

## In the Name of Allah, the Most Compassionate, the Dispenser of Grace

Khutbah – Muslim – Christian Relations  
Islamic Center of Michiana  
Friday 28th January 2011/24th Safar 1432  
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The purpose of the Friday *khutbah* is to remind, exhort, inspire, and most of all engage the community on the spiritual, ethical, social, cultural, and political issues which affect it – and draw it all back to loving, serving, and glorifying Allah and improving our own dispositions and the human condition.

Consonant with this objective I would like to briefly reflect on some disturbing recent developments and provide some modest advice as to how Muslims should be dealing with this.

During the past couple of months we have witnessed a number of abominable attacks on Christian Churches in at least four Muslim majority settings. The most obstinate of these have taken place in Iraq. More recently, however, Christian Churches have also been attacked with devastating consequences in countries such as Nigeria and Egypt. On Christmas Eve, December 25, 2010, a couple Christian Churches in the Nigerian city of Jos was bombed and another one in Southern Philippines. These abominable attacks left at least 38 people killed and many others injured and maimed for life. A week later, on New Year's Eve a suicide car bombing outside the All Saints Coptic Church in the Egyptian city of Alexandria left 23 people dead and dozens injured.

It is clear as the Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR) has correctly reminded us, that while we do not yet know who may have perpetrated these heinous acts, their motive apparent motive is clear: it is to harm long-term relations between Muslims and Christians, who by and large coexist together peacefully.

Commendably, most Islamic institutions and leaders have unequivocally condemned these attacks on Christian Churches as violating the teachings of Islam, and have expressed their condolences with the families of the victims. In his statement condemning the bombing of the Coptic Church in Alexandria the Egyptian Grand Mufti, Shaykh Ali Gomaa, argued that the religious freedom and well-being of Christian minorities represent Islamic duties of such high ethical standing that "(t)he Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) considered non-Muslims and Muslims as participating in a social contract which was inviolable. The promise of a Muslim is sacrosanct, for as he (the Prophet) said, "Whoever unjustly persecutes one with whom he has an agreement, or short-changes his rights, or burdens him beyond his capacity, or takes something from him without his blessing, I will be an argument against him on the Day of Judgment."

Muslims have not only widely condemned these attacks as unislamic but more importantly have they have used this tragic moment in Muslim-Christian relations as an opportunity to affirm the full dignity and religious freedom of Christians and to redouble their efforts at forging cordial relations with Christians. In the Egyptian city of Alexandria, for example, many Muslims went to Church on the Coptic Christmas celebrations on January 7th to serve as "human shields" in order to protect their Christian co-citizens.

The message of this khutbah is that in the light of these tragic developments Muslims should work hard to foster good relations with Christians and encourage constructive interfaith dialogue.

The best response to these cowardly attacks on Churches is to redouble our efforts to build bridges of understanding between faiths. One of the best ways of doing so is to educate and empower Muslims with regard to the noble teachings of Islam on relations with non-Muslims.

The purpose of this khutbah is to advance this objective.

### **Qur'anic View of Religious Freedom**

How does the most primary source of Islamic guidance, the Muslim sacred scripture, the Glorious Qur'an, regard religious differences among humankind?

The Qur'an regards (*ikhtilaf*) differences regards differences in religious beliefs, perspectives and viewpoints, as being natural and an essential part of the human condition.



**"Let there be no compulsion in religion. Truth stands out clear from Error: whoever rejects evil and believes in**

**God has taken hold of a trustworthy hand-hold that never breaks. And God hears and knows all things” (Qur’an 2:256).**

A denial of the right of others to hold beliefs and views that are different and incompatible to one’s own is tantamount to a denial of God himself. Among the numerous verses of the Glorious Qur’an that emphasizes this point are the following: aya/verse 99 from Surah al-Tawbah, chapter 10 and aya/verse118 from Surah Hud:



**“If your Lord had so desired, all the people on the earth would surely have come to believe, all of them; do you then think, that you could compel people to believe? (Qur’an 10: 99).”**



**“Had your Lord so willed, He could surely have made all human beings into one single community: but (He willed it otherwise, and so) they continue to hold divergent views” (Qur’an, 11:118)**

All of these aforementioned Qur’anic verses establish the principle of freedom of belief and thought in Islam. Imam Al-Qurtubi (d.1272 CE), renowned for his exposition on the legal implications of the Qur’anic text claims that at the conclusion of the first verse, the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) is himself reproved for transgressing this principle by being over-enthusiastic in convincing others with regard to the truth of Islam. Thus, the Qur’an stresses that the differences in beliefs, views and ideas of humankind is not incidental and negative but represents a God-willed, basic factor of human existence.

The challenge, for Muslims, is to amplify the Qur’anic teachings on religious pluralism and work hard to make it an integral part of the fabric of contemporary Muslim culture.

Furthermore, Islamic ethics guides Muslims towards noble dealings and good conduct with all people without any kind of discrimination due to differences in faith. The most primary source of Islamic guidance, the Glorious Qur’an itself exhorts us to display kindness and solidarity with non-Muslims. For example, in Surah al-Mumtahinah, Chapter 60, verse 8, Allah the Sublime declares:



**“Allah does not forbid you to show kindness and deal justly with those non-Muslims who do not wish to fight you on account of your faith and neither wish to drive you from your homes. For truly, Allah is most Just”**

Moreover, the Qur’an explicitly prohibits attacks on places of worship of people of other faiths. This is based on the following verse of the Glorious Quran from Surah al-Hajj, Chapter 22, verse 39 & 40:



**‘Allah has given permission to those against who war is declared to defend themselves because they are expelled from their homes for declaring their belief in God. Had not God repelled some people by others, monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques all in which God’s praise is celebrated daily, would have been utterly demolished. God will certainly help those who help His cause’ (The Quran, 22:40-41).**

It is interesting to note that the above verses gives precedence to the protection of monasteries, churches and synagogues over that of mosques in order to underline their inviolability and the duty of the Muslim to safeguard them against any desecration or abuse, and protect freedom of belief. The above verses, clearly stipulates that the defense of religious freedom for all is the foremost just cause for which arms may be undertaken, as a last resort.

### **Two Examples from History**

I would like to conclude by providing two examples of how our pious ancestors understood this Islamic ethic of

freedom of religion and in particular protection of Christian places of worship. The first, is that our the illustrious companion, `Umar ibn al-Khattab (may Allah be pleased with him), who when he conquered Jerusalem he was invited by Greek Orthodox Patriarch Sophronious, to pray inside the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, he politely refused to do so, because he was afraid his followers may misinterpret this and destroy the Church. He thus chose to pray outside and subsequently a masjid was built outside the Church of the Holy Sepulcher to remind future generations of the noble example of `Umar ibn al-Khattab.

The second example is that of the Umayyad caliph `Umar ibn `Abdul `Aziz (d.720), who was very kind and just towards non-Muslims. As a devout Muslim, he was not only graciously tolerant to the members of other creeds but also solicitous towards them. When `Umar became Caliph, the Christians complained to him that the `basilica' of John the Baptist in Damascus, had been taken from them and incorporated into the site of a masjid built by the Umayyad's. On investigating the charge and discovering that the objection was true `Umar ibn `Abdul `Aziz ordered the Governor to return to the Christians what belonged to them.

These are some of the wonderful examples that should inspire us in our current efforts at seeking to build good relations with Christians and other non-Muslims.

### **Conclusion**

I have been encouraged by the positive manner in which members of the Islamic Society of Michiana have taken up this challenge of forging good relations with our Christian neighbours. Thanks to the wise leadership of Imam Muhammad Sirajuddin and our Masjid Council our Islamic Center continues to regularly receive groups from the local community who are interested to know more about Islam.

Some of our women are engaged in a dialogue initiative with Catholic women from Saint Mary's College and the Little Flower Church.

I would like to commend all of these wonderful efforts and many others that I may not be aware of. We need to continue these important bridge building efforts in the future.

Our key goal should be to forestall efforts to create a schism between the Muslim community and the broader society. In order to achieve our objective, Muslims must not become weary from stating again and again, loudly and unequivocally, that acts of wanton violence and barbarism are contrary to the teachings of Islam.

**In Islamic ethics, the end does not justify the means.**

Religious extremism (*tatarruf*) has no virtue in Islam and has been unequivocally condemned by the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him). He worked tirelessly against tendencies of extremism prevalent amongst even some of his own followers. He is reported in an authentic prophetic tradition (*hadith*) recorded in the hadith compendium of Imam Muslim to have condemned extremists by declaring thrice:

**هالك المتظعون**

**"The extremists and religious zealots shall perish."**

In conclusion, we make du`a and pray that Allah, the Protector, will safeguard us against any kind of calamities and abominations.

May Allah bless me and all of you with the Sublime Qur'an. May the signs and wisdom of the Qur'an benefit me and all of you. May Allah accept from me and you our recitations and reflections on the Qur'an; for He is All-Hearing and All-Knowing.

After having shared these words of advice:

I humbly ask Allah, the Sublime, to forgive me and all of you, and all men and women who submit themselves to Allah, and all men and women who truly believe in Allah. I exhort us all to "Seek Allah's forgiveness; For truly those who are forgiven are the successful ones and those who repent will achieve salvation.

