

Abstract

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Title of Dissertation: **The Islamic View of Christianity and Its Impact on Relations Between the Two Religions**

Together, the Christian Church and the Islamic Community represent more than the half of the world's population. Muslim-Christian relations are therefore of global significance.

The research topic is the Islamic view of Christianity and its impact on relations between the two religions. The motivation for the research is the persecution of Christians in Islamic countries, a phenomenon that is growing in waves. The goal of the research is to define the role of the Islamic view of other religions and Christianity in religious persecution.

The approach of the research is similar to the comparative theology of religions method, an interdisciplinary way to investigate the way religions perceive each other and the reasons why they perceive each other as they do. The legitimacy of this approach is the observation that the mutual perception of religions defines the potential for such relations and dialogue. Yet the process of perception is not always conscious, and religious adherents rarely realize the limits of their own understanding, which underscores once more the importance of this research.

It is the first summary of this far-reaching topic in the Hungarian language. It also provides a short section at the end containing the answers of prominent Hungarian Muslim teachers about some important doctrinal questions.

The dissertation has five main sections in ten chapters.

The *first main section* contains an introduction to the topic, quoting statistics of Christian human-rights agencies and governmental studies on the persecution of Christians in Islamic countries, comparing their situation with problems of Muslims living in the West. The second chapter explains the transliteration system, abbreviations etc. The third chapter outlines the importance of the comparative

theology of religions method, and deals with the methodological approaches taken, ranging from technical to ethical.

The *second main section*, the fourth chapter contains a general introduction to Islam and its various theological and legal schools. The second part of the chapter summarizes the religious understanding of the Qur'an, traces the human side of the compilation of the text, analysing its structural and hermeneutical peculiarities, summarizing its religious significance for Muslims, and reporting the latest results of Qur'anic textual criticism. The third part of the chapter about Muhammad provides a survey of his life, reconstructed from the Qur'an and the biographical literature, and summarizes his religious significance for Muslims according to the Qur'an and in Islamic piety, analyzing the phenomenon of „Imitatio Muhammadi“. These studies help to understand the Islamic perception of the Bible, Jesus Christ and the Trinity.

The *third main section* provides an in-depth study of the Qur'anic view of Christianity. The fifth chapter traces the development of Muhammad's views about the Bible, Jesus Christ and Christians throughout the Meccan and Medinan periods and catalogs all imaginable sources he could have had about Christianity (including linguistic skills, scriptural sources, and personal contacts). The sixth chapter describes the Islamic view of basic Christian doctrines about the Bible, Jesus Christ and the Trinity, compared to historical Christian doctrines.

The *fourth main section* shows the general view of religions in Islam. The seventh chapter summarizes the Islamic categorization of religions and Christianity, giving special attention to the concept „People of the Book“, presenting key Qur'anic statements and the Night Journey of Muhammad recorded in the Hadith, introduces the modern concept of religious tolerance, analysing a Hungarian Muslim's presentation using specific Qur'anic passages to prove Islamic religious tolerance.

The eighth chapter offers an introduction to the Sharia system and the four accepted Sunni legal schools, and shows how the general view and categorization of religions is applied to Islamic law. It summarizes what the so-called „protected“ status has meant for Jews and Christians over the centuries, explains the prosecution of Muslims for converting to Christianity, and describes of old and new alternative hermeneutical approaches to the topic. It also compares contemporary Islamic human rights declarations to United Nations standards, especially the right to freely choose another faith. The ninth chapter is a historical overview of Muslim-Christian relations,

focusing on key persons and schools of thought from the beginning to the present time.

The *fifth main section* is the tenth chapter, which contains a critical reflection on „A Common Word”, the famous letter signed by 138 Muslim scholars to all Christian church leaders (2007).

The thesis of the dissertation is the following:

Islam makes no distinctions among religion, culture and society; consequently, Islam perceives nations as religious communities, and Islam regards history to be the history of competing religions. Based on its own model of religion, Islam identifies nations and countries according to their religious beliefs. As a result, any tension between the Western („Christian”) world and the world of Islam, the tension always has a religious connotation (and even explanation) and Christians living among Muslims have to suffer.

The Islamic enmity against Christians is *potentially* rooted into the Islamic view of religions in general and the very negative view of Christianity in particular as articulated in the Qur’an and Hadith.

Islam „accepts” former revelations like those given to Moses and Jesus, yet claims to „abrogate” former revelations (such as the Tanakh and Judaism, the New Testament and Christianity) based on the concept of repeated revelation (i.e., God reveals always the same truths, if the Bible contradicts Muhammad, its text must have been corrupted). Judaism and Christianity are religions that will eventually die out; until then, their adherents must pay for the right to practice their religion.

The Qur’an also raises doctrinal charges against Christianity, like „associating” Jesus and Mary to Allah, and „changing” Scriptures, both of which are considered unpardonable sins.

The potential enmity against Christians *can be activated* by conflicts between the world of Islam and the Western („Christian”) world, even if the tension is essentially political, ethnic or economic. Thus, (1) in territories, where Muslims are the majority, (2) in times of severe social crisis, (3) the quotation of certain Qur’anic and Hadith texts in religious speeches can (4) motivate Muslims to act against local Jews and Christians.

Granted, in general such phenomena are *not* Islam-specific, since all human societies tend to create enemies by stigmatizing minorities to vent anger and fear. Yet

the legitimization of such aggression by certain religious stigmata (religious legal status and doctrinal charges) *is* peculiar to Islam.

It is also true, that religious differences are often used (and abused) as a pretext for covering real social tensions, but this is only because they are easy to use. In fact, they are „oil” poured on a fire that was lit in the 7th century.

The study shows the differences between what the Qur’an actually says and its later interpretations, and demonstrates that while there is – at least theoretically – a chance for reinterpreting its anti-Christian texts, it is obvious that the exclusivist majority of Muslims have no interest in abandoning their traditional concepts of Christianity, and are unwilling to forsake proven strategies for converting Christians (such as demonstrating the unreliability of the Bible).

The author’s conclusion is, that changing this negative picture remains the task of Christians. By means of all due respect and love, Christians must share *authentic information* about Christianity with their Muslim friends, who need to understand historic Christian beliefs, the positive results of biblical textual criticism, and the essential difference between Christianity and today’s Western culture.