

NURSEITIC UNDERSTANDING OF MULTI-RELIGIOUS PRACTICES: A MODEL FOR COEXISTENCE AND UNIVERSAL PEACE

Idris Ali

Student, Masters in Educational management and leadership (G1519683)

Kulliyyah of Education, International Islamic University Malaysia

Phone: +601121321718; Email: idris.iium@gmail.com

Abstract

The contemporary world is undergoing a heavy burden of bloody wars and communal strives. Leading a peaceful life for human being is very difficult in this conflictive planate. Surface reading of the history of those clashes suggests that almost all the conflicts and wars somehow involve religious fanaticism. A critical study of the religions however would assert that in fact religions may offer a deeply engaging social clue which if accordingly internalized may hold the people of different faiths together. It is more so with the three Semitic religions which share some extraordinary common features in terms of establishing mutual understanding, coexistence and peace in any given society. This paper in adopting doctrinal method investigates the question of why the world is fraught with wars, clashes and conflicts though all religions enjoin their followers to live a peaceful life. The study seeks to explore the common grounds and teachings that ask the people of respective religions to follow the path of harmony and tolerance with special reference to Semitic scriptures which strongly advice their followers to show respect towards other religions and tolerate religious practices of other faiths. The present work tries to trace the main obstacles and barriers which are contributing not to realize the core peaceful teachings of respective religions. Finally, based on the harmonious understandings of religions structured by Said Nursi, the study aims to provide an inclusive model of socio-religious engagement which may address the bad impact of secularism which has negatively shaped the thought and behavior of multi-religious people in one hand and propose a set of harmonious religious approaches on the other which would solve all the religion-based clashes and conflicts among multi-ethnic religious societies.

Keywords: Nurseitic Model; peace; Semitic Religions; Judaism; Christianity; Islam.

1. INTRODUCTION

Throughout the human history, religion has been positioned as central to some conflicts. The Irish conflict, the Arab-Israeli wars, the Fulani jihad of the 1800s, Anti-Muslim movement in Burma, the resurgence of fascism in Europe, and most recently, the uprising of the Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State are a good example. This linkage, though not well-studied, is still seen to have justification by many because of the central role religion plays in society and individual lives.

Reviewing the religious history of the world, we find that in every age religion has centrally contributed to the welfare of humanity, peace, prosperity and guidance towards right path. We further see that there have been numerous clashes and wars occurred based on religion. Hundreds of thousands of people have been killed and many cities and civilizations destroyed. In fact, if we deeply read, we will see that religious wars or conflicts in the history of the globe have not occurred only because of religion. Actually, there are many reasons for this. Firstly, sometimes the followers of religion have misinterpreted the religious principles because of which religion-based conflicts have occurred. Secondly, sometimes a group of elite selfish people rigged religion for their own benefit. They used religion as a *casus belli* for their war. With the hope of extending the borders of their empires, a couple of imperialists are seen to have circumvented religion which allowed them to wage war against other people. Hitler's killing of millions of Jewish people would be an example in the case.

Even in the modern world, we can see that people are still involved in a lot of clashes on the basis of religion. For example, Muslim genocide has taken place in Myanmar for religious reasons. In the same way, there is also a religious influences behind the bloody clashes that exist in Palestine, Kashmir, Bosnia, Chechnya, Syria and China.

As the observation of socio-politico-cultural conflicts unfolds some arguments involving direct or indirect religious reasons, the article has tried to examine the root cause of misrelating the reasons of conflicts to religion. Secondly, the researcher has attempted to show that every religion has some common features and values especially in Semitic religion. And every religion invites their followers to peace, safety, and welfare and to lead a peaceful life but why followers of each religion are engaged in various sorts of conflicts and wars. And what are the main reasons for this and why the followers of religion refrain from the basic religious teachings and values of their religion. Thirdly, the researcher has further endeavored to propose a common

universal platform based on the basic shared ideologies and characteristics of each religion which may foster a tolerative attitude in the minds of the followers of respective religions.

Given that this paper has tried to highlight Said Nursi's contribution towards promoting global peace among the people of different faiths while especially focusing on his approach towards peace-building among the followers of Semitic religions in the modern world. The study, in this regard, explores some significant teachings of said Nursi's religious pluralism approaches as reflected in "Risale-i-Nur" with special reference to the noble Qur'an which are relevant to the context of present work of how the root of contemporary challenges would be better traced and accordingly overcome.

2. A Glimpse At Some Common Features Of Abrahamic Religions

As the source of Semitic religions is same, many similarities are easily seen in these three religions over different perspectives. Some of them are mentioned below:

2.1.Divine Scriptures

The Torah, Bible, and Qur'an are the three holy books of Semitic religions that set the foundations of their beliefs and practices. The scripture given to Jewish people is the Torah. And the holy book of Christian is Bible is believed to be the divine scripture given to the Christians. The noble Qur'an is the holy Book of Allah given to Muslims. To conclude, all three Abrahamic faiths share common premise in terms of having scriptures from divine source. It is hence quite reasonable that they interact with each other in a more concordant manner rather than despising themselves.

2.2.Religious Law

Some common religious legislations and laws can be found within all three traditions. In Judaism, these laws are called the Halakhah. In Islam they are known as Shari'a, and in Christianity one example from Catholicism is called the Canon Law, which is a body of laws that the Church uses internally to govern. In Judaism, there are religious laws known as the mitzvot, or commandments. In Islam, Shari'a is derived from the Qur'an and the Sunnah (the normative practices and teachings of Muhammad). The laws deal with issues of family that include lawful and unlawful matters, marriage, divorce, custody issues and the rights of human being.

Moreover, other main aspects of Shari'a law include inheritance, contracts, banking and rules of cleanliness and hygiene.

2.3.Charity

Benevolence or Charity is the core of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. It is expected that people share their wealth with those who are needy, poor or helpless. In terms of financial contributions, all three faiths call upon their followers to be socially responsible to one another. Stewardship and care of the earth is also highly valued by all three faiths. To display charity is more than an act of good will; it is an attitude, or way of life, that embodies compassion and love for humanity. These concepts are deeply rooted in all three religions. In addition, synonymous words are used for charity or donations in Semitic religions. Such as zakat system in Islam, tzedakah in Judaism and as well as tithe in Christianity.

2.4.Clergy

All the people of these three religions spontaneously follow their religious leaders and clergy. Rabbis are the religious leaders in Judaism; imams and sheiks are the religious leaders in Islam; as well as, priests, ministers, pastors and bishops are examples of the different clergy in Christian religion. The religious clergy plays various roles in their respective religion or faith. However, in Semitic religion, there are many similar roles and responsibilities for religious leaders. For example, all clergy members lead their congregations in prayer, counsel those in need and perform marriages. In addition, most imams are well versed in Arabic, the language of the Qur'an, while rabbis have studied Hebrew, the language of the Torah. At the same time, many Christian clergy have a working knowledge of Greek or Latin.

2.5.Worship

In general, all these three monotheistic faiths have a specific day of worship. In Judaism, the Sabbath, or day of rest and time of worship, is observed starting Friday night and all of Saturday. For Christen, Sunday is the day of worship when many attend Church services. As well as, Friday is the day of congregational prayer for Muslims. Other forms of worship include prayer. Muslims have a formal prayer that occurs five times a day.

A strikingly similarity found in the three faiths is that each of them has different sects. For example, Reform, Conservative and Orthodox are three branches of Judaism. For Christians there are many religious traditions, a few of which include Catholic, Protestant, Quaker, Baptist, Lutheran and Orthodox. Similarly, in Islam, the two major sects are Sunni and Shi'a.

2.6.Prophets and Beliefs

The common principles of all three faiths are the belief in one God. There is a belief in angels, prophets, and an afterlife. Significantly, all three faiths believe the Messiah will return to the region from where these religions originated. Moreover, in all three faiths, prophets were the chosen ones who had laid the foundation, spread the word of God, and led congregations. The three faiths share the belief in the same prophets, like Abraham, Noah, Moses, Jacob and Joseph, to name a few.

2.7.Circumcision

The action of circumcising of a young boy, man or woman is practiced by Jews and Muslims. For both it is a religious obligation. This is not a mandatory practice in Christianity; however, many Christian males are circumcised. This is a more common practice for Christian males in the United States than in other parts of the world.

2.8.Food restrictions

Having halal or pure food is required very strongly by the religious laws in all religions especially in Judaism Christianity and Islam. All prohibit the consumption of pork. In Judaism, kashrut is the name given to the body of Jewish laws dealing with what can be eaten, which is commonly known as kosher or real or pure. Permitted foods in Islam are known as halal. Like Judaism, they must meet a certain criteria as outlined by the Qur'an and Sunnah. It is upheld by the three faiths that all foods allowable by religious observance be consumed in moderation.

2.9.Fasting

As we observed in Semitic religions, some form of fasting can be found in all three religious traditions. In Judaism, one of the most important days of the year is Yom Kippur, or the Day of Atonement. On this day, followers begin a 25-hour period of fasting that initiates the eve of Yom Kippur. In Islam, the month of Ramadan is a time of fasting and reflection. Muslims refrain from

eating and drinking from sunrise to sunset for the duration of the month. Finally, Lent is a time when Christians prepare for Easter. The Lenten season is a time of reflection, repentance, and fasting. Many Christians fast by refraining from certain foods or activities during the 40 days of Lent that lead up to Easter.

2.10. Holidays

There are many celebrations and days of remembrance in all three religious traditions. These are times of reflection, personal growth, community gatherings, family, and celebration. While the three traditions may celebrate or mourn different occasions, they are unified in that they all honor their religious history and significant days. Some major holidays in Semitic religion, for example, the Jewish people celebrate different kinds of religious festivals as like, Passover, Hanukkah, Purim, Rosh Hashanah as a Jewish New Year, and Yom Kippur. And the Christian society also celebrate Christmas day on 25 December and Palm Sunday. Similarly, the Muslims celebrate two major religious festivals such as Eid al-Adha which is known as the feast of Sacrifice marking the end of the pilgrimage to Makkah, known as Hajj and another is Eid al-Fitr marking the end of the holy month of Ramadan. And also the day Ashura is celebrated by Muslim in which many important cosmic events took place.

3. Position of peace in three Abrahamic faiths

3.1. Definition of Peace

Before we detail the position of peace in the Abrahamic faiths, it would be suitable to define the term peace. Peace, as Oxford Dictionary defines, is a situation or a period of time in which there is no war or violence in a country or an area, state of being calm, of quietude and living in friendship with somebody.

3.1.1. Islam

According to the history of religions, Islam is the youngest revealed religion of the world. It is in fact not a new religion, but a revised and enlarged edition of eternal Divine religion based on Unity of God (*Tawheed*), medium of Prophets (Risalah) and the concept of After-life (*Akhirah*). Islam shares these three fundamentals with the other living Abrahamic faiths i.e. Judaism and Christianity. This is explicit from the Quranic text itself:

“The same religion has He established for you as that which He enjoined on Noah—that which we have sent by inspiration to you and that which we enjoined on Abraham, Moses, and Jesus.” (Al-Quran 42:13)

The word Islam deriving from Arabic root ‘*silm*’ connotes peace. One of the attributes of Allah described in the Quran is ‘As Salaam’, which means peace and security. In the Quran, divine guidance is likened to the path of peace. (Al-Quran, 5:16). According to Islam, paradise is the ideal human abode, and is thus called ‘home of peace’. It is also mentioned that people of paradise will greet each other with the word, ‘salaam’ (peace).

Islamic primary texts the Holy Quran and the Hadith of Prophet (PBUH) are rich with instructions and exhortations for peace. Let’s have a look at few verses from the Quran: “Allah calls to the home of peace”. (Al-Quran; 10:25) “Disturb not the peace of the earth after the fair ordering thereof by God.” (Al-Quran 7:56& 7:85)

In Islam, the right to life is an absolute value: “He who kills a soul unless it be (in legal punishment) for murder or for causing disorder and corruption on the earth will be as if he had killed all humankind; and he who saves a life will be as if he had saved the lives of all humankind.” (Al-Quran 5:32)

Now let’s turn to the precedence from the Sunnah of Holy Prophet of Islam (PBUH):

The prophet of Islam (PBUH) was a man of peace and reconciliation. He urged his Companions to ask God for peace. For the prophet’s main task was the communication of divine message to the people and an atmosphere of peace and good will was essential to perform this duty. “God grants to peace what he doesn’t grant to violence” (Muslim: 2593). “Do well to those who harm you” (Al-Tirmidhi).

It becomes thus amply clear that Islam is primarily a religion of peace having nothing to do with violence. Or the violence prevalent in the contemporary world has no sanction from the Quran or the life of the Prophet of Islam (PBUH). So, Islam is the religion of peace. It therefore enjoins peace even in war when the enemy is inclined to peace. “If the enemy is inclined towards peace you should also incline towards peace and trust in God.” (Al-Quran 8:61)

3.1.2. Christianity

In Christian religion, the word peace is used in the Bible in a very wide sense. It takes in the wellbeing and health of people, as well as the absence of violence. The teachings of Jesus Christ are enshrined in the New Testament. The Jesus' well known 'Sermon on the Mount' goes as: "To him who strikes you on the one cheek, offer the other also. And from him, who takes away your cloak, do not withhold your tunic either. Give to everyone who asks of you. And from him, who takes away your goods, do not ask them back." (6:29-30)

Ethical stands in Christianity, a large part of Jesus' teachings was ethical. When an earnest young man asked him, "what should I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus Christ answered in accordance with the old law and said, "Do not kill, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not bear false witness and do not defraud. Honor your father and your mother".

3.1.3. Judaism

Peace is a concept that is central to Judaism. Along with truth and justice, it is one of the three key Jewish values. The Hebrew word for peace is shalom which is derived from one of the names of God, meaning "complete" or "whole". The history of Judaism goes back more than three thousand years. According to Jewish traditions, when the Israelites left Egypt and reached the Sinai desert, God gave them the fundamental Ten Commandments that were to govern their social existence. These Laws and commandments are in fact meant to serve as guides to fostering a good relationship with God and other people. The 10 Commandments/Decalogue of Judaism among others, include (6-10): {Deuteronomy 5:6-21) & Exodus, 20:13} "Honor your father and mother, you shall not kill, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal and you shall not covet your neighbor's house, his wife, his servants, his animals or anything he owns."

4. Concept of Peace in World's Major Religions

We have endeavored to find out from holy texts of major religions regarding their teachings on peace, restrictions on violence and the social phenomena that contribute to creation of peaceful atmosphere among individuals and communities.

In Hinduism, Peace is an essential part of Hinduism. A Quotation from Valmiki Ramayan says: “A superior being doesn’t return evil for evil.” “Speak the truth, speak what is pleasant, but don’t speak the unpleasant truth”. Manusmriti 4:138. A Vedic Prayer: “May there be peace in the heavens, Peace in the atmosphere, peace on earth, Let there be coolness in water, healing in the herbs; And peace radiating from trees, Let there be harmony in the planets, and in the stars, And perfection in eternal knowledge! May everything in the universe be at peace! Let peace pervade everywhere at all times! May I experience that peace with my own heart” (YajurVed, 36:17). Ahimsa (a very important belief in Hinduism) means trying to fight injustice and evil but without using any physical force. Bhagavad Gita (2:31) says: “Think thou also of thy duty and do not waver. There is no greater good for a warrior than to fight in a righteous war.”

According to Buddhism, there are the basic moral philosophies or an ethical way of life in this religion. “One must renounce all desires and all thoughts of lust, bitterness and cruelty. One must harm no living creature. One must abstain from all killing. One must work in an occupation that benefits others and harms none.” And the five commandments of Buddha or Panchshila) includes; “Do not kill any living being, not take what is not given to you, do not speak untruth, do not take intoxicating drinks and do not commit adultery.” He also stated that, "Hatred is never appeased by hatred. Hatred is only appeased by Love (or, non-enmity). This is an eternal law." (Verse 5/423) "There is no evil equal to hatred and no spiritual practice equal to forbearance. Therefore, one ought to develop forbearance, by various means, with great effort." (Ch. 6, verse 2).

The religion of Jaina is a living faith in Indian sub-continent and its teachings claim to be of universal application. The system of Jaina ethics is optimized in the principle of three Jewels (ratnatraya) that include: the Right faith, Right knowledge, and Right conduct. These are the major contributory factors for achievement of a state of peace. There goes the final saying of Mahavira: “truth, non-violence and penance are the root sources of religion”. As well as, in Sikhism, there is a sanction for just war against oppression. Sikhism also approves of any action to promote human rights and harmony. Guru Nanak (the first Guru) wrote: “No one is my enemy; No one is a foreigner; with all I am at peace. God within us renders us incapable of hate and prejudice.”

5. Multi-religious approach for world peace

As seen above, almost all the religions have common ideals of love, of benefiting humanity through spiritual practice, and of making their followers better human beings. All religions teach moral precepts for perfecting the functions of mind, body, and speech. All teach us not to lie or steal or take others' lives, and so on. However on the contrary to such noble teachings, under the aegis of religious claims, there have been major conflicts once again on the rise over the last few decades.

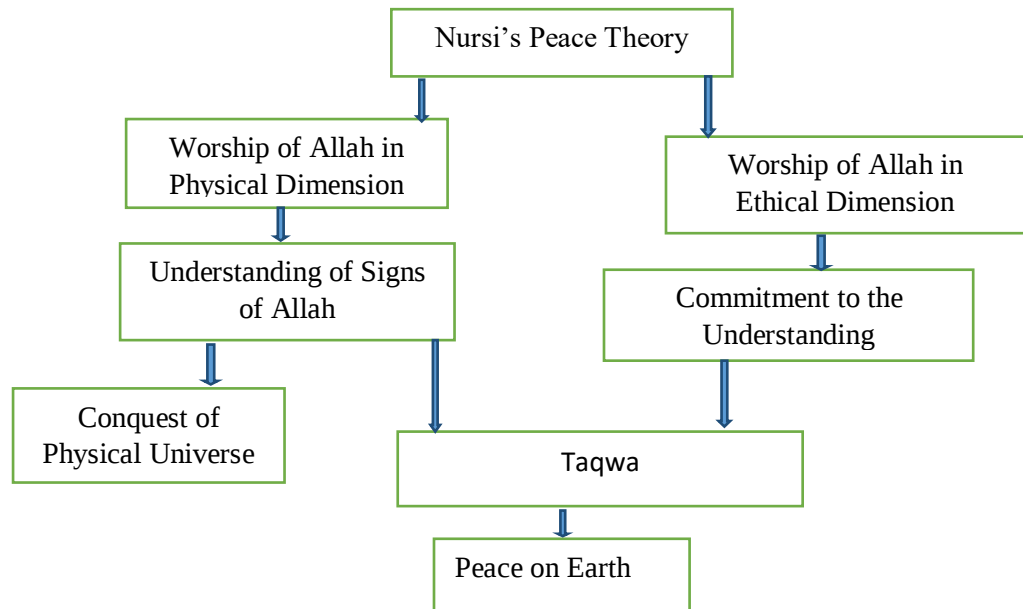
Hence, referring back to the challenges facing religious practitioners who are concerned with world peace, it would be better to promote interfaith understanding so as to create a workable degree of unity among all religions. This may be achieved in part by respecting each other's beliefs and by emphasizing our common concern for human well-being. We must bring about a viable consensus on basic spiritual values that touch every human heart and enhance general human happiness. This means we must emphasize the common denominator of all faiths' humanitarian ideals. These steps will enable us to act both individually and collectively to create the necessary spiritual conditions for world peace.

To sum up, all the different religions should strive towards bettering religious understanding of their respective followers which may enable them to develop a tolerative and respectful attitude towards others' religions. It is from this perspective that if all religions make the betterment of humanity their main concern, then they can easily work together in harmony for world peace.

6. Nursi's Peace Theory

Said Nursi spent his every single moment in establishing true peace not only in his own society but also in the world which have been reflected in his speech and writings. He devoted his life to seek the pleasure of Allah through promoting peaceful existence among the mankind irrespective of culture, race, place, country and so on.

Based on Nursi's views on peace theory that can only bring the peace in the globe, the structured of peace theory is mentioned bellow as a graph:



According to Nursi (Resale-i-Nur) and based on the above chart, the first requirement for peace in the world is to worship Allah in true sense as He is the Creator (al-Qur'an: 2:30-34), Lord and only He should be worshiped. None is there who can be worshiped besides Him (al-Qur'an: 9:129). The worship can be from two dimensions, i.e., Physical and ethical. The physical dimension of worshipping Allah leads people to the understanding of His Signs in this physical world and ethical dimension of worship leads people to the understanding that they are the servants of the Creator and He only should be worshiped. Once we have the understanding of the signs of this physical world, we do have the conquest in this world. Allah created mankind as His *khalifah* on earth (al-Qur'an: 2:30), then he made a promise with the mankind that those who believe and perform righteously, Allah will give them *khalifah* (stewardship) on earth (al-Qur'an: 24:55). Moreover, both of these understandings lead a person to the piousness (taqwa) and taqwa can only bring inner and outer peace in this worldly life.

7. Relevance of Nurseitic Approach to comparative religious discourse

7.1. Interfaith Dialogue

Interfaith dialogue, as the discipline of comparative religion suggests, is an important vehicle that would allow the people of different faiths to sit together, to explore common features and teachings of their faiths and apply them in their practical lives. Such approaches help them know

the practicalities of others' religions and hence develop a sense of accommodation and toleration towards others' faiths.

Viewed in this way, it is quite sensible to maintain that Nursi was a man of inclusion who could have offered a sizable portion of his struggling life to cultivate a climate of interfaith dialogue. In so doing, he is seen to have had a good number of steps which clearly shows his inclination to the facilitation of the inclusive religious discussion. For instance, during his lifetime, Nursi reached out to Christian leaders. Two prominent examples that are cited are (a) Nursi sent a collection of his works to Pope Pius XII in 1950; and (b) he visited the Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras in Istanbul in 1953 to request cooperation between Muslims and Christians against atheism (Michel 2005b: 36f).

7.2. Religious pluralism

Religious pluralism offers a host of meanings. The prominent one is that all the religions are valid. As a practicing and intellectually engaging Muslim mind, Nursi was aware of such understanding. However he is found to have maintained a certain exception to the plain meaning of religious pluralism. He views that Islam is the only surviving true religion and all other religions are false or at least left distorted.

It may sound paradoxical for Nursi to be related to pluralism. Yes, indeed. But argument unfolds the justification. In fact, he thinks that though Islam is the only true faith a Muslim is in no way allowed to force the people of other religions to accept Islam. As part of Divine plan, he contends, all other faiths have been put as a test for human beings. A soul may accept any faith irrespective of its reality or reject it. The living of non-Muslims in pre-modern Muslims Governances across Islamic Civilizational history is a clear evidence to the claim. In that sense, Islam recognizes the validity of other religions. It is thus quite arguable to relate religious pluralism to Said Nursi who strived hard to propagate the teaching of Islamic openness to other religions.

8. Conclusion and recommendations

As observed above all religions share some common teachings in terms of establishing peace and cultivating individual minds in line with noble virtues and precepts. Hence a close study of different religious scriptures yields the proposition that lack of due understanding of respective

religions is principally responsible for the happening of religious conflicts and fanaticisms. Hence the author is inclined to conclude that only a thorough realization of teachings through exact understanding of respective faiths would be of greater use to deal with the faith based conflicts. And Said Nursi's accommodative approach would facilitate to ensure the conviction of global peace, mutual understanding and coexistence. With that caveat in mind, the present work is tempted to offer a couple of recommendations which would prove quite effective in terms of the realization of global peace.

8.1.Recommendations

In the light of the above discourse, the following recommendations are hereby proffered to promote peace, security and sustainable development through religious education, multi-faith coexistence. We have to take some practical steps to establish religion based peace and harmony world-wide.

1. The radical reform of education: In the present world, the biggest enemy of religion is secularism, this secular education system is the biggest and main obstacles to keeping people away from their religious rituals, religious principles and ideals. Therefore, the education system should be desecularized and reethicalized which would allow the students to equip themselves with better understanding of respective religions and noble values.
2. Multi-religious studies should be introduced and mandated upto a certain level of education which permits them to grow an inclusive attitude towards other faiths and help them to dispel any misconception over others' faiths.
3. As Islam is the major player in the context of present world, a comprehensive teachings of Islamic religious treatment may be disseminated among its followers especially and the people of other faiths generally which allow them to know Islam with a sense of inclusivity and, easily respect each other's socio cultural practices. It would be hoped that such understandings may trigger the conviction of both local and global peace.

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