

CHRISTIANS HAVE APOLOGISED

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The controversy between E. Mohamed (Apologise to the Muslims, January 19) and C. Simpson (What about Ottoman and Muslim atrocities, January 21) needs clarification.

The Vatican did apologise to Muslims 30 years ago. The Vatican Council in 1970 called for the need to clear away "out-dated image inherited from the past or distorted by prejudice and slander," and to "recognise the past injustice towards Muslims for which the West, with its Christian education, is to blame". The 150-page document refuted the classic views held by Christians on Islam - Islamic fatalism, fanaticism and jihad (Muslim "holy" wars supposedly waged to exterminate Christians).

Many significant and relevant verses from the Qur'an were quoted: "There is no compulsion in religion" (Qur'an, chapter 2 verse 256) and "(God) has not laid upon you in religion any hardship" (Qur'an 22:78). It acknowledged the massacres committed by the Crusades, and defended Islam and Muslim thought as "a principle of possible evolution in civilian society". The Vatican therefore paved the way for genuine dialogue between Christians and Muslims in the spirit of the Qur'an.

Most recently, the Anglican Archbishop of Canterbury spoke to Muslims in the mosque of Damascus (Syria) and at the oldest university - al Azhar in Cairo (Egypt). He made references to the Qur'an where God Almighty speaks of a common ground between Muslims and the "People of the Book" (Qur'anic term of respect for Christians and Jews).

As for the Ottoman dynasty and other world Muslim rulers before the Ottomans - there were some that committed gross atrocities against people of other faiths and creed. People were also treated as second-class citizens and in some instances, the oppressive regimes did not spare Muslims either. This was in obvious contradiction to the fundamental principles of Islam. There were numerous exceptions during the 1300 years of Muslim governments - the dhimmis (people of other faiths), enjoyed citizenship, and enjoyed freedom of expression and freedom to practise their religion.

Some people are "trained" or "programmed" or indoctrinated to be bigots in the name of religion or an ideology. That there are misguided Christians who maligned Islam cannot be denied, but Christianity cannot be blamed. Similarly, there are eminent Muslim scholars who have condemned certain Muslims who have committed terrorists acts and other atrocities in the name of Islam.

It is mandatory according to all divine scriptures that all God-conscious people stand out firmly against injustice and to work collectively to build the bridge of unity, love and peace.