Principles of Peace in Islam
A Theoretical Framework

(First Draft, Due to Revision and Change)

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"O Belivers! All enter into peace completely and do not follow the steps of Satan."
(The holy Qur'an: ۲:۲۰۸)

"Abrahamic religions", semitic religions of Abraham, has been used to denominate the world's three primary faiths of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The common origins and values of these three religions are monotheistic faiths. According to *New World Encyclopedia*, "They are named for the patriarch Abraham, and are unified by their strict monotheism. Today, around ۳،٤ billion people are followers of Abrahamic religions and they are spread widely around the world".[2]

Given that Islam, like Christianity and Judaism, is one of the Abrahamic religions, it stresses peace, love and unity of human beings rather than war, hate and separation of mankind. Etymologically speaking, the Arabic word "Islam," or "submission", derives from the term "aslem" in Syriac language which means "to make peace" and from "slem" in semitic one which means "to be complete". Thus, the word "Islam" is closely related to peace and submission, since true peace can only be achieved through factual obedience to the will of Allah. But, if so, why and how have (Jews, Christian, and Islamic) fundamentalist readings been formed? And how can we find common approaches with Christianity and Judaism to peace?

Concentrating on Shia Islam, this article tries to put forward the ways and approaches which demonstrate Islamic reading(s) based on peace, and how we, as believers of Abrahamic religions, may come together. Investigation will show that

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meta-textual reasoning, comparing with textual one, is more reliable in inter-religious peace talks. By "meta-textual principles", here, I mean anthropological, epistemological, methodological and ethical foundations, while the textual one is exegesis (and jurisprudence). The study is important for a number of reasons such as revealing principles and methods of interpreting Abrahamic religious texts. In another article titled "Jihad from a Shia Hermeneutic Perspective", I have argued controversial ideas on offensive (pre-emptive) jihad.[1] Accordingly, Shiites and Sunnites have different, and sometimes contradictory, readings of jihad. The weaknesses of fundamentalist, traditionalist, and modernist views in this regard lead me to a dialectical reading of jihad between text and context. That dialectical approach supports the argument that no form of jihad, including the offensive one, contradicts freedom of religion. This study differs from the previous research in that (textual and meta-textual) principles of peace are discussed and compared.

Readings of Islam

Islam ١ is the Islamic holy texts, while Islam ٢ is the reading(s) of the Quran and the Prophetic tradition (as the holy texts), and Islam ٣ is the conduct of Muslims and Islamic countries during history. Considered in terms of an "ideal type", according to Max Weber,[2] Islam ٢ is different from Islam ١ and ٣. In fact, our interpretations of the holy texts, what we are talking about here, is Islam ٢. The main difference between Islam ٢ and Islam ٣ is that the former is theoretical (including philosophical and jurisprudential), while the latter is sociological and historical. It is important to emphasize that in this article, I do not want to discuss what Muslims have done in their societies or in Islamic history in general.

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[1]. Seyed Sadegh Haghighat, "Jihad from a Shi'a Hermeneutic Perspective", *Between Text and Context: Hermeneutics, Scriptural Politics and Human Rights*, edited by Bas de Gaay Fortman (Kurt Martens and M.A. Mohamed Salih), forthcoming by Palgrave-Macmillan Press in ٢٠١٠.

[2]. Borrowing from Max Weber, the "ideal type" of interpretation involves a "combination" of all categories. According to Weber, there is no homogenous legitimacy as any political regime has a combination of charismatic, traditional, and legal legitimacy. Rather, in practice, every interpretation of texts involves a combination of fundamentalism, traditionalism and modernism.

The difference between Islam ١ and Christianity ١ is that there is no change in Islam ١, and all words of the holy Quran are revealed by God Himself. In Islam ٢, it is necessary to differentiate not only between Sunni and Shia Islam, but also between fundamentalist, traditionalist and modernist approaches. Since fundamentalist scholars primarily rely on the very text superficially, the core meaning (and modern implications) is of secondary importance. In contrast, traditionalist scholars concentrate on the core of the message rather than the text itself. To apply modern ideas to the text, modernist scholars interpret the text in the light of modern conditions. Unlike fundamentalists, traditionalists and modernists place more importance on the core of religion. Instead of the holy war, Hossein Nasr acknowledges the "inner jihad" or the "greater jihad" (i.e., the non-military one) which encompasses overcoming selfish motives, desires, emotions and the tendency to grant primacy to earthly pleasures and rewards.١ Similarly, modernists who try to establish positive links between Islam and modernism, do not believe in the offensive kind of jihad.

It should be noted that fundamentalist approach, here, is more general than political fundamentalism. This approach interprets the meaning of Sharia concepts with the stress on the shell of religion rather than its core meaning. This characteristic is common between political fundamentalists (like Taliban) and traditional٢ jurisprudents (like Abolqasem Khoei as a non-political faqih). For example, both of them refer to the literature and words of following Quranic verses about jihad such as:

> "Fight those who believe not in Allah, nor the Last Day, nor forbid what has been forbidden by Allah and His Messenger, and those who acknowledge not the Religion of Truth [Islam] among the People of the Scriptures [Jews, Christians and Zoroastrians], until

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١ .Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "The Spiritual Significance of Jihad", *Al-Serat,*Vol. IX, No. ١.

٢ . It seems that the difference between "traditional" approach (like Khoei) and "traditionalist" one (like Nasr) is clear.

they pay the *jizya* with willing submission and feel themselves subdued."[1]

This verse means that Muslims should support jihad as a continual war upon non-Muslims until they repent and accept Islam, or until they pay jizya (referred to as poll tax). Radical fundamentalists, such as Seyed Qutb, believe that fighting infidels is compulsory, because infidels Quranic precepts are divine and timeless. Thus, offensive jihad is regarded as one of the key signifiers of fundamentalist discourse. On the other hand, A. Khoei who does not consider establishing the Islamic government in the "occultation era" (absence time of the Hidden Imam) believes in the offensive jihad too.[2]

Anthropological Principles

Thomas Hobbs and John Locke are considered as two prominent thinkers of social contract theory. In the state of nature, according to Hobbs, each person would have a right to everything in the world. This inevitably leads to a full fledged conflict: a "war of all against all".[3] While Hobbs concludes leviathan and maximal state from this theory, Locke derives minimal liberal state from the theory itself. The difference stems from many things including their various ideas about the nature of human being.

Given that some thinkers are pessimistic and others are optimistic, what is the Quranic view in this regard? According to the holy Quran, similarly to the Old Testament and the New Testament, after Adam's creation from mud God inspired from His soul to him:

"(And remember) when the lord said to the angels: I am going to create a man from dry clay of mud. So when I have fashioned him

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[1]. The Quran, ٩:٢٩.

[2]. Mohammad Akram Arefi, *Ayatollah Khoei's Political Thought* (in persian), Qom, Bustan-e Ketab, ٢٠٠٨, pp. ١٥٦-١٥٩.

[3]. Thomas Hobbs, *Leviathan,* Oxford University Press, ١٩٩٨.

completely and breathed into him the soul which I have created, then fall down prostrating yourselves unto him".[1]

Whether symbolically or virtually, it shows that human's nature is a combination of good and evil.

In short, anthropological principles which are common between Islam, Christianity and Judaism can found the basis of peace and legitimate war.

Epistemological Principles

One of the peace principles is the way we recognize the world and other people. Beginning from a mechanistic understanding, Hobbes postulates what life would be like without government, a condition which he calls "the state of nature". So his view on the authoritarian government is rooted in his epistemology. Emanuel Kant bases his peace theory on his epistemology too. He stresses that we should begin peace case from ethical aspects, since we know phenomenon only. According to Kant, no theoretical reasoning is reliable.

In religious studies, epistemological foundations lead us to an exclusivist, inclusivist, or pluralist approach. The first approach holds that it is the only truth and that no other ideas are needed to answer the questions of human existence. On the other extreme, pluralists claim that no religion has the exclusive way to the truth. Taking the middle ground, inclusivists assert that one religion is correct and true but that other religions do have genuine value. It goes without saying that the first approach closes any way to inter-religious dialogue.

Methodological Principles

Our readings of facts and events depend on our presuppositions and our methods which guide us to them. Neither people in the west nor in the east have similar conception of religious notions. The ideas of secularists and non-secularists are not

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[1] .The Quran: ١٥: ٢٨-٢٩:
(وَإِذْ قَالَ رَبُّكَ لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ إِنِّي خَالِقٌ بَشَراً مِنْ صَلْصَالٍ مِنْ حَمَإٍ مَسْنُونٍ فَإِذَا سَوَّيْتُهُ وَنَفَخْتُ فِيهِ مِنْ رُوحِي فَقَعُوا لَهُ سَاجِدِينَ).

similar either. For example, consider the definition of jihad according to The United States Department of Justice:

> "Jihad is the Arabic word meaning 'holy war'. In this context, jihad refers to the use of violence, including paramilitary action against people, property or governments deemed to be enemies of a fundamentalist version of Islam. As used in this Superseding Indictment, 'violent jihad' or 'jihad' includes planning, preparing for, and engaging in, acts of physical violence, including murder, maiming, kidnapping, and hostage-taking". [1]

These kinds of misconceptions ignore the relationship between text and context, and try to impose our contemporary and modern understanding to traditional ideas or events which originated several centuries ago. Similarly, Karl Popper bring Plato to his own time and condemns his ideas as anti-liberal! [2] Pre-modern phenomena cannot be interpreted in light of modern circumstances. However, methodologically speaking, each text should be interpreted in its context. Imam Ali says: "Ask the Holy Quran, since it does not speak on its own" [3] Since jihad, even offensive one, was as a "norm" at that time, it can not be labeled as extremist and non-democratic. We can interpret its significance within modern Islamic political thought, if we turn to the pre-modern consciousness in order to determine the nature of jihad. As I posed before, the offensive kind of jihad – which is allowed just in the time of the holy Prophet and the innocent Imams (according to the majority of Shiite jurisprudences) - is tuned to "anti-Muslim countries", not to the secular ones. [4] Offensive jihad is one of the signifiers of tribe-state and empire-state discourses, not the ones of contemporary nation-states.

Ethical Principles

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[1] . www.answers.com
[2] . Karl Raimund Popper, *Open Society and its Enemies*, Princeton University press, ١٩٧١.
[3] . Imam Ali, *Nahjolbalaqeh*, sermon ١٥٨.
[4] . Haghighat. Ibid.

The importance of ethical principles of peace, as well as the previous principles, in inter-religious debates is that they emphasize reasonable reasoning rather than narrative one. If the Jews, Christians and Muslims begin their discussion on peace from ethical and rational points, they will presumably find similar ways of understanding. In fact, the common good is a global one. On the contrary, if they refer to jurisprudence or exegesis of their own holy texts they may find some how misunderstandings. Conflicts amongst religion during history root in their controversial divergences in rituals and in Sharia. The holy Quran supports the idea of dialogue: "Invite (mankind) to the way of your Lord with wisdom and fair preaching, and argue with them in a way that is better."[1]

Exegesis Principles

Exegesis and jurisprudential (fiqhi) interpretations of Sunni differ considerably from Shia school of thought in many aspects. We observed the various readings of traditionalists, fundamentalists and modernists earlier. Interpreting the Quranic verses of jihad, M.H. Tabatabaee classifies targets of jihad as polytheists,[2] pagans,[3] and people of the Scripture[4] (Jews and Christians).[5]

Tabatabaee and M. Mutahhari argue that the unconditional Qur'anic verses of jihad (those that do not require conditions to fight) should be interpreted by the conditional verses, i.e. those that limit the practice of jihad to a form of defense and retaliation.[6] Consequently, unconditional Quranic verses should be interpreted in the light of conditional verses. Then, jihad is obligatory just in the case of defense.

But Tabatabaee and Mutahhari themselves have another different point of view. Since monotheism, they argue, is the most important right of human being, both

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[1]. The Quran: ١٦:١٢٥.
[2]. The Quran: ٩:٥.
[3]. The Quran: ٩:١٢٣.
[4]. The Quran: ٩:٢٩.
[5]. M. H. Tabatabie, Al-Mizan, vol ١٥, Beirut, Alami, ١٩٧٣, p. ٦٦.
[6]. Morteza Mutahhari, *Jihad*, translated by M.S. Towheedi, B'ethat Foundation, ١٩٨١, pp ٦٩-٧٠.

offensive and defensive jihad is regarded as defense of humanity.[1] Although they try to justify offensive jihad, in my point of view, it does not seem sufficient. If (mono) theism is a right for mankind, he should trust in God voluntarily, not by war.

Other fiqhi foundation in this regard is the place of contracts. In modern era, no state can survive without international bilateral and multilateral conventions. The Quran explicitly declares:

"O you who believe! Fulfill your obligations".[2]

Since following the implications of contracts, whether national or international, is obligatory, an Islamic state can not violate the conventions and so, it can not initiate a combative war against secular states. In fact, international contracts could confine trans-national responsibilities of the Islamic states.[3]

Conclusion

This study has attempted to demonstrate foundations of peace in Islam. In sum, I can refer to a couple of conclusions:

١) Differentiation of religion ٢ (readings of religion) from religion ١ (the very holy texts) and religion ٣ (conduct of the religious) is necessary. The subject of religious negotiations should be religion ٢. No one can defend all prctices of the religious people during history. To achieve peace here and now, and to develop inter-religious peace talks, it is necessary to put the practices of Muslims, Christians and Jews "in bracket". Discussing (and defending) practice and conduct of the religious people and groups during history does not seem to solve any problem of us now.

٢) Since all Abrahamic religions see mankind nature as a combination of good and evil, they seem to believe in peace and legitimate war.

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١ . Ibid, and Tabatabie, Ibid.
٢ . The Quran: ٥:١.
٣ .Seyed Sadegh Haghighat, *Trans – national Responsibilities in the Foreign Policy of the Islamic State*, Tehran, Center for Strategic Researches, ١٩٩٧ (in Persian).

٣) Epistemologically speaking, criticism on religious exclusivist approaches is required.

٤) If we interpret (holy) text(s) in the related context, and if we consider the situation(s) in which Abrahamic religions are appeared, misunderstandings and misconceptions will decrease gradually. No text, methodologically, can be interpreted without consideration of its context implications. Secular states in the modern time are not the targets of offensive jihad.

٥) Compared with exegesis, ethical principles seem to be more appropriate foundations of peace talks amongst Abrahamic religions. It is because of their rational and reasonable methods.

٦) Overall, principles of peace are divided into two groups: textual reasoning, i.e. the exegesis and fiqhi principles, and meta-textual reasoning including anthropological, epistemological, methodological and ethical ones. While the first one is controversial, the second one seems to be a suitable basis for inter-religious debates to achieve peace. However, my own view is the confluence of textual and meta-textual religious reasoning.