

The Tolerance of Original Islam

Koran, "The Cow" Sura, Verse 61:

Verily! Those who believe and those who are Jews and Christians, and Mandaean¹ [الصابئة المندائيون], whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day and do righteous good deeds shall have their reward with their Lord, on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve.

That the Prophet considered Islam the last in the chain of the three Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) is a well-known fact. Not so well known is that he also recognized Mandaeanism² as a valid religion on par with Islam, though some of its tenets are very different from those of Islam. There can be no doubt that had the Prophet known about the highly developed religions and teachings of the Far East, for instance, [Taoism, Shintoism, Buddhism, Hinduism the Vedas, the Upanishads etc.], he would have warmly embraced them as well.

A question might arise though: Why did the Prophet fiercely oppose the Paganism practiced in the Arab peninsula in his days? Was such opposition compatible with tolerance?

The following considerations may answer this question:

1) The Prophet did not consider pre-Islamic Paganism a religion. To show why he shunned it, it would suffice to give two instances of how the pre-Islamic Arabs looked upon their idols. The first instance is the well-known story of the great pre-Islamic poet Imru'l-Qays who had an idol whom he consulted before setting out to take revenge from the murderer of his father. After receiving three times discouraging advice from the idol, he became very angry and ended up cursing the idol, while remarking that it would not have given him such an advice had the idol's own father been the one who was murdered! The other instance concerns the idols Usaf and Na'ila, who, according to myth, had committed adultery in the sanctuary, and were punished by being transformed permanently into idols. Clearly their sinful origin had no impact on their status as objects of worship.

The idol worship in Mecca of those days was a lucrative business, and idols were often made of edible materials and sold to the worshippers during the pilgrimage.

2 For a long time, The Prophet did not interfere much with the idol worshipers, beside showing his rejection of their practices. The real clash started much later after the pagans prosecuted and tortured his followers hoping to silence him thus forcing him to immigrate to Medina. The Prophet ultimately came back and entered Mecca triumphantly. He did not take revenge, which according to the laws of the time he was entitled to, but rather gave a general amnesty.

References

1. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mandaeanism or ar.wikipedia.org/wiki/مندائية
2. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jahiliyyah
3. The Social Origins of Islam, By M.A. Bamyeh, Univ. of Minnesota Press