliefs as binding and accepted them in a dogmatic way. But today, this isolation is broken and people are facing different cultures and religions. Nowadays, to ignore other traditions is difficult, if not impossible. Believing in Transcendent unity of religions helps us to respect other religions in peace.

It is important to notice that Nasr talks about pluralism at the level of truth not only *soteriological pluralism*. It means that different religions propose equivalent truths, and because the truth ends in the salvation they all find salvation, and it is not the case only one or few religions find their way toward real salvation while followers of other religions find the salvation just by God's favor.

Nevertheless, it can be argued that some religions may have gone through alterations to their truth through time, thus different religions may not be the same, when it comes to access to the truth, as well as salvation. However, religions could still be considered as the same at the core level. Metaphorically, the Truth can be the tip of a mountain and religions are different paths to that tip; some are wide and easy to pass while others are narrower and harder, though eventually all will end to the top.

All of this is a denial of religious exclusivism and to have tolerance with others. And last but not least, the responsibility is on the intellectuals and the media to enlighten people to have better understanding of their faith in social aspects. People should be aware of peace as a primary universal human right. The media plays a central role in the public sphere to encourage people to have peaceful communications with each other. "The media is used as an effective tool for peace. Rather than promoting division, the media can advocate for strategies of conflict resolution, dialogue, cross-conflict understanding, and reconciliation" (Loewenberg, 2009: 174). As a peace journalist, they should identify, understand, and explain the roots of conflict and working against disinformation; providing balanced information from a variety of sources; and educate the public by offering principles of culture of peace.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we need a more peaceful world, in which a non-violent communication will be guaranteed. This paper suggests first, to teach peace discourse in society for the realization of a society free of violence and the culture of peace. Second, to avoid conflicts and violence in societies, cultural and religious pluralism should be accepted, interactions and friendships between people with different religions should be pursued, on the one hand, and to reject exclusivism and conflicts on the other hand.

Since religion is a crucial factor to secure peaceful world, as almost every war between the nations has involved wrong religious education, we strongly need to have a true interpretation of religious teachings. One of the main causes of misunderstandings and misinterpretations of the Islamic teachings is Fundamentalism, and the avoidance of rationality. Education in any society will play an important role in the cultivation of knowledgeable people and in the development of culture. Because the human factor is the most important factor in the development, growth and development of a society.

I have argued that there are many principles in Islamic teachings that provide a foundation for the culture of peace. The first, the acceptance of religious faith is optional. The second is Islam's emphasis on peace and non-violence as the primary law. The third principle is to pay attention to the spiritual self-awareness inherent in our human nature that can move people away from violence. In spite of these principles of peace in Islamic cultural heritage, however Islamic teachings are misunderstood and misinterpreted in some societies. The responsibility is on the intellectuals and the media to enlighten people to have better understanding of their faith in social aspects.

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