

Islamic Revivalism, Religious Freedom and the Non-Muslims in Malaysia: A Preliminary Discussion

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ABSTRAK

Respons bukan Islam terhadap dasar Islamisasi kerajaan dan kebangkitan Islam di Malaysia serta matlamat organisasi mereka berkaitan dengan hal-ehwal bukan Islam mempunyai banyak persamaan. Seseorang dapat membuat kesimpulan mengenai respons bukan Islam di Malaysia daripada soal selidik dan wawancara. Sungguhpun Perlembagaan Malaysia menjamin kebebasan beragama dan hak-hak bukan Islam, apa yang menjadi soal di sini ialah amalan sebenar kerajaan Malaysia dan kakitangan kerajaan dalam melaksanakan peruntukan-peruntukan dalam perlembagaan. Orang bukan Islam tidak yakin dengan hak-hak mereka dalam perlembagaan. Secara umumnya, kerisauan mereka berdasarkan kepada kurangnya penjelasan yang jelas dan perbincangan terbuka. Rasa tidak selamat di kalangan bukan Islam akan meningkat selama mana hak-hak mereka dinafikan ataupun diabaikan. Cubaan untuk mengislamkan Malaysia akan meningkatkan rasa keterpinggiran dan mereka akan bertindak untuk mempertahankan hak-hak mereka.

ABSTRACT

The non-Muslims' responses towards the Islamization policy of the government and Islamic revivalism in Malaysia and their major organisation aims regarding non-Muslims affairs have many things in common. From the questionnaires and interviews, it is possible to summarise the responses of the non-Muslims in Malaysia. Although the Malaysian constitution guarantees the non-Muslims religious freedom and rights, what matters are the actual practices of the Malaysian government and civil servants in implementing the constitutional provisions. The non-Muslims are not convinced about their constitutional rights. Generally, their fear are based on the lack of a clear and open discussion. The non-Muslims sense of insecurity will be increased as long as their rights are denied or neglected. Attempts to Islamize Malaysia will further intensify the non-Muslim's feeling of disadvantage and they will react to fight for their rights.

INTRODUCTION

The importance of Islamic revivalism is based on the reassertion of Islam in Muslim economic, social, political, and personal life. Islam becomes a vital and dynamic sociopolitical force in Muslim communities. Without discounting other factors, the characteristics of Islamic teachings and dynamism are the primary attributes of the broad-based phenomenon of Islamic revivalism. Hence, the phenomenon of Islamic revivalism in Malaysia

and elsewhere are a very interesting topic for discussion.

The Meaning of Islamic Revivalism

The concept of *al-din* is a unique one in comparison to other religions.¹ There is no separation between worldly affairs and religious affairs. It is also inconceivable to separate religion and State. *Al-Qur'an* and *al-Sunnah* are the legitimate sources of law and their role is

¹ For further explanation see Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas. 1992. *Islam: The Concept of Religion and the Foundation of Ethics and Morality*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.

inherent in Islam.² The role of the State is to enforce the law.

There are four basic elements for a spirit of revivalism:

1. The performance of the demands of faith, the design, development and way of life in accordance with the demands of the *Shari'ah*;
2. The practice of moral and ethical norms of Islam;
3. The assimilation of the virtues into the soul as modes of being (*akhlaq*);
4. The performing of good deeds and the eradication of the evils in public dealing (*mu'amalah*).

Most Muslims attempt to address political and social issues in their countries in terms of Islam and or Islamic terms. "Islam is a major component of the framework in which these issues are discussed. This is because Islam has always addressed all aspects of a believer's life..."³ In examining the rise of Islamic revivalism and the Muslim Brotherhood movement in Egypt, Hasan al-Banna explains that the decisive factor is the perfection of Islam itself. The discovery of Islamic perfection by Islamic thinkers neglected by Muslims for a long time, exposed to the masses the bad attributes of other heritages. He shows the role of Muslim thinkers in comparing Islamic perfection with the social system of other society's heritages. He further adds:

...God had enlightened their thinkers and they had compared the social rules of their religion with what they had been told by the greatest sociologists and the cleverest leading theorists, they noted the wide gap and the great distance between a heritage of immense value on one side and the conditions experienced on the other. Then, Muslims could not do justice to the spirit and the history of their people, proclaiming the value of this heritage and inviting all peoples - nonpracticing Muslims or non-Muslims - to follow the sacred path that God had traced for them and to hold a straight path.⁴

On the other hand, the growth of Islamic revivalism was not dependent upon the natural outgrowth of the truth and the intrinsic flexibility of Islam but it also is related to the direct relationship between Islamic movements and the political, social and cultural factors.⁵

Khurshid Ahmad suggests that in examining the phenomenon led by Islamic movements, they "...must be understood not merely by examining (the movements) as reactions to colonial rule but in the context of the positive aspirations of the Islamic ummah to regain the position it lost (to) Western civilization."⁶ The massive activities of Islamic movements all over the world show that Islam is rising rapidly with large numbers of followers, political impact, social influence, strength of belief and economic power. At this time, one can commonly equate the Islamic revival with an institutionalized Islam which has taken hold in many Muslim countries.

Islamic Revivalism in Malaysia: Meaning and Perspectives

Islamic revivalism literally means a new birth of Islam or the phenomenon describes the rebirth of the importance of Islam or it simply means Islam revives so as to regenerate the awareness of the essence of Islamic teachings.⁷ To describe the phenomenon of Islamic revivalism, it might be assumed that there is a rising, a motion or movement on the part of Muslims. There is a desire to take Islam in a state of sensibility and free it from mental bondage and stagnation. There are also efforts to remove bad elements which restrain Muslims from becoming awake.

Islamic revivalism is hence a religious phenomenon resulting from the rise of Muslim awareness of Islam and a return to Islam as a way of life solving their worldly difficulties in all aspects of life from psychological to governmental

² *Surah al-Hashr*, 59: 7. "...And whatsoever the Messenger (Muhammad s.a.w.) gives you, take it; and whatsoever he forbids you, abstain (from it). And fear Allah; verily, Allah is Severe in punishment."

³ William R. Darrow. 1987. *Marxism and religion: Islam*. In *Movements and Issues in World Religions. A Sourcebook and Analysis of Developments since 1945: Religion, Ideology and Politics*, ed. Charles Wei-bsun Fu and Gerhard E. Spiegler, p. 394. Westport: Greenwood Press.

⁴ Hasan al-Banna. 1982. *Renaissance in the Islamic world*. In *Political and Social Thought in the Contemporary Middle East*, ed. Kemal H. Karpat, p. 100. Revised and enlarged edition. New York: Praeger.

⁵ Enayat: *Modern Islamic...*, p. 84.

⁶ Khurshid Ahmad. 1983. *The nature of the Islamic resurgence*. In *Voices of Resurgent Islam*, ed. John. L. Esposito, p. 220. New York: Oxford University Press.

⁷ On the meaning of revival see also Munir Ba'alaki. 1975. *Al-Mawrid*. fifth edition, Beirut: Dar al-'Ilm li al-Malayin, p. 786. On resurgence, see p. 782.

problems. As a result, Muslims become more attached to Islam as a defence and a solution in whatever crisis they face. Knowledge of Arabic is an indispensable tool since "Islamic revivalism depends on *ijtihad* in religious law, and *ijtihad* is impossible without a proper understanding of the sources of law, that is the Arabic language".⁸

The specific characteristic of Islamic revivalism is not only based on spirit, verbal expression or slogans. The true revival of Islam is based on the total commitment to Islam, its ethics and morality, and its worldview. The youth are the backbone of this revival.⁹ Allah says:

(The believers whose lives Allah has purchased are) those who turn to Allah in repentance (from polytheism and hypocrisy), who worship (Him), who praise (Him), who fast (or go out in Allah's Cause), who bow down (in prayer), who enjoin (on people) Al-Ma'ruf (i.e. Islamic Monotheism and all what Islam has ordained) and forbid (people) from al-Munkar (i.e. disbelief, polytheism of all kinds and all that Islam has forbidden), and who observe the limits set by Allah (do all that Allah has ordained and abstain from all kinds of sins and evil deeds which Allah has forbidden). And give glad tidings to the believers.¹⁰

Their movements obviously are a great phenomenon in the modern world. Although the revival of Islam among the youth cannot be doubted, certain comments need to be made:

- They must be moderate in the sense of doing something within the realm of necessity.
- They must master not only the different branches of knowledge but more importantly they have to be imbued with knowledge.
- They must respect the opinion of the others although they have their own opinion.
- They must be conscious and keep abreast of the contemporary reality and the

environment while being prepared to undertake much-needed changes and adjustments.

- They must avoid disagreements over petty and technical issues. Be more tolerant on petty issues.

Tajdid and Islah in Relation to Islamic Revivalism

The reformists or revivalists represent objectives to protect Islam and the institutional structures upholding it. In a limited degree, they are younger 'ulama' who accept modernization or changes because of rational awareness of the current situation and needs, but on the other hand they oppose secularization and westernization. In a certain sense their movement is involved in social change with various methods within Islamic flexibility, thus they are described as a religious movement.¹¹

Every group has its own contribution to make. Each of the groups plays a significant role in Islamic revivalism. However, conflicts and disagreements prevent them from cooperating with each other. They should have a complementary role in their *da'wah* activities in the light of the Islamic brotherhood. The Muslim traditionalist, reformist and modernist goals were founded basically on the Islamic notions of *tajdid* and *islah*. "*Tajdid* is translated as 'renewal' and *islah* as 'reform'."¹² "*Islah* has been the word generally used by Arab scholars to mean 'reform'".¹³

The concept of *tajdid* is derived from the *hadith* of the Prophet which says: "God will send to this *ummah* at the beginning of each century those who will renew its faith."¹⁴ On the other hand, the concept of *islah* is based on Quranic verses commanding Muslims to carry out *islah*

⁸ Muhammad Rashid Rida quoted in Hamid Enayat. 1982. *Modern Islamic Political Thought*. p. 75. Austin: University of Texas Press.

⁹ Credit should be given to the 'ulama' and the proponents of the revival. There is usually a surge of Islamic literature and history, pamphlets and articles published for guidance or direction. The youth who are the backbone of this revival can be seen everywhere practising Islam. The wearing of *jilbab* can be seen among the women.

¹⁰ *Surah al-Taubah*, 9: 112.

¹¹ *Ibid*.

¹² John Obert Voll. 1983. *Renewal and reform in Islamic history: Tajdid and Islah*. In *Voices of Resurgent Islam*, ed. John L. Esposito, p. 32. New York: Oxford University Press.

¹³ Hassan Saab. 1963. *The spirit of reform in Islam*. *Islamic Studies* 2 (March): 1, p. 18.

¹⁴ Al-Imam Sulaiman bin al-Ash'ath al-Sijistani. 1956. *Sunan Abu Daud*. Vol. 4. *Tahqiq* Muhammad Mahy al-Din 'Abd al-Samad, Beirut: Al-Maktabah al-Tijariyyah al-Kubra, p. 109.

among their people¹⁵ and assuring God's reward to *al-Muslihun*.¹⁶ The concept of *islah* has a very broad meaning. One can trace its significance by referring to the literal meaning of *islah* itself. The word *islah* is an infinitive noun. According to Lane, it means:

...made, or rendered, it or him, good, incorrupt, right, just, righteous, virtuous, or honest; constituted it, disposed it, or qualified it, well, rightly, or properly; rectified, corrected, redressed, or reformed, it; put it into a good, incorrupt, sound, right, or proper, state; or restored it such a state; put it to rights, or in a state of order; set it right, set it in order, ordered it, managed it well, cultured it; adjusted, dressed, or trimmed, it; prepared it properly for us; repaired, mended, amended, or improved, it; made it, or him, to thrive;...¹⁷

The person who promotes *islah* is called *muslih* or in plural, *muslihun*. They are of the people who occupy themselves in the things conducive to good, not the things conducive to evil or bad in the light of Islamic essences. They considered the things that were good for Islam, the people, creatures, environment and universe.

Perhaps, to best describe the idea of reformism in Islam one may refer to one of the sayings of the Prophet's companions. Husin ibn Ali in a gathering in Mina and 'Arafah during the hajj season, declared his intention to launch his reform campaign. There he repeated the pronouncements of his father, saying:

*O God! You know that our struggle, moves, protests, and campaigns have not been, and are not, for the sake of rivalry and for obtaining power, neither are they for the sake of personal ambition nor for worldly ends, nor for the purpose of accumulating wealth and acquiring worldly advantages. But to reestablish the landmarks of your religion, that we may make reform manifest in your lands, so that the oppressed among your servants may have security, and your laws, which have been suspended and cast into neglect, may be reinstated.*¹⁸

Therefore, the goals of reformism in Islam are:

- Not for the sake of competition and obtaining power
- Not for the sake of personal ambition or interest

- Not for the sake of worldly ends
- Not for the purpose of accumulating wealth and acquiring worldly advantages
- To uphold and establish the teachings of *al-Qur'an* and *al-Sunnah*
- To reform life in all aspects included the material conditions of man's life, and
- To establish *Shari'ah* in this world.

The nature of *islah* in Islam is a basic and gradual process, that is fundamental and substantial. It is in light of these interpretations that the phenomenon of Islamic revivalism should be observed.

Religious Freedom and the Non-Muslims Responses: Methodological Rationale

The responses discussed in this section were based on the analysis of data revealed by the respondents through the questionnaires.

The findings are reported under several thematic headings. The analyses are primarily based on the answers obtained from the questionnaires. The analysed data is then backed up by library research and qualitative interviews, which were carried out with ordinary non-Muslims as well as their religious leaders. The frequency and percentage results derived from the four-point scale questionnaires are expressed in two ways. Firstly, the total frequency or percentage of 'agreement' (strongly agree and agree) or 'disagreement' (strongly disagree and disagree) and secondly, the actual frequency and percentages obtained from each answer in the multiple answer questionnaires. Supplementary information was obtained from interviews and various publications. Information obtained from the literatures and interviews might help to show an indication of possible relationships that may exist between variables. Certain variables from the survey data were also treated through cross tabulation to examine and demonstrate the presence or absence of a relationship. This would help to build up a

¹⁵ *Surah al-Nisa'*, 4: 114. "There is no good in most of their secret talks save (in) him who orders *Sadaqah* (charity in Allah's Cause), or *Ma'ruf* (Islamic Monotheism and all the good and righteous deeds which Allah has ordained), or conciliation between mankind; and he who does this, seeking the good Pleasure of Allah, We shall give him a great reward."

¹⁶ *Surah al-A'raf*, 7: 170. "And as to those who hold fast to the Book (i.e. act on its teachings) and perform *As-Salat*, certainly we shall never waste the reward of those who do righteous deeds."

¹⁷ Lane: *English-Arabic Lexicon*..., p. 1714.

¹⁸ *Nahj al-Balaghah*, "Khutab", p. 131.

clearer explanation about the nature of the phenomenon being studied.

Before we go further, it is important to explore some of the Malaysian non-Muslim grievances as a result of the Islamic revivalism. This is to understand the general views of the non-Muslims before shifting to a specific analysis.

The Non-Muslims' Grievances

Many non-Muslim writers emphasize that although religious freedom is technically protected, different faiths are treated unequally. The non-Muslims are restricted by the Constitution from promoting their religion among Muslims including the prohibition of publishing materials containing elements of non-Islamic religious teachings. Those who have broken these restrictions have faced internment under the Internal Security Act (ISA). One issue which is of deep concern to non-Muslims concerns the freedom of worship. According to CRC, the principle of religious freedom under the *Shari'ah* appears to be violated by some countries, "...e.g. Saudi Arabia and Qatar, which place obstacles to worship and religious education, and by Iran, which censor non-Muslim textbooks in the light of Islamic teaching."¹⁹

The non-Muslims claim that they are facing few significant restrictions on their internal religious activities. The most burning issue is in the area of rights to build places of worship. The Government was accused of limiting the non-Muslim places of worship. Another problem faced by the non-Muslims is the difficulty in getting approval for the building of a church or temple,

and applying for a land marked for a church, a temple or a burial ground.

The Non-Muslims' Responses

With the creation of the Federation of Malaya in 1948, the constitution (the Constitution of the Federation of Malaya 1948) declared that, subjected to Clause 48 of that Agreement which gave the power to the British High Commissioner and Sultans to make laws in Malaya,²⁰ the religion of the State "...shall be the Muslim religion heretofore professed and practised in the State..."²¹

The first serious discussion on Islam as the religion of Malaysia and the right and freedom of the non-Muslims was highlighted in the draft constitution proposed by the Reid Commission.²² Interestingly, there was no provision similar to Article 3 of the Federal Constitution. When touching on the question of religion and the right and freedom of the non-Muslim in Malaya, the Reid Commission Report observed:

*We have considered the question whether there should be any statement in the Constitution to the effect that Islam should be the State Religion. There was universal agreement that if any such provision was inserted, it must be made clear that it would not in any way affect the civil rights of non-Muslims. In the memorandum submitted by the Alliance it was stated "the religion of Malaya shall be Islam. The observance of this principle shall not impose any disability on non-Muslim nationals professing and practising their own religions and shall not imply that the State is not a secular State". There is nothing in the draft Constitution to affect the continuance of the present position in the States with regard to the recognition of Islam or to prevent the recognition of Islam in the Federation by legislation or otherwise in any respect which does not prejudice the civil rights of non-Muslim individuals.*²³

¹⁹ CRC: Islamization of Malaysian Laws..., p. 21.

²⁰ J. de V. Allen, A.J. Stockwell and L.R. Wright (eds.) 1981. *A Collection of Treaties and Other Documents Affecting the States of Malaysia: 1761-1963*. Vol. 2, p. 138. New York: Oceana Publication Inc.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 150.

²² After several meetings, a committee consists of the British Secretary of State, the Malay Rulers (Sultan) and the new Alliance Ministers (consist of UMNO, MCA, and MIC), agreed to appoint five members of a commission to draft the Malaysian Federal Constitution. Strangely, not a single Malaysian serving in that commission. The members were led by Lord Reid, a Lord of appeal in Ordinary; Sir Ivor Jennings, Master of Trinity Hall, Cambridge, Justice Abdul Hamid of the West Pakistan High Court; Sir William Mckell, a former Governor-General of Australia, and Mr. B. Malik, a former Chief Justice of the Allahabad High Court. This committee was known as the Reid Commission.

²³ Colonial Office. 1957. Report of the Federation of Malaya Constitutional Commission 1957, London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, p. 73. See also Philip Koh Tong Ngee. 1987. *Freedom of Religion in Malaysia: The Legal Dimension*. p. 2. Petaling Jaya: GCF. For further details on the fundamental liberties of Malaysian citizen see H. E. Groves. 1979. Fundamental liberties in the constitution of the Federation of Malaysia. In *The Constitution of Malaysia - Its Development: 1957-1977*, ed. Tun Mohamed Suffian et al., p. 27-40. Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press.

The Commission eventually agreed to allocate a provision on the position of Islam in the Federal Constitution. According to the Federal Constitution, Islam is the official religion of Malaysia. According to Sheridan and Groves, "The words may impose an obligation on the participants in any federal ceremonial to regulate any religious part of the ceremony according to Muslim rites".²⁴ Islam as a religion in the interpretation of Sheridan and Groves seemed to emphasize only ritual ceremonies which was incorrect.

As soon as Malaya gained independence on 31st of August 1957, some of the Muslim leaders wanted the application of Islamic law in the country and the establishment of an Islamic state.²⁵ Datuk Haji Yahya, representing many Muslim leaders warned and reminded the government in a very strong motion:

It would be sufficient if I remind our Islamic government that it is pointless for the independent Federation Government to recognise itself as an Islamic Government if the teachings of Islam and the laws of Shara' are neglected and the honour of Islam sacrificed through actions forbidden by the Hukum Shara'... We have been officially recognised as an Islamic State. The state must therefore respect the rules of Islam and the Islamic laws, as far as possible. An Islamic Government, is a pure government and if we challenge the sanctity of its laws, I am sure this is one way for our government to be condemned by the Almighty Allah who has the power to bring down tragedies upon our country.²⁶

Islam as the Religion of Malaysia

Although Islam is the official religion of Malaysia, every person has the right to profess and practise

his own religion, and the right to propagate his faith. But the right to propagate other religions amongst persons who are Muslims is not permitted by law. In other words, although Islam is the religion of Malaysia, non-Muslims enjoy their own religious liberty except in propagating their faith to the Muslims.

Based on this premise, the respondents were asked to state their stand. The first question is on the constitution's provision which stated that Islam was the religion of the Federation. Table 1 shows the stand chosen by the respondents according to their religious faith. It seems from the data that 56.1% of the respondents show agreement with the constitution provision that Islam is the religion of Malaysia, 17.9% of the respondents show disagreement and 25.9 gave no response. Irrespective of their religious beliefs and ethnic origins, the majority of the respondents seem to have accepted the mentioned constitutional provision. Living in a multiracial country with its unique historical background, these respondents understand the significance of Islam being the religion of Malaysia. Furthermore, they realize that their right to profess and practice their own religion is guaranteed. Moreover, the non-Muslims themselves feel that the provision does not affect their social, economic, and religious liberty. In fact, they were given full religious freedom in the sense that they would not be compelled to pay any tax for the purpose of any religion other than their own, the right to manage their own religious affairs, to establish and maintain

TABLE 1
Respondents' stand on Islam as the religion of Malaysia

Religion	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Buddhist	3 (1.9%)	8 (4.9%)	18 (11.1%)	48 (29.6%)	4 (2.5%)	81
Christian	2 (1.2%)	10 (6.2%)	14 (8.6%)	15 (9.3%)	1 (.6%)	42
Hindu	-	5 (3.1%)	9 (5.6%)	14 (8.6%)	8 (4.9%)	36
Sikh	-	1 (.6%)	1 (.6%)	1 (.6%)	-	3
Total	5 (3.1%)	24 (14.8%)	42 (25.9%)	78 (48.1%)	13 (8.0%)	162

²⁴ L. A. Sheridan and Harry E. Groves. 1979. *The Constitution of Malaysia*. p. 37. Singapore: Malayan Law Journal (PTE) Ltd.

²⁵ Hamid Jusoh. 1991. *The Position of Islamic Law in the Malaysian Constitution with Special Reference to the Conversion Case in Family Law*. p. 98. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.

²⁶ Quoted in Ahmad Ibrahim. 1979. The position of Islam in the constitution of Malaysia. In *The Constitution of Malaysia, Its Development: 1957-1977*, ed. Tun Mohamed Suffian, H.P. Lee and F.A. Trindade, p. 55. Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press.

religious institutions and charitable purposes, and to acquire and hold any property.²⁷

In other words, the non-Muslims religious freedom is guaranteed within the framework of the interpretation of the constitution. The non-Muslims who accepted the provision are the ones who have shown their tolerance and respect towards the Malays who own the country, and towards their leaders and the Malay leaders in preparing such an important provision in the constitution. Despite the agreement, one could look further into the differences among the groups. Many non-Muslim religious leaders also show their agreement with the provision.²⁸ Although the Constitution stated the special position of Islam as the official religion of Malaysia, many non-Muslims, referring to the first Prime Minister of Malaysia, interpret Malaysia as a secular state, in the sense that Islam is concerned only with spiritual and ritual matters.²⁹

When some one speaks about preserving the country as a secular state, it means that the state has no connection with religion, the society is no longer under the control or influence of religion, and the religion is not allowed to play a part in civil affairs.³⁰ Therefore, Malaysia is not a secular state in one sense. However, Malaysia

can be regarded as a secular state if the term secular is applied according to the definition of being "... concerned with worldly affairs than spiritual ones".³¹

As to the question of which religion should become the religion of Malaysia, the majority of the followers of every religion have chosen their own religion. 42% of all the respondents show agreement to the statement, 19.1% show disagreement and 38.3% were uncertain (see Table 2).

However, the percentage of agreement within every religious group is quite different. Within the Buddhists, 39.5% show agreement with their religion becoming the religion of Malaysia, 14.8% show disagreement and 45.7% were uncertain. Among the Christians, 61.9% show agreement with their religion becoming the religion of Malaysia, 14.3% show disagreement and 23.8% uncertain. Among the Hindus, 25% show agreement, 33.3% show disagreement and 41.7% were uncertain. Among the Sikhs, 66.7% show agreement while 33.3% show disagreement (see Table 3).

Not every religious group wanted their religion to be the religion of Malaysia. This is because the majority of Malaysian multiracial

TABLE 2
Respondents' opinion on own religion should become the religion of Malaysia

Religion	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree
Buddhist	1 (.6)	11 (6.8)	37 (22.8)	26 (16.0)	6 (3.7)
Christian	2 (1.2)	4 (2.5)	10 (6.2)	19 (11.7)	7 (4.3)
Hindu	4 (2.5)	8 (4.9)	15 (9.3)	6 (3.7)	3 (1.9)
Sikh	-	1 (.6%)	-	2 (1.2%)	3 (1.9)
TOTAL	7 (4.3%)	24 (14.8%)	62 (38.3%)	53 (32.7%)	16 (9.9%)

²⁷ Ahmad Ibrahim: "The Position of Islam...", p. 51.

²⁸ See for example Tan Chee Khoo. 1984. Constitutional provisions for religious freedom in Malaysia. In *Contemporary Issues on Malaysian Religions*, ed. Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra et al., p. 29. Petaling Jaya (Malaysia): Pelanduk Publications. S.M. Ponniah. 1984. A Hindu perspective. In *Contemporary Issues on Malaysian Religions*, ed. Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra et al., p. 77. Petaling Jaya (Malaysia): Pelanduk Publications.

²⁹ This provision needs to be correctly elaborated further if misconceptions are to be removed. Many questions arise regarding this issue and confuse many people. According to Syed Naquib al-Attas, the term 'secular': "... is meant to denote not merely secular ideologies such as for example, communism or socialism in its various forms, but encompasses also all expressions of the secular world view including that projected by secularization, which is none other than a secular historical relativism which I have called secularizationism." See Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas. 1978. *Islam and Secularism*. p. 45. Kuala Lumpur: ABIM.

³⁰ See the meaning of secular, secularism, secularity and secularize in *Kamus Dwibahasa Bahasa Inggeris - Bahasa Malaysia*. p. 1123. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka and Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia. See also J. B. Sykes. 1982. *Concise Oxford Dictionary*. 7th Edition. p. 950. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

³¹ See Ehrlich Eugene. 1980. *Oxford American Dictionary*. p. 612. New York: Oxford University Press.

TABLE 3
Respondents' opinion on own religion should become the religion
of Malaysia based on every religious group

Religion	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Buddhist	1 (1.2%)	11 (13.6%)	37 (45.7%)	26 (32.1%)	6 (7.4%)	
Christian	2 (4.8%)	4 (9.5%)	10 (23.8%)	19 (45.2%)	7 (16.7%)	
Hindu	4 (11.1%)	8 (22.2%)	15 (41.7%)	6 (16.7%)	3 (8.3%)	
Sikh	-	1 (33.3%)	-	2 (66.7%)	-	

society are Muslims while the non-Muslims form the minorities. The religion of Malaysia was never queried. The constitution has provided a fair provision for religious freedom, the right of conscience and worship in accordance with the non-Muslim religious beliefs. Malaysia also is known as "... a country where there is no State coercion or interference with other religions."³² There was a sort of agreement between Muslims and non-Muslims on the matter of the official religion of Malaysia. Lim Kim Sai, a Chinese political leader is of the opinion that "... Islam is not a problem to non-Muslims in Malaysia. For a long time, we all have come to know its importance to the Malays. So, we respect the wishes of the Malays".³³ However he raised his fears about the extremist and fundamentalist activities which might reduce the confidence of the non-Muslims who live in the country. A senior opposition leader, Tan Chee Koon, had a similar view. He pointed out:

*Islam is not a big problem in this country. The Chinese, for instance, do not care so much about what is happening as long as they can continue to do business and are not deprived... with a careful approach to the whole matter, Islamisation in Malaysia does not necessarily mean worse things to come.*³⁴

Nevertheless, from this questionnaire survey, the non-Muslims show an inclination towards their own religion to become the religion of Malaysia. This is because every religious group

has its religious loyalties, that is the sense of belonging.

In respect of religious freedom, the Federal Constitution stated that: (a) "Every person has the right to profess and practise his religion and, subject to Clause (4), to propagate it"³⁵. (b) The State and Federal law for Wilayah Persekutuan Kuala Lumpur and Labuan "may control or restrict the propagation of any religious doctrine or belief among persons professing the Muslim religion."³⁶ (c) No person under the age of 18 years "shall be required to receive instruction in or to take part in any ceremony or act of worship of a religion other than his own."³⁷ The religion of a person under the age of 18 years shall be decided by his parent or guardian.³⁸ (d) "No person shall be compelled to pay any tax the proceeds of which are specially allocated in whole or in part for the purposes of a religion other than his own."³⁹ (e) "Every religious group has the right: (i) to manage its own religious affairs; (ii) to establish and maintain institutions for religious or charitable purposes; and (iii) to acquire and own property and hold and administer it in accordance with law."⁴⁰

The Restriction of Propagating Other Religion Among Muslims

Islam is the official religion of the country⁴¹, but all these fundamental rights of non-Muslims are

³² Lim Kit Siang: Malaysia: Crisis..., p. 39.

³³ Quoted in Hussin Mutalib: Islam in Malaysia..., p. 102.

³⁴ Quoted in Ibid., p. 101.

³⁵ Article 11(1), Federal Constitution.

³⁶ Article 11(4), Federal Constitution.

³⁷ Article 12(3), Federal Constitution.

³⁸ Article 12(4), Federal Constitution.

³⁹ Article 11(2), Federal Constitution.

⁴⁰ Article 11(3), Federal Constitution.

⁴¹ Article 3, Federal Constitution states: "Islam is the religion of the Federation; but other religions may be practised in peace and harmony in any part of the Federation".

not interfered with, except propagating any religious doctrine or belief among Muslims. The State or Federal law may restrict any kind of propagation of any non-Muslim religious doctrine or belief among the Muslims. Based on this fact, the respondents were asked to give their opinions on the restriction of propagating other religions among persons professing Islam. The responses are shown in Table 4.

From the table, one can see that the majority of the respondents (either agree or fully agree, 50%) are of the opinion that there is a restriction of propagating other religions among persons professing Islam. The Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, and Sikhs regard Muslims secure in terms of their faith. This is indicated by 24% of the Buddhists, 12.4% of the Christians, 11.7% of the Hindus and 1.3% of the Sikh. Interestingly, 34.6% of our respondents are not certain about the restriction. Perhaps, this results from a lack of knowledge of the Federal Constitution.

The non-Muslims see that the Muslims are protected from proselytization. Thus, in their view, the Muslims are always secure in terms of their faith. As one Christian respondent put it:

In term of faith security, I think the Muslims are very fortunate. May be, this is because Malaysia is a Muslim country and the official religion is Islam. So, the security of faith of the Muslims must be protected from any form of proselytization. This is not new. In Afghanistan, Brunei and the majority of the Muslim countries, Muslims are protected from proselytization...⁴²

But it is not only in the field of faith that the non-Muslims see other ethnic groups (the

Muslims) as more secure than their own. It also involves other fields such as economy, education and politics.

Islam is the official religion of Malaysia and the Muslims are protected from being exposed to other religious doctrines. This is not a strange practice and policy. For a comparison, we found that in most of the Muslim countries i.e. Afghanistan, Brunei, Maldives and Pakistan, the state religion is Islam, and proselytism is illegal although believers of other religions may practise their rites and religious teachings. In Malaysia, Islam is the state religion and proselytization is prohibited. In Bangladesh, although the state religion is Islam, proselytism is permitted.⁴³ In Indonesia, only five religions are recognized, namely Islam, Catholicism, Protestantism, Buddhism and Hinduism. Atheism, Jehovah's Witnesses, Bahaism, Confucianism and some other religions have been banned by the government.⁴⁴

The practice is also recognized by other non-Muslim countries. Many non-Muslim countries prohibit proselytization among certain religious groups, for example, Bhutan, Burma, Laos and Nepal. Bhutan's state religion is Buddhism. Although citizens of other faiths may practice their religion, they are not allowed to proselytize. Conversion to another faith is illegal.⁴⁵ In Burma, the Buddhists enjoy a special position in the country and the government has been making an effort to link itself with Buddhism to establish its popular legitimacy. Permanent foreign religious missions have not been permitted until the 1960s.⁴⁶ Laos gave its

TABLE 4
Respondents opinions on the restriction of propagating other religions among persons professing Islam

Religion	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Buddhist	3 (1.9%)	6 (3.7%)	33 (20.4%)	26 (16.0%)	13 (8.0%)	81
Christian	2 (1.2%)	8 (4.9%)	12 (7.4%)	15 (9.3%)	5 (3.1%)	42
Hindu	-	6 (3.7%)	11 (6.8%)	11 (6.8%)	8 (4.9%)	36
Sikh	-	-	-	3 (1.9%)	-	3
Total	5 (3.1%)	20 (12.3%)	56 (34.6%)	55 (34.0%)	26 (16.0%)	162

⁴² Interview with respondent no. 19.

⁴³ See <http://www.religiousfreedom.com/wrpt/Aprt.htm#Bangladesh>

⁴⁴ For further details see <http://www.religiousfreedom.com/wrpt/Aprt.htm#Indonesia>

⁴⁵ See <http://www.religiousfreedom.com/wrpt/Aprt.htm#Bhutan>

⁴⁶ See <http://www.religiousfreedom.com/wrpt/Aprt.htm#Burma>

citizens the right and freedom to believe or not to believe in religion but the government encourages Buddhism. The government also forbids proselytizing by foreigners.⁴⁷ In Nepal, the official religion of the country is Hindu. People are free to practice their own religion as long as they do not proselytize.⁴⁸

The main purpose of the protection given to the Muslims in terms of prohibiting propagation of other religions is to protect the Muslim's faith. The main focus is on Christian missionaries although it cannot be denied that it is applicable to others. This is because in this world, the most obvious and active missionary religion is Christianity. Historically, since the 16th century the Christian missionaries under the encouragement of the British have had full freedom to propagate Christianity in Malaysia. Christianity came to Malaysia in relation to colonialism. One of the serious efforts to establish Christian missionary work among the Malays began in 1875.⁴⁹ Foreign missionaries played a vital role in this mission of proselytization especially from the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand. Hundreds of missionary groups were established under various names. Financial and personnel support was received from various parts of the world. In the word of one Christian, "...in colonial times, it was natural to look elsewhere for help - to London, or New York, or Canterbury."⁵⁰ This is also true at the present time.

The law for protection of the Muslims from other religious teachings, which is provided by the Federal Constitution is in line with the

teachings of Islam. Every human being is free to follow the creed which he is satisfied with. Allah's guidance to man has been given through the agency of prophets. Mankind has been given the choice, however limited that choice might be, to accept or reject the direction which comes to him through the prophets. The promise which Allah made with Adam a.s. was:

We said: "Get ye down all from here; and if, as is sure, there comes to you guidance from Me," whosoever follows My guidance, on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve. "But those who reject faith and belie Our signs, they shall be Companions of the Fire; they shall abide therein."⁵¹

Thus, the freedom of will and action is the basis of the virtuous life in Islam.⁵² However, the free will is restricted, but that does not mean that man's actions are predetermined. Human's deeds are recorded at the time when they are done.⁵³ God expects man to follow the Divine guidance but the decision is left to man himself whether or not he likes to surrender his will freely to the Will of Allah and thus work in harmony and participation with His Creator.

In Islam, once a person becomes a Muslim, he or she is subjected to the rule and law of Islam. Apostasy is a serious sin in Islam. Once becoming a Muslim, no one is allowed to convert to another religion. Although Allah will not be hurt by the false beliefs of unbelievers (if he had wished, all the people on the earth would have believed in Him⁵⁴), a Muslim is not free to follow any other religion. The punishment for apostasy in Islam is death. In one *hadith sahih*, the Prophet Muhammad s.a.w. said: "Whosoever

⁴⁷ See <http://www.religiousfreedom.com/wrpt/Aprt.htm#Laos>

⁴⁸ See <http://www.religiousfreedom.com/wrpt/Aprt.htm#Nepal>

⁴⁹ One of the active missionaries who carried out work on the Malays and the Malay-speaking Chinese (Baba) was Benjamin Keasberry. See John R. Fleming. 1969. Singapore, Malaysia and Brunei: the Church in a racial melting pot. In *Christ and Crisis in Southeast Asia*, ed. Gerald H. Anderson, p. 87. New York: Friendship Press.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ *Surah al-Baqarah*, 2: 38-39. See also 7: 35-36.

⁵² Allah has truly shown mankind the path and the way, therefore they may accept it or reject it. But Allah has prepared a fire of Hell for those who reject it. *Surah al-Kahf*, 18: 29. Allah also has shown "clear proofs" and it is for mankind's own good. *Surah al-Dahr*, 76: 3-5. Allah warns man that whoever is "blind", it is for his "own harm". *Surah al-Balad*, 90: 8-10. Mankind who believe in Allah are the Companions of the Right Hand and mankind who reject Allah, they are the Companions of the Left Hand. *Surah al-Balad*, 90: 17-20. Allah also emphasized that if mankind does good things, it is for their own souls, and if they do evil it is also for them. *Surah al-An'am* 6:105. Allah also clarifies, there is no compulsion in religion but the right way [*al-Rushd*] is clearly distinct from error [*al-Ghay*]. *Surah Bani Isra'il*, 17: 7.

⁵³ *Surah Qaf*, 50: 17.

⁵⁴ *Surah al-An'am*, 7: 35.

changes his religion, slay him.”⁵⁵ Although the words of this *hadith* are general, the majority of the Muslim jurists are of the opinion that the warning is confined only to Muslims but not non-Muslims. There is also disagreement among the jurists whether the *hadith* applies to a woman apostate or not. The question is quite complex here. Therefore, the law for Muslims from being exposed to other beliefs and doctrines is a kind of way of preventing the Muslims from committing apostasy.

In Malaysia every person has the right to profess and practise his or her own religion but except in some states, every person's religion under the age of eighteen years shall be decided by his parent or guardian. Every person has also the right to propagate his own religion. However there are restrictions in propagating other religions among persons professing Islam. In a sense, it seems that the Muslims are protected from being exposed to other beliefs or ideologies. The government also assumes that the ethnic Malays are protected from being converted to other faiths by the statement of Tunku Abdul Rahman, who said: "...a Malay who gives up his religion will cease to be a Malay".⁵⁶ Based on these facts, we asked our respondents about the protection given to the Muslims.

There were 50.7% (either strongly agree or agree) of all the respondents who said that the Muslims are being protected from other religious doctrines. Interestingly, 45.1% of our respondents were uncertain on the protection given to the Muslims while 4.4% either strongly disagree or disagree on that particular issue (see Table 5).

This finding shows that most of the non-Muslims believe that the Muslims are protected

from other religious beliefs. It appears that there is a protection for the Malaysian Muslims. However, since there is a provision in the constitution that every person has the right to practise his religion, the protection cannot be interpreted to say that the Muslim has no freedom to choose a faith of his own choice. Furthermore, there is no law prohibiting the Muslims from committing apostasy although it is a serious sin in Islam. A few of the Malay Muslims and converted Muslims have become Christians and Hindus. In this respect, although the Federal and State constitutions impose a limit on religious liberty, it did not impose any limit on Muslim personal religious liberty. This is the weakness of the provision itself. The term "...a Malay who gives up his religion will cease to be a Malay" has no significance at all in this context since a non-Malay who converted to Islam is not regarded as Malay. Therefore, how can a Malay convert to another faith be regarded as a non-Malay? The protection given to Malay beliefs is still not enough. On the one hand the constitution appears to protect the Muslims from proselytism but on the other hand, neither the state laws nor the "*Shari'ah* courts" nor the constitution itself protect the Muslims from converting to other religions. In other words, no provision in the Federal Constitution prohibits the Muslims from changing their belief or religion.

The differences among religious groups shows that 28.4% of the Buddhist respondents reply that Muslims are protected in terms of belief. 10.5% of the Christians, 11.1% of the Hindus, and 0.6% of the Sikhs take the same stand. In the eye of the non-Muslims, Muslims are protected by the constitution. Besides that, the Yang diPertuan Agong and Sultans, who

TABLE 5
Respondents' opinion on the belief protection given to the Muslims

Religion	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Buddhist	-	2 (1.2%)	33 (20.4%)	32 (19.8%)	14 (8.6%)	81
Christian	3 (1.9%)	1 (.6%)	21 (13.0%)	14 (8.6%)	3 (1.9%)	42
Hindu	-	-	18 (11.1%)	14 (8.6%)	4 (2.5%)	36
Sikh	-	1 (.6%)	1 (.6%)	1 (.6%)	-	3
Total	3 (1.9%)	4 (2.5%)	73 (45.1%)	61 (37.7%)	21 (13.0%)	162

⁵⁵ Quoted in S.A. Rahman. 1996. *Punishment of Apostasy in Islam*. p. 59. New Delhi: Kitab Bhavan.

⁵⁶ Tunku Abdul Rahman. 1985. *Challenging Time*. p. 28. Petaling Jaya: Pelanduk Publication.

head the Malay states also act as protectors of Islam, Muslims and their affairs. This result is in line with Batumalai's statements. Batumalai mentions that the Malays need to preserve and protect their religion in terms of their customs and cultural practices and the Malays do need means to safeguard their religion and royalty.⁵⁷ In this case the protectors of the Muslims are the Sultans who might be identified as the symbols of the Malay political elite while there is no elite for the non-Muslims. Hence, the non-Muslims feel the Muslims are protected in terms of belief. In Malaysia, although there are social pressures against Muslims converting, missionary activities are generally directed toward the Chinese, Hindu and tribal communities.

The Right to Profess and Practise Religion in Malaysia

It is a matter of fact that the State Constitution imposes a limit on religious liberty for non-Muslims in the sense that they are not allowed to propagate their religion while the Muslims are protected from proselytization. But one must remember, there were several cases where non-Muslim politicians voted to pass Islamic laws on that particular issue. On the one hand, one might argue it could have been merely for their political survival, but on the other hand, this might give evidence to the support of non-Muslims on the Muslim protection of belief. Many non-Muslim political leaders voted for the passing of the Administration of Islamic Law Enactment 1989 in the Selangor State and the passing of "...an Enactment to control and restrict the propagation of non-Islamic religious doctrines and beliefs among persons professing

the religion of Islam" on 16th November 1991 in the Johor state.⁵⁸

We included an extensive questioning of these facts. We attempted to examine the respondents' knowledge of the concept of religious freedom and propagation of one's religion as stated in the Malaysian Constitution. Several statements were put in the questionnaire based on the above Clause. The questions were also intended to detect and assess reaction to (a) the freedom and right to practise and profess one's religion, (b) freedom and restriction in propagating their religion (c) the protection given to the Muslims from other religious doctrines.

92.6% show agreement with the statement that every person has the right to profess and practise his or her religion in Malaysia, 4.4% show disagreement and 3.1% are uncertain (see Table 6). These responses show that the majority of the non-Muslims have a clear idea of their right to profess and practise their own religion.

On the question of restriction in propagating another religion among persons professing Islam, the majority of the non-Muslims stated they 'strongly agree' or 'agree' (50%) with the statement that there is a restriction in propagating other religions among persons professing Islam and in reality the restriction exists. 15.4% 'strongly disagree' or 'disagree' while 34.6% of the respondents are 'uncertain' regarding the restriction (see Table 7). These responses illustrate that the non-Muslims oppose the regulation restricting propagating other religions among the Muslims. The majority of the respondents also believed that the non-Muslims have the right to propagate their own

TABLE 6
The right to profess and practice religion in Malaysia

Religion	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree
Buddhist	2 (1.2%)	2 (1.2%)	1 (0.6%)	27 (16.7%)	49 (30.2%)
Christian	1 (0.6%)	-	1 (0.6%)	15 (9.3%)	25 (15.4%)
Hindu	-	1 (0.6%)	3 (1.9%)	8 (4.9%)	24 (14.8%)
Sikh	-	1 (0.6%)	-	1 (0.6%)	1 (0.6%)
TOTAL	3 (1.9%)	4 (2.5%)	5 (3.1%)	51 (31.5%)	99 (61.1%)

⁵⁷ Batumalai: *Islamic Resurgence*...., p. 70.

⁵⁸ Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism and Sikhism [n.d.]. *Should Islamic Law Be Introduced in Malaysia*. p. 3. Kuala Lumpur: MCCBCHS.

religion. But the Federal Constitution restricted the propagation only on the Muslims but not the non-Muslims. Therefore, the non-Muslims can propagate their religion among followers of all religions except the Muslims. For instance, the Christian preachers can approach the non-Muslims; the Buddhists and the Hindus⁵⁹ and the aborigines in their religious activities. This is because Christianity is an active missionary religion and there is no such regulation prohibiting propagation of religion among non-Muslims. The clause in the Federal Constitution also protects the Muslims from other religious beliefs and doctrines but does not protect them from committing apostasy.

The Federal Constitution provides that every religious group has the right to manage its own religious affairs. When asked whether there is a restriction in managing non-Muslims religious affairs, 94 of our respondents claim that there is no restriction, 32 are uncertain while 36 respondents claim that there is a restriction (see Table 8).

Freedom of Worship/Propagation of Faith (Freedom to Manifest Religion or Belief)

The individual's right to establish a place of worship for himself in his private house for his own use does not raise any serious question. However, establishing buildings for communities to worship in is rather different. In Malaysia, the right to build religious institutions is recognized by the Malaysian constitution. The constitution recognizes the right to establish religious institutions for Muslims and non-Muslims alike. Nevertheless, there are rules and regulations governing the building and construction of any religious building. Any construction for religious worship must be approved by the local authorities. To prevent any illegal building of religious centres or institutions, rules and regulations have to be fulfilled before the building program can be started.

The letter of the law is quite ideal but the actual situation is somewhat different especially in establishing places of worship for the non-Muslims. When we questioned non-Muslims about this, the majority (57.4%) of them agreed

TABLE 7
Restriction in propagating other religion among the Muslims

Religion	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree
Buddhist	3 (1.9%)	6 (3.7%)	33 (20.4%)	26 (16.0%)	13 (8.0%)
Christian	2 (1.2%)	8 (4.9%)	12 (7.4%)	15 (9.3%)	5 (3.1%)
Hindu	-	6 (3.7%)	11 (6.8%)	11 (6.8%)	8 (4.9%)
Sikh	-	-	-	3 (1.9%)	-
TOTAL	5 (3.1%)	20 (12.3%)	56 (34.6%)	55 (34.0%)	26 (16.0%)

TABLE 8
Respondents' opinion on restriction in managing non-Muslim religious affairs

Religion	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree
Buddhist	16 (9.9%)	30 (18.5%)	18 (11.1%)	14 (8.6%)	3 (1.9%)
Christian	5 (3.1%)	21 (13.0%)	6 (3.7%)	6 (3.7%)	4 (2.5%)
Hindu	6 (3.7%)	15 (9.3%)	6 (3.7%)	7 (4.3%)	2 (1.2%)
Sikh	1 (0.6%)	-	2 (1.2%)	-	-
TOTAL	28 (17.3%)	66 (40.7%)	32 (19.8%)	27 (16.7%)	9 (5.6%)

⁵⁹ Amran Kasimin. 1984. *Saudara Baru Cina di Wilayah dan Selangor*, p. 131. Bangi: Fakulti Sains Kemasyarakatan dan Kemanusiaan, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. Mr. Vitalingham, the President of Malaysia Hindu Sangam at the first Hindu Unity Rally (5 October 1997), in his address said that the Hindu community should seriously study and need to know the reasons for those being converted by some Christian religious extremist groups. See "2000 Hindus at Rally", SANGAM (Newsletter), No. 2, December 1997.

(Table 9) that there are all sorts of bureaucratic and red-tape problems in gaining permission from the authorities for establishing places of worship for the non-Muslims. We also examined the non-Muslims attitude regarding the regulation of constructing a church in a locality in Malaysia. The Christians for example, need about 4000 residents in a locality to be allowed to construct a church. Overall, 54.3% of our respondents claimed that the regulation was not fair, 17.9% claimed it was fair enough, 15.4% did not know, and 12.3% gave no response at all (Table 10). Laws regarding building non-Muslim's places of worship should take into consideration the locality occupied by a majority of the non-Muslims. According to Muslim jurists, in an Islamic state, the non-Muslims cannot

build their places of worship in a locality largely inhabited by the Muslims.⁶⁰

When we questioned non-Muslims about the ban on placing Bibles in hotels in Malaysia, the majority of the non-Muslims (56.2%) did not agree with the banning, 24.1% either fully agreed or agreed, and 13.8% either did not know or gave no response to the question (Table 11). In our opinion, the ban on placing of Bibles in hotels in Malaysia is reasonable because it is a sort of Christian proselytization and it is against the constitution. The placing of Bibles in hotels in Malaysia was a practice which was duplicated from the western countries and is perceived as being a threat to the faith of Muslims.

TABLE 9.
Respondents' opinion on laws relating to building places of worship for non-Muslims

Religion	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree
Buddhist	3 (1.9 %)	21 (13.0%)	14 (8.6%)	29 (17.9%)	14 (8.6%)
Christian	2 (1.2%)	10 (6.2%)	6 (3.7%)	16 (9.9%)	8 (4.9%)
Hindu	3 (1.9%)	3 (1.9%)	7 (4.3%)	13 (8.0%)	10 (6.2%)
Sikh	-	-	-	2 (1.2%)	1 (0.6%)
TOTAL	8 (4.9%)	34 (21.0%)	27 (16.7%)	67 (37.0%)	33 (20.4%)

TABLE 10
Respondents' opinion on regulation of constructing a church

Religion	Fair Enough	Not Fair	Do Not Know	No Response
Buddhist	19 (11.7%)	39 (24.1%)	12 (7.4%)	11 (6.8%)
Christian	3 (1.9%)	30 (18.5%)	4 (2.5%)	5 (3.1%)
Hindu	7 (4.3%)	16 (9.9%)	9 (5.6%)	4 (2.5%)
Sikh	-	3 (1.9%)	-	-
TOTAL	29 (17.9%)	88 (54.3%)	25 (15.4%)	20 (12.3%)

TABLE 11
Respondents' opinion on the ban on placing Bibles in hotels

Religion	Fully Agree	Agree	Do not Agree	Don't Know	No Response
Buddhist	6 (3.7%)	14 (8.6%)	44 (27.2%)	11 (6.8%)	6 (3.7%)
Christian	1 (0.6%)	6 (3.7%)	27 (16.7%)	5 (3.1%)	3 (1.9%)
Hindu	3 (1.9%)	7 (4.3%)	19 (11.7%)	6 (3.7%)	1 (0.6%)
Sikh	1 (0.6%)	1 (0.6%)	1 (0.6%)	-	-
TOTAL	11 (6.8%)	28 (17.3%)	91 (56.2%)	22 (13.6%)	10 (0.2%)

⁶⁰ See Abd al-Karim Zaidan. 1976. *Ahkam al-Dhimmiyyin wa al-Musta'minin*. p. 96-99. Beirut: Muassasah al-Risalah, See also Yusuf al-Qaradawi. 1977. *Ghair al-Muslimin fi al-Mujtama' al-Islami*. p. 20-21. Cairo: Maktabah Wahbah.

CONCLUSION

The above findings suggest that the non-Muslim religious leaders' responses towards the Islamization policy of the government and Islamic revivalism in Malaysia and their major organisational aims regarding non-Muslim affairs have many things in common. From the questionnaires and interviews, it is possible to summarise the responses of the non-Muslims in Malaysia. Although the Malaysian constitution guarantees the non-Muslims religious freedom and rights, what matters is the actual practices of the Malaysian government and civil servants in implementing the constitutional provisions. The non-Muslims are not convinced about their constitutional rights. Generally, their fears are based on the lack of a clear and open discussion. The non-Muslims' sense of insecurity will increase as long as their rights are denied or neglected. Attempts to Islamize Malaysia will further intensify the non-Muslim's feeling of disadvantage and they will react and fight for their rights.

This study revealed a number of problems faced by the non-Muslims in Malaysia with different levels of complexity. The origin of these problems can be traced back to their misunderstanding of the teachings of Islam on the one hand and on the other hand the Malay ethnic preference policy of the government. Perhaps, they were influenced by researchers or the media whose understanding of the Malaysian society was circumscribed by personal grievances and prejudices and whose views of the Malaysian scenario is far too narrow.

Our interviews have shown many negative aspects of the elements of Islam in Malaysia, although some of the respondents also expressed positive feelings. The general impression is that there really exists a fear and dissatisfaction among non-Muslims and the Islamization program of the government.

With greater demands from the Muslims to totally implement Islamic teachings in the country, the government has to respond to them. On the other hand, the government also has to face criticism from the non-Muslims since this implementation of the Islamization policy directly or indirectly affects them.

Based on this study, the non-Muslims are generally cautious and fearful of the pronounced emphasis upon Islam by the government on behalf of the political parties. The non-Muslims feel the efforts of the state in setting up Islamic

institutions in almost every aspect of Malaysian life are more than a ritualistic and symbolic nature. The label "Islam" or "Islamic" invites a polemic and dilemma in the non-Muslim's mind. As a result the non-Muslims feel left out and ignored. The government needs to provide a satisfactory answer to the non-Muslims on this issue. The establishment of IKIM (*Institut Kefahaman Islam Malaysia*) can play this role.

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