



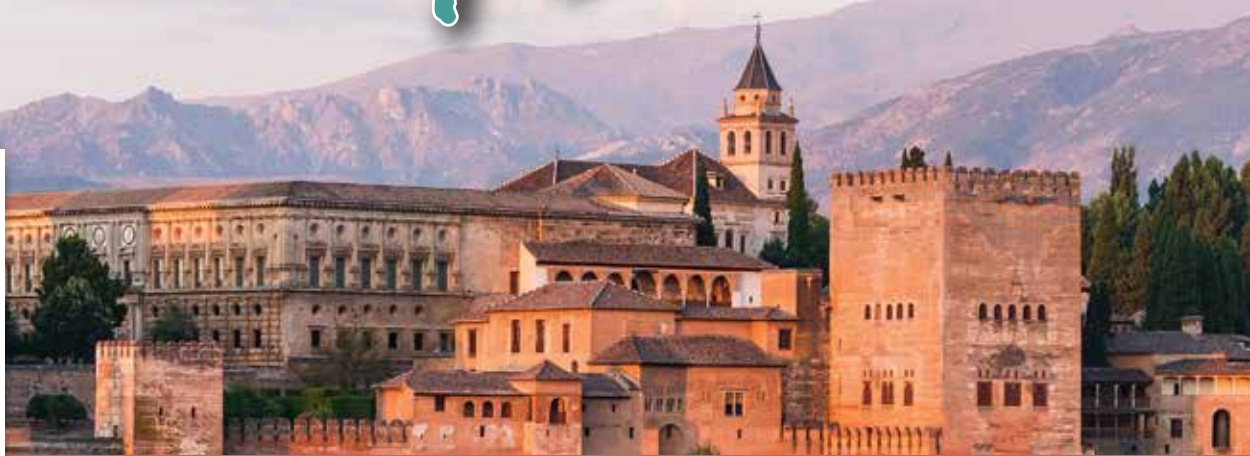
# The Mosque Foundation COMMUNITY

## Pulse

AUGUST 2017 - THUL-Q'ADA - THUL-HIJJAH 1438 -ISSUE 117



Sh. Ahmed Arafat



## WHEN ISLAM WAS A MODEL OF TOLERANCE FOR EUROPE

*"Let the Muslim be my master in outward things rather than the Latin dominate me in matters of the spirit. For if I am subject to the Muslim, at least he will not force me to share his faith. But if I have to be under Frankish rule and united with the Roman Church, I may have to separate myself from God."*<sup>1</sup>

This was what the Patriarch Michael III of Anchialos (1170:1178) had to describe the religious situation in the 12th Century. On the eve of the fall of Constantinople in 1453, this view was more bluntly expressed by Duke Lucas Notaras in his famous words: *"Better the turban of the Turk than the tiara of the Latin [Pope]."* Moreover, during the Dutch Revolt, the phrase *"Rather Turkish than Popish"* was coined to express that life under the Ottoman Sultan would have been better than life under the Catholic King of Spain.<sup>2</sup> Some used to wear a Dutch crescent-shaped medal, with the slogan *"Rather Turk than Pope"*.



Half Moon Geuzen Medal, worn by the Dutch from 1566 to 1574

These incidents might be shocking for the Islamophobes whose campaigns against Islam became a career for them or a condition for holding some positions! It might equally be shocking for the general public who constantly receive negatives images of Islam and Muslims from the anti-Muslim media that vigorously works hard on presenting *"The Islamic Threat"* and creating the stereotype of the Muslim as violent and intolerant of other faiths. However, these historical incidents serve as an embodiment of the many Islamic teachings on coexistence, not just tolerance, with other faiths. This article seeks to identify one of the roots of religious tolerance in Islam and how European reformers, some of whom were ridiculed as *'Mahometans'*, came to admire the Islamic model of tolerance and called for adopting the religious diversity as ensured by the Muslim sultans.

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## WHEN ISLAM WAS A MODEL OF TOLERANCE FOR EUROPE

At the time when many medieval Christian rulers raised the motto “*One State, One Law, One Faith*” as their government policy which inevitably led to many religious persecutions of different sects within Christianity, Islam introduced a completely different motto “*There is no compulsion in religion*” (Q. 2:256) which laid down the foundation for religious coexistence and non-interference with the beliefs of other religious communities. Even though this text was violated in few cases in later history, Bernard Lewis affirms that “In the early centuries of Islamic rule there was little or no attempt at forcible conversion, the spread of the faith being effected rather by persuasion and inducement.”<sup>3</sup>

What is so special about this Islamic motto? First, according to the above-cited verse, religious freedom was expressed as ‘a statement,’ not ‘a command’. The verse did not say “Do compel others to leave their faith or embrace Islam;” rather it used the statement style which, according to Arabic rhetoricians, indicates that religious tolerance has to be viewed as a nonnegotiable *fact* that cannot be abrogated, simply because compulsion is not an accepted conversion as God judges the heart, not the lip. Second, this verse was revealed in Madina when the Muslim community was considerably strong and had to deal with the presence of Jews and Christians therein. Third, some people or systems may endorse tolerance in areas that you do not value the most; for instance, religious practice could be tolerated because it is not crucial in a specific worldview whereas some political views could be suppressed in the same worldview. However, Islam adheres to religious freedom for non-Muslim communities in spite of the fact that the Muslim civilization is theocentric.

Above all, this motto was backed by a positive attitude towards the human nature in general and the Judeo-Christian tradition in principle. Contrary to the Christian belief in original sin and the assumption that non-Christians are sinning even during their sleep, Islam restored the faith of the early prophets who affirmed that people are born sinless and that sins are acquired, not inherited. Furthermore, based on its affirmation of the unity of the Divine message, Islam accepts Moses and Jesus as great prophets who belong to a long chain of prophets with Muhammad as the Seal of all Prophets. Accordingly, a Muslim does not see himself or herself following one of the conflicting religions but embracing the same faith shared and taught by all of God’s prophets.

Due to this positive worldview, Muslim medieval history records unique moments of free thinking and interfaith dialogues and debates about religious and philosophical issues, using reason alone with no references to one’s scripture. In his biographical work *Jadhwat al-Muqtabis*, al-Humaydi (d.1095), tells the story of Abu ‘Umar ibn Sa’di who records his experience as follows:

*“At the first session I attended I saw a majlis [gathering] which included every kind of group: Sunni Muslims and heretics, and all kinds of infidels: Majus, materialists, atheists, Jews, and Christians. Each group had a leader who would speak on its doctrine and debate about it. Whenever a leader arrived, from whichever of the groups he was, the assembly rose up for him, standing on their feet until he would sit down, then they would take their seats when he sat. When the majlis was jammed with its participants, and they saw that no one else was expected, one of the infidels said, “You have all agreed to the debate, so the Muslims should not argue against us on the basis of their scripture, nor on the basis of the sayings of their prophet, since we put no credence in it and do not acknowledge him. Let us dispute with one another only on the basis of arguments from reason, and what observation and deduction will support.” Then they would say, “Agreed.” Abu Umar said, “When I heard that, I did not return to that majlis. Later someone told me there was to be another majlis for discussion, so I went to it and I found them involved in the same practice as their colleagues. So I stopped going to the majalis of the theologians, and I never went back.”<sup>4</sup>*

Besides the freedom of faith granted to non-Muslim communities, this sense of religious tolerance,



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A European and an Arab practicing geometry together.  
15th-century manuscript

coupled with Muslims' interest in and sponsorship of all fields of knowledge; led to the flourishing of religious study in non-Muslim faiths as the leaders of these faith were motivated by the academic disciplines Muslim scholars expanded or even originated. For instance, the Jews, who suffered persecutions under Christian rule on account of the accusation of killing the Messiah, were encouraged, under Muslim rule, to engage in the philosophical, legal, ethical, linguistic and religious discussions of the day. Saadia's *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, Maimonides' *The Guide for the Perplexed*, Ibn Paquda's *Duties of the Heart*, Solomon ibn Gabirol's *The Improvement of the Moral Qualities* and Ibn Kammuna's *Examination of the Three Faiths*, Judah Halevi's *The Book of Refutation and Proof on the Despised Faith* and Al-Qirqisani's *The Book of Lights and High Beacons* are just few examples of medieval Jewish works originally written in Arabic and greatly influenced by Muslim works and spirit.

This religious tolerance was clearly noticed by many European theologians, philosophers and reformers and advocated as a model of religious tolerance for Europe to follow. For the sake of brevity,

two tolerance advocates will be cited here to illustrate the European fascination with the Islamic model of tolerance as part of their attempt to encounter the wave of inquisitions and religious persecutions.

First, based on a Protestant city council, Michael Servetus (d. 1553) was tried and burned alive for heresy as he denied the Trinity, the incarnation of Christ and some other doctrines. Trying to put an end to such bloody acts, Sebastian Castellio (d. 1563) records this testimony:

*"At Constantinople there are Turks, there are Christians, and there are also Jews, three peoples widely differing from one another in religion. Nevertheless they live in peace, which certainly they would not do if there were persecution. A careful investigation will reveal that persecutors have always been the cause of great troubles. Wherefore, Princes and Magistrates, if you desire peace and tranquility, do not listen to those who incite you to persecution, for they are seditious ..."*<sup>5</sup>

Second, based on perjured witnesses, a Protestant figure Jean Calas was accused of killing his son Marc-Antoine to prevent his conversion and thereby executed in 1762. Following the trial of Jean Calas, the famous French philosopher Voltaire writes his *Treatise on Tolerance* to display the Catholic fanaticism. Among the examples he cited as a model of religious tolerance, Voltaire calls on his people:

*"Let us reach out from our narrow little sphere for a moment, and examine what goes on in the rest of the globe. The Turkish prince, for example, rules peacefully over twenty races of different religious conviction; two hundred thousand Greeks live in Constantinople in perfect safety, and the Mufti himself nominates and presents the Greek patriarch to his emperor; there is even a Roman Catholic patriarch living there. The Sultan nominates Catholic bishops to some of the Greek islands, with the following words: "I commend him to go and reside as bishop on the isle of Chios in accordance with its ancient customs and vain ceremonies". This empire is stuffed with Jacobites, Nestorians, Monothelites, Copts, Christians of St John, Jews, Gebers, and Baniens. The annals of Turkey bear no record of a revolt raised by any of these religious communities."*<sup>6</sup>

These two examples illustrate that, in the middle of religious persecutions in Europe, some tolerance advocates made allusions to the Islamic model of governing to conjure up images of tolerance and coexistence to save medieval Europe from religious prejudice and pave the way for the Enlightenment. All in all, religious tolerance with other faith communities has been part and parcel of the Muslim civilization. For those who want to know whether ISIS is true Islam or un-Islamic, ask Sebastian Castellio or ask Voltaire! If you like patriarchs, you may ask Patriarch Michael III of Anchialos!

1 Christopher Allmand, Rosamond McKitterick (ed.), *The New Cambridge Medieval History: Vol. 7*, Cambridge University Press, p. 782

2 For more details, see Benjamin Schmidt, *Innocence abroad: the Dutch imagination and the New World*, Cambridge University Press.

3 Bernard Lewis, *The Jews of Islam*, Princeton University Press, p. 17

4 Abu 'Abd Allah Al-Humaydi, *Jadhwat al-Muqtabis*, Cairo, 1953, pp. 101-102, cited in *The Majlis: Interreligious Encounters in Medieval Islam* edited by Hava Lazarus-Yafeh

5 Sebastian Castellio, *On Heretics: Whether They Are to Be Persecuted and How They Are to Be Treated*, transl. R Bainton, Columbia University Press, p. 225

6 Voltaire, *Treatise on Tolerance*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 20-21

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# MFCC ANNUAL RAMADAN QURAN COMPETITION

For the last 9 years, MFCC holds an annual Ramadan Quran competition. this year 80 participants competed on 5 levels. Judging took place on Saturday June 24, and the results were announced during an award Ceremony held on Saturday July 1st. Results were as follows:

ALFAJER	
Zaina Al-Ahdab	1ST PLACE
Abdallah Alraiwe	2ND PLACE
Aseya Hemadit	3RD PLACE
ALHAQQA	
Liyan Nassar	1ST PLACE
Fatima Hemadit	2ND PLACE
Duha Hamdan	3RD PLACE
Salma Alyhabib	3RD PLACE
ALMULK	
Heyam Yousef	1ST PLACE
Mohammad Al-Ahdab	2ND PLACE
Salem Hefidah	3RD PLACE
Jasrah Ali	3RD PLACE
ALWAAQEAA	
Amin Alaani	1ST PLACE
Alhassan Elkossei	2ND PLACE
Yousef Abdelaal	3RD PLACE
Muhammad Yuldasheva	3RD PLACE
Makia Elsheikh	3RD PLACE
Fatema Abouzekry	3RD PLACE
Heba Sandouka	3RD PLACE
Nour Hammad	3RD PLACE
ALARRAF	
Naseem Khubeih	1ST PLACE
Sara Tawfik	2ND PLACE



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شهادته مية عن مدرسة الصديق ...  
أهم الأسباب التي تجعلني أصر على تسجيل أولادي في مدرسة الصديق

# Al-Siddiq School

أولاً: البيئة التربوية التي أراها مجسدة بتصرفات الكادر التعليمي أولاً وبالتطبيق العملي لأطفالنا. ثانياً؛ التعاليم الإسلامية التي تُدرّس في كل مرحلة عمرية مراعية الفروق اللغوية والعمرية. ثالثاً: تحفيظ القرآن عن طريق أحدث الكتب والطرق لجعلهم يرتلون القرآن بصورة صحيحة. رابعاً: تعليم اللغة العربية بأحدث الأساليب العلمية لغير الناطقين بها. خامساً: استخدام الأساليب التطبيقية لتطبيق ما يتعلمه الطالب من خلال الأنشطة المختلفة. سادساً: توفير البيئة الصحية والرياضية من خلال النادي الرياضي والأنشطة الرياضية المختلفة. سابعاً: استخدام أسلوب التحدي في التعلم والحفظ من خلال المسابقات التعليمية كمسابقة اقرأ وأسباب النزول وغيرها. ثامناً: مراعاة التغذية الصحية وتوفير وقت الغداء للطلاب. تاسعاً: توفير كادر من المعلمات من ذوي التعليم العالي والخبرة الواسعة في مجال التعليم. عاشراً: النظام المدرسي الذي كدنا أن نفقده من خلال طابور الصباح والفقرات المتعددة.

منى أبو شقرة

أحدى الامهات والمساعدات في مدرسة الصديق

## Proud Al-Siddiq Graduating Students Stated...

As salaam wa 3laikum wa rahma tu Allah well, we made it. The time has finally come where we, graduating students of Al-Siddiq School for the year 2017, are closing a chapter of our learning journey through which we have become not only better Muslims, but better people. We may be ending our time here at Al-Siddiq School, but what we have learned here will help us in our future as Muslims. Giving us the knowledge to spread Islam in the best manner. Graduating from Al-Siddiq School means that we have succeeded in learning more of our Deen and Arabic language (which by the way is very impressive) as well as leaned how to read the constitution of life itself, The Holy Quran. We all started our chapters here at different stages of life but now we are finishing with the same achievement becoming more knowledgeable with an Islamic identify. Thank you, Salam wa 3lai-kum.



Written and read by: Needah Abdurahim,  
Hanin Abuzir, and Lena Mohammed

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8. The School's library includes hundreds of books and stories in Arabic and English students can check out and read with their parents.

9. Availability of sport programs such as soccer, basketball, and swimming.

10. Diversity of students

11. Al-Siddiq School is invested in engaging parents in the learning of their children.

12. One of the largest and oldest weekend schools in the nation with accumulating excellence over the years. The School serves around 700 students annually.

13. Over 75 dedicated teachers, teacher aides, and staff work at Al-Siddiq



School providing the best education for the students and their families.

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