

# Universalism in Islam

By Prof Mohammad Rafi

## Friday feature

ISLAM has a unique role to play being vehemently committed to salvation and reward in both the worlds. It laid the foundation of universalism. For the first time it proclaimed that every great religion came from God, every nation was given a warning. If this Quranic teaching is accepted, there would be mutual understanding and tolerance leading to a spirit of co-existence so essential for peace and prosperity.

Islam is universal in its outlook. It seeks the welfare of all humanity and not of Muslims alone. Tolerance is the essence of Islam as it is the only religion which preaches total respect for all religions. It is a great factor for unification and its chief object is to create harmony among the discordant and divergent units of humanity and never has the need for such harmony been more evident than today.

The Quran does not appeal to the passing emotions of man; nor does it stoop to humour him. It faces the problems of life in a realistic manner and offers practical solutions for them. 'Return a bad act by one that is beautiful and good. It may be that he, between whom and you there is enmity, becomes your bosom friend (41:34). At another place, a Momin is described as 'one who repels wrong with right (28:54).

The Quran categorically says that 'Allah has conferred dignity and respect on all humanity (17:70). At many places it lays stress on the fact that all human beings belong to one community (44:33, 2: 213).

While the western world is happy in its so-called clash of civilizations and their claim as the torch-bearers of human rights, it must remember that tolerance and respect of all humanity are virtues amply highlighted by Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him).

Under the Islamic system, it is incumbent upon every Muslim to establish justice and

balance (57: 25).

This is meant for all citizens. Furthermore, to establish the freedom of conscience, everyone, according to Quranic teachings, has the right to choose his own faith and no one should force his religious beliefs on others by persecution or otherwise. Muhammad ensured the protection of life and property of the followers of other religions in the same way as he did in the case of a Muslim.

According to Ameer Ali, 'No faith has given to its subjects a nobler guarantee than is to be found in the following words of the

Islam is universal in its outlook. It seeks welfare of entire humanity and not of Muslims alone. Tolerance is the essence of Islam and it preaches total respect for all religions. It is a great factor for unification and its chief object is to create harmony among the discordant and divergent sections of mankind and never has the need for such harmony been more evident than it is today.

Nabi: "To the Christians of Najran and the surrounding territories the security of God and the pledge of His Prophet are extended for their lives, their religion and property. No bishop shall be removed from the bishopric, nor any monk from his monastery, nor any priest from his priesthood and they shall continue to enjoy everything."

Muslims and non-Muslims are absolutely equal in the eyes of law. "Their blood" said Ali, the fourth caliph, "is like our blood". This spirit of toleration and co-existence was observed everywhere under Muslim rule. After the conquest of Egypt, Caliph Umar preserved intact the churches. Muslim rulers in India granted subsidies and estates for the upkeep of Hindu temples.

The last Surah of the Quran reflects God Almighty as the cherisher, nourisher and judge of the whole mankind. Muslims have

to realize that God forbids them to kill or destroy. They have been raised for the benefit of mankind (3: 108). Concerning the non-Muslims, the Quran says 'If a pagan asks thee for asylum, grant it to him so that he may hear the word of Allah and then escort him to where he can be secure' (9:6).

How would the perpetrators of crimes in mosques, imambargahs, temples and churches reflect on this ayat. If anyone slew a person, it would be as if he slew the whole mankind (5: 32).

The real interests of the individual are not interwoven from, but are interwoven with those of mankind. They are not anti-theoretical but, are identical with, each other. Man, therefore realizes himself by furthering the interest of mankind.

Sectarianism is not allowed in Islam "as for those who divide their religion and break up into sects, you (Nabi) have nothing to do with them (6:159) 'Be not amongst those who split up their religion and become sects — each sect rejoicing in that which it has (30: 32).

Muslims have been commanded never to deviate from the path of 'Adl' and 'Ihsan'. 'Adl' means to give each man his due and 'Ihsan' means to actively contribute to make good the deficiency

of others. A society based on these values would definitely be a tolerant one and would ultimately end all prejudices, exploitations and injustice. Quran tells us to be strictly just even in our dealings with the enemies: 'O You who believe, be steadfast witnesses for Allah in equity and let not the enmity of any people seduce you that you deal not justly. Deal justly' (8: 8).

Islam not only tolerates the followers of other religions, but also bestows on them all the rights of humanity and solemnly undertakes to protect and guard their places of worship. 'And if Allah did not repel some people by others, cloisters, churches and synagogues and mosques in which Allah's name is oft remembered would have been pulled down and surely Allah will help him who helps Him in this regard' (22:40).