

'I' AND THE OTHER: A QURANIC ACCOUNT IN THE CONTEXT OF RELIGIOUS DIFFERENCES

'Ben' ve Öteki: Din Farklılıkları Bağlamında Bir Kur'anî Değerlendirme

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ABSTRACT

Human beings are different from one another not only in terms of physical appearance but also in terms of ethnicity, language, etc. These differences tend to form or reinforce the concept of 'the Other'. In addition, it seems that primary factors contributing to the forming or reinforcing of the perception of 'the Other' are still the ones related to religious differences. In this article, we will look into religion-related differences in the Quranic perspective, drawing on the ways utilized to deal with the concept of 'the Other' throughout Islamic history. More specifically, in this article, we seek to put forth an account effective and useful in dealing with the concept of 'the Other' in the perspective of Quranic revelations. In doing that we will be especially focusing on the relationships between peoples of different religions in the Ottoman Empire and how the relevant Quranic verses were interpreted and acted out by the Ottomans. By investigating the Quranic perspective and how it was implemented in history, we seek to make a contribution to modern ways that are utilized in dealing with the concept of 'the Other.'

Keywords: Quranic Perception of the 'Other,' Divine Books, Experience of Living Together, Ottoman Example.

ÖZET

İnsanlar yalnızca fiziksel görünüm açısından değil, etnik köken, dil vs. açılardan da birbirinden farklılık arz etmektedir. Bu farklar 'Öteki' algısını oluşturma ya da takviye etme temayülü göstermektedir. Yanısıra, öyle görünmektedir ki 'Öteki' algısının oluşumuna ya da takviye edilmesine katkı sağlayan başlıca etkenler hâlâ din olgusuyla

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ilintili farklardır Bu makalede, İslam tarihi boyunca 'Öteki' mefhumuyla başa çıkmak amacıyla istihdam edilen yöntemleri gündeme getirmek suretiyle dinle ilgili sözkonusu farkları Kuran perspektifiyle tetkik etmeye çalışacağız. Daha özgül olarak söylersek, bu makalede, Kur'an ayetlerinin ışığı altında 'Öteki' algısıyla başa çıkmada etkili ve faydalı bir değerlendirme ortaya koymaya çalışacağız. Bunu yaparken de özellikle Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda farklı din mensupları arasındaki ilişkilere yoğunlaşacak ve ilgili Kur'an ayetlerinin Osmanlılar tarafından nasıl yorumlanıp uygulandığını ele almaya çalışacağız. Kur'ani perspektifi ve bu perspektifin tarihte nasıl uygulandığını tetkik etmek suretiyle 'Öteki' algısıyla başa çıkmada istihdam edilen çağdaş yol ve yöntemlere bir katkıda bulunmayı hedeflemekteyiz.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kur'an'ın 'Öteki' Algısı, İlahi Kitaplar, Birlikte Yaşama Tecrübesi, Osmanlı Örneği.

Introduction

The concept of 'I' and 'the Other' actually came into being with creation. When Adam was created by God, he was a representative of 'the Other' for angels. For this reason, they objected to Adam being the *khalif*, the representative of God on earth. For Satan, who saw himself as the center of the cosmos, Adam was the other. Therefore, he stood against God's order to obey Adam, saying that 'I was created from fire, he was created from mud.' Cain saw his brother Abel, whose offering was accepted by God, as the Other and therefore killed him. In course of time, differences of faith and creed started to be seen as the most fundamental criterion in the distinction of 'I' and 'the Other.' People were divided into two basic groups as 'prophets of God and those in support of them' and 'those against the prophets.' Whereas some of them became 'I' some others became 'the Other.' Later on, this distinction between 'I' and 'the Other' turned into the distinction between people belonging to different religious traditions. It should be noted that the same distinction became latent in Mecca at the onset of the religion of Islam as people belonging to various religions and Muslims. Getting positioned on the center, everyone saw himself/herself likewise and evaluated the other accordingly. The one who was on the center became 'I,' the essential one, the representative of good, the righteous and the superior one. On the other hand, the one who was not positioned on the center became the Other, always the secondary one, the representative of bad, the unmerited and the insignificant one. This conception, which is unfortunately still valid and nearly intact in the world, became effective in bringing about societies getting separated and scattered. Espousing the identity of 'I' resulted in suppression and even annihilation of 'the Other.'

The question is: should one see the concept of 'I and the Other' always as a negative idea? Is there not a positive aspect to it? Is it not possible that 'I' would

get to live together peacefully, integrate, even unite with 'the Other?' Is there not good examples of 'I and the Other' in history living together in harmony? In this article, we will look into the divergence of religious identities in a more globalizing world than ever before through a Quranic perspective. In addition, we will investigate into the principles set by the Quran for the purpose of keeping people of different religious identities together and having them to live in peace and harmony.

Quranic Perception of the Other: Approach towards Jews and Christians

The Holy Quran is a book that, like the other holy books, came out for the happiness of people. In other words, the Quran did not come out for tribulation and trouble: "We have not sent down to you the Quran that you be distressed" (Qur'an, 20/2). On the contrary, it came down for the purpose of bringing people out of darkness into light:" ... [This is] a Book which we have revealed to you, [O Muhammad], that you might bring mankind out of darkneses into the light by permission of their Lord—to the path of the Exalted in Might, the Praiseworthy" (Qur'an, 14/1). It is such a book that leads people, who are being dependent on itself, to the rightful way (Qur'an, 17/9). It is light and thus brings people from darkness into light (Qur'an, 42/52); it is guidance and thus leads people to the right path (Qur'an, 16/64; 46/30); it is mercy and thus brings relief and tranquility to the uneasy hearts (Qur'an, 28/86; 13/28); it is cure and thus heals the ailments of the hearts (Qur'an, 10/57; 17/82), etc.

Both Jewish and Christian Bible (Torah and Gospel[s]) are essentially like the Quran.¹ And all these books came about in order to guide the human beings in the right path: "... And He revealed the Torah and the Gospel before, as guidance for the people..." (Qur'an, 3/3-4). Moreover, they came about as a source of divine light, mercy, and guidance. (Qur'an, 5/44, 46; 6/91, 154).

In this context, one can see that all the divine books have the same characteristics.² It is actually not anything strange because all of them came from the same source.³ Accordingly, the ones that came last always confirm and refer to the previous ones. While the Christian Bible confirms the Jewish Bible (see: Matthew, 5/17; Quran, 61/6); the Book of Muslims confirms and refers to both of them:⁴ "And this is a book which we have sent down, blessed and confirming

1. For extensive information, see: Hidayet Aydar, "Kur'an'da Kitap Kavramı ve Bir Kitap Olarak Levh-i Mahfuz", İÜ. İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi, issue: 2, İstanbul, 2000, 81-92.

2. Süleyman Ateş, "Cennet Kimsenin Tekelinde Değildir", İslami Araştırmalar, cilt 3, sayı 1, Ocak 1989, 7; Süleyman Ateş, "Mawkıfu'l-Kur'ani'l-Kerim mine'l-Edyani's-Semaviyyeti'l-Uhrâ", **Kur'an Mesajı İlmî Araştırmalar Dergisi**, sayı 22,23,24, yıl 2, 21; Süleyman Ateş, "The Attitude of the Koran Towards The Divine Religions", **Kur'an Mesajı İlmî Araştırmalar Dergisi**, issue: 22, 23, 24, year: 2, 51-2.

3. See: Mehmet Paçacı, **Kur'an-ı Kerim Işığında Vahiy Geleneğine –Kitab-ı Mukaddes Bağlamında– Bir Bakış: Kur'an ve Ben Ne Kadar Tarihseliz?**, Ankara Okulu, Ankara 2000, 82-85.

4. Ateş, "Mawkıfu'l-Kur'ani'l-Kerim mine'l-Edyani's-Semaviyyeti'l-Uhra", 26-27; Süleyman Ateş, "İlahi Dinlerdeki Ruh Birliği", **Kur'an Mesajı İlmî Araştırmalar Dergisi**, issue: 22, 23, 24, year: 2, 73.

what was before it..." (Quran, 6/92; also see: 2/41; 3/3; 10/37). Moreover, it is also understood from the Quran that it was mentioned and in a way inherent in the previous books. A Quranic verse, having stated that the Quran was sent down by God and it was sent down through the mediation of *Rûh-i Amîn* (the Trusted Spirit: Gabriel), adds the following: "And indeed, it [the Holy Quran] is [mentioned] in the scriptures of former peoples" (Quran, 26/196). Another verse states the following: "Indeed, this is in the former scriptures; the scriptures of Abraham and Moses" (Quran, 87/18-19). In short, as so many commentators of the Quran pointed out,⁵ this verse clearly means that the Quran was mentioned in the previous divine books as having the aforementioned features.

The Holy Quran demands believers to also accept/believe the divine books such as Torah and Gospel, which were previously sent down, and signify that that as one primary tenet of faith. In the context of the qualities of believers, Quran states the following: "And [believers are those] who believe in what has been revealed to you, [O Muhammad], and what was revealed before you..." (Quran, 2/4). Moreover, in another place, believers are required to say the following: "... 'We believe in that which has been revealed to us and revealed to you'" (Quran, 29/46). As can be seen below, the verses that involve the tenet of belief in the prophets also point out this requirement.

Muslims are supposed to believe not just in the books mentioned by the Quran, they are also supposed to believe all the prophets of God. Pointing out this tenet of faith, the Quran states the following: "The Messenger [the Prophet Muhammad] has believed in what was revealed to him from his Lord and [so have] the believers. All of them have believed in Allah and His angels and His books and His messengers..." (Qur'an, 2/285). The rest of the aforementioned verse states the following through the language of the believers: "... [saying] 'We make no distinction between any of His messengers.'" Stressing the same tenet of faith, another verse states the following: "Say, [O believers], 'We have believed in Allah and what has been revealed to us and what has been revealed to Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and the Descendants and what was given to Moses and Jesus and what was given to the prophets from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and we are Muslims [in submission] to Him'" (Qur'an, 2/136).

The Quranic approach toward the prophets and the books given to them is both similar to –and indicative of– its approach toward those who believed in God and did good deeds from amongst Jews and Christians, known in the

5. See: Ebû Cafer Muhammed b. Muhammed İbn Cerir et-Taberî, **Câmiu'l-Beyân an Te'vîli Âyi'l-Kur'ân**, annotated by Abdullah b. Abdulmuhsin et-Turkî, Dâru Hecer, er-Kâhire, 1422/2001, XXIV/323-325; Ebu'l-Kâsım Mahmûd b. Ömer Cârullah Ez-Zemahşerî, **el-Keşşâf an Hakâiki Ğavâmidî't-Tenzîl ve Uyûni'l-Ekâvil fi Vucûhi't-Tenzîl**, Dâru'l-Kutubi'l-Arabî, Beyrût, 1407, IV/741. Also see: **Kur'an'ın Farklı İnanç Mensuplarına Yaklaşımı**, (symposium book), ed. by Fethi Ahmet Polat, (Konya: Konya İlahiyat Derneği Yayınları, 2007).

Quranic terms as the People of the Book (or the People of the scripture).⁶ In other words, it commended and honored them.⁷ According to the Quran, People of the Book are not the same. Some of them believe in God accordingly and believe in the books God sent down to them and to Muslims. They do not hide the divine truth and they do not sell out God's verses for worldly benefits. These people are commended in the Quran in various ways: "They are not [all] the same; among the People of the Scripture [the People of the Book] is a community standing [in obedience], reciting the verses of Allah during periods of the night and prostrating [in prayer]. They believe in Allah and the Last Day, and they enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong and hasten to good deeds. And those are among the righteous" (Qur'an, 3/113, 114). Regarding the followers of Moses, another Quranic verse states the following: "And among the people of Moses is a community which guides by truth and by it establishes justice" (Qur'an, 7/159). Also, regarding the followers of Jesus, another Quranic verse is as follows: "You will surely find the most intense of the people in animosity toward the believers [to be] the Jews and those who associate others with Allah; and you will find the nearest of them in affection to the believers those who say, 'We are Christians.' That is because among them are priests and monks and because they are not arrogant" (Quran, 5/82).

These people who are honored by the Quran are described as believing in the holy books and getting emotionally affected by the Quran upon hearing it: "But those firm in knowledge among them [Jews] and the believers believe in what has been revealed to you, [O Muhammad], and what was revealed before you. And the establishers of prayer [especially] and the givers of zakah [alms] and the believers in Allah and the Last Day –those we will give a great reward" (Quran, 4/162). "... Indeed, those who were given knowledge before it [the Quran]—when it is recited to them, they fall upon their faces in prostration, and they say, 'Exalted is our Lord! Indeed, the promise of our Lord has been fulfilled.' And they fall upon their faces weeping, and this increases them in humble submission" (Quran, 17/107-109). "Those to whom we gave the Scripture before it [the Quran]—they are believers in it. And when it is recited to them, they say, 'we have believed in it; indeed, it is the truth from our Lord. Indeed we were, [even] before it, Muslims [submitting to Allah]'" (Quran, 28/52-53). Another verse states about Christian priests and monks the following: "... And you will find the nearest of them [the People of the Book] in affection to the believers those who say, 'We are Christians.' That is because among them are priests and monks and because they are not arrogant. And when they hear what has been revealed to the Messenger, you see their eyes overflowing with tears because of what they

6. See: Peter Antes, "İslamî Teolojide Gayr-i Müslimlerle İlişkiler", translated into Turkish by Z. Durmuş, in *Din Bilimleri Akademik Araştırmalar Dergisi*, II (2002), sayı 3, 241-244.

7. For further information, see: Paçacı, *ibid*, 88-91; Necmettin Gökçür, *Kur'an-ı Kerim'in İlahi Kitaplara Bakışı*, (unpublished master's thesis presented to İstanbul Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü), İstanbul, 1999, 56-59.

have recognized of the truth. They say, 'Our Lord, we have believed, so register us among the witnesses. And why should we not believe in Allah and what has come to us of the truth? And we aspire that our Lord will admit us [to Paradise] with the righteous people'" (Quran, 5/82-84).

The Holy Quran proclaims that those who believe this way will be rewarded abundantly: "Those will be given their reward twice for what they patiently endured..." (Quran, 28/54). "So Allah rewarded them for what they said with gardens [in Paradise] beneath which rivers flow, wherein they abide eternally. And that is the reward of doers of good" (Quran, 5/85). "Indeed, those who believed and those who were Jews or Christians or Sabeans [before the Prophet Muhammad] —those [among them] who believed in Allah and the Last Day and did righteousness— will have their reward with their Lord, and no fear will there be concerning them, nor will they grieve" (Quran, 2/62).

There are a group of people from amongst the People of the Book who did not actually believe in God. They do mock religion and make fun of it. They do change the religious injunctions as they please. They do withhold the divine truths that came from God. They do sell out the verses of God for little benefit, and they do interpret them wrongly taking them far away from their original meanings and implications. Thus and so they manipulate the verses in the divine books. They are devoid of the fundamental ethical principles. They go too far in mischief and animosity. They do kill the prophets who God chose from amongst them. They do lie and not keep the promise they gave God... The Holy Quran does criticize them sporadically in various places.⁸ As a matter of fact, both Jewish and Christian Bible (Torah and Gospel) point out that these people broke their contract with God, that they went into idolatry, destroyed the worship places, killed the prophets of God and that they were ungrateful to God with all the blessings they had. Both Christian and Jewish Bible condemned and strongly criticized them for their bad characters.⁹ Alongside the other holy books, the Quran advised them for good conduct and called them out for genuine faith and good deeds. The Quran also proclaims that these people will be graciously blessed if they act according to the will of God: "And if only they upheld [the law of] the Torah, the Gospel, and what has been revealed to them from their Lord, they would have consumed [provision] from above them and from beneath their feet." (Qur'an, 5/66).

8. See: Paçacı, **ibid**, 86-88; Mehmet Okuyan & Mustafa Öztürk, "Kur'an Verilerine Göre Öteki'nin Konumu", İslam ve Öteki, edited by Cafer Sadık Yaran, İstanbul, 2001, 178-9.

9. See: I. Kings, 18/17-18; 19/9-14; II. Kings, 17/1-18; 34-41; 22/17; 23/3; 24/18-19; 33/1-9; II. Numbers, 24/18-19; 33/1-9; Psalms, 10/6; 105-107; 12/4; Isaiah, 3/1-22; 59/1-8; Jeremiah, 2/7-26; 7/8-10; 9/2-6; 17/15; Nehemiah, 9/16-35; Matthew, 15/1-9; 23/1-28; Mark, 7/1-13; 12/40; Luke, 20/46-47.

Approach toward Jews and Christians in Early Islam

The conduct of Muslims with the People of the Book took place within the framework specified by the Quran. The verses that came down in the Meccan era talked in large measure about what happened to the nations who did not believe their prophets and stated that a bad consequence would await the nation of the Prophet if they keep not believing in him. The Quran, on the other hand, consoled and comforted the believers who were in tribulation and turmoil in that era by pointing out that the nations who believed in their prophets had successful endings in their struggles.¹⁰ In this era, the Quran put Muslims and the People of the Book nearly on the same line of consideration. Because the Quranic verses that the Prophet received from the divine source often referred to the previous prophets and religions and stated that the new religion called Islam was a continuation of them: "Indeed, we have revealed to you, [O Muhammad], as we revealed to Noah and the prophets after him. And we revealed to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, the Descendants, Jesus, Job, Jonah, Aaron, and Solomon, and to David we gave the book [of Psalms]" (Quran, 4/163; also see: 42/13). In another verse pointing out that the Prophet Muhammad constituted just one more ring of the previous prophets' chain instead of being any different from them, he was commanded to proclaim the following: "I am not something original among the messengers, nor do I know what will be done with me or with you. I only follow that which is revealed to me, and I am not but a clear warner" (Quran, 46/9). It is mentioned in the Islamic sources that the Prophet at times sat down with the common people who were involved in the People of the Book. Moreover, when the Prophet had his first experience of receiving verses from the divine source he was terrified. And shortly right after that time, the very person who consoled him by saying that "the one that came to you [meaning the Angel Gabriel, known as the angel conveying the verses coming from the divine source to the prophets] is the one who came to Moses" was Waraqa Ibn Nawfal, a leading Christian figure of the time.¹¹

At this point, it should also be noted that the good treatment of the king of Axum (the king of Axumite Ethiopia, whom Islamic tradition named Ashama Ibn Abjar) with some of the early Muslims, who took refuge in his country upon the persecution inflicted by the polytheists of Mecca, has always been remembered with gratitude and praise by Muslims throughout the history of Islam.¹² Besides, the Prophet Muhammad proclaimed fraternity between himself and the king and, upon his death, performed his funeral prayer *in absentia*.¹³

10. See: Nadir Özkuyumcu, "Asr-ı Saadette Hıristiyanlarla İlişkiler", **Bütün Yönleriyle Asr-ı Saadette İslam**, edited by Vecdi Akyüz, İstanbul 1995, II/383.

11. Ebû Abdillâh Muhammed İbn Sa'd, **et-Tabakâtu'l-Kubrâ**, annotated by İhsan Abbas, Dâru Sâdir, Beyrût, 1968, I/195; Özkuyumcu, **ibid**, II/389.

12. İbn Sa'd, **et-Tabakâtu'l-Kubrâ**, I/207.

13. Muhammed b. İsmail el-Buhari, **Sahihu'l-Buhari**, in **Kütüb-i Sitte**, İstanbul 1401/1981, Cenâiz, 4.

Moreover, Muslims of Mecca were saddened by the news that the pyrolatrist Persians defeated the Byzantines. As a response to the polytheists of Mecca who said “[referring to the defeat of the Byzantines, i.e., the People of the Book,] just like that, we will defeat and annihilate you,”¹⁴ the Quran states the following: “The Byzantines have been defeated. In the nearest land. But they, after their defeat, will overcome. Within three to nine years. To Allah belongs the command before and after. And that day the believers will rejoice” (Quran, 30/2-4). It is important to notice that the chapter of the Quran in which these verses are located is called ‘Rum’ (Rome). Not long after, just in the time interval specified by the Quran, the Byzantines defeated the Persians and Muslims of the time rejoiced greatly with the news.¹⁵

It is historically known that the Prophet Muhammad and his close companions established good relations with the People of the Book in Madina. Shortly upon arriving at Madina, the Prophet Muhammad made social, political and military agreements with the People of the Book living there. These agreements were summed up in the constitution known as the document of Madina (or otherwise known as the contract of Madina). All the parts of the people of Madina started to live without conflict provided that they were loyal to this document.¹⁶ Jews living in Madina made great use of the rights determined by this document and enjoyed full freedom in their religious life.¹⁷ From time to time, however, great discussions took place amongst them. During these discussions, Muslims and the People of Book learned from each other. Whereas the People of the Book learned from Muslims about some of the foundations of the religion of Islam Muslims gathered from them some further information about the nations and prophets that were mentioned in the Quran only concisely. On the other hand, whereas some of them strongly rejected this new religion some others accepted and embraced it. In the course of all these discussions, the stance and conduct of Muslims came out within the framework determined by the following verse: “And do not argue with the People of the Scripture except in a way that is best,

14. Cemaluddin Ebu'l-Ferec Abdurrahman İbnü'l-Cevzi, **Zâdu'l-Mesir fi İlmi't-Tefsir**, annotated by Abdurrezzâk el-Mehdi, Dâru'l-Kütübî'l-Arabî, Beyrut 1422, III/415.

15. Ebû Muhammed Abdülhak İbn Atiyye el-Endülüsi, **el-Muarreru'l-Veciz fi Tefsiri'l-Kitâb'l-Aziz**, annotated by Abdüsselâm Abdüşşâfi Muhammed, Dâru'l-Kutubi'l-İlmiyye, Beyrût, 1422, IV/328.

16. Vehbe Zuhayli, **et-Tefsiru'l-Munir fi'l-Akidedi ve's-Seriatu ve'l-Menhec**, Dâru'l-Fikri'l-Muâsir, Dimaşk, 1418, VI/127; Afif A. Tabbara, İlmîni Işığında İslamiyet, translated by Mustafa Öz, İstanbul, 1981, 300-301; 303-306; Muhammed Hamidullah, **İslam'a Giriş**, translated by Cemal Aydın, Ankara 1996, 214-215; Muhammed b. Muhammed el-Avâci, **Ehemmiyyetu Dirâsâti's-Sire en-Nebeviyye ve'l-İnâye bihâ fi Hayâti'l-Müslimin**, Mecmau'l-Melik Fehd li Tibâeti'l-Mushafî's-Şerif, 34; Ali Bulaç, “Asr-ı Saadette Bir Arada Yaşama Projesi: Medine Vesikası”, **Bütün Yönleriyle Asr-ı Saadette İslam**, edited by Vecdi Akyüz, İstanbul, 1995, II/167-195.

17. Muhammed et-Tayyib en-Neccâr, **el-Kavlu'l-Mübîn fi Sireti Seyyidi'l-Mürselin**, Beyrût: Dâru'n-Nevedveti'l-Cedide, 197-198; Muhammed el-Gazâli, **Fikhu's-Sire**, Dimaşk: Dâru'l-Kalem, 1427, 194-195; Muhammed Şit Hattâb, **er-Rasûl el-Kâid**, Beyrût: Dâru'l-Fikr, 1422, 73-74; Safi er-Rahmân el-Mübârekfûri, **er-Rahiku'l-Mahtûm**, Beyrût: Dâru'l-Hilâl, 173; Ahmed İbrahim eş-Şerif, **Mekke ve'l-Medine fi'l-Câhiliyye ve Ahd'r-Rasûl Sallallâhu Aleyhi ve Sellem**, Dâru'l-Fikri'l-Arabî, 380; Osman Güner, “Hz. Peygamber'in Öteki'ne Bakışı”, **İslam ve Öteki**, edited by Cafer Sadık Yaran, İstanbul, 2001, 239-245.

except for those who commit injustice among them, and say, 'We believe in that which has been revealed to us and revealed to you. And our God and your God is one; and we are Muslims [in submission] to Him'" (Quran, 29/46). In addition, another verse in this context, states the following: "Allah does not forbid you from those who do not fight you because of religion and do not expel you from your homes –from being righteous toward them and acting justly toward them. Indeed, Allah loves those who act justly. Allah only forbids you from those who fight you because of religion and expel you from your homes and aid in your expulsion..." (Quran, 60/8-9).

The Holy Quran allowed Muslims to eat the food of the People of the Book. Moreover, the Quran also allowed Muslim men to get married with the women belonging to the People of the Book: "This day [all] good foods have been made lawful, and the food of those who were given the Scripture is lawful for you and your food is lawful for them. And [lawful in marriage are] chaste women from among the believers and chaste women from among those who were given the Scripture before you, when you have given them their due compensation, desiring chastity, not unlawful sexual intercourse or taking [secret] lovers..." (Quran, 5/5). It is the case that at times Muslims including the Prophet himself visited Jewish and Christian people living amongst them, ate their food and that they married women belonging to the People of the Book. In fact, the Prophet Muhammad actually got married with Safiyya, the daughter of the leader of a Jewish tribe called Banu an-Nudayr [the Children of Nudayr].¹⁸ Besides, the Prophet also married Reyhane, the daughter a Jewish man named Shamûn.¹⁹ As a result of these marriages, there emerged some sort of kinship between them and Muslims with respect to the mentality of the time. In addition, it historically a fact that Muslims always sustained good relationships with them as neighbors and at times business partners.²⁰ The Quranic expression "the neighbor farther away" was interpreted as meaning Jews and Christians by most of the reliable scholars (commentators) of the Quran. This expression is mentioned in the Quran as in the following: "... and to parents do good, and to relatives, orphans, the needy, the near neighbor, the neighbor farther away, the companion at your side, the traveler, and those whom your right hands possess..." (Quran, 4/36). The commentators of the Quran add that according to this Quranic verse, Muslims

18. Muhammed İbn İshak, *Siretu İbn İshak*, (Tahk. Süheyl Zekâr), (Beyrût: Dâru'l-Fikr, 1398/1978), 264-266; Muhammed b. Ömer İbn Vâkid Ebû Abdillâh el-Vâkidî, *el-Megâzi*, annotated by M. Cunos, Beyrût: Dâru A'lamî, 1409/1989, II/709; Ebu Muhammed Cemaluddin Abdulmelik İbn Hişâm, **es-Sire en-Nebeviyye li'İbn-i Hişâm**, annotated by M. Sakâ et. al., Mısır: Şeriketu Mustafa el-Bâbî el-Halebî, 1375/1955, II/646; Abdülğani Abdurrahman Muhammed, **Zevcâtü'n-Nebi Muhammed Sallallâhu Aleyhi ve Sellem ve Hikmetu Taaddudihinne**, el-Kâhire: Mektebetu Medbûli, 57.Güner, **ibid**, 256-263; Nadir Özkuyumcu, "Asr-ı Saadette Yahudilerle İlişkiler", **Bütün Yönleriyle Asr-ı Saadette İslam**, edited by: Vecdi Akyüz, İstanbul 1995, II/435-437.

19. Muhammed b. Habib b. Ümeyye Ebu Cafer el-Bağdâdî, **el-Muhabbar**, Beyrût: Dâru'l-Âfâk el-Cedide, w.date, 93; Ebû Cafer Muhammed b. Muhammed İbn Cerîr et-Taberî, **Târîhu't-Taberî Târîhu'l-Umem ve'l-Mulûk**, Beyrût: Dâru't-Turâs, 1387, II/591.

20. Güner, 263-265.

are supposed to always treat them well like neighbors.²¹ It was mentioned in the Islamic sources that when the Prophet died his armor was mortgaged with a Jewish man in return for his debt.²² Muslims later on sustained these relations.²³

At this point, it should be noted that, some of the People of the Book living in Madina felt uneasy about the new religion starting to flourish and becoming a political power in the region and thus they were involved in treason against the society in Madina. As a result, they were severely punished.²⁴

The Prophet Muhammad, when he was to give verdict as a judge, considered their religion and at times gave verdicts in accordance with the Jewish Bible.²⁵ Those who were loyal to the contracts were given all kinds of assurances. In the letter sent by the Prophet to the Christians of Najran, we see the following words:

ولنجران وحاشيتها جَوَارِ اللَّهِ وَذِمَّةُ مُحَمَّدِ النَّبِيِّ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ عَلَى أَمْوَالِهِمْ وَأَنْفُسِهِمْ وَأَرْضِهِمْ وَمِلَّتِهِمْ وَعَائِيهِمْ وَشَاهِدِهِمْ وَعَشِيرَتِهِمْ وَبَيْعِهِمْ وَكُلِّ مَا تَحْتِ أَيْدِيهِمْ مِنْ قَلِيلٍ أَوْ كَثِيرٍ، لَا يُعَيَّرُ أَسْفُفٌ مِنْ أَسِيفِيَّتِهِ وَلَا رَاهِبٌ مِنْ رَهْبَانِيَّتِهِ وَلَا كَاهِنٌ مِنْ كَهَنَتِهِ وَلَا نِسَ عَلَيْهِ ذَنْبُهُ. وَلَا دَمٌ جَاهِلِيَّةٍ وَلَا يَحْسُرُونَ وَلَا يُعْسِرُونَ وَلَا يَطَأُ أَرْضَهُمْ جَيْشٌ. وَمَنْ سَأَلَ مِنْهُمْ حَقًّا فَبَيِّنْتُهُمُ النَّصْفَ عَمِيرَ ظَالِمِينَ وَلَا مَظْلُومِينَ. وَمَنْ أَكَلَ رِبًّا مِنْ ذِي قَبْلِ قَدَمَتِي مِنْهُ بَرِيئَةٌ. وَلَا يُؤْخَذُ رَجُلٌ مِنْهُمْ بِظُلْمٍ آخَرَ، وَعَلَى مَا فِي هَذَا الْكِتَابِ جَوَارِ اللَّهِ وَذِمَّةُ مُحَمَّدِ النَّبِيِّ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ أَبَدًا حَتَّى يَأْتِيَ اللَّهُ بِأَمْرِهِ، مَا نَصَحُوا وَأَصْلَحُوا مَا عَلَيْهِمْ عَمِيرٌ مُتَقَلِّبِينَ بِظُلْمٍ.

“The lives of the people of Najran and its surrounding area, their religion, their land, property, cattle and those of them who are present or absent, their messengers and their places of worship are under the protection of Allah and guardianship of His Prophet. Their present state shall neither be interfered with, nor their rights meddled with, nor their idols deformed. No Usqu (Bishop) Rahib or Waqa, shall be removed from his office... Neither the people shall be punished for any past crime or murder, nor shall they be compelled to do military service. Neither shall Ushr [a tax] be imposed on them nor any army shall enter their

21. Et-Taberî, *Câmiu'l-Beyân*, VIII/399; Ebu Muhammed Abdurrahman b. Muhammed İbn Ebî Hâtîm, *Tefsîru'l-Kur'âni'l-Azîm li-lbn-i Ebî Hâtîm*, annotated by Es'ad Muhammed et-Tayyib, el-Memleketu'l-Arabiyyetu's-Suûdiyye, Mektebetu Nezzâr Mustafa el-Bâz, 1419, III/949; İbnü'l-Cevzî, *Zâdu'l-Mesîr*, I/404; Ebû Abdillâh Muhammed b. Ahmed el-Kurtubî, *el-Câmi' li Ahkâmi'l-Kur'an*, annotated by Ahmed el-Berdûni-İbrahim Ettafayyîs, el-Kâhire: Dâru'l-Kutubi'l-İlmiyye, 1384/1964, V/183; M. Zeki Duman, *Kur'an-ı Kerim'de Adab-ı Muâşeret Görgü Kuralları*, 5. ed., İstanbul, w.date, 239.

22. Muhammed b. İsmail el-Buhârî, *Sahîhu'l-Buhârî*, in *Kütüb-i Sitte*, İstanbul 1401/1981, Buyû', 14.

23. Tabbara, *ibid.*, 303-306.

24. Ahmet Bostancı, *Hiz. Peygamber'in Gayri Müslimlerle İlişkileri*, İstanbul, 2001, 51-61.

25. Ebû Cafer Muhammed b. Muhammed İbn Cerîr et-Taberî, *Târihu't-Taberî Târihu'l-Umem ve'l-Mulûk*, Beyrût: Dâru't-Turâs, 1387, II/591; Muhammed Hamidullah, *İslam Peygamberi*, translated by Salih Tuğ, İstanbul: İrfan Yayınevi, 1400/1980, I/633; *Doğuştan Günümüze Büyük İslam Tarihi*, edited by Kenan Seyithanoğlu, Konya: Kombassan Yayınları, 1994, I/420-421.

area. Whatever has been written in this pact, Allah and Muhammad His Prophet (S.A.W.) [i.e., peace be upon him] are guarantors for it, unless there is an order from Allah, in this connection, and as long as the people of Najran remain faithful and adhere to the conditions which have been made for them, except that someone compels them to do otherwise..."²⁶ The points specified in this letter was also adopted by the first great *khalifs*, i.e., Abu Bakr (d. 12/634), Omar (d. 22/644), Osman (d. 34/656) and Ali (d. 40/662), who were the successors of the Prophet as statesman.²⁷ For example, when Omar entered Jerusalem he kept this approach intact and announced to the people of Jerusalem of the time that the security of their lives, properties, and worship places were under the protection of Muslims and that no one would be forced to leave his/her religion.²⁸

As is known, in the subsequent decades, the religion of Islam quickly spread in this region. And the areas in which Christians and Jews lived were taken by Muslims. The People of the Book living in the region turned into a minority living amongst Muslims. Nevertheless, Muslims fully recognized the rights and freedoms of the People of the Book and, except for some minor limitations such as putting constraints on clothing in order to make them avoid to dress like Muslims,²⁹ did not intervene with them. Muslim jurists made regulations about them in the light of the Quran and Sunna, the two most essential sources of the religion of Islam.³⁰ And as long as they were in accordance with those regulations they were not faced with restraints coming from the state. These regulations involved collecting the *jizya* tax. This was taken only from the males of non-Muslim minorities; in other words, non-Muslim women, children, elderly and clergy were exempted from the *jizya* tax.³¹ However, in return for this tax, Muslims were supposed to provide the non-Muslim minorities with protection and safety against the attacks of outside enemies.³² At this point, it is also important to note that the Muslim administrators gave this tax back when they felt unable to protect the non-Muslim minorities. Indeed, Ebu Ubeyde b. Cerrah, who were the commander of the Muslim army in the reign of the Khalif Omar, gave the *jizya* tax back to the Christians living in Damascus when he realized that

26. See: Ebü Yüsuf Yakub b. İbrahim el-Ensârî, **Kitâbu'l-Harâc**, annotated by Taha Abdurrauf Sa'd & Sa'd Hasan Muhammed, el-Kâhire: el-Mektebetu'l-Ezher li't-Turâs, w. date, 85. See also: Ebu Yusuf Yakub b. İbrahim, **Kitâbu'l-Haraç**, translated by Ali Özek, 2nd ed., İstanbul, 1973, 127; Osman Şekerci, *İslam Ülkelerinde Gayri Müslimlerin Temel Hakları*, İstanbul, 1996, 16-17. [The translation of the excerpt was taken from the following web site: <http://lettersofprophetmuhammad.wordpress.com/2007/09/18/pact-of-najran/> (last visited in May, 2014)].

27. See: Ebü Yüsuf, **Kitâbu'l-Harâc**, 85-87, 128-130; Hamidullah, *İslam'a Giriş*, 214-224.

28. Tabbara, **ibid**, 299-300; Şibli Numani, **Bütün Yönleriyle Hz. Ömer ve Devlet İdaresi**, translated by Talip Yaşar Alp, İstanbul, 1980, II/ 210-212.

29. See: Ebü Yüsuf, **Kitâbu'l-Harâc**, 140-141, 207-209.

30. See: Ebu Yusuf, **ibid**, 197-206; Salih Tuğ, *İslam Vergi Hukukunun Ortaya Çıkışı*, İstanbul 1984, 111-132.

31. See: Ebu Yusuf, **Kitâbu'l-Haraç**, 135, 200; Şekerci, **ibid**, 20.

32. Şekerci, **ibid**, 18-19; Hüseyin Algül, "Müslümanların Siyasi Hakimiyeti Altında Yaşayan Gayr-i Müslimlere Tanınan Haklar Konusunun Çeşitli Devirler İçinde İslam Tarihine Yansıması", **Uludağ Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi**, 7 (1998), 13-14.

the Byzantines were getting prepared to attack the city with a strong army, and told them the following: "We hear that the Byzantines are in war preparation. We took *jizya* from you in return for protection of your life, property and homeland. Now that we understand that we are not able to provide that protection we give the *jizya* back to you. If God grants us victory again we will stick to the previous conditions." Moved by this exemplary attitude of Muslims, it is reported that the Christian minority prayed for Muslims' victory.³³

As we have pointed out above, through laws and legal regulations, the Prophet and his successors as statesman consolidated and guaranteed the minorities' fundamental rights and freedoms.³⁴ The scope of these rights and freedoms was wide and detailed.³⁵ The German Orientalist Sigrid Hunge states that the approach of Muslims towards minorities belonging to other religions was unprecedented in history. According to an account he put forth, the archbishop of Jerusalem, in a letter sent to the archbishop of İstanbul (ca. 9th century), talked about Muslims as follows: "They are just and fair; and they do not do injustice to us nor do they impose restraints upon us."³⁶ It is worth mentioning in passing that the Umayyad Khalif Omar b. Abdulaziz (r. 717-720), in a letter sent to one of his governors named Adiy b. Ertat, said the following: "Take care of the protected [non-Muslims] and be compassionate towards them. You are supposed to support those of them who grow older and cannot make a living."³⁷

In the Muslim societies, it is not unusual to see Christians and Jews who were notable in various realms such as business, education, etc., who were also renown among Muslims. These people benefited from all kinds of opportunities the Muslim countries provided to their people regardless of religious differences. Among them were even people who became grand viziers in the reign of the Abbasids (r. 750-1258).³⁸ It should also be noted that these people played a crucial role in the process of the translation movement aimed at conveying the Greek culture and science along with that of the other civilizations into Arabic, which came about particularly in the beginning of the reign of the Abbasids. In other words, these people constituted a major part of the historical endeavor aimed at conveying the written legacy of the world into Arabic as the primary language of the religion of Islam. For instance, these people became the principal supervisors

33. See: Ebu Yusuf, **Kitabu'l-Haraç**, 224-225.

34. See: H. Yunus Apaydın, "Birlikte Yaşama Tecrübesinin Fikhî Çerçevesi: Gayr-i Müslimlerin Şer'î Hükümler Karşısındaki Konumu", **Müslümanlar ve Diğer Din Mensupları**, Ankara: Türkiye Dinler Tarihi Derneği Yayınları, 2004, 66-70.

35. Said Havva, *İslam*, translated into Turkish by Said Şimşek, Ankara, w. date, 1/242; Şekerci, 22-81; Bostancı, **ibid**, 96-152.

36. Sigrid Hunke, **Avrupa'nın Üzerine Doğan İslam Güneşi**, translated by Servet Sezgin, İstanbul w. date, 256.

37. Hamidullah, *İslam'a Giriş*, 222.

38. Roger Garaudy, *İslamın Va'dettikleri*, translated by Nezih Uzel, Pınar Yay., 2nd ed., İstanbul, 1983, 46.

in the institutions such as Beytu'l-Hikme (the House of Wisdom) established mainly to translate the great works known at the time.³⁹

Ottoman State's Relations with its Non-Muslim Citizens

Christians living in the Ottoman Empire, despite many wars that took place between the Ottomans and the Christian countries of the west, were given the benefits of the fundamental rights and freedoms. As known, the Ottoman State was established in 1299 in the western part of Asia Minor bordering the Byzantine Empire. While in the beginning it was a small state, more like seignior, gradually in the course of time it enlarged its territory to also include many regions of the Byzantine Empire. It was the idea of justice for all that constituted a major factor in the fact that the Ottoman State enlarged its territory eventually turning into an empire in less than a century. The idea of justice that the Ottomans espoused required them to be fair to all kinds of people, i.e., both Muslim and non-Muslim people. The Ottomans did not intervene with the religious and social life of the Christian people living in the territories taken from the Byzantine Empire they also reduced the tax amount that the non-Muslim population of these territories used to give to the Byzantine Empire. Christian people of the Ottoman State preferred the Ottomans over the administrators of their own kind because of the good and just treatment of them with their non-Muslim citizens. It would also be worth mentioning that, although he was held captive, the archbishop of Thessalonica, Gregory Palamas, was allowed to engage in argumentation with Muslim scholars in front of the second Ottoman sultan, Orhan Gazi.⁴⁰

Our history books record the fact that the Ottomans protected members of Orthodox Church living in the region against Catholic pressure of conversion and, moreover, provided the members of all religions with freedom of religion.⁴¹ In this context, in his book called *The Foundation of the Ottoman Empire (Osmanlı İmparatorluğunun Kuruluşu)*, Gibbons states the following: "Regarding the tolerance of the Ottomans, whether it is based on politics, good intention or indifference, one cannot deny the fact that the Ottomans became the first nation in their time to espouse the idea of freedom of religion as the fundamental principal in the process of forming their national identity. Christians and Muslims lived in peace and harmony under the Ottoman administration for centuries which were 'responsible' for supporting the Inquisition and endless persecution

39. See: M. Tayyip Okıç, "Hadiste Tercüman", *Ankara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi*, XIV, Ankara, 1967, 28; Ramazan Şeşen, "İslam Dünyasında İlk Tercüme Faaliyetlerine Umumi Bir Bakış, Başlangıçtan H. IV/M X. Asrın Sonlarına Kadar", *İslam Tetkikleri Enstitüsü Dergisi*, VII (1979), 3-4, 7; Garaudy, *ibid*, 46.

40. İsmail Hakkı Uzunçarşılı, *Osmanlı Tarihi*, Türk Tarih Kurumu, Ankara 1988, I/182; Algül, "Müslümanların Siyasi Hakimiyeti Altında Yaşayan Gayr-i Müslümlere Tanınan Haklar Konusunun Çeşitli Devirler İçinde İslam Tarihine Yansımaları", 21.

41. Uzunçarşılı, *ibid*, I/183; Fuad Köprülü, *Osmanlı Devletinin Kuruluşu*, Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, 1991, 108.

of Jews.⁴² Non-Muslim minorities in the Ottoman State enjoyed greatly all the rights and economic and other opportunities a minority community could have in a great empire.⁴³ Non-Muslim minorities always freely performed their religious rituals and services in their worship places, i.e., without being exposed to intervention or restraint. In addition, they were not faced with any problem concerning the education of their religious scholars and the election of their religious representative.⁴⁴ When Mehmet II (Fatih Sultan Mehmet) conquered Istanbul in 1453, he did not intervene in the churches of Istanbul except Hagia Sophia, which was seen as a symbol of the conquest at the time. Mehmet II allowed Christians living in his Empire to build new churches and allowed freedom of religion for all of them. Historical sources indicate that Mehmet II provided the patriarch of Istanbul with the liberty to perform the rituals and other religious services with convenience.⁴⁵ Mehmet II granted this liberty not only to Christians living in Istanbul but also to those living in other regions of his Empire. In fact, after the conquest of Istanbul, the patriarch of Christians living in Jerusalem, Athanasius, came to Mehmet II together with a deputation of priests and asked for the same liberty. Upon hearing them, Mehmet II granted them an edict stating that no one will/can interfere with their rituals, churches and other places of pilgrimage.⁴⁶

Christian minorities fully enjoyed their social and economic rights and freedom. Moreover, Christian minorities got hold of trading and artisanship gradually in time because, unlike Muslim people, they were not required to do military service.⁴⁷ Historians point out that the Ottoman administration itself encouraged its minorities to deal with trade and artisanship in a way that contributed to their wealth.⁴⁸ Consequently, non-Christians under the Ottoman administration not only come out as statesman, interpreter, merchant, dealer of gold and other precious metals, and banker they also got a hold of key jobs and positions such as the inspection on the state treasury,⁴⁹ and so they became more prosperous in some cases than Muslims.⁵⁰ This trend that begun in the Ottoman era continued in the era of the Turkish Republic as well; in other words, the aforementioned trend has lasted till today putting many Christians and Jews amongst the wealthiest people of the country. Nowadays many large

42. See: Uzunçarşılı, *ibid*, I/184-185.

43. Salahi Sonyel, "Hıristiyan Azınlıklar ve Osmanlı İmparatorluğunun Son Dönemi", **Osmanlı**, Yeni Türkiye Yayınları, Ankara 2000, II/142; İlber Ortaylı, "Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda Gayri-Müslimler", **Rekabet Kurulu Perşembe Konferansları**, Nowember 2000, 3-23.

44. Şekerci, *ibid*, 66-70.

45. See: Uzunçarşılı, *ibid*, I/491; Ziya Kazıcı, **Siyasi-Dini-Kültürel-Sosyal İslam Tarihi**, İstanbul 1997, XI/93-95.

46. Kazıcı, *ibid*, XI/94-95. (For a copy of the edict and its Latin translation, see: *ibid*, XI/94-95).

47. Samiha Ayverdi, **Türk Tarihinde Osmanlı Asırları**, İstanbul, 1977, I/410.

48. Ahmed Güner Sayar, **Osmanlı İktisat Düşüncesinin Çağdaşlaşması**, İstanbul, 1986, 118.

49. Sayar, *ibid*, 302.

50. Azmi Süslü, "Osmanlıların Gayri Müslimlere Gösterdiği Müsamaha", **III. Osmanlı Sempozyumu (Söğüt – 1988)**, Ankara 1989, 57.

corporations in the Turkish Republic are directly or indirectly in the hands of Jewish and Christian citizens.

Jewish and Christian minorities in the Ottoman Empire were entitled to start and run their own schools with the curriculums completely determined by themselves.⁵¹ More specifically, since the beginning of the reign of Mehmet II, in which the Ottoman State turned into an empire, these minorities were allowed to start their schools right beside their churches and synagogues. And the classes in these schools were taught by their own clergy members.⁵² The freedom of education for the Ottoman minorities was also recognized and thus in a way consolidated in Lausanne Treaty signed in 1923. It is interesting to note that in the wake of the Turkish Republic, these schools increased in numbers and started to accept Muslims' children as well. The Bosphorus University, one of the top universities today in Turkey, was established on the campus and academic tradition of Robert College, which was established an American educator Dr. Cyrus Hamlin and an American philanthropist Christopher R. Robert of New York in 1863.⁵³ It is worthy of mention that many notable people in Turkey, including some of the former prime ministers, graduated from Robert College. Moreover, like Robert College, some other educational institutions of foreign enterprise such as Galatasaray High School have been so far influential in the Turkish education, business and politics.⁵⁴

Not only did the Ottoman State showed tolerance for its Christian and Jewish subjects but also its Muslim subjects showed them respect and conducted with them as if they were no different from them. Like an application of the verse mentioned before, Muslim subjects of the Ottoman State did not lack respect and good behavior toward its non-Muslim subjects. In other words, one can see this tendency of good behavior toward non-Muslims as an application of the Quranic verse which stresses the fact that God likes those who raise and fortify justice (see: Quran, 60/8-9). Accordingly, Muslim people of the Ottoman State were always sensitive about their conduct –especially concerning trade– with the People of the Book even more than with their conduct with the other Muslim people. Claude Farrère, the renowned French writer who extensively wrote about his experiences in the Ottoman Empire, wholeheartedly stated that the Ottoman people were perfectly just and honest in their trade and that as a non-Muslim he was never deceived in his financial conduct with the Ottoman people.⁵⁵ To mention a note in passing, one can assert that so many Christians

51. Osman Cilacı, "Tarih Boyunca Anadolu'da Yaşayan Gayr-ı Müslimlere Genel Bir Bakış", *Diyanet İlmî Dergi*, vol. 35, issue: 4, October-December 1999, 25-27.

52. Şekerci, *ibid*, 65-66.

53. http://www.boun.edu.tr/about/history_tur.html

54. Süleyman Uludağ, *İslam'da İrşad*, 6. ed., İstanbul, 1997, 91.

55. See: Claude Farrère, **Türklerin Manevi Gücü**, translated into Turkish by Orhan Bahaeddin, Tercüman 1001 Temel Eser, 141-147; M. Yaşar Kandemir, *Örneklerle İslam Ahlakı*, İstanbul 1979, 330-333.

and Jews converted to Islam with consent as a result of this exemplary tolerance and brotherly conduct.

Questions and Problems

In the ages in which the Ottoman Empire was a super power, both Muslims and the People of the Books (Jews and Christians) were prosperous and complacent. However, when the Ottomans were in the decline, both Muslims and the People of the Book started experiencing various problems. In other words, these problems were by no means pertaining only to the People of the Book. On the contrary, every Ottoman community was influenced by those problems. In fact, when the Ottoman State started to fall into decline every institution and every layer of the Ottoman society had their share of the problems. As a result, both the Ottoman and the international initiatives tried to take immediate measures for the purpose of preventing or at least minimizing specially the problems the People of the Book faced. In addition to the assurances given by the Ottoman administration, Christian citizens living in the Ottoman State were taken under the patronage of the Russian Tsar through the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca (Kuchuk Kainarji), which was signed on 21 July 1774, and through some other military negotiations. Besides, it was proclaimed that Christian citizens of the Ottoman State were entitled to the same rights as that of Muslim citizens through the Edict of Gülhane (1839) and the Treaty of Paris (1856).⁵⁶ Moreover, in the Reform Edict of 1856 (Islahat Fermânı or Islahat Hatt-ı Hümâyûnu), it was also stated that all the Ottoman citizens were equal before the law. In other words, the Reform Edict of 1856 consolidated that Christians and Muslims of the Ottoman State had equal rights before the law.⁵⁷ Furthermore, in the Reform Edict, it was also proclaimed that Christian minorities of the Ottoman State were taken under the patronage of the great powers of Europe.⁵⁸

We have already mentioned above the fact that Christian people had also suffered from the corruption to which the whole Empire was exposed. Historians wholeheartedly state that the sufferings of the Muslim subjects at times of corruption were no less than that of the Christian subjects. In fact, one can see that, at those times, whereas Muslim men were required to do military service, which meant engaging in war, Christian men were exempted from that requirement in return of certain payment. Again, in this era, Christian minorities became the most prosperous and wealthiest people of the Ottoman Empire dealing with trade and craftsmanship while Muslim men were fighting on the battle fields.⁵⁹ As a matter of fact, as we have pointed out above, the richness of Christians that begun at that age lasted till now. The majority of Christians and Jews living in

56. Enver Ziya Karal, **Osmanlı Tarihi**, Türk Tarih Kurumu, Ankara, 1988, V/170-171.

57. Sonyel, **ibid**, 142.

58. Karal, **ibid**, V/244.

59. Sonyel, **ibid**, 142-143.

let them settle down their monasteries without fear in all the countries of my empire. Neither my royal highness, nor my viziers or employees, nor my servants, nor any of the citizens of my empire shall insult or disturb them. Let nobody attack, insult or endanger neither their life or their property or the property of their church. Even if they bring somebody from abroad into my country, they are allowed to do so."⁶⁴

Because of this religious tolerance and humanistic approach, religious minorities and especially Jews, who were oppressed in the countries they lived in, preferred to take refuge in the Ottoman Empire. In fact, Jews who were oppressed in Spain⁶⁵ solicited asylum from the Ottoman Empire in 1492 and, upon the permission given by the Ottoman Sultan Beyazıt, they took refuge in big masses and settled in various Ottoman cities.⁶⁶ These people live in Turkey today as citizens enjoying the basic human rights and freedoms and commemorate now and then the time they first set foot in the Ottoman land. Moreover, in 1992, they celebrated 500th anniversary of the welcoming of the Sephardic Jews to the Ottoman Empire and five centuries of peaceful coexistence with Turks through ceremonies organized in New York, Istanbul, Thessalonica (Greece) and in Israel.⁶⁷

However, through the late seventeenth century some of the countries, which craved to be the dominant power in the region, wanted to provoke the Ottoman Christian people to bring out unrest and thus to gain land from the Ottoman Empire. In this context, one should be reminded that the Jesuits, who were supported by France, put forth endeavors to cause the Ottoman Empire to collapse from inside.⁶⁸ To this end, they made use of the nationalist movement, which emerged and somewhat pervaded in the wake of the French Revolution. Some Christian minorities, which were backed up by the European states (i.e., the great powers of Europe of the time), made demands only contributing to the undermining of the imperial alliance. It is worth mentioning that both the Ottoman and the British archives, which were recently made public, are full of documents indicative of the cooperation level between many Ottoman Christian citizens and the countries seeking to scatter the Ottoman Empire.⁶⁹ In regions where Christians constituted the majority, especially in the Balkan Peninsula, various peoples in revolt sought independence from the Ottoman Empire. In other words, the Ottoman Pact was weakened and severely undermined. At these times, there emerged unrest leading sometimes to battles among the Ottoman peoples.⁷⁰ This unrest and turmoil went on until World War I, at the end of which the Ottoman Empire actually collapsed.

64. <http://www.dddocs.com/docs/index-263357.html> (last visited 24 January, 2014).

65. See: Şekerci, *ibid*, 40-41.

66. Şekerci, *ibid*, 41-42; Veli Şirin, *Siyasi ve Kültürel Osmanlı Tarihi*, İstanbul 1996, 230.

67. Şekerci, *ibid*, 42.

68. See: Uzunçarşılı, *ibid*, III/ 117-120.

69. Sonyel, *ibid*, 145.

70. Sonyel, *ibid*, 143-144.

At this point, it should also be noted in passing that, as we have taken into account throughout this article, the whole history of Islam is indicative of the tolerance that Muslims had toward Christians. Besides, it is worth mentioning that many Christian scientists remembered with gratitude and celebrated this tolerance. To give an example, Thomas Arnold in his book entitled *The Call to Islam* once remarked about this tolerance as follows: "The fact is that Christian tribes [in the Arabian Peninsula] entered Islam with their own will instead of coercion of any kind."⁷¹

Conclusion

In conclusion, Muslims have espoused and acted out an approach of tolerance toward non-Muslims since the emergence of the religion of Islam. On the other hand, as we have already pointed out in this article, non-Muslims living in Muslim countries were at times exposed to some troubles. However, one should be reminded again that these troubles were temporary and, more importantly, they were not peculiar to non-Muslims. In other words, both Muslims and non-Muslims suffered from those troubles.

The fundamental characteristics observed in the relationship between Muslims and the People of the Book was tolerance and empathy. Some of the reasons why this is so can be stated as follows: First of all, both Muslims and the People of the Book share a common core called humanity. Pointing out that man is the *khalif* of God on earth, the Holy Quran proclaims that mankind is worthy of respect, venerable and honorable:⁷² "And we have certainly honored the children of Adam... and preferred them over much of what we have created, with [definite] preference" (Quran, 17/70). On the other hand, as we have pointed out above, both the Quran and the Prophet of Islam commended the sincere members of the People of the Book who held duly established faith. The Prophet of Islam announced that the People of the Book, who had a special status called *dhimni* status, were under the protection of Muslims and strongly blamed those who tried to oppress them. It was reported that he said "whoever oppresses a *dhimni* [a member of the People of the Book] or puts burdens on *dhimnis* that are beyond their stamina I am the belligerent of that person."⁷³ It was also reported that the Khalif Omar on deathbed said the following: "I advice the next khalif to fully recognize the rights of the *dhimnis* of the Prophet as required by the agreements and contracts and, if necessary, to fight for the sake of the safety of them and their properties and not to make them carry out the tasks that are beyond their strength..."⁷⁴ The Holy Quran prohibited the oppressing, regardless of the one who is being exposed to it, and wanted Muslims to be just and gracious in any case. Finally, when Said Ibn Zayd saw some *dhimnis* being

71. See: Tabbara, *ibid*, 306-308.

72. Osman Eskiciođlu, *İslam Hukuku Açısından Hukuk ve İnsan Hakları*, İzmir, 1996, 272-273

73. See: Ebu Yusuf, *ibid*, 203-205.

74. Ebu Yusuf, *ibid*, 203-204.

punished by being held under the scorching hot sun he said to the state official named Iyad, who was inflicting this punishment on them: "O Iyad! What is all this? I see that you have been doing things improper. The Messenger of God [The Prophet Muhammad] said that 'whoever torments people in this world will be tormented in the hereafter'"⁷⁵ And for such reasons, Muslims got along well with the People of the Book since the age of the Prophet.

The People of the Book, whose population highly increased in the era of the Ottomans, had lived freely with their fundamental rights intact for centuries. In the era of the Republic of Turkey, they were entitled to the same rights through the Treaty of Lausanne signed on 24 July, 1923.⁷⁶ The fact that the Orthodox Church in Istanbul, which is the official center of the sect, maintained its mission for centuries including the era of the Republic, is a clear indication that people who embraced Christianity have been entitled to live their religion freely. Armenians, who had lived together in harmony with Muslim people since the era of Selcuki Turks, were entitled to their religious freedoms until the last quarter of the Ottoman Empire. As we have pointed out above, Ottoman Armenians together with Ottoman Muslim people went through some struggles because of some tragic events that took place in the ending phase of the Ottoman State; however, shortly after those events, they started again to live as being entitled to their full freedoms as they were. Armenian citizens of Turkey, whose patriarch is residing in Istanbul, enjoy all the fundamental freedoms and rights in a way no different than the other citizens.⁷⁷ On the other hand, members of the Syrian Orthodox church residing in various regions of Turkey still espouse the Turkish city of Mardin and its district Midyat as their religious hubs and freely perform their religious services and rituals under the guidance of their religious leaders, like they did in historical times.⁷⁸ One should also note that the rights and freedoms of non-Muslims living in Turkey were largely extended within the framework of its integration into the European Union. Jewish and Christian people living in Turkey today have been equipped with all the rights and opportunities no different than that of Turkey's Muslim majority to the extent that in some cases they are said to have more rights and opportunities than Muslims.

In the 21st century, which is hoped to be the age of tolerance and dialogue between religions, inviting people who espouse different religions and ideologies to get together in the light of the common core known as 'human being' and to get them to act in accordance with the fact that human being is the most valuable entity on earth is likely to generate insights extremely useful and functional in solving many problems with which human beings have been faced for so long.

75. Ebu Yusuf, *ibid*, 203-204.

76. See: **Atatürk ve Türkiye Cumhuriyeti, Antlaşmalar/Konferanslar, Lozan Barış Antlaşması**, <http://www.ataturk.net/mmuc/lozan.html> (last visited on May, 2013).

77. Cilaci, *ibid*, 22-24.

78. Cilaci, *ibid*, 21-22.

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