

Islam the First and Last Religion

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The present text strives to showcase the fact that the only true religion of Allah swt is that of Islam (submission) and that Islam is the only religion Allah swt has ever sent. Though it has been referred as Judaism or Christianity the author argues saying that Islam was the first and last religion.

In the Name of God; the Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful

As Muslims we believe in One Unique God; Allah. The Almighty Allah due to His Wisdom and Mercy has chosen some of the noblest men to be the recipients of His revelation called prophets and Messengers of God. The Almighty God dispatched His messengers to guide people to the Right Path. The duty of the messengers was to proclaim the divine message to people for whose guidance they were sent.

Purpose

The divine message of the messengers of God is called 'Religion'. The term 'religion' (Deen in Arabic) literally means obedience and following the path and the command of God. Religion is the collection of divine laws which designs a system of life, the following of which brings man closer to God and a prosperous life both here and in the hereafter.

Islam

The religion that God has prescribed to mankind is 'ISLAM' (submission and obedience to God). It is only this religion that has the capacity to cover all the needs of man, and encompasses the above purpose. Therefore, the only recognized religion in the sight of God is Islam.

“Truly the religion with Allah is Islam.” (3: 19)

“And whoever seeks a religion other than Islam it will never be accepted of him and in the hereafter he will be one of the losers.” (3:85)

Because the religion of God (Islam) is guidance and truth, therefore it can lead man to his prosperity.

“He it is Who has sent His Messenger with guidance and the religion of truth.” (48:28)

In the history of religion it is the religions (plural) which are discussed by theologians. However, the holy Quran has never used the term religion in a plural form which indicates that the Almighty God recognizes only one religion and one path to Him and that is Islam. Such is one of the major differences between the prophets and the messengers of God in comparison to philosophers and thinkers – for even contemporary philosophers and thinkers oppose each other, and their doctrines and all schools of thoughts may contradict one another. That is not ever the case in the office of prophet-hood.

There is only one Almighty God and one Law-Giver. He is the only source of authority of all prophets. The Almighty God never contradicts Himself and hence there shall not be any contradictions amongst the teachings of His messengers.

Nevertheless, the teachings of the prophets are similar to different grades of one school. For instance, the concept of mathematics that we learn in grade two does not contradict the mathematical concepts of grade one, nor does it contradict what we will learn in the ensuing grades. It will rather complete and advance mathematical knowledge until the student reaches a point whereat he has learned enough to be able to solve all new mathematical problems by utilizing his mathematical qualifications.

Such is the situation in the school of divine religion. The Almighty God considering the different levels of mentality of mankind throughout history, disclosed certain portions of the Truth to them until the entire Truth was disclosed to man by the revelation of the holy Quran to Prophet Muhammad (saww).

Were the Teachings of the previous prophets universal?

The stories of the prophets as mentioned in the Quran suggest that the teachings of the previous prophets have been limited to their own time and region to which they have been dispatched. For instance, about Prophet Nuh we read,

“And indeed We sent Nuh to his nation saying: ‘Warn your nation before there comes to them a painful torment.’ (71: 1)

With regard to Prophet Moses, the Quran says,

“And indeed We sent Moses with our signs saying ‘Bring out your nation from darkness into light.’ (14:5)

Thus Judaism is the religion of the tribe of Judah so a ‘Jew` originally designates a member of that tribe.

Similarly, regarding Prophet Jesus, the holy Quran says,

“And remember when Jesus son of Mary said, ‘O children of Israel I am the messenger of God unto you.’” (61:6)

It is also narrated in the gospel of Matthew that

“Jesus was only sent for the lost sheep of the house of Israel .” (Matt. 10:5–6)

Matthew and Mark further narrate that a gentile woman (non–Jewish) begs Jesus to heal her daughter but Jesus initially refuses saying that *“it is not fair to take the children`s bread and throw it to the dogs of the house.”* However, when she insists that even the house dogs eat of the crumbs that fall from the masters table, Jesus answers her and heals her daughter. (Matt. 15:22–28)

Nevertheless, the holy Quran regards the story of Prophet Nuh and his followers who embarked the ship and saved from the flood, a Sign for the world. (29: 15). And the sacred house, the Ka`ba, which was built by Prophet Ibrahim is regarded in the Quran as guidance for the world.(3:96) The Almighty God elevated the spiritual status of Mary mother of Jesus, so highly in the Quran that she was chosen over all the women of the world. (3:42) And finally, referring to the children of Israel , the Almighty God in the Quran says,

“O children of Israel . Remember My favour which I bestowed on you and that I preferred you to the world.” (2: 122)

Also, if the teachings of the previous prophets were regional and limited to the people of their time then one wonders as to why their stories and teachings are mentioned in the Quran knowing for a fact that every single verse in the Quran is part of the manifestation of Islam. Thus, it is not only for the sake of knowing the history of the past that the Almighty God revealed all the stories of the previous prophets.

Our Christian brethren also disagree with the regional and time–limited mission of Prophet Jesus. They believe the story of the Gentile woman was in the beginning of Jesus` mission and eventually he proclaimed his mission to the world through his disciples. According to Mark and Matthew Jesus before his ascension (or resurrection as Christians believe) commanded his disciples to go to the whole world and proclaim the Good News to all creation. (Mark 16: 15–16, Matt.5: 14–16)

It seems paradoxical that on the one hand the previous prophets have been designated to their own nation, yet on the other hand they are the divine Signs for the world.

My suggestion for reconciliation between the two sides of the paradox is that the teachings of the previous prophets were limited due to the requirements and intellectual capacity of the people of their time and hence they were also limited to a specific time and place. Nevertheless, all those teachings were forming parts of the universal and eternal religion of God; Islam. Thus, seeing them individually they were regional but looking at them collectively they were the signs and parts of forming a universal and perfected religion.

It is narrated from the prophet of Islam to have said; “The parable of my mission and the mission of the previous prophets is the parable of a man constructing a building until he makes it as complete and beautiful as possible. Then people walk around it and say, ‘we have never seen such a beautiful building except that there is a brick (part) missing in it.` So I am that brick.” (Muslim vol.4 ch. Prophet

Muhammad is the Seal of the Prophets)

We should also bear in mind that by making a point we should not rely on a distorted biblical story which insults the prophets of God. I cannot begin to imagine that prophet Jesus refuses to help a woman's child simply because they were not Jewish.

Universal & Eternal Religion

In the history of religion a universal religion is the one which is prevalent all over the world and its followers are found in various nations and countries thus, Islam, Hinduism and Christianity are classified universal religions. However, by using the term universal religion we mean a religion that existed from the beginning of the creation of man on earth and will continue its existence inasmuch as man exists on this planet. In this sense Islam was the only, is the only and will be, the only universal religion.

Islam is the religion taught in its fundamentals by all the prophets. It is the religion first introduced on Earth for mankind to follow. It is the religion of Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad and all previous prophets from time immemorial. The universal religion has a universal name, and that name is Islam.

The End of Prophethood

The religion of Islam was completed and perfected at the end of the mission of Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.w). The Almighty God states in the Holy Quran in the last chapter revealed to the Prophet of Islam

“This day, I have perfected your religion for you, completed My Favour upon you, and have chosen for you Islam as your religion.” (5:3)

Thus, Muhammad (s.a.w.w) was the last Prophet sent to mankind and his Message was the last divine message and since then prophethood ceased to continue.

“Muhammad is not the father of any of your men, but he is the Messenger of Allah and the last of the Prophets. And Allah is Ever All-Aware of everything.” (33:40)

In the terminology of the Quran a messenger of God is the one who brings a message and the canon law, and a prophet is usually the one who was sent to man to inform them of the divine news (Naba'). When the office of Prophethood comes to an end, it means there will be no more news and revelation, including the fact that there will be no more messengers either to give the news of their coming.

The Meaning of the End of Prophethood

Some Muslim thinkers such as Iqbal Lahoori and later, Dr. Shari'ati, assumed that the meaning of the end of Prophethood is the end of divine leadership and the rise of the rational guidance. They further

assumed that man`s intellect had reached a status where he no longer needed divine guidance. His intellect has been replaced with revelation.

The above interpretation of the seal of Prophethood is very misleading and results in nothing other than secularism.

The actual meaning of the seal of Prophethood is that the package of the religion of God was completed and perfected and God did not need to send any more revelations to man. The perfected religion, i.e. Islam, is sufficient for all the needs of man forever. Man will not face any problems relating to his wellbeing for which the answer is not found in the teachings of Islam.

Characteristics of the Universal and Everlasting Religion

In order for a religion to meet the needs of the people of all times and places, and to guide them to the Right Path, it is imperative that it enjoys some characteristics without which it fails to serve the purpose. In the following I shall share with you some of these characteristics:

1. The Word of God

The first characteristic of the universal and everlasting religion is that its teachings must be the actual words of God without any perversion or distortion.

“For it is only the Word of God which is perfect and timeless. We agree with our Christian brethren that “the Word of God endures for ever” (I Peter 1:25)

The question, however, is which Scripture today is the Word of God alone.

Some Facts about the Bible

a) The Bible: The present Bible is a collection of writings which the Church of God has solemnly recognized as inspired. (Encarta)

b) The Original Bible: The original manuscripts of the Bible are lost and no living person has ever seen them. Thus, the Bible educators talk about ‘inspiration of scriptures’. That means the compilers of the Bible claim to have been inspired about the scriptures after the original texts have been lost.

c) The Language and the earliest Bible: To this date there is no confirmation about the actual language of the Bible and the earliest Bible. We have been told that the Bible was originally written in Greek and Hebrew. However, no one can actually prove that they were so written. The reason being that there is no original text of the Bible. The first five books could have been written in Egyptian, the language in which Moses was educated and the country wherein the Israelites had lived for many years. Conversations in the gospel were certainly not spoken in Greek even though the oldest manuscripts of the Bible are in

Greek or Aramaic.

There is an ongoing debate as to whether the earliest Gospels were written in Aramaic or Greek. Some scholars have proposed that they were written in Aramaic. But then again, no one has ever seen an Aramaic Gospel predating the fourth century which had to be translated from Greek to Aramaic. To this date scholars are still debating as to what language that Jesus spoke? For many years it was believed and still there are many adherers to that, that the language of Jesus was Aramaic. But recently, the majority of the scholars tend more to believe that it was Hebrew. However, the oldest texts of the Gospels available to us today are in Greek. Thus our Christian brethren do not even know the language in which their lord spoke.

The oldest Bible was compiled six years after the Council of Nicea in the year 331AD. Constantine the Great, a pagan solar worshipper who was the first Roman Emperor who converted to Christianity destroyed all earlier copies of the Gospels and the fifty copies of the Gospels they produced are the basis for all Christian belief today. Ironically these fifty copies are considered 'originals'.

The Old Testament and most of its contents were gradually written within the nine centuries which is a long time after Prophet Moses. Thus the Bible both the Old and New Testaments is by no means a unified book in terms of authorship, date composition or literary type.

d) Different Versions of the Bible. The Bible of Judaism and the Bible of Christianity are different. The version of the Old Testament used by the Roman Catholic is the Bible of Judaism plus seven other books and additions to books. The version of the Old Testament however used by Protestants is limited to the 39 books of the Jewish Bible. Not to mention the various versions of the Bible, Jehovah Witness, Mormons and many, many others claim to be the original.

e) Fragmentary: The present Bible is fragmentary in its literature style, i.e. made up of the remains of a larger literature.

These and many other reasons will make the present Bible nothing more than a expired history book of the past legends. Unless you are a faithful Christian or Muslim, historically, up until the present time there is no concrete proof about the existence of Jesus son of Mary. Had the Quran not spoken and acknowledged Prophet Jesus son of Mary none other than faithful Christians would today believe in the existence of Prophet Jesus.

None of the abovementioned problems of the Bible exists in the holy Quran. The holy Quran is the actual verbatim word of God revealed word by word to Prophet Muhammad (saww) through the Arch Angel Gabriel. Let us take a closer look at the wordings of the Quran.

When a teacher tells his student to read a particular paragraph it is not expected that the pupil will say: "Read this.." and then start reading the sentence! Nonetheless, as the holy Quran is composed of none other than the Words of Allah, then its style is different. According to the majority of narrators the first

Ayaat revealed to the Prophet of Islam was in Chapter 96 (Sura Al-alaq) in which the Almighty God addresses His messenger:

“ Read in the name of your Lord Who created.”

If the holy Quran were not the actual verbatim word of God the present format of the above Ayaah would have been ‘in the name of my Lord Who created’! Similarly, in many instances the Almighty God is addressing His messenger to say something. Interestingly even the word ‘SAY’ is mentioned in the Quran such as:

“Say: I seek refuge with the Lord of mankind.” (Chapter 114)

It is an indisputable fact that the Quran was revealed to the Prophet of Islam in Arabic. The Quran is the unique and original scripture of all Muslims of the world irrespective of the different sects amongst Muslims.

Reverend Bosworth Smith in Muhammad and Muhammadanism (London 1874) writes about the Quran, “We have a book absolutely unique in its origin, in its preservation... under substantial authority of which no one has ever been able to cast a serious doubt.”

Therefore, we agree with our Christian brethren that ‘the Word of God endures forever’. But we add that there is no actual and original Scripture which contains only the word of God other than the holy Quran.

2. Rationality & Simplicity

The message of God to humanity shall not contradict the inbuilt common sense and the faculty of mind that the Almighty God, the Creator, has instilled within man. From the Islamic perspective the Almighty God has provided man with two types of proof and guidance. An internal one called common sense, and external ones being the messengers equipped with revelation.

The teachings of the everlasting religion must therefore be in accordance with one`s common sense; profound, yet simple to comprehend. One should not require a degree to be able to understand the message of God as one should not find it contradictory to one`s common sense.

In 1793 the German philosopher Immanuel Kant wrote his great book Religion Within the Bounds of Bare Reason. He intended it as a philosophical experiment to test whether or not Christianity could be adequately defended as the universal religion of mankind. According to Kant a true religion must have the qualification for universality. Meaning that religion should have validity for every human being or “community of insight”.

Kant argued that the revealed ‘religion` must also be a ‘natural religion` (Fetrat as mentioned in the Quran). A religion may be classified as both natural and revealed as long as humans could and ought to

have come to the religion through reason, even if not as easily or quickly as with a divine revelation, in which the revelation is, 'wise and very advantageous'. (Cambridge University Press 1998)

Far from irrationality of imported concepts of Trinity and Original Sin, reincarnation and the like, Islam remains the only religion of common sense in all its teachings. Unlike Christianity which advocates its followers 'in terms of religion (that) one must stop reasoning` and when they are asked about Trinity they regard it supposedly as beyond logic!, Islam invites people to reflect and to start reasoning in exploring Islam. The Almighty God in many instances in the Quran invites the non-believers to the common humane platform of common sense and intellect to provide their logical and rational proofs if they are truthful. (2:111, 21:24, 16:64, 9:6)

The Prophet of Islam (saww) was profoundly rational and realistic in all different aspects. He never took advantage of the naivety and ignorance of people. When his beloved son Ibrahim died, and an eclipse occurred, rumours of God`s personal condolence quickly spread. Whereupon Prophet Muhammad (saww) announced: "An eclipse is a phenomenon of nature. It is foolish to attribute such things to the death or birth of a human being." "Edward Montet, 'La Propagande Chretienne et ses Adversaries Musulmans, 'Paris 1890. (Also in T W Arnold in 'The Preaching of Islam,` London 1913)

"Islam is a religion that is essentially rationalistic in the widest sense of this term considered etymologically and historically... A creed so precise, so strict of all theological complexities and consequently so accessible to the ordinary understanding might be expected to possess and does indeed possess a marvelous power of winning its way into the consciences of man."

3. A Socio-Political Religion

A universal religion which allows its teachings to last forever without any alteration should be able to present the best lifestyle in socio-political and economic needs of people as well as the nearness to God and prosperity, and hereafter. Islam is the only religion that has successfully made reconciliation between the worldly affairs and spirituality. In Islam celibacy is not a means of spirituality and perfection, rather marriage and a healthy response to physical needs pave the way to gain more spirituality. In Islam, one can be a millionaire and yet very spiritual and pious in so far as his wealth does not make him heedless towards God. In the Bible we read,

"It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God." (Matt. 19:24, Mark 10:25, Luke 18:25)

Compare this distorted version which condemns the mere wealth with the Quranic version in which the Almighty says,

"Verily, those who belie Our Ayaat (evidences, signs) and treat them with arrogance, for them the gates of heaven will not be opened, and they will not enter paradise until the camel goes through

the eye of the needle (which is impossible). Thus do We recompense the criminals.” (7:40)

Therefore what is regarded impossible in the word of God is for criminals to enter paradise not the rich and you judge with your common sense.

Another unique aspect of Islam which has made it an everlasting religion is the fact that Islam is not only a ‘Friday-go to mosque’ religion. Islam is a system of life and as such has economic and political doctrines. Unlike Christianity, in Islam religion and state are not separated. The prophet of Islam himself established the first Islamic state. He was a prophet and was simultaneously the head of a state.

The perverted version of the Bible narrates that when Pharisees asked Jesus if it was lawful to pay tax to the Caesar (government) or not? Jesus is claimed to have answered,

“Render to Caesar what is Caesar’s; to God what is God’s.” (Matt.22: 15–22)

It was due to this perverted teaching that in today’s Christianity even the Pope has no voice in his own country; Italy, against the Italian government to oppose the occupation of Iraq by the allies! It is due to such distorted concepts that our Christian brethren ought to ‘learn to live with the problems of homosexuality, gambling, abortion, etc.’

Reverend Bosworth Smith in ‘Muhammad and Muhammadanism,’ London , 1874:

“Head of the State as well as the Church, he was Caesar and Pope in one; but he was Pope without the Pope’s pretensions, and Caesar without the legions of Caesar, without a standing army, without a bodyguard, without a police force, without a fixed revenue.”

Sir Bernard Shaw in ‘The Genuine Islam’, vol. 1 no. 8, 1936.

“If any religion had the chance of ruling over England , nay Europe within the next 100 years, it could be Islam.”

Michael Hart in ‘The 100, A Ranking of the Most Influential Persons in History, New York, 1978:

“My choice of Muhammad to lead the list of the world’s most influential persons may surprise some readers and may be questioned by others, but he was the only man in history who was supremely successful on both the secular and religious level.... It is this unparalleled combination of secular and religious influence which I feel entitles Muhammad to be considered the most influential single figure in human history.”

4. General Rules

The universal and timeless religion must have the capacity to cater for the needs of people of all times. Nonetheless, human society is always progressing. The man of our age is very different in his lifestyle than that of his ancestors 1400 years ago. Thus, the requirements of the man of our age are different than people even two centuries ago let alone 1400 years past. For instance, issues such as ‘insurance’,

'narcotic drugs', 'smoking cigarettes', 'AIDS' etc and many more to come did not apparently exist in the past. Thus, how possible would it thus be for the religion of Islam, the teachings of which being revealed 1400 years ago, to solve the ongoing problems of man throughout history?

The above problem would remain unsolved had the teachings of Islam referred only to the particular. However, the Almighty Knower of all the things has already set general rules which referring to, and conducting from, would solve the ongoing problems of man. In Islam there are specific jurisprudential rules and general rules. For instance, rules such as 'the law of no harming the self or others'; 'the law of fulfilling your contracts'; 'the law of the necessity of safeguarding human society'; 'the law of the authority of the jurist', has enabled Muslim jurists to deduct and apply the general laws to solving upcoming issues.

The holy Quran, for instance, considers the consummation of intoxicants an abomination. The term used in the Holy Quran is 'al-Khamr' which literally means any substance which causes the malfunctioning of the human brain. In the past the only existing example of this was alcohol.

Nevertheless, the term al-Khamr (intoxicants) is such a general term which fully includes all types of narcotic drugs. Moreover, by utilizing the general rule of 'the law of no harming the self nor the others' a Muslim jurist is capable of deducting a rule that the unauthorized use of narcotic drugs is forbidden in Islam even if there is no specific Hadith (saying) from the Prophet of Islam about it.

Muslims whether living in a skyscraper in New York or in a desert of the Sahara when facing any jurisprudential issue with relates to their day to day living, simply contact an expert jurist or Mufti and he will have an answer for all their inquiries. Therefore, the nature of the Islamic law has given it the capacity to endure forever.

The Holy Quran acknowledges itself as the living Scripture

I would like to end this lecture with some quotations from the Quran and the sayings of the Prophet of Islam (s.a.w.w) which confirms the universality of Islam:

- 1. "Say: No reward I ask you for this (the Quran). It is only a reminder for the world." (6:90)**
- 2. "Blessed be He Who sent down the criterion (of right and wrong; the Quran) to His devotee (Muhammad) that he may be a warner to the world." (25: 1)**
- 3. "Say: Allah is Witness between me and you; this Quran has been revealed to me that I may therewith warn you and whosoever it may reach." (6: 19)**
- 4. "Say (O Muhammad): O mankind! Verily, I am sent to you all as the Messenger of Allah." (7: 158)**

5. ***“He it is Who has sent His Messenger (Muhammad) with guidance and the religion of truth (Islam) superior to all religion(s). And All-Sufficient is Allah as a Witness.” (48:28)***

6. ***“And We have sent you (O Muhammad) except as a giver of glad tidings and a warner to all mankind, but most of men know not.” (34:28)***

7. ***“And WE have sent you (O Muhammad) not but as a mercy for the world.” (21: 107)***

8. ***“And this (the Quran) is a blessed Book which We have sent down, confirming (the revelations) which came before it, so that you may warn the Mother of Towns¹ and all those around it.” (6:92)***

9. Although the first addressee of the Prophet of Islam (saww) were Arabs, the Holy Quran has never addressed them as ‘O you Arabs!’ It always addresses ‘O You People!’ or ‘O You who believe` and the like free from any tribal or national or gender designation.

10. The Prophet of Islam seven years after his migration to Medina dispatched his ambassadors to the then world leaders to convey the message of Islam to them. This is one of the practical proofs for the universality of Islam.

There are also numerous Prophetic sayings in which Prophet Muhammad (saww) has prophesized that Islam will be prevailed on earth. “There will remain no house on earth whether made of mud or hair (like tent dwellers) but the word of Islam will enter therein.”

¹. The expression of the ‘Mother of Towns` is referred to Mecca as the centre of the world and ‘all those around it` includes all other parts of the earth.

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