

Introduction

I begin with the Islamic greeting, *as-salāmu ‘alaykum*, which is a greeting of peace for all of you, for my sisters and brothers in faith as well as for my sisters and brothers in humanity.

These words of courtesy expressed for non-Muslims as “sisters and brothers in humanity” are nothing new in a Muslim’s psychic. Fourteen centuries ago when Imām ‘Ali bin Abi Tālib, the son-in-law and successor of the Prophet, appointed Mālik al-Ashtar as the governor of Egypt, he wrote an epistle for him which outlined the basic rules of governance. Since Egypt was a multi-faith province of the then Muslim Empire, ‘Ali instructed his new governor as follows:

Infuse your heart with mercy, love and kindness for your subjects. Do not stand over them like greedy beasts who feel it is enough to devour them, for they are of two kinds: either they are your brethren in faith or like you in creation. [1](#)

This sense of respect for non-Muslims has been an integral part of Islam, the faith brought to us by Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.), a prophet who is followed by one-fifth of the human race and a prophet who is ranked by Michael Hart as “the most influential single figure in human history.” And, therefore, it is important to know him and his people.

Dialogue between civilizations is an urgent need of our time. It is indeed sad to see that even though we live in the era of fast and vast means of communication, nations and religious communities have not yet been able to have a meaningful dialogue with one another.

It is in this background, that I believe the timing of this program at the Canadian Parliament is very appropriate *since* we have just gone over a major speed-bump on the road of interfaith dialogue, a speed-bump in which the Prophet of Islam was maligned as a person who brought nothing but “evil and inhuman” teachings.[2](#)

1. See the compilation of Imam 'Ali's sermons, letters and sayings compiled by Sayyid Razi in Nahju 'l-Balāgha, letter no. 53. Nahjul Balagha is available online at www.al-islam.org [1]
2. This refers to the statement of Pope Benedict XVI at an university in Germany where he gave a lecture on 12 September 2006 on "Faith, Reason and the University." In it he quoted the Byzantine emperor Manuel II Paleologus as follows: "Show me just what Mohammed brought that was new, and there you will find things only evil and inhuman, such as his command to spread by the sword the faith he preached."

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