CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM RELATIONS (Quranic Perspective)
Abdollatif Ahmadi Ramchahi, Mohd Yakub Zolkifli
Mohd Yusoff
Post Doctorate Researcher, Center of Quranic Research (CQR),
University of Malaya
Directors of CQR& Dean of Faculty of Islamic Studies-UM
magapu2005@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT
This article aims to study Christian-Muslim relations by discussing and finding out the examples of great relationships between these two groups during the past fourteen centuries. It additionally highlights how the holy books (the Qur’an and the Bible) respect and admire each other. The research then focuses on ten fundamental Qur’anic foundations which could build the Muslim-Christian relations. So the article deals with a very important issue that related to human relations in general and religious relations in particular. This article approaches these issues using the method of descriptive analysis.

Keywords: Relation, Christians, Muslims, Qur’anic Foundations, Qur’an, Bible.

82. Thou shall certainly find the Jews and those who associate partners with ALLAH to be the most vehement of men in enmity against the believers. And thou shall assuredly find those who say, ‘We are Christians,’ to be the nearest of them in friendship to the believers. That is because among them are savants and monks and because they are not arrogant. (Quran 5: 82)

1.0 Introduction
In all religions, the main commandment is for people to love and respect one another and that by getting to know one another, hatred would be eliminated. The question is how to achieve this lofty goal. Actually humanity lives today in a “global village,” where no people or nation can live in isolation and be indifferent to what goes on elsewhere. In the global village everybody has the right to live in peace and freedom by respecting the laws, rules, and rights of others, and by respecting the beliefs and religions of others.
Religion still plays a vital role in shaping people’s attitudes and influencing their behaviours. The good relationships between religions help us to reach a peaceful and freed life. Nowadays, two big global religions, Islam and Christianity, comprise nearly half the world's population, and have the most influence in the lives of people all over the world. Thus relations between them will change the processes of the world.

The nature of the relationship between Christians and Muslims is significant to the whole human family. People have been in contact with one another for more than fourteen centuries. There were great times and there were times, tolerance, respect and cooperation on one side, and murder, intolerance, and hostility on the other. But history indicates when two religions were in great relations, they could reach a peaceful life and they could develop their societies.

History also tells us that these two religions are more closed in relations than others, so this may be one of the meanings which Allah (swt) informed us in Surah 5: 82 which was mentioned previously. In this paper, we are going to analyse the great relationship through history between Muslims and Christians, and how these relations and communications were built and should be rebuilt.

2. Historical Review On Affirmative Muslim-Christian Relations

Islam is the only religion to express love for Jesus (pbuh), after Christianity. It is an obligation on Muslims to love Jesus (pbuh), as no one who disrespects him would ever go to heaven. Allah says:

“Say ye, ‘We believe in ALLAH and what has been revealed to us, and what was revealed to Abraham and Ishmael, and Isaac and Jacob and his children and what was given to Moses and Jesus, and what was given to all other Prophets from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them; and to HIM we submit ourselves’” (Qur’ān 2: 136)

As a matter of fact, Jesus (pbuh) is expressly mentioned 28 times in the Qur’ān, and there are about 90 verses spread across 15 chapters of the Qur’ān that refer to Jesus (pbuh), and three of them, Aale-Imran, Al-Maida, and Mariam, are so named because of their references to Jesus (pbuh) and his work. The Qur’ān asserts that Jesus (pbuh) is one of God's greatest Messengers to mankind and mentions that he was strengthened by the "Holy Spirit". Allah says:

“And verily WE gave Moses the Book and caused Messengers to follow in his footsteps after him; and to Jesus, son of Mary, WE gave manifest Signs, and strengthened him with the Spirit of Holiness. Will you, then, every time a
Messenger comes to you with what you yourselves desire not, behave arrogantly and treat some as liars and slay others?” (Qur’ān 2: 87)

The Qur’ān states that Jesus (p.b.u.h) and his mother are a "sign for the whole world". Allah says:

“And remember her who guarded her chastity, so WE breathed into her of Our Word and WE made her and her son a Sign for all peoples.” (Qur’ān 21: 91)

The Qur’ān confirms that the Gospel (Al-Injeel) is the Book of God. Allah says:

“And WE caused Jesus, son of Mary, to follow in their footsteps, fulfilling that which was revealed before him in the Torah; and WE gave him the Gospel which contained guidance and light, fulfilling that which was revealed before him in the Torah; and a guidance and an admonition for the God-fearing.” (Qur’ān 5: 46)

- Jesus (p.b.u.h) is believed to have performed many miracles. Allah says:

“When ALLAH will say, ‘O Jesus son of Mary, remember MY favor upon thee and upon thy mother; When I strengthened thee with the spirit of holiness so that thou didst speak to the people in the cradle and when of middle age; and when I taught thee the Book and the wisdom and the Torah and the Gospel; and when thou didst fashion a creation out of clay, in the likeness of a bird, by MY command; then thou didst breathe into it a new spirit and it became a soaring being by MY command; and thou didst heal the night-blind and the leprous by MY command; and when thou didst raise the dead by MY command; and when I restrained the Children of Israel from putting thee to death when thou didst come to them with clear Signs; and those who disbelieved from among them said, ‘This is nothing but clear deception.” (Qur’ān 5: 110)

As can be seen in the above verses, the Qur’ān describes Jesus (p.b.u.h) in the best way, and states that he is one of the greatest Messengers to mankind. So this can be the main point for relationship between Muslims and Christians.

Without any doubt the name of Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h), his characteristics, and attributions are in the Bible. In this part some traditions attributed to Prophet Jesus (p.b.u.h), in which that great prophet talks about the Chief of all Prophets, Muhammad (p.b.u.h) are presented. The traditions are naturally in the form of prophecies, since Prophet Jesus (p.b.u.h) lived before the
time of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). The traditions are from the Gospel of Barnabas compiled by a 13th century Italian on the basis of early Christian sources and other Gospels.

- “after me shall come the Splendor of all the prophets who shall shed light upon the ambiguities of all that the prophets have said, because he is the Messenger of God.”
- Jesus also said: “I therefore say unto you, that the Messenger of God is a splendor that shall give gladness to nearly all that God has made, for he is adorned with the spirit of understanding and counsel, the spirit of wisdom and might, of fear and love, prudence and temperance; he is adorned with the spirit of charity and mercy, of justice and piety and gentleness and patience, which he has received from God three times more than He has given to all His creatures combined. Blessed will be the time when he shall come to the world! Believe me that I have seen him and have done him reverence, even as every prophet has seen him. And when I saw him my soul was filled with consolation, saying, O Admirable One! God be with thee, and may he make me worthy to untie thy shoe-latchet for obtaining this I shall be a great prophet and holy one of God.”
- He also mentioned: "As for me, I am now come to the world to prepare the way for the Messenger of God, who shall bring salvation to the world. By the living God, in whose presence my soul stands, I am not the Savior whom all the tribes of the earth expect."
- And when priest asked him that: "How shall the Savior be called, and what sign shall reveal his coming?" Jesus answered: "The name of the Savior shall be the Admirable One, for; God himself gave him the name when he had created his soul, and placed it in celestial splendor." (The Gospel of Barnabas, 1907: 18-22)
- John 16:7.” Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is expedient for you that I go away, for if I go not away, the comforter (Parakletos) will not come unto you, but if I go, I will send him unto you”. (The Gospel of Barnabas, 1907: 1054)

If we look at the main historical sources, we can find many examples of great relationships between Muslims and Christians during the past fourteen centuries. History has indicated that when two groups understand each other correctly, the relationship becomes more possible and life becomes more beneficial. Therefore in this chapter we are going to revise history and show briefly some examples of good relations between them.
**Example 1:** The relationship between the Muslims and Christians of Habasha and King Negus

The first example is a victorious Muslim-Christian relation in the early Muslim era. It was a Christian king in a predominantly Christian land who gave the small, persecuted community of new Muslims at the beginning of Prophet Muhammad’s mission. The Muslims sought refuge in Habasha, in modern day Ethiopia, after suffering starvation and torture at the hands of polytheistic Makkans. Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) said about King Negus and Habasha: "a king rules without injustice, a land of truthfulness". (Ibn Hesham, *the Life of Prophet*, Vol.2: 164)

Muslims were welcomed, protected and lived in peace with the Christians of Habasha. But this did not sit well with the Makkans who did not want to see them leave Makkah or want the message of Islam to flourish in peace. They sent special envoys with gifts and lies about the Muslims to convince King Negus to send the Muslims back to Makkah. They told the king that this "new" faith took pride in insulting not just ancestral Makkan beliefs, but the beliefs of the Christians as well.

King Negus ordered that the leader of the Muslim community come to his court and explain Islam’s position. J‘afar ibn Abī Ṭālib entered and not only did he eloquently explained the message of Islam and the persecution of those who accepted this truthful message, he also recited the opening verses of Surah 19 of the Quran, Surah Maryam or Mary, after the king asked him to do so. King Negus listened to the recitation of the Qur’ān in focused attention and said: ‘Surely this Revelation and the Revelation of Jesus were from the same Source.’ Then to the two Makkkan ambassadors, he said, ‘By God, I will not hand over these persons to you. So he returned the gifts of the Quraysh and told them he was not used to taking bribes and the Muslims would remain under his protection. (Goddard, Hugh. *A history of Christian- Muslim relations*: 20-21)

**Example 2:** Christians of the town of Najran and Prophet Muhammad (pbuh).

One of the good examples is the meeting between Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) and the Christians of Najran. This incident happened years after the hijra in 662/1 when the prophet (pbuh) received a delegation of Christians from the town of Najran, the town which was an important center of Monophysite Christian influence in south Arabia. The delegation, according to Ibn Ishaq, was led by three people, the ‘Aqib or leader of the people, their Sayyid or administrator, and their Bishop. The name of the leader was ‘Abd al-Masih, and the Bishop was described as a great
student, with excellent knowledge of the Christian religion, and because of his knowledge had he been honored by the emperors of Byzantium.

The purpose of the visit was essentially political, namely to negotiate a kind of treaty with Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). When the Christian arrived, Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) was praying the afternoon prayer, and when the time came for their prayers the Christians were permitted to pray in the mosque.

Later, when discussion began, the Christians were invited to submit, which they claimed they had already done, the language of submission being somewhat ambiguous since it was not clear whether submission to God or to Muhammad (pbuh) was being called for. Ibn Ishaq recorded that Prophet Muhammad’s response was that their belief that God had a son, their worship of the cross, and their eating pork held them back from submission.

A lengthy Christological discussion followed centering around many of the Qur’ānic verses about Jesus, and at the end of this a challenge was issued, namely that the issue should be decided by the mutual invocation of a curse. After some deliberations, the Christians declined and returned home, preferring to agree to differ peacefully and to be permitted to continue to practice their faith. (Ibn Hesham, vol. 3: 112-116)

Example 3: Umar ibn al-Khattab, Dhimmis, and Jerusalem
Jerusalem and its surrounding territory were and remain holy to Muslims, Christians and Jews. It was during the time of Caliph Umar ibn al-Khattab (634-635) that Muslims first gained leadership of this territory. May Allah be pleased with Umar. The Muslims reaction to this victory is something to remember.

- Omar entered Jerusalem in humility. He walked in with, not him, the Caliph, but his servant comfortably riding on a camel. They had been taking turns walking and riding.
- In the treaty with the Christians of Jerusalem it was provided: the protection is for their lives, and properties, their churches and crosses. Their churches shall not be used for habitation nor shall these be demolished, nor shall injury be done to their crosses.

At one point in Jerusalem, the Christians asked him to pray in their church but he declined. He refused saying that he is afraid that in the future Muslims would use it as an excuse to take over the church for building a mosque. (Mohammad Redha, The Second Caliph Omar ibn Khattab: 164-166)
In general, in the treaties with non-Muslims conducted during the caliphate of Umar it was invariably provided that the life, liberty, and property of the non-Muslims were guaranteed.

The Dhimmis were treated as full citizens of the state. There was to be no discrimination between the Muslims and non-Muslims in the eyes of law. Umar also allowed the Dhimmis to follow their own personal law, and they were free to follow their religious practices. Umar issued strict instructions to his officers. These instructions forbade the Muslims to do any injustice to the Dhimmis. No harm should be done to them in any way.

Even on his death bed, Umar thought of the state’s responsibility to the Dhimmis. In his bequest to his successor, he said: “my bequest to my successor is that covenant with the Dhimmis should be observed faithfully. They should be defended against all invasions. No injustice should be done to them. They should be treated as full-fledged citizens and should enjoy equality before law. Their taxes should be fair, and no burden should be imposed on them which they cannot bear”. (Masud – ul-Hasan, Hadrat- Umar Farooq: 141-14)

**Example 4: Saladin al-Ayyubi and the Crusades**

It was in response to the horrific oppression in Jerusalem at the hands of the Crusaders in the 11th century and the need to free the area of their control that Sultan Salah al-Deen al-Ayyubi (Saladin) liberated Jerusalem from them in 1187.

His arrival brought relief to the local Christian population who helped him after the oppression they suffered at the hands of their co-religionists, the Crusaders. Not only did Saladin treat the Crusaders with kindness, he ensured that Muslims and non-Muslims lived in peace and harmony with each other.

One particular story about him recounts that some Muslim soldiers were besieging a Christian fortress. Many Christians were seeking shelter inside, including a young couple who was planning to get married but whose plan had been stopped by the fighting. They decided to get married anyway even though they were trapped inside the castle. Saladin was in charge of the Muslim troops at that time. When he heard about the wedding, he ordered his soldiers not to attack the castle where the couple was staying so that they could enjoy peace and quiet. In return for this respect, the bride’s mother sent out trays of food so Saladin and the Muslim army could share in the wedding celebrations. Indeed the longest period of peace and justice for all in
Example 5: Muslim-Christian relations during the Ottoman Empire

The primary mechanism with which the Ottomans used to manage the internal affairs of their multi-religious and poly-ethnic empire, from the 15th century to the 20th, was the millet system. Under this system, minorities enjoyed wide latitude of religious and cultural freedom, as well as considerable administrative, fiscal and legal autonomy under their own ecclesiastical and lay leader. The term ‘millet’ originally meant both a religion and a religious community.

The millet system was, in effect, an extension of the Ottoman’s general administrative practices. In an age that lacked modern technologies of administration and control, the Ottomans, like other contemporary states, had little choice but to deal with the masses of their population cooperatively, allowing each group wide latitude in the conduct of their internal affairs.

In practical terms, the millet system permitted the minority communities to establish and maintain their houses of worship, often with the help of tax-exempt religious endowments. The minorities also operated their own education. The curriculum and language of instruction in these schools were determined by the community. Each community could also set up its own welfare institution which depended on its own financial resources. To support their institution, the communities were permitted to collect their own internal taxes. State taxes were collectively assessed by the local Ottoman authorities to the local community as a whole based on the number and wealth of its members. Muslims and minorities tended to live in their own quarters in the urban as well as in rural areas, congregating around their houses of worship and community institutions.

In general, in the 15th and 16th centuries, when the Ottoman Empire was as its zenith and its administration was well-organized and efficient, life was good for all and inter-communal relations were at their best. But in the 17th and 18th centuries, as the Ottoman Empire became economically marginalized by the ascent of Europe and as it began its slow decline and disintegration, life became more difficult and intergroup relations deteriorated. Still, through this entire period there were never any incidents of wide-scale interethnic violence. A reason for this position can be pointed to Sultan Mahmud II’s speech in 1830 when he declared “I distinguish among my subjects Muslims in the mosque, Christians in the church, and Jews in the synagogue,
but there is no difference among them in any other way. My affection and sense of justice for all of them is strong and they are all indeed my children”. (Levy, Avigdor, Christian, Jews and Muslims in the Ottoman empire: 1-4)

As stated in previous pages, Christianity and Islam have been in contact with one another for fourteen centuries. Christian-Muslim relations have sometimes been marked by constructive living together, sometimes by rivalry or violent conflict. The present-day relationships of Muslims and Christians in the world reciprocally impact one another.

Nowadays, scholars of both groups should think about unity because both religions are from the same root. They willingly trace their descent back to Abraham (pbuh). So there is so much that Muslims and Christians have in common; the directions they take are mutual and somehow they have to find a way to have their separate traditions bring them together rather than separate them. Therefore if in the course of past centuries there has arisen not infrequent discussion and hostility between Christians and Muslims, they now should urge everyone to forget the past, to make sincere efforts at mutual understanding and to work together in protecting and promoting social justice, good morals as well as peace and freedom for the good and benefit of all men.

3. TEN QUR’ĀNIC FOUNDATIONS OF MUSLIM/CHRISTION RELATIONS

Peaceful relationships among human beings include various circles such as family, community, society, and humanity at large. It includes relationships with fellow believers in Islam and with humanity. The focus of this section, however, is on the universal concepts and values underlying the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims. They include the following:

3.1 Faith in the One Universal God (Allah in Arabic): Islam is founded on the belief that there is only one God (Allah in Arabic), who is the universal Creator, Sustainer, and Cherisher of all. Being the sole creator of all humankind precludes any notion of multiple, competing creators, each marshalling his creation against the other “gods” and their creation. Allah is one and is impartial toward His creations. He provides for all, including those who reject faith in Him or even those who defy Him. He cares for the well-being of all and gives them ample opportunity to repent to Him and end the state of separateness suffered by those who reject Him or are unmindful of Him. This belief implies that all humans are equal before Allah in terms of their humanity, irrespective of their particular beliefs. Only Allah is the ultimate judge of any person’s “theological
correctness.” No human should be oppressed or mistreated by other fellow humans because of a perceived “theological incorrectness.”

3.2 Unity and Universality of the Core Teachings of all Prophets: That core message is peace in submission to Allah, literally Islam. According to the Qur’ān, a Muslim must accept, revere, and believe in all the prophets of Allah, without discrimination. They all represent one brotherhood of faith extending vertically to include many generations and horizontally to embrace all humanity. In the Qur’ān we read: “we (Muslims) make no distinction between any of His messengers (God’s messengers)” [Al-Baqarah 2: 285]. We read also: “Behold, We have revealed to you (O Muhammad) as We revealed to Noah and all the prophets after him” [Al-Nisaa’ 4: 163]. Still in another verse we read: “In matters of faith, He (God) has ordained for you that which He had enjoined upon Abraham, Moses, and Jesus: steadfastly uphold the (true) faith and make no divisions therein” [Ash-Shura 42: 13].

These Qur’ānic texts preclude the notion of narrow partisanship that may lead to hatred or even violence against communities who perceive themselves as followers of other prophets.

3.3 Universal Human Dignity: The Qur’ān gives various reasons why each human being must be honoured and dignified on account of being human, irrespective of his or her chosen beliefs. Such honour is symbolized by the way the Qur’ān describes Allah’s creation of the human in the best of moulds and commanding the angels to bow down in respect to Adam (pbuh). The Qur’ān describes the human as the trustee of Allah on earth. Allah created everything on earth and in the heavens for the benefit of the human race. Sanctity of human life is affirmed in the Qur’ān: “Nor take life, which God has made sacred, except for just cause” [Al-Israa’ 17: 33]. The Qur’ān confirms God’s revelation to previous prophets that: “If anyone slays a human being, unless it be (punishment) for murder, or for spreading mischief on earth, it shall be as though he had slain all humankind; whereas, if anyone saves a life, it shall be as though he had saved the lives of all humankind” [Al-Ma’idaah 5: 32].
Beyond the sanctity of life, in the Qur’ān we read: “Indeed, We (God) have conferred dignity on the children of Adam” [Al-Isra’ 17: 70].

It is noted that this verse is inclusive of all humans, irrespective of their religion or even their belief in God.

3.4 Universal Justice: The Arabic term for justice is *adl*, meaning “to be in a state of equilibrium, to be balanced.” That balance is inherent in the cosmic order and ecology as much as it is inherent in spiritual and ethical values. The Qur’ān warns against disturbing that balance. Within that broad context, we can examine the concept of justice as it relates to human relationships based on Islam’s primary sources. Justice is a universal concept that should be observed without nepotism, even with the “enemy”. God says: “O you who believe! Stand out for justice, as witnesses to Allah, and even as against yourselves, or your parents, or your kin, and whether it be (against) rich or poor.” [An-Nisaa’ 4: 134]. And in another part he says: “O you who believe! Stand out firmly for Allah, as witnesses to fair dealing, and let not the hatred of others to you make you swerve to wrong and depart from justice. Be just: that is next to piety and fear Allah, for Allah is well acquainted with all that you do.” [Al-Ma’idah 5: 8]

The above concept of universal justice relates to peace in at least two ways:

a. It is inconceivable to secure genuine lasting peace without justice. In fact, doing justice is a pre-requisite to peace.

b. To harm, persecute, or fight against any person on account of his or her religious convictions is one of the worst forms of injustice, which is condemned in the primary sources of Islam.

3.5 Universal Human Brotherhood: Addressing the entire human race, the Qur’ān states; “O humankind! We (Allah) have created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female and have made you into nations and tribes, so that you may come to know one another. Verily, the most honored of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous (or Allah-conscious) of you. Surely, Allah is All-Knowing, All-Aware.” [Al-Hujurat 49: 13]

It must be noted that this verse does not address Muslims exclusively, but begins with the inclusive address “O humankind,” an address that embraces all. It reminds humanity
that they belong to one family with the same set of parents, albeit a diverse family. This is a reminder that diversity in unity and unity within diversity are possible. Humanity is like a bouquet of flowers in which each flower is beautiful in its own right, yet, the combination of all flowers and the rich diversity of their colours is more beautiful. This sweeping statement in the Qurʾān about broad human brotherhood is a profound basis for peace for and among all.

3.6 Acceptance of Plurality in Human Societies: While the notion of plurality may appear to be a relatively new concept, it is not new to those who are familiar with the Qurʾān. The Qurʾān is quite explicit in reminding all that if God willed it, He would have made all mankind of one nation. God says: “And WE have revealed unto thee the Book comprising the truth and fulfilling that which was revealed before it in the Book, and as a guardian over it. Judge, therefore, between them by what ALLAH has revealed, and follow not their evil desires, turning away from the truth which has come to thee. For each of you WE prescribed a clear spiritual Law and a manifest way in secular matters. And if ALLAH had enforced HIS will, HE would have made you all one people, but HE wishes to try you by that which HE has given you. Vie then with one another in doing good works. To ALLAH shall you all return; then HE will inform you of that wherein you differed;” [Al-Maʿidah 5: 48].

In another part he says: “And if thy Lord had enforced HIS will, HE would have surely made mankind one people; but they would not cease to differ;” [Hud 11: 118].

Likewise, the Qurʾān states that had it been God’s will, He would have made all people believers: “And if thy Lord had enforced HIS Will, surely, all who are in the earth would have believed together. Wilt thou, then, force men to become believers? And no soul can believe except by the permission of ALLAH. And HE causes HIS wrath to descend on those who would not use their judgment. [Yunus 10: 99-100].

This means that forcing people to believe in God runs against His decree of free will, which includes the fact that some will reject Him. The ultimate reward or punishment for accepting or rejecting belief in God is deferred until the Day of Judgment. This value inculcates the attitude of being non-judgmental and accepting of people as they are, human beings entitled to choose and who are answerable to their
Creator. Acceptance of plurality does not mean accepting the plurality of ultimate truth, nor does it preclude sharing one’s faith with others and even inviting them to it. Plurality means peaceful coexistence with those who hold differing beliefs and convictions.

3.7 Prohibition of Compulsion in Faith: Sharing or propagating faith is not the same as compulsion in religion. The Qur’an makes it a duty on believers to communicate the message of Islam to fellow humans and to be witnesses to humankind. God says: “And thus We (Allah) made of you (O Muslims) a justly balanced community that you might bear witness (to the truth) to humankind and the Apostle might bear witness over you.” [Al-Baqarah 2: 143].

Being witnesses for Allah includes both witnessing through righteous deeds and sharing what one believes is the truth, which is beneficial to humankind. The Qur’an gives guidance on how to invite others to Islam. Invitation should be with wisdom and in the most gracious way. God says: “Invite (all humankind) to the path of your Lord with wisdom and goodly exhortation and argue with them in the most kindly manner, for, indeed, your Lord knows best as to who strays from His path and best who are the right-guided.” [An-Nahl 16: 125].

Also in numerous verses in the Qur’an, compulsion in religion is forbidden:

“There shall be no coercion in matters of faith.” [Al-Baqarah 2: 256].

“And so (O Prophet), exhort them; your task is only to exhort. You cannot compel them (to believe). As for one who turns away, being bent on denying the truth, him or her will God cause the greatest suffering (in the life to come). For verily, unto Us will be their return, and verily, it is for Us to call them to account.” [Al-Ghashiyah 88: 21-26].

3.8 Universal Mercy: The essence of Islam and its Prophet’s mission is summed up in the following verse:

“And (thus, O Muhammad), We have not sent you, but as mercy to all the worlds.” [Al-Anbiyaa’ 21: 107]

It is obvious that Muslims are not the only dwellers of the earth. Hence the command to be merciful applies to all. In fact, mercy applies as well to animals and other creatures of Allah. A logical fruit of this attitude of mercy is to love humankind as persons and
honoured creatures of Allah, while dissociating oneself from their erroneous beliefs or even rejection of Allah. This love finds its greatest form by loving and guiding them. This does not mean loving their wrongdoing or their rejection of faith in Allah. It is the love of their guidance and well-being in this life and in the life to come.

3.9 Universal Peaceful Coexistence: The basic rule governing the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims is that of peaceful coexistence, justice and compassion. The following two verses are key verses that embody that general rule:

“As for such (non-Muslims) who do not fight you on account of (your) faith, or drive you forth from your homelands, God does not forbid you to show them kindness (also love and respect) and to deal with them with equity, for God loves those who act equitably. God only forbids you to turn in friendship towards such as fight against you because of (your) faith and drive you forth from your homelands or aid (others) in driving you forth. As for those from among you who turn towards them for alliance, it is they who are wrongdoers. [Al-Mumtahanah 60:8-9].

These verses make it a Muslim’s duty to treat peacefully coexisting persons with equity (qist) and birr. The term birr and its derivatives are the same expressions used in the Qur’an and Hadith to refer to one’s relationship with his or her parents. Such a relationship is more than kindness, since it includes also love and respect.

4. Peaceful Dialogue, Especially with the People of the Book: All of the above nine principles apply to all non-Muslims. The Qur’an accords the People of the Book (Jews and Christians) a special position. The very term to designate them distinguishes them from others such as idolatrous Arabs (Al-Bayyinah 98: 1). It is a complimentary title as it acknowledges that, like Muslims, their faiths are based on revealed books or scriptures. In its family and dietary laws, the Qur’an gives a special consideration to the People of the Book. For example, a Muslim male may marry a believing Jewish or Christian woman [Al-Ma’idah 5: 5]. The Qur’an exhorts Muslims to engage in peaceful dialogues with Jews and Christians:

“Say (O Muslims), O People of the Book! Come to a common term which we and you hold in common: that we shall worship none but Allah, and that we shall not ascribe divinity to none beside Him, and that we shall not take human beings for our Lord beside
Allah, and if they turn away, then say: bear witness that we submit ourselves unto Him.” [Aal `Imran 3: 64].

It may be noted that “turning away” from this invitation is not presented as a punishable offense in this life, and that the consequence of rejection is to simply testify Muslims’ submission to Allah. Another verse in the Qur’ān encourages peaceful dialogue and invites all to build upon the common ground between Muslims and the People of the Book. The Qur’ān instructs Muslims:

“And do not argue with the People of Book except in a most kindly manner, except for those of them who are bent on evil-doing, and say: “We believe in the revelation which has come down to us and in that which has come down to you; our Lord and yours is One and it is to Him that we (all) submit ourselves.” [Al-`Ankabut 29: 46]. (http://islamonline.net/english/Contemporary/2005/04/Article01.shtml)

It may be concluded that the ten values and principles above represent a solid foundation for a peaceful relationship and coexistence with all, irrespective of their religious choices. It may be noted, however, that genuine and lasting peace must be protected and safeguarded against those who try to destroy it. Genuine peace does not necessarily mean the total absence of use of force or even war as a lesser evil and as a last resort.

Conclusion
The improvement of Christian-Muslim relations is thus essential for the emergence of a pluralistic world as well as the survival of the faiths as socially and morally relevant worldview. Both sets of believers have to work hard to overcome the impasse of their respective histories and traditions, and both have to recognize that mutual respect means that each group has the right to be described, and understood, in terms of their own religious concepts and categories. Both groups have to fight the imperialism of their own traditions and move from servile conformity and apathetic non-commitment to positions where their worldviews are adoptive rather than ossified in a particular historic location.

The onus and responsibility is on believers to fill the emerging and exponent system that is both distinctively contemporary and deeply rooted in authentic religious traditions. So a joint Christian-Muslim ethical enterprise, designed to generate adoptive and pragmatic intellectual and
social responses to the problems of our age, would be the most appropriate response of the believers to the demands of the postmodern age.

Finally, only by making ethical connections that are the true heritage of the Abrahamic faiths and by working together for the establishment of an objective moral order can we make genuine progress towards the creation of true Muslim and Christian societies.

References