

*O Muslims, we prefer you to the Byzantines though they are of our faith, because you keep better faith with us and are more merciful to us, and refrain from doing us injustice and your rule over us is better than theirs, for they have robbed us of our goods and our homes.*

The people of Emessa closed the gates of their city against the army of Hercules and told the Muslims that they preferred Muslim government and justice to the injustice and oppression of the Greeks.

3- Mu'awiyah (661-680) employed Christians very heavily in his service, and the other members of the reigning house followed his example. Christians frequently held high posts at court.

4- During the days of Umar Ibn Abd-AlAziz (an Umayyad Caliph), some Muslims took a church to enlarge the Grand Mosque at Damascus. Caliph Umar Ibn Ab-alAziz ordered the demolition of that part of the mosque and the restoration of the Church. However, the Christians preferred money as a settlement.

5- Non-Muslims were given the citizenship of the Muslim country in which they lived, including the right to vote at the election of the Muslim state. However, they were exempt from being drafted into the Muslim army. They were exempt from paying taxation of Zakat (Religious Tithing), while Muslims were not.

6- During the days for Haroon Al-Rashid, Dr. Gabriel, the personal physician of the Caliph, was a Nestorian Christian and derived a yearly income of 800,000 dirham from his private property. In addition he received an emolument of 280,000 dirham a year for his attendance to the Caliph. The second physician, also a Christian, received 22,000 dirham a year.

## **V. LATER HISTORY**

Christians and Jews lived peacefully with Muslims. Non-Muslims flourished among Muslims. None were killed in the name of Islam. The mere presence of a large number of Christians and Jews in the Muslims world is a sign of tolerance among Muslims to Non-Muslims. Jews fled from Spain during the Inquisition and Muslims welcomed them in their lands. They protected them and helped them to establish themselves and they indeed flourished.

During the occupation of the Middle East by the Crusaders, the local Christians were treated as second class citizens by their European brethren. They could not tolerate the insults and humiliation. Therefore, they helped the Muslims rid themselves of the crusaders from the area, mainly Jerusalem and Palestine.

Salahuddin (Saladdin) was able to liberate Jerusalem from the occupation of the Crusaders. He was kind to the knights and their soldiers. He treated them generously, especially those who were knights. He considered them as political leaders who should be treated with honor and dignity. They appreciated his kindness, generosity, and fair treatment. Some of them later accepted Islam.

Michael the Elder, Jacobite Patriarch of Antioch, writing in the latter half of the twelfth century, approved the actions of his co-religionist. He saw the finger of God in the Arab conquest even after the Eastern Churches experienced five centuries of Muhammadan rule.

## **VI. CONTEMPORARY TREATMENT OF NON-MUSLIMS**

Non-Muslims flourished in the Muslim world in all aspects of life, even after the abolition of

colonialism. Anywhere a person goes in both the Arab world and the non-Arab Muslim world, he will see Christians of all denominations and Jews.

They live freely in the Muslim community and thrive in the fields of religion, education, economics, politics, health, industry, farming, housing, banking, festivities, and social services. No one is denied, stifled, or harassed.

The contemporary Muslim world has a large number of Christians in the highest political levels of the government. During the crisis in Iraq invasion of Kuwait, it was found that there were six Christians who were holding positions of ministers in the government of Saddam Hussein. Similar things are to be said about Jordan, Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Algeria, Sudan, and many other Muslim countries.

For more information contact

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# NON MUSLIMS IN MUSLIM HISTORY

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## IN THE NAME OF GOD, MOST GRACIOUS, MOST MERCIFUL

By Dr. Ahmad Sakr

### 1. GENERAL

This paper is devoted to a special group of Non-Muslims, namely those who are called Christians (Catholics, Protestants, others) and Jews. Such groups are considered in Islam to be People of the Book. People of the Book are looked upon by Muslims as God-fearing, God-loving, and God-conscious.

Although Islam is the most recent religion sent by God to mankind, it is a complete and total way of life. Islam, Christianity, and Judaism are rooted in the Abrahamic Religion. Muslims are to respect, honor, protect and defend non-Muslims present in the Islamic state. They are to see that non-Muslims are living in peace and harmony within Muslim territories.

### II. DURING THE DAYS OF THE PROPHET

#### **A. As far as the Jews are concerned**

1- During the life of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW), the Jews in Madina had a synagogue and an educational institute by the name of Bait Al-Madras.

He preserved them as well as he protected them.

2- The Prophet of Islam made several treaties with the Jews. One of the messages that he wrote is the following:

*In the name of God, most Gracious, ever Merciful. This message is from Muhammad, messenger of God. Verily, whoever follows us from the Jews shall have the help and the aid; and shall neither be victim of injustice, nor taken vengeance upon. The Jews of the children of Awf are safe with the Faithful. They have their religion and the Muslims theirs and*

*themselves, except those who oppress or sin; they will forfeit themselves and their families. The Jews of Baani Al-Najjar, of Bani Al-Harith, of Bani Saaedah, of Bani Aws and of Bani Belanah are Jews like the others.*

#### **B. As far as the Christians are concerned**

1- The Prophet honored the Yemen Christians of Najran who visited him in his own mosque in Madina. The Christians prayed according to Christian tradition while inside the mosque, and the Prophet and his followers prayed in Muslim tradition.

2- The Prophet respected the autonomy of the Christian churches. The nomination and appointment of bishops and priests were left to the Christian community itself.

3- Prophet Mohammad prompted cooperation between Muslims and Christians in the political arena as well. The Prophet selected a non-Muslim and delegated him to be his ambassador to Negus, the king of Ethiopia. The name of that ambassador was Amr-idn-Umayyah-ad-Damri.

4- During the days of the Prophet, there were two super powers, the Persians and the Romans. The Romans adopted Christianity, while the Persians adopted Godless beliefs. These two super powers were at war with each other. During that period, Muslims were a small minority in the Arabian Peninsula. They prayed to Almighty God that the Romans would win the war against the Atheistic community. The feelings and the beliefs of the Muslims were based on the fact that the Romans were part of the People of the Book. (See Quran Chapter 30-Verses1-7)

5- The Prophet (SAW) sent a message to the Monks of Saint Catherine in Mount Sinai. The English Translation of that document is as follows:

*This is a message written by Muhammad Ibn Abdullah, as a covenant to those who adopt Christianity, far and near, we are behind them. Verily, I defend them by myself, the servants, the helpers, and my followers, because Christians are my citizens and by Allah! I hold out against anything that displeases them. No compulsion is to be on them. Neither are their judges to be changed from their jobs, nor their monks from their monasteries. No one is to destroy a house of their religion, to damage it, or to carry anything from it to the Muslims' houses. Should anyone take any of these, he would spoil God's covenant, and disobey his Prophet. Verily, they are only allies and have my secure charter against all that they hate. No one is to force them to travel or to oblige to fight. The Muslims are to fight for them. If a female Christian is married to a Muslim, this is not to take place without her own wish. She is not to be prevented from going to her church to pray. Their churches are to be respected. They are neither to be prevented from repairing them nor the sacredness of their covenants. No one of the nations is to disobey this covenant till the Day Of Judgment and the end of the World.*

### III. DURING THE DAYS OF UMAR.

1- The second Caliph (religious leader of Muslim people), Umar, asked his Governor in Syria to recruit a Greek person who could put the accounts of their revenues in order. He also appointed a Christian to head his administration.

2- Umar respectfully declined to pray inside the church of resurrection in Jerusalem, but he did pray outside. He was concerned that his followers would take it over from Christians, if he prayed inside.

3- Muslims were given the key to the Church of the Basilica in Jerusalem during the days of the Caliph Umar. The Muslims are still taking care of it today.

4- During the time of Caliph Umar, certain Muslims had taken a piece of land belonging to a Jew. They constructed a mosque on it. Umar ordered the demolition of the mosque and the restoration of the land to the Jew.

5- When Jerusalem was submitted to Caliph Umar, an agreement was made between Umar and the local Christians. The agreement goes as follows:

*In the name of god, the Merciful, the Compassionate! This is the security which grants to the people of Elia. He grants to all, whether sick or sound, security for their lives, their possessions, their churches and their crosses, and for all that concerns their religion. Their churches shall not be changed into dwelling places, nor destroyed, neither shall they nor their appurtenances, be in any way diminished, nor the crosses of the inhabitants nor aught of their possessions, nor shall any constraints be put upon them in the matter of their faith, nor shall any one of them be harmed.*

### IV. DURING THE UMAIYADS AND ABBASIDS

1- Non-Muslims held the rank of political ministers, administrative positions, and memberships in executive councils. Non-Muslims were given judicial autonomy, not only for personal status, but for all affairs of their lives: civil, penal, and others. During the Abbasid Caliphs, Christian Patriarchs and Jewish Hakhams (Rabbis) held the highest positions in the Islamic state. They held the position of advisors in the cabinet of the Caliph himself.

2- When the Muslim army reached the Valley of Jordan and Abu Ubaydah pitched his camp at Fihl, the Christian inhabitants of the country wrote to the Arabs, saying: