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# Editorial

Hadrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad, Khalifatul Masih V, the Supreme Head of the worldwide Ahmadiyya Muslim community, returned to London on 14 April 2004 after a month long visit encompassing Ghana, Burkina Faso, Benin and Nigeria. He opened more than twenty new mosques and visited a number of the community's hospitals, clinics, schools and colleges. He met Mr. John Ajyekum Kufuor, President of the Republic of Ghana, who remarked that he considered the Supreme Head to be a Ghanaian. We shall be featuring Huzur's address to the Annual Convention in the June edition of *The Review of Religions*. Huzur also met Mr Mathieu Kerekou, President of the Republic of Benin, and Mr Blaise Compaore, President, and Hon. Mr Permanga Ernest Yonhi, Prime Minister of the Republic of Burkina Faso.

In this edition, however, we are featuring the Supreme Head's lecture on 'Islam is a Religion of Peace', delivered at the Université D'Abomey – Calavi, Cotonou, the capital of the Republic of Benin. We have supplemented this lecture by an address by the Amir and Missionary in Charge of Ghana, Mr Abdullah Wahab Adam on 'Religious Tolerance', delivered a year earlier. These two articles need to be read in the backdrop of comments by the former Archbishop Lord Carey in Rome: 'Sadly, apart from a few courageous examples, very few

Muslim leaders condemn clearly and unconditionally the evil of suicide bombers who kill innocent people.' Lord Carey would find these two articles, an eye-opener on how far Islam goes. There is no parallel teaching in any other scripture. Suicide bombers, like extremism, fundamentalism and terrorism, are totally alien to Islamic teachings. Then Lord Carey added, 'Muhammad, acknowledged by all in spite of his religious greatness to be an illiterate man, is said to have received God's word direct, word by word from angels, and scribes recorded them later. Thus believers are told, because they have come direct from Allah, they are not to be questioned or revised... During the past 500 years, critical scholarship has declined, leading to strong resistance to modernity.'

Although the Holy Qur'an certainly promotes reflection upon its true meaning and further study, it is a complete Book. If it is not from God, Lord Carey should prove it first before he passes judgement on it. The Qur'an has never required any supplement. No one has ever been able to produce anything like its opening seven verses. On the other hand, a teaching as basic as the Lord's prayer has been rewritten by the Church time and again. But what has its revision achieved? Has it made Christians better? Dwindling attendance tell a very different story. Perhaps that is where Lord Carey should concentrate

# Islam is a Peaceful Religion

A lecture by Hadh]rat Mirza Masroor Ahmad, Khalifatul Masih V, Supreme Head of the worldwide Ahmadiyya Muslim community delivered at the Universite D'Abomey-Calavi Cotonou, Benin, during his recent most succesful visit in Ghana, Burkino Faso, Benin and Nigeria.

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*Dear students and staff members  
at this university,  
Assalamu alaikum  
warahmatullah.*

I have been asked to shed some light on Islam as a peaceful religion. In view of the shortage of time, I can only address this subject briefly.

Whenever one wishes to speak about Islam as a religion of peace, the question naturally springs to mind that whereas there are so many religions in the world such as Judaism, Christianity, Hinduism, Budhism, etc., when it comes to finding out whether Islam is a religion of peace, why should Islam be the odd one out?

One reason for this is that a few years after the beginning of Islam, anti-Islamic powers began a propaganda that Islam is a religion of extremism and violence and

wants to compel others into belief by means of the sword. This, of course, is incorrect. In the beginning, the Muslims of Makkah suffered persecution but they remained silent. Finally, they migrated to Madinah but there too the disbelievers hounded the Muslims and forced upon them a battle to which I will revert later. The proof against those opponents who allege that Islam was spread by the sword is that although the disbelievers of Makkah raised all sorts of objections, yet history stands witness to the fact that the people of Makkah themselves never complained that the Muslims had used the sword against the disbelievers to compel them to change their faith.

Secondly, what has given Islam a bad name is an ugly and awful image of extremism presented, whether knowingly or unwittingly, by some Muslim groups and

organisations, and these groups unfortunately had personal vested interests.

In order to see a religion's beauties or its defects, justice requires that you should make its teachings or its holy scripture the anvil by which to judge it, otherwise everyone would accuse every other faith willy-nilly. For instance, the teaching of Christianity, according to the Holy Bible, is:

'But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.'

*(Matthew: 5:39)*

But, in Bosnia or Iraq or other countries, America and the other Western powers, resorted or are resorting to aggression. If, however, we say that the Christian teaching is that if anyone raises his head against you, you should use all your might to trample it to death, this would be a grave injustice. In the same way, to find out the true teachings of Islam, we would have to study the Holy Qur'an and see what it says and not base it on the actions of some

Muslims who have forgotten the teachings of the Holy Qur'an.

The stand of the Ahmadiyya Muslim community is that the teaching of the Holy Qur'an promotes peace. We have to take this message to every corner of the world. Therefore, I shall begin my message today by reference to the Holy Qur'an. After that we shall examine the practice of the Holy Prophet Muhammad<sup>(sa)</sup> to whom the teachings of the Holy Qur'an were revealed. Did he ever support any kind of cruelty, violence or extremist terrorism? Then, based on the Holy Qur'an and the Traditions of the Holy Prophet<sup>(sa)</sup>, some important clarification has been provided to us by the Founder of the Ahmadiyya Muslim community, Hadrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad of Qadian<sup>(as)</sup>, who claimed that he was the Promised Messiah, and I shall refer to some of his writings.

Anyhow, let us first see what the Holy Qur'an commands us to do in order to establish peace. God Almighty says in the Holy Qur'an:

*Whosoever killed a person – unless it be for killing a person or for creating disorder in the land – it shall be as if he had killed all mankind.*

(Al Maidah, Ch.5: v. 33)

Explaining this verse, the Founder of the Ahmadiyya Muslim community says:

‘A person who kills a person unfairly or who kills someone who had neither rebelled, nor became a source of violating peace amongst the people nor created disorder in the land, it is as if he has killed the whole of mankind. In other words to kill a person without any cause is, according to God Almighty, like the murder of the entire human race. It is obvious from this verse, how big a sin it is to take the life of another person without reason.’

*(Lecture Chashma-e-Ma’rifat pp 23-24: Commentary by the Promised Messiah Vol.2: p.405)*

Thus, this is the beautiful teaching of Islam that the unlawful killing or the shedding of innocent blood

of someone is like the killing of the entire human race, that is to say, the taking of a single life is like the massacre of thousands of innocent lives. Now, everyone can very well imagine what kind of sentence would be passed on someone who is found guilty of the taking of thousands of innocent lives. So this is the beautiful teaching given to us by God Almighty in the Holy Qur’an. Whosoever acts against this, acts against the teachings of Islam.

Then, the Holy Founder of the Ahmadiyya community takes us further than this because it was after his true reflection and deliberation and his understanding of Islamic teachings that God Almighty provided him with the guidance. Commenting on this verse, he adds:

‘He who abandons kindness abandons religion. The Holy Qur’an teaches that whosoever kills a person without justifiable cause will be as if he has killed the whole world. In the same way, I say that if someone is not kind unto his brother, it is like he has been

unkind to the whole world.’  
(*Al Hakm Vol. 9 No.15* dated  
30 April 1905 p.2:  
*Commentary by the Promised  
Messiah, Vol.2: p.405*)

Now on this verse, the Founder of the Ahmadiyya Muslim community has drawn an interesting conclusion that people think that Islam is an extremist religion but this is a mis-understanding on their part. Islam is saying that even if you are unkind in your treatment with your fellow human being, you are a cause of destroying the peace and harmony of the world. Forget killing anyone, you should always be kind in your dealings with every person in the world and spread the peaceful message of Islam.

I shall briefly explain some of the countless examples of kindness we find in the life of the Holy Prophet Muhammad<sup>(sa)</sup> and how concerned he was about the condition of his people.

If someone is kind to some person and wants to see his or her betterment, then the person will try his best to do something for him or her. The Holy Prophet<sup>(sa)</sup> was so kind and anxious for his people and

prayed for them even though they believed in so many gods that it is beyond our imagination. God Almighty has promised that He would most surely punish those who associate others with God. Now, this thought that God Almighty would never forgive one who associates partners with God, used to make the Holy Prophet<sup>(sa)</sup> restless so much so that he would bow down repeatedly in prayers. He had a burning passion in his heart for the reformation of his people that he had become weary with worry for his people. Finally, God Almighty had to tell him not to grieve himself to death for sorrow after them (Ch.18:v.7) and that his mission was only to give them the message. We can judge his prayers from the following Tradition:

The Holy Prophet<sup>(sa)</sup> prayed for his enemies:

‘O Allah! Guide my people because they know not (*do not know the truth*)’.

In the same way, when once he was asked to pray that a curse befalls the Dossan tribe, he prayed instead:

‘O Allah! Guide the tribe of Dossan.’

So this was the anxiety in him for kindness and for humanity. He never said that he was going to compel them into belief by use of the sword but in fact refrained from any malediction or uttering any curse that an evil befalls his enemy.

‘The pagans of Makkah exiled the Holy Prophet<sup>(sa)</sup> from Makkah and gave him no respite in Madinah but whenever he met them, the Holy Prophet<sup>(sa)</sup> dealt with gracious kindness towards them. After the migration of the Holy Prophet<sup>(sa)</sup> to Madinah, the people of Makkah had to suffer a severe drought so much so that they had to live on dead meat and bones. Then in utter helplessness, Abu Sufyan, the leader of the Makkans, had to approach the Holy Prophet Muhammad<sup>(sa)</sup> and said: “O Muhammad! You command treating one’s own relatives well. Your people are dying. Pray to your God in our favour

(that this famine passes away) and it begins to rain lest your people perish.”

To bring Abu Sufyan down to earth, the Holy Prophet<sup>(sa)</sup> remarked that you are very brave and courageous that despite the transgression by the Makkans, you demand a prayer on their behalf. But the Holy Prophet<sup>(sa)</sup> did not refuse to pray because he was mercy personified and he could have never wished that his people should perish. Then the people observed that his hands went up in prayers immediately and the Holy Prophet’s prayers for an end to the famine and the heavens to open up was duly accepted. It rained so much that the days of ease and abundance returned for the Quraish of Makkah. But, at the same time, their denial and opposition grew rapidly.’

(Bukhari: *Kitabul Tafseer Sura Al-Rum lidukhan*)

Now after this who can say that he gave a teaching of extremism and terrorism.

## **There is no compulsion of faith in Islam**

Then the Holy Qur'an states:

*There should be no compulsion in religion. Surely, right has become distinct from wrong; so whosoever refuses to be led by those who transgress, and believes in Allah, has surely grasped a strong handle which knows no breaking. And Allah is All-Hearing, All-Knowing.*

(Ch.2:V. 257)

Its explanation and practical application can be seen from this Tradition when the Banu Nadir were exiled from Madinah when they failed to fulfil their promise to maintain peace. At that time they also had many children of the Ansar (Muslim inhabitants of Madinah). These children had begun to live amongst the Jews, because in the pre-Islamic days of ignorance, amongst the Arab tribes of Aus and Khizraj, those who had no male children used to pledge that if the next child were born a male they would make him a Jew. Thus, there were many boys from the Aus and Khizraj tribes who had been handed over to

Jewish families. When the Jews of Banu Nadir were exiled because of their transgression, the Muslims wanted to get back their own descendants from the Jews. The Holy Prophet of Islam<sup>(sa)</sup> refrained them from their action on the very basis that 'there is no compulsion in religion' that once you hand over your own son to someone else and that someone else makes your descendant a follower of Judaism, you cannot take him back: he would have to go with the Banu Nadir.

Then there is the account of a slave of Hadrat Umar<sup>(ra)</sup> who narrates that although he was a slave of Hadrat Umar<sup>(ra)</sup>, Hadrat Umar<sup>(ra)</sup> never forced him to become a Muslim. Hadrat Umar<sup>(ra)</sup> most certainly used to explain to him with love and affection to become a Muslim but the slave would refuse and Hadrat Umar<sup>(ra)</sup> would only say: There is no compulsion in faith and fell silent after that. Finally, before his death, he set this slave free. Now who can, therefore, say that there is any room for compulsion or causing a breach of peace in Islam?

The Founder of the Ahmadiyya Muslim community, the Promised Messiah<sup>(as)</sup> says:

‘I know not wherefrom our opponents or from whom they have heard that Islam was spread by the sword. God says in the Holy Qur’an that there is no compulsion in the Islamic faith. Then who gave the order of force? What were the weapons of that force? And what kind of sincerity and belief is it of those compelled to become Muslims that without being paid and despite being a mere two to three hundred men, they should confront a force of thousands? Then, when they should have grown into thousands, they should defeat several hundred thousands, and, in order to save their faith from the enemy, they should offer their heads like sacrificial lambs and should seal the truth of their faith with their own blood. And they should be so passionate for spreading the Oneness of God that like refugees, they should endure such hardship and reach the desert of Africa and spread

Islam on that continent; and should bear such difficulties and reach China not in the form of invaders but as refugees and should call the people of China to Islam. Say honestly, is this the work of those who were forced to become Muslims? Those whose hearts disbelieve, can their tongues believe? No, but this is the work of those whose hearts are filled with the light of faith and in whose hearts there is none but God and God.’

*(Paigham Sulh: Ruhani Khazain, Vol. 23, pp.468-469)*

### **Freedom of Faith and Conscience**

Amongst the very many traditions about the teaching of Islam on the freedom of faith and conscience, perhaps just one account is enough after which there is no need of further clarification.

‘Despite becoming the subjects of the Holy Prophet<sup>(sa)</sup>, some groups of opponents wanted to hang on to their own faith. The question came to their mind as to what would happen to them because they knew that the

Holy Prophet<sup>(sa)</sup> required that every man had the right to believe in any faith. These opponents had not accepted this demand but in the past had used force against the Muslims. When the opponents had been defeated, the Holy Prophet<sup>(sa)</sup>, decided to remove their humiliation and addressing them suggested: “The principle for whose acceptance I fought against you, will not be abandoned because of your opposition to it. Undoubtedly, because of your cruel mentality, you adopted a wrong course of action, but rights shall be preserved. Go, no blame attaches on you. Each one of you is free in matters of faith. You are our Zimmi (a non-Muslim living in a Muslim country). God and His Messenger shall be fully responsible for your safety.’

[*Nisb al Raiyah fi Takhrij Ahadith Al Hadaya* Vol. 4, p.381 published Egypt]

Then Allah says:

*O ye who believe! be steadfast*

*in the cause of Allah, bearing witness in equity; and let not a people's enmity incite you to act otherwise than with justice. Be always just, that is nearer to righteousness. And fear Allah. Surely, Allah is aware of what you do.*

(Sura Al-Mai'dah – Ch.5:V.9)

Let us now examine the practical application of this Qur'anic teaching. After this who can say that Islam is not a religion of peace, harmony, reconciliation and justice.

‘It is narrated that Muhayyasa, Allah be pleased with him, a Companion of the Holy Prophet<sup>(sa)</sup> was killed as a martyr in Khyber. His beneficiaries asked the Holy Prophet<sup>(sa)</sup> for the capital punishment. The Holy Prophet<sup>(sa)</sup> asked: Can you swear and determine his killer? They said: O Prophet of God, we were not there so how can we swear? He replied: There can be no capital punishment without proof. There is only one possibility that the Jews of Khyber whom you suspect

should according to the law swear fifty times that they know not who is the killer. The beneficiaries of Muhayyasa, Allah be pleased with him, said: Who can trust these Jews, they will take false oaths. The Holy Prophet<sup>(sa)</sup> replied: Then beyond this no cross-examination is permitted because in the sight of the law, there can be no preference. After this the Holy Prophet<sup>(sa)</sup> paid blood money to the beneficiaries of Muhayyasa.’ (*Tajrid Al-Bukhari*, Chapter *Faslil Jihad*, Part 2 published by Ferozsons Lahore)

From these verses it should have become clear that according to the teachings of Islam there can be no compulsion in matters of faith. God Almighty has left the choice of which belief to accept to be determined by the conscience of each person. In fact, the example I gave earlier of the slave, even in his case he was not forced to accept Islam. The Holy Qur’an mentions this freedom of conscience in various verses and it is not possible to mention all of them here.

In brief, after this clear and unambiguous teaching, the question arises that if the Holy Prophet<sup>(sa)</sup> or his Companions did not hold the sword in one hand and the Qur’an in the other nor destroyed the peace of the world, what are these holy wars and what is this thing called Jihad which is on everyone’s lips and for which every Muslim is being blamed for causing mayhem in the world? The amazing thing is that it is believed that these wars started during the time of the Holy Prophet<sup>(sa)</sup>. We would have to fulfil the requirements of absolute justice and examine the situation of that age because without bringing that age to the fore, it would be impossible to do justice. In this connection, I set out briefly the words of the Founder of the Ahmadiyya Muslim community who says:

Our Prophet<sup>(sa)</sup> endured pain in Makkah and even after this at the hands of the disbelievers and in particular just to picture in our minds how the thirteen years in Makkah were spent under such persecution and cruelty of all kinds that it

makes us weep. But he did not raise a sword nor replied to their harsh words with harshness – till many Companions and his dear friends had been murdered most cruelly; and, were made to suffer all kinds of ordeals; and, sometimes were poisoned; and, many a plots were hatched of assassinating him in which the opponents remained unsuccessful. When the time of God's reckoning approached, it so happened that all the leaders and highly placed persons in Makkah unanimously agreed that come what may, the Holy Prophet<sup>(sa)</sup> had to be killed. At that time, God Who is the Guardian and Protector of His beloved and honest and truthful ones, informed the Holy Prophet<sup>(sa)</sup> that apart from evil there was nothing left in this town and its people were hell-bent on murder and that he should leave at once. Then, under divine command, he migrated towards Madinah but even there his enemies did not leave him and chased him in pursuit and in any case wanted to

destroy Islam. When their mischief had gone beyond recall and the murder of many innocent ones made their killers worthy of punishment, at that time was the permission granted in the interest of defence and self-preservation. Moreover, many of those innocent ones who had been killed in mischief and otherwise than in open combat and their properties had been seized had deserved that their opponents should be dealt in this manner. But at the time of the victory of Makkah, our Prophet<sup>(sa)</sup> forgave all of them. Therefore, this thought that the Holy Prophet<sup>(sa)</sup> and his Companions engaged in any war to spread the faith or to compel anyone to become a Muslim is a terrible error and cruelty.

*(Masih Hindustan Mein pp.7-8: Tafseer Hadrat Masih Maud Vol. 3: pp.316-317)*

And despite the permission granted to engage in a defensive battle against these pursuers and cruel persecutors, the consistent teaching of God Almighty was not

to exceed the limits as it is stated:

*And fight them until there is no persecution, and religion is freely professed for Allah. But if they desist, then remember that no hostility is allowed except against the aggressors.*

(Surah Al-Baqarah  
Ch.2: v.194)

So, here this commandment of war is for defensive war and to end evil and that is why it is stated that when they desist, then you are not to engage in battle with them because your true job is to establish peace. So even in the permission for war, we have been given a beautiful principle of defence and making peace.

### **Wars and principles and regulations**

When the Holy Prophet<sup>(sa)</sup> engaged in a battle, he used to firmly order that:

- No woman be killed;
- No children be killed;
- The old not be impeded;
- Nothing be said to the refugees, monks or hermits;
- No person be set on fire;
- No animal be killed;

- No tree be cut down;
- Unlike your enemy, no person's nose or ear be cut off.

Then having been victorious, he used to proclaim:

- No injured be killed;
- Do not pursue unnecessarily anyone who escapes.

Then in connection with prisoners of war, he used to ask for their kind treatment.

‘Thus the prisoners taken after the Battle of Badr themselves admitted that: By God! The Muslims walked on foot while we were made to ride, they remained hungry themselves whilst they fed us, they remained thirsty while they gave us water.’

*(Bukhari, Muslim, Tirmidhi, Abu Daud)*

Those who call Islam a belligerent, trigger happy and extremist religion should think whether a belligerent religion can give this kind of teaching. Do not toss the action of a few people and organisations into the lap of Islam

and call it Islam. Today, in this age when man considers himself highly advanced and understanding should ask himself whether these high values manifest themselves when bombs rain down from the skies, when missiles are fired on cities and dwellings. How much blood is shed of innocent lives in this indiscriminate bombardment which falls here and kills one here and another one there? In areas where there is anarchy, each day there are funerals of the old, women and children. Such news is not hidden from our eyes.

In conclusion, I end my subject of Islam's beautiful teaching and its promotion of peace and its teaching which united a diverse mankind into a single brotherhood with a quotation from a Christian historian, Georgie Zeidan:

‘A primary reason for the rapid progress in Muslim education is that the Caliphs of Islam greatly valued the scholars of all faiths and all people and always enriched them with awards of gifts and bounties. They had no concern with their

religion or their nationality or their caste or creed. Amongst them were Christians, Jews, Sabians, magicians, soothsayers and in fact people from every group. The Caliphs dealt with them with extreme reverence, respect and esteem. The non-Muslims had the same rights and freedoms that the Muslim leaders and governors enjoyed.’

*(Tarikh Al Tamaddan Al-Islami*  
Vol.3, p.194)

Now if after this anyone says that Islam is not a religion of peace, it would be a grave injustice.

I hope that in view of the shortage of time whatever I have said would have shown you some aspects of Islamic teaching of peace.

I am grateful to you for listening to my address with attention and respect.

Thank you, once again.

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## Divine Guidance – Part II

On 27th December 1901, after Asr prayers, Hadrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad<sup>(as)</sup> of Qadian, the Promised Messiah and Mahdi addressed a large gathering of people who had come from different parts of the country. Presented below is the second part of the translation of the speech that was delivered on this day. The original Urdu text of this speech has been taken from *Malfoozat*, Volume 3, pp.149-156.



**The founder of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community was Hadrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad<sup>(as)</sup>.**

In 1891, he claimed, on the basis of Divine revelation, that he was the Promised Messiah and Mahdi whose advent had been foretold by Muhammad, the Holy Prophet of Islam (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and by the scriptures of other faiths.

His claim constitutes the basis of the beliefs of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community.

[Translator's Note: All references to the verses of the Holy Qur'an are given in Arabic as they occur in the text. The English translation, presented in italics, is taken from the translation of the Holy Qur'an by Hadrat Maulvi Sher Ali Sahib<sup>(ra)</sup>. Where the Promised Messiah<sup>(as)</sup> has himself stated a certain interpretation of the Arabic verse, this is incorporated in the main body of the text].

*Translated by Amatul-Hadi Ahmad*

The age in which the Holy Prophet<sup>(sa)</sup> appeared and was appointed for the manifestation of God's glory and for revival of the lost concept of unity of God, was an age whose condition itself was such that it provides for a fair minded, thinking person with a righteous disposition, a clear proof of the truth of the Holy Prophet

Muhammad<sup>(sa)</sup>. He who is wise would acknowledge this without seeking a miracle.

The priest, Mr. Pfander has raised the question in his book *Meezan-ul-Haq* as to why it is that when the Holy Prophet Muhammad<sup>(sa)</sup> declared that he was a Prophet, God did not stop him? He answers this question himself and writes that the Christians of the time had strayed and their character and practice were not good. They had abandoned the way of truthfulness and that was why God did not stop the Holy Prophet Muhammad<sup>(sa)</sup> – it was for the purpose of their admonishment. Based on this conclusion, the foolish Christian does not acknowledge the truth of the Holy Prophet<sup>(sa)</sup> but raises the issue in the form of an objection. I ask however, was there a need at that time for a Reformer or was it to be the case that if one hand was severed, the other should be severed also? He who is sick should be stoned to death! Can this be the mercy of God Almighty?

The reality, however, is that it was a time of darkness, a fact that has been acknowledged by the

Christians. Dayanand [an Arya Hindu leader] has also acknowledged this in his book and history also bears witness that idol worship was widespread in India. However, it was not only India but the whole world that was steeped in a very dangerous darkness, a fact that has been acknowledged by historians and commentators of all nations. Hence, in such an environment the appearance of the Holy Prophet<sup>(sa)</sup> was not without necessity. On the contrary, he came as a sign of mercy for the whole world. Hence it is stated in the Holy Qur'an:

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ إِلَّا  
رَحْمَةً لِّلْعَالَمِينَ

(Ch.21:V.108)

‘O Prophet, We have sent thee as mercy for the whole world’. The the Holy Prophet<sup>(sa)</sup> did not himself know what was the situation of Arya practice at that time and into what dangerous crevice of darkness it had fallen! It had reached such an extreme point that among the Arya there even existed the practice of worship of human private parts.

Neither did the Holy Prophet<sup>(sa)</sup> know what the condition of the Christians was in the land of Syria. He did not know what kind of human worship they engaged in and as a result, how they abandoned good morals and performing righteous deeds and were living in a [spiritual] darkness? Nor did he know as to what was happening in Iran and Egypt. The Holy Prophet<sup>(sa)</sup> was born in a jungle which at that time had neither a formal written history that he might have read nor did he go to any school or college to gain education and to broaden his knowledge nor were there available any other means for him to gain knowledge of the situation of other people as we now have in the form of such things as telegram, post and newspapers.

The Holy Prophet<sup>(sa)</sup> was informed of the corrupt state of the world only by God when this verse was revealed:

ظَهَرَ الْفَسَادُ فِي الْبَرِّ

*Corruption has appeared on land and sea.*

(Ch.30: V.42)

That is, ‘the rivers have become corrupted and the jungles have become corrupted’. By ‘rivers’ is meant those people who had been given ‘water’, that is religious Law or the Book, and by ‘jungle’ are meant the people who did not have a share in that. What was meant by this was that the people of the Book as well as the polytheists and the atheists all had become corrupt. In short, it was a time when darkness had spread all over the world. At such a time God caused the Holy Prophet<sup>(sa)</sup> to be born so that the darkness may be removed. The birth of the Holy Prophet<sup>(sa)</sup> at such troubled times was itself a powerful proof of his truth and of his being from God. Would that someone ponder over this! He who is wise and possesses a wholesome nature can never hurriedly falsify such a Reformer. At least this much needs to be acknowledged that he has come at the right time. If, for instance, someone claims at the time of a plague or the spread of cholera that he has come for its cure, would one not have to acknowledge at least that this person has come at the time of need? Certainly, one would have

to acknowledge it. Similarly, for the truth of the Holy Prophet<sup>(sa)</sup> the first proof is that when he came, it was the need of the time.

The Holy Qur'an has indicated this [in the following verse]:

وَبِالْحَقِّ أَنْزَلْنَاهُ  
وَبِالْحَقِّ نَزَّلَهُ

*In truth have We sent it down  
and with truth has it  
descended.*

(Ch.17: V.106)

Hence, remember that the first proof of recognition of the appointed one from God is to observe the time and situation to see whether there is the need for a man of God or not. A person who digs a well amongst existing streams or where there is a presence of numerous other wells would be said to have wasted time and money. However, if he were to arrange for a well to be dug in a jungle where there is no other well then one would have to admit that he has done considerable good.

The Holy Prophet<sup>(sa)</sup> was born in a physical jungle but he was also born in a spiritual jungle. Moreover, if there were no physical or spiritual streams of water in Mecca, other countries too had died due to the lack of spiritual streams of water – the entire 'earth' had died, as is stated in the Holy Qur'an:

إِعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ يَحْيِي  
الْأَرْضَ بَعْدَ مَوْتِهَا

(Ch. 57:V.18)

'Did you know that the whole earth had died. God now wishes to bring it back to life anew'. This is a most powerful proof of the truth of the Holy Prophet<sup>(sa)</sup> that he came at a time when the whole world was generally steeped in evil practices and wrong beliefs. It was lacking in truth and the sense of reality and was devoid of purity as well as the concept of the unity of God.

The second proof of the truth of the Holy Prophet Muhammad<sup>(sa)</sup> is that he returned to God at a time when he had fully discharged the

obligations of his Prophethood and was successful in achieving its objective. Just as it is necessary to look at conditions existing prior to the coming of a Prophet in order to assess whether he has come at the right time or not, it is also essential to observe whether he was successful or not – did he in fact ‘heal’ the ‘sick’ for whose cure he had come?

There is no need at this juncture to delve into the details of this aspect as there are present in the audience a great number of people who are well versed with the conditions of the Arabs at the time of the advent of the Holy Prophet<sup>(sa)</sup>. There was no evil that was not present amongst them. Just as complete mastery of a skill is achieved by successfully completing tests in all areas of that skill, so were the Arabs fully ‘skilled’ in immorality and the practice of immorality. They indulged in drunkenness and adultery. They usurped the wealth of orphans and indulged in gambling. In short, they exceeded in all manner of ills so much so that they took pride in their evil deeds. Their saying was [as described in the Holy Qur’an]:

مَا هِيَ إِلَّا حَيَاتُنَا  
الدُّنْيَا نَمُوتُ وَنَحْيَا

(Ch.45: V.25)

‘Our life is only this that we die here as well as coming to life here, that resurrection and life after death are nothing – the last day is nothing – what is heaven and what is hell’? The misdeeds and ills that the commandments of the Holy Qur’an prohibit were all present among them. This, however, is a description of the general condition that prevailed at the time. A careful consideration of these conditions will clearly indicate the reality of the state of those people. It is described [in the Holy Qur’an in these words]:

يَتَمَتَّعُونَ وَيَأْكُلُونَ

(Ch.47: V.13)

‘They enjoy themselves and consume’, that is, they fill their bellies and occupy themselves with physical and other pleasures that engulf them. It should be remembered that when a person is

imprisoned by physical desires and other pleasures, in doing so he does not bring the natural needs under the demands of a moral condition, hence, the enslavement by those pleasures is his hell and the difficulties he faces in the fulfillment of those desires and needs appear to him as a grave punishment. It is for this reason that God Almighty has stated that whatever state they are in, it is as if they are in hell.

This fact should never be forgotten that the Holy Qur'an is *Khatam-al-Kutab*, that is, it is the Seal of all Books – it is not a collection of stories. Those who, through their own misunderstanding and the practice of hiding the truth, have referred to the Holy Qur'an as a collection of stories, do not possess a nature that is capable of recognising true facts. It is the case that this Holy Book has turned even earlier stories into a philosophy and this is a great service that it has performed for all the Books and all the Prophets otherwise their words would have been laughed at today. It is also a blessing of God that in this age of knowledge when the sciences of

the physical world and the study of specific natural qualities of things are advancing, God has established a system for [man's attainment of] heavenly knowledge and explanation of its truths. At the time of *Feej A'awaj*, [that is, a time of moral decay and spiritual darkness prophesied by the Holy Prophet<sup>(sa)</sup>], when these matters did not have any significance greater than ordinary stories that were being mocked in this age of science, God has presented matters [in the Holy Qur'an] as a means of knowledge in the form of a philosophy.

In previous times we see that the idea of heaven and hell was resented as an idea in a very simple form. The Messiah<sup>(as)</sup> said to the thief that he [Jesus<sup>(as)</sup>] will today go to heaven but no explanation of the idea of heaven was given. We do not consider it relevant at this point to explore this question further as to whether according to the Christian belief, Jesus<sup>(as)</sup> went to heaven or hell. The aim is merely to show that he did not explain the reality of heaven at all. In one sense the Christians have even surveyed

their heaven. In contrast, the Holy Qur'an does not present any teaching in the form of stories but always presents it in the form of knowledge. For example, regarding heaven and hell the Holy Qur'an states:

وَمَنْ كَانَ فِي هِدَايَةٍ أَغْنَىٰ  
فَهُوَ فِي الْآخِرَةِ أَغْنَىٰ

(Ch.17: V.73)

'He who is blind in this world will be blind in the hereafter'. What does this mean? It means that it is in this world that one acquires the 'eyes' and the sense of 'vision' that would enable one to see God and other pleasures of the next world. He who does not attain them in this world, will not have them in the hereafter. This points to the fact that it is the duty of a person to strive to obtain the [spiritual] capacity to 'see' and the [spiritual] 'eyes' so that he enters the next world with the capacity of 'sight'.

Similarly, explaining the philosophy and reality of punishment, the Holy Qur'an states:

نَارُ اللَّهِ الْمَوْقَدَةُ  
الَّتِي تَطَّلِعُ عَلَى الْآفِيدَةِ

*It is Allah's kindled fire,  
Which rises over the hearts*  
(Ch.104: Vs. 7-8)

That is, God's punishment is a fire that is kindled by God and that flame falls upon the human heart. This means that the root of God's punishment and of hell is the heart of man itself and impure thoughts, evil goals and aims are the fuel of that hell.

In contrast, describing the rewards of paradise and in praise of the righteous people, [the Holy Qur'an states]:

يُفَجِّرُونَهَا تَفْجِيرًا

(Ch.76: V.7)

That is, 'they are making streams flow' here [on earth] and again it states when describing the reward of the believers and those who do righteous deeds:

جَنَّاتٍ تَجْرِي مِنْ  
تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ

*Gardens beneath which flow  
streams.*

(Ch.2: V.26)

The question is, can anyone refer to these description as stories? How true is this that whosoever ‘waters’ here [on earth with good deeds], he would be the one who eats the ‘fruit’ [of his ‘watering’ in paradise]. In short, the Holy Qur’an presents all its teaching in an enlightened form of knowledge and philosophy. Moreover, the present age in which God Almighty has Himself established this system for the spread of true knowledge, is the age of discovery of the true nature [of things].

Hence, it should be remembered that the Holy Qur’an has done a great service to the previous Books and to previous Prophets whose teachings were in the form of stories by giving them a rational form. I say this truly that no person can gain salvation from these stories and fables until he reads the

Holy Qur’an because such is the glory of the Holy Qur’an [as described in the following verse]:

إِنَّهُ لَقَوْلٌ فَصْلٌ  
وَمَا هُوَ بِالْهَزْلِ

*It is surely a decisive word  
And it is not a useless talk  
(Ch.86: Vs.14-15)*

The Holy Qur’an is the ‘Balance’, the ‘Protector’, the ‘Light’, the ‘Healing’ and the ‘Mercy’. Those who read the Holy Qur’an and consider it to be a story have not read the Holy Qur’an at all. Rather, they have been disrespectful towards it. Why is it that our opponents are so strong in their opposition towards us? Simply for this reason that we wish to present the Holy Qur’an as God Almighty has stated it to be that it is Light and Wisdom and [leads to] knowledge of God whereas the opponents attempt to show the Holy Qur’an as no more than an ordinary story. This is intolerable! It is a blessing of God Almighty that He has made it evident to us that the Holy Qur’an

is a living and lucid Book. Hence, we do not care for the opposition against us.

I repeatedly draw attention of the people who are close to me and advise them that God Almighty has established this system for revealing the true nature of [religious] matters as without this there cannot develop any light in practical life. I wish that through the practice of truth, the beautiful qualities of Islam should be made apparent to the world as God has appointed me for this purpose. Hence, you should study the Holy Qur'an frequently, not as a story but as a philosophy.

I will now turn to the real purpose and say that the reality of heaven and hell that has been described by Holy Qur'an has not been described by any other Book. It has clearly manifested that [the system of heaven and hell] begins in this very world. Hence it is stated:

وَلَيْسَ خَافَ مَقَامَ  
رَبِّهِ جَنَّتِينَ

(Ch.55: V.47)

'He who fears to stand before God Almighty, for him there are two heavens'. That is, one 'heaven' he will find in this very world because the fear of God prevents him from committing bad deeds. Moreover, inclination towards the bad creates a restlessness and anxiety that is in itself a hell but the person who fears God, abstains from bad deeds and thus escapes from the punishment and pain that results from enslavement to physical desires and worldly pleasures. Instead, he develops and progresses in the qualities of faithfulness and inclining towards God that gives him enjoyment and pleasure. Thus it is that his heavenly life begins in this very world. Similarly, in turning away from [such a path], the life of hell begins [in this very life] as I have explained above.

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*To be continued*

# Religious Tolerance

This article is based on an address to the Ghana Academy of Arts and Sciences on the occasion of the May 2003 Founders Week celebrations on religious tolerance. The author, is the Amir (National President) and Missionary Incharge of the Ghana Jama'at.

*By Abdul Wahab Adam*

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If life were to begin with birth at the mid-wife's clinic and end with death at the undertaker's mortuary, society could do away with religion. But life has a deeper meaning than that.

## **Religion**

It is religion that sets for society rules of love, mercy, forgiveness, justice, patience and endurance. These are immutable laws framed by a Being Who knows the hidden and the future and Who has based them on truth and wisdom. Religion should therefore be an instrument for the mental, social, moral, and spiritual development of a nation.

The society that isolates itself from religion and therefore ignores the immutable laws of God cannot stand. Similarly, a religion that alienates itself from society and adopts an unsolicitous attitude

towards the community relinquishes the right to be called a religion.

We all agree that despite the fact that successive governments have guaranteed for the people of this country freedom of religion, there exists religious intolerance arising from bigotry, ignorance, blind fanaticism and imagined fear of one religious system dominating the other. This attitude has frequently brought religion into contempt, hatred and ridicule. It is therefore not only in the interest of national unity, but the dignity of religion itself that religious leaders should try to effect a change in the attitude of their followers by encouraging the close study of other people's religious beliefs from their original sources. This would generate an awareness in the fact that all the founders of religion believe in One Supreme

Being, and that the Unity of God, and therefore of mankind, is the basic reality of the universe.

I shall discuss that with the establishment of the Forum of Religious Bodies in this country, the level of co-operation between various religious communities has improved considerably, ushering in an era of relative calm and harmony in the country.

There is no doubt that the history of religion dating back to Adam<sup>(as)</sup> through Noah<sup>(as)</sup>, Abraham<sup>(as)</sup>, Moses<sup>(as)</sup> and Jesus<sup>(as)</sup> to the Holy Prophet of Islam<sup>(sa)</sup>, is a period during which the world has witnessed as many as 124,000 Prophets, including Krishna<sup>(as)</sup>, Buddha<sup>(as)</sup>, and Confucius<sup>(as)</sup>.

This long history presents a consistent and an unchanging picture of the cruelty, perversion and arrogance of man in dealing with these spiritual stars, moons and suns who appear in the world's spiritual firmament with the sole aim of dispelling darkness and offering enlightenment and hope to a despondent humanity.

They were turned out of their homes; they were stoned to death; they were thrown into burning furnaces; food and drink were denied them; they were dragged on hot burning sands and stones; they were crucified!

This proves wrong all those who charge religion with intolerance. The whole long history of mankind bears ample testimony to the fact that it is the *givers of religion* who were persecuted and not the other way round.

### **Persecution**

The fact is, the religion which believes in and uses persecution and torture as instruments of conversion, is no religion at all. It would have proved from its ungodly methods of conversion that it is a hollow vessel – completely empty and spiritually bankrupt!

It is most ironical that with the passage of time when the revealed Word of God becomes mutilated and polluted, adherents of religion themselves become guilty of those self-same crimes that were committed against their prophets!

## Northern Ireland

A friend told me a story about his trip to Northern Ireland. When he arrived at the airport, he boarded a taxi that was to take him to his hotel. The moment he sat in the taxi, the taxi driver asked him: 'My good friend, are you a Catholic or a Protestant?' My friend was perplexed, to say the least. If he said he was a Catholic and the taxi driver happened to be a Protestant, he would be in trouble. And if he said he was a Protestant and the driver happened to be a Catholic, here again he would be in trouble.

So he had to think very fast. He told the taxi driver:

'I have come from Africa. There in Africa, there is a Big Tree and all of us worship under it'.

The taxi driver was satisfied with the response and took my friend safely to his hotel!

We know that Jesus Christ<sup>(as)</sup> was a very peaceful Prophet of God who taught that if somebody slapped you on the right cheek, turn the

left. Here was a prophet who would not touch a fly in order to harm it. Yet, in his name, today, in a relatively advanced country in terms of education and discernment, children are maimed on an almost regular basis, men and women are killed, and violence goes on unabated!

So it should be easy to understand that religion may teach one thing and yet a section of its followers may practise quite another thing. And I use the phrase 'a section' advisedly. The fact that only a section may practise a religious teaching differently also buttresses the fact that their practice may not represent the true teachings of that religion.

## Teachings

It is in the light of the discussion so far that I intend to submit in brief outline, some teachings of Islam in respect of religious tolerance.

The world is a beautiful piece of creation. Its beauty portrays the wisdom of the Creator. The pattern of colour, the pattern of size, the pattern of height, the pattern of density of palpable things, then the

emotions of fear and jealousy, of love and hate, of contentment and satisfaction and then things of the spirit which are best experienced than described, all are part of our world.

God says in the Holy Qur'an:

*And among His Signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth and the diversity of thy tongues and colours. In that surely are Signs for those who possess knowledge.*

(Ch.30: V.23)

When we look around ourselves, we see diverse things created by God – the heavens and the earth, the sun and the moon, the rivers and the oceans, the trees and the mountains and the valleys of diverse hues and colours – each of these has its distinct characteristics. Yet despite their distinctiveness, they all work together in unison to make the world beautiful and give the world stability and provide comfort, progress and prosperity for man.

In the Qur'anic verse quoted earlier, we are told that despite the

diversity of our tongues, tribes, religions and stations in life, we must realise that having been created by One God, we all are, as it were, from one source, 'children of one father' and should, therefore, try our utmost to live in peace and harmony and co-operate to make life worth living for all!

We may look again at the story of Northern Ireland to draw a few more lessons from it. It is amazing that our taxi driver friend was satisfied with the story about Africans worshipping under a big tree. Imagine all the billions of people of the whole continent of Africa worshipping under one tree!

Yet, upon reflection, there is truth in that assertion. It is a fact that all of us, not only those of us in Africa, live under one roof, the heavens, and on one earth, both provided, together with everything we see in them and in between them by the Most Gracious and Ever Merciful Creator.

We derive our energy, strength and nourishment from Him. He does not discriminate between any

human being on the basis of his or her colour, race, sex or creed. When He sends the rains, everybody, worshipper and non-worshipper alike, benefit.

So my friend was right when he told our taxi driver friend that we all worship under one tree.

It will interest you to learn that, according to the Holy Qur'an, Christians are the nearest in love to Muslims.

*And you shall assuredly find those who say, 'We are Christians' to be the nearest of them in love to the believers. That is because among them are savants and monks and because they are not proud. And when they hear what has been revealed to this Messenger, you see their eyes overflow with tears, because of the truth which they have recognised. They say, 'Our Lord, we believe, so write us down among those who bear witness.'*

(Ch.5: Vs.83-84)

## **Message of Peace**

The last of the 80 books written by the Founder of the Ahmadiyya Movement in Islam is titled *Message of Peace*. The circumstances in which he wrote the book and dedicated it to all those who truly and honestly aspire for peace between religious communities invest the book with special appeal. That he finished writing the book on the very day that he was called back to His Creator makes the message of the book his last testament to all religious communities in the world.

He begins the book with a declaration which is self-evident.

'That religion is no religion which does not inculcate broad sympathy.'

He continues:

'God is not a partial Being. He has not withheld His bounty from any people. For all peoples of the world the earth of God serves as a floor and for the sake of all, the sun, the moon and the stars give their

light and perform such other functions as God has charged them with. All people derive benefit from the air, water, fire, earth and other things created by God and all of them use the produce of the earth – its maize, its herbs, its flowers and its fruits. These liberal ways of God teach us that we also should do good to help mankind and should not have a cramped outlook, or a confined sympathy.’

### Causes of Conflict

The verses of the Holy Qur’an quoted earlier show that one of the causes of religious conflicts is false pride and lack of appreciation of the truth in other religions.

### Universality of Prophethood

The Holy Qur’an affirms the universality of prophethood. Islam teaches belief in all the prophets of God. Muslims are, therefore not to make a distinction between any of the prophets but revere them all.

*Say ye: We believe in Allah and what has been revealed to Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and his*

*children and what was given to Moses and Jesus and what was given to all other prophets from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them and to Him we submit ourselves. (Ch.2: V.137)*

Again the Holy Qur’an says:

*We did raise among every people a Messenger with the teaching, ‘Worship Allah and shun the evil one’.*  
(Ch.16: V.37)

and again:

*Thou art but a Warner – Verily, We have sent thee with the Truth, as a bearer of glad tidings and as a Warner and there is no people to whom a Warner has not been sent.*  
(Ch.35: Vs.24-25)

### Monopoly

Commenting on these verses of the Holy Qur’an, Hadrat Mirza Tahir Ahmad<sup>(ra)</sup> in one of his books titled *Islam’s Response to Contemporary Issues*, states:

‘In view of the above, it is

manifestly clear that Islam does not monopolise truth to the elimination of all other religions but categorically declares that in all ages and in all parts of the world, God has been looking after the spiritual and religious needs of mankind by raising Messengers who delivered divine messages to the people for whom they were raised and commissioned.'

*(Islam's Response to Contemporary Issues, p.15)*

## Salvation

He also states in the same book:

'The question of salvation, howsoever innocent it may appear to be on the face of it, is potent in its danger to peace in the religious world. It is one thing for a religion to declare that those who see to be redeemed from Satan and attain salvation should rush to the safe haven of that religion, and that it is there that they would find salvation and eternal liberation from sin. But it is quite another for the same religion to declare in the next breath that those who do not

come hither to seek a refuge will be damned eternally, one and all, no matter what they do to please God. However much they love their Creator and His creation, however much they lead a life of purity and piety, they would most certainly be condemned to an everlasting FIRE!

*(Islam's Response to Contemporary Issues p.23)*

## Compulsion

Another cause of religious conflicts is the attempt by some religious zealots to impose their religion indiscriminately on others. The Holy Qur'an declares in no uncertain terms:

*There should be no compulsion in religion. Surely right has become distinct from wrong.*

*(Ch.2: V.257)*

Compulsion can create hypocrites, not sincere commitment to a cause. For this among other reasons, Islam does not permit coercion as an instrument for the spread of its message. It is clear, therefore, that the Holy Prophet<sup>(sa)</sup> of Islam could not have been

commanded by the Almighty to compel people to accept his faith. Indeed the Holy Qur'an describes him as a Warner.

*Admonish, therefore, for thou art but an Admonisher, thou hast no authority to compel.*  
(Ch.88: Vs.22-23)

The Holy Prophet Muhammad<sup>(sa)</sup>, is further reminded:

*But if they turn away, We have not sent thee as a guardian over them. Thy duty is only to convey the Message.*  
(Ch.42: V.49)

*And I am commanded to be of those who submit to God and to recite the Qur'an. So whoever follows guidance, follows it only for the good of his own soul; and as to him who goes astray, say, I am a Warner.*  
(Ch.27: Vs.92-93)

### **Intellect**

At the same time, the Holy Qur'an appeals again and again to the need to exercise our divine given intellect in determining the truth. It demands proof and authority for

claims that anybody may put forth,

*Or have you clear authority?  
Then provide your Book if you are truthful.*  
(Ch.37: Vs.157-158)

*Say: Have you any knowledge?  
Then produce it for us! You follow nothing but mere conjecture. And you do nothing but lie.*  
(Ch.6: V.149)

*I take my stand on a clear evidence from my Lord .....*  
(Ch.6: V.58)

### **Free Will**

Even the Almighty Himself does not compel people to accept Him but gives each person the free will to decide either to worship or not to worship Him.

*Say, Allah's is the argument that reaches home. If He had enforced His will, He would have surely guided you all.*  
(Ch.6: V.150)

To avoid religious conflicts, Islam sets out a code of conduct for the propagation of its message:

*Call unto the way of thy Lord with wisdom and goodly exhortation and argue with them in a way that is best. Surely, thy Lord knows best who has strayed from His way; and He also knows who are rightly guided.*

(Ch.16: V.126)

### **Foul Talk**

Even foul talk is to be rebutted with what is best. The Holy Qur'an declares:

*Repel evil with that which is best. We know very well what they allege.*

(Ch.23: V.97)

Despite the fact that Islam is a purely monotheistic religion, adherents of Islam are, for the sake of peace and harmony, strictly prohibited from speaking in disparaging terms about idols and imaginary gods of the idolators.

*Revile not those whom they call upon beside Allah, lest they out of spite revile Allah in their ignorance.*

(Ch.6: V.109)

### **Liberty**

On liberty, Hadrat Mirza Tahir Ahmad<sup>(ra)</sup> has this to say:

'Islam champions the cause of liberty but not in a manner as to cause disorder, chaos and indiscriminate vengeance causing suffering to the innocent. The message of Islam is: *And God does not like disorder* (Ch.2:V.206). Islam, like every other religion, emphasises the role of balanced freedom in a spirit of give and take. The concept of absolute freedom is hollow, weird, and unreal in the context of society. Sometimes, the concept of freedom is so misconceived and misapplied that the beauty of the cherished principle of freedom of speech gets transformed into the ugliness of freedom to abuse, hurl insults and to blaspheme.' (*Islam's Response to Contemporary Issues*, p.38)

Islam does not accept the breach of the peace on the plea of provocation. Instead Islam advocates a walk out rather than the disruption of the peace.

The Holy Qur'an says:

*He has already revealed to you in the Book that when you hear the Signs of Allah being denied and mocked at, sit not with them until they engage in a talk other than that....*

(Ch.4: V.141)

### **Protection of Places of Worship**

Islam, on the basis of the principle just mentioned, makes the protection of all places of worship mandatory for believers:

*And if Allah did not repel some men by means of others, there would surely have been pulled down cloisters and churches and synagogues and mosques, wherein the name of Allah is oft commemorated.*

(Ch.22: V.41)

Is it not significant that, in the defence of places of worship, mosques, i.e. places of worship of Muslims, is mentioned last? The Holy Prophet of Islam<sup>(sa)</sup>, had permitted members of a Christian delegation from Najran to worship in his own Mosque. What a noble gesture of religious tolerance!

### **Islamic Jihad**

From the discussion so far, it would be clear to all, that Islamic Jihad cannot, by any stretch of imagination, mean that non-Muslims should be compelled to accept Islam, failing which their heads should be chopped off! It should be remembered that:

‘Swords can win territories but not hearts. Force can bend heads but not minds.’

*(Islam's Response to Contemporary Issues, p.42)*

Nor could the general view of punishment for apostasy or blasphemy be held to be valid when seen under the transparent microscope of Islamic teachings. Islam goes further to urge its followers to co-operate and collaborate with others in beneficent endeavours, despite religious differences.

*Say, O people of the Book! come to a word equal between us and you – that we worship none but Allah and that we associate no partner with Him.*  
(Ch.3: V.65)

*And let not the enmity of a people incite you to transgress. And help one another in righteousness and piety, but help not one another in sin and transgression.*

(Ch.5: V.3)

### **Islamic History**

Islamic history is replete with examples of such collaboration which helped to build peace and widened the frontiers of knowledge. Indeed the Renaissance would not have happened but for such co-operation of Muslims with people of other faiths.

There is no reason why adherents of such teachings cannot help, even today, to rid the world of prejudices, encourage it to eschew violence and foster unity and peace for the progress and prosperity of the present and future generations of mankind.

### **Gift**

One of the gifts for which Hadrat Mirza Nasir Ahmad<sup>(ra)</sup>, the Third Khalifa of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, will be remembered is the motto he gave to Ahmadi Muslims:

**‘LOVE FOR ALL, HATRED FOR NONE’**

### **Ahmadi Muslims**

It is in the light of these authentic verses of the Holy Qur’an, Traditions of the Holy Prophet<sup>(sa)</sup> of Islam, and their exposition by the Founder of the Ahmadiyya Movement in Islam and his Successors that Ahmadi Muslims all over the world have eschewed violence, intolerance and any utterance or behaviour that tends to disturb the peace.

That is why though the Mission pursues a rigorous programme of bringing the beauty of Islam to other people, it has sought to do so through peaceful preaching, lectures, symposia and the distribution of literature.

In addition, the Mission has, as a policy, provided a platform for representatives of the various religions – Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism etc. – to speak on their respective religions.

Friendly debates have been held in the most cordial atmosphere between representatives of the

Mission and representatives of other religions.

Muslim – Christian clashes distress us because they give Islam and Christianity, in particular, and religion, in general, a very bad name.

### **Peaceful Religious Goal**

We of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community will continue to pursue our peaceful religious goal of bringing Islam to our countrymen. We urge other religious bodies to do the same. If they have to preach their religion, they should ensure that abuse, such as intolerable provocative acts as stamping on Holy Books and questioning the mental capacity of followers of other religions should be eschewed.

It is to the good fortune of this country that through the concerted efforts of all well-meaning religious leaders in this country, we have what we call the Forum of Religious Bodies.

It is an umbrella organisation that groups the leadership of all the religious bodies in the country.

The Catholic Secretariat, the Christian Council, the Federation of Muslim Councils, the Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission, Ghana Pentecostal Council, Council of Independent Churches etc. are all members of the Forum. It will interest you to learn that we have been meeting together to discuss matters of national interest.

We have been issuing joint pastoral letters addressing all the people of Ghana and drawing their attention to issues of morality, unity, peace and development.

I can say without fear of contradiction that the relative peace that we enjoy in Ghana is partly attributable to the spirit of mutual respect and inter-religious co-operation that exists in this country.

Only last year under the auspices of Johns Hopkins University, leaders of Christian and Muslim faiths congregated at Akosombo for a workshop on *Compassion For People Living With HIV/AIDS*.

The interaction culminated in the formal launch by H.E. the Vice President, Alhaj Aliu Mahama, of *The Religious Bodies' Initiative Towards Compassion For Those Living With HIV/AIDS*.

That ceremony stressed the fact that people of diverse faiths can and should live together in peace and in harmony. The ceremony also stressed the fact that people of diverse faiths can and should collaborate to bring love and solace to all mankind.

So, you would agree with me that here in Ghana, religion has come of age. Here we believe that religion should unite and not divide; religion should promote peace and not violence; religion should bring love and solace to our lives and not pain and anguish.

### **Conclusion**

Finally, I wish to submit that though there are fanatics in all religions, there are also those who uphold the free and unadulterated teachings of their respective religions.

I challenge all such believing men and believing women in the world today to be loud enough and not allow the fanatics and extremists to have their way and destroy the peace which Allah's Messengers and Prophets have toiled to build for the whole of mankind.

This way, the voice of reason will prevail and all of us, irrespective of our religious affiliation, can live together in mutual respect, peaceful co-existence and unity for national cohesion and development.

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# Economic Justice

by Saad Ahmad – Oshkosh, USA

*Verily, Allah enjoins justice, and the doing of good to others; and giving like kindred.*  
(Ch.16:V.91)

In order to understand the concept of ‘Economic Justice’, I will first explain the concept of justice in general – its definition and importance. Then I will discuss its application in an economic system. After establishing the importance of justice in an economy I will discuss the approach that Islam takes to tackle the issue. Finally I will discuss some specific steps that Islam suggests in order to achieve economic justice.

For references, I have relied heavily on the Holy Qur’an, and the books *Absolute Justice, Kindness and Kinship* and *Islam’s Response to Contemporary Issues* – both by Hadrat Mirza Tahir Ahmad<sup>(ra)</sup>, which provided valuable guidance.

Justice is not the end, it is the means that will lead to grace and

then to a spontaneous expression of love and care as experienced by a mother for her child; who would not want to have a society like that. In fact the desire for this ultimate objective, where the whole society is so harmonious that every one feels about the next person as their kin is a desire that is built in to the human psyche. All laws, philosophies, dogmas *try* to achieve this objective, Islam provides the way – and the first stop on this journey is *justice – that is absolute justice.*

Absolute justice can be compared to the idea of *Equilibrium and Balance* in the physical world. An example can be seen in an *ecosystem*. A perfect balance exists between the animal kingdom and the plant kingdom; and this balance is responsible for the survival of the whole system. A slight deviation, like cutting some trees, killing some animals or introducing some new ones adversely affects the whole system.

Justice is in play in all spheres of life and is essential for survival. Human beings are given free will, so the true absolute justice will be defined as a conscious effort to remain on this just path. For an illustration, visualise a bullet jetting out of a muzzle. From then on it is on a fixed path governed by the natural laws. If other factors, such as winds and change of medium, influence the bullet to deviate from this set course and if again the bullet had not only the consciousness but also the ability and strength to resist these influences and continue to maintain its trajectory unruffled, then that conscious effort to remain on the right path is what is termed as absolute justice.<sup>1</sup>

Now that we have an understanding of the theory of absolute justice, let us explore its application in an economic system. Allah explained the fundamental principles of 'economic justice' to Prophet Adam<sup>(as)</sup> as follows:

*It is provided for thee that thou wilt not hunger therein, nor wilt thou be naked.*

*And that thou wilt not thirst therein, nor wilt thou be exposed to the sun.*

(Ch.20: Vs.119-120)

Hence, at the economic level, the teachings of Adam<sup>(as)</sup> comprise four fundamental *rights* granted to man at the very start of the formation of society. They are:

- Every person has the right to be properly fed; none will remain hungry.
- Every person has the right to be adequately clothed.
- Every person is guaranteed a supply of healthy water.
- None will be left without shelter.<sup>2</sup>

**This is the paradise of Adam<sup>(as)</sup> as depicted in the Holy Qur'an.**

Why, one would ask, is Islam trying to guarantee these rights? Is it not fashionable these days to say that one needs to earn these basic needs? Is it not an expectation of these fundamental rights termed as *freeloading*? (A freeloader is an American slang for one who attends social gatherings for free food and drink and has begun to be applied to dependents of state

handouts or benefits..ed). Is not the popular phrase in today's materialistic society – equality of opportunity, not equality of equity? Are you not supposed to work for a living? Would not a society encourage laziness by *guaranteeing* these rights?

These are tough questions; for an answer let us turn to the ultimate creation of the Almighty – the human body.

First part of the answer deals with the concept of cause and affect: meaning what would happen if these rights were not respected. The natural laws will work against such a society. The members of a society that will utilize this right may not be the most vibrant contributors to the economy, they may not be paying the most taxes, they may not be the intellectuals and the thinkers; nevertheless they are parts of the same whole. Some parts of a human body contribute more to the bodily functions than others; mind is the king, heart is the government, immune system is the army, kidneys and lungs are the cleaning crew, blood vessels are the post office; all working

vigorously toward the survival of the body... and then there is the small toe, lonely toe that no one cares about. That toe may not be contributing as much as the heart or the mind; but nevertheless it has some basic rights to blood, energy, nourishment etc. These rights are not a function of the organ's contribution; because health of the whole body would be adversely affected even if the least important organ is deprived of these basic necessities. Ignoring an injury to the toe may cause tetanus or some other disease causing grave suffering to the whole body.

This is what will happen in a society that does not guarantee the basic rights. If it does not guarantee the blood circulation to some organs from the point of view that they have done nothing to earn it, the society as a whole will suffer from painful diseases. We see implications of that every day in every society that does not follow this principle. We see young innocent children turning into gangsters and murderers. We see families losing their fathers to drugs and suicide. We see mothers abandoning their children. We see

abortion on the rise. We see care on decline. We see apathy strengthening and empathy losing – all signs of a sick, infected, and diseased society. Why do we feel surprised on hearing such incidents? Allah has already told us the principle governing these outcomes. Allah has promised us that a guarantee of these rights will make this very world a heaven – consequently a lack of this awareness will make this world a hell.

The second part of the answer deals with the ownership of the economy. There is no controversy, for example, over the right to breathe. No one is required to pay for breathing; because air is no one's property and the mode of its circulation, as chosen by the Almighty does not involve a payment system. Source of material wealth is none other, but the same God. For its distribution, He has established a different system involving human beings as the carriers, just like blood is carried one way in a human body and air as another. God is still the source, so He has the ultimate right to dictate the ground rules for

its distribution. Allah tells us about this rule as follows:

*And Allah multiplies it further for whomsoever He pleases; and Allah is Bountiful is Allah All-knowing.*  
(Ch.2: V.262)

If the heart pumps the blood to go toward the feet, no organ in between the two has any right to hoard the blood. No argument may be used to justify such an attitude by any organ, simply because it was not its blood to begin with. At any given time, one organ may be using more blood than the other, it may be using more resources than the other – but at no time is that organ the owner of those resources.

The wealth of the society does not belong to individuals, as a capitalist might want; nor does it belong to the society, as a socialist may desire. It belongs to God and God alone. He is the only one who has the final right to decide on the methods of its distribution.

Now that we have established the definition of absolute justice and its importance in an economic

system, what guidance does Allah provide us in this regard?

Hadrat Mirza Tahir Ahmad<sup>(ra)</sup>, the fourth successor of the Promised Messiah<sup>(as)</sup>, explained this as follows:

‘In scientific socialism, an attempt is made to level-off the economic soil so completely and perfectly that there are no ups and downs left. If watered such a soil will get its share equally. There is no question of any demand from the haves nor any threat to the haves from the less fortunate sections of the society to forcibly rob them of their surplus wealth.

In the capitalist society, they talk more of equal opportunities, level playing fields and free economies than of equal distribution of wealth. Thus there is always room for the demand of rights and the creation of pressure groups such as trade unions etc. which seek the most out of the government or other capitalists for the sake of the employee

and the labourer who always live under a sense of deprivation.

If scientific socialism is implemented ideally, there is no need left for any section of society to make demands. Either that society would be rich enough to equitably distribute national wealth according to the *needs or it* would be so poor as to have failed to fulfill even the basic needs leaving every member of the society to share equally in the misery. Either way, it would end up as a society where demand no longer has a meaningful role to play.

The capitalist system, on the other hand, is demand-oriented. The less fortunate section of the society must be given the right to express its dissatisfaction and a free opportunity to be heard: hence the need for the formation of pressure groups and strikes, industrial strife, lockouts etc.

Islam attempts to create an attitude whereby the govern-

ments and the wealthy are constantly reminded that it is in their own ultimate interest to establish an equitable system. They are also constantly exhorted to be on the look out for the rights of others. The weak and the poor should not be denied their fundamental economic rights, such as freedom to chose one's profession, equal access to opportunities, and the basic requirements of life – as discussed earlier. The lack of this very special attitude has already caused much misery, pain and disorder in the history of human struggle and survival. There is thus greater emphasis in Islam on giving than taking or keeping. The government and the wealthy must constantly be on the lookout lest there be a section of society which is deprived of the fundamental human right to live decently. A truly Godly state would have felt the need and taken appropriate measures for its fulfillment. Before grief turns into crises and protest and before the need threatens peace and order, the cause of grief

must be removed and the need fulfilled.’<sup>3</sup>

Islam is guaranteeing the same basic rights that a socialist system also promises but does not use the same coercive means to achieve them. Islam realises that in any society there will be wealthy and poor people, just like in a human body some organs have access to more resources than the others. Islam's approach is not so cold as dialectical materialism either. The Islamic social system remains deeply wedded to the innate laws of the human psyche. Islam attempts to raise the consciousness and sensitivity of a society, as a whole, to such a degree whereby members of a society as a whole are concerned more about what they owe to the society than what the society owes to them. Prophet Muhammad<sup>(sa)</sup>, explains these ideas in his various sayings as follows:

‘Give the laborer more than his dues. Pay him what he has earned before his sweat has dried out. Do not put those who serve under you to such tasks, as you cannot perform

yourself. As far as possible, feed your servants with whatever you feed your family. Provide them with similar clothing. Do not transgress against the meek in any way, or you will be held responsible before God. Lest you succumb to false pride, occasionally make your servants sit on the same table with you and serve them.'

*(Various Ahadith)<sup>†</sup>*

It is easy to be conscious of the rights of others when the economy is doing well; it is the recession and the economic hardships that make us careless. Allah tells us to spend in good cause even in adversity:

*And vie with one another in asking for forgiveness from your Lord, and for a Paradise whose price is the heavens and the earth, prepared for the God-fearing those who spend in prosperity and adversity, and those who suppress anger and pardon men; and Allah loves those who do good.*

*(Ch.3: Vs.134-135)*

When economy is at a low, the first victim of our budgeting is charity. We think that *United Way*, *Salvation Army*, or *Red Cross* will have to wait for better times in order to receive our monies. The Almighty explains to us that even in the toughest times do not hold back on charity because it is those times that the poor are suffering the most. They need the most help when the economy is at its worst.

All civilised societies today have well-established institutions for charity and people do contribute toward those also; but the concept of alms, as generally understood, is double-edged. On one hand, it pays compliment to the qualities of excellence of the donor, but on the other hand, it creates an embarrassing, if not disgraceful, image of the recipient. The very act of receiving alms degrades his status. Islam revolutionises this concept. A fascinating analysis is made of why some people are poor and some are rich in the following verse of the Holy Qur'an:

*And in their wealth was a share for the beggar (one who asked for help) and the*

*destitute (for one who could not.)*  
(Ch.51: V.20)

This verse is telling the donor that what he gives to the poor, in reality, did not belong to him anyway. Something has to be very wrong with an economy where some people are left destitute or compelled to beg for their survival. This is not a sign of a healthy economic system.

The message delivered to the recipient is that there is no need for him to be embarrassed because, in fact, God has granted him the fundamental right to survive decently and honourably. So whatever your apparent benefactor is giving to you, is your own right which somehow got transferred over to the donor. As mentioned earlier, God's teachings are directly related to the human nature. Any injunction that is likely to disturb the equilibrium is counter balanced by corrective measures.

An objection may be raised against this model on the grounds that this idea will promote *free loading* and the rights will be provided at the

cost of decent behaviour. To remove such ills, Allah turns to the recipients and says:

*If you are ungrateful, surely Allah is Self-Sufficient, being independent of you. And He is not pleased with ingratitude in His servants. But if you show gratefulness, He likes it in you.*  
(Ch.39 :V.8)

Further emphasising the point, the Holy Founder of Islam<sup>(sa)</sup> reminds the believers:

‘One who is not grateful to human beings is not grateful to God either.’<sup>5</sup>

The implication is that Allah will not accept gratitude from a person who is ungrateful to fellow human beings. This message of the rights of the recipient is intended to be only a quiet message to the recipients so that they do not suffer from any inferiority complex and to safeguard their dignity. The inference is that to express gratitude is not against the dignity of man: on the contrary it elevates him.

On the other hand, Allah tells the donor that it is against his dignity to accept gratitude as if he deserved it. According to Islam, the service to mankind is for a higher purpose than to satisfy the natural urge or earn good reputation. The acts of kindness should be for the sake of the Almighty not for any material reasons. About such people Allah says:

*And they feed, for love of Him, the poor, the orphan, and the prisoner, saying, 'We feed you for Allah's pleasure only. We desire no reward nor thanks from you.*

(Ch.76 :Vs. 9-10)

To remove the potential ill of free loaders, Islam encourages spending more than receiving. The Holy Founder of Islam<sup>(sa)</sup> once said:

'The hand of the donor is better than that of receiver.'<sup>6</sup>

And on another occasion he said:

*'The upper hand is better than the lower hand.'*<sup>7</sup>

When Allah talks about giving and receiving it is not confined to the domain of money. Whatever Allah has given an individual should be spent in His cause. Allah says:

*Who believe in the unseen and observe Prayer, and spend out of what We have provided for them.*

(Ch.2: V.4)

This covers all faculties, qualities, and also, of course, every type of material possession, human relationship and ties. The phrase also covers such values as honour, peace, comfort etc.

By establishing this system Allah is giving us the recipe of a heavenly society where:

- People give to others, not for personal gain, but only for the sake of the Almighty.
- The donor does not expect any gratitude. He sincerely believes himself to be entrusted with the money so that it is distributed to the less fortunate.
- The receiver expresses gratitude to the donor as well as to the Lord.

- People in general want to give more than they receive.
- People do not hesitate to donate their time, services, money, comfort, and any other material possession in the way of God.

Surely, injustice will not find home in such a society.

Understanding of this philosophy makes hearts softer and more receptive to the Divine Guidance. Islam does not stop here, rather it goes a step further and provides some details. Hadrat Mirza Tahir Ahmad<sup>(ra)</sup> explains this as follows in his book *Islam's Response to Contemporary Issues*:

‘Islamic economic system commences with the premise that all that is in the heaven and the earth has been created by God Who has bestowed man various provisions on trust. As a trustee, man will be held accountable for the discharge of this trust. The possession or absence of wealth is a means of trial so that both in abundance and adversity, those who are mindful of their accountability may be

distinguished from those who resort to callousness and scant attention to the sufferings of the rest of the mankind.’<sup>8</sup>

The most prominent tool that Islam uses to promote circulation of wealth in a society is the system of *Zakat*. *Zakat* is one of the five pillars of Islam. The Arabic word *Zakat* literally means to purify something and in the context of a mandatory levy would mean that the residual wealth after the deduction of *Zakat* had rendered it pure and lawful for the believers.

*Zakat* is a ‘tax’ on disposable assets above specific thresholds that have remained in the hands of the owners beyond one year. The exact percentage of this tax is flexible and is a function of the economic situation. The money thus collected can be utilised only for certain categories of expenditure – which have been spelled out in the Holy Qur’an as follows:

*The alms are only for the poor and the needy, and for those employed in connection therewith, and for those whose*

*hearts are to be reconciled, and for the freeing of slaves, and for those in debt, and for the cause of Allah, and for the wayfarer – an ordinance from Allah. And Allah is All-Knowing, Wise.*  
(Ch.9: V. 60)

The treasury is bound by this ordinance. No room is left here, for example, for using the collected tax for debt financing or anything of the sort. Money is collected and distributed, just like blood is distributed in the body.

With Zakat, Islam sets forth another ordinance – that being the prohibition of interest. According to Islam, money is meant to be circulated not hoarded. Expectation of growth of money without circulation, as expected by interest, is like storing blood in one part of the body, expecting that it will grow. Such blood will not grow – rather it will cause clotting and may lead to death. Islamic economic system promotes joint-ventures, investments, partnerships, share-holdings, business etc. – all means of circulation of wealth. The system of Zakat,

where idle money is taxed, is intended to promote this system of circulation. If idle wealth is going to be taxed, people will be tempted to invest money into the society thus improving the health of the society. The system of the interest on the other hand promotes hoarding of wealth. The borrower is expected to pay the interest regardless of the economic condition. This encourages the companies to save for difficult periods rather than investing into society. Interest is like a parasite that eats away the very fibre of the economic system.

I will end this paper with some verses from the Holy Qur'an which summarise the basis of this philosophy:

*And to Allah belongs the Kingdom of the heavens and the earth; and Allah has power over all things.*  
(Ch.3:V.190)

*Allah has favored some of you above others in worldly gifts. But those more favoured will not restore any part of their worldly gifts to those whom*

*their right hands possess, so that they may be equal sharers in them. (Ch.16:V.72)*

*Verily, Allah commands you to make over the trusts to those entitled to them. (Ch.4:V.59)*

*Verily, your wealth and your children are a trial. (Ch.64:V.16)*

*Their flesh reaches not Allah, nor does their blood, but it is your righteousness that reaches Him. (Ch.22:V.38)*

*Allah will abolish interest and will cause charity to increase. (Ch.2:V.277)*

*In the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of the night and day there are indeed signs for men of understanding; those who remember Allah, standing, sitting, and lying on their sides, and ponder over the creation of the heavens and the earth, say 'Our Lord, Thou hast not created this in vain;*

*Nay, Holy art Thou; save us then from the punishment of the Fire. (Ch.3:Vs.191-192)*

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1. Hadrat Mirza Tahir Ahmad, *Absolute Justice, Kindness and Kinship*. Islam International Publications, p 26
2. Hadrat Mirza Tahir Ahmad, *Absolute Justice, Kindness and Kinship*. Islam International Publications, p 116
3. Hadrat Mirza Tahir Ahmad, *Islam's Response to Contemporary Issues*. Islam International Publications, p 115
4. Hadrat Mirza Tahir Ahmad, *Islam's Response to Contemporary Issues*. Islam International Publications, p 117
5. Hadrat Mirza Tahir Ahmad, *Islam's Response to Contemporary Issues*. Islam International Publications, p 119
6. Hadrat Mirza Tahir Ahmad, *Islam's Response to Contemporary Issues*. Islam International Publications, p 123
7. Hadrat Mirza Tahir Ahmad, *Islam's Response to Contemporary Issues*. Islam International Publications, p 124
8. Hadrat Mirza Tahir Ahmad, *Islam's Response to Contemporary Issues*. Islam International Publications, p 144

# Who are the Amish?

By Zakaria Virk, Canada

Travelling near Kitchener (Berlin until 1916), Ontario or in the agriculture paradise of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, it is not hard to spot an Amish as their men wear broad-brimmed black hats, plain-cut trousers and the women wear bonnets and ankle length dresses. Their distinctive garb and use of horses visibly distinguishes them from other Americans. On visiting an Amish settlement you will notice a horse and buggy clip-clopping along the road and energy producing wind-mills dotted in the fields. Among the Amish, the horse and cart are a powerful symbol of their way of life.

## Origins of the Amish

The Amish (an offshoot of the Anabaptist faith) is a Protestant religious group that originated in Switzerland over 300 years ago. The Anabaptist movement had started on January 21, 1525 in Zurich, Switzerland when Protestant pastor Ulrich Zwingli proclaimed that the grace of God and forgiveness of sins were freely available to all by faith alone. In the

first half of the 16th century when Europe was embroiled in religious upheaval, a group who called themselves the *Swiss Brethren* formed a fellowship. They were named Anabaptists (re-baptizers, or *Wiedertreuer*). Both Catholics and Protestant churches persecuted them. The reason for their persecution was their belief that :

- the church should be a group of voluntary adults, baptized during their adulthood instead of during infancy as children are innocent;
- there should be a total separation of church and state;
- worship should be in the home rather than at church.

Moreover they stressed the priesthood of all believers and adult baptism on confession of faith. At that time in Europe adult baptism was considered a crime punishable by death. They believed that the Church had moved away from the principles revealed in the Bible, that people should be loyal to God rather than any government.

In the 16th century European society Anabaptism came to stand for the vilest person imaginable. The Church and State authorities tried to force them to recant, those who refused were ridiculed, their properties burned or taken away from them. Many thousands were tortured by having their tongues, hands, feet or even ears cut off, while others were burned at the stake, drowned in rivers, starved in prisons, or lost their heads to the executioner's sword. It is said that between the years 1525 – 1531, about 5000 were killed, with the last known martyr to have died in 1614 in Switzerland.

A twelve-hundred-page *Martyr's Mirror* first published in Dutch in 1660 and later in German and English records the suffering of their ancestors from 1531 to 1597 in Europe. Virtually every Amish home reserves a special place for *Martyr's Mirror* alongside the Bible. As a result of this harsh persecution many of them fled to Holland, Russia, England, Prussia, and some later moved to North America in view of the religious tolerance. This persecution led to the Amish tradition of farming and

having their worship services in homes rather than churches.

In 1537 Menno Simons (1496-1561), a Dutch Catholic priest, declared that infant baptism was unscriptural, joined the movement and soon became its leader. His moderate leadership, prolific writings, preaching and tireless organisational work did much to unify the Anabaptists who were scattered in northern German states and the Netherlands. Two of his most important books are *Foundations of Christian Doctrine* (1539) and *True Christian Faith* (1541). It is from Menno that the descendents of the Swiss Brethren derived the name Mennonite. Today close to two million Mennonites of various races and tongues are spread in more than 75 countries. Many descend from their early beginnings in Switzerland, Germany and Holland.

In 1693, a young Swiss Mennonite Bishop Jakob Ammann broke with his brethren and formed a new Christian fellowship. His followers were nicknamed Amish (pronounced Ah'mish, also spelled Omish). Amman argued that

Christians, in obedience to Christ, should wash each other's feet at the communion service. To promote doctrinal purity and spiritual discipline, Amman forbade beard trimming and fashionable dress. He administered a strict discipline in his congregations. Appealing to New Testament teaching and the practice of Dutch Anabaptists, Amman advocated shunning excommunicated members. This issue drove the decisive wedge between Amman and other Anabaptist leaders. These theological differences as well as personal feuds eventually erupted into a breach beyond repair. The Mennonites and the Amish have split many times either because of personality conflicts or from a deep concern about the purity of faith. Most Amish groups consider themselves cousins of the Mennonites. Both have been nourished by a common Anabaptist spring, although they have remained organisationally separate to the present day. Both churches still share the same beliefs concerning baptism, non-resistance, and basic Bible doctrines. They differ in matters of dress, technology, language, form of

worship, and interpretation of the Bible.

### **Immigrate to America**

In 1681, William Penn, a member of the Quakers, received land in America from King Charles II, who owed a debt to his father. The king named this land Penn Sylvania. Around 1700, Penn traveled to Germany and invited the tormented people to Pennsylvania promising them religious freedom. A group of Mennonites immigrated to the United States and established themselves in Germantown, near Philadelphia in 1683. Within six years of their arrival, they issued a protest against slavery, predating Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation by 174 years.

The first group of Amish immigrants left Switzerland and Germany on the ship *Charming Nancy* which arrived in Philadelphia on October 8, 1737. They settled near the town of Hamburg (now Reading). Although the Amish were excellent farmers, the English looked down upon them. For instance Benjamin Franklin dismissed them as *stupid boors*. The first Ohio settlement

was established in 1807; it now has the largest church districts and largest Amish population in the United States. Three quarter of all Amish are settled in Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Indiana. A large majority of them live on the farms. The total Amish population in the US is estimated at 134,000, but only adults are counted as full church members.

In 1993, the Amish celebrated their tri-centennial. Extinct in their European homeland, today more than 200,000 of them live in two hundred settlements across North America. These settlements are now prime tourist attractions.

Mennonites first arrived in Canada from the US in 1786, after the American Revolution. They acquired land from private owners in the Niagara Peninsula, in York and Waterloo counties. Such family names as *Kropf, Zehr, Ruby, Lichti, Kennel, Roth, Nafzigers, Gingerich, Bender, and Steinmans* are quite common to this day in Kitchener-Waterloo cities of Ontario. In the 1870's several thousand Dutch Mennonites settled in the Canadian province of Manitoba where a rapidly growing community is

established in Winnipeg. There are 1000 congregations in Canada, tied into families of two types: those representing the older tradition called *Old Order Mennonite Churches*, and those representing newer structures called *Conferences*, i.e. the Conference of Mennonites in Canada.

### **Basic beliefs**

The primary tenet of the Amish creed is the supremacy of the Bible. Their major doctrines are:

- remaining separate from the world;
- rejection of involvement with the military;
- autonomy of districts; no central organization;
- no desire to create converts;
- application of the *Ordnung* which regulates private, public and ceremonial life.

Every Amish home has four distinctive books, the Bible, the *Martyr's Mirror*, a hymnbook called the *Ausbund*, and a prayer book which contains the 1632 edition of the Dordrecht Confession of Faith. The sacred text of the Amish people is the Bible. They interpret the Bible literally, which

explains their lifestyle. In 1659 a Dutch Mennonite Van Braught collected stories of 4011 martyrs from the 16th and 17th century. This volume was not available in German until 1749 when it was printed in Pennsylvania. In 1886, *Martyrs Mirror* was translated into English. The first partial edition of the *Ausbund* was printed in 1564 under the title *Etliche schone christliche Gesang (some beautiful Christian songs)*. It consists of 51 hymns composed and sung by Anabaptist prisoners in the dungeons of the Oberhaus castle of Passau on the Danube (Germany) from 1535-40. These verses were borne out of persecution and speak of sorrow and pain in this life as the following extract shows:

*We wander in the forest dark,  
With dogs upon our track;  
And like the silent, captive lamb  
Men bring us, prisoners, back.  
They point to us amid the throng,  
And with their taunts offend;  
And long to let the sharpened ax  
On heretics descend.*

There are 11 known European editions and many editions printed in America (latest in the 1990s). As late as 1692 the government of

Bern, Switzerland, placed the book on the proscribed list and ordered its confiscation when found. The old Order Amish still regularly sing selections from the *Ausbund* in their worship services. The *Ordnung* are the unwritten rules on which the Amish people base their morals and way of life and has evolved gradually over the decades. For instance it prescribes that a woman's hair should be parted in the centre and a man's hair should be combed with bangs. It also lays down rules for food preferences, types of crops grown, job choices, style of house, and hobbies. It contains prescriptions – you ought to wear a wide brimmed hat – and proscriptions – you should not own a television etc. They have taken no stand for or against smoking. None of the women smoke, and men usually like smoking cigars. Amish do not believe anyone is better just because of his position therefore, they call everyone by his or her first name.

The Amish often think of ingenious ways to get around an old practice. For example, freezers are not permitted in homes but are placed in the homes of non-Amish neighbours.

The Amish believe that:

- The One and only God has revealed Himself as existing eternally as Father, son, and Holy Spirit
- The Bible is the Word of God, the ultimate authority and New Testament is the fulfillment of the Old Testament.
- God has created and continues to sustain all things.
- Humankind is sinful, needs atonement through Jesus Christ.
- Everyone is free to choose or reject salvation by grace through faith.
- The church is the visible expression of those who commit themselves to a life of holiness and love.
- Jesus Christ will personally return to judge the world, raise the dead, and usher in the glorious kingdom of God.

### **Church Organisation**

The Amish church is highly decentralised, each *Gemeinde* or congregation consisting of 175 members choosing its bishop, preacher, and deacon from its membership. The Amish meet every two weeks in the home of a member on Sunday for worship.

The service (*Diener Versammlungen*) which lasts for about four hours is conducted in High German. At the service *Ausbund* is used which contains words but no music. A foot washing ceremony is conducted twice a year, Easter and October, when members bring towels and buckets of water into church to commemorate Jesus' washing of his disciple's feet (John 13:14). Pairs of women also wash each other's feet. Afterwards they clasp hands and kiss each other as a symbol of love and fellowship.

The sermon is delivered by the minister in High German and is often mixed with Pennsylvania Dutch and English. Pennsylvania Dutch (early settlers in Pennsylvania confused Deutsch with Dutch, it has nothing to do with Netherlands) is the language all Amish speak among themselves. The Amish calendar is very simple; there are two great Sundays of communion in spring and fall, with days of fasting that precede them which are high points of religious observance. Apart from that, a service is held every other Sunday. Christmas is celebrated with family

dinners and an exchange of gifts, however there is no Christmas tree, no decorations, and no Santa Claus. Good Friday is spent in prayer and fasting followed by Easter. Ascension Day (40 days after Easter) and Pentecost (11th Sunday after Easter) are Amish holidays. Thanksgiving and New Year's Day are observed with fervour, but Halloween is totally ignored.

One of the most important tenets of their faith is *non-conformity* i.e. separation from the world which means refusal to follow values set by a world they consider evil. In practice this tenet is the reason for their distinctive dress and rejection of most modern amenities such as electricity, televisions, tractors, cars and telephones (they cannot own one but can use pay telephone). Similarly they are allowed to ride in motorised vehicles including airplanes but cannot own one. Business partnerships with non-Amish are forbidden. Marriage within the groups is encouraged; even marriage with a young person from a different district with slightly variant *Ordnung* is not approved of. Believers are advised not to swear oaths or to hold public

office. They refuse to bear arms, as they think of themselves as '*defenseless Christians*'.

Their belief in life after death is very strong as they regard life on earth as temporary, a preparation for eternity. To a devout Amish eternity has more reality than life on earth.

The Amish social life exclusively revolves around family, home, and church. The society is organised around three basic social units: 1) A *settlement* includes a cluster of families living in a common geographical area. 2) The *church district* is the basic organisational unit above the family in their society including thirty to forty families that live in the immediate locale. 3) The *affiliation* is a cluster of Amish congregations, in spiritual fellowship within a settlement.

### **Gelassenheit (Submission to God)**

The early Anabaptists used the term *Gelassenheit* to convey the idea of submitting to the will of God with a dedicated heart. The rough translation of this German word is submission to a higher authority. To Amish thinking, obedience to the

will of God is the cardinal religious value. *Gelassenheit* is an abstract concept which encompasses many aspects of Amish life. It can be broken down into five units which include: personality, symbols, structure, ritual, and values.

The meek spirit of *Gelassenheit* unfolds as Amish individuals submit to the will of Almighty God, church elders, parents, community, and the Amish tradition. The goal of *Gelassenheit* is to produce a humble person who discovers fulfillment in the community and in return receives a visible ethnic identity. It stands in sharp contrast to modern day individualism. A favorite Amish saying defines 'JOY' as *Jesus first, Yourself last, and Others in between*. Amish teachers sometimes remind their students that the middle letter of pride is 'I'.

The meaning of *Gelassenheit* is serving and respecting others, a modest way of acting, talking, dressing, and walking. It forbids the use of force. Therefore, they refuse to serve in the military, file law-suites, hold political office, use courts, serve on juries, or work as police officers. Silence and avoidance are often their means of

avoiding conflict. *Gelassenheit* is a social process that recycles the individual's energies for the advancement of community.

### **Dress**

In Amish society, a person's dress signals *Gelassenheit*, i.e. submission to the collective will of the society. Whereas a modern dress portrays individual expression, the Amish dress is an expression of group solidarity. By surrendering control over their appearance, they demonstrate that individuals are less important than the group. The form and colour of dress signify sex, age, marital status, church membership, as well as death and mourning. It enables communication without words. Dress regulations have been encoded in the church's customs.

Generally men and boys wear dark suit coats which have no lapels and fasten with hooks and eyes. Trousers are made in the traditional pattern and held up by suspenders, with no fly, no crease, and no belt. Shirts are made of solid coloured fabric like blue, green and orange. Coloured shirts are allowed, but stripes and prints are not. Patterns are not allowed as they are

considered fancy. Shoes are black for dress up, but brown for work. Broad brimmed hats made of either straw or black felt are worn outdoors. The width of an Amish hat brim not only signifies his status but also the degree of his orthodoxy. The broader the brim, the more conservative the wearer is.

The hair is cut about even with the earlobe, not parted and combed front in bangs. Long untrimmed beards without moustaches are the mark of an adult Amish. Men are clean shaven until they get married, then they wear a beard which is like a wedding ring. Single men over forty also grow a beard. Sideburns without a beard are prohibited.

The Amish women make all the clothing for their families, using sewing machines and brown paper patterns used for generations. Amish housewives still use heavy flat irons which are heated on the burners of wood stoves. Little girls up to the age of eight wear a pinafore called a Schlupp Schotzli over their dress. Women wear full skirts made of solid coloured fabric. Purple is their favorite colour, while red is the least favourite due to the fact that red was the colour of the

church doors of those who persecuted them in Europe. As a sign of modesty, an apron is always worn and a cape often covers the bodice of the dress. Amish girls and women fasten their dresses with straight pins. Women do not cut or curl their hair, or let it hang loose. They wear it parted in the middle and combed back from the face, then twisted into a bun at the back of the head. When going to church, women put on their *kapp* (prayer cap) with bonnet and a black shawl on the body. The *kapp* is white if they are married and a black one if they are single. Amish women do not wear any kind of jewelry, or make up. For Sunday preaching, men wear a *Mutzi*, a long black frock coat with rounded edges in front and a slit at the bottom in back and a rounded standing collar. Buttons are disallowed because Amish are pacifists and think that buttons are of military origin. Neckties are forbidden. Other than preaching, men wear *Wamus*, a black sack coat with high round neck. Buttoned sweaters are sometime allowed. Black shoes and stockings are worn for outdoors.

Amish introduced *Fraktur* art and quilting in America and Canada.

Fraktur is the name given to the meaningful symbols and distinctive style of Mennonite art. As they believed that Jesus or God should not be represented, so they express their feelings through God's creations such as birds, trees and flowers. Women embroider tulip, rose, star and heart motifs on towels, pillowcases, and quilts.

### **Pacifism**

Most Amish and Mennonites refuse to go to any kind of war. For five hundred years these people have believed that peaceable Christians will go to prison rather than kill a fellow human being. Their leaders have urged returning good for evil and turning the other cheek for the sake of peace. In the USA, Amish have been able to work for two years in approved alternative service projects in lieu of the military service. During World War II, Amish worked in US hospitals, forestry, or overseas agricultural development and health projects. Many Amish young prefer the Voluntary Service i.e. working for varying lengths of time without compensation, with room and board provided by the Voluntary Service Centres. During the time of US

military draft, many young men chose voluntary service for their two years of alternative service. Despite their stand against war, the Amish are regarded as good citizens. They pay their taxes faithfully, help their neighbours and support community fire and health facilities. There is a strong tradition of social conscience among the Amish. They were the first to protest slavery in the United States.

### **Education**

The majority of Amish believe in higher education as a good experience for young people although some of the Older Order groups question whether such education leads to greater wisdom and obedience. The Amish believe that wisdom and understanding are more important than knowledge and facts. On average an Amish child knows less about science, technology, and the arts but more about soil, animal and plant care and basic skills for carpentry, masonry and food preservation. Amish children are not sent to kindergarten, because parents want their kids to stay home until they are six. In school, children are never allowed to stand around by

themselves, they must be included in the group. Children are expected to work together as a group, not compete as individuals. In 1972 the US Supreme Court ruled that the Amish sect is exempt from state compulsory education laws requiring a child to attend beyond the 8th grade, as such laws violate the Constitutional right to the freedom of religion. They have an old saying, *'The more educated the more mixed up.'*

### **Farming and other Careers**

The Amish have always preferred to be farmers, because of the biblical directive that man should live *'by the sweat of his brow.'* They believe that working the soil not only keeps them close to God, but it helps to keep the family together, and it keeps the temptations of the world at bay. The Amish farmers produce plentiful crops by working long hours and employing innovative methods. In the state of Pennsylvania (USA) generally an Amish has about 40 acres with various crops like alfalfa, corn, tobacco and grains. They use horses to cultivate and harvest crops as well as to bale hay and straw. The farm practices of Mennonites in

Ontario were widely copied by others, such as rotation of crops, and bank barns. They strongly believe in sharing their gardens and earnings with others. Amish Church agencies are dedicated to finding ways to improve soils and seeds and farming methods in developing countries.

Besides farming many Amish sons go to work in cabinet shops or cheese factories. Owning a bar or a gambling establishment is not approved. The Old Order Amish women sometimes work outside home, doing house cleaning, selling goods at farmer's markets, or working in factories.

Legislated by the U.S. Congress, self employed Amish do not pay taxes because they do not receive Medicare, Social Security benefits, or any type of government assistance or insurance benefits. Their refusal to be *'yoked with an unbeliever'* forces them not to accept any subsidies from the government, like subsidies for milk. Another example of *'yoke with the unbeliever'* is electricity by generator is acceptable but electricity by wire is taboo. All their automatic milking machines,

coolers, and lights are operated with diesel generators.

If an Amish is disabled or widowed, others will come forward to help with chores and finances. Amish care for their elderly until death.

### **Missionary work**

The early Anabaptists participated in active missionary work, going everywhere, preaching and teaching. Many Anabaptists died for their faith. Many were viciously persecuted so they sought refuge in the hills, caves and countryside. By 1851 the Amish and Mennonites were spread in seven countries. In 1995 organised fellowships existed in nearly sixty countries around the world. Half of the fellowship is non-white and lives outside of Europe and North America. The *Beachy Amish* have active mission and service programs in about a dozen countries.

The Old Order Amish do not participate in organized missionary work. They tend to believe in 'missionary by example'. Mennonites in North America sent their first foreign missionaries to India and Turkey in 1898. Most Amish groups are active in relief

and service work, and the Mennonite Central Committee distributes millions of dollars in aid to countries 'in the name of the Christ'.

It is estimated that about 20 per cent of Amish youth choose to join a less demanding denomination or leave altogether, and "*go English*".

### **Weddings**

Among the Amish groups, the wedding practices vary, but certain assumptions are the same: marriage is for life, divorce and remarriage are not considered options, the bride and groom must be at the wedding party along with family and Church community. Marriages are not arranged. The wedding and reception are held at the bride's home where food is provided for four to five hundred guests.

The Old Order Amish weddings mostly take place in November when farm work is less demanding. A four hour service begins at 8.30 am. It includes wedding hymns from the *Ausbund*, a long sermon on marriage illustrated from the Bible, simple vows, testimonies from church leaders, and an extended prayer. There is no

exchange of kisses, rings, fashion consultants, or caterers.

Photographs are forbidden by the *Ordnung* as it shows pride (*Hochmut*) in one's appearance. Following the service food is served. First to eat are the bride and groom. The newly wed couple does not go on honeymoon; instead they visit their extended families receiving wedding gifts.

Among the Amish groups, most of the farms and businesses are co-owned by husband and wife. The wife makes all the purchases, bids at auctions, and writes cheques to pay the bills. In the church she is not entitled to any leadership but she may participate in voting. Times are changing and a growing number of congregations now do ordain women to the ministry. Divorce in Amish couples is rare, separation is unknown. Amish couples do not marry for love or romance, but out of respect and need for a partner.

### **Last rites**

Funeral and burial usually takes place three days after the death of a member. During these three days members visit the grieved family to

offer sympathy and help. A funeral director assists in supplying the coffin and the hearse. The body is dressed in white, however, in the case of women she is buried in white shawl and apron. Family and friends gather around the body for a service. There are no eulogies. A hymn is spoken, but not sung. The law requires that the body must be embalmed if it is not buried within 24 hours of the death. No flowers are placed at the grave, only a simple tombstone to mark the spot. After the burial family and friends eat together to help the bereaved return to normal life again.

### **Spiritual Healing**

The Old Order Amish are often portrayed in the press as opposing modern medicine. This is a gross misrepresentation. Most Amish go to doctors, hospitals, and take medicine. They also believe in the fact that healing is a gift from God. 'The Lord gives and the Lord takes away'. Home remedies do receive a lot of attention, however, rural people do believe that good food, honey, tea, vinegar are as effective as drugs. Some members go to non-medical clinics and others visit mines and springs. Many groups operate health facilities in North

America. These health facilities expanded as a result of the military draft. Young men looking for alternative service found work in these health facilities.

The Amish have some tried and tested methods for dealing with the emotional illness that can cause physical illness.

*Love* – God is love and love is what heals all. This law is first in Amish life. *Adversity* – the Amish do not buy insurance as they have a solid network of family and friends. Scientists have now concluded that the greatest risk toward heart disease is loneliness. *Alms* – The Amish believe that one must give away a portion of his wealth, without boasting and he will be rewarded. *Anger* – Resentment eats a person up like cancer. *Forgive* others so that you may be forgiven. *Conscience* – a clear conscience is the best pillow. *Contentment* – he that is content has enough. The greatest wealth is to live with little. *Depression* – the best prescription for depression is to count your blessings. *Envy*- it's not so much what you eat that makes you sick, but what is eating you. *Family* –

close-knit families are the rule, grand parents are not placed in nursing homes but kept at home in their cottage on the farm called 'grossdadi haus'. *Fear* – there is no fear in love, perfect love casts out fear. *Happiness* – is a healthy outlook on life. Happiness is found by avoiding vanity, pride, anger, malice, lust, greed and fashion. *Holidays* – The Amish cherish their holidays. *Humour* – laughing exercises the lungs, heart, and adrenal glands while stimulating the brain to produce endorphins. Laughter relieves tension and fear. *Thankful* – it is hard to find a thankful person who is unhappy. *Touch* – many people show illness more as a deficiency for affection. The Amish enjoy massages of the feet, scalp, and back. Certain Amish dedicate their careers to the ministry of healing touch

## Conclusions

The Amish people are a fascinating sect of Christianity. Through the centuries they have stuck to their beliefs seemingly uninterested in which direction the world is moving. Some of them have not reaped the benefits of every changing technology. While some

of their thinking is a little extreme (i.e. the literal interpretation of the Bible), the sentiment of staying humble and friendly is indeed commendable.

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