Peace and Conflict Resolution in the Islamic Tradition

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Since the events of September 11, 2001, Muslims have become aware that they cannot afford to live in impregnable fortresses and that living in a pluralistic milieu requires an active engagement with the "other." The events of September 11 also proved to the Muslim community that the silent majority syndrome has to end simply because Muslim acquiesce has encouraged an extremist expression of Islam. It is the extremists who have spoken on behalf of Islam as their acts of violence have drowned the silent voices of the Muslim majority. Hence, a discourse on the issue of peace and nonviolence within the Islamic tradition is to be welcomed. It is imperative to voice an opinion on an issue that is of major concern to millions of people, especially for a religion that has often been targeted as violent and militant.

In this paper, I will attempt to delineate the Qur'anic position on peaceful coexistence with the "other." In addition, I will examine the different modes of conflict resolution in Muslim societies in modern times. In the final section, I will discuss how dialogue can lead to peaceful coexistence and create an appreciation of the other.

Peace and Co-existence in the Qur'an

The Qur'anic view of peace and co-existence is interwoven with its view of a universal moral discourse that unites all human beings. According to the Qur'an, human beings are created with an innate disposition (*fitra*) that leads to knowledge of and belief in God. In fact, the Qur'an posits a universal morality for humankind that is conjoined to values

ingrained in the conscience of all human beings (30:30). This suggests a universal, ethical language that all human beings can connect to and engage in. As the Qur'an states, "He (God) has inspired in [human beings] the good or evil [nature] of an act, whosoever has purified it (the soul) has succeeded, one who corrupts it has surely failed." (91:8-10). The Qur'anic concept of a universal moral order is thus grounded in the recognition of an innate disposition engraved in the human conscience. Through this notion, Islam embraced certain universal human values that could form the basis for interaction with a diverse "other."

The basis of such a universal moral order can also be traced to verses like the following, "Humankind, be aware of your duties to your Lord, who created you from a single soul, and from it created its mate, and from the pair of them scattered abroad many men and women (4:1)." The verse suggests a common genesis and unity of human beings based on God's creation. It also implies that human beings have to recognize and live with their differences. On the basis of universal guidance and a common human origin, the Qur'an posits the presence of an objective and universally binding moral standard that is accessible to all intelligent beings. A striking feature of the Qur'anic discourse is the emphasis on the capacity of human beings to use their innate intelligence to comprehend universal truths. It is on the basis of their innate capacity and shared moral values that human beings can deal with others based on the principles of fairness and equity.

A major obstruction to peace arises when human beings take upon themselves the task of judging and condemning others. This can engender an exclusivist attitude and lead to the marginalization and even extermination of the other. In this respect, the Qur'an insists that guidance is the function of God, and it is He alone who has the right to decide the "spiritual destiny" of human beings. The Qur'an categorically maintains that the ultimate fate of human

beings be left to God, the true judge of human conduct. Not even the Prophet has the right to judge the ultimate fate of human beings. As it states, "Upon you [O Prophet] is the deliverance [of the message], upon us is the reckoning [of the deeds] (13:40)." In another verse, the Qur'an states, "Had God willed, they would not have been idolaters. We have not appointed you as a watcher over them, neither are you their guardian (6:107)." By elevating judgment to the divine realm, the Qur'an accommodates the space for coexistence on the human plane.

Fundamental to the Qur'anic conception of peaceful co-existence is the view that human beings are united under one God (2:213). They are to strive towards virtuous deeds (5:48), for the most noble person in the eyes of God is the one who is most pious (49:13). These and other verses command Muslims to build bridges of understanding and cooperation with fellow human beings so as to create a just social order.

Acceptance and Protection of the Other

Peaceful co-existence requires that people abstain from abusing and denigrating those who do not share their beliefs. Deriding and mocking others can often engender violence and hatred. Therefore, the Qur'an urges the respect for the beliefs of others. The Qur'an further states, "Had God willed, they would not have been not idolaters; and We have not appointed you a watcher over them, neither are you their guardian. Abuse not those to whom they pray, apart from God, otherwise, they will abuse God in revenge without knowledge. So We have decked out fair to every community their deeds; then to their Lord they shall return, and He will tell them what they have been doing" (6:107-108).

Qur'anic tolerance extends protection not only to Muslims and the people of the book (*ahl al-kitab*) but even to strangers who openly declare idolatry. As it says, "If one of the idolaters seeks protection, then grant him protection so that he may hear the word of God, and after that, send him to a place of safety" (9:6). The verse instructs Muslims not only to protect but also to ensure that no harm comes to the idolaters when they leave Muslim territory, and to send them to a place of safety. The discussion above indicates that the Qur'an envisioned a diverse community that was united under common moral values. Human beings are to coexist in peace and harmony. Diversity and differences in faith were to be judged by God only since, "Isn't He (God) the best of judges"(95:8)?

Qur'anic verses allow warfare under specific circumstances and stipulate that the Muhammad should accept peace overtures from the enemy (8:61). Verses 2:192-93 command the Prophet to cease hostilities if the enemy desists. In order not to transgress, Muslims are required to respond proportionally to the injury done to them. Even here, the Qur'an urges restraint by accepting blood money and forgiveness.

The Qur'an sanctions *jihad* to establish a moral order that will protect the welfare of the Muslim community against both internal and external enemies. The permission to engage in hostilities was a response to the threat posed by the powerful Meccan tribes. A prescriptive measure was needed to redress the harm and the wrongs suffered by the Muslims in the face of Meccan aggression. These divinely sanctioned campaigns were a response to the hostility of the Meccan pagans. The Qur'an does not state that force is to be used against all unbelievers; only those unbelievers who demonstrate their hostility to Islam by trying to undermine the Islamic polity and by persecuting Muslims

are to be targeted. It is Meccan hostility, rather than their disbelief, that is the target of the Qur'anic verses on *jihad*.

The Qur'an does not accept the idea of unlimited or aggressive warfare. By the assiduous usage of the term *la ta'tadu* (do not transgress) in the context of warfare, it can be argued that the Qur'an qualifies *jihad* with a moral condition of restraint. It also exhorts Muslims seek avenues of peace. Thus it restricts rather than gives free license to recourse to war.[1]

Peace in the Juridical Literature

There has been limited discourse on peace in the exegetical and juridical literature. Most of the discourse was focused on warfare and the extension of the abode of Islam (*dar al-Islam*). For Muslim jurists, the discourse on peace was set in the context of a general theory, which presupposed that peaceful coexistence with a Muslim state was possible only when *dar al-harb* (the territory of non-Muslims) was subdued. Anything less than that was construed as seen as a compromise of Muslim ascendancy and an act of relinquishing power. This was in violation of the Qur'anic guideline of peaceful coexistence.

Furthermore, when Muslim jurists discussed peaceful coexistence with non-Muslims in the legal literature, it was in the context of certain measures that would allow for a temporary cessation of hostilities. Shafi'i jurists, for example, inserted between *dar al-Islam* and *dar al-harb* a third category, *dar al-sulh*, the abode of truce. *Dar al-sulh* refers to the territories where peace exists with an Islamic state based on treaties, alliances, and cooperation.

[1] There are other verses in which Muslims are seemingly encouraged to kill disbelievers wherever they are found. I shall deal with the "sword verses" later on.

During the period of the truce, *dar al-sulh* would have to pay the *jizya* (a tax levied on the people of the book) or cede a portion of its territory. [2]

According to al-Shafi'i (d. 820), the imam could contract the truce if the welfare of the Muslims required it. However, al-Shafi'i's theory only suspended, rather than eliminated, warfare. Based on the precedent established by the Prophet's agreement with the Meccan tribes at al-Hudaybiyya in 630 C.E., the truce could not exceed 10 years.

The jurists were also divided on the question of signing the period of the peace treaty. Malik b. Anas (d. 795) and Ahmad b. Hanbal (d. 855), two prominent jurists, supported the notion of an indefinite peace treaty as long as it served the interests of the Muslim community.[3] However, not all jurists recognized the existence of *dar al-sulh*. The Hanafis did not accept it whereas Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328) argued against putting a restriction on the length of the peace treaty. [4]

The jurists conceived of another scenario for temporary peace. One of the most important aspects of *siyar*[5] was the guarantee of free passage or security *(aman)*, which any

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[2] Muhammad al-Idris al-Shafi'i, *Kitab al-Umm* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1990), 4:103-04.

[3] M. Raquibuz Zaman, "Islamic Perspectives on Territorial Boundaries," in *Islamic Political Ethics: Civil Society, Pluralism and* Conflict, ed. Sohail Hashmi (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 94.

[4] Khaled Abou El Fadl, "Between Functionalism and Morality: The Juristic Debates on the Conduct of War," in *Islamic Ethics of Life: Abortion, War and* Euthanasia, ed. Jonathan Brockopp (Columbia, University of South Carolina Press, 2003), 120.

[5] *Siyar* describes the conduct of Muslims in their relations with non-believers of enemy territory as well as with people with whom the believers had made treaties, who may have been temporarily or permanently in Muslims' land. In addition, *siyar* also describes the laws of conduct with apostates and rebels.

Muslim could grant to a visitor from *dar al-harb* (called *harbi*).[6] The *aman* is a pledge of security through which a non-Muslim would be entitled to protection for up to a year while he is in *dar al-Islam*. The holder of the *aman* (called *musta'min*) is not considered to be a *dhimmi*,[7] neither is he required to pay the *jizya*. The *aman* can be renewed at the end of the period if he agrees to pay the *jizya* and to become a *dhimmi*. The *aman* suspended, albeit temporarily, the state of hostilities.

Despite the focus on warfare in Muslim juridical literature, there have been many instances where Muslims have co-existed peacefully with non-Muslims. Indeed, to portray Islam as intrinsically violent and incompatible with Western values is to ignore Muslim engagement with and contribution to Western civilization. The tendency to view Islam through violence and militant lens distorts the view that Islam has a rich cultural heritage and precepts that necessitate co-existence with the other. Spain is a great example where Muslims not only co-existed peacefully with Christians and Jews, but also protected them and shared their scientific achievements with their counterparts. For much of Islamic history, Muslim societies have been remarkably open to the outside world.[8] Recounting such anecdotes in Christian-Muslim encounters serve two purposes; they not only destroy the myth of Islam as an intrinsically violent and militant religion but also provide a paradigm for co-existence and collaborative actions between the people of the two faith groups.

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[6] There is a difference among jurists as to who can give the *aman*. See Majid Khadduri, *War and Peace in the Law of Islam* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1955), 164-65.

[7] The *ahl al-dhimma* in the Qur'an and early history of Islam were the protected minorities, both Jewish and Christian, who had chosen not to convert to Islam.

[8] Eickelman, "Islam and Ethical Pluralism," in *Islamic Political Ethics*, ed. Sohail Hashmi, 118.

In the past, Muslims not only tolerated but even protected minority groups, especially Jews and Christians, the people of the book. In ninth-century Baghdad, Hunayn ibn Ishaq, a Christian, directed the translation academy when the classical Greek works and Hindu and Persian scientific treatises were translated to Arabic. The Caliph al-Ma'mun (d. 833) would send emissaries to Constantinople to bring back manuscripts written in Greek so that they could be translated. Greek works like Aristotle's *Rhetoric* and *Poetics* and Plato's *Dialogues*, were saved due to these translations. It was through the works of Avicenna (d. 1037) and Averroes (d. 1198) that Aristotelianism and neo-Platonism came into Europe.[9] Averroes' commentaries on Aristotle were indispensable to Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274) and Moses Maimonedes (d. 1204).[10]

Spain provides an excellent precedent where Muslims not only lived peacefully with Christians and Jews, but also shared their scientific accomplishments with them in the construction of a great civilization. Although treated as second-class citizens, the Jews of Spain were given religious liberty; they could run their own affairs based on their own laws. Cordoba was the center of a brilliant Jewish culture epitomized by Hasday b. Shaprut, a scholar and physician serving the caliphs 'Abd al-Rahman III and al-Hakam.[11] He was a Jewish physician in the Caliph's court, who, at various times, held important diplomatic and financial responsibilities.

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[9] Luce Lopez-Baralt, "The Legacy of Islam in Spanish Literature," in *The Legacy of Muslim* Spain, Salma Khadra Jayyusi ed. (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 1:509.

[10] James A. Bill and John Alden Williams eds., *Roman Catholics and Shi'i Muslims* (Chapel Hill & London: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 101.

[11] Robert Hillenbrand, "The Ornament of the World: Medieval Cordoba as a Cultural Centre," in *The Legacy of Muslim* Spain, ed. Salma Jayyusi, 1:124.

Like Hasday, Isma'il b. Naghrila (d. 1056), known in Hebrew as Samuel the Nagid, was also a central figure in the Jewish community.[12] Bearing the Hebrew title *Nagid* (prince) he not only supported Hebrew poetry and Talmudic scholarship, but was himself one of the most accomplished men of his time in both fields.[13]

Christians and Jews were also involved in the Royal Court and in the intellectual life of Cordoba. Muslim-Christian interaction can be discerned from the following remark made by the Bishop of Cordoba, Alvaro. He stated regarding his Christian co-religionists, "…hardly one can write a passable Latin letter to a friend, but innumerable are those who can express themselves in Arabic and can compose poetry in that language with greater art than the Arabs themselves."[14] Other Christians served as administrators, financiers, physicians, artists, and craftsmen in the royal court.[15]

The discoveries by Muslim scientists were transmitted to the west. Cordoba's mosque was famed as a centre for higher learning on a par with Cairo and Baghdad and was the earliest medieval university in Europe. Major contributions were made in music, philology, geography, history, alchemy, chemistry, medicine, astronomy, philosophy, botany, mathematics, and agriculture.[16] Hellenism was largely reintroduced into Europe by way of Spain and Sicily. It was

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[12] Raymond P. Scheindlin, "The Jews in Muslim Spain," *The Legacy of Muslim* Spain, ed. Salma Jayyusi, 1:190.

[13] Ibid. The Muslim rulers of Spain relied on Jews in diplomacy, finance and public administration, because the Jews could not aspire to ultimate political power. Thus, they posed a lesser risk to the political authorities.

[14] Robert Hillenbrand, "The Ornament," in *The Legacy of Muslim* Spain, ed. Salma Jayyusi, 1:115.

[15] Ibid. 123.

[16] Ibid. 122.

this phenomenon, which made the European Renaissance possible.[17] Such accounts are important to mention as they remind us of how, by adopting a nonviolent posture, Muslims, Jews and Christians established a brilliant civilization for posterity.

Peace and Conflict Resolution in Islam

Many Muslims have questioned the formulations of the classical jurists, claiming that their interpretations are no longer binding in contemporary times. In particular, the scholars of al-Azhar, one of the oldest institutes of Islamic learning, have emphasized the social rather than militant dimension of *jihad*. According to them, *jihad* is a peaceful social struggle against illiteracy, poverty, and disease. They underline the peaceful nature of the Islamic message.[18]

Muhammad Shaltut, the rector of al-Azhar, asserts that Islam is open to pluralism. He also claims that the Qur'an does not require Muslims to resort to warfare when they proselytize. Fighting cannot be a part of the Islamic mission he argues, for the heart of Muhammad's mission is to bring good tidings and to warn humanity.[19] Since war is an immoral situation, Shaltut continues, Muslims are required to live at peace with non-Muslims.[20]

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[17] Luce Lopez-Baralt, "The Legacy of Islam," in *The Legacy of Muslim* Spain, ed. Salma Jayyusi, 1:509.

[18] Bassam Tibi, *The Challenge of Fundamentalism: Political Islam and the New World Disorder* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 58.

[19] John Kelsay, *Islam and War: A Study in Comparative Ethics* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 40.

[20] Bassam Tibi, "War and Peace in Islam," in *Islamic Political Ethics*, ed. Sohail Hashmi, 183.

Muslims who have accentuated peaceful coexistence with non-Muslims have looked to the Qur'an as a legitimating source for their pronouncements. From its inception, Islam recognized the role of forgiveness in conflict resolution and combating violence. Thus, the Prophet is reported to have said, "God fills with peace and faith the heart of one who swallows his anger, even though he is in a position to vent it."[21] Muslims are urged to forgive especially when their rights have been violated and they are in a position to exact revenge.

Retaliation is a strictly defined legal principle that can perpetuate a culture of violence and a cycle of carnage. The Qur'an evidently wants to replace this with a culture of peace. While permitting retaliation, the Qur'an urges the victim to forgive and eschew revenge (2:178). To inject peace in a series of retaliatory measures requires forgiveness as a healing and empowering process so as to restore human relationship.[22]

Whereas a punitive response is often considered necessary when harm is inflicted, retribution is to be linked to a restorative process. Thus, verse 2:179 states that, "In [the law of] retribution is a source of life, O people of understanding." The verse invites people to replace the cycle of violence by considering retributive justice as a process of rehabilitation. In this way, the Qur'an is replacing death caused by retaliation with life through forgiveness.

Retributive justice, according to the Qur'an, should aim at redressing the wrongs by making the offender acknowledge responsibility and by encouraging the victim to consider

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[21] Mohammed Abu-Nimer, *Nonviolence and Peace Building in Islam: Theory and Practice* (Gainesville, University Press of Florida, 2003), 67.

[22] Abdulaziz Sachedina, *The Islamic Roots of Democratic Pluralism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 105.

alternatives to the perpetuation of violence through retribution.[23] The offender acknowledges the harm his acts have done so that a repaired relationship between the offender and victim can reinstate the dignity of both. Acknowledgement of injury inflicted is the first step in seeking forgiveness. Repentance and a genuine sense of remorse is another. The Qur'an also offers an alternative to violence by recommending the acceptance of blood money as compensation.

There is a clearly articulated preference in Islam for nonviolence and forgiveness over retribution. The Qur'an is also concerned about proportionality even in retribution. By stipulating appropriate levels of punitive response when attempting to restore violated rights or correct injustices, it regulates acts of retribution, for these should not exceed the extent of the original injury. [24]

On the part of the victim, forgiveness is preferred over retribution as he foregoes the moral right of demanding injury by inflicting more injury. As verse 42:40 states in this context, "… whoever forgives and thereby brings about a reestablishment of harmony, his reward is with God; and God loves not the wrongdoers." By his acceptance of compensation in the face of repentance and the acknowledgement of the harm that the offender has inflicted, the victim demonstrates willingness to rehabilitate the offender in society. The victim is, in turn, rewarded by God.

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[23] Ibid., 112.

[24] On the role of forgiveness as a tool in peace making and relationship building see Marc Gopin, *Holy War, Holy Peace: How Religion Can Bring Peace to the Middle East* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 110-11, 129-130.

Approaches to conflict resolution also appropriate religious values and traditional rituals of reconciliation. Scholars have also recognized the role that culture plays in conflict and peacemaking, and have affirmed the potential contributions of diverse institutions to conflict resolution. Cultural modes of reconciliation include acceptance of individual and collective responsibility of wrongdoing, attentiveness to face-related issues (public status, shame) and the achievement of restorative justice.[25] Muslims have delineated other processes for resolving conflicts in a peaceful manner. Conflicts are also resolved based on local customs such as public acts of repentance,[26] *sulh* (reconciliation),[27] and *tahkim* (arbitration).[28] Frequently, communal leaders and village elders facilitate a process of reconciliation. During this phase, the parties agree upon the outcome of the arbitration. If they publicly accept the outcome, then there is usually an amount of compensation to be paid, an amount that is determined before the public ceremony.

Islamic and Arab values are often used to resolve disputes. The traditional notion of '*urf* (customary law) functions as a mechanism for social control and cohesiveness, bringing the tribe's members together into a unified community. Such measures often help maintain

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[25] Abdul Aziz Said, Nathan Funk, and Ayse Kadayifci, "Islamic Approaches to Peace and Conflict Resolution," in *Peace and Conflict Resolution in Islam: Precept and Practice*, Abdulaziz Said, Nathan Funk and Ayse Kadayifci eds (Lanham: University Press of America, 2001), 10.

[26] On the role of repentance in cultivating personality changes and humility see Gopin, *Holy War, Holy Peace,* 118-19.

[27] On the role of *sulh* in peace making see ibid., 136-37; George Irani and Nathan Funk, "Rituals of Reconciliation: Arab-Islamic Perspectives," in *Peace and Conflict* Resolution, ed. Said *et al.*, 183. The *sulh* rituals are often are conducted in public. See Gopin, *Holy War, Holy Peace*, 136.

[28] For details of this see, Gopin, *Holy War, Holy Peace*, 97; Ahmad Mousalli, "An Islamic Model for Political Conflict Resolution: *Tahkim* (Arbitration)," in *Peace and Conflict Resolution*, ed. Said *et al.*, 150-51.

social control. Administering an oath and offering testimony and evidence are other important methods of customary law. Tribal leaders use the Qur'an to administer the oath. It is believed that a false oath would have catastrophic effects on the person and or his/her family. The phrasing of the oath varies with the nature of the case involved.[29]

Recent measures in Iran have also tried to promote a nonviolent, peaceful image of Islam. Ayatollah Dr. Seyed Mohammad Bojnourdi, a former member of the Supreme Judicial Council in Iran, believes that when the 12th messianic Imam, the Mahdi reappears he will guide mankind towards humanity and Islam through cultural means, reasoning, and logic instead of resorting to force.[30] This view is in contrast to the generally held view that when the messiah appears, he will fight and convert non-believers and those who oppose his mission.

Ayatollah Bojnourdi also believes that the current method of administering certain Islamic punishments weakens Islam and presents a distorted image of the religion to the world. He proposes that in the execution of Islamic punishments, it would be better to take advantage of the views of psychologists, sociologists and other experts. Bojnourdi further states that the Islamic penal code law is based on the principle of "elimination of obscene deeds." It is not mandatory, he argues, to resort to punishment if someone commits an offense, since the principle in Islam is based on correction and development of mankind. "The life style of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) and Imam 'Ali (the first Shi'ite Imam) attest to the fact that at the time of punishment, they would first resort to admonition and guidance in order to lead the convict to repent. In many cases,

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[29] Mohammed Abu-Nimer, *Nonviolence and Peace Building*, 93.

[30] Based on an email I received from a friend.

punishment would be averted if the offender repented."[31] Thus, in many cases of punishment, if the convict repents prior to the approval of the case by the court, the responsibility of the court to look into the offense would be dropped as well.

Bojnourdi further maintains that if the process for execution of penalty results in the denigration of Islam and causes the people, especially the youth, to demean the religion, then the process should then be revised so that no causes of such denigration would remain. If certain punishments such as flogging in public create a negative impression regarding Islam, such a practice should be abandoned. This is because the preservation of the dignity and prestige of Islam is the prime task and a duty that has priority over other obligations.

Peace through Dialogue

One of the most potent ways to promote peace is by engaging in inter-faith dialogue. In its discourse with Christians and Jews, the people of the book, the Qur'an invites them to the notion of a shared religious community based on the belief in one God. Thus, the Prophet Muhammad is instructed to tell them, "Say! O people of the book! Come to a word common between us and you, that we serve none but God, and that we associate not aught with Him, and do not some of us take others as Lords, apart from God. And if they turn their backs, say, 'bear witness that we are Muslims'" (3:64).

The Qur'an also outlines the form that dialogue should take and the way in which it should be conducted. It suggests that Muslim interaction with the other should be accompanied with proper demeanor and attitude. As the Qur'an states, "Do not discuss with the people of the book except in the best way possible, apart from those who are unjust among themselves" (29:46). Furthermore, the Qur'an states, "God does not forbid

[31] Ibid.

you from establishing relations of generosity and just behavior with those who have not fought against you over your religion and who have not evicted you from your dwellings. God loves those who act fairly" (60:8). Verses such as these reflect the Qur'an's response to those who claim that it prohibits Muslims from interacting with non-Muslims.

Historically, the Muslim encounter with Christians generated much debate, discussions, and even disputations between the parties.[32] As the parties argued for the preponderance of their distinctive theological points and tried to refute the arguments of their interlocutors, early Muslim-Christian encounters took the form of polemics rather than dialogue.[33] For example, Timothy, who was the head of the Nestorians in Iraq, had discussions with the 'Abbasid caliph al-Mahdi in 781 C.E.[34] Timothy had to respond to eight questions regarding various points of Christian beliefs. He was able to present a well-articulated and nuanced exposition of Christian theology.[35]

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[32] The Prophet Muhammad is reported to have met and discussed with Christians from Najran. See Muhammad b. Ishaq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans. A. Guillaume (London: Oxford University Press, 1955), 179.

[33] For a summary of Muslim polemics against Christians in the early history of Islam see Montgomery Watt, *Muslim-Christian Encounters: Perceptions and Misperceptions* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), 65-66. On the early Muslim-Christian debates and refutation of each other's arguments see Jacques Waardenburg, *Muslims and Others, Relations in Context* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2003), 136-40.

[34] Montgomery Watt, *Muslim-Christian Encounters*, 63.

[35] Jacques Waardenburg, *Muslims and Others*, 112. In response to a question posed by the 'Abbasid Caliph, the Assyrian patriarch is reported to have said that Muhammad had walked in the path of the prophets. See David Kerr, "He Walked in the Path of the Prophets: Toward Christian Theological Recognition of the Prophethood of Muhammad" in *Christian-Muslim Encounters*, ed. Y. Haddad and Wadi Haddad (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1995), 426.

Most Muslim scholars were content to emphasize Christianity's deviation and corrupt beliefs and practices. Only a few scholars like al-Mas'udi (d. 956) and al-Shahrastani (d. 1153) were well versed in Christianity and had read the Christian scriptures in some detail. Later on, the Andalusian scholar Ibn Hazm (d. 1064) wrote a polemical tract, refuting Christian doctrines, especially those pertaining to the divinity of Jesus.[36] Al-Ghazali (d. 1111) also wrote a refutation of the divinity of Jesus.[37] As Hossein Nasr states, Jewish and Christian scriptures have rarely been studied seriously by the Muslims, and have often been subsumed under the category of abrogated texts or those which were interpolated by human beings.[38]

The Nature of Inter-faith Dialogue

Dialogue is interwoven to the establishment of peaceful relations with others because it provides access to windows of understanding of how others define themselves and it challenges us to grow in our own faith through the experience of the other. It necessitates a shift in paradigm, asking us to embrace those we have previously excluded or demonized. We tend to exclude or marginalize others in different ways. These range from assimilation, abandonment, indifference, and domination of the other.[39] Exclusion is also conjoined with

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[36] Montgomery Watt, *Muslim-Christian Encounters*, 65, 72.

[37] Ibid, 67.

[38] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "Comments on a Few Theological Issues in the Islamic-Christian Dialogue," in *Christian-Muslim Encounters*, ed. Y. Haddad, 461.

[39] Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace, A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 75. See also Liyakatali Takim, "From Conversion to Conversation: Interfaith Dialogue in Post-911 America," in *The Muslim World*, 94, no. 3 (2004): 343-357.

the distortion rather than simply ignorance of the other. As Miroslav Volf states, "it (exclusion) is a willful misconstruction, not mere failure of knowledge."[40]

Exclusion often entails cutting of the bonds of humanity that connect us as moral human beings and can generate a wide range of emotional responses ranging from hatred to indifference and even cursing of or killing the other. The other emerges as an inferior being that must be either assimilated by being made like the self or subjugated to the self.[41]

Dialogue is the first step to accommodate or make space within oneself for the other. The challenge for both Muslims and Christians when they converse is to seek opportunities for interpretations that can make a community see the enemy in a new way. It is essential that we move away from defining ourselves over and above an enemy "other." This is an important measure to establish peaceful relationship. In this sense, I believe, that we need to go beyond tolerating or understanding the other.[42] More than ever, there is a need to embrace the other. This suggests a different function of dialogue, one that can bring the hearts - not just the minds - of the people together. Dialogue has become an effective act of affirmation, of listening, and of different hearts coming together. Muslims and non-Muslims have met to

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[40] Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion*, 76.

[41] Ibid, 67.

[42] The root of the term tolerance comes from the medieval toxicology and pharmacology, marking how much poison a body could tolerate before it would succumb to death. See Omid Safi, "Introduction: The Times are A-Changing; - A Muslim Quest for Justice, Gender Equality, and Pluralism," in *Progessive Muslims: On Justice, Gender and Pluralism*, ed. Omid Safi (Oxford: Oneworld, 2003), 24.

share their experiences of September 11, 2001 and to engage one another so as to help construct a more humane and just world.[43]

One of the major obstacles to reaching an understanding of the other is when we compare our ideals with the realities of the other. Viewed in this context, the violence perpetrated by members of one party is often contrasted with the ideals of peace and love of the other. A more appropriate basis of comparison is to contrast our ideals with theirs or our realities with the realities of those we dialogue. When communities compare their respective realities, they often discover that both of them have been unjust to each other, and, in the name of religion, have committed atrocious acts. Indeed, disputes between groups often arise when one party believes that it is the only injured group or victim and refuses to accept its role in the conflict. Dialogue provides the challenge and opportunity for both Muslims and non-Muslims to acknowledge that they have both inflicted and suffered much pain. For this to occur, dialogue needs to go beyond merely understanding the other; it has also to provide the platform for people to acknowledge and experience the pain of the other. As they relate their experiences in the past two years, their partners in dialogue have both communicated and internalized the pain. As a friend commented, "By internalizing the other's pain, dialogue enables me to view the other as a brother."

Given the realities after the events of September 11, 2001, dialogue can no longer be confined to a room where partners talk about peace and understanding. It must also confront the realities of hate, discrimination, and violence in society. Collaborative actions have become more important since September 11, 2001 as Muslims have realized that conversations with their non-Muslim friends ought to lead to shared commitment so as to

[43] On specific steps toward building new relationship see Marc Gopin, *Holy War*, chapter 10.

address humanitarian issues that concern both communities. This sense of shared commitment and concern to address humanitarian issues has resulted in dialogue in action rather than mere conversation.

As Tariq Ramadhan correctly states, "One of the best testimonies that a religious or spiritual tradition can give of itself lies in acts of solidarity between its adherents and others. To defend the dignity of the latter, to fight so that our societies do not produce indignity, to work together to support marginalized and neglected people, will certainly help us know one another better, but it will, above all, make known the essential message that shines at the heart of our traditions: never neglect your brother in humanity and learn to love him or at least to serve him."[44]

Challenges for Muslims in Contemporary Times

Muslim discourse on war and peace has been defined primarily by the juridical literature. Especially after the events of September 11, 2001, we are witnessing a period of reinterpretation and redefinition of the notion of *jihad* in the Muslim community. It has been argued that the Qur'an offers a distinctly modern perspective on tolerance and respect in a multi-ethnic, multi-communal world.[45] The challenge for Muslims in contemporary times is to recover the tolerance and means for peaceful coexistence through the Qur'an rather than the juridical and exegetical understanding which were formulated to assert the subjugation of the "other" in a particular historical context. As they engage in a re-examination of

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[44]Tariq Ramadan, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*, (Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004), 212.

[45] Eickelman, "Islam and Ethical Pluralism," in *Islamic Political Ethics*, ed. Sohail Hashmi, 115.

traditional exegesis, the point of departure for Muslims has to be the Qur'an itself rather than the multi-faceted and multi-layered scholarly discourse that has accumulated since the eighth century.

The moral tenor of the Qur'an shows that it wants to engage humanity in a moral discourse where all human beings can connect with the Qur'an and with each other based on universal values. As Sohail Hashmi argues, there are few ethical works that outline the Qur'anic vision of coexistence or warfare. Muslims need to disentangle Islamic ethics from medieval Islamic law and re-examine the Qur'anic pronouncement on war and peace in light of its ethical axioms.[46] Thus, the challenge for Muslims is to draw on this Qur'anic vision so as to develop just interreligious and intercultural relationships in a world of cultural and religious diversity.

Muslims are also confronted with the challenge of contextual hermeneutics in dealing with the pronouncements of the Qur'an on specific legal issues like hostility and warfare. Verses on *jihad* must be understood taking into account the particular conditions of persecution and oppression in which they were revealed. Returning to the Qur'an and prophetic traditions in their proper historical context is often circumvented by the juridical interpretations that promoted the hegemonic interests of the Islamic state ignoring, in the name of Islam, the ecumenical and universal message of the Qur'an. Muslim scholars and jurists have to engage in hermeneutic and interpretive exercises to provide a coherent re-evaluation of classical formulations and to reassert the Qur'anic ecumenical and inclusivist vision of peace. Stated differently, Muslims need to go beyond the classical formulation on

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[46] Sohail Hashmi, "Islamic Ethics in International Society," in *Islamic Political Ethics*, ed. Sohail Hashmi, 148.

dhimmis, *siyar*, and non-believers. Boundaries have to be re-mapped since the delineation of *dar al-Islam* and *dar al-harb* is no longer applicable. Furthermore, Muslims must articulate a theory of international relations that will incorporate notions of dignity, freedom of conscience, rights of minorities, and gender equality based on the notion of universal moral values.

Conclusion

Peace requires changes in our worldviews. The quest for peace challenges us to reevaluate how we have viewed the other. It also necessitates a shift in paradigm, asking us to embrace those we have previously excluded or demonized. The challenge is to seek opportunities for interpretations that can make a community see the enemy in a new way. This is an important measure to establish peaceful relationship.

There is a concurrent requirement to move away from defining ourselves over and above an enemy "other." The starting point is to re-examine traditions that draw boundaries of exclusion and marginalization. Peaceful coexistence is only possible when we no longer see a group as the other but as a concrete human community with ancient values and norms. Ultimately, peaceful relations between human beings are grounded on a community's construction of an order based on egalitarianism, justice, and a concern for the moral and social well being of all its citizens.

Contemporary Muslims are confronted with hegemonic values of the past and the emerging political reality that often challenges the applicability of those values. The tension between the peaceful and militant strains of Islam can be resolved only through the reexamination of the specific contexts of the rulings and the ways in which they were

conditioned by the times. This re-interpretive task demands that Muslims undertake the task of re-evaluating the classical and medieval juridical corpus.