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Islam and Other Religions

Two stereotypes dominate most of what has been written on tolerance and intolerance in the Islamic world.¹ The first depicts a fanatical warrior, an Arab horseman riding out of the desert with a sword in one hand and the Qur’ān in the other, offering his victims the choice between the two. This picture, made famous by Edward Gibbon² in his Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, is not only false but impossible—unless we are to assume a race of left-handed swordsmen. In Muslim practice, the left hand is reserved for unclean purposes, and no self-respecting Muslim, then or now, would use it to raise the Qur’ān. The other image, almost equally preposterous, is that of an interfaith, interracial utopia, in which men and women belonging to different races, professing different creeds, lived side by side in a golden age of unbroken harmony, enjoying equality of rights and of opportunities, and toiling together for the advancement of civilization. To put the two stereotypes in Jewish terms, in one version classical Islam was like modern America, only better; in the other it was like Hitler’s Germany, only worse, if such can be imagined.

Both images are of course wildly distorted; yet both contain, as stereotypes often do, some elements of truth. Two features they have in common are that they are relatively recent, and that they are of Western and not Islamic origin. For Christians and Muslims alike, tolerance is a new virtue, intolerance a new crime. For the greater part of the history of both communities, tolerance was not valued nor was intolerance condemned. Until comparatively modern times, Christian Europe neither prized nor practiced tolerance itself, and was not greatly offended by its absence in others. The charge that was always brought against Islam was not that its doctrines were imposed
by force—something seen as normal and natural—but that its
doctrines were false. Similarly on the Muslim side, the claim
to tolerance, now much heard from Muslim apologists and
more especially from apologists for Islam, is also new and of
alien origin. It is only very recently that some defenders of
Islam have begun to assert that their society in the past ac-
corded equal status to non-Muslims. No such claim is made
by spokesmen for resurgent Islam,³ and historically there is
no doubt that they are right. Traditional Islamic societies nei-
ther accorded such equality nor pretended that they were so
doing. Indeed, in the old order, this would have been regarded
not as a merit but as a dereliction of duty. How could one
accord the same treatment to those who follow the true faith
and those who willfully reject it? This would be a theological
as well as a logical absurdity.

The truth, as usual, is somewhere between the opposing
and contrasting stereotypes, and is more complex, more var-
ied, more shaded than either of them.

How tolerant has Islam been in the past? The answers we
may give to this question depend very much on the definitions
we assign to its terms. What do we mean by Islam? This is
neither as easy nor as obvious as might at first sight appear.
What do we mean by tolerance? This again has many different
definitions and raises many questions, not least of which is
our standard of comparison.

The definition of Islam raises problems that are by now
familiar. As has often been pointed out, the word “Islam” is
commonly used in several different senses. In the first instance
it denotes what Muslims conceive as the definitive revelation
vouchsafed by God to the Prophet Muhammad and contained
in the holy book called the Qur’ān. This is what might be
called the original Islam, a set of doctrines and commandments
that is the basis and also the starting point of the religion
known by that name.

But the word “Islam,” like the word “Christianity,” is also
used in a second and broader sense to indicate the historical
development of that religion after the death of its founder. In
this sense the term “Islam” embraces theology and mysticism,
worship and ritual, law and statecraft, and the whole complex of what countless Muslims thought, said, and did in the name of their faith. Islam in this sense may be as different from the Islam of the Prophet as, shall we say, the Christianity of the Emperor Constantine and the bishops from the Christianity of Christ—or, we might add, as different as the Judaism of the Talmud from that of the Torah, or the Judaism of today from that of the Talmud.

On the whole, however, the difference was probably less radical in Islam than in either Judaism or Christianity, because of the very different experiences of the founders of the three religions. Moses died before he entered the promised land; Christ died on the cross. Muḥammad attained not martyrdom but power. During his lifetime he became a head of state, commanding armies, collecting taxes, administering justice, and promulgating laws. The resulting interpenetration of faith and power, of religion and authority, has remained characteristic of Islam throughout most of its history. Even so, a great deal happened after the death of the Prophet, and Islam in the empire of the caliphs, like Christianity in the empires of Rome and its successors, evolved into something vastly more complex and more extensive than the original dispensation.

Finally, there is a third meaning in which the term “Islam” is the counterpart not of Christianity but of Christendom. In this sense it denotes not just a religion but a whole civilization, including many things that, as we in the Western world classify them, would not be regarded as religious in any sense. The term “Islamic art,” for example, denotes virtually any kind of art produced within the Islamic world and marked by certain cultural and not merely religious characteristics. The term “Christian art” is limited to devotional and ecclesiastical art and would certainly not be extended to include art produced by Christians, still less by non-Christians living within the world of Christendom. Similarly, “Islamic science” means mathematics, physics, chemistry, and the rest, produced within this Islamic civilization and expressed normally in Arabic, occasionally in one of the other languages of Islam. Much of
this science, as of this art, is the work not of Muslims but of Christians and Jews living in Islamic lands and constituting a part of the Islamic civilization in which they were formed. In contrast, the term “Christian science” is not used to designate the scientific achievements of Christians and others in Christendom. Indeed, until comparatively recently the term was not used at all, and when it first made its appearance, it was with an entirely different meaning.

Given the centrality and pervasiveness of religion in Islamic life and culture, even in this third sense of the word, the religious element in Islam is greater and more significant than in Christendom. But in this sense the term “Islam” denotes not precept but practice, not the doctrines and commandments of Islam, but the record of Muslim history—a record, that is, of the activities of human beings, their successes and failures, their weaknesses and achievements. And Muslims, like the rest of mankind, sometimes fall short of their own ideals, and sometimes relax their own strict rules. If we look for tolerance or intolerance in both the theory and practice of Islam, the answers may differ according to the definition of Islam that we adopt. They may also differ according to our standard and measure of tolerance.

What indeed do we mean by tolerance? In dealing with such subjects there is an inevitable tendency to assess and evaluate by comparison. If we speak of tolerance in Islam, we shall soon find ourselves measuring tolerance in Islam against tolerance in other societies—in Christendom, in India, in the Far East, or perhaps in the modern West. This is a form of comparison much cultivated by polemicists of various factions. The polemicist can of course make his task much easier by choosing the terms of comparison that suit him best. It is, for example, always easy to demonstrate the superiority of one religion to another by contrasting the precept of the one with the practice of the other. I recall reading a delightful little pamphlet proving that the Islamic caliphate was superior to the American presidency. This was done by the simple device of defining the caliphate in terms of theological and juridical treatises and the presidency in terms of the latest scandals.
from Washington. It would of course be equally easy, if anyone thought it worth the trouble, to demonstrate the reverse by the same method—by defining the presidency in terms of the constitution, and the caliphate in terms of gossip from medieval Baghdad, which is not lacking in the sources at our disposal.

This kind of comparison, however common, is not very helpful. It may be emotionally satisfying, but it is intellectually dishonest to compare one’s theory with the other’s practice. It is equally misleading to compare one’s best with the other’s worst. If, as the term of comparison for Christendom, we take the Spanish Inquisition or the German death camps, then it is easy to prove almost any society tolerant. There is nothing like Auschwitz in Islamic history, but it would not be difficult to name Muslim rulers or leaders worthy to rank with Cotton Mather or Torquemada and thus demonstrate Christian tolerance.

Other, more subtle, forms of loaded comparisons can be achieved by comparing discrepant times, places, and situations. For example, we can compare a medieval society with a modern one, or a believing society in which religion is profoundly important and religious tolerance is a searching test with a secular society in which religion is of minor interest. Tolerance is easy in matters of indifference; it is much more difficult in those that deeply concern us. A glance at the effective limits on freedom of expression in academic life even in the most advanced present-day democracies will illustrate this point.

Though other disparities have displaced religion as the main source of conflict and therefore of repression in our modern society, the term “tolerance” is still most commonly used to indicate acceptance by a dominant religion of the presence of others. Our present inquiry is limited to one question: How did Islam in power treat other religions? Or, to put it more precisely, how did those who, in different times and places, saw themselves as the upholders of Muslim authority and law, treat their non-Muslim subjects?

Whether this treatment deserves the name of tolerance de-
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depends, as already noted, on the definition of terms. If by tolerance we mean the absence of discrimination, there is one answer; if the absence of persecution, quite another. Discrimination was always there, permanent and indeed necessary, inherent in the system and institutionalized in law and practice. Persecution, that is to say, violent and active repression, was rare and atypical. Jews and Christians under Muslim rule were not normally called upon to suffer martyrdom for their faith. They were not often obliged to make the choice, which confronted Muslims and Jews in reconquered Spain, between exile, apostasy, and death. They were not subject to any major territorial or occupational restrictions, such as were the common lot of Jews in premodern Europe. There are some exceptions to these statements, but they do not affect the broad pattern until comparatively modern times and even then only in special areas, periods, and cases.

Islam has often been described as an egalitarian religion, and in many senses it is indeed such. If we look at the changes made by Islam at the time of its advent in seventh century Arabia; still more, if we compare the Muslim world in medieval times with caste in India to the east or with the entrenched aristocratic privilege of Christian Europe to the west, then Islam does indeed appear as an egalitarian religion in an egalitarian society. In principle and in law, it recognizes neither caste nor aristocracy. Human nature being what it is, both tend to obtrude themselves on occasion; but when this happens, it is in spite of Islam and not as part of it, and such departures from equality have repeatedly been condemned by both traditionalists and radicals as non-Islamic or anti-Islamic innovations.

All in all there was far greater social mobility in Islam than was permitted either in Christian Europe or Hindu India. But this equality of status and opportunity was limited in certain important respects. The rank of a full member of society was restricted to free male Muslims. Those who lacked any of these three essential qualifications—that is, the slave, the woman, or the unbeliever—were not equal. The three basic inequalities of master and slave, man and woman, believer and unbeliever,
were not merely admitted; they were established and regulated by holy law. All three groups of inferiors were seen as necessary, or at least as useful, and all had their places and functions, even if occasional doubts were expressed about the third. Though there was general agreement on the need for slaves and women, there was at times some question about the need for unbelievers. The common view, however, was that they served a variety of useful purposes, mostly economic.

A major difference between the three is the element of choice. A woman cannot choose to become a man. A slave can be freed, but by the choice of his master, not his own. Both the woman and the slave are thus in a position of involuntary—for the woman also immutable—inferiority. The inferiority of the unbeliever, however, is entirely optional, and he can end it at any time by a simple act of will. By adopting Islam he becomes a member of the dominant community, and his status of legal inferiority is at an end. True, in the earliest Islamic period there was some social differentiation between the Arab Muslims who founded the Empire and the non-Arab converts who appeared among their subjects, and traces of these differences remained in the formulations of the law. But in general, these early distinctions were forgotten, and in most times and places the perceived differences between old Muslims and new converts did not go beyond the bounds of familiar social snobbery. The status of inferiority to which the unbeliever was subject was thus entirely voluntary; from a Muslim point of view it might indeed be described as willful. For the Muslim, Jews and Christians were people who had been offered God’s truth in its final and perfect form, of which their own religions were earlier, imperfect, and abrogated forms, and yet had willfully and foolishly rejected it.

Of the three victims of social inferiority, therefore, the unbeliever was the only one who remained inferior by his own choice. He was also the one whose disabilities were on the whole the least onerous of the three. Other things being equal, it was more comfortable to be a free male unbeliever than a woman or a slave in Muslim society. Perhaps for this very reason it was felt to be more necessary with an unbeliever
than with a woman or a slave to enforce or at least visibly to symbolize the status of inferiority. Of this more in a moment.

The history of the relations between the Muslim state on the one hand and its non-Muslim subjects and, later, neighbors on the other begins with the career of the Prophet. The Qurʾān and the Muslim tradition tell us about Muḥammad’s dealings with the Jews of Medina and of the northern Hijaz, with the Christians of Najrān in the south and some other Christians in the north, and with the pagans who constituted the majority of the Arabian population. For pagans the choice was clear: Islam or death. For Jews and Christians, possessors of what were recognized as revealed religions, based on authentic though superseded revelations, the choice included a third term: Islam, death, or submission. Submission involved the payment of tribute and the acceptance of Muslim supremacy. Death might be commuted to slavery.

At an early stage in his career as ruler of Medina, the Prophet came into conflict with the three resident Jewish tribes. All three were overcome and, according to the Muslim tradition, two were given the choice between conversion and exile, and the third, the Banū Qurayza, between conversion and death. The bitterness generated by the opposition of the Jewish tribes to Muḥammad is reflected in the mostly negative references to Jews in the Qurʾān and in the biography and traditions of the Prophet.5

A different situation arose with the capture in the year 7 of the Hijra (corresponding to A.D. 629) of the oasis of Khaybar, about ninety-five miles from Medina. This oasis, inhabited by Jews, including some who had settled there after being driven out of Medina, was the first territory conquered by the Muslim state and brought under its rule. The Jews of Khaybar capitulated to the Prophet after about a month and a half of hostilities, and were granted terms by which they were allowed to remain in the oasis and to cultivate their lands; but they were to hand over one-half of the produce to the Muslims. This agreement became a locus classicus for later legal discussions of the status of conquered non-Muslim subjects of the Muslim state. Its force as a leading case was not affected
by the subsequent expulsion of the Jews of Khaybar in the time of the caliph 'Umar I (634-644).\(^6\)

Contacts with Christians during the lifetime of the Prophet were rather less important and very much less contentious than with Jews. The Prophet's relations with Christian tribes and settlements in the northern Hijaz, and later in southern Arabia, were in general regulated by agreements, the most famous of which was that concluded with the Christians of Najrān. By its terms the Christians were permitted to practice their religion and run their own affairs, on condition that they paid a fixed tribute, gave hospitality to the Prophet's representatives, provided supplies to the Muslims in time of war, and refrained from usury. No doubt because of the rather more peaceful relations between the Prophet and the Christians, references to them in the Qur'ān are more favorable than to Jews. A much-quoted passage reflects the Prophet's differing experiences with the followers of the two earlier religions: "You will surely find that the most hostile to the Believers are the Jews and the idolators, while those who have the greatest affection to them are the ones who say: 'We are Christians'" (V,86). Other passages in the Qur'ān and elsewhere dealing with Jesus, while not accepting Christian doctrines on Christ's nature and mission, nevertheless share the Christian view of the Jewish rejection. Toward the end of the Prophet's life, the expansion of the Muslim state brought it into contact and sometimes into conflict with Christian tribes, and a somewhat less benign attitude toward Christians is reflected in Muslim scripture and tradition. But in general, while these on the whole express a far more sympathetic attitude toward Christians than toward Jews, the subsequent development of Islamic law makes no such distinction between the two.

The political problem posed by the relations between Muslim and non-Muslim was already clear in the lifetime of the Prophet, and the principles for its solution are contained in the Qur'ān. As chief magistrate and later ruler of the community of Medina, the Prophet had Jewish subjects; as sovereign of the Islamic state he had relations with both Christian
and Jewish neighbors in other parts of Arabia. Already at the beginning, the question was seen as one of power—the rules to be followed by the Muslim state in its dealings with non-Muslim subjects, neighbors, and ultimately conquests, and the larger principles from which these rules derive. The Qurʾān speaks clearly and unequivocally on these issues and contains the nucleus of what later became an elaborate system of legal regulations.

But Muḥammad became a statesman in order to accomplish his mission as a prophet, not vice versa, and it is clear that the more strictly religious aspect of these relationships was also a prime concern. Here too the Qurʾān is very instructive. Unlike most earlier religious documents, it shows awareness of religion as a category of phenomena, and not merely as a single phenomenon. There is not just one religion; there are religions. The word used in Arabic is ʿdin, obviously related to the Hebrew and Aramaic word meaning law. In both Judaism and Islam, religion and law, though not identical, largely overlap. Our modern word “religion” comes from the Latin, but the Latin religio and the Greek threskeia mean rather different things. The notion of religion as a class or category, in which Islam is one and in which besides Islam there are others, seems to have been present from the advent of the Islamic dispensation. The Qurʾān contains a number of passages in which the new religion defines itself against others—a normal way of self-definition, for communities as well as individuals. A much-cited phrase describes the Muslims as a umma ʿdin al-nās, a people or a community distinct from the rest of mankind. Islam is defined against Christianity by verses rejecting the incarnation and the trinity, against Judaism by passages abandoning some of the Jewish dietary laws. Far more important than the rejection of Christianity or Judaism, however, was the rejection of paganism—the main enemy against which the Prophet fought and from which he won the main body of his converts. Inevitably, the struggle against paganism brought Islam closer to Judaism and Christianity, seen, if not as allies, then as kindred faiths opposed to a common adversary.
Something of this sense of kinship can be discerned, at least in later times, in the consciousness of all three communities. There are passages in the Qurʾān that have been interpreted by later commentators and exegetes as an acceptance of religious pluralism, even of coexistence. Though the precise meaning of some of these passages in the original text has recently been challenged, there can be no doubt about the consensus of Muslim opinion. Thus, for example, the verse la ʾikrāḥa fīʾl-dīn (II, 256), “there is no compulsion in religion,” has usually been taken to mean that other religions should be tolerated, and that their followers should not be forced to adopt Islam. Recently a European scholar has argued that this phrase is not a commendation of tolerance but rather an expression of resignation—an almost reluctant acceptance of the obduracy of others. One may argue for or against this interpretation of the original meaning of the Qurʾānic words, but even if we accept this version, it does not affect the way in which the verse was normally and regularly interpreted in the Islamic legal and theological tradition. The same may be said of the well-known verse lakum dīnukum wali dīnī (CIX, 6), “To you your religion, to me my religion.” Here again there may be some uncertainty as to what precisely these words conveyed in their original context, but a common subsequent interpretation was to use this as proof-text for pluralism and coexistence. Another Qurʾānic verse (II, 62) appears to offer even more striking support: “Those who believe [i.e., the Muslims], and those who profess Judaism, and the Christians and the Sabians, those who believe in God and the Last Day and act righteously, shall have their reward with their Lord; there shall be no fear in them, neither shall they grieve.” At first sight, this verse might seem to treat the four monotheistic and scriptural religions as equal. While such an interpretation is excluded by other passages in the Qurʾān, this verse nevertheless served to justify the tolerated position accorded to the followers of these religions under Muslim rule.

A much-cited example of other, more negative, passages occurs in V, 51: “O you who believe, do not take the Jews and Christians as friends [or perhaps allies—the word is au-
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liyā’]; they are friends of one another, and whoever among you takes them as friends will become one of them.” This and other similar verses reflect the periods when the Prophet was in conflict with both religions. A well-known verse of the late period deals with the need for the holy war against the unbelievers and the imposition on them of a poll tax (Qur’ān, IX, 29): “Fight against those who do not believe in God or in the Last Day, who do not forbid what God and his Prophet have forbidden or practice the true religion, among those who have been given the Book, until they pay the jizya [poll-tax] from their hand, they being humbled (‘an yadin wahum ṣāghirūn).” These four words have recently been the subject of several studies, curiously enough written almost entirely by Jewish, mostly Israeli scholars, offering new interpretations of what these Arabic words really mean or could originally have meant.9 But here again what concerns us is not the original meaning of the verse but the way in which it was interpreted in historic Islam. On this there is little doubt. The normal interpretation was that the jizya was not only a tax but also a symbolic expression of subordination. The Qur’ān and tradition often use the word dhull or dhilla (humiliation or abasement) to indicate the status God has assigned to those who reject Muḥammad, and in which they should be kept so long as they persist in that rejection. Thus, in a passage on the Children of Israel, we read: “They were consigned to humiliation and wretchedness; they brought the wrath of God upon themselves, and this because they used to deny God’s signs and kill His Prophets unjustly and because they disobeyed and were transgressors” (II, 61).

The imposition of the jizya, and more especially the manner of its payment, are usually interpreted in this light. The words ‘an yadin wahum ṣāghirūn are explained symbolically. Thus, for Maḥmūd ibn ʿUmar al-Zamakhshārī (1075-1144), author of a standard commentary on the Qur’ān, the meaning of these words is that “the jizya shall be taken from them with belittlement and humiliation. He [the dhimmī, i.e., the non-Muslim subject of the Muslim state] shall come in person, walking not riding. When he pays, he shall stand, while the

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tax collector sits. The collector shall seize him by the scruff of the neck, shake him, and say: 'Pay the jizya!', and when he pays it he shall be slapped on the nape of his neck.' 10 Other authorities add similar details—such as, for example, that the dhimmī must appear with bent back and bowed head, that the tax collector must treat him with disdain and even with violence, seizing his beard and slapping his cheeks, and the like. A piece of symbolism prescribed in many law books is that the dhimmī's hand must be below, the tax collector's hand above, when the money changes hands. The purpose of all this is made clear by a fifteenth-century jurist of the rigorous Hanbali school who, after prescribing these and similar acts of ritual humiliation to be performed in public "so that all may enjoy the spectacle," concludes: "Perhaps in the end they will come to believe in God and His Prophet, and thus be delivered from this shameful yoke." 11

In contrast to the commentators and other theologians, the jurists are less ferocious and more concerned with the fiscal than the symbolic aspect of the jizya. Abū 'Ubayd (770-838), author of a classical treatise on taxation, insists that the dhimmīs must not be burdened beyond their capacity, nor must they be caused to suffer. 12 The great jurist Abū Yusuf (731?-808), the chief qādi of the caliph Hārūn al-Rashid, rules explicitly against such treatment: "No one of the people of the dhimma should be beaten in order to exact payment of the jizya, nor made to stand in the hot sun, nor should hateful things be inflicted upon their bodies, or anything of that sort. Rather, they should be treated with leniency."

Abū Yusuf was not, however, in favor of coddling the taxpayers: "They should be imprisoned until they pay what they owe. They are not to be let out of custody until the jizya has been exacted from them in full. No governor may release any Christian, Jew, Zoroastrian, Sabian, or Samaritan unless the jizya is collected from him. He may not reduce anyone's payment by allowing a portion to be left unpaid. It is not permissible for one person to be exempted and for another to have to pay. That cannot be done, because their lives and
possessions are guaranteed safety only upon payment of the jizya, which is comparable to tribute money.""}

Several points must be noted in considering these and other similar passages. First, the jurists, with their more humane and also more practical attitude, belong to the early period of Islam, when it was confident and expanding; the commentators cited were writing in a period of contraction and constraint, when Islam was under threat both at home and abroad. Second, there can be no doubt that it is the attitudes of the jurists, rather than of the commentators and other theologians, that more accurately reflect the practice of Muslim rulers and administrators. Most of these, in the treatment of dhimmis as in many other matters, failed to meet the exacting demand of their religious advisers and critics. The rules that some of the ulema laid down on the collection of the jizya and related matters belong more to the history of mentalities than of institutions. They have their own kind of importance, which becomes greater in times of crisis or defeat.

In general, these prescriptions again illustrate the need that was felt to remind the unbeliever of an inferiority that he might otherwise be tempted—and even permitted—to forget. No such reminder was needed for the woman or the slave.

After the death of the Prophet, the sway of Islam was extended across a vast territory reaching from the Atlantic in the west to the borders of India and China, and at times even beyond these borders, in the east. In these newly acquired territories there were large, important, and established religious communities; there were also old established legal and administrative systems regulating how these communities were treated. The most important of these systems—indeed the only ones encountered during the early formative centuries of the Islamic state—were those inherited from the ancient empires of Persia and of Rome. The overwhelming majority of the new subjects of the Islamic state were Christians of various churches. Iraq, though part of the Persian Empire, was predominantly Nestorian Christian. Syria, Palestine, the whole of North Africa, and the Muslim acquisitions in Europe had all formed part of the Christian Roman Empire. In all these
countries there were Jewish minorities, sometimes of considerable size. In Iran, too, there were Christian as well as Jewish populations, but the majority of the Iranians professed the religion of Zoroaster or one of its variants.

In the early centuries of Islamic rule, there was little or no attempt at forcible conversion, the spread of the faith being effected rather by persuasion and inducement. The rate and scale of conversion are difficult to assess from the available evidence, and some scholars have argued that as late as the Crusades, non-Muslims still constituted a majority of the population. It is clear, however, that large numbers of Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians adopted the Muslim religion and became part of Islamic society.  

There are significant differences in the fates of the three religions after the Muslim conquest. Zoroastrianism fared worst. The pre-Islamic Persian state, unlike the Christian state, was completely overcome and destroyed, and all its territories and peoples were brought within the embrace of the Islamic caliphate. The Zoroastrian priesthood had been closely associated with the structure of power in ancient Iran. Deprived of this association, and possessing neither the stimulation of powerful friends abroad enjoyed by the Christians nor the bitter skill in survival possessed by the Jews, the Zoroastrians fell into discouragement and decline. Their numbers dwindled rapidly, and it is striking that they took little or no part in the Iranian cultural and political revival that occurred under the aegis of Islam in the tenth century and thereafter.

Christianity was defeated, not destroyed by the rise of Islam and the establishment of the Islamic state. But the processes of Arab settlement, of conversion to Islam and assimilation to the dominant culture, gradually reduced the Christians—when and at what stage is impossible to say—from a majority to a minority of the population. In some places, notably in Central Asia, southern Arabia, and North Africa, where Christianity before the advent of Islam had occupied a significant or even, in the last-named, a dominant position, it died out completely. For many Christians, the transition from a dominant to a subject status, with all the disadvantages involved,
was too much to endure, and large numbers of them sought
refuge from subjection by adopting Islam and joining the domi-
nant faith and community. Judaism in contrast survived. Jews
were more accustomed to adversity. For them, the Islamic
conquest merely meant a change of masters, in most places
indeed for the better, and they had already learned to adapt
and endure under conditions of political, social, and economic
disability. In the core countries of the Middle East, in Egypt,
Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, and to a lesser extent Iraq, Chris-
tianity showed greater endurance than in North Africa, and
Christian minorities survived in significant numbers. The rea-
son may be that in these countries the Christians enjoyed the
same advantage, if we may call it that, as the Jews: experience
in survival. In Iraq they had been subordinate to the dominant
Zoroastrian faith; in Egypt and the Syrian lands, though shar-
ing the Christian religion with the rulers of the Byzantine
Empire, they were of different sects and subject to discrimina-
tion and even at times to persecution. For many of the
adherents of the Eastern churches, the advent of Islam and
the transfer of their countries from Christian to Muslim rule
brought a marked improvement in their circumstances, and
a greater degree of religious freedom than they had previously
enjoyed.

The further expansion of Islam brought the authority of the
Muslim state beyond the heartlands of the Middle East and
North Africa, which were also the homelands of Christianity
and Judaism, into new areas where these religions had little
or no impact. Buddhists and Hindus in Asia, animists in Africa
south of the Sahara and of Ethiopia, now came within range
of Muslim power. For the Muslim, these were polytheists and
idolators, and were therefore not entitled to tolerance. For
them the choice was between Islam and death, which later
might be commuted to enslavement at the discretion of their
captors.

In the vast empire which they created by conquest, the
Muslims at first found themselves as a dominant but small
minority. Their religion provided them with certain basic re-
ligious principles by which to rule their subject populations;
the older regimes which they had replaced bequeathed them traditions, procedures, and even personnel with which to put these principles in practice, or to modify them. Certain features of the situation in the former Persian and Byzantine lands that constituted the new Islamic caliphate are very relevant to the understanding of Muslim policies toward other religions.

Perhaps most important, the Middle Eastern region was and had for long been one of ethnic and religious pluralism. True, the Greek orthodox Christian masters of the Byzantine Empire and the Persian orthodox Zoroastrian masters of the empire of Iran had been trying, in the not-so-distant past, to impose their faith and identity on other religious and ethnic groups. But these efforts had failed, and the resulting tensions and resentments made the Muslim conquerors more welcome, and their presence, after the conquest, more acceptable. Apart from one episode, of brief duration and minor significance, the Arab Muslim rulers of the new empire did not repeat the errors of their predecessors but instead respected the pattern of pluralism that had existed since antiquity. This pattern was not one of equality, but rather of dominance by one group and, usually, a hierarchic sequence of the others. Though this order did not concede equality, it permitted peaceful coexistence. While one group might dominate, it did not as a rule insist on suppressing or absorbing the others. The new dominant group was variously defined—at first as Arab Muslims, then simply as Muslims. And with the replacement of an ethnoreligious by a purely religious definition, access to the dominant group was open to all, thus making it possible, in the course of the centuries, for a dominant minority to become an overwhelming majority.

This change, too, was facilitated by a feature observable in the Middle East through most of its recorded history—a pattern of fluctuation, of change, even of fusion between the different communal, national, territorial, cultural, and legal identities. It is an essential part of human behavior to divide the world into ourselves and the rest. The ancient Middle East had known many such divisions—kinsmen and strangers, Jews and gentiles, Greeks and barbarians, citizens, metics, and
aliens, as well as others. A classification already familiar to Jews and Christians was between believers and unbelievers. In Islamic times this came to be by far the most important line of division, overshadowing all others.

Both these groups were of course subdivided in various ways. The subdivisions of the believers do not concern us here. The unbelievers are subdivided, in most Muslim theoretical discussions of the subject, by two broad classifications, one theological, the other political. The theological classification is between those who follow a monotheistic religion based on revelation, and those who do not. The possessors of such a revelation are known as ʾabd al-kitāb, the people of the book, a term commonly used of the Jews, but also applicable to other religious communities possessing recognized scriptures.

The Qurʾān recognizes Judaism, Christianity, and a rather problematic third party, the religion of the Sabians, as earlier, incomplete, and imperfect forms of Islam itself, and therefore as containing a genuine if distorted divine revelation. The inclusion of the not very precisely identified Sabians made it possible, by legal interpretation, to extend the kind of tolerance accorded to Jews and Christians much more widely, first to Zoroastrians in Persia, later to Hindus in India and other groups elsewhere. Communities professing recognized religions were allowed the tolerance of the Islamic state. They were allowed to practice their religions, subject to certain conditions, and to enjoy a measure of communal autonomy. Those who were not so qualified, in other words those classified as polytheists and idolators, were not eligible to receive the toleration of the Islamic state; for them, indeed, according to the law, the choice was the Qurʾān, the sword, or slavery.

A difficult problem is presented by monotheistic religions that arose after the advent of Islam, especially those that emerged from within the Muslim community, such as the Bahāʾīs in Iran and the Aḥmadiyya in India. The followers of such religions cannot be dismissed either as benighted heathens, like the polytheists of Asia and the animists of Africa, nor as outdated precursors, like the Jews and Christians, and their
very existence presents a challenge to the Islamic doctrine of the perfection and finality of Muḥammad’s revelation. Muslim piety and Islamic authority have always had great difficulty in accommodating such post-Islamic monotheistic religions.

The political classification was between those who had been conquered or who had submitted themselves to the power of Islam and those who had not. In Muslim law and practice, the relationship between the Muslim state and the subject non-Muslim communities to which it extended its tolerance and protection was regulated by a pact called dhimma, and those benefiting from this pact were known as ahl al-dhimma (people of the pact) or more briefly, dhimmis.¹⁷ By the terms of the dhimma, these communities were accorded a certain status, provided that they unequivocally recognized the primacy of Islam and the supremacy of the Muslims. This recognition was expressed in the payment of the poll tax and obedience to a series of restrictions defined in detail by the holy law.¹⁸

The second category of unbelievers in this political classification consists of those who have not yet been conquered and are not subject to Muslim power. Lands where Muslims rule and the Islamic law prevails are known collectively as the Dār al-Islām, the House of Islam; the outside world, inhabited and also governed by infidels, constitutes the Dār al-Ḥarb, the House of War. It has this name because between the realm of Islam and the realms of unbelief there is a canonically obligatory perpetual state of war, which will continue until the whole world either accepts the message of Islam or submits to the rule of those who bring it. The name of this war is jihād, usually translated as “holy war,” though the primary meaning of the word is striving or struggle, hence struggle in the cause of God. There are some parallels between the Muslim doctrine of jihād and the rabbinical Jewish doctrine of milhemet mitsva or milhemet hova, with the important difference that the Jewish notion is limited to one country whereas the Islamic jihād is worldwide.¹⁹

A non-Muslim from the Dār al-Ḥarb may be permitted to visit the Muslim lands and even to reside there for a specified period of time, for which he receives what is known in Muslim

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law as an *aman*, a kind of grant of safe conduct. The holder of an *aman* is called *musta'min*. This denotes the legal status of the non-Muslim from outside who comes as a merchant or envoy and stays for a while under Muslim rule. He is not a *dhimmī* and is not subject to the poll tax and other disabilities.

The Muslim law books discuss in some detail the granting of *aman*—when, by whom, to whom, and on what conditions it may be granted. The *aman* was in principle given for a limited period, and the visitor from outside who became a permanent resident changed his status from *musta'min* to *dhimmī*. In fact, however, the *aman* was normally renewed on a yearly basis and resident communities of foreign merchants were allowed to retain that status. Citizens of a foreign state could benefit from a collective *aman* accorded to their government. Interestingly, the status of *musta'min* was on some interpretations limited to Christian citizens of Christian states. European Jews traveling in the Ottoman Empire were sometimes, especially later, treated as citizens or subjects of their countries, benefiting from the collective *aman* accorded to them; at other times as Jews, on the same footing as Ottoman Jews, with both the advantages and disadvantages of this different status. In some Ottoman documents the phrase *kāfir yahudisi* (the infidel’s Jew) is used to designate Jews who are subjects of Christian states. Similarly, in Persia, Sunni Muslim subjects of the Russian czars were not allowed to benefit from the extraterritorial privileges accorded to Russian subjects but were treated as Sunni Muslims—not always an improvement in a Shi‘ī Muslim state.²⁰

The discussions both of *dhimma* and *aman* relate to the position of the non-Muslim resident or visitor in Muslim territories. The position of the Muslim, whether as resident or as visitor, in non-Muslim territory is another matter. It is discussed very little in the classical Islamic sources for the good reason that the question rarely arose. In the early centuries of Islam, when the basic principles of Muslim law and theology were formulated, Islam was advancing steadily all the time. Territory might be briefly lost in the course of military operations, but it was always swiftly recovered. There
seemed no good reason to doubt that the advance of Islam would continue until, in the not too distant future, the holy war achieved its ultimate goal and all the world was incorporated into the House of Islam. The possibility of retreat, of the loss of territory and populations to infidel rule, simply did not occur to the men of the heroic age.

By the mid-eighth century it was becoming clear that the advance of Islam had come to a stop, and the notion of a frontier, and of dealings with more or less permanent authorities on the other side of it, came to be accepted. Though from time to time there was a resurgence of the jihād and a new wave of conquest, the final victory in the jihād was postponed from historical to eschatological time.

But worse was to come. What began as a pause became a halt and in time the halt gave way to a retreat. With the Christian recovery in Portugal, Spain, and Sicily and the arrival of the Crusaders in Syria and Palestine, Muslim territories were conquered by Christian armies and Muslim populations fell subject to Christian sovereigns. The resulting problem was much discussed by Muslim jurists, particularly of the Mālikī school, predominant in North Africa and among the Muslims of Sicily and the Iberian peninsula. There were different opinions on the obligations of Muslims who found themselves under non-Muslim rule. Some authorities took a lenient view. If a non-Muslim government was tolerant, that is, if it allowed Muslims to practice their religion and obey their laws and thus live a good Muslim life, then they might stay where they were and be law-abiding subjects of such a ruler. Some opinions go further and permit Muslims to remain even under an intolerant ruler, if necessary pretending to adopt Christianity but preserving their Islam in secrecy.

The opposing, more severe, view is formulated in a classical text, a fatwā or responsum written by a Moroccan jurist named Āhmad al-Wanshariṣī and issued shortly after the final conquest of Spain by the Christians. The fatwā addresses the question: May Muslims remain under Christian rule or must they leave? His answer is unequivocally that they must leave—men, women, and children alike. If the Christian government
from which they are departing is tolerant, that makes it all the more urgent that they should leave, since under a tolerant Christian government the danger of apostasy is greater. Al-Wansharisi dramatizes his ruling in the phrase: "Rather Muslim tyranny than Christian justice."^{21}

This formulation was more rhetorical than real, since for the most part Christian justice was not on offer. There was no _dhimma_ for Muslim residents in Europe, no _amân_ for Muslim visitors. For a while Christian rulers in Spain and Italy, inspired by the example or perhaps fearing the reprisals of the surviving Muslim states with Christian subjects on European soil, treated their Muslim (and also Jewish) subjects with a measure of tolerance. But the final expulsion of the Moors removed both the example and the incentive, and Muslims, like Jews, were given the choice, if they wished to live, of exile or apostasy.

Inevitably, the great struggles between Christendom and Islam in the Reconquista and the Crusades brought a sharpening of religious loyalties and antagonisms, and a worsening of the position of minorities—Jewish as well as Christian—under Muslim rule. Even so, in this as in many other things, Islamic practice on the whole turned out to be gentler than Islamic precept—the reverse of the situation in Christendom.

The early history of the _dhimma_, or more broadly of the restrictions imposed on the tolerated non-Muslim subjects of the Muslim state, is full of uncertainties. The Muslim historiographic tradition ascribes the first formulation of these regulations to the caliph 'Umar I (634-644) and preserves what purports to be the text of a letter addressed to him by Christians in Syria indicating the terms on which they are willing to submit—the disabilities they are prepared to accept and the penalties to which they make themselves liable if they violate these undertakings. According to this account, when the caliph was shown this letter he agreed to the terms with two additional clauses.

Though the so-called "pact of 'Umar" was frequently cited both by Muslim and _dhimmi_ writers as the legal basis of the relationship between the two sides, the document can
hardly be authentic. As A. S. Tritton pointed out, it is not normal for the vanquished to propose the terms of surrender to the victors, nor is it likely that Syrian Christians in the seventh century, who knew no Arabic and undertook not to study the Qurʾān, would echo its language and provisions so faithfully. Some of the clauses clearly reflect developments of a somewhat later period, and it is not unlikely that in this as in many other aspects of early Muslim administrative history, some measures that were really introduced or enforced by the Umayyad caliph ʿUmar II (717-720) are ascribed by pious tradition to the less controversial and more venerable ʿUmar I.22

However, while this and other similar documents may in themselves be partly or wholly fabricated, they nevertheless reflect the development, in the course of the early centuries, of the policy of maintaining a certain differentiation between the dominant group and the various subordinate groups. The origins of many of these restrictions seem to go back to the very first period of the Arab conquests, and to be military in nature. When the Muslims first conquered immense territories and were a tiny minority of conquerors amid a vast majority of the conquered, they needed security precautions for the protection of the occupying and governing elements. As with so many of the practices of the early period, their actions, even though determined by immediate considerations of expediency, were sanctified and incorporated in the holy law, so that what began as security restrictions became social and legal disabilities. These restrictions involved some limitation on the clothes that dhimmīs might wear and the beasts they might ride, and forbade them to bear arms. There were limits on the building and use of places of worship. They were not to be higher than mosques; no new ones were to be built but only old ones restored. Christians and Jews were to wear special emblems on their clothes. This, incidentally, is the origin of the yellow badge, which was first introduced by a caliph in Baghdad in the ninth century and spread into Western lands in later medieval times.23 Even when attending the public baths, non-Muslims were supposed to wear distin-
guishing signs suspended from cords around their necks, so that they might not be mistaken for Muslims when disrobed in the bathhouse. (Under Shi'a rules, they were not allowed to use the same bathhouses.) The need to distinguish arose especially in the case of Jews, who shared with Muslims the rite of circumcision. The non-Muslims were required to avoid noise and display in their ceremonies, and at all times to show respect for Islam and deference to Muslims.

Most of these disabilities had a social and symbolic rather than a tangible and practical character. The only real economic penalty imposed on the dhimmis was fiscal. They had to pay higher taxes, a system of discrimination inherited from the previous empires of Iran and Byzantium. There are varying opinions among scholars as to how hard the payment of these extra taxes bore on them. Where we have documentary evidence, as in the eleventh-century Geniza documents from Cairo, it would seem that for the poorer classes at least the burden was heavy. They, however, since the rate of the jizya was fixed in gold by Holy Law, it became progressively less of a burden with the steady rise of prices and incomes through the centuries. In addition to the poll tax, dhimmis were in principle, though not always in practice, called upon to pay a higher rate than Muslims in other taxes—in certain periods including even tolls and customs duties.

Apart from taxation, there was one other economic disability that often weighed very heavily on the non-Muslim subjects. This arose from the laws of inheritance. The general rule of Muslim law was that difference of religion was a bar to inheritance. Musims could not inherit from dhimmis, nor could dhimmis inherit from Muslims. A convert to Islam could therefore not inherit from his unconverted kinsmen, and on his own death only his Muslim heirs could inherit from him. If he reverted to his previous religion before his death, he ranked as an apostate, and his estate was forfeit. The rule that a Muslim cannot inherit from a dhimmī, while accepted by the four canonical schools of Muslim jurisprudence, was not admitted by all the doctors of Holy Law. Some of them held that in inheritance as in marriage, there is a necessary ine-
quality, and that while a dhimmī may not inherit from a Muslim, a Muslim may inherit from a dhimmī. Some Shi’a jurists went so far as to maintain that a Muslim heir will always preempt dhimmī heirs, and thus if a dhimmī died leaving a number of dhimmī heirs and a single Muslim heir, the latter alone could inherit to the exclusion of all others. The application of this rule, particularly in periods of forced conversion, could cause considerable hardship. It was the subject of frequent complaint among the Jews of Iran.25

In their own internal affairs, the dhimmīs normally enjoyed some autonomy, being subject to their own chiefs and judges, and living, at least in family, personal, and religious matters, according to their own laws. In relations between dhimmīs and Muslims, they were treated unequally. A Muslim could marry a free dhimmī woman, but a dhimmī man could not marry a Muslim woman. A Muslim could own a dhimmī slave, but a dhimmī could not own a Muslim slave. While the second of these limitations was often disregarded, the first, touching a far more sensitive point, was enforced with the utmost rigor, and any violation of it was severely punished and by some authorities treated as a capital offense. A similar position existed under the laws of the Byzantine Empire, according to which a Christian could marry a Jewish woman, but a Jew could not marry a Christian woman under pain of death. Likewise, Jews in Byzantium were forbidden to own Christian slaves on whatever grounds. The laws of the Muslim state assimilated the position of its Christian and Jewish subjects to that previously held by the Jewish subjects of Byzantium, but with some alleviation for both. The evidence of a dhimmī was not admissible before a Muslim court, and most schools—but not the Ḥanafīs—put a lower value on dhimmīs than on Muslims in the compensation or bloodwit to be paid for an injury.26

On the other hand, apart from the fiscal and occasionally the testamentary burden, dhimmīs were not subject to any economic disabilities. They were not barred from any occupations, nor were they forced into any others. There were no restricted professions and, besides the Hijaz, the Muslim holy
land, and a few sanctuaries elsewhere, there were no restricted places. Except in Morocco and sometimes in Iran, *dhimmīs* were not confined to ghettos either in the geographical or in the occupational sense. Though Christians and Jews tended on the whole to form their own quarters in Muslim cities, this was a natural social development and not, like the ghettos of Christian Europe, a legally enforced restriction. The only significant exception in early times was the decision of the caliph ʿUmar I to expel the Jews and Christians from Arabia, so that only Islam would be professed in the holy land of its birth.\(^{27}\) This decision seems to have applied only to the Hijaz, since Jewish and for a while Christian communities remained in southern and eastern Arabia.

However, just as the minorities tended to congregate in certain places, so too we find them concentrating in certain professions, more particularly in those requiring skills that the Muslims needed and either did not possess themselves or did not care to acquire. In certain periods the *dhimmīs* were heavily engaged in trade and finance, vocations scorned by hero military societies; in some periods, particularly in the later centuries, they were well represented in what one might call the dirty trades. These included such tasks as cleaning cesspools and drying the contents for use as fuel—a common Jewish occupation in Morocco, Yemen, Iraq, Iran and Central Asia. Jews were also found as tanners, butchers, hangmen, and other similar disagreeable or despised occupations. As well as the more obvious dirty jobs, these *dhimmī* professions included what was also, for a strict Muslim, something to be avoided—namely, dealing with unbelievers. This led at times to a rather high proportion of non-Muslims in such occupations as diplomacy, commerce, banking, brokerage, and espionage. Even the professions of worker and dealer in gold and silver, esteemed in many parts of the world, were regarded by strict Muslims as tainted and endangering the immortal souls of those engaged in them.

The question of the employment of non-Muslims in high government positions was a sensitive one, and is probably the
commonest single form of complaint. A few dhimmis, in both earlier and later times, managed to reach positions of great power and influence under Muslim sovereigns. Much greater numbers served in the middle and lower ranks of the state bureaucracy. This was of special importance in a society where access to the economic activities of the state was the surest—at times the only—road to riches. A saying attributed to the caliph 'Umar I is relevant: “Do not appoint Jews and Christians to public office because in their religion they are people of bribes. But [in Islam] bribes are not lawful.” The attitude of the doctors of the law to the employment of dhimmis is unequivocal, as for example in this responsum from a thirteenth-century jurist:

**QUESTION:** A Jew has been appointed inspector of coins in the treasury of the Muslims, to weigh the dirhams that come and go and to test them, and his word is relied upon in this. Is his appointment permissible under the Holy Law or not? Will God reward the ruler if he dismisses him and replaces him with a competent Muslim? Will anyone who helps to procure his dismissal also be rewarded by God?

**ANSWER:** It is not permissible to appoint the Jew to such a post, it is not permitted to leave him in it, and it is not permissible to rely on his word in any matter relating to this. The ruler, may God grant him success, will be rewarded for dismissing him and replacing him with a competent Muslim, and anyone who helps to procure his dismissal will also be rewarded. God said, “O you who believe, do not take intimates from among those who are not of your own people, for they will spare no pains to corrupt you; what they desire is what makes you suffer; their hatred appears in their mouths, but that which is hidden in their breasts is greater. We have made the signs clear to you, if you can understand” (Qur’ān, III,114). The meaning of this is that you should not adopt outsiders, that is, unbelievers, and allow them to penetrate to your innermost affairs. “They will spare no pains to corrupt you.” This means that they
will not refrain from anything which is in their power to cause you harm, damage, or injury. "Their hatred appears in their mouths," for they say, "We are your enemies." 29

Despite such rulings and polemics, however, the practice of employing non-Muslims was and remained almost universal—for pragmatic rather than theoretical reasons. They were useful, and that was enough; Muslim rulers and their spokesmen did not normally find it necessary or expedient to justify the practice. There is, however, an interesting story preserved in the scribal tradition and attributed to the time of the caliph 'Umar I. The caliph, who was in the mosque, asked Abū Mūsā, the governor of Kūfa, to send his secretary to the mosque to read him some letters that had arrived from Syria. Abū Mūsā replied that the secretary could not enter the mosque. 'Umar asked: "Why, is he in a state of ritual impurity?" "No," replied Abū Mūsā, "but he is a Christian." The caliph was shocked, slapped his thigh in indignation and said to Abū Mūsā: "What is the matter with you? May God strike you! Don't you know the words of Almighty God: 'O you who believe, do not take the Jews and the Christians as friends' (V,51). Why couldn't you take a genuine Muslim?" To which Abū Mūsā replied: "His religion is his, his secretaryship is mine." Abū Mūsā's meaning is clear—a man's religion is his own affair; his employer's concern is only with his professional skill. The narrator of this story, however, gives the caliph the last word: "I will not honor them when God has degraded them; I will not glorify them when God has humiliated them; I will not bring them near when God has set them far away." 30 This distinction between a man's religious affiliation, which might be disapproved, and his professional competence, which might be useful, was rarely expressed but often applied.

The fiscal penalization of the unbeliever is basic to the perceived relationship between the two sides, and is central to the dhimma as a whole. Unlike most of the other restrictions of the dhimma, it rests on a clear text in the Qur'ān, and is well authenticated and established in the oldest traditions and historical narratives. In the earliest period, when, in accord-
ance with the usage of the time, the Muslims would have been entitled to treat the conquered people as booty and sell them into slavery, the procedure adopted, of imposing a poll tax, was an action at once of prudence and of clemency. The point is clearly made in an early treatise on taxation citing a letter allegedly written by the caliph 'Umar I to one of his governors:

Neither you nor the Muslims who are with you should treat the unbelievers as booty and share them out [as slaves] . . . if you take the poll tax from them you have no claim on them or right over them. Have you considered, if we take them and share them out, what will be left for the Muslims who come after us? By God, the Muslims would not find a man to talk to and profit from his labors. The Muslims of our day will eat [from the work of] these people as long as they live, and when we and they die, our sons will eat [from] their sons forever, as long as they remain, for they are slaves to the people of the religion of Islam as long as the religion of Islam shall prevail. Therefore, place a poll tax upon them and do not enslave them and do not let the Muslims oppress them or harm them or consume their property except as permitted, but faithfully observe the conditions which you have accorded to them and all that you have allowed to them.\textsuperscript{31}

The fiscal differentiation between believer and unbeliever remained in force throughout the Islamic world until the nineteenth century, and was never at any time or place allowed to lapse. The other restrictions, in contrast, seemed to have varied very considerably in their application. On the whole one gets the impression that they were more often disregarded than strictly enforced. Partly, no doubt, such laxness may be attributed to limited powers a medieval state was able to exercise over the mass of its subjects, but partly also to a genuine disinclination on the part of rulers to enforce the more irksome and humiliating restrictions.

All in all, though sometimes alleviated, this pattern of restriction became part of the Islamic way of life. As in many other societies and situations, its symbolic purpose was to
demonstrate who belonged, however remotely, to the domi-
nant group and who did not, and to maintain the distinction
between the two.

The extent to which these restrictions were relaxed or en-
forced was determined by many factors, one of the most
important being the strength or weakness of the Muslim state.
It is easier to be tolerant when one feels strong than when
one feels weak and endangered. The relationship between
Muslims and *dhimmīs* was affected by the state of relations
between Islam and the outside world. We shall hardly be
surprised to find that from the time of the Crusades onward,
as the Muslim world, compared with the Christian world,
became weaker and poorer, the position of the non-Muslim
subjects of the Muslim states deteriorated. They suffered from
a more rigorous enforcement of the restrictions and even from
a degree of social segregation—something that had not often
happened previously.\(^{32}\)

Their position was in general tolerable but insecure. Hu-
miliation was part of the pattern. The Qur’ānic words *dhull*
and *dhilla*, meaning lowliness, abasement, abjectness, are often
used by Muslim writers to denote the humility that was felt
to be appropriate for the non-Muslim and more especially the
Jewish subjects of the state. This is amply attested both in
medieval sources and by a succession of Western travelers to
the Islamic lands.\(^{33}\)

In considering the long record of Muslim rule over non-
Muslims, a key question is that of perception and attitudes.
How did Muslims view their *dhimmī* subjects? What did they
see as the normal relationship between themselves and those
subjects? What departures from these norms did they see as
calling for action—and what action?

One important point should be made right away. There is
little sign of any deep-rooted emotional hostility directed against
Jews—or for that matter any other group—such as the anti-
Semitism of the Christian world. There were, however, un-
ambiguously negative attitudes. These were in part the “nor-
mal” feelings of a dominant group toward subject groups,
with parallels in virtually any society one cares to examine;
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