

Human Rights in Christianity and Islam: A Comparative Study

Atique Tahir*

ABSTRACT

It is the basic purpose and duty of every religion to guide humanity to lead a peaceful life, by upholding certain noble principles, in order to maintain human rights and dignity of person. Almost all the religions and philosophies of the world have given central place to the idea of justice and injustice, right and wrong, good and evil; legality and illegality and the dignity of man and equality of men. Today the sanctity and dignity of a person has vital importance in the constitutions and laws of the states. The protection of dignity of man and fundamental rights of the people is generally recognized as the basic and fundamental aim of modern international law. Both the people and governments of the states have been insisting that by laws and constitutions of the states, the fundamental rights and freedoms of the people must be respected and secured. Variety of Religion is found in the history. The present study analyzes the different aspects of Christianity in the perspective of human rights and compares it with Islam.

In the present era the term ‘right’ has become of common currency. Everyone speaks about right but no one really knows what the term stands for. Keeping in view this complex nature of right it has been rightly stated by Roscoe Pound that “there is no more ambiguous word in legal and juristic literature than the word right”.¹

The term Dignity also has many facets. It is generally used in moral, ethical, and political discussions to signify that “a being has an innate right to respect and ethical treatment”.²

In the present article the following important aspects have been discussed:

- 1) Introduction to Christianity and Islam
- 2) Human Dignity in Christianity and Islam
- 3) Important Dimensions of Human rights in Christianity and Islam
- 4) Implications

INTRODUCTION

Christianity is derived from the Greek word, Khristos, Christ, which literally stands for ‘anointed one’³.

In reality, “Christianity is the name given to the religion attributed to Jesus, Son of Mary, who was one of the Apostles of Allah, just like Noah, Abraham,

* Dr, Associate professor, Faculty of Shariah and Law, International Islamic University, Islamabad. E-mail: atique.tahir@gmail.com Date of Receipt: 15-12-2013

Moses, David, Solomon, Zachariah, etc". The name Christian (Greek Χριστιανός) was "first used in reference to Jesus' disciples in the city of Antioch,⁴ meaning followers of Christ".⁵

The primary sources of Christian religion are its sacred scripture the Bible, which consists of 'The Old Testament' (books written prior to Jesus) and 'The New Testament' (books related to the life and teachings of Jesus), 'the life and the teachings of Jesus Christ'.⁶

The Christianity is based on the following fundamental beliefs:

- i) 'Jesus is the Son of God';
- ii) 'the essential component of God's Being is His love for the humanity;
- iii) 'Jesus died to redeem humankind'.⁷

"Christianity began as a movement of Jews who accepted Jesus as messiah for them".⁸

The early Christians were "persecuted under the Roman Empire because of their refusal to worship the Roman gods or to pay homage to the emperor as divine, but were supported by Constantine I, the first Christian emperor".⁹

"The major branches of Christianity are: Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy (which parted ways with Catholicism in 1054 A.D.) and Protestantism" (which came into existence during the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century)¹⁰.

Baptism is considered as an essential part of Christian beliefs, as according to its faith "man is born sinful by nature, which essentially requires Baptism for his salvation".¹¹ It is believed in Christianity that: "by taking this bath man is enlightened and indeed becomes Light himself". By taking this bath a man becomes purified because "it washes the sins of a baptized person".¹²

In comparison with Christianity, Islam is not a religion in the limited sense but a complete code of life, guiding its followers in every aspect of their lives. It is based on three basic beliefs:

Firstly, there is no deity except Allah (only creator and controller of the universe). This belief in oneness of Allah, as being the creator and ruler of the Universe, teaches its believers not to worship or obey any other except the real owner and creator of this universe, i.e.; Allah.

Secondly, in the messengers of Allah and that Muhammad (PBUH) is the last messenger of Allah. According to Islam, Allah has sent His Holy men for the guidance of mankind, throughout the history of mankind and Muhammad (PBUH) as His last Messenger in this regard.

Thirdly, in the life after death, according to which all the people will be resurrected for the purpose of accountability of their deeds of worldly life. The life hereafter will be eternal and everlasting.

Islam makes it abundantly clear that those who will be right in their conduct in this world will be declared successful in the life after death and will enjoy a life of pleasure and happiness and those who will lead a sinful life will be declared as unsuccessful and will face the torment of Fire¹³.

On the basis of the belief that there is only one *Illah* (Deity), Islam teaches its followers that all human beings are equal in dignity, rights and status. No one is superior to another on the basis of cast, color, creed and language.

In the Holy Quran and Ahadith of Muhammad (PBUH) there are clear instructions that all the people are equal in the sight of Allah and no one is superior or inferior on the basis of race, language, locality or colour of his skin etc. The Quran emphasizes on the common origin of mankind and declares that mankind was but one community and then there arose differences between them¹⁴.

The Quran in this regard speaks as:

“O mankind! Lo! We have created you by male and female, and have made you nations and tribes that ye may know one another. Lo! The noblest of you, in the sight of Allah, is the best in conduct”.¹⁵

“Whoever, be it a male or a female, does good deeds and he or she is a believer, then they will enter the Paradise.”¹⁶

The Messenger (PBUH) of Islam, in his famous address on the occasion of his farewell pilgrimage, declared in unambiguous words:

“O people: your Lord is one. You are descendants from the same line. Beware: No Arab has any superiority over a non Arab, and no non Arab has any superiority over an Arab, and no white one has any superiority over a black one, and no black one has any superiority over a white one, except on the basis of piety. All men are the progeny of Adam and Adam was made of clay”.¹⁷

The wording of the hadith is very clear and simple, which implies that:

“Islam is neither for the Arabs nor for the non-Arabs but for all mankind”. “In Islam every human being is equal and is entitled to equal treatment of law including the right of access to seek justice”. “No distinction is made on the basis of color, territory, language or race in Islam as all mankind is treated to be the offspring of Adam”.¹⁸

The Messenger of Islam (PBUH) instructs the believers of giving others equal treatment without any discrimination. As it is stated in the following tradition:

“Give equitable punishment to the remote and the near and have no fear of the reproach of people in enforcement of limits set up by Allah”.¹⁹

Islam teaches that every human being is born sinless with a pure conscience and no one will bear the burden of another.

The Holy Quran speaks in this regard as:

“No carrier shall carry the burden of others”.²⁰

HUMAN DIGNITY

Human dignity is the manifestation of human rights. It lays a firm base for the building of society on equal basis, wherein all could claim dignity and honor as human beings²¹. “Human dignity is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world”.²²

The term “Dignity is derived from the Latin word ‘dignitas’ which denotes a quality of being worthy or honorable which signifies his highest and noble position in a community. It stands for honor, authority or reputation”.²³ “The Human Dignity consists in man’s ability to experience self awareness and to think rationally”.²⁴ “When one loses the ability to exercise his rational function, one loses the essential dignity as well”.²⁵

Dignity is a social factor. “It involves one’s ability to participate in a social arrangement of some sort and to hold some kind of rank therein. Society confers dignity on the individual. Social dignity refers to one’s reputation or good name. Cassio said in Shakespeare’s Othello, “reputation is something priceless and much more valuable than any other possession”.²⁶

In modern times if there is one single ideology widely accepted round the world today, it is the concept and ideology of human dignity and of human rights²⁷.

The protection of human dignity is generally recognized to be a fundamental aim of modern international law. In recent decades almost every international organization, regional and global, has adopted human rights norms and responded to human rights violations by member states²⁸.

In Christianity, the dignity of man is defined in these words:

“The human being is to be respected and treated as a person from the moment of conception; and therefore, from that same moment his rights as a person must be recognized, among which in the first place is the inviolable right of every innocent human being to life”.²⁹

Christianity takes “dignity and sanctity of human life as its founding principle. It opposes all acts of genocide, torture, killing of noncombatants in war and taking the lives of innocent people”.³⁰

In the Religion the correct view of human person is 'being in the image of God'.³¹

Christianity considers that it is in Christ that:

"The divine image has been restored to its original beauty and ennobled by the grace of God". The human person is the only creature on earth that God has willed for its own sake. By virtue of his soul and his spiritual powers of intellect and will, man is endowed with freedom, an outstanding manifestation of the divine image".³²

It is believed by the Christian theologians that these rights to the honor and dignity of person are prior to society and thus must be recognized by it. "It is the recognition of these rights which gives a moral legitimacy to every authority. By refusing to recognize them in state legislation, a society undermines its own moral legitimacy. Any authority not respecting and honouring them will be treated as usurper which is relying only on force or violence to obtain obedience from its subjects".³³

This right of dignity in Christianity is extended to the dying persons as well. The relevant provision on the subject is as follows:

"The believers are instructed to give attention and care so to live their last moments in dignity and peace. The bodies of the dead must be treated with respect and charity".³⁴

In comparison of Islam with Christianity, Islam seems to be correctly in line and spirit of Christianity. Islam believes in the dignity of man and sanctity of human life. Like Christianity it commands "not to kill and torture the innocent people, the children, women and worshipers of any religion during the war".³⁵

The 'dignity of a person' is considered to be the fundamental and basic right of the individuals in Islam. In "all the sources of Islamic law beginning from Quran to *Ijtihad* there is a concept of human dignity".³⁶

Looking at from the historical aspect the concept of human rights and dignity of man in Islam is as old as man himself. "Islam has declared and guaranteed it 1400 years ago and every Muslim is bound to accept and follow them".³⁷

The best statement of the human dignity in Islam is to be found in the address delivered by the Messenger (PBUH) in his Sermon on the eve of the Farewell Pilgrimage (*Hajjat al-Wida'a*)³⁸.

Before the advent of Islam, honor, status and dignity were reserved for certain classes on the basis of birth, power or wealth. "Islam presented its concept of honor and dignity on the basis of man's creation by Allah":

"Verily, We created man in the best stature (mould)".³⁹

The dignity of man is in conformity with the Quranic verse which says:

“And Indeed We have honored the children of Adam, and We have carried them on land and sea, and have provided them with lawful good things and have preferred them above many of those whom We have created with a marked preferment”.⁴⁰

The Messenger of Islam also instructs the believers to observe dignity of man by saying as:

“There is no advantage for an Arab over a non-Arab or for a white man over a black”.⁴¹

IMPORTANT DIMENSIONS OF HUMAN RIGHTS

The Christianity takes the social justice as the ultimate end of a society, which can only be achieved by respecting and protecting man's honour and dignity. In the religion “It is the dignity of man, his protection and promotion, which has been entrusted to man by the Creator”.⁴²

Christianity gives special consideration to the poor and needy, children and parents, womenfolk and widows, neighbors, orphans and old men etc. It believes in God's love for humanity and that ‘man is created in the image of God’; which requires that man should love every human being⁴³.

Six out of ‘Ten Commandments’ of the religion speak on the rights of the people, stating as:

“...not to murder, not to commit adultery, not to steal, not to give false witness against your neighbour, not to covet anything that belongs to your neighbor”.⁴⁴

Concerning the rights of neighbors the religion pays special attention. It instructs the followers that:

“Everyone should look upon his neighbor (without any exception) as another self, respecting his life and assuring the provisions of necessities to live with honour and dignity”.⁴⁵

To take care of the ill and wounded people is one of the fundamental beliefs of Christianity. The Christ himself was so compassionate towards the sick that he identifies himself with them:

“I was sick and you visited me”.⁴⁶ The Christ commands his disciples “to heal the sick”.⁴⁷

In Christianity it is the fundamental right of every person to enjoy a decent life and to have the basic necessities of his life⁴⁸.

Jesus Christ stressing on to help the poor and needy states as:

“On the Day of Judgment, God will ask what they did to help the poor and needy”.⁴⁹ And

“Give to him who begs from you, do not refuse him who would borrow from you; you received without pay, give without pay”.⁵⁰

To help the poor and needy in Christianity, like Islam, is not considered an act of charity but their due right⁵¹.

The position of helping the poor and needy and respecting the neighbors in Christianity can simply be understood by the remarks passed by St. Rose of Lima as:

“When we serve the poor and the sick, we serve Jesus. We must not fail to help our neighbors, because in them we serve Jesus”.⁵²

The Christianity not only speaks about the rights of the poor and needy and the like persons but also prescribes practical ways to help them out; which is through instruction, advice and counseling etc, on the theoretical side. Whereas on the positive and active side it is “by feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and imprisoned, and burying the dead”.⁵³

The Christianity also instructs the employers “not to look upon their employees as their bondsmen, but ... to respect every man and his dignity”.⁵⁴

In the religion all the workers have a “right to productive work, to decent and fair wages, and to safe working conditions”.⁵⁵

Respect for parents is also among the fundamental beliefs of Christianity. Emphasizing on respect of parents and taking care of them, the religion speaks as:

“With all your heart honor your father, and do not forget the birth pangs of your mother. Remember that through your parents you were born; what can you give back to them that equals their gifts to you”.⁵⁶

Christianity takes it as a fundamental obligation of the faithful children to obey and take care of their parents. Some of the relevant provisions on the subject are as follows:

“My son: keep your father's commandment, and forsake not your mother's teaching... When you walk, they will lead you; when you lie down, they will watch over you; and when you awake, they will talk with you”.⁵⁷

“A wise son hears his father's instruction, but a scoffer does not listen to rebuke”.⁵⁸

“For the Lord honored the father above the children, and He confirmed the right of the mother over her sons. Whoever honors his father atones for sins, and whoever glorifies his mother is like one who lays up treasure. Whoever honors his father will be gladdened by his own children, and

when he prays he will be heard. Whoever glorifies his father will have long life, and whoever obeys the Lord will refresh his mother”.⁵⁹

“O son, help your father in his old age, and do not grieve him as long as he lives; even if he is lacking in understanding, show forbearance; in all your strength do not despise him... Whoever forsakes his father is like a blasphemer, and whoever angers his mother is cursed by the Lord”.⁶⁰

The parents on the other hand, are also under a religious obligation to take care of their children and give them a due respect. They must regard their children as children of God and respect them as human persons⁶¹. They are obliged to educate their children to fulfill God’s plan:

“He who loves his son will not spare the rod... He who disciplines his son will profit by him”.⁶²

The fourth commandment speaks on the issue as under:

“Whoever would be great among you must be your servant”.⁶³

By comparing the above mentioned teachings of Christianity with Islam it seems that they are totally in line and spirit with Islam. Islam being a complete code of life directs and covers all aspects of human life. It gives a special consideration to the parents, womenfolk, children, widows, neighbor’s orphans and old men⁶⁴.

Much emphasis is given in Islam on the children “to look after their parents and to respect and obey them”.⁶⁵ The Messenger of Islam has also given great importance, by his words as well as by his deeds, to the rights of parents over their children. In his view for a child “it is one of the greatest sins to disobey his parents”.⁶⁶ The parents in Islam have been considered as “one’s paradise and Hell”.⁶⁷

Islam also enjoins on parents to pay full attention for the upbringing of their children. They are responsible for building their character as well⁶⁸. Killing the children ‘out of fear of poverty or by any other reason is treated as a great sin’.⁶⁹

The Messenger of Allah, Muhammad (PBUH) was himself an affectionate care taker of the children. The Messenger (PBUH) ‘used to kiss children and love them very much’.⁷⁰ ‘His love and kindness was not confined to Muslim children but was for all’.⁷¹

Islam has laid much stress on the rights of neighbors. It enjoins upon the believers to show kindness to their neighbors⁷².

The Messenger of Allah, Muhammad (PBUH) was a good and friendly neighbor. He treated them with extreme cordiality and often enquired about their health and other affairs⁷³.

The Messenger of Allah, Muhammad (PBUH) always advised his companions to be good, kind and considerate to their neighbors. He told them “to share with them their food, even though it was a small quantity; which would develop a deep and close relationship, friendship between them”.⁷⁴

Visiting and taking care of the sick is considered as an act of great virtue in Islam. The Messenger (PBUH) was the best friend of the sick. He was kind and friendly towards “all those who were weak, deprived and sick”.⁷⁵ He used to be sympathetic and compassionate to all, the Muslims and non-Muslims both, including those “who had done great personal harm to him and those who opposed his divine mission”.⁷⁶

The Messenger of Allah (PBUH) instructed his believers to treat their servants with kindness and civility, feed and clothe them well and should not harm them⁷⁷.

Islam has given paramount importance to education and learning. The first revelation of the Holy Quran in the chronological order is about reading, teaching and use of pen⁷⁸. It proves the importance of reading, learning, writing and teaching in Islam.

The Messenger (PBUH) makes it compulsory for every Muslim (man or woman) to acquire knowledge.

“Seeking knowledge is obligatory upon every Muslim”.⁷⁹

Christianity believes in the limited concept of man’s freedom, which in fact, is not a true freedom except in the service of what is good and just. Freedom in Christianity is perceived as obedience to the commandments of the Holy Spirit⁸⁰.

The freedom in the religion does not imply a right to say or do everything, as an absolute freedom leads to man’s destruction and failure. In Christianity it is an abuse of freedom and leads to the “slavery of sin”.⁸¹

In Christianity the subjects of the religious kingdom are under obligation to regard those who are in authority, considering them as the representatives of God, disobedience to whom is treated as disobedience to God⁸².

“Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution”.⁸³

In Christianity it is considered that it was due to freedom that man failed in his ‘First Test’, by refusing ‘God's plan of love’ and became a slave to sin. Thus, all it was the consequence of the abuse of freedom⁸⁴.

It is pertinent to mention here that in the views of some of the Christianity scholars the individual are allowed “to defend their own rights and those of their fellow

citizens against the abuse of this authority within the limits of the natural law and the Law of the Gospel, in case they are oppressed by the public authorities".⁸⁵

In Christianity freedom may be exercised in relationships between human beings, every human person, created in the image of God. All owe to each other this duty of respect⁸⁶.

In comparing Islam with Christianity, Islam recognizes all sorts of liberties for the individuals including the political freedom, freedom of thought, religious freedom and civil freedom etc.⁸⁷ Islam does not only guarantee human rights and fundamental freedoms for the Muslims and non-Muslims but, at the same time, "provides' remedies for the infringement of these rights and freedoms".⁸⁸

In Islam, the real base of an individual freedom is his full faith in *Towhid*, (believe in one Allah). This concept of *Towhid* provides him a strong base for his freedom. "Being benevolent to fellow beings, he demands no reward from them".⁸⁹

The Messenger (PBUH) warned the Muslims of the consequences at their silence over tyranny. He said that:

"The best of *Jihad* is of him who speaks a just word before a ruthless and unjust authority".⁹⁰

In another Hadith reported by Abu Saeed Khudhri the Messenger (PBUH) said: "If any one of you comes across an evil, he should try to stop it with his hand (using force), if he is not in a position to stop it with his hand then he should try to stop it by means of his tongue (meaning he should speak against it). If he is not even able to use his tongue then he should at least condemn it in his heart. This is the weakest degree of faith".⁹¹

Maulana Maududi draws from these instances the logical conclusion that:

"Even an organized group, opposed to the form of government, may entertain its political opposition provided it is not done in a disorderly fashion and does not call for the destruction of the state by forceful means or violence".⁹²

The right to exercise free choice in matters of belief is unambiguously endorsed by the Quran. No one is authorized to impose his religious beliefs on others.

"So will you then compel mankind, until they become believers?"⁹³

"There is no compulsion in religion".⁹⁴

"And say: The truth is from your Lord, and then whosoever wills, let him believe; and whosoever wills let him disbelieve".⁹⁵

Regarding religious rights of non-Muslim, Islam extends to them full freedom to observe their respective religions. “It ensures all types of social rights to non-Muslims. They enjoy full security of their lives and properties. Similarly, they enjoy full rights of educational facilities. They also have maximum political rights”.⁹⁶

This order is not “merely limited to the people of the scriptures, but applies with equal force to those following other faiths”.⁹⁷

In Islam the Muslims are enjoined to invite people to embrace Islam, but “no force will be applied in order to compel them to accept it. If someone does not wish to accept Islam, Muslims are religiously bound to recognize and respect his discretion, and no moral, social or political pressure will be exerted on him to change his faith. Islam does not prohibit people from holding debate and discussion on religious matters, but it desires that these discussions should be conducted with decor and decency”, says the Quran:

“Do not argue with the people of the Book unless it is in the politest manner”.⁹⁸

Christianity treats right to life is as one of the important fundamental human rights. The religion does protect all aspects of right to life of a person. The religion not only recognizes the right to life of the people but also of the animals, beasts and plants etc.

Some of the important provisions of Bible on the right to life of the individuals as well of the animals, beasts and plants etc are as under:

“The Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil”.⁹⁹

“Pairs of all creatures that have the breath of life in them came to Noah and entered the ark”.¹⁰⁰

“And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food. And it was so”.¹⁰¹

“I myself will guarantee his safety; you can hold me personally responsible for him. If I do not bring him back to you and set him here before you, I will bear the blame before you all my life”.¹⁰²

“I will remember my covenant between me and you and all living creatures of every kind. Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life”.¹⁰³

“And for your lifeblood I will surely demand an accounting. I will demand an accounting from every animal. And from each human being, too, I will demand an accounting for the life of another human being”.¹⁰⁴

“When Reuben heard this, he tried to rescue him from their hands. ‘Let’s not take his life,’ he said”.¹⁰⁵

“So God said to Noah, ‘This is the sign of the covenant I have established between me and all life on the earth’”.¹⁰⁶

“Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being”.¹⁰⁷

In Christianity human blood is always considered as sacred¹⁰⁸. The fifth commandment speaks on the prohibition of human blood.¹⁰⁹

“Do not slay the innocent and the righteous”.

In the Sermon on the Mount, the Lord recalls the commandment, “You shall not kill”.¹¹⁰ Christ goes further by advising his disciples “to turn the other cheek”, “to love their enemies”.¹¹¹

In comparison of Christianity with Islam, the sanctity of human life holds immense importance in Islam. In Islam life is the first and the foremost right of the people. It is among the biggest bounty granted by Allah.

The protection of life, liberty, property and human pursuit is secured by Islam and ‘can only be abridged by the process of law’.¹¹²

In Islam protection of life is given the utmost importance out of the five essential interests protected by Shariah. (i.e. life, religion, intellect, property, and lineage). The Qur’an and the Sunnah further provide authority for each of these values¹¹³.

In Islam, to put a life to death unjustly means to put all humanity to death. Both the Quran and Sunnah of the Messenger (PBUH) provide authority on the sanctity and protection of human life.

The Quran while mentioning the qualities of the pious people states as:

“Who invoke no other deity along with Allah, nor take any life - which Allah has forbidden - save justly; who do not commit unlawful sexual intercourse and whoso does that shall meet its penalty”.¹¹⁴

“O you who believe, do not consume one another’s wealth unjustly but only through trade with mutual consent. And do not kill yourselves (or one another)”.¹¹⁵

“Say to them (O Muhammad!): 'Come, let me recite what your Lord has laid down to you: (i) that you associate nothing with Him; (ii) and do good to your parents; (iii) and do not slay your children out of fear of poverty. We provide you and will likewise provide them with sustenance’”.¹¹⁶

The Messenger of Islam (PBUH) warned the believers in many of his Ahadith about the sanctity and importance of human life and its protection. Some of the traditions in this regard are as follows:

- i) It is narrated by Abdullah bin Masud that the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) asked him about the worst sins. He mentioned three sins in his reply, one of which was: “to kill your own child for fear of its sustenance”.¹¹⁷
- ii) Anan Ibn Malik narrates that the Messenger (PBUH) states as:

“The biggest sins: to share any one with Allah, to kill a person, disobedience to parents, and false speech”.¹¹⁸
- iii) *Sunnan al Nisai*, book of hadith, has mentioned a continuous hadith of the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) as:

“The first thing (in the hereafter) for which man will be made accountable is Salah (prayer) and the first thing that will be decided among the people will be the claims of the blood”.¹¹⁹

In Islam the term ‘right to life’ is used in a broader perspective, covering a compendium of economic, social and cultural rights; the right to work, the right to a fair wage, the right to leisure, the right to social security, the right to found a family and much besides¹²⁰.

Christianity believes in the equality of men on the faith that all men are “created in the image of one God and are equally endowed with rational souls”. They therefore, have the same nature and origin and enjoy an equal dignity.

In the religion “every form of cultural and social discrimination on the grounds of sex, race, color, language, or religion must be curbed and eradicated as incompatible with God's design.”¹²¹

Along with this theoretical equality among men, Christianity believes “in the unequal distribution of talents among men concerning their physical abilities, intellectual or moral aptitudes, the benefits derived from social commerce, and wealth”.¹²²

These differences believed in Christianity belong to God's plan, which is that those who receive more are obliged to be more generous in giving the others.

“I distribute the virtues quite diversely; I do not give all of them to each person, but some to one, some to others... I shall give principally charity to

one; justice to another; humility to this one, a living faith to that one... and so I have given many gifts and graces, both spiritual and temporal, with such diversity that I have not given everything to one single person, so that you may be constrained to practice charity towards one another... I have willed that one should need another and that all should be my ministers in distributing the graces and gifts they have received from me".¹²³

In comparison of Islam with Christianity, in Islam there is no distinction in dignity and fundamental rights of the people on the basis of race, sex, blood relations or wealth¹²⁴.

In the Holy Quran and Hadith there are clear instructions on equality. The Quran emphasizes on the common origin of mankind and declares that mankind was originally one community and then subsequently there arose differences between them.

“O mankind! Lo! We have created you male and female, and have made you nations and tribes that ye may know one another. Lo! The noblest of you, in the sight of Allah, is the best in conduct”.¹²⁵

The Messenger (PBUH) of Islam, in his famous address given on the occasion of his farewell pilgrimage, declared in unambiguous words:

“O people, be aware: your God is one. No Arab has any superiority over a non Arab, and no non Arab has any superiority over an Arab, and no white one has any superiority over a black one, and no black one has any superiority over a white one, except on the basis of piety. All men are the progeny of Adam and Adam was made of clay”.¹²⁶

Hazrat Ubayda bin Samit (RA) reports that the Messenger (PBUH) said:

“Give equitable punishment to the remote and the near and have no fear of the reproach of people in enforcement of limits set up by God”.¹²⁷

The Messenger of Allah (PBUH) applied this principle of equality and justice in its true letter and spirit. Once, a woman belonging to a noble family of Madina was arrested in connection with a theft. The case was brought before the Messenger (PBUH) and he was requested that she might be spared from punishment of theft. The Messenger (PBUH) replied:

“The nations that lived before you were destroyed by God because they punished the common men for their offences but let their dignitaries go unpunished for their crimes. I swear by Him who holds my life in His hand that even if Fatima, the daughter of Muhammad (PBUH) had committed this crime I would have amputated her hand”.¹²⁸

All the Righteous Caliphs acted upon these injunctions of the Qur'an and Sunnah during their caliphate. The extent to which they paid regard to this right of human beings can well be gathered from various instances of their history.

Once Hazrat Umar (RA) while addressing his audience said:

“Gentlemen, officers are appointed not to harass you or seize your properties. They are appointed to teach you the way of the Messenger (PBUH). Therefore, if any officer has acted otherwise let me know so that he should be compelled to make good. Amar bin Aas (the governor of Egypt) rose up and said: ‘would you punish an officer who beats a person for enforcement of discipline?’ Hazrat Umar replied: Yes, I swear by Him who holds my life in His hand that I will certainly punish him for I myself saw the Messenger (PBUH) punishing such officers. Take warning! Do not deprive them of their rights lest they be compelled to do wrong”.¹²⁹

In the time of the Caliphs, “complaints were made in the court of the Qadi of the metropolis, or wherever the ruler may be residing, and Abu Bakr, Umar, Ali and many Umayyad and ‘Abbasid Caliphs attended the court at the summons of the judges”.¹³⁰

During the caliphate of ‘Umar, Muhammad the son of Amr ibn al-Aas, the Governor of Egypt, whipped an Egyptian. “The Egyptian went to Medina and lodged his complaint with the Righteous Caliph, who immediately summoned the Governor and his son to Medina. When they appeared before him in Medina, the Caliph handed a whip to the Egyptian complainant and asked him to whip the son of the Governor in his presence. After taking his revenge when the Egyptian was about to hand over the whip to ‘Umar, he said to the Egyptian, ‘Give one stroke of the whip to the honorable Governor as well. His son would certainly have not beaten you if it were not for the false pride that he had in his father high office’. Then he turned to Amr ibn al-Aas and said; ‘O Amr, when did you start to enslave the people, though they were born free of their mothers?’”¹³¹

IMPLICATIONS

The core essence of both the religions –Christianity and Islam is to guide humanity to lead a peaceful life, by upholding certain noble principles. Both the religions give central place to the concept of justice and injustice, right and wrong, good and evil; legality and illegality and to the dignity of man and concept equality etc.

Both the religions –Christianity and Islam are revealed religions in their originality and are based on the revealed knowledge and principles for the welfare and guidance of mankind. Christianity, however, lost its originality by mixing the human writings in its sacred scripture –the Bible.

Christianity is given the name because of Jesus Christ; whereas Islam has no such attribute. The Christianity believes in trinity. It takes it necessary for the infants, for their salvation to baptize.

Islam envisages that every human being is born sinless; each human being is born with a pure conscience and no one will bear the burden of another. Whereas Christianity

believes that man is sinful by nature. It is because of this philosophy of being sinful by nature, un-baptized babies are 'not allowed to be buried in the Christian cemetery'.¹³²

This doctrine of Christianity of being sinful by nature seems to be against the basic principles of justice. It condemns a person before the commission of any crime or sin on his part. This philosophy in fact pollutes the concept of man's dignity and sanctity.

The Christianity by declaring the celibacy as the mark of piety and sanctity and that the clergy could not marry, lead the whole Christendom to intellectual and moral thralldom. Monks and nuns leading their lives in a state of celibacy, against the law of nature became the 'sweet first fruits of the monastic order'.

The distinction made by the Catholic Church between the clergy and the laity struck at the very root of the principle of equality. The clergy and the member of the monastic order are looked upon as superior to the laity in regard to piety and sanctity. It eventually divide the Christian society into some irreconcilable groups.

This distinction in the religious order between the clergy and the laity gradually gave birth to race, color, and nationality throughout the world, which ultimately found expression in the well-known couplet by Rudyard Kipling;

"East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet".¹³³

The inevitable consequence of this distinction is that throughout the Christian world today the followers of the same religion are treated differently on the basis of their social and religious status. It is the reason that in many churches throughout the world, pews are reserved for the nobility and members of higher social status. In Lahore, (a city of Pakistan) a Church in 'Diamond Market' is reserved for those Christians who belong to the sweeper class.

At present no individual who has not been ordained a priest can lead a congregational prayer, nor he can conduct any religious service in any church. He is not even allowed to perform any marriage ceremony or the burial rites.

Islam is not a 'religion in the limited sense' but a complete code of life. Its fundamental beliefs are: the belief in oneness of Allah, the belief in prophethood and its finality, that Muhammad (PBUH) is the last messenger of Allah, and the belief in the life after death. Islam believes in the equality of man in dignity, right and status and of no distinctive right on the basis of race, color, language or territory.

While talks about human rights, Islam doesn't create discrimination based on any gender. The only difference there exists is concerning the role which Islam has envisioned for man and woman. This has nothing to do with superiority or inferiority. In Islam, man and woman are equal in rights; but equality is not synonymous to similarity. Islam believes that man and woman are equal but

dissimilar. Islam looks at their different roles in society not as superior or inferior but as complementary to each other.

The right to liberty and freedom of thought and expression is essential and basic requirement for the existence and progress of any society. Islam aims at striking such a balance between them as would promote the liberty of a person and at the same time ensure that such freedom is not detrimental to the interests of the community as a whole¹³⁴. Islam gives this right to all human beings, either they are Muslims or non-Muslims, citizens of an Islamic state or not. In an Islamic state, any person male or female, Muslim or non-Muslim, rich or poor can rise to any place on the basis of his hard work, education, virtues and personal merits¹³⁵. During the Righteous Caliphate non-Muslims were never denied this right. Some non-Muslims were holding very high posts¹³⁶.

It is only the highest office of the state and a few key posts where policy is determined that are not open to non-Muslim subjects. It is quite obvious that in an ideological state has to take some measures to maintain and protect its ideology from subversion. Even in the United Kingdom, although it is not an ideological state, a Roman Catholic cannot become its head, according to its traditions. And likewise, a Communist cannot be accepted for key positions in the United Kingdom, nor in the United States of America¹³⁷.

Christianity like Other religions (except Islam) owed their expansion to some mighty emperors and powerful rulers; as Christianity had its Constantine, Buddhism its Asoka and Zoroastrianism its Cyrus, each lending to his chosen cult the mighty force of secular authority; not so Islam.

A student of history knows that when the Crusaders captured Jerusalem they killed the Muslims mercilessly and demolished the mosques; including the “mosque of Umar”. But when Salauddin, defeated the Crusaders and recaptured Jerusalem, he granted general amnesty to the Christians and left their churches unmolested. Herein lays the basic difference between *Jihad* and other wars¹³⁸.

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4. Acts 11:26 5. E. Peterson, Christianus, p.353-72 6. Genesis 5:1
7. Matthew 28:19; Luke 24:7; McGrath, Christianity: An Introduction, p.4-6; Metzger/Coogan, Oxford Companion to the Bible, p.513, 649; Sheed, F. (1993), Theology and Sanity, Ignatius Press: San Francisco, p.276
8. The word Messiah in Hebrew (Old Testament) stands for anointed (one) or anointed king. It is the same word as Christ in Greek (New Testament). In Latin the word Messias also stands for the same meaning that is anointed [one]. In Islam *Isā al-Masīḥ* (عيسى المسيح) is believed to

- be anointed one from his birth by Allah with the specific task of being His messenger; See John 1:41,42; Robinson, G. (1999), *Essential Judaism: A Complete Guide to Beliefs, Customs and Rituals*, Simon & Schuster, p.229; Esler, P. F. (2000), *The Early Christian World*, Vol 1, London: Routledge Publishing Co, p.157
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 11. To baptize (Greek baptizein) means to plunge into the water. This bath symbolizes regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit. See 2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15; Cf. Rom 6:34; Col 2:12
 12. Jn 1:9; 1 Thess 5:5; Heb 10:32; Eph 5:8; St. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oratio* 40, 3-4
 13. See Quran: 26: 78 – 81; 18:26; 112:1-4; 2:136; T.B. Irving, et al.: *The Quran: Basic Teachings*; Hamuda Abdalati: *Islam in Focus*; M. Outb: *Islam: The Misunderstood Religion*; Maudoodi: *Towards Understanding Islam*; Maurice Bucaille: *The Bible, The Quran and Science*; Suzanne Haneef: *What Everyone Should know About Islam and the Muslims*
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49. Genesis 2:18
50. Mt 5:42; Mt25:31-36
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60. Sir 3:12-13, 16
61. Cf FC 36. CA 36 # 2
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