

# Islamic International Law's Position on Religious Cooperation and Mutual Respect: Pathway to National Unity, Peace and Prosperity

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## Abstract:

*According to a prophetic statement, "The quest for knowledge is the duty of every Muslim, male or female", where knowledge is meant as a discovery of real value of things and of oneself in relationship with the world in which God has placed us. This universal dimension of knowledge is in fact a wealth of wisdom of traditional doctrine naturally linked to the cultural and spiritual heritage of every human beings and every believer of faith. It allows for the respect of internal and external differences as positive elements of the cultural and spiritual heritage of mankind. This paper examined the legal provision of the inter-religious relationship as practiced by the holy Prophet Muhammad, (SAW).*

## 1.0 Introduction

If anything, history and facts have taught us one salient truth about our existence: that it is impossible for there to be a society whose members are all alike, without distinction as to race, colour, creed, culture etc. Ours always has been a heterogeneous existence and will continue to remain so. In the words of God, we read:

*O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another...*<sup>3</sup>

Thus, society will always be comprised of people of different orientations and as humans, it is only natural that we are quite aware of how different we are from others. This consciousness of our difference has occasioned friction in our societies. It must be confessed, it has facilitated both cooperation as well as enmity amongst people. It has led to various vices, ranging from simple acts of violence to full-blown wars.

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<sup>3</sup> Qur'ān 49:13

This is so despite the fact that we are all united in our agreement to live as a nation, to identify ourselves first as Nigerians then as Muslims, Christians or traditional worshippers. Our lack of religious cooperation and mutual respect has led to, among other things, civil or internecine strife or wars which have claimed a good lot of our fellows. In this, everyone, Muslim or Christian or traditionalist, is guilty, not because our religions extol hostility and disunity, but because we have abandoned the true teachings of these religions.

It is therefore no surprise that the only complaint of Prophet Muhammad (S) on the judgement day recorded in the Qur'ān is:

*And the Messenger has said, "O my Lord, indeed my people have taken this Qur'an as [a thing] abandoned."<sup>4</sup>*

It is therefore the thrust of this piece to explore the Islamic disposition towards religious cooperation and mutual respect and to examine how these can be the pathway towards national unity, peace and prosperity.

## **2.0 Religious Cooperation and Mutual Respect in Islam**

By religious cooperation is meant the fact of people of different religions or creeds working together for a shared aim. A convenient synonym for religious cooperation is religious unity though this should not be construed as meaning that different religions fuse into one; but that in their differences, these religions or their adherents have agreed to act as one in order to achieve a common goal. Mutual respect, on the other hand, implies that each of the different religious groups refrain from abusing or denigrating those who do not share their convictions.

Islam extols unity on two levels: on the one hand, there is a command to Muslims to unite amongst themselves and never be divided;<sup>5</sup> on the other hand, there is a duty upon the Muslims to cooperate with adherents of other faiths in order to attain a peaceful society. It is this latter type of religious cooperation that comes under the focus of this piece. The discussion shall now turn to examine the sources of Islam for evidence of religious cooperation.

### **2.1 Evidence from the Qur'ān**

The Qur'ān is the first primary source of Islam. Its message is clear and immutable so that it applies in all climes. It provides the standard by which every other source of Islam is

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<sup>4</sup> Qur'ān 25:30

<sup>5</sup> God says in Qur'ān 3:104: "And hold firmly to the rope of Allah all together and do not become divided..."

measured for validity. It contains the communications of God as revealed to Prophet Muhammad and it is the fundamental guide to Islam whose teachings bind all Muslims in all ages. There can be found in the Qur'ān an abundance of evidence for religious cooperation and mutual respect and such evidence will now be examined.

### **2.1.1 Common Origin and Diversity of Mankind**

A careful perusal of the verses of the Qur'ān reveals, quite interestingly, a message which identifies a common origin for all humans thus:

*O mankind, fear your Lord, who created you from one soul and created from it its mate and dispersed from both of them many men and women...<sup>6</sup>*

The glorious verse of Surah an-Nisā' not only identifies a common origin or ancestry for mankind but also emphasises the fact that the differences which we have come to know of one another do not in fact matter at all. Hence, further, in another passage of the Qur'ān, God states the purpose of our differences thus:

*O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. Indeed, Allah is Knowing and Acquainted.*

Without mincing words, God states the purpose of having created mankind into different nations and tribes as nothing but to allow us appreciate and learn to live with one another's differences. To further show that little or no importance is assigned to our tribal differences, He declares that the most honourable of men is he who most regards God i.e. righteousness and not colour or nationality is what determines who is most honourable in the sight of God.

### **2.1.2 Recognition of a Multi-Faith Society**

Another way Islam promotes religious cooperation is in fact its confirmation of religious pluralism i.e. Islam confirms the impossibility of all of mankind adhering to the same faith or adopting the same creed. About this God says in the Qur'ān:

*But if Allah had willed, they would not have associated [partners with Him]. And We have not appointed you over them as a guardian, nor are you a manager over them.<sup>7</sup> (emphasis ours)*

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<sup>6</sup> Qur'ān 4:1

It is therefore crystal clear that it is never part of God's plan to have all of mankind believe and worship in the same way. In fact, evidence from the Qur'ān suggests more strongly that God favours a multi-faith society wherein is cooperation among the different groups for purposes of peaceful co-existence and self-preservation. Hence, in Sūrah al-Hajj, we read:

*[They are] those who have been evicted from their homes without right - only because they say, "Our Lord is Allah." And were it not that Allah checks the people, some by means of others, there would have been demolished monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques in which the name of Allah is much mentioned. And Allah will surely support those who support Him. Indeed, Allah is Powerful and Exalted in Might.*<sup>8</sup>

The idea of Islam's recognition of a multi-faith society is further corroborated by passages of the Qur'ān wherein God compels the people of the book, Jews and Christians particularly, to adhere to the tenets of their faith as contained in the scriptures brought by their prophets. God states that it is He who has revealed the Tawrah and prophets who came after Prophet Mūsā (A) had judged by it as did Prophet Mūsā himself.<sup>9</sup> Therefore Jews must judge by it, too.<sup>10</sup> God says the exact same thing about the Injīl, commanding the Christians to judge by it.<sup>11</sup> In the same context, God speaks of the Qur'ān thus:

*And We have revealed to you, [O Muhammad], the Book in truth, confirming that which preceded it of the Scripture and as a criterion over it. So judge between them by what Allah has revealed and do not follow their inclinations away from what has come to you of the truth...*<sup>12</sup>

A more remarkable thing about this verse is its unequivocal declaration that God has prescribed for Jews, Christians and Muslims different Sharī'ah and Manḥaj. None but God is the source of our creedal or religious creedal differences the verse reads on thus:

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<sup>7</sup> Qur'ān 6:107 Compare Qur'ān 10:99 "And had your Lord willed, those on earth would have believed - all of them entirely. Then, [O Muhammad], would you compel the people in order that they become believers?"; and Qur'ān 13:40 "And whether We show you part of what We promise them or take you in death, upon you is only the [duty of] notification, and upon Us is the account."

<sup>8</sup> Qur'ān 22:40

<sup>9</sup> Qur'ān 5:44

<sup>10</sup> Qur'ān 5:45

<sup>11</sup> Qur'ān 5:46-7: "And let the People of the Gospel judge by what Allah has revealed therein. And whoever does not judge by what Allah has revealed - then it is those who are the defiantly disobedient."

<sup>12</sup> Qur'ān 5:48

*...To each of you We prescribed a law and a method. Had Allah willed, He would have made you one nation [united in religion], but [He intended] to test you in what He has given you...<sup>13</sup>*

### **2.1.3 Cooperation in the Multi-Faith Society**

The most remarkable thing about the verse above is the closing statement it contains and it reads:

*...so race to [all that is] good. To Allah is your return all together, and He will [then] inform you concerning that over which you used to differ...<sup>14</sup>*

It is in this latter part of Sūrah al-Mā'idah that we find a direct command to adherents of different faiths to observe religious cooperation for God says *fastabaqu-l-khayrāti*.e. all of you, Muslims, Jews and Christians, should race towards all that is good. Hence, there is a duty imposed to not let our differences prevent the good things we can achieve through cooperation with one another. Necessary from this point is that the standard of cooperation be set and this God has done in Sūrah al-Mā'idah thus:

*...And cooperate in righteousness and piety, but do not cooperate in sin and aggression. And fear Allah; indeed, Allah is severe in penalty.<sup>15</sup>*

Flowing from the above, the standard or basis of religious cooperation has been defined as promotion of what is good and opposition of what is bad. Thus, all members of the multi-faith society must join hands in promoting everything that will further enhance the peace and peaceful coexistence of members of the society and oppose, together, anything which will dent their harmony or breach such peace.

### **2.1.4 Mutual Respect in a Multi-Faith Society**

The Qur'ān does not only encourage religious cooperation between Muslims and people of other religions. It further makes mutual respect a duty upon all Muslims which they must not violate lest they sin against God. Thus, Sūrah al-An'ām reads:

*And do not insult those they invoke other than Allah, lest they insult Allah in enmity without knowledge. Thus We have made pleasing to every community*

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>15</sup> Qur'ān 5:2

*their deeds. Then to their Lord is their return, and He will inform them about what they used to do.*<sup>16</sup>

In the above is the strongest evidence of mutual respect and God provides the rationale for its necessity, considering, on the one hand, His permission of a multi-faith society, and, on the other, the necessity to invite others to one's faith. It also suggests God's confirmation of the fact that matters of faith, if not properly handled, easily incite the passion of man and brew enmity. Thus, to further entrench mutual respect and remove every possibility of its violation, God permits inter-faith dialogue, this being one of the best ways to promote peace and peaceful co-existence. In Sūrah al-Ankabūt, we read:

*And do not argue with the People of the Scripture except in a way that is best, 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."*<sup>17</sup>

Instances may arise wherein adherents of other faiths, who coexist with the Muslims, are the first to breach the mutual respect which God and reason has imposed to prevent friction and encourage peaceful coexistence. In such instances, God in the Qur'ān has prescribed the proper cause of action that Muslims should take and hence, we read in Sūrah an-Nisā:

*And it has already come down to you in the Book that when you hear the verses of Allah [recited], they are denied [by them] and ridiculed; so do not sit with them until they enter into another conversation. Indeed, you would then be like them. Indeed Allah will gather the hypocrites and disbelievers in Hell all together.*<sup>18</sup>

In the glorious verse above, God commands that where Muslims witness His verses being belied, mocked or ridiculed, what they should do in the face of such insult and blasphemy to God and His messenger is to avoid such gathering until the topic is changed. Permission to later mingle with the perpetrators of such blasphemy is evidence of how God discourages

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<sup>16</sup> Qur'ān 6:108 Compare Qur'ān 60:8: "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."

<sup>17</sup> Qur'ān 29:46 Compare Qur'ān 16:125: "Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good instruction, and argue with them in a way that is best. Indeed, your Lord is most knowing of who has strayed from His way, and He is most knowing of who is [rightly] guided."

<sup>18</sup> Qur'ān 4:140 Compare Qur'ān 6:68: "And when you see those who engage in [offensive] discourse concerning Our verses, then turn away from them until they enter into another conversation. And if Satan should cause you to forget, then do not remain after the reminder with the wrongdoing people."

enmity and hostility, and enforce peaceful coexistence; it further shows God never intends or commands that such be killed or attacked for how can they change the topic or how can we return to them after they are killed?

Before the discussion turns to the Ḥadīth, it is important to quickly and briefly consider Sūrah at-Tawbah (Qur'ān 9) which has been heavily quoted from to support the notion that Islam is belligerent always and does not permit faith freedom. The Sūrah points strongly to the fact that the Muslims had a treaty with their idolatrous neighbours and only those neighbours such as were repeatedly violating the treaty were now being fought after permission had been given by God. These violators had three options: to give up arms, seek protection from the Muslims and be let safe; to embrace Islam and become one of the Muslims; or to keep violating the treaty and be continuously fought for resisting peaceful coexistence.<sup>19</sup>

## **2.2 Evidence from the Sunnah**

The Sunnah is the second primary source of Islam, having drawn its validity from the Qur'ān.<sup>20</sup> It comprises the sayings, actions and tacit approvals of the prophet. Now, the Sunnah is embodied in the Ḥadīth literature and it provides the practical application of Qur'ānic injunctions by the prophet i.e. it provides the case law. Therefore, if anything, the Sunnah must lend credence to the message of the Qur'ān on religious cooperation and mutual respect. Not surprisingly, it is replete with evidence of such and the most remarkable of these will be discussed in subsequent paragraphs.

### **2.2.1 The Flight to Abyssinia**

After the prophet started his message in Makkah and started to gain a little following, the Meccan polytheists, surprised by his message of monotheism, a concept alien to their polytheistic way of life, declared him an open enemy and practised all forms of persecution against him and his followers.<sup>21</sup> Concerned for his followers, the holy prophet said to them:

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<sup>19</sup> See generally Qur'ān 9:1-12

<sup>20</sup> Qur'ān 4:59, God says, "O you who have believed, obey Allah and obey the Messenger and those in authority among you. And if you disagree over anything, refer it to Allah and the Messenger, if you should believe in Allah and the Last Day. That is the best [way] and best in result."

<sup>21</sup> Hazrat Mirza Bashiruddin Mahmud Ahmad, *The Life of Muhammad* (Islam International Publications Limited, UK 2005) pp. 29-38

*If you were to go Abyssinia (it would be better for you), for the king will not tolerate injustice and it is a friendly country, until such time as Allah shall relieve you from your distress.*<sup>22</sup>

Upon this, some Muslims of about fifteen in number set out for Abyssinia and eventually sought refuge under the Najāshī (the Negus), the king of Abyssinia which was at the time a Christian kingdom. Despite the attempts of the Quraysh to have the king return the exiles to Mecca, he refused to hand them over after he had heard from both parties and was satisfied that the Muslims were really being persecuted.<sup>23</sup>

It is further recorded that while in Abyssinia, Amr ibn al-As, who was then a polytheist and one of the Meccan envoys to the Negus to secure the return of the Muslim fugitives, had told the king that the Muslims blasphemed Jesus the son of Mary (‘Isā ibn Maryam (A)). The king invited the Muslims a second time to hear their case and they told him the Islamic understanding of Prophet ‘Isā as God's servant, His prophet, His spirit, and His word which He cast upon the Virgin Mary. Satisfied that their answer was no blasphemy, he asked the Muslims to go and reassured them of their safety in his country.<sup>24</sup>

This event, which now is known as the first Hijra, is important and relevant to religious cooperation and mutual respect for two reasons. One, the seeking of refuge by the Muslims and the subsequent granting of same by the king signifies Islam's openness to religious cooperation. This is further in tandem with the dictates of God in Qur'ān 60:8 that Muslims have the permission to establish good relations and seek cooperation with those who do not persecute them in matters of their faith.

The second significance of this event relates to the calumny of Amr ibn al-As about the Muslims and how the king dealt with same. Rather than condemn the Muslims unheard, he invited them over and listened to their view and despite the refusal of the Muslims to affirm Prophet ‘Isā was a son of God, he understood and respected their difference of opinion and further reaffirmed his promise of refuge and safety to them.

The question therefore is: If Islam as a religion has benefitted from religious cooperation and mutual respect, can it in good conscience be opposed to same? The answer to this lies in the

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<sup>22</sup> Ibn Ishāq, *Sīratu Rasūlillāh* (tr.) Alfred Guillaume (Oxford University Press, UK 2004) p. 146.

<sup>23</sup> *The Life of Muhammad*, pp. 42-45

<sup>24</sup> *Sīratu Rasūlillāh*, pp. 150-153



events that unfolded in the latter part of the life of the prophet i.e. the events following the second Hijra, the Hijra to Medina.

### **2.2.2 The Medinan State and the Medinan Charter**

Medina, prior to the migration of the prophet was plagued by internecine wars for some hundred years.<sup>25</sup> Realising an external arbiter was needed in lieu of the usual practice of an eye for an eye, a delegation left for Makkah with the purpose of inviting the prophet to be that chief arbiter.<sup>26</sup> In Makkah, too, the Muslims were still facing intense persecutions from the polytheists. Soon, the Muslims started emigrating until there was not left in Makkah any Muslims save a handful of slave converts, the prophet and Abu Bakr.<sup>27</sup> The latter two later escaped Makkah by night and got to Medina after having escaped further attempts by the Meccan polytheists to seize and kill them.

In Medina, by way of putting an end to the tribal wars which had plagued the city, the prophet drew out a pact which was to regulate the affairs of the inhabitants of the city, Muslims, Jews and pagans alike. This pact is what is now known as the Constitution of Medina or the Medinan Charter. The charter set out the rights and duties of each of the parties to it and these parties included all the eight tribes of Medina including the Muslims as emigrants.<sup>28</sup>

The essence of the charter was to formalise a religious cooperation and mutual respect amongst all the tribal and religious communities in Medina, fashioning out of them a form of federation known as the *Ummah*, wherein each community was religiously and judicially autonomous and formed part of the consultative bodies, through its representative, in matters concerning the nation as a whole. Thus, Welch writes in Encyclopaedia of Islam:

*The constitution reveals Muhammad's great diplomatic skills, for it allows the ideal that he cherished of an ummah (community) based clearly on a religious outlook to sink temporarily into the background and is shaped essentially by practical considerations.*<sup>29</sup>

No doubt the practical considerations spoken of here must be nothing but the tribal and religious diversity of the city which prevented anyone from imposing the faith or culture of

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<sup>25</sup> *Constitution of Medina*, Wikipedia, the free encyclopaedia  
<[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constitution\\_of\\_Medina](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constitution_of_Medina)> accessed March 20, 2017

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>27</sup> *The Life of Muhammad*, p. 66

<sup>28</sup> *Constitution of Medina*

<sup>29</sup> Welch, *Muhammad* in Encyclopaedia of Islam (Ed) Bearman P. et al (Brill, Leiden 1960-2005)

one of the communities on the others, knowing what could only be the result of such imposition was disunity and enmity. Hence, each community was allowed to practise its own faith and adjudicate on matters concerning solely its people. Some of the salient provisions<sup>30</sup> of the charter read:

- i. The security of God is equal for all groups,
- ii. Non-Muslim members will have the same political and cultural rights as Muslims. They will have autonomy and freedom of religion.
- iii. Non-Muslims will take up arms against the enemy of the nation and share the cost of war. There is to be no treachery between the two.
- iv. Non-Muslims will not be obliged to take part in religious wars of the Muslims.

From the above, the necessity for religious cooperation is manifested by the provision that it was the duty of all communities in the Ummah to defend it when it was being faced by external attack or aggression or a threat to its peace. This contrasts sharply with the last provision quoted above which removes any obligation from the other parties to the pact from taking part in any war involving solely the Muslim community of Medina.

### **2.2.3 The Hudaibiyah Treaty**

The Hudaibiyah Treaty was a pact entered into by the Muslims and the Meccan polytheists in 6AH. Its contents or terms were the quintessence of unfairness and injustice to the Muslims, yet the prophet, in his desire for peace, signed it to bind all the Muslims. The events leading to the said treaty were quite simple. The Muslims left Medina, following the prophet with the intent to perform the 'Umrah (lesser pilgrimage) and camped at a well close to Makkah for purposes of ascertaining the possibility of performing their rites in peace.<sup>31</sup>

The Quraysh resisted their ingress and the prophet proposed a truce, a pact for peace. After some further hesitation, the Quraysh agreed on the conditions that they dictated the terms of the treaty. Hence, they sent their delegate, Suhayl Ibn Amr, to negotiate the terms. The terms were: one, that the Muslims would have to come back the following year to perform the 'Umrah; two, that the treaty and armistice would last ten years; three, that the Muslims would return any Meccan convert to the polytheists but not vice versa; and four, that any tribe could join Quraysh or the Muslims in the treaty.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>Ahmad Barakat, *Muhammad and the Jews* (Vikas Publishing House, 1979) pp. 46-47

<sup>31</sup> Aziz S. A., *A Manifest Victory: Reflections on the Treaty of Hudaibiyah* (Muslim Access)

<<http://muslimaccess.com>> accessed 17 March, 2016

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid*

The prophet agreed to all of these terms, after he had commanded Ali to start the treaty with “Bismka Allahuma” (a phrase Suhayl insisted must be used in place of Bismillahir-Rahmānir-Rahīm). He had also commanded Ali to address him in the treaty as Muhammad Ibn Abdullah as dictated by Suhayl. All these the prophet allowed to the detriment of himself and his followers, so that the son of Suhayl who had joined the Muslims right before the treaty, was returned to the Meccans.<sup>33</sup>

In the following year, the Muslims returned to perform the pilgrimage and they were allowed into Makkah. The essence of this event is that the prophet had shown the Muslims that compromise is not only allowed but must be made in order to promote peace and peaceful coexistence with adherents of other faiths. It further shows that Muslims must remain true to their treaties and agreements with adherents of other faiths for it was in this vein that the prophet was compelled to return Suhayl’s son.

#### **2.2.4 The St. Catherine Monastery’s Charter of Freedom**

In the same year as the year of the Treaty of Hudaibiyah, we find another exemplary conduct of the prophet which further confirms his undying desire for religious cooperation and peaceful coexistence. In the year 628, the prophet granted a Charter of Freedom to the St. Catherine’s Monastery in Mt. Sinai, Egypt.<sup>34</sup> Perhaps it is best to reproduce the entire content of the said charter and it reads:

*This is the document which Muhammad, the son of Abdullah, God’s Prophet, Warner and Bearer of glad tidings has caused to be written so that there should remain no excuse for those coming after. I have caused this document to be written for the Christians of the East and West, for those who live near, and for those of the distant lands, for the Christians living at present and for those who will come after, for those Christians who are known to us and for those as well whom we do not know.*

*Any Muslim violating or distorting what has been ordained will be considered to be violating God’s Covenant and will be transgressing against His Promise and by doing so, will incur God’s wrath, be he a monarch or an ordinary subject. I promise that any monk or wayfarer who will seek my help on the*

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>34</sup> ‘The Holy Prophet(saw): A Messenger of Peace and Reconciliation’  
<<http://www.reviewofreligions.org/168/the-holy-prophetsaw-a-messenger-of-peace-and-reconciliation/>>  
accessed 01 April, 2017

*mountains, in forests, deserts or habitations, or places of worship, I will repel his enemies with my friends and helpers, with all my relatives and with all those who profess to follow me and will defend them, because they are my covenant. And I will defend the covenanted against the persecution, injury and embarrassment of their enemies in lieu of the poll tax they have promised to pay. If they prefer to defend their properties and persons themselves, they will be allowed to do so and will not be put to any inconvenience on that account.*

*No bishop will be expelled from his bishopric, no monk from his monastery, no priest from his place of worship, and no pilgrim will be detained in his pilgrimage. None of their churches or other places of worship will be desolated or destroyed or demolished. No material of their churches will be used to build mosques or houses for the Muslims; any Muslim doing so will be regarded as recalcitrant to God and His Prophet. Monks and Bishops will be subject to no poll tax or indemnity whether they live in forests or on rivers, in the East or in the West, in the North or in the South. I give them my word of honour. They are on my promise and covenant and will enjoy perfect immunity from all sorts of inconveniences. Every help shall be given to them in the repair of their churches. They shall be absolved of wearing arms. They shall be protected by the Muslims. Let this document not be disobeyed till Judgement Day.” (Signed: Muhammad, the Messenger of God) (Quoted from Makâtîb-ur-Rasûl [Letters of the Messenger])<sup>35</sup>*

Unarguably, anyone reading the above will know that Islām has made adequate provisions, in theory and practice, on the duty of Muslims to cooperate and live peacefully with adherents of other faiths. In fact, such a covenant as above has been unprecedented in the history of mankind.

### **3.0 Conclusion and Recommendation**

The discussion so far has shown that it is impossible for any society to be absolutely homogenous and this fact of heterogeneity makes the occurrence of disagreements inevitable save when there is in place a mechanism for managing such. Religious cooperation and mutual respect have thus been identified as two key ingredients which can help promote peace, unity and prosperity. The position of Islam towards religious cooperation has equally

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<sup>35</sup>*Ibid*

been examined from its two major sources i.e. the Qur'ān and the Sunnah. It has been shown beyond peradventure that the first primary source of Islam, the Qur'ān, identifies a common origin for all mankind, mentions the essence of diversity as an opportunity to appreciate our differences and further shows that what Islam in fact has in contemplation is nothing but a multi-faith Ummah.

Thus, in order to achieve a common goal, peaceful coexistence in our society, God commands that sectarian and religious differences be cast aside, dialogue be made on friendly and peaceful terms, and the religious personalities and edifices of others be respected. And there is indeed no harm in adopting that virtuous thing in the faith of others though one's faith may not command same.

It has equally been demonstrated, with the aid of textual and historical authorities, that quintessence of this multi-faith society were in fact practised during the lifetime of the prophet i.e. the Medinan state. This state, it has been shown, was comprised of communities, differentiated by creed and tribe, which were brought together by the prophet of Islam as one Ummah, one nation. The sophistication of the Medinan state is exhibited in its constitution which crystallised religious cooperation and mutual respect for the purpose of attaining national peace, unity and prosperity in the state. This, no doubt, could only have been achieved by the prophet by following religiously the injunctions of God in the Qur'ān.

There is, therefore, in this, more than a lesson but also a precedent which can be followed even in modern times with all our modern state arrangements. Nigeria, like the Medinan state, already has a constitution governing the affairs of all its citizens jointly and severally. The only reason we still face difficulty in attaining National peace, unity and prosperity cannot but be our lack of adherence to the teachings of our religion which not only requires adherence to the constitution but also has championed the cause of religious cooperation and mutual respect for purposes of attaining national peace, unity and prosperity, long before the western world came up with the Magna Carta.