

Through Interreligious Dialog to Human Brotherhood

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ABSTRACT

Talking about brotherhood/sisterhood implies the human race in general. We will try to shed light on the compatibility of all heavenly religions regarding this topic from an Islamic perspective. In the following sentences, we present Islamic theological frameworks as well as examples of good practices that help us develop our own views and clear attitudes about human brotherhood.

Keywords: Brotherhood, Dialog, Human brotherhood, Interfaith dialog, Islam, Qur'an, Sunnah.

SAŽETAK

Govoriti o bratstvu, svekolikom bratstvu, ljudskom bratstvu, u konkretnom slučaju podrazumijeva i sestrinstvo ili općenito ljudski rod. Islamskim pogledom u ovu tematiku pokušat ćemo osvijetliti kompatibilnost svih nebeskih religija glede ove teme. Narednim rečenicama donosimo islamske teološke okvire kao i primjere dobre prakse koji nam pomažu u razvijanju vlastitih pogleda i jasnih stavova o ljudskom bratstvu.

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INTRODUCTION

Based on the Charter of Human Fraternity signed by Pope Francis and Sheikh Al-Azhar Dr Ahmed At-Tayeb on 4th February 2019 in Abu Dhabi in the presence of over 500 delegates from all over the world, representatives of all religious denominations, and organizational forms, we can say that the notion of human brotherhood takes a whole new dimension. Openness, wisdom, courage, and faithful sincerity, which come from the greatest religious and moral authorities of today, made the greatest civilizational leap in the 21st century. For those of us who participated in the creation of this Charter and witnessed this historic act, it is a great pleasure but also an additional obligation to ensure that the Charter does not remain "one more letter written on paper." This act enabled all of us to witness the creation and signing of the Charter, as well as its promotion and implementation, and to be a part of this great, universal, religiously acceptable, and theologically based idea. All the people of goodwill in the world have warmly welcomed this great step forward. The fact that the international community declared 4th February (the day of the signing of the Charter) as the International Day of Human Fraternity is pleasing. Thus, the annual calendar got the new term—human brotherhood, which will serve as a reminder that this topic is regularly raised among people. At the same time, it is a great recognition of the signatories of the Charter itself and a confirmation of the need for quality ideas and breakthroughs that deserve the attention of the whole world. All this supports the need to avoid and prevent all forms of behavior that lead to different forms of conflicts, which we, unfortunately, witness everyday. We, who follow

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different paths to the one God, must take this as part of our own mission and transmit it into daily programs. As stated in the title of this work, we will deal with the Islamic vision of human brotherhood through the prism of the sources of Islam and good practice encouraged by Muslims.

THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORKS OF THE HUMAN BROTHERHOOD

Sometimes there is certain skepticism toward conducting interreligious dialog. Some tend to go so far as to call the dialog between Christians and Muslims a mutual attempt to conduct evangelization/Islamization, respectively. Such fear has no ground in the facts because the Qur'an encourages us to open toward others, strengthen our relations, and persist in the dialog.

"O people, We create you from one man and one woman and divide you into nations and tribes so that you may know each other. The most honorable with God is the one who fears him the most. God truly knows everything and nothing is hidden from him."

If we look at the mentioned Qur'anic line/verse, we notice that the almighty God is referring to all mankind, emphasizing the universal principle of brotherhood among people. So, the invitation is not addressed only to Muslims but to all people. All people make one family, and it is clearly emphasized that the division into nations and tribes does not aim to alienate each other but rather requires better mutual acquaintance/lite'arefuu/, respect, appreciation, understanding, trust, and brotherly cooperation. It is also clear that this large family is not individually and collectively valued or viewed through belonging to a tribe, people, nation, position, or any other determinant but, as the only parameter of evaluation, is viewed from God's side through the prism of piety, serving only him /taqwa/, which serves moral greatness and spiritual development.

Famous interpreters of the Qur'an/mufessirs/Zamakhshari, Razi, and Baydawi interpreting the following line/verse—"O people, We made you from one man and one woman we create..." indicate that this equality of biological origin is reflected in the equality of human dignity that is shared by all.

Al-Zamakhshari, in his interpretation of part of the mentioned line/verse—"We divide you into nations and tribes so that you may know each other..." says—"Have in mind that all people belong to one human family without any innate superiority of one over the other. In other words, the evolution of people into "nations and tribes" is intended to enhance rather than diminish their mutual desire to understand and appreciate the essential human unity that underlies their external distinctions. Accordingly, all racial, national, and tribal prejudices/asabiyya/ are condemned in the Qur'an as well as in the hadith."

The famous commentator of the Qur'an, Sayyid Qutb, in his commentary "In the shade of the Qur'an," commenting on this line/verse/ says—"O people! The one who calls you with this invitation is the one who created you from one man and one woman." He will explain to you the purpose of your division into nations and tribes. The goal of this division is not mutual killing and conflict. The division's goal is familiarity and harmony. Differences in languages and colors, differences in habits and morals, differences in giftedness, and readiness to help are differences that do not require conflict and discord but cooperation to assume all obligations and fulfill all needs. Color, nation, language, homeland, and more have no importance in God's standards. There is only one standard according to which values are determined and with which one knows the advantage of one person in relation to another. "The most honorable by God is the one who fears him the most."

The view and interpretation that we saw through the prism of four famous interpreters of the Qur'an from different times are almost identical. All of them point to the same origin of humanity, which eliminates any reason for conflict on Earth and decreases all possibilities for starting enmity. The pride through taqwa (awareness of God's presence and existence) is the true quality that is before any other that

might be considered. In support of this claim is the hadith of God's prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him—"You are all descendants of Adam, and Adam was created from the Earth. It is forbidden to brag about your ancestors or you will be lesser than a scarab before God."

We find similar Qur'anic content in other chapters where the almighty addresses all people, points to the same source, and encourages unity, respect, and cooperation—"O people, fear your Lord, who created you from one man, and from him is also he created his second, and from the two of them he scattered many men and women. And fear God with the name by which you pray to one another and do not break the ties of kinship, because God is truly watching over you."

Calling people to commit to God for the sake of the common root, "who created you from one man," and pointing to a common family, "and from him he also created another," ending the line/verse/ with a warning to a man that God watches and follows him, "because God, verily, He watches over you constantly," begins the chapter /sura/ An-Nisa.

These facts show that humanity has sprung from one will, unites in one family, meets in one thread, stems from one basis, and belongs to one origin. If people understood these facts, every spark of difference would disappear in their feelings. True knowledge of these facts would be the greatest guarantee for the elimination of racial, class, religious, tribal, national, gender, or any other determinants. Putting any determinant in front of this knowledge means moving away from true God's intention and misunderstanding God's plan for creating man on Earth.

The second fact, there is no difference either fundamentally or in nature between man and woman. The difference is only in readiness to fulfill their role. In the mentioned Qur'anic verse/line/, the family and its role in society are defined. The Qur'anic texts give great attention to the family, where all the details are described and all the rights and obligations are specified. A true understanding of this God's message expressed in the first verse/line/chapter of En-Nisa/women/ is the best prevention of all conflicts and bigotry in the world and a direct reference to the brotherly dimension of humanity.

THE COMMON PLATFORM OF THE HEAVENLY RELIGIONS

The concept of brotherhood in revealed religions is universal, and through the messages of all God's messengers, he promoted the idea of monotheism, submission to God alone, and respect for moral standards. The Qur'an emphasizes this dimension in several places—"Say: "O followers of the Book, come and let us gather around one word that we and you have in common." That we do not worship anyone but God, that we do not consider anyone equal to him, and that we do not regard each other as gods, besides God!" So if they don't agree, you say: "Be witnesses that we are obedient and loyal to God!"

The word “kelima” primarily means “word” or “expression” and is often used in a philosophical sense to denote “judgment” or “principle.” It is clear from the aforementioned invitation that it was addressed to Jews and Christians because they are followers of God’s books/Ehlul-kitab/. In Islam, worship, the performance of all duties, charity, and a complete system of moral order or moral theology or theology of morality, is directed only toward God and love for God’s sake. Only in such an approach a person becomes free, unbiased, and ready to understand the essence of systems, programs, religious laws, laws, values, and standards that are received from God. All people, without distinction, are equal before God. None of them takes each other as a superior being worthy of worship besides the one God. Islam, in this sense, represents a strong belief in one God which was preached by every messenger of God. The almighty God sent messengers to save people from worshipping something other than him and to save them from injustice by following his orders to achieve God’s justice.

INSTEAD OF A CONCLUSION

Inspired by the Charter on Human Fraternity signed by Pope Francis and Dr Ahmed At-Tayyeb, the two leaders who started changes through a call for peace in the world and a life without violence and bloodshed, the Meshihat of the Islamic Community in Croatia and the Croatian Bishops’ Conference organized an international conference on “human brotherhood—the foundation of peace and security in the world” with which they marked the anniversary of the signing of that great historical document. The conference was held on the 4th and 5th of February 2020 as part of the Republic of Croatia’s presidency of the Council of the European Union. At the end of the conference, a large number of participants from all over the world representing different religious denominations adopted the Zagreb Declaration on Human Fraternity to strengthen peace and security in the world.

The participants at this conference pointed out the importance of promoting the value of human brotherhood as the most important point for achieving world peace and harmony in society, stressing that brotherhood is pure in nature and represents the essence of human purity. It is far from any extremism, be it political, religious, ideological, or racial. Those deviations do not respect the fraternal bonds between people or their common values; rather, they build the foundations of hate speech, egoism, closure, and conflict with all the evil it carries within itself. The participants also emphasized the importance of the Charter on Human Fraternity as a document from which inspiration

for promoting the value of peace and security in the world is drawn. The document also raises awareness that peace is not everything, but without peace, everything else loses its value. Clear recommendations were also given for the best implementation of the provisions on human brotherhood indicated in the Charter.

The last in a series of positive documents that affirm human brotherhood is the encyclical of Pope Francis on brotherhood and social friendship, *Fratelli tutti* (FT). In this document, Pope Francis refers to the Charter on Human Fraternity (285). Pope Francis has said that he is happy to recall the memories from the brotherhood meeting with Dr At-Tayyeb and also to reconfirm their statement that indicates the fact that religions do not ignite a war, conflicts, or hate speech, nor do they foster enmity or any form of extremism. Religions do not call for violence or bloodshed. These tragic realities are the result of alienation/deviations from religious teachings. They are the result of using religions for political purposes, as well as the interpretations of religious groups that, in some historical periods, abused the influence of religious feelings in people’s hearts....“That’s why I want to repeat here the appeal for peace, justice, and brotherhood that we made together.”

With this encyclical letter, Pope Francis invites us to actively get involved and participate in the rehabilitation and support of societies affected by different challenges (FT 77); life is not a time that passes but a time of encounter (FT 66); globalization brings us closer, but to less extent makes us brothers (FT 12); there are no “others” or “them,” only “we,” (FT 87). The claim that all human beings are brothers and sisters obliges us to new perspectives and the development of new responses (FT 128).

Expressions that permeate the new encyclical of Pope Francis, such as meeting becomes a lifestyle, passion, and desire (FT 198), life is the art of meeting (FT 215), a culture of meeting (FT 216), give us encouragement and hope, and additionally oblige us to strengthen the cultural dialog and to build mutual trust to make this world better. It is the sacred duty of believers.

Bringing together many documents and statements of the highest authorities in Croatia and the world and offering them to the public facilitates the implementation of interreligious dialog and dialog in general, raises awareness of its importance, and encourages dialog as a means of promoting peace and security in society. That’s how I understood today’s meeting, and I have gladly accepted the invitation to participate in it, for which I am especially grateful to the center for the promotion of social teaching of the church.