

"Brothers in Deen": the Quran calls for Coexistence, not Clash



The rise of ISIS and the recent Charlie Hebdo massacre have brought the “clash of civilizations” discourse to a fever pitch. In reality, the Quran calls for a government based on values closely resembling that of Western republics. Equal rights are guaranteed to non-Muslims so long as they fulfill the same two obligations as their Muslim counterparts: follow the law and pay an income tax. Henceforth, they are considered “brothers in the system of life.” No religious conversion is required.

Before we proceed, note that Islam (meaning “submission” to the will of God) is referred to as a “Deen” in the Quran. Deen means “system of life” or “way of governance.” Religion is but a component of Deen. Next, let’s review the verse deemed “the verse of the sword” by critics:

9:5: “Slay those who ascribe divinity to aught beside God wherever you come upon them, and take them captive, and besiege them, and lie in wait for them...”

At first glance, this would seem to condone violence against non-Muslims. But, an honest contextual review reveals that this verse references those non-Muslims who keep violating treaties and attacking the Muslim government.

9:10: “They respect no tie and no pact regarding a believer. They are the transgressors.”

*9:11: “If they (the warring non-Muslims) mend their ways and establish Salat and pay Zakat, then they are your **Brothers in Deen.**”*

So we are clearly told that non-Muslims are considered “brothers” to Muslims if they are not fighting against them and they fulfill two duties: establish Salat and pay Zakat. “Salat” means the “system that follows closely” (the divine commands). The scope of Salat can vary with context. For instance, the Quran indicates that establishing Salat at a government level eliminates corruption (11:84-87) and all creatures “know their Salat” (24:41), meaning they follow their Divine programming instinctually. At a personal level, Salat defines the Islamic daily prayers but more importantly the

moral code of honesty, sincerity, truthfulness, steadfastness, etc. (70:19-34).

jizya is not a non-believer's "tribute" to Muslims as commonly believed

Coming to Zakat, it is commonly defined as "charity", but in actuality it was a government income tax (6:141) in the early days of Islam, and only 100 years after Prophet Muhammad (S) died was Zakat disconnected from state collection (see <http://tinyurl.com/mta34mw>). Notably, the Quranic term for charity is *sadaqa* (9:60). Furthermore, the Quran did not restrict Zakat to its current ineffectual 2.5%.

With this understanding of Deen, Salat, and Zakat, we can appreciate verse 9:11 clearly:

"If they (the warring non-Muslims) mend their ways and establish Salat (follow the rules of the Islamic government and its code of ethics) and pay Zakat (the income tax), then they are your Brothers in Deen (good citizens of the Muslim state or brothers in your way of life)."

A parallel can be drawn between this understanding and that of the status of Muslim-Americans, such as myself. I follow the laws of the American Republic, I respect Judeo-Christian American values, and I pay my taxes. Hence, I am considered a good American citizen.

What about the *jizya*? Are Non-Muslims subject to a special tribute? As discussed, their only economic duty is to pay the Zakat tax. *Jizya* is mentioned in the following verse:

9:29: "Fight against those who reject belief in God and the Last Day, (and keep breaking treaties, 9:13)...until they pay jizya with willing submission."

First, *kharaj* is the Quranic term used for tribute (18:94), not *jizya*. Secondly, *jizya* comes from the word *jaza* (recompense, see 18:106) and hence means "war reparations" owed by the aggressive rebels, not a non-believers' "tribute" as commonly mistranslated. Evidence aside from the Quran regarding *jizya* can be found in the first true Islamic State constitution written by Prophet Muhammad (S): [The Covenant of Medina](#) and his equally benevolent [Charter of Privileges for the Coptic Christians on Mt. Sinai](#). These landmark human rights documents grant non-Muslims equal rights and make no mention of a tribute.

Certainly some abusive Muslim rulers did burden their non-Muslim subjects with tribute taxation. More in line with Quranic guidance, the Moorish rulers of Spain presided over Muslim, Jewish and Christian subjects for seven centuries without oppressive taxation. This thriving milieu made contributions in all fields of learning, and by many accounts gave birth to the European Renaissance.

Regardless of this nostalgia, the thought of living under any rules remotely "Islamic" repulses Westerners. Take comfort in that 99.99% of immigrant Muslims have no motivation to overthrow Western democracies. It is these republics that uphold Quranic principles such as freedom of religion and expression (2:256), equality before the law (4:135), presumption of innocence (49:6), gender equity (4:32, 33:35), social safety nets (9:60), rule of law (33:60), and strong ethics (70:21-70:33). The barbarism of blasphemy and apostasy laws, stoning, child marriage, the burqa, 72 virgin mythology, intolerance, all beliefs added to Islam centuries after its advent, await in many of their (so-called) Islamic homelands such as Afghanistan, Saudia Arabia, Yemen, etc. Such is the damage

that hate philosophies, including Wahhabism and dictatorial rule have wrought on Islam over the past centuries.

With this latter point, a word to Muslim readers: Islam has been hijacked not only by extremist groups, but also by an orthodox religious establishment that shuns correction of fabricated traditions and misinterpretations which violate human rights and enable extremism. There is an urgency for a Reformation of Islamic thought. Don't sit this one out. Your children and your Brothers in Deen deserve better!

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