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Author (s):	Dr. Muhammad Kalimullah Dr. Naseem Mahmood
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Religious Pluralism in Pakistan: A Necessity for the Peace to Combat Violence and our Responsibilities

Dr. Muhammad Kalim Ullah Khan*

Dr Naseem Mahmood**

ABSTRACT

Pluralism is a concept, which has been discussed in wider connotations with different perspectives and in different contexts. This paper aims to discuss the possible ideas of religious pluralism in Pakistan, correlating and elaborating with Western and Islamic political thoughts. This paper examines the impact of religious pluralism in Pakistan's perspectives. It is argued that orthodox traditionalism somehow creates hindrance for the religious pluralism and the world security as well. This paper suggests we need religious tolerance to diminish the severe trend of orthodoxy, which leads towards conflict and violence. Moreover, it demonstrates, the societal tendencies, of our religious hegemonic groups that create hindrance for the security of the country, and the regional and world peace as well. Theoretical and ethnographical data reveal that Pakistan extremely needs the true sense of religious pluralism. This paper later shows the recurring phenomenon of violence in Pakistan is largely political and religious in nature.

Keywords: Religious Orthodoxy, Violence, Non-Religious, Hegemonic Groups, Political-elite, Minorities

Introduction:

In recent times, Pakistan has experienced a lot of political and religious violence including bomb blasts, suicide attacks, target killing, massacre and carnage. Looking into this gigantic problem, this paper attempts to unearth that "are hegemonic political groups vis-a-vis political-religious groups affecting the religious pluralism in Pakistan or in contrast it is nourishing? In this paper, my attention is directed towards the historical viewpoint of religious pluralism in Pakistan. The role of the state is particularly important to any discussion of religious pluralism because states are vested with the responsibility to protect its people against any kind of violence, whether it is political or religious as well as to prevent them from committing violence. Undoubtedly, it is alternatively caused by the country's chronic political problems that no government in power has ever succeeded in addressing such kind of serious issue. It is also very important to be discussed because we live in multi religious society and have multi identities. This is the point in question, which this paper will attempt to examine. The focus of this paper, however, is the religious

* Assistant Professor, Department of Islamic Thought and Civilization, University of Management and Technology (UMT), Sialkot Campus.

** Assistant Professor, Department of Islamic Studies, Allama Iqbal Post Graduate College, Sialkot

pluralism in Pakistan. Second, many international scholars, political scientists and historians have extensively discussed the concept of religious pluralism. However, in Pakistan's academia and in Pakistan's context as well there have been a very few or less studies of this issue that conducted specifically in the historical perspective. The present paper discusses the religious pluralism in Pakistan by examining historical facts and elaborates on the various governments and systems. Moreover, it discusses the Western and Islamic thoughts on religious pluralism to correlate the discussion with Pakistan's context. The pattern of religious pluralism will be analysed with the view of understanding its nature in historical context.

I have discussed this problem in a historical perspective when there was everywhere bomb blasts, suicide attacks, target killing, massacre and carnage. Even the people were frightened to go to Mosques and they preferred to say their prayers in homes instead of Mosques because they were not sure that, they would come back home safe and sound or not. Mosques, markets, public places and processions were epicenter for terrorist attacks. The news were common among laymen that terrorist organizations either they were local or international, were doing those activities to destabilize the country. It was not prima facie case but the problem, which had to be solved was pure national. During this process, I got some eye witnessing which disturbed a lot that it was media that creating sensational news of violence that disturbed more the atmosphere of religious pluralism, religious harmony, co-existence and peace. Media was covering every incident as breaking news; due to it, religious communities and individuals were presuming themselves unprotected. It was also observed that school going children, taking their satchels, who were murmuring that how many people were killed in such suicide attack and how a lot of blood on road everywhere. If innocent kids will watch those brutal acts then who would expect of their brilliant future and in near future, what negative impacts would prevail on them and how will they get rid of this monster. One fifteen year old, school-going boy came into the clutches of the violent people. He was asked to leave the school and come to paradise where chaste maiden would wait of you, come you are to visit the paradise. If such kinds of stupid acts will be presented on TV channel, then in consequences all the religious communities whether they are Muslim or not will become frustrated. This thing also disturbed the atmosphere of religious pluralism. In this context, both kinds of religious communities were affected i.e. intra-religious communities and inter-religious communities. However, it was not the answer of the question.

I was thinking the real causative of the problem. After a long deliberation and discussion, I focused my attentions towards political issue. After

studying the different governments, I saw in depth that there was the essence of authoritarianism in all those governments whether they were democratic or dictatorial governments. In short, after analyzing the different governments, that analysis revealed that it was the inbuilt problems in the existing political system and due to this; other destabilizing factors emerged that badly affected the religious pluralism. Second, I see violence also erupted in the society due to the weakened governmental institutions that seriously weaken the political system of the country. Therefore, religious pluralism is directly linked with political system. If religious pluralism is affected then it means there is something wrong with our political system. And if political system is not delivering well then without exemption all religious entities will also be affected. Violence does not erupt into the society if the religious communities feel secure. Religious communities do not mean religious minorities but all the communities that have their own religious identities, whether they are Muslim or belong to other religion. If they will not feel protected then they will indulge themselves into mal activities and they can involve themselves into violence against other citizens and government as well. In reaction, government will sabotage their primary rights and violence will prevail in the society. As Giddens¹ says that, sometime violence takes place by the state against citizens and sometime citizens' violence against the state and sometime it becomes mutual to control the state. Recent and fresh example of 25 Nov 2017 is enough to quote here when the law and order agencies killed more than six people in Islamabad and its surroundings². Farrington quotes Thomas Hobbes³, that government is the only alternative to anarchic violence continues to dominate the international position. Moreover, politically influential groups trigger it more. Politically and economically strong governments reduce the violence and enhance the religious pluralism, as said Friedmann⁴. Furthermore, Giddens⁵ view goes toward dictatorial governments that enhance the violence. However, Pakistan's case is different, here violence increased without any specification of religious entity. Here religious minorities are less hurt than their own Muslim fellows. When the government loses its control over all communities then the commitment to human rights and religious pluralism are shaken. This is the political-religious violence, which turn the state into "collapsed state". Moreover, when political-religious violence turned into internal anarchy and chaos then the state becomes like "failed state". At this stage, state loses its control and integrity, and then foreign role become active to make it more sabotage. Therefore, sometime, militancy within the country prove harder and longer⁶ than the militancy outside the society. It has been proved in my above-mentioned discussion that religious pluralism has not only been

hurt within the country but without country as well by the destabilized institutions of the state.

There are different forms of pluralism, such as political, ethnic, moral, religious, value, ethical, cultural, etc. but religious pluralism nowadays is very debating and contesting form. It is debating in one sense that its momentum is increasing because the religion has been politicized. It has largely been discussed by Western and secularist thinkers. Some Western thinkers believe that exclusivism completely make contrast of religious pluralism. They mark specifically such religions that preach and seek the people for conversion. Their identification is towards Islam and Christianity. The part of my discussions on religious pluralism is just an Islamic viewpoint. Therefore, I shall focus and analyze Islamic concept after this discussion. According to their opinion, religious pluralism cannot exist if one understands that his religion is true and other is false. Second, secularist concept also goes to above-mentioned theory. Secularist concept marginalizes the people who have faith in any religion. Such marginalization if it comes in a practical form then it will lead towards both kind of violence i.e. political and religious violence. John Hick theory discusses Theo-centric plurality but Heim's view on pluralism rejects the Hick's pluralism. Hick says that more than 95 percent people accept their religions as a gift of their birth. However, Islam's concept is beyond this theory. Islam says that man takes birth at his nature. He or she believes in the oneness of Allah (S.W.T) but his or her parents make him/her either Christian or Jew. In my sense, convertism occurs when an adequate picture comes into his/her mind and soul. When both (mind and soul) have reconciliation on one point and idea, then the recognition of absolute truth comes, which compel the person to admit the truth. Why it is? It is because he returns to his own origin. At many other places Allah (S.W.T) ensure all humankind that there is no compulsion in the Dīn (*la ikraha fid dīn*). Therefore, this was first direct message of religious freedom from Allah (S.W.T). Islam gives the lesson of pluralism. So there should be co-existence, harmony, cooperation, identity, agreement, unity, consensus etc. its means Islam wants peace and nullify the violence in the society. Therefore, I myself do not believe in the concept of *Kung* that there will be no peace if there is no peace in the religion⁷. On the other hand, *Dianna Eck* is right in saying that pluralism and religious freedom go together⁸. Kant epistemology discusses noumenon and phenomenon. On the other hand, Copernican Revolution discusses religious plurality. Debating and contesting in a broad sense is that whether it is contradicted to Islam or not. According to me, undoubtedly its momentum is increasing day by day specifically after 9/11. Second, I think, we should not confine Islam to its original sources because it does not close the access to other sources of the truth and

wisdom since it is not contradicted to the fundamentals of Islam. Therefore, now I analyze religious pluralism in the Islamic epistemological perspective.

According to my own analysis, religious pluralism is discussed in the Islamic concept very broadly because Islam tells how to improve the religious life and how to make better the needs of civil society. Because Islam focusses on both aspects of man's life and sees its impacts very seriously. Islam does not leave man only to the religious boundaries but it goes beyond of it. Therefore, this is the absurd and invalidates view that religious pluralism is contradicted to Islam. The first written lesson of pluralism, the first manifesto, the first social contract, and the first written constitution of pluralistic society was given by our beloved Prophet Muhammad (S.A.A.S) in the form of *Mithāq al- Madīnah* (Charter of Madīnah) in 622CE. The constitutional process that started at 622 was completed by himself after ten years when the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.A.S) gave his last sermon to humankind and presented the universal World Order⁹. Here I present just one clause to make the point clear. It is stated that, "The Non-Muslim shall be considered a community along with the Muslim. They shall be guaranteed the right of religious freedom, along with the Muslims"¹⁰. That was the balanced constitution, which gave the concept of devolution of power. On the other hand, the Great Britain delivered the first constitution in the form of *Magna Carta* in 1215CE and today's superpower America gave the first constitution (known as Federal Convention or the Constitutional Convention) on 17 September 1787. The concept of pluralism in Islam is as new as it is old in its real sense. Islam gave the concept of pluralism and diversity when the Holy Prophet Muhammad (S.A.A.S) gave the first world order to whole Ummah, where it was categorically mentioned that all the sects of the people would enjoy all the rights as a fundamental constitutional rights. Second, this was the declaration that how to resolve the disputes among the people where co-existence and religious pluralism or absolute pluralism was carried out through toleration instead of military means. Third, such written constitution was the soul of pluralism where all the people have their own religious identities without assimilating into one religion. Fourth, this was the mechanism where the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.A.S) ensured a culture of harmony and co-existence, culture of social and political prosperity, and he (S.A.A.S) himself established a multi-cultural society. Fifth, exist and co-exist is the ethical spirit of Islam. Therefore, this is Islamic concept in real sense. Islam always appreciates newness. Because Islam is as new as it is old. It does not damage customs, traditions and human values. If it is called primitive and old, then it should be the part of the history as many religions came but they could not sustain their presence on the earth or what other religions are existed in the earth

were distorted. In addition, their originality was shaken or completely altered. Due to this newness, Islam always appeals all the human being towards it. Conversion to Islam from heterogeneous array of languages and cultures from differing races and even nationalities is the beautification and newness of the Islam. In Brunei, which is a small country, according to the statistics, there is an average of 500 conversions to Islam annually for the past decade. If Islam does not believe in pluralism then why they are being attracted towards Islam? According to the Association of Religion Data Archives that after 9/11 67% of Muslim population increased in America. Since 2000 to 2010, Muslim population increased from 1 million to 2.6 million¹¹. This is the spirit (of pluralism) in the message of Islam that it does not condone violence in any way. That is why; the Holy Prophet Muhammad (S.A.A.S) abolished the customs of discrimination and said, "An Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab nor a non-Arab has any superiority over an Arab; also a white has no superiority over a black nor a black has any superiority over white except by piety and good action¹²." Hate and crime increased against the Muslim after 9/11. According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), hate crimes increased against the American Muslims at 1,700 percent¹³. This thing is against the pluralism and pluralistic society and it was demonstrated practically by many people in the America and Western World, whence they did not care of the sacrifices of the Muslim during peace and war. Just one example is to be mentioned here that Captain Humayun Khan is a test case, who was killed in Iraq in 2004 in a roadside explosion but his sacrifice was made fun of. Moreover, Muslim society appeals and accommodates all the nations, religions, and races to live and enjoy all the human rights without any difference. Contemporary scholar Marmaduke William Pickthall (b. 1875) compares the Muslim society with American society in these words. He states:

"This religion (Islam) has succeeded, where Christianity has failed, in uniting men of different colour happily and equally in one society. White, black, brown, yellow peoples intermingle in its mosques and places, fraternize and intermarry without bad results". He further discusses and make the sketch of the American society that, "The United States of America have been called the crucible of nations, and in truth have they assimilated many peoples of one colour, but the black, the brown, the yellow races have been jealously excluded from the mixture. Their work is therefore not to be compared with that of al-Islam¹⁴".

Pluralism leads a man to learn from each other, whether they are Muslim or non-Muslim. In my thinking, this concept is also right. If we discuss it in Islamic perspective it is mentioned categorically in the Hadith where

the Prophet Muhammad (SAAS) said, “The wise statement is the lost property of the believer, so wherever he finds it, then he is more worthy of it¹⁵”. He (Muslim) learns from every one. Learning from other who have different religion than Islam, does not mean to accept other religion. Islamic civilization flourished due to this concept. Otherwise, mere learning without benefiting other leads towards fanaticism. In addition, this is not the soul of Islam. Fanaticism leads a man towards extremism and extremism finally touches terrorism and violence. Most of the crises were deepened due to the misuse of the religion by some intra religious minorities in the society in particular and by majority in common. It is important for the scholars and expert of the field to see as a critique to arrest the breakdown of political system for promoting peace and co-existence to map the boundaries in the political landscape of the society. otherwise, making the isolation between the two create more gap and gulf that will widen it more and create further chaos in the society, because the secularist denial of any religious inspiration make and give the rise of religious militancy and the religious violence.

Islam does not make distinction between spiritual and temporal life as secularist philosophy completely marginalize and isolate the religion from politics. However, Islamic concept is different. It demands the excellence in this world and hereafter as well. Moreover, Islam does not make discrimination between *hoqūk Allah* (Allah’s rights) and *hoqūk al-’Ibād* (human rights). It does not force and focus on just Allah’s rights but equally focuses on human rights as well. If you are in Masjid to fulfill Allah’s rights then you do but when you come out of Masjid then you have to fulfill human rights. This is the will of Allah (S.W.T). Dr. Muhammad Iqbal said in his book ‘Bal-e Jibrail’, ‘*Juda Ho Deen Siasat Se to Reh Jati Hay Changaizi*’¹⁶ (Statecraft divorced from faith will lead to reign of terror). There is also a famous quotation in the Persian language that ‘*syasaṭ shywa-e pyghmbrān shawd*’ (politics is a prophetic tradition).

That brief description made my point clear. However, historians and political scientists categorically elaborate that political-religious violence increase when political elites lose its legitimacy. Moreover, assassination, bomb blasts and suicide attacks occur if one class enjoys all the rights, whether they are religious or political rights; and the other class is being neglected absolutely, as Denis Goulet stated. Consequently, religious communities that are to show religious pluralism are marginalized. This marginalization not only induces the violence but it also leads the system towards its failure. Nowadays, religion is being used as a tool. I am sure that I am not leveling a very serious charge without argumentation. Religious pluralism does not marginalized by just the weakness of the system but this is also a gift of Western philosophies that completely

marginalized the religious pluralism by rejected the concept of civilization. As some say that civilization is a product of worldviews¹⁷. Some other as Wallerstein¹⁸, he categorically does not accept the concept of civilization. He prefers World System instead of the civilization. He rejects the idea of civilization as a unit. He does not see it in historical perspective and calls it unreal. His world system and other worldviews just fulfill the physical need of the man. They have no concern with the spiritual aspect of man's life. On the contrary, Islamic civilization focuses on both aspects of man's life. It does not ignore the other aspect that is integral to nature. Islamic civilization is more than world system¹⁹. Islamic civilization flourished due to the basic teaching of 'toleration' instead of 'acceptance' because there is no coercion in the acceptance of Islam. Islam does not say that one must accept Islam but it insist on toleration and says it's up to one whether accept or reject, we have made clear both ways .i.e. good way and bad way. Whole Surah in the Holy Quran discusses just pluralism as Allah (S.W.T) said in the Surah al-Kafirun.

Toleration is the bottom line of Islam, and the Islamic civilization displayed it as a main characteristic. Therefore, undoubtedly toleration was the middle point and the nucleus of Islamic civilization. Moreover, Islam wants all the entities and groups of the people united. Unity does not mean in any sense to make the things similar or singular but it means to put different things at one place harmoniously. Example of bouquet is good to quote here, where all colors of flowers are put and fastened together, and they are presented on formal and informal occasions. All the flowers are at one place but they do not lose their individuality, identity and originality. I developed my own mathematical formula towards peace and violence, which needs its implementation in the society. I defined it that Islamic Civilization + Toleration = Supremacy/Peace. On the contrary I defined it that non-Toleration + Authoritarianism= Violence/Terrorism. I elaborate this above-mentioned mathematical formula here. Due to the practical presence of toleration in the Muslim society, Islamic civilization was flourished and there was the supremacy of law and peace. Peace and co-existence was existed in the society until both ingredients persist in the society. However, when they diminished in the society, then as adverse effect authoritarianism and non-Toleration came into the society that created the violence and terrorism.

Islamic civilization was developed due to the world empire and world economy, and its essence is Islam and Tawhid (oneness). Tawhid gives Islamic civilization its identity and makes all constituents (religious identities and entities) an integral body. In other sense, it unites all the existing groups at one place. Muslim Rulers were the patronizers of the every denomination, sect, group, political elite, and even all the religious

groups. Focusing on just Islamic civilization, it was she, which proliferated, nourished and developed the concept of religious pluralism. In the response, Islamic civilization got culmination and rejected all the concepts of exclusivism. This was the long golden age, started at 786CE to 1258CE, where sophisticated societies were developed under different Abbasid dynasties, Berber of North African and non-Arab nations, Fatimid and Andalusian dynasties (909-1171 CE) (711-1492 CE). Christian, Jews, Hindus, and even Chinese made great role under the patronage of Islamic empires for the development of socio-cultural and scientific achievements. This was the concept given by Islamic dynasties is now being adopted by the western countries. They give scholarships to the expert people from the Muslim countries, who are contributing and developing their societies. Consequently, their countries and their societies were quickly progressed due to our own foremen. How our golden age as an Islamic civilization was marked? It was just our own contribution or something else. under the patronizing policies of the Islamic dynasties and empires, golden age/Islamic civilization was marked, which gave the relative harmony that formed it, even due to the Islamic civilization Muslims preserved the ancient heritage of Romans and Greeks, distinctly Muslims preserved the antique literatures of the prominent scholars. Until the end of the 10th century, Greek books were translated into Arabic language. Bagdad was the Centre of that classical Greek writings, and the Arabic was the classical language, even before Latin language²⁰. Second, Islamic Spain was the place and center where philosophers of dominant religions such as Islam, Christianity and Judaism have their presence. It (Islamic Spain) was the place of *La-Convivencia* (co-existence or living together) where *Yahya Ibn 'Adi* who was Christian, was the student of the Muslim *al-Farabi*, the Jew *Maimonides* and the Muslim *Averroes*. This was the example of inter-religious co-existence and religious pluralism²¹. Islamic civilizational message was given by Islamic thoughts and teachings that was the unity of humanity because the common nature of humanity undoubtedly unified all the cultures. Islam did not convert or merge all the cultures into Islamic society for the negation of their identities but they preserved their own identities as it is obviously discussed in the Holy Quran *Sūrah Taūbah* verse No 33. Even Islam does not nullify the identities within Islam, such as Indo-Islamic or Euro-Islamic²². It always accepts all the hyphenated Islamic Identities. Its mean Islam preserve the cultural identities. Therefore, it was Islam, which sustained religious pluralism along with the cultural diversity. Moreover, due to the presence of soul of religious pluralism in the Islamic civilization harmony, compassion, tolerance and mutual respect demonstrated during that period. Was that golden age and development in the Islamic civilization without peaceful atmosphere or it

was under non-peaceful atmosphere'. Moreover, as Islam preserved all the old heritage and cultures, at the same level Islam saved all the old philosophies of Greeks and Romans. On the other hand, living in this century white racial superiority still exists in whole Europe, as it was in the old period. Kant (1724-1804) who was a big philosopher as well as he was a big racist. He writes, "race of the whites contains all talents. And motives in itself"²³. He writes more about Negroes that "it (the race of the negroes) can be educated but only to the education of the servants, i.e. they can be trained"²⁴. In the contrary, Islam believes in the equality of the human being and cleans all the negative dots of the racial superiority in any sense. As I was discussing above that western philosophy is a promoter of racism but Islamic philosophy is the promoter of unity and love because it is preserved in its essence, because Islam is not only religion but also an attitude and self-reliance. It does not turn down the identities of other religious communities. Its mean, Islam believes in all colors, no distinction between black and white. This is the same case with Islamic philosophy; it is also marginalized as Islam was marginalized because it is considered that Islam negates the religious pluralism. However, its marginalization does not lose its essence of religious pluralism. Just I discussed the concept of religious pluralism in the concept of Islamic civilization and made it relevant to the present.

Here I briefly discuss different governments and their role to combat violence and to save the religious communities whether they are Muslim or non-Muslim. Ghulam Ishaq Khan, the successor to Zia-ul-Haq, served as President from 1988 to 1993. During his one five-year term he had two Prime Ministers such as Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif, both of whom he dismissed from their post. This fact alone is enough to show how unstable politically Pakistan was in the 1990s. With all his powers and the opportunities available to him, Ishaq Khan could have made Pakistan more democratic and less violent. Instead, he used various pretexts not to have a good working relationship with his Prime Minister's government. Benazir Bhutto's gender provided one such pretext. Benazir's appointment as Prime Minister ignited violent opposition to her rule mainly among these groups, which was exploited by her political enemies. The resulting violence was both religious and political. Although the government took immediate steps to suppress the violence, the Muslim League and the President of Pakistan of that time played an active role in trying to unseat her. Ishaq Khan sacked her in 1990 on corruption charges but that dismissal did not prevent her from becoming Prime Minister the second time three years later (1993). In the same decade when this political turmoil was going on Sunni-Shi'a sectarian killings occurred to help increase the cycle of violence, in the society. Violence in the name of religion is usually occurred by a small group of people. The mainstream

Muslim society viewed them as not having the proper understanding of religion. In the case of the opposition against Benazir violence was seen to be used to dissuade women from challenging male-dominated power. In last of my discussion, I raise very important issue that has not yet been discussed seriously. In our denominations, *fatwa* system is very weak. It should be discussed actively. It can increase the atmosphere of religious pluralism and decrease the violence. However, in contrary, it could not be proved conducive to combat the violence and useful for the religious pluralism because of the polarization of the intra religious groups.

Conclusion

I analyzed in my whole discussion that neither Islam nor Islamic civilization negates Religious pluralism. Second, I examined that all the religious minorities in Pakistan are more save than their own Muslim fellows. Admittedly, sporadic accidents occur against the religious minorities in the political landscape of the Pakistan that hurt the atmosphere of religious pluralism. Third, violent people within Pakistani community have their own interpretation for Islam that does not appeal the large Muslim community. This is our own religiously self-serving justifications and interpretations that lead to violence and terrorism. It has been analyzed that this is not the religion that justifies the violence and nullifies the human rights at all, as it is discussed by the horizontal secularist theories²⁵. Religion tells the elite class how to setup political system to fulfill the needs of public and individual needs, societal and moral needs, material and spiritual needs etc. This was also examined that religious pluralism was also perturbed when new concocted theories of Sunni and Shia Islam cropped up. Society was disintegrated and different communities were marginalized politically and religiously. This marginalization increased due to the bunch of the incapable leadership. Incompetent leadership could not sort out the problem. Consequently, they felt insecure under that kind of leadership. This thing is badly disturbing the religious pluralism in the country. This paper also examined the country's *fatwa* system in relation to the phenomena of violence. It revealed the important fact that the widespread of sectarian motives and apostatizing practices in *fatwa* issuance was a major contributory factor to the increase of violence in the country. Factional or sectarian *fatāwa* resulted in wide confusion and many acts of violence.

Findings: Present study believes in religious pluralism and accepts the existence of other religions. Islam recognizes the diversity and wants to create reconciliation. Secondly, it also inspires to make good relationships with the followers of other religions. Moreover, it accepts the human rights in real spirit. Islam believes in interfaith dialogue also so that peaceful atmosphere could be created in the world.

Recommendations

First, we must weigh the concept of Religious Pluralism and Religious participation as well because both are associated with one another, and religious harmony and the pure nature of Islam as a peaceful religion can be portrayed at International level. Second, religious pluralism is mostly accompanied by religious vitality in the sense of the importance of the religions. Therefore, we need the confirmation of religious vitality.

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