



**“PHILOSOPHIC
APPROACH TO
AGREEING TO
DISAGREE: A QUR’ANIC
PERSPECTIVE”**

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The philosophic approach that I am presenting is based on a particular worldview and epistemology, i.e. **THE WORLDVIEW OF ABSOLUTE AND UNCOMPROMISING MONOTHEISM (*TAWHID*) AS POSTULATED BY THE QUR'AN** which influences the behavior of believing Muslims and their construction of knowledge, intellectual discourses and dialogues with adherents of other religions.

- ✓ In this worldview, ontology is perceived as consisting of a) **THE BEING AND REALITY OF ALLAH AS THE CREATOR, THE LIVING SUSTAINER OF THE COSMOS** and b) **HIS CREATION INCLUDING THE COSMOS**.
- This cosmos is real but it is fleeting and will come to an end, the permanent reality being in the Hereafter. **HUMAN BEINGS AS THE CROWNING GLORY OF HIS CREATION OCCUPY THE HIGHEST STATUS OF EXISTENCE**.

❖ From the epistemological perspective of the Qur'an, **DIVINE KNOWLEDGE** as embodied in revealed scriptures is the supreme and infallible source of truth and values. The faculty of reason in man is a manifestation of the Divine attribute of The Real Knower.

❖ ***HUMAN KNOWLEDGE IS ACQUIRED BASICALLY THROUGH A) DIVINE REVELATION, B) REASON OR INTELLECT ('AQL) WHICH IS THE MOST PRECIOUS GIFT OF THE ONE TRUE GOD TO HUMAN BEINGS, AND C) THE SENSES.*** Knowing God (*ma`rifat Allah*) occupies the highest position in the hierarchy of knowledge.

His revelation in the form of a series of Divine scriptures culminating in *THE QUR'AN IMPARTS RELIGIOUS, METAPHYSICAL, ONTOLOGICAL, COSMOLOGICAL, AXIOLOGICAL, SPIRITUAL AND ESCHATOLOGICAL TRUTHS WHICH CANNOT BE REACHED OR CHALLENGED BY HUMAN REASON OR MAN-MADE LAWS.* QUR'ANIC ETHIC REQUIRES HUMAN REASON IS TO BE COMPLEMENTARY AND IN HARMONY WITH DIVINE REVELATION, USED FOR FINDING THE WAYS AND MEANS OF CONSTRUCTING A HOLISTIC CIVILIZATION IN CONSONANCE WITH THE WILL AND PLAN OF GOD AS THE COMPASSIONATE MASTER AND RULER OF MANKIND.

❖ REASON IN QUR'ANIC EPISTEMOLOGY AND AXIOLOGY CAN NEVER BE DIVORCED FROM DIVINE KNOWLEDGE AND WISDOM, NOR IS IT ALLOWED TO BE COMPLETELY AUTONOMOUS TO DETERMINE WHAT IS RIGHT OR TRUE AND WHAT IS WRONG OR FALSE.

❖ Any attempt of reason to question Divine authority or commandment or authoritative text will be met with Divine sanction or wrath as in the story of Iblis being condemned for questioning a Divine command at the beginning of human history.

- REASON, HOWEVER, IS THE PRINCIPAL TOOL FOR HUMANS TO FIND ANSWERS WHICH ARE NOT PROVIDED BY DIVINE REVELATION OR PROPHETIC TRADITION.
- IN THIS DOMAIN, SCHOLARS OR EXPERTS IN THE RESPECTIVE FIELDS OF SPECIALIZATION MAY DISAGREE WITH ONE ANOTHER, AND IF ATTEMPTS TO FORGE A CONSENSUS FAILS, THEN THE MODE OF AGREEING TO DISAGREE IS THE APPROPRIATE MODE TO BE ADOPTED BY THE SCHOLARS.

IN THOSE **IJTIHADI** (INDEPENDENT REASONING) OR **ZANNI** (SPECULATIVE) DOMAINS, MUSLIM SCHOLARS MAY AGREE TO DISAGREE WITH EACH OTHER AS LONG AS THE BASIS FOR THEIR REASONING IS THE QURAN AND SOUND HADITH. EVEN THE COMPANIONS OF THE HOLY PROPHET (PEACE BE UPON HIM) WERE NOT IN AGREEMENT ON MANY WORLDLY MATTERS BUT THEY DID NOT CALL EACH OTHER SINNERS OR DISBELIEVERS JUST BECAUSE THEY DISAGREED WITH EACH OTHER. A POPULAR SAYING OF THE PROPHET SUGGESTS **THAT DIFFERENCES OF OPINION (ON LEGITIMATE ISSUES) BY THE SCHOLARS OF THE MUSLIM COMMUNITY IS A TOKEN OF DIVINE MERCY.**

❖ THE ATTITUDE OF TRUE BELIEVERS (*MU'MINUN*) IN THE QUR'AN IS THAT OF ABSOLUTE OBEDIENCE (*TAA'AH*) TO THE COMMANDMENTS OF ALLAH AND THE FINAL MESSENGER WITHOUT COMPROMISING FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES.

❖ THE QUR'AN CONDEMNS THE ATTITUDE OF DISBELIEF (*KUFR*), ASSOCIATING PARTNERS WITH GOD OR POLYTHEISM (*SHIRK*), SKEPTICISM, CYNICISM, DOUBLE STANDARDS OR HYPOCRISY (*NIFAQ*) AMONG THE BELIEVERS.

The Qur'an makes it incumbent upon the Believers to enjoin what is right or forbid what is wrong (*AL-AMR BI AL-MA'RUF WA AL-NAHY 'AN AL-MUNKAR*), and to spread (*DA'WAH*) the message of the Qur'an to all mankind through peaceful means, because it forbids forcing others to embrace Islam. Although the Believer does not agree with the doctrines of other religions, they are forbidden from despising or denigrating the gods or deities of other religions, let alone from depriving them of their right to worship their gods in their own ways.

REACHING A CONSENSUS (*IJMA'*) AMONG SCHOLARS OF DIFFERENT VIEWPOINTS OR SCHOOLS OF THOUGHT IS A HIGHLY DESIRABLE GOAL IN ISLAMIC TRADITION AND CULTURE, BUT WHERE SUCH A POSITION IS NOT ATTAINABLE, THEN *DISAGREEMENT IS ALLOWED AND THE ATTITUDE OF AGREEING TO DISAGREE HAS TO BE ADOPTED TO AVERT SERIOUS DISCORD (IKHTILAF) OR DIVISIONS WITHIN THE MUSLIM COMMUNITY.*

- ISLAMIC SCHOLARS ARE NOT SUPPOSED TO DISAGREE ON MATTERS WHICH CONSTITUTE FUNDAMENTAL THEOLOGICAL DOCTRINES (**AQA'ID**) OR PRESCRIBED RELIGIOUS WORSHIP (**'IBADAH**) WHICH BELONG TO THE IMMUTABLE AND UNCHANGEABLE ASPECTS (**THAWABIT**) OF THE RELIGION OF ISLAM.
- BUT ON MATTERS WHICH ARE REGARDED AS BELONGING TO THE “BRANCHES” (**FURU'**) AND SUSCEPTIBLE TO CHANGE (**MUTAGHAYYIRAT**), SUCH AS IN MATTERS RELATED TO WORLDLY TRANSACTIONS (**MU'AMALAT**) WHOSE DETAIL FORMULATIONS ARE TO BE CRAFTED THROUGH THE EXERCISE OF INDEPENDENT JURIDICAL REASONING (**IJTIHAD**), IT IS NATURAL AND EXPECTED OF SCHOLARS TO HAVE DIFFERENCES OF OPINION, OR EVEN IRRECONCILIABLE VIEWPOINTS.

IN INTER-CULTURAL, INTER-CIVILISATIONAL RELATIONS, MUSLIMS ARE TAUGHT TO *TOLERATE* AND *RESPECT DIFFERENCES*, SEEK KNOWLEDGE AND WISDOM FROM WHATEVER SOURCES AS LONG AS THEY ARE COMPATIBLE WITH THE VALUES AND NORMS OF ISLAM. EXTREMISM, MILITANCY AND RADICALISM IN RELIGIOUS MATTERS DO NOT BELONG TO MAINSTREAM ISLAMIC ORTHODOXY AND THE *JUSTLY BALANCED NATURE (WASATIYYAH) OF THE MUSLIM UMMAH* (UNIVERSAL COMMUNITY OF BELIEVERS).

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