

## KURIOSITAS

*Media Komunikasi Sosial dan Keagamaan*

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Volume 13

No.2, Desember 2020

Halaman 125-140

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### **Ethics Of Love In Islam And Christianity: A Comparative Study**

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#### **ABSTRACT**

The study concentrates on elaborating the concept of “love” in both Islam and Christianity. Both religions emphasize extensively on “love”. It is indispensable to understand that there are many fundamental differences between both religions on the notion of love despite numbers of similarities being shared. Hence, there is a necessity to know on how these religions converge and diverge in the concept of love. The academic nature of study requires an inductive and an analytical methodology that yielded a number of important results in examining the real meaning of love, its divisions and its major sectors focused in Christianity and Islam; i.e., love towards God, love towards oneself, and love for neighbor, as well as the differences in categorizing the love in both Islam and Christianity.

**Keywords:** Ethics, Love, Islam, Christianity

#### **ABSTRAK**

Studi ini fokus kepada elaborasi konsep "cinta" dalam agama Islam dan agama Kristen. Kedua agama ini secara ekstensif menekankan konsep "cinta". Studi ini diperlukan untuk memahami bahwa ada banyak perbedaan mendasar antara kedua agama dalam pengertian cinta meskipun juga terdapat banyak kesamaan. Karenanya, menjadi penting untuk mengetahui bagaimana persamaan dan perbedaan kedua agama ini dalam konsep cinta. Studi ini menggunakan metodologi induktif dan analitis yang menghasilkan sejumlah hasil penting dalam menyingkap arti cinta yang sebenarnya, objek utamanya difokuskan pada Kristen dan Islam; yaitu cinta kepada Tuhan, cinta terhadap diri sendiri, cinta kepada sesama, serta perbedaan dalam mengkategorikan cinta, baik dalam Islam maupun Kristen.

**Kata kunci:** Etika, Cinta, Islam, Kristen

## **INTRODUCTION**

Love is one of the noblest human principles and traits. It cultivates the spirit of interaction, solidarity, cooperation and affection to human relationships and dealings. All religions and cultures promote love in different dimensions. Love towards God, fellow human beings, family, self and environment are cherished and encompassed in the teachings of many religions including Christianity whereby love is the central value in its teachings, literature, and practices.

All teachings of Jesus can be summed up in the one word "love"; the love of Jesus was perfect love, and he commanded his disciples to love in all its dimensions; "He who does not love does not know God, for God is love" (1 John 4: 8); "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3: 16; 17: 24, 26); "Jesus said to him, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind". This is the first and great commandment. The second commandment was an extension of the first one which is "You shall love your neighbour as yourself" (Matthew 22: 37-39).

In his teachings and miracles, Jesus focused human awareness on two most important facts: God's overwhelming divine love of humanity, and people accepting that love and letting it flow through them to others which will eventually make this world a Kingdom of God for good to prevail over falsehood.

As being mentioned, all religions have cherished love in encompassing sense. Looking to the sources of Islam, it can be known that love is a necessary fundamental in every one's life. It is because love plays a crucial role in a person's life which ultimately determines his faith. Islam does not only promote love but goes to the level where it teaches "*a person*

*cannot be considered a Mu'min unless; he loves Prophet (PBUH) more than his father, his son and the whole of mankind". Moreover, Allah (SWT) says, "Say, [O Muhammad], "If you should love Allah, then follow me, [so] Allah will love you and forgive you your sins. And Allah is Forgiving and Merciful" (3:31).*

There are many verses which vehemently emphasize the love and mercy of God. However, God's love is not only measured by the times this theme has occurred in the Qur'an but it is magnified when Allah illustrates the creation of human where He commanded the angels to bow down to him and exalting human to be the trustees of Allah, creating all that is on earth and in heavens for human benefit, granting humans the freedom to believe in God and obey Him or to reject Him. Even for the sinful, the door of repentance is widely open at any time prior to the time of death. Hence, it can be concluded that Islam does not only emphasize on man's love towards God and other but underscores the infinite love of God Almighty.

As been highlighted that both Islam and Christianity emphasize extensively on "love". However, Jesus Christ has often been described as the embodiment of love. Even though is an undisputable fact nevertheless; Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was and is the mercy to the world which is often sidelined by the mainstream propaganda. He forgave those who inflicted pain and drove away from his land when he had all the power to avenge them. His teachings are living today which encourages nothing but goodness and love. Hence, we can draw many similarities between Christianity and Islam.

Both Islam and Christianity have emphasized extensively on love not only to those who share the same belief but love is generalized upon everyone even encompassing the environment. It is indispensable to understand that there are many fundamental differences between both

religions on the notion of love despite numbers of similarities being shared. Hence, the need arises how these religions converge and diverge in the concept of love. In addition to it, throughout history there are numerous conflicts and wars between the followers of these religions, fighting one another in many bitter and bloody wars. Hence, why these incidents occurred despite advocating love by both religions is a point to ponder. Hence, this research is attempted to find solutions for the above stated problems.

## **DISCUSSION**

### ***THE MAIN OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY***

As there is a specific question on the main objectives of the study it is being dealt more elaborately. The main objective has been modified to connect all the other research questions together with the initial attempt on the researcher's aim to investigate on the ethics of love in Christianity.

Love has been a subject of negligence or conceived wrongly in the modern world. Further, the main reason for human downfall and decadence is the growing enmity among one another. This enmity and hatred lie in human arrogance and self-worship. They result in unjust hostility towards others without one's even being aware of it. Hence, the prosperity of humans lies in spreading love to one another. Said Nursi prescribes love and enmity as "*The thing most deserving of love is love and the most deserving enmity is enmity*" (Michel, 2005).

If the love is the solution for all problems, then it has to be investigated deeply. The source of love for a man is his heart. The beauty of love flows from it and the fragrance spreads wherever the heart goes. Hence, purification of the heart is the central in transforming lives to love. For this reason, Islam emphasizes emphatically of purification of the heart.

According to Faruqi (1967), this was the sole objective of Jesus (PBUH) as he struggled to transform the lives of Jews individually so as to realize the true potential of human being. They brought the destructions upon themselves by holding onto 'ethics of consequence' and rejecting the call of Jesus (PBUH) which was the 'ethics of love'. Jews are mentioned in the Qur'an in many places for Muslims to take lessons from them. Therefore, it is important for us to study the 'ethics of love' in the light of Islam and Christianity. Hence, various literatures are studied to achieve this paramount objective.

However, the objective of this paper is also to analyze the convergence and divergence of the concept of love in both Christianity and Islam. This analytical approach will give deep understanding to recognize the similarities to build healthy relationships between these two communities. Further, these communities can understand the differences between the two religions which they can recognize the divergence and build a society in more common grounds.

Furthermore, it is mystifying that how these communities can rival each other as it has no place in the religious teachings. However, history has witnessed bloody wars claiming the lives of many. Hence, why these conflicts happened between the two in spite advocating love towards one another should be evaluated as well.

This paper has attempted to investigate the concept of love in both Christianity and Islam and then analyzes the similarities and differences. The next section would be dedicated to know the underlying reasons for the conflict between the two communities and finally will be the conclusion.

#### ***THE CONCEPT OF LOVE IN CHRISTIANITY***

The teachings of Jesus were mostly focused on love. It has always been understood, not as a legal obligation, but as a force by which persons never satisfied with any given expression of love, but always seek further to give themselves thoroughly to spread the message of love (Hallett, 1989).

Hence, love in Christianity is the foundation of its faith and governs the activities of men. The concept of love is located in three major themes; love towards God, self and neighbour which is briefly discussed as follows (Allen, 1995).

Loving God means giving ourselves totally to him, and living every day of our lives to please him. This is the highest mode of worship man could offer to God. The Christian command to love God, announced by Jesus, is embedded in St. Mark, *“And you shall love the Lord, your God, with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength; this is the first commandment.”* (New International Version, Mark 12: 30). In another verse, *“I love the Lord because He has heard my voice and my supplication”* (New International Version, Psalm 116: 1).

The God's love is not a simple idea in the Christian perspective. The meaning of God's love is manifested in the relationships (Post, *A Theory of Agape on the Meaning of Christian love*, 1st edition, 1990). According to Al-Faruqi (1967) to love God is the first commandment of Jesus which implies that there is no need of another commandment to follow that. The logic behind this is because every good deed should flow from this fundamental commandment. There was no second commandment but rather the second commandment is an implication of the first. When one's heart is filled with God's love, what place it can give to another commandment as it has already occupied. This concept of God's love was important breakthrough in Christianity, because it demolished the Jews concept of Tribal God. Israel

was built on external laws which separated Jews from others. However, when Jesus brought attention to love of God by inner self of man, it universalized Israel community with universal brotherhood as we are all equal in the eyes of God. This transformation prevents the need of law as whatever deeds flow out of the transformed soul will be good and this will give broader perspective of life. Jesus not only explained this ideal but spent his whole life, living it.

### ***SELF LOVE***

True self love is justified by Augustine. The love for self is not contradictory to the love towards God nor diminishes it. This is due to the self love is compatible and complimentary of love for God (Lennon, 2019). A rival view which is inconsistent with the thoughts of Augustine insists that even the last iota of self concern must be renounced in order to achieve a perfectly "pure" motivation (Post, *A Theory of Agape on the Meaning of Christian love*, 1st edition, 1990).

However, the true meaning of self love in Christianity defined as the pursuit of one's own good within the context of moral values and laws which can be distinguished from both selfishness (the pursuit of one's own separate interest) and self-infatuation (Simmons & Sorrells, 2016). Not all self love is a beast to be kept caged, although those who idealize selfless love misunderstood the Christian meaning of Self love (Post, *A Theory of Agape on the Meaning of Christian love*, 1st edition, 1990).

### ***LOVE FOR NEIGHBOUR***

The Christian command to love God is linked to the "second command" to love one's fellow man. The second command is that, "*You shall love your neighbor like yourself. There is no other command greater than these.*" (St. Mark, 12:31). Jesuit theologian Karl Rahner (1984) commented

this rule as follows, *“Love of God can only be realized through unconditional love of one’s next-door neighbor since only that way one can pierce the hell of one’s egotism”*.

The Gospel makes clear that charity given to one’s brother is a way of loving God, *“Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.”* (Mathew, 25: 40). And further it is reiterated, *“If a man should say “I love God” but hates his brother, he is a liar. For if he does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God Whom he has not seen?”* (1 John, 4: 20)

The purpose and meaning of neighbors love is not just extending a helping hand but to build a relationship from the heart and soul to build a communion of universal brotherhood (Post, 1990).

### ***THE ISLAMIC CONCEPT***

Almost every chapter of the Quran begins with *“in the name of God, the Compassionate and the Merciful.”* According to Islam, God has showered countless blessings on human beings by creating the entire universe for us . God wishes the best for us, which why he has sent prophets and holy books. They teach the values and ethics that elevate the status of human among the rest and nourishes our souls with goodness, to love God and love one another. The Prophet (PBUH) said *“you cannot enter paradise unless you love one another”; “Indeed, should love all his creatures great and small”*. These statements are confirmed in the Quran which states that, *“for those with faith and good works, the compassionate has assigned love’* (19:96)

The foundation of Islam is Tawhid (unity of God). This has an immense implication to see the purpose of mankind. Firstly, Islam establishes the law of Conscience through Tawhid as Allah is ever living and we are accountable to Him (Huda et al., 2019). This makes humans to be moral and ethical even within close doors. Further, as Allah is One and we were all created from Allah, it unifies humans and nature as one even though we have infinite differences among us. If



we do not have differences, we would need number plates to recognize one another as we cannot differentiate the uniqueness of each individual nor we would appreciate our fellow men. Hence, Islam reaches to all humans with the sense of love and tolerance. Islam urges to appreciate the differences and recognize the beauty of God to build an intimate relationship with Him through the beauty of His creations (Bayman, 2003).

The love of God in Islam is not because God has sacrificed Him to us. In Islam the humans are not the master of God. It is us who needs Him. We are slaves and owned by Him (Naro et al., 2020). We do not and cannot question His wisdom or Judgement. It is out of His blessings that we are given the choice and freedom to worship Him. In return, we are obliged to love Him unconditionally. In whatever the situation may be Islam commands us to say "Alhamdulillah" (All Praise is due to Allah).

In Islam God is God is the one beyond time and space whose being cannot be perceived by our intellect alone or put together. Muslims believe that Allah is beyond material reality and permanent and eternal. However, they also firmly believe that He is closer to us than our own jugular vein, "And We have already created man and know what his soul whispers to him, and We are closer to him than [his] jugular vein" (50: 16).

Hence, Muslims are therefore expected to love God more than anything else, "And [yet], among the people are those who take other than Allah as equals [to Him]. They love them as they [should] love Allah. But those who believe are stronger in love for Allah... (2: 165).

God's gifts are limitless and His love is more penetrative than the sun rays. It penetrates to all human beings even though we have continuously rejected Him or disobeyed Him. To know Him is to understand and discover one's own "self" and to connect with Him spiritually. This

connection is love in Islam which made Ibrahim (PBUH) to jump into the fire with a smile, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) to visit the woman who was dumping garbage on him and made Abu Bakr (RA) to give away all his wealth in the path of Allah etc.

### ***LOVE FOR NEIGHBOUR***

Allah is Oft-Forgiving. However, He will not forgive those who have oppressed other unless the oppressed one forgives them first. Hence, Islam has laid strict principles for us not to transgress the right of others. Hence, it is impossible for a person to love Allah without loving his brother. In other words, a person can only love Allah by recognizing and appreciating His creation which encompasses to love one another and the nature as a whole. Islam commands us to fulfill the rights of others, "Worship God and join none with Him [in worship]; and do good to parents, kinsfolk, orphans, the poor, the neighbor who is near of kin, the neighbor who is a stranger... (4:36).

Further, when the delegation of the Christians of Najran visited Medina, the Prophet (PBUH) hosted them at the mosque for several days.

As much as the Christian faith, Islam teaches that the love of God must translate into compassion for man. However, Muslims are a bit more hesitant when it goes to use the word "love". In general they prefer to designate the same attitude as brotherhood and sisterhood.

### ***SIMILARITIES IN THE CONCEPT OF LOVE IN CHRISTIANITY AND ISLAM***

There are many points of convergence between Christian and Islamic beliefs. Both understand God as Creator and Sustainer, as Just and Merciful. Further, they all believe that we are all accountable to God in the afterlife. It is true that God loves His creation in both religions but this is not the same as how humans love Him (Miner et al., 2014). Both religions emphasize that

we should love Him as He has blessed us infinitely which shows the dependency of man towards God and not vice versa. Hence, both religions urge man to love Him in totality by surrendering the Self to Him. God's will precede human desires. This fundamental concept is similar in both religions.

Further, both communities of faith stress the centrality of prayer, and share common values and ideals such as the search for justice in society, providing for people in need, love for one's neighbour and living together in peace. Tolerance is signified in both religions in its comprehensive scope. Even though, Islam has permitted revenge it promotes forgiveness as Allah is Oft-Forgiving which is similar to the teachings of Jesus whereby showing the other cheek for the one who slapped.

Both Muslims and Christians often fail to recognize these points of convergence because they tend to see themselves superior to the other which in itself condemned by both religions.

### ***DIFFERENCES***

There are substantial differences between the two religions in the concept of love. The concept of Trinity in Christianity and the concept of Unity in Islam is the fundamental divergence between the two religions even in the philosophy of love. Christianity begins human history with the original sin. To release man from his misery God Himself came to the world and sacrificed Himself for the sinning of man. This is parallel to a person who is lost, a person may give direction or he might come by himself to show the way. In Christianity, as God really loves man, he did not only sent Prophets to show directions to salvation but came by Himself to guide people. This concept is different in Islam.

Firstly, Islam believes that everyone is responsible for his own deeds, "Whoever is guided is only guided for [the benefit of] his soul. And whoever errs only errs against it. And no bearer of burdens will bear the burden of another. And never would We punish until We sent a messenger" (17:15). Hence, it is Adam's (PBUH) responsibility to repent and will not be inherited by others. Further, Allah taught Adam (PBUH) how to seek forgiveness (7:23) and forgave him and He made him as the father of mankind and the trustee of the world. Allah elevates a person who sins and seeks forgiveness as man is bound to err. The story of David (PBUH) where he failed in the test but sincerely asked forgiveness and the result was Allah elevated him as the successor upon earth, "So We forgave him that; and indeed, for him is nearness to Us and a good place of return. [We said], "O David, indeed We have made you a successor upon the earth, so judge between the people in truth and do not follow [your own] desire, as it will lead you astray from the way of Allah ." (38:25-26).

In Christianity, the love towards God is conditional to an extent where it states that, "We love Him because He first loved us" (John 4: 19). Hence, if man perceives that God does not love him anymore, he will not love God anymore which contradictory to the principles of Islam. Allah states that, "Do the people think that they will be left to say, "We believe" and they will not be tried? But We have certainly tried those before them, and Allah will surely make evident those who are truthful, and He will surely make evident the liars" (29:2-3). Hence, lovers of God will be tested more to differentiate between true love and the conditional one. Hence, in Islam whether God answers prayers or not, men are commanded to be patient and consistent in loving Him and submitting only to Him.

In Christianity the “love” is an abstract command but in Islam it is unrestricted to God alone. It gives restrictions on how much we can love Prophet (PBUH), parents, family and others. These restrictions clearly separate between the unconditional love towards the Lord God and the conditional love towards the creations. Given these and other differences, it is essential for the continuing improvement of relations that both Christians and Muslims make greater efforts to learn more about each other's faith to recognize the common fundamentals to build brotherhood and to respect the divergence of one another.

### ***CONFLICTS BETWEEN MUSLIMS AND CHRISTIANS***

From the inception of Islam, there have been issues between the two religions despite advocating peace, love and harmony. Christian-Muslim relations have been plagued by controversies and wars over the centuries. From the crusades and more recently the conflict in Lebanon are examples of Christian Muslim conflict at the level of armed combat (El Khazen, 2020). However, we should not forget that Christians and Muslims have lived together peacefully around the world for many centuries. Though those wars have been bloody and devastating, they should not over shadow the peaceful experiences whereby Christians and Muslims have shared the same space with love and peace throughout history.

At the beginning of Islam in Makkah, when persecution was unbearable, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) gave permission to migrate to Abyssinia as he said that the Christian King Najjashi was a righteous king and will help the migrants. The king welcomed the Muslim and helped them leave peacefully in the Christian community as long as they wished (Qurashi, 2019). This was the first migration in Islam and has a significant implication on Islamic history. To add to that both the Prophet (PBUH) and

the king shared love throughout the dealings. Hence, the fundamental problem is not with either Islam or Christianity but lies in Muslims and Christians. If Prophet (PBUH) could trust the Christian king over all Arab tribes in the whole of Arabia even without seeing him before and if the king can help the Muslims even without any worldly rewards, we should ask the fundamental question of what makes man better than the rest is his character. Hence, building good character and purifying our hearts should be the first step to transform lives. Hence only from a purified soul, the true love can spread be it a Muslim or Christian.

## **CONCLUSION**

This paper does not intend to evaluate both Christian and Islamic concept of love to find which one is superior. The objective of this paper is to understand love in both religions and to recognize one another. We have attempted to draw convergence in the divergence of this concept in both religions. Even though, there are many fundamental differences between the two religions it is important that both religions advocate man to love God and his fellow human beings. It does not elevate human beings because they belong to any sect or religion but rather the status of man is exalted by his good conduct with others.

Further, in both religions, God's will precede human desires and we are accountable to Him in the afterlife. Hence, there is always a check on us to be a better person even inside close doors. As concluding remarks, love comes from heart. If the heart is purified, then the love is also pure and unconditional. Purifying hearts will unite human beings as one even having numerous differences. Both Islam and Christianity is embracing materialism which does not have any place in these religions and lost its trait in spirituality. We have all lost our purpose in life. Going back to our

own fundamentals is the only solution. Becoming more religious does not make a person extremist it makes him more tolerant. Father does not get offended by the mistakes of the child. Hence pious people embrace the common man with a smile and do not respond with iron fist. This shows that the so called “pious” are just like immature children as they are fighting over peanuts without having any understand of religious teachings.

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