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Religions And Hate Speech

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RELIGIONS

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RELIGIONS/ADYAN is an annual and bi-lingual (English and Arabic) publication in interfaith studies published by the Doha International Center for interfaith Dialogue with an emphasis on interreligious dialogue and the relation between Islam and the other faiths.

In a world of the religious misunderstandings, violence and hijacking of religious faith by political ideologies the RELIGIONS/ADYAN intends to provide a welcome space of encounters and reflections upon the commonalities and shared goals of the great religions of the world. The title of the Journal suggests religious diversity, while suggesting the need to explore this diversity to develop keys to both a deepening of one's faiths and a meaningful opening to other creeds. The Quran suggests a commonality of faiths and a striving for the Truth within the context of religious diversity:

“To reach among you, we have prescribed a law and an open way. If God had willed, He would have made you a single people, but (His Plan is) to test you in what He hath given you: so, strive as in a race in all virtues. The goal of you all is to God; it is He that will show you the truth of the matters in which ye dispute.” (The Table Spread: 48, version of Yusuf Ali).

As a refereed international publication published by the Doha International Center for interfaith Dialogue, RELIGIONS/ADYAN finds its inspiration in the universal message of the monotheistic broadly understood, while engaging the various religious faiths that share common principles and values within this broad defined context.

RELIGIONS/ADYAN encourages comparative studies and interreligious exchanges in a spirit of dialogue and mutual enrichment. Its aim is to promote understanding between religious faithful of various traditions by exploring and studying the rich field of their theological and spiritual common grounds, their mutual and constructive relationships, past, present, and potential future, a better understanding of the causes of their conflicts, and the current challenges of their encounter with atheism, agnosticism and secular societies.

In addition, RELIGIONS/ADYAN wishes to highlight and revive the universal horizon of Islam by fostering studies in the relationship between Islam and other religions and civilizations in history, the arts, and religious studies. This is also away to revitalize intellectual discourse in Islam, within the context of an interactive and cross-fertilizing engagement with other faiths.

The essays published in RELIGIONS/ADYAN exclusively engage the intellectual responsibility of the authors, and necessarily reflect the views of the DICI. They are published as part of an ongoing dialogue on religions, and should not be construed as the expression of the positions of any sponsoring organizations.

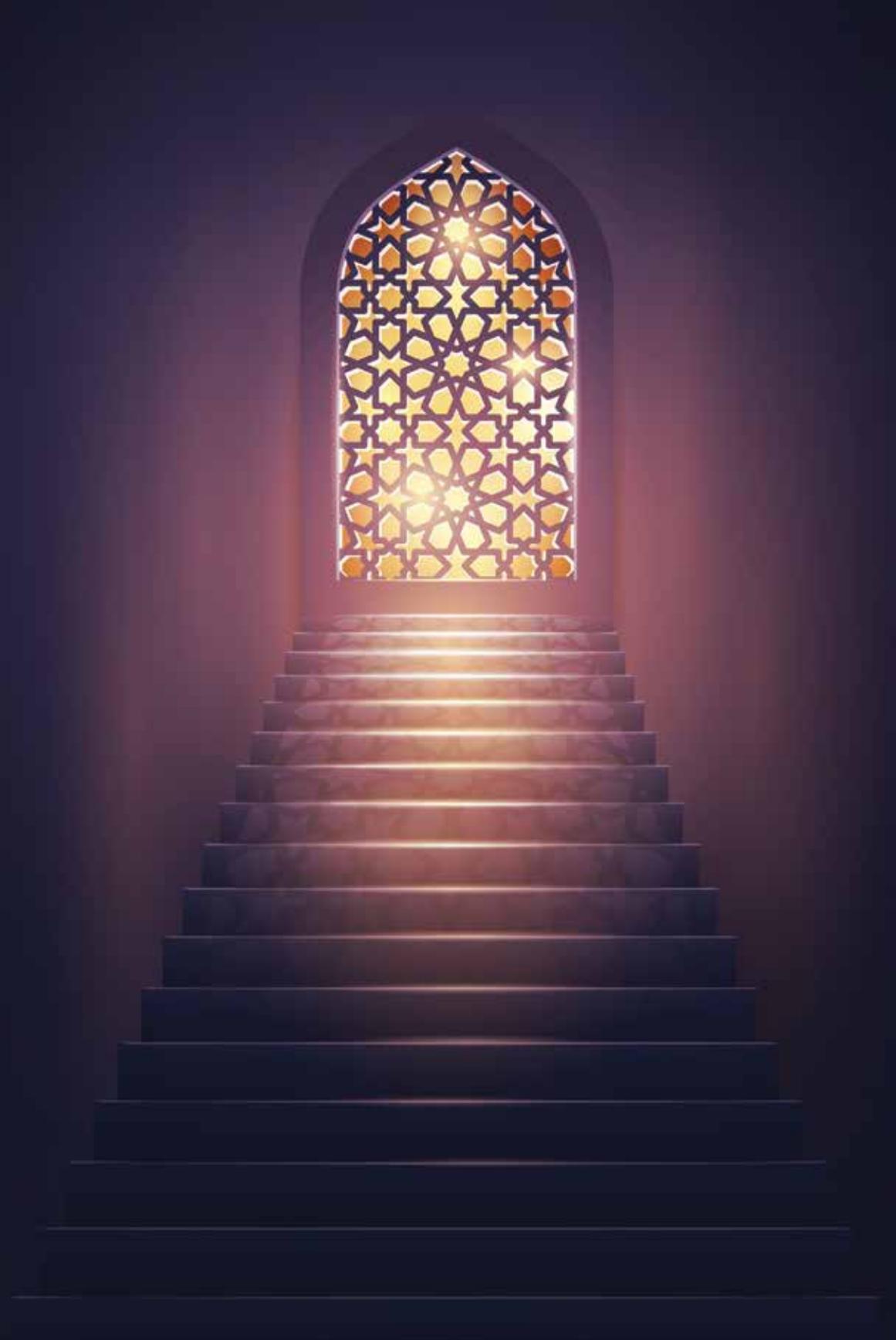


And We have not sent you, O Muhammad, except as a
mercy to the worlds

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Therefore, the role of the Catholic Church in the area of sensitization of Catholic faithful and the society against hate speech is much more important. Catholic Church leaders, besides generally passing Catholic teaching, especially spoke against hate speech.⁵⁷ In 2012, reflecting to an MP's offending statement, the Catholic Church – together with other denominations – declared, “we find it really annoying that hate speech was, could be said in the Parliament. Hungarian legislation, MPs and politicians, who are responsible for determining political public discourse, have increased responsibility against hate speech.”⁵⁸

Summary

During the most important Catholic event of the 20th century, the Second Vatican Council, communist dictatorship reigned in Hungary. The representatives of the Hungarian Catholic Church could take part in the Second Vatican Council with state permission under strict

control. The concept of the Council regarding interfaith dialogue could be implemented with limitation. After the regime change, the social position of the Church changed significantly. Regarding faith questions, the Church got considerable freedom, but it was lack of the continuity, which was a characteristic feature of western Churches. Pope John Paul II's visit to Hungary in 1991 gave interfaith dialogue a push. The Catholic Church spoke against religious hatred, if applicable against hate speech more and more strongly. In theory, the Church is asked in case of the legislation regarding religious and ethical questions. However, those utterances that the church makes for interfaith dialogue locally are more important. In Hungary, regarding non-Christian religions, the Church has experience in the dialogue with Jewish communities. The challenge of the future is what kind of sensitization the Church can present along the pressure appearing with refugee and migration processes, namely against hate speech.

57 MAZSIHISZ: Keresztény egyházi vezetők a gyűlöletbeszéd ellen. <https://mazsihisz.hu/hirek-a-zsido-vilagbol/mazsihisz-hirek/keresztény-egyhazi-vezetok-a-gyuloletbeszed-ellen> (downloaded: 10 January 2020)

58 ibidem



Combating Hate Speech from the Perspective of Islamic Philosophy: Building a Moral Paradigm

1 Introduction

Encyclopedia Britannica denoted “hate speech” as a “speech or expression that denigrates a person or persons on the basis of (alleged) membership in a social group identified by attributes such as race, ethnicity, gender, religion, age, physical or mental disability, and others¹”. As the UN Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech (published by May, 2019) clearly explain it, there is no international legal definition of hate speech, and the characterization



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of what is ‘hateful’ is controversial and disputed. In the context of this document, the term hate speech is understood as any kind of communication in speech, writing or behavior, that attacks or uses pejorative or discriminatory language with reference to a person or a group on the basis of who they are, in other words, based on their religion, ethnicity, nationality, race, colour, descent, gender or other identity factor².

1 <https://www.britannica.com/topic/hate-speech>, Accessed Decemeber 03, 2019.

2 <https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/UN%20Strategy%20and%20Plan%20of%20Action%20on%20Hate%20Speech%2018%20June%20SYNOPSIS.pdf>. Accessed Decemeber 03, 2019.

Within the legal proceedings of the European Union, hate speech is approached from the position that the rise in prejudice and intolerance can in many cases be directly linked to the respective governments' own policies and communications strategies. Representatives of prominent political parties, public officials, and, in some countries, even government ministers, have used inflammatory and derogatory language in their public communications, and have targeted various minorities, refugees and migrants, as well as the EU agenda. As a result, there is minimal political will to adequately and appropriately respond to instances of 'hate speech' surfacing in society at large.

Islamic philosophy, being it medieval or contemporary one, usually described as the tradition where both revelation (*naql*) and reason (*'aql*) play an important role. When any of the modern problems are approached, it always requires strong presuppositions. For the case of the hate speech issue, this must be some analysis of what the hate is, how it appears, how can be separated from another form of insulting speech and so on; in other words, there are some system of values should be placed before any judgment is done. In context of that, the study is dedicated to the explanation of the hate speech problem from the perspective of the classical and modern Islamic philosophy: how it could be improved by the promotion of ethics (*tahdhib al-akhlaq*), in which way

one must combat it by the reason and revelation proofs (both on the individual and social level), and how this kind of moral illness can be "cured" spiritually, approaching the paradigm of Islamic philosophical thinking. According to Saeed Alzahrani, hate speech under the traditional Islamic perspective (Shariah) is ambiguous and that in turn increases hate speech under the justification of protection of freedom of expression. At the same time, the ambiguity in the definition for the concept of hate speech in Islam has been leading many countries to suppress peaceful political opposition under the justification of the fight against hate speech

Taking all this into consideration, our study will be concentrated over three main tasks: first of all, how do Islamic thinkers of the past understood hate speech in the approach to the Qur'an, secondly, the perspective of akhlaq and adab writings on the free speech (starting from al-Farabi and Miskawayh) and, finally, how contemporary Islamic scholars address that issue in their works. Main subject of our analysis is the hate speech *per se*, being it addressed against Muslims or the followers of other religions.

1- Contemplation over the Qur'anic perspective of the hate speech

One of the Qur'anic verses which clear blames the behavior which can

be linked to hate speech is the one from surah "The Women" (4:148): "Allah does not like the public mention of evil except by one who has been wronged. And ever is Allah Hearing and Knowing" (*Saheen International Translation*). Al-Wahidi in his book "Reasons of Revelations" comments over this by the next way: "Allah loveth not the utterance of harsh speech..." [4:148]. Said Mujahid: "One man sought hospitality with some people. However, because they did not show him proper hospitality, he complained about them. And so this verse was revealed, giving him dispensation to complain". In the later tafsirs, like the one by Jalalayn, the similar commentary is given: "God does not like the utterance of evil words out loud by any person that is to say He will punish him for it unless a person has been wronged in which case He would not punish him for uttering it out loud when he is informing others of the wrong done to him by the wrong-doer or summoning them against him. God is ever Hearer of what is said Knower of what is done". So, *naqli* tradition clearly states that the verse is related to something about "wrongdoing" and the human reaction to it, but what the *'aqli* tradition of tafsirs says?

Fakhr al-Din al-Razi (d. 1209), who authored voluminous commentary "Keys to the Unseen" (*Mafatih al-Ghayb*), gives quite sound outline of what has been said in regard to the aforementioned verse. Al-Razi interprets *jahra bi l-su' min al-qawl* as "exposition of wrongdoings", and all this is prohibited in the case if

there are no necessity to speak about that in order to avoid "greater damage". So, there are some places when it should be done, for example, if someone really oppressed (*mazlum*). Mentioning sayings of Qatadah, Ibn Abbas, Mujahid and some other of the earlier generation of the scholars, al-Razi also speak about some "hidden affairs" (*ahwal al-mastura al-maktuma*) which should not be revealed if the person has no right for doing that. If this rule is violated, this will "lead a people to the backbiting and a person to a doubt". Thus, there are two perspectives for the verse can be related to the problem of the hate speech: that is, the legal one, and the second is social one. For the first perspective, the one may criticize others only being in charge of it or having special right to it; for the second one, this should be done in proper way and not in the public one. Comparing this to the contemporary definitions of the hate speech, the one may ask: is there any situation appear when any person has a right to blame some religious, social or ethnic group? If we taking al-Razi perspective, there are such cases, since if someone is "oppressed" by the member of another "group" he belongs to, there is obvious "right" (*haqq*) to seek justice, but thus justice is a problem of relation between the concrete people, and not the groups (ethic, religious, etc); thus, there are no cases where any xenophobia as it is can be justified. "So let the person fear God and says only what is Truth, not making harm to what is hidden, otherwise he will be unobedience", summarizes al-Razi.

3 https://www.article19.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/ECA-hate-speech-compilation-report_March-2018.pdf. Accessed Decemeber 03, 2019.

4 Alzahrani, Saeed Mohammed. Hate Speech from the Traditional Islamic Perspective. Unpublished PhD Dissertation. Indiana University. 2017.

5 Al-Razi, Fakhr al-Din. Tafsir Mafatih al-Ghayb. Beirut, 1982. Vol. 11, pp. 91-92.



2- Hate speech as inappropriate anger: philosophical perspective

One of the first great Islamic thinkers to address ethical virtues was al-Farabi. He derives his vision of “virtuous man” from the ideal of “doing good deeds at every moment of his time,” it is in fact not a moral-rigorous outlook, but an attempt to define the internal imperatives for the acquisition of virtues. On the one hand, it uses a purely metaphysical criterion of happiness (“distant true happiness”, that is, otherworldly), on the other, it formulates a perfectly rational basis for choosing what is “beautiful” and what is not. After all, among other things, fortunately, a person leads a logical thinking (“deep understanding”, Arabic). How to understand these theses, whether it is, in fact, a tribute to the Islamic religious outlook, or, nevertheless, one of the lines of development of ancient philosophical thought – this debate is still ongoing in science.. Leaving aside the discussion of al-Farabi universalism or culturalism, it should be noted that in his *Epistle on the Apprehension of the Happiness* (“*Risalah al-Tanbih ala Sabil al-Sa’da*”), the thinker draws attention not so much to social but as individual ethics, to the three means of achieving happiness that require appropriate intentions (“good deeds”), The “golden mean” in virtues, as well as logical thinking (“depth of understanding”). Al-Farabi’s further thesis already appeals to a kind of hedonism, contrasting the “temporal”

pleasures (which “block” the road to happiness) with the pleasures of the “ultimate”, that is, those which result from more conscious and sustained actions. The theoretical basis for the “path to happiness”, as evidenced by al-Farabi’s final thoughts, are the various “arts” distributed in the policies of his time. To some extent, the “Message” continues the line laid by al-Farabi in the “programmatic” work “Message about the views of the inhabitants of the virtuous city”, calling the “virtuous city” the people whose inhabitants go to such “true happiness” and not to “ghostly blessings”. According to al-Farabi, the human must have anger (*gadhb*) not only because of his nature (since part of it is the “power of anger”, “the animal” part of the soul, *al-quwwah al-gadhbimah*), but only “where it is appropriate” (*ala ma yanbagi*). So, the human has a right to criticize and even to blame others, but only when the situation needs it; since there are no real reasons to blame any group or ethnicity, any kind of hate speech cannot be recognized as good state of the soul and therefore belongs to “*akhlaq mazmumah*” (“bad morals”).

The similar ideas were expressed by Abu Ali Miskawayh. As a result of human beings living together with others, and being in contact with them, their experience is enriched and virtues are rooted in their soul by way of putting these virtues into practice. The importance of transactions with people, as Miskawayh says, refers to the fact that transactions lead to the appearance

6 Al-Farabi. *Risalah al-Tanbih 'ala Sabil al-Sa'adah li-Abi Nasr al-Farabi*(Ed. S. Khalifat). Amman. 1987..

of virtues which only do so in company and in dealings and interaction with others, such as integrity, courage, and generosity. If the person did not live in this human milieu, these virtues would not be apparent, and the human being would become just like people frozen or dead. Miskawayh repeats in several places that it is for this reason the wise men said that man is civil by nature, meaning that he needs a city, containing many people, for his human happiness to be complete. This being so, it is easy to refer the idea back to its original source, since Aristotle presented it in his book the Nicomachean Ethics. To Miskawayh, love (*mahabba*) originates from the very name man, *insan*. The word *insan* is derived from the Arabic substantive *uns* meaning “to associate” or “to be friendly” towards others. Man is, then, by nature inclined to fellowship and is never averse to others. Friendship (*al-sadaqa*), on the other hand, defines Miskawayh: “is a kind of love, but it denotes something more particular than love. Love is said to be a state of both the rational and the irascible souls, which exists between man and someone to whom he cannot do good such as God, the pious. and those who have gone before him. Thus, for Miskawayh any kinds of hate speech generally confronts the “social nature” (*uns or ins*) of human, as well as to the virtue of love.

3- Hate speech from the perspective of modern Islamic thinkers

Despite the fact that contemporary Islamic philosophy is a very broad school of thought with many differences inside, there are some ethical teachings quite common for all the representatives of this tradition. For example, the one represented by Muhammad al-Ghazzali (1917–1996), the author of many books, among them “*Husn al-Khuluq*”. As he clearly states in Chapter 12 of the book, when the quarrel intensifies and its roots go deeper, and its thorns become branches and branches increase in number, then the freshness of the fruits of faith is adversely affected. Softness, sympathy, satisfaction and peace which are encouraged by the Islamic teachings receive a setback. Performance of worship loses its righteousness, nor does the self get any benefit from it. Many times the mutual quarrels perturb the persons who claim to be wise. In this they take a recourse to the lowly and superficial things, and sometimes indulge in such dangerous acts which only increase difficulties and bring troubles. When a man is displeased, his eyes become prejudiced and ignore the camel and object to gnat. Such eyes do not appreciate the beauty of the peacock, for they only see its ugly feet and claws. If a slight defect is present, it turns the molehill into a mountain. And

sometimes the internal rancour and jealousy affect them so badly that no hesitation is felt in inventing imaginary stories. Islam disapproves of all these manifestations of ill-feeling and advises to abstain from them. It declares their avoidance as the most virtuous form or worship. Finally, Muhammad al-Gazzali says: “In every dispute or quarrel, a man is necessarily in one or the other condition, he is either an oppressor or the oppressed. If he is an oppressor, he has usurped the rights of others, and then he should give up this wrong policy and should reform his character. He should understand that his opponent could abandon his hostility and rancour towards him only when he takes a

satisfying and pleasant step in this regard. In such a condition Islam has commanded that he should request his opponent to come to a peaceful settlement and he should please him”. This corresponds to hadeeth:

“He who has harmed his brother’s rights or has hurt his honor, then he should please him today, before the day comes when there will be neither dirham nor dinar with him. If he would have virtues, then they would be taken in proportion to the aggression that he had committed. If there would be no virtues in his record, then the evil deeds of the oppressed would be thrust into his (oppressor’s) account.” (Al-Bukhari)



7 Nadia Jamal al-Din. Miskawayh, in: Prospects: the quarterly review of comparative education (Paris, UNESCO: International Bureau of Education), vol. 24, no. 1/2. 1994, pp. 131–52.

8 Nasir Omar, Mohd. Islamic Social Ethics: An Analysis of Miskawayh’s Thought, in European Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies, [S.l.], v. 1, n. 1, 2016, pp. 81-87.

9 Al-Ghazzali, Muhammad. Muslim Character. New York: Kazi Publications, 2014,, pp.144-150.

For Muhammad al-Ghazzali, This is Islam's advice for the oppressors, but those who are the oppressed and whose rights have been harmed for them the advice of Islam is that when the oppressor may ask for their pardon and may seek his Lord's forgiveness, then he should pardon him and should show softness. In such circumstances, to reject the request for pardon is a great sin.

Conclusions

Following the analysis of the problem of hate speech in Islamic tradition, some basic conclusions could be stated. First of all, despite the idea of "hate speech" is the modern one, we have many examples from Islamic sources of the past which could enrich our experience of modern interreligious and intercultural dialogue. As we have shown, thinkers of the past interpreted problem of anger and public hate speech in legal, social and moral perspective. For the legal one, this was nothing than the violation of the rights of others, since there is no basis to judge the whole group of people (ethnic, religious, cultural etc) even if some of them violated the rights of the individual. In some way, Islamic thinkers of the past understood well that interreligious conflicts usually motivated not by the pure religious factors, but by the political, economical or other reasons. For the social perspective, this is the ideal of social stability and order; while any kinds of hate speech are constitute the big challenge of that. Finally, the moral perspective provides in-depth understanding of the anger and how it can be exposed in different paradigms, where the hate speech is one of them;

thus, for Muslim intellectual tradition of Medieval Ages and nowadays, hate speech has not relations to the free speech or restoration of the rights, it is the negative phenomena everyone (being Muslim or non-Muslim) should be aware of it to prevent negative moral consequences.

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Religious Freedom, Discarding Hate Speech and Contempt of Religions

Introduction:

In order to draw a historical/epistemological framework more comprehensive and accommodating to the essence of the dilemma posed, it is necessary to learn about the basic principles agreed upon around the world.

Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the United Nations, provides us with appropriate grounds for a deep understanding of the dilemma of religious freedom. This Article stipulates



Neven Melek

the following: "Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance." However, religious freedom as noted by¹ Roger Finke and Robert R. Martin, remained as an orphan idea that has almost been lost in the maze of the human rights struggle.

¹ Roger Finke & Robert R. Martin:
Research submitted to Pennsylvania State University 2017.