

*Discover Islam*

# ISLAM IN HISTORY

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Table of Contents.....	2
Islam in History .....	3
The Eradication of <i>Fitna</i> .....	5
The Age of Religious Freedom .....	11
The Peaceful Propagation of Islam .....	24
The Role of Non-Muslims in Islamic Development.....	35

## ISLAM IN HISTORY

According to a tradition, the Prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him, observed that every verse of the Qur'an has two levels of meaning, one apparent and one hidden. That is, we have to read between the lines in order to go beyond the literal meaning and then, by keener concentration, arrive at its deeper significance.

So far as the literal import of the Qur'an is concerned, this was fully understood by the people at the time of revelation itself. For instance, the verse, 'Say, God is one,' (Qur'an, 112:1) was correctly construed by the Muslims of the early period of Islam, just as it will be today. There will be no difference in meaning with the passage of time. But, on more profound reflection, Qur'anic nuances, hidden in the lines, become unveiled. Such close study is engaged in in every period of time, so that new shades of meaning will continue to be revealed in every age.

According to a *hadith*, the Prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him, observed: "The wonders of the Qur'an will never come to an end." (*Mishkat al-Masabih*, Vol. 1, p. 659). This *hadith* refers to that aspect of the Qur'an which is of deeper significance, or that which lies between the lines. The Qur'an being the scriptures of an eternal religion, new connotations will go on being revealed in every succeeding age as a result of profound reflection. This process will continue uninterrupted until Doomsday.

Here I should like to focus on certain very apt verses appearing at two places in the Qur'an. (2:193, 8:39). They concern *qital-e-fitna*, that is, the abolition of religious persecution. When we study these verses in the light of other related verses of the Qur'an, we find that it was God's plan to abolish religious persecution and replace it with complete religious freedom, so that His servants could worship Him alone without any fear of persecution. Along with that, the door to the call of monotheism also was to be thrown wide open.

## THE ERADICATION OF *FITNA*

Islam emerged in the first quarter of the seventh century. At that time, monarchy was the order of the day all over the world. To the political rulers of that epoch, dissent of any kind, particularly religious free thinking, was anathema, because they saw it as a threat to their power. Therefore, to achieve political consolidation, the monarchs of those days adopted the principle of ideological coercion. Religious persecution thus became a weapon in the hands of the despots, so that no new ideology could be allowed to develop. Strong exception was taken to the growth of any other religion save that approved by the state. The independent thinking so essential for intellectual progress, was thus cruelly suppressed, and that was why, during the long periods of monarchical rule, neither could the sciences flourish, nor could individuals opt for the religion of their choice. Anyone who had the audacity to make an issue of this was likely to face summary execution.

The Qur'an refers thus to the religious oppression of ancient times:



Cursed be the people of the trench, who lighted the consuming fire and who sat around it watching the believers whom they were torturing. And they had nothing against them, save that they believed in God, the Mighty, the Praiseworthy. (85:4-8)

The human condition of those days is similarly depicted in a Makkan tradition narrated by Khabbab ibn al Arat: We complained to the Prophet at a time when he was resting in the shade of the Kabah wall. We said to him: "Don't you pray for us to God?" The Prophet replied: "Those who went before you faced such unbearable trials (due to their faith in a religion other than that of the state). One of them would be brought for trial, a pit would be dug for him, then he would be buried in it in a standing posture, with his head above the edge of the pit. Then a saw would be passed through his head until it split into two parts. Yet even such severe trials did not cause him to waver from his faith. People were scraped with iron combs until all their skin came off and the bones of their bodies were exposed. Yet these acts of persecution did not deter them from adhering to their faith. Certainly

God's will shall prevail (that is, the age of religious freedom will certainly come) when a traveller will journey from Sana'a to Hadhramawt, (that is, from one region to another,) without fearing anyone save God. And he will fear no wolf for his sheep. Yet you are in a hurry." (*Sahih Bukhari, Kitab al-Manaqib, Chapter, Alamaat an Nubuwwah fi'l Islam*).

This *hadith* shows that one of the revolutionary changes to be ushered in in the wake of the Prophet's mission was the end of this ancient age of religious persecution and the replacing of it with an age of religious freedom in order to smooth the path for God's servants to follow His religion. This most significant transformation was to take place as part of a divine plan. That is why the Qur'an enjoined the Prophet's companions to pray in advance to God: "Lord, do not lay on us the burden you laid on those before us. Lord, do not charge us with more than we can bear." (2:286)

This prayer was revealed by God Himself for the benefit of the believers. It was like a divine ordinance announced in the form of a prayer to be recited by the companions. This means that God,

who is the controller of history, had decreed a change in this coercive political system of ancient times in order that the religion of Monotheism could be practised and the invitation to people to answer its call could be issued in an atmosphere of freedom—a task which till that point had been seriously hindered by the prevalent religious oppression.

This divine edict became a reality, ostensibly as a result of human intervention, but actually with the succour of the Almighty. In consonance with this divine plan, the Qur'an enjoined the believer to "make war on them until persecution (*fitna*) shall cease and Religion is only for God. If they desist, God is cognizant of all their actions; but if they pay no heed, know then that God will protect you. He is the Noblest Helper and Protector." (8:39-40)

Religious coercion through persecution was totally against the Creation Plan of God. God created this world for the purpose of putting mankind to the test. For this purpose to be fulfilled, everyone in this world had to enjoy full freedom of speech and action. If people were divested of their freedom, the



very purpose of the test would be defeated. Therefore, God granted special help to the believers, so that they might put an end to a system which had suppressed the freedom essential to the divine test in this world.

In order that religion might be wholly for God, the original natural state had to be re-established, that is, a state which was in accordance with the creation plan of God. Here religion (*din*) does not refer to Shariah, but to what in chapter 30, verse 30 of the Qur'an is called 'upright nature.' That is to say, what the believers were commanded to establish was religion in the sense of divine nature and not religion in the sense of Shariah. In other words, it would be proper to say that it was like a kind of divine operation carried out by the Prophet's companions. This was initiated in Arabia where, within a period of 23 years, the religious oppression which had prevailed there under the Quraysh, was brought to an end forever.

In those days, there were two great powers in the neighbourhood of Arabia— the Sassanid and the Byzantine empires. These were two of the greatest



bastions of the politically coercive system of ancient times. Their perpetuation meant the consolidation of this manner of governance and it was only their extinction which could put an end to it. However the believers launched these campaigns against the empires in defence. The aggression had been initiated by these empires themselves. This oppression soon bore fruit during the rule of the second Caliph, Umar Faruq. During his caliphate, the light of these two despotic empires was forever extinguished.

The French historian, Henri Pirenne, has rightly observed that, if the Arab Muslims of the seventh century had not liquidated the Sassanid and Byzantine empires, mankind might never have been freed from tyranny, and the world might never perhaps have witnessed the age of human freedom with its sweeping intellectual revolution.

Abdullah ibn Umar, a companion of the Prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him, and son of the second Caliph, observed on one occasion: “we fought according to the Qur’anic injunction to end *fitna*, religious persecution, until *fitna* was abolished

from the face of the earth forever.” (*Sahih al-Bukhari*).

This means that *fitna*, or the ancient political coercive system, had been dealt a severe blow during the period of the pious caliphate itself but, like many other major historical revolutions, this new phase only very gradually reached its culmination.

In the wake of the revolution in the first phase of Islam, religious freedom took a decisive course in history, spurred on in the initial stages by Muslim action, and in the later stages by the active participation of non-Muslim nations. In the first half of the twentieth century, firstly through the League of Nations and later through the United Nations, all the nations of the world unanimously declared that religious freedom was a fundamental right for all, and could not under any circumstances be abrogated.

## THE AGE OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

The first stage of the cessation of *fitna*, which brought with it the dawn of religious freedom, was



accomplished in Arabia. This development took place during the lifetime of the Prophet. During his last days, on the occasion of his final Hajj, the Prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him, preached a sermon, generally known as the Sermon of the Last Pilgrimage, in the presence of all of his companions. One of the points in his address on which the Prophet laid emphasis was that God had sent him “as a mercy to all mankind,” and that this being so, they should communicate this message of peace to all people everywhere. In obedience to this injunction given by the Prophet towards the end of his life, his companions travelled far and wide beyond the boundaries of Arabia. Indeed, they spent the rest of their lives carrying out their Prophet’s command. Thereafter, their successors, as well as the disciples of these successors, continued to make it their mission to disseminate the teachings of Islam, to the point where finally, the message of Islam had reached the greater part of the known, inhabited world of that age. This *da’wah* process, from beginning to end, was carried out in an entirely peaceful manner. The mere introduction of the ideology of Islam was sufficient to conquer

the hearts of the people. British historian, Sir Arthur Keith writes of the Egyptians:

The Egyptians were conquered not by the Sword but by the Qur'an.

This is true not only of the Egyptians, but also of all other nations which entered the fold of Islam. A detailed account of this peaceful spread of God's religion is given in *The Preaching of Islam*, by British historian, T.W. Arnold. This work, running to 508 pages, was first published in 1896. In this matter, the policy of Islam is to keep political activity separate and at a distance from the task of propagation, in order that the communication of the divine message may continue unhampered. Wherever there is political power, the element of coercion cannot be far away: political confrontations must, therefore, be avoided at all costs if the process of *da'wah* is to be set in motion and continue in an atmosphere of freedom.

The Prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him, foresaw that religious coercion would not be used as a weapon by secular rulers. His insight told him that in future in the secular sphere the principle of

religious freedom would become so established and thoroughly consolidated that no secular ruler would ever attempt to put a curb on religious freedom. And that if this problem ever arose, it would be due to the adoption of some wrong policy, or the committing of some blunder by the believers themselves. That is why the Prophet gave extremely important guidelines as an advance warning to Muslims.

In books of *hadith*, there are a large number of traditions which foretell the setting in of corruption in the Muslim rulers of later times, yet Muslims were strictly forbidden to wage war on them in the name of political reform. The Muslims were rather enjoined to keep their distance from them, to take to the hills (that is, to stay away from political activities) and to devote themselves to tending their sheep and goats. That is to say that they had to abandon the path of political confrontation in favour of continuing their activities in non-political fields, such as education, *da'wah*, the service of the Qur'an and *hadith*, etc.

In the first phase of Islam, it was Abdullah ibn Zubayr who violated this prohibition. He engaged in an armed confrontation with the Umayyad ruler, Yazid ibn Muawaiya, in the name of reform in politics. It resulted in the loss of precious Muslim lives and resources. At that time, Abdullah ibn Umar, son of the second Caliph and companion of the Prophet, was in Makkah, yet he did not take part in the fighting. Some companions of Abdullah ibn Zubayr met him and asked him to join in the battle. The conversation that took place on this occasion has been recorded in *Sahih al-Bukhari* under three references.

One account has been thus recorded: Nafe narrates that during the (*fitna*) revolt by Ibn Zubayr, two persons came and said to Ibn Umar that people were being killed, while he, the son of Umar (the second caliph) as well as a senior companion of the Prophet, refused to take part in the campaign. They asked him what prevented him from doing so. He replied: "I refrain from joining in this battle because of God's express command never to shed the blood of one's brother: it is unlawful." Both replied: "Has not God enjoined us to fight till persecution (*fitna*)

ceases?” Abdullah ibn Umar then retorted: “We fought till *fitna* ceased. Religion became only for God, and now you want to fight so that *fitna* may return, and religion will no longer be for God.” (*Fathul Bari, Kitab at-Tafsir*, vol. 8, p.32, *Kitab al-Fitan* Vol. 13, p. 49).

From this account we learn that war against persecution as commanded by God was limited in its scope and of a particular nature. It had to be directed against those leaders who had established a system of religious persecution; who were not ready to grant to believers in monotheism the liberty to practise their faith. The companions of the Prophet waged war against such oppression, first of all in Arabia, and then in major parts of Asia and Africa, and succeeded in bringing it to an end. Thenceforth, believers in Islam had full freedom to practise their religion and to invite others to answer its call.

After the successful conclusion of this movement against religious coercion, the believers began living in an atmosphere of religious freedom. But during the reign of the Umayyads, when the rot of



corruption had begun to set in, certain Muslims, referring to this verse of the Qur'an, engaged themselves in armed conflict with the rulers. To all intents and purposes, the battle was for a good cause: they wanted to oust these corrupt caliphs and replace them with men who were virtuous and just. But, in reality, their actions proved counter-productive.

The Prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him, foresaw that the effort at political reform would, in effect, culminate in nothing but destruction. It would only replace a lesser evil with a greater evil. That is why he had issued a stern, prior warning, expressly commanding his people to confine their activities to non-political fields and to opt for a policy of avoidance as regards corruption in political institutions.

In books of *hadith* a number of traditions have been recorded on this subject under the heading of *fitna*. It was thanks to these traditions that, after the development of the Islamic sciences (in terms of which commentaries on the traditions were written), religious scholars arrived at a consensus

that it was totally unlawful to revolt against an established Muslim government, regardless of how justified such action might appear to be.

The famous traditionist, Imam al-Nawawi, has commented on the tradition regarding *fitna* as recorded in *Sahih Muslim*:

These traditions clearly convey that we should not enter into any confrontation with political rulers. Even if we find in them any major deviation from Islam, our responsibility will be limited purely to the giving of advice in private. According to the consensus of Muslim scholars, so far as revolt and armed confrontation are concerned, even if the rulers in question are corrupt and tyrannical these actions are unlawful (haraam). (*Sahih Muslim*, with the commentary of an-Nawawi, *Kitab al-Imarah*, vol. 12, p.229).

From this commentary, we learn that the waging of war against *fitna* in no way meant the replacing of non-Muslim governments with Muslim regimes. Its actual purpose was to put an end to the use of intellectual and ideological coercion, so that God's

servants might be at liberty to perform their devotions to God and communicate God's message in an atmosphere of freedom. Waging war against Muslim rulers will certainly result in a revival of the coercive system, for the rulers will not hesitate to resort to oppression in order to keep their political power intact. The upshot will be that the old *fitna* will re-emerge in a new garb. That is why the Prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him, strictly forbade such action and Islamic scholars arrived at a consensus that according to the Islamic shariah, insurrection against an established Muslim government was unlawful. Even in unavoidable situations, Muslims are required to strive peacefully and to refrain entirely from launching violent movements aimed at unseating those in positions of authority.

This is undoubtedly an important Islamic injunction. It has great wisdom behind it. To put it briefly, the kings of ancient times made every effort to politicize religion. And when they found the adherents of any given religion placing obstacles in their path, they went all out to crush them. In a similar way, even today, certain factions attempt to

Islamize governments, then those rulers who become their targets, wreak all kinds of havoc on Islamists in order to save their political power.

The solution to this problem, as laid down in Islam, is to refrain from setting oneself on a collision course with the rulers. If any evil is found in them, the course to adopt is to give advice, privately, at the individual level, and to avoid all public condemnation or armed clashes. This sage counsel was given by Islam, so that the basic task of propagating and consolidating the religion might continue unhampered in non-political fields.

The manner of working of the traditionists gives us a good historical example. The gigantic task of the compilation of the traditions in the first phase of Islam lasted from the time of the Umayyad empire till that of the Abbasid empire. Without doubt, the rot had set in in the Muslim rulers. But the Islamic scholars of this period did not launch any movement against them. Remaining aloof from politics, they continued to serve the cause of the *hadith*. It is the result of this wise policy on their part that today we possess in compiled form the

precious treasure of the Prophet's traditions. If the traditions of those days had opted to set themselves up against these Muslim rulers, they would have met the same fate as that of Abdullah ibn Zubayr, Husain ibn Ali, Nafs Zakiyya, etc. any political *jihad* engaged in by these traditionists would have come to the same disastrous end. All the people concerned would have been assassinated by the rulers,—as had happened with other political opponents. And then the inestimable wealth of the traditions would have been buried along with the traditionists, in whose memories they had been preserved.

From a study of the Qur'an and *hadith*, we find that the actual target of a religious mission is the Islamization of the individual rather than the State. The domination of Islam at the level of the state is only an offshoot of the religious mission and not its actual target.

The Qur'an has clearly stated that, for believers, political power is a gift from God, and not a goal to be striven for. That is why the Qur'an observes:

God has promised those of you who believe and do good works to make them masters in the land as He had made their ancestors before them, to strengthen the faith he chose for them and to change their fears to safety. Let them worship Me and serve no other gods besides Me. Wicked indeed are they who after this deny Me (24:55).

The same point has been made in a tradition of the Prophet: Just as you will be, so will be your rulers. (*Mishkat al-Masabih*).

In actual fact this tradition tells us of a law of nature. The political power of a country depends upon its people. Any system which has the acceptance of the public will perpetuate itself, while a system which is anathema to the people will prove unsustainable. In a truly Islamic society, an un-Islamic political regime cannot take root, and cannot therefore be self-perpetuating. That is why Islam has enjoined the targeting of individuals for Islamic reform. If in any society a large number of people follow Islam, both in the letter and in the

spirit, such a society will on its own come under the direction of political power based on Islam.

This separation of *da'wah* activism and political confrontation was crucial. It was by virtue of this separation that the propagation of Islam continued unhampered for a period of a thousand years after the emergence of Islam, until the number of Muslims rose to one billion. Without this, the great achievement of the dissemination of Islam could never have become a reality.

The wisdom of this teaching of Islam has become clearer than ever today. In present times two revolutions have taken place contemporaneously. After a long historical process, religious freedom has been held to be an irrevocable right of human beings all over the world. Today, the right to believe, and practise and propagate any religion of one's choice has become an established right of human beings. This freedom has only one condition: that in the availing of these rights, one should not engage in violence of any sort. The adoption of violence will render the practice and

propagation of one's religion impossible, whatever the part of the world that might be.

Another great revolution of our times has come in the form of modern communications, which has rendered the spread of Islam much more effective than hitherto. The print and electronic media, as well as other means of communication, have opened all the doors to the global dissemination of the message of Islam. Now the task of *da'wah* in the present age has been so greatly facilitated that it seems as rapid and easy as the diffusion of the sun's rays across the earth.

## THE PEACEFUL PROPAGATION OF ISLAM

Referring to Christ and his followers, the Qur'an tells us:

When Isa (Christ) observed their refusal he asked:

Who will be my supporters in the cause of God? The disciples replied: We are the supporters of God. We believe in Him. Bear witness that we have surrendered ourselves to Him. (3:52)



The response given by the disciples to the call of Jesus was so appropriate that the same response was likewise demanded by the Muslims. Therefore the Qur'an says:

O Believers, be God's helpers. When Christ the son of Mary said to the disciples, 'Who will come with me to the help of God?' They replied: 'We are God's helpers.' Some of the children of Israel believed in Him, while others did not. We aided the believers against their enemies and they triumphed over them. (61:14)

On deeper reflection we find that this verse is of relevance to the history of the second stage of Islam, that is, the second period of the Muslim *ummah* (community). That was when *fitna* had ceased and religious freedom had been introduced into the world. Then the Muslims had to adopt the same course as that adopted by the followers of Christ under his guidance. Of course, there was no question of adopting the additions and innovations in their religious beliefs; these were to be rejected. Therefore, leaving aside the system of their beliefs,

the practical pattern adopted by them in *da'wah* was without doubt a prophetic pattern. And it was as worth adopting for the Muslims as it was for the Christians.

The question arises as to what kind of “help” Christ had asked his followers to give. We find the answer in the traditions. Ibn Hisham, the Prophet’s biographer of the first phase, writes: “I have received it from reliable sources that Abu Bakr al-Huzali narrated that, one day, after the peace treaty of Hudaibiya, the Prophet came to his companions and said, ‘O people, God has sent me as a mercy to all the nations of the world, therefore, do not differ as the disciples of Christ differed with Christ.’ The Prophet’s companions asked: ‘O Messenger of God, how did the disciples of Christ differ from their Prophet?’ The Prophet replied: ‘Christ invited the disciples to what I have invited you. So those who were sent to nearby places, happily accepted it, but those who were sent to distant places were reluctant to go. Then Christ complained to God about it, so God’s special succour descended upon them and these disciples began speaking the language of the

community to which they were being sent." (*Seerat an-Nabi*, Ibn Hisham, vol. 4/279).

This incident has been recorded in the present Bible. Here are some excerpts in brief:

Go ye therefore and make disciples of all the nations. (Matthew, 28:19).

And the gospel must first be preached among all the nations. (Mark, 13:10).

Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. (Mark, 16:15).

In obedience to these injunctions of Christ, his followers left Palestine. After Christ had left the world, they spread over different cities and countries. They propagated their religion peacefully and those who embraced their faith also adopted the path of peace in propagating the divine message. In this way, the spread of Christianity continued from generation to generation.

As a result of this non-aggressive activity on the part of the followers of Christ, within a period of two hundred years after the advent of Christianity,



it spread to many eastern countries. Subsequently, these Christians entered Europe. Here they were initially faced with great difficulties. However, they quietly began propagating Christianity until the time when the European Emperor Constantine the Great came under its influence, converted to Christianity in 337 A.D. and proclaimed it to be the official religion of his empire. Subsequently, the majority of Europeans entered the Christian fold.

The Qur'an tells us that during the life of Christ, God decreed that the followers of Christ should prevail over their enemies.

In the third chapter of the Qur'an, addressing Christ, God said: "I shall.... Exalt your followers above them (the disbelievers) till the Day of Resurrection." (3:55). Similarly, in chapter 61, the Qur'an has this to say:

We aided the believers (in Christ) against their enemies, and they triumphed over them. (61:14).

Here the question arises as to how the followers of Christ came to dominate them. Surely this did not

come about as a result of war and violence. For neither by the Qur'an, nor by historical records can it be established that the Christians engaged in armed confrontations with their religious opponents.

According to historical records, the number of Christ's followers continued increasing until a time came when, by the sheer ratio of their numbers, they came to enjoy a position of dominance. This leads us to ask what feature of the propagation of their mission was so especially effective as to cause their numbers to increase so rapidly. The Qur'an states that this came about with the special succour of God: "We gave Christ the gospel and put compassion and mercy in the hearts of his followers" (57:27). We find the same sentiments expressed in the Bible in the words uttered by Christ:

But I say to you who hear: love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you. To him who strikes you on the one cheek, offer the other also. And from



him who takes away your cloak, do not withhold your tunic either. Give to everyone who asks of you. And from him who takes away your goods, do not ask them back. And just as you want men to do to you, also do to them likewise. But if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. And if you lend to those from whom you hope to receive back, what credit is that to you? For even sinners lend to sinners to receive as much back. But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil. Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful. Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into



your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you.  
(Luke 6:27-38)

This utterance of Christ indicates what kind of character a man with a mission should have. Normal human relations between the *da'i* and the *madu'* (the person addressed) are essential for the success of any *da'wah* mission. The only way to establish a favourable atmosphere is for the *da'i* to adopt the ethics of unilateralism, that is to behave well, consistently and unconditionally, even if his hearers (the *madu'*) do not behave well towards him. In refusing to copy the attitude and conduct of the *madu'*, the *da'i* adheres to the highest code of ethics based on Islamic principles.

“And from him who takes away your cloak, do not withhold your tunic either” (Luke, 6:29) We are told here in symbolic language what our behaviour should be. The *da'i* does all he can so that no controversy is created between himself and the *madu*; all he does is convey the message of *da'wah*. That is why the *da'i* takes sole responsibility for the maintaining of a propitious atmosphere for *da'wah*

by unilaterally bringing all controversies to an end. Such an approach was not peculiar to Christianity; it was a feature common to the missions of all of the prophets. This principle of unilateral accommodation is a sine qua non for success in the task of *da'wah*.

The followers of Christ wholeheartedly adopted this teaching of their Prophet. This special feature of their missionary character contributed extraordinarily to the spread of the Christian religion. They made such headway, that they gave new meaning to the principle of peaceful proselytism. And then, along with their teaching, they engaged in such social service as proved an effective means of bringing the *madu'* closer to them. It was the result of this particular *da'wah* style that Christianity spread all over, becoming the greatest world religion.

There is a tradition recorded in *Sahih Muslim* which foretells us this rapid spread of the Christian religion:

Mustaurid Qarashi related that he heard the Prophet say that Doomsday would not come





until the Christians were the greatest in number. When these words of the Prophet were conveyed to Amr ibn al-As (a senior companion of the Prophet and the conqueror and governor of Egypt) he asked Mustaurid: 'What is the nature of these traditions you are narrating?' Mustaurid replied: 'I narrate only what I have heard from the Prophet.' Amr ibn al-As said: 'If you say so (that is, if it is an authentic *hadith*) then the Christians are undoubtedly the most forbearing in times of adversity, take no time in setting themselves in order after a calamity and are better than others in caring for their weak and deprived.' (*Sahih Muslim, Kitab al-Fitan*)

From these details we find that a major aim of the revolution brought about by the Prophet and his companions was to remove all obstacles in the path of *da'wah*, so that such conducive conditions would prevail as would encourage people to practice God's religion and invite others to the same path. This process had to be continued from generation to generation.

The first stage of this revolution was marked by the coercive system being brought to an end, ushering in the dawn of religious freedom in the world. The second stage was embarked upon, when, by availing of the advantages of this freedom, Muslims disseminated Islam at the universal level. Now the Muslims are in the third and final stage of their history, when the progress of religious freedom has reached its zenith. Now Muslims have to continue the task of conveying the truth to people and it is imperative that they do so by adherence to peaceful methods. The truly shining example of religious achievement, according to the testimony of the Qur'an, is that of the followers of Christ.

Judging by the above-quoted words of Abdullah ibn Umar, the obstacles in the path of *da'wah* work have been removed forever. If obstacles reappear, this will surely be as a result of some ill-considered policy pursued by the Muslims themselves. If the Muslims are able to refrain from adopting any erroneous course, no real obstacle should ever come in the way of the call of the truth until the advent of Doomsday.

## THE ROLE OF NON-MUSLIMS IN ISLAMIC DEVELOPMENT

Islam is the religion of Nature, and in treading its path, it is non-discriminatory, finding room within its scheme of things for every segment of society. Rigidity is quite alien to its process of development.

There is a meaningful *hadith* in *Sahih al-Bukhari* to this effect. According to this *hadith*, the Prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him, said: “God Almighty will strengthen this religion [Islam] through a *fajir* (one who is not a true Muslim) person as well. (Bukhari)

This is a very important declaration because in this world, any natural process begins with the involvement of different elements—as happened in the case of Islam. Humanity as a whole is an interdependent body and Islam is not an exception.

Islam is an ideology aimed at human development, and no process of human development can endure without involving humanity at large. There are

several phases in the history of Islam, which illustrate this point.

The Prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him, spent his first thirteen years of prophethood in Makkah. At that time in Makkah, there existed a tribal system. There was no organized state in the modern sense. It was necessary for everyone to have protection under one of the tribal chiefs. So, according to this prevalent custom, the Prophet availed himself of the protection of two of the local chieftains—Abu Talib and Mut'im bin Adi alternatively, both of whom happened to be non-Muslims.

After spending thirteen years in Makkah, the Prophet migrated to Madinah. It was a very risky journey because his opponents had announced a reward of a hundred camels to anyone who would bring them the Prophet's head. In spite of this, the Prophet chose a member of the rival group to be his guide for the journey, because this guide was known to be an honest person in his profession. He is known in Islamic history as Abdullah bin

Urayqit. He was a non-Muslim and died as a non-Muslim in Makkah.

After the migration of the Prophet, a series of armed conflicts broke out between the Prophet and his opponents. One of the military campaigns of his opponents, known in Islamic history as Ghazwa al-Ahzab, was so devastating that even the Qur'an refers to it as one of the most terrifying moments in Islamic history. At the time, the Muslims had become quite helpless against their opponents. The only thing that eased this most difficult of situations was the role a Madinite played—that of a middleman.

This man came to the Prophet in the night when Madinah was surrounded by enemy forces. He said, "I have become a Muslim in my heart, but I have not made it public yet. So the mushriks and the Jews both have trust in me." Realizing that this man was in a position to play a peace-making role between the two parties, since he was trusted by both, the Prophet said, "You are the only one in this position among us."



This man began, therefore, to negotiate between the two parties and history tells us that it was he who cleared the path to peace at this juncture between the two rival parties. It was because of his efforts that the enemy decided to lift the siege of the city of Madinah and return to their homes.

Islamic history contains many examples of the role played by non-Muslims in the development of Islam. This principle of non-Muslim involvement in Islamic development can also be extended from an individual level to the level of an entire group.

In the present day context, Western Civilization is an appropriate example. Although Western Civilization developed in non-Muslim societies without any direct contribution from the Muslim minds, it is helpful for Islam in many aspects. For example, it is this Western Civilization that finally ended religious persecution and opened the door for religious freedom and *da'wah*. Similarly, it is this Western Civilization, which has developed the modern means of communication that has made it possible for Muslims to do *da'wah* work on a global scale. Also, modern scientific discoveries made in

the West have paved the way to proving the beliefs of Islam on a scientific basis.

In previous times, it was assumed that the truths of Islam, or religion for that matter, could be supported only by arguments that were inferential in nature and not by arguments that were direct. But modern science, in bringing human thought from a macrocosmic level to a microcosmic level, has made it possible to accept that inferential reasoning is as valid as direct reasoning. This development has allowed Islam to prove its truth on the same level as scientific theories are proven.

From these few examples, it is clear that non-Muslims are also helpful to the cause of Islam in many ways. Islamic development is such a universal process that all Muslim and non-Muslim forces contribute towards its fulfillment.

This aspect of a role for those other than Muslims in the development of Islam serves a moral end as well. It makes Muslims sympathetic towards the rest of the world so that the hearts of Muslims are filled with love for others instead of hate, enmity and distrust.





The contribution of non-Muslims to Islam has not been of a temporary nature. It has continued throughout Islamic history. In present times these contributions made by non-Muslims, especially in the field of scientific discoveries, have been far greater than ever before.

What are these scientific discoveries? They are, in actual fact, the discoveries of nature. Nature, or in the words of the Qur'an, "all the things of the heavens and the earth" are signs of God. Accordingly, all the things of the universe serve as scientific argument for Islamic teachings. In this respect the discoveries of nature are in fact the discoveries of the divine realities, which testify to the truth of the teachings of Islam. I have gone into considerable detail on this point in other books. Here I wish to give only one example to illustrate my point.

There is a verse in the Qur'an:

We shall save your body this day, so that you may be a sign for those who come after you.  
(10:92)





This refers to the Egyptian ruler, Pharaoh, a contemporary of the Prophet Moses. As we know, Pharaoh had been drowned by God in the deep waters of the sea. At that moment God had decreed the preservation of Pharaoh's body in order that it might be a sign of God for future generations.

However, neither at the time of revelation of the Qur'an, nor even a thousand years later, did anyone have had any knowledge regarding Pharaoh's body; it remained absolutely unknown to the Muslim world. It was not until the end of the nineteenth century that this preserved body was discovered. This prediction of the Qur'an had been fulfilled to the letter. However, this task was performed entirely by non-Muslims.

It was a French scholar, Professor Loret, who discovered this mummified body of Pharaoh at Thebes in the King's Valley, from where it was transported to Cairo. Prof. Elliot Smith removed its wrapping on the 8th of July, 1907. He gives a detailed description of this operation and examination of the body in his book, *The Royal Mummies* (1912).



In June 1975, Dr. Maurice Bucaille was allowed by the Egyptian authorities to examine Pharaoh's body. Special investigations were made during this examination of this mummified body along with a team of specialists. By means of several modern techniques like radiography, Carbon-14 dating, and endoscopy, the exact period of this body was established. After study and research lasting several years by a team of western experts, it was scientifically proved that this body definitely belonged exactly to the period of Moses.

It was also established beyond any doubt that this Pharaoh died either from drowning or from very violent shocks preceding the moment when he was drowned.

The French author, Dr. Maurice Bucaille, rounds off the chapter called 'The Exodus' in his book, *The Bible, the Qur'an and Science*, with these thrilling words:

Those who seek among modern data for proof of the veracity of the Holy Scriptures will find a magnificent illustration of the verses of the Qur'an dealing with the Pharaoh's body by

visiting the Royal Mummies' Room of the  
Egyptian Museum, Cairo. (p.241)