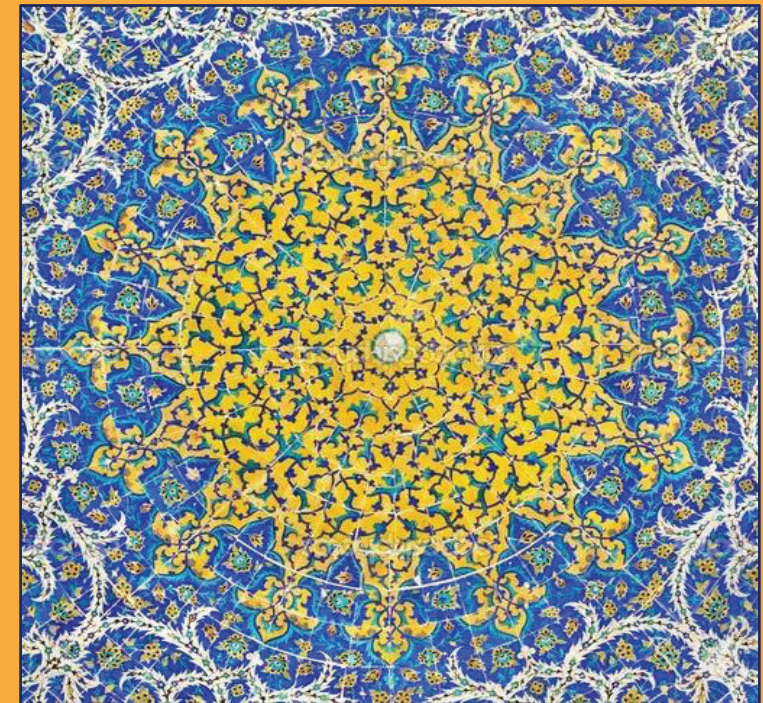


DICID - CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS SERIES

*Proceedings of the 12<sup>th</sup> Doha Interfaith Conference*

# SPIRITUAL AND INTELLECTUAL SAFETY IN THE LIGHT OF RELIGIOUS DOCTRINES



Edited by Senad Mrahorović



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**DICID**

مركز الدوحة الدولي لحوار الأديان  
Doha International Center for Interfaith Dialogue





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**SPIRITUAL AND INTELLECTUAL SECURITY  
IN THE LIGHT OF RELIGIOUS DOCTRINES**

**Foreword by Prof. Ibrahim Alnaimi**  
**Afterword by Prof. Aisha Al-Mannai**

**Edited by Senad Mrahorović**



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## Foreword

This year, a huge assembly from the international community of interfaith dialogue comprising of religious leaders from all three monotheistic religions, notable scholars, renowned thinkers and numerous other activists and researchers alongside Qatari intelligentsia, have witnessed to a highly significant conference organized by Doha international Center for Interfaith Dialogue (DICID) in Doha from 16 to 17 March, 2016. The conference was entirely focused on intellectual and spiritual security as one of the most important issues in today's world. Throughout its main sessions and some additional activities spanning over two working days, numerous participants were able to discuss the main theme of the conference, namely, "Spiritual and Intellectual Security in the Light of Religious Doctrines," from a range of different perspectives.

The conference was divided into four plenary sessions, the three of which were further divided into three sections. The first session entitled "**Religion and its Role in Spiritual and Intellectual Security**" gave the participants the chance to explore the importance of religious teachings concerning the matter of spiritual and intellectual freedom and security. Besides a number of presenters that generally dealt with the above subject, others were more focused on the exploration of one of the three subthemes of this session, namely: 1. Essential relationship between physical and intellectual concepts of security; 2. Protection of individuals' rights and religious and intellectual freedom in society; 3. Religion as the main source of moral values. From the titles of these sections, it is very obvious that a religion is deeply rooted in peoples' cultural and social milieu wherein its role in shaping one's spiritual as well as intellectual viewpoint, especially in its positive manner is certainly of great importance.

The second plenary session was titled "**Destabilization of Moral and Intellectual Security**". Here the central question was to thoroughly analyze what may be the actual cause/s for weakening and destruction of ethical and rational norms in an individual or a society. Also, to what extent the use or misuse of religious teachings contribute to all negative aspects of individual or collective intellectual and moral principles that may lead to crime and violence against others. More specific discussion in this session was oriented towards the following three themes: 1. Media's negative role in shaping moral and intellectual principles and values; 2. Social media and destabilization of intellectual security; Negative influence of radical clergy and political leadership on youth. All of these topics were treated with the enthusiastic care and sensitivity in order to reach a final conclusion of how to reduce and or even fight the negative outcomes acquired either from religious indoctrination or from some baseless media propaganda on a certain subject.

In the third plenary session entitled "**Protecting Youth from Intellectual and Moral Violation and Cultural Alienation**", the conference participants were envisaging and suggesting a number of ways of how to keep young people from falling into an abyss of spiritual and intellectual disorientation and ignorance whereupon their own social, cultural and religious environment might become

overnight an alien and disturbing space to live in. The discussion on this subject was additionally developed within the three subthemes of this session: 1. Role of family and educational institutions in establishing intellectually and spiritually peaceful generation; 2. Reinforcement of competent and professional agencies for determining and presenting religious, media, intellectual and cultural values; 3. Effective response to all manifestations of extremism and its tackling and isolation from society.

The fourth session of the conference was dedicated to a panel discussion under the title “**Strategies for Protecting Spiritual and Intellectual Freedom and Security: Future Expectations**”. Besides summarizing the principal messages of the three plenary sessions held earlier, the panelists also took advantage to venture into their own future expectations regarding spiritual and intellectual safety not only in a particular society but in the whole world which more than ever reflects the notion of ‘global village’ where almost every component has become so tightly interconnected, affecting every citizen positively or negatively.

These are the major themes that are being systematically as well as academically explored within the foregoing pages of this volume of the proceedings. We sincerely thank every participant of the conference who has provided his or her expertise and knowledge during the two days intensive discussion of this important theme to all of us. Finally, our hope is that this book will benefit not only students and researches interested in the field of interfaith dialogue, but also other readers who wish to enrich their knowledge in spiritual and intellectual aspects of security as portrayed within different religious doctrines.

Prof. Ibrahim Alnaimi

Chairman of Doha International Center for Interfaith Dialogue

## Introduction

“The most fundamental objective of man throughout the history is to attain the ultimate ontological security and freedom.”

Ahmet Davutoğlu

The idea to organize an event that will exclusively focus on spiritual and intellectual security has no doubt been prompted by over two decades’ long security problems with certain religious connotations. After the Bosnian war where more than one hundred thousand people, predominantly Muslims, have lost their lives on the hands of their neighbors both, Orthodox Christian Serbs and Roman Catholic Croats, the problems of human safety ignited clearly on religious grounds among other reasons, have spread in a number of other countries from Kosovo in Europe to Myanmar in Asia, not to mentioned some countries in the Middle East, Africa and Asia where conflicts are still ongoing. Then the recent phenomenon of the so called “Arab Spring” that has so far claimed hundreds of thousands of lives mainly in Muslim countries due either to the sectarian conflicts or military interventions involving a number of Western countries, has only complicated the problem and upgraded it to yet another alarming level whereby the echoes of these wars are now spreading much beyond its actual borders.

In addition to the crisis in question, modern forms of information and communication technology have contributed to the immense flow and rapid share of news data across the globe whereupon the only headlines and selected caption of information are being underlined and as such considered by the majority of people. A few would take time to read a piece of information in its entirety. Even some well known international news agencies often use the same method with enormous lack of information in order to broadcast a certain story or event and thus contributing to the already ambiguous and bewildered news being broadcasted. Thus, certain religious concepts and doctrines have become very often misrepresented by media and consequently misunderstood by its audience worldwide. For instance, a number of Islamic notions such as *jihad*, *usul* and *turath* have acquired based on its modern media interpretation only singular meanings, namely, holy war, fundamentalism and backwardness. In fact, each of these notions has much deeper meaning spiritually and interpretative understanding theoretically than what has been projected today by the majority of international media unfortunately.

All of these factors more or less have largely contributed to the crisis in the domain of intellectual and spiritual security almost equally in both, the East and the West, not to speak of economic and political reasons that for centuries have played leading role in such circumstances. While in the Muslim countries a number of classical subjects of Islam of philosophical, scientific, artistic and spiritual nature has been almost completely neglected or replaced by modern ones mostly of socio-economic nature, creating a huge gap in understanding Islamic religion in all its philosophic and theological dimensions on the one hand and its cultural and civilizational facets on the other hand; in the West, an Orientalist miss/representation of Islam and Muslims rooted deeply in Medieval period and

currently supported by modern media miss/conception about the same subjects have seemingly reached its highest point in recent years, especially during the current refugees crisis that is unfolding in Europe and elsewhere. In this turmoil the political and economic forces are on the fore to exploit the current situation, reviving and reminding us all of the colonial past and its consequences.

However, in order to better analyze and understand the issues at stake, especially those related to the spiritual and intellectual security in the light of religious perspectives and what can be done from interfaith perspective to help overcome the current crisis, DICID is to be credited for organizing this conference and inviting more than two hundred experts in various fields from religion and philosophy to interfaith dialogue and a number of socio-economic sectors, including media to discuss a range of issues pertaining to spiritual and intellectual security in the light of religious doctrines. Of course, the praise for hosting this important assembly equally goes to the State of Qatar and for its encouragement and support of religious and inter-religious discussion and dialogue as part of its Islamic and cultural tradition.

As the editor of this volume, I would like to thank all the participants of the conference, especially those who contributed their articles for these proceedings. My sincere gratitude is to my colleagues from DICID for assisting me in the process of preparing the texts for its final inclusion in the proceedings, and to my dear friend Islam Karam for rendering some portion of the English text into Arabic. Finally, to the Chairman of DICID, Prof. Ibrahim al-Naimi and his deputy Prof. Aisha al-Mannai, I would like to extend my deepest appreciation for all their constructive suggestions and inputs while editing and preparing this volume for the publication.

Senad Mrahorović  
Researcher, DICID

# RELIGION AND ITS ROLE IN SPIRITUAL AND INTELLECTUAL SECURITY



*Oliver Leaman*<sup>1</sup>

## **The Abrahamic Religions and the Resolution of Violence**

### **Abstract**

Religions are often associated with violent and negative events that are indeed carried out sometimes under their label. Denying that those events really have anything to do with the religions looks like trivializing religion, while accepting that violence is sometimes linked with religion runs the risk of supplying a blanket critique of religious phenomena. It could be argued by contrast that the Abrahamic religions at least have within themselves the resources to counter violence, since they tend to advocate the significance of moderation and balance in human behaviour. They acknowledge the ubiquity of violence and at the same time provide resources for dealing with it. In fact, one of the things that the Abrahamic tradition is excellent at doing is helping train the human character in how to live with others in a diverse environment. The argument will be supported by relevant scriptural passages from all three religions.

### **Violence and Religion**

Religions are often linked with violence and in particular the Abrahamic religions. Much violence that takes place occurs within a religious context, in the sense that some of the protagonists use religious labels to describe themselves and what they do. There is an interesting discussion nowadays about the appropriate title for the organization that calls itself “Islamic State” with many media outlets prefacing the title with “so-called” to deny them the right to identify themselves with a religion that has many members who reject such a description. On the other hand, that is what they want to call themselves, and clearly they have close links with a form of Islam, since they often cite appropriate *hadith* and Qur’anic *ayat* in defense of what they do, and as we know there is a school of thought in Islam which has provided the intellectual underpinnings for many of their actions. There is a prolonged discussion about when it is appropriate to label activities and ideas as Islamic or religious, and it is a useful discussion. It is often unclear whether we should call behavior religious just because it is carried out by people who claim to share a particular religion. On the other hand, if they use their interpretation of the religion to justify what they do, and it seems to be part at least of their motivation, it becomes more difficult to dissociate them from the label. There are far too many simplistic declarations after particular horrifying acts that such things could not be done by Muslims, so their perpetrators cannot be called Islamic. On the other hand, calling them Islamic suggests that the religion itself calls for such acts, which for many within it is not the case at all. There is often general agreement that some foreign country or evil group of people is behind the whole thing, in which case

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describing it as Islamic is to fail to acknowledge the real source of the event. Such attributions are an attempt at dodging the moral bullet.

Around the world religious groups mobilize against other religious groups, or against those supposed to have no religion, in ways that would have surprised social scientists in the past, since they tended to argue that as societies modernized they would gradually or swiftly abandon religion. Yet religion has continued to have great influence in the world and many societies which in the past were becoming less religious have seen a reversal in the trend. Religion has become fashionable again and no longer the exclusive domain of the poor and ill-educated. It is a powerful mechanism for organizing people and has been much used and will not doubt be continued to be used in this way in the future. Before we agree that these uses of religion are corrupt, we need to acknowledge that many religions say some very violent things about how enemies ought to be treated.

In the Jewish Bible, for example, some communities are supposed to be entirely destroyed, including even their animals. The military conquest of the land of Canaan by the Hebrews was a result of what God told Moses:

But of the cities of these peoples which the Lord your God gives you as an inheritance, you shall let nothing that breathes remain alive, but you shall utterly destroy them - the Hittite, Amorite, Canaanite, Perizzite, Hivite, and Jebusite - just as the Lord your God has commanded you, lest they teach you to do according to all their abominations which they have done for their gods, and you sin against the Lord your God (Deut 20: 16-18).

We are told of his successor that:

So Joshua conquered all the land: the mountain country and the South and the lowland and the wilderness slopes, and all their kings; he left none remaining, but utterly destroyed all that breathed, as the Lord, God of Israel had commanded (Josh 10.40).

On the other hand, in the messianic age “they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation nor shall they learn war any more” (Isaiah 2.4). There is a Hebrew expression which is adopted as the name of many synagogues in the United States, *rodef shalom*, which means a seeker after peace but the word *rodef* actually is much more active than is implied by the English word “seeker,” it means someone who aggressively pursues an end.

Christian Europe was hardly a good example of non-violence, often destroying other Christians who were seen as having heterodox views. At various times Christians have been extraordinarily violent in their dealings with other religions. The Gospels are not fruitful places to look for justifications of violence, though. Much of the Old Testament law was abrogated or completed, depending on one’s perspective, by Jesus. “Eye for an eye” was replaced by “turn the other cheek.” Totally loving God and one’s neighbor became the supreme law (Matt. 22:38-40.) Furthermore, Jesus is generally in favor of passivity and altruism. The

New Testament contains absolutely no exhortations to violence. There is the verse “I come not to bring peace but a sword” (Matt. 10:34), but this seems from the context to make it clear that Jesus was not commanding violence against non-Christians but rather predicting that strife will exist between Christians and those around them. The Gospels make clear that there will be conflict and violence in society and it needs to be resolved in an acceptable way, and it sets out strategies to this end.

### **Religions and Morality**

Some religious groups have largely separated themselves from their society, often because they think they are purer than everyone else, or special in some way, and this could also be seen as an act of violence, albeit less direct than violence that takes a physical form. Religions rely on communities and groups within communities who cut themselves off from others because they see themselves as special or better are dangerous to the idea of cohesion that is so crucial a concept in religion. All the Abrahamic religions had significant groups of thinkers in them who were enthusiastic about Aristotelian ethics. Aristotle argued that a good guide to how to act is to be found by looking for the medium position between extremes, and that social life is essential to the good life. Jewish, Christian and Muslim philosophers took this view on board since it fitted so neatly into what they saw as the ethics of their religion, and particularly the legal emphasis of Judaism and Islam. When we are trying to work out how to behave we could wait for divine inspiration or we could just do whatever we want, or we could look for some legal rule that applies to our case. The Jewish thinker Maimonides suggests that even the laws that often appear to have no rationale are there to help shape our behavior in an appropriate direction, since they were created for that purpose. Even if we do not know what they are for, they encourage us to do what God tells us to do and this in itself is a useful aspect of human training. We do not always know why we should behave in certain ways since we do not know everything about ourselves, but if someone who knows a lot about us recommends a certain course of behavior, surely it would be rational to follow it. God may be assumed to know a lot about us since he created us. He could have just got us to behave in whatever way He wanted us to behave, but instead He gave us the opportunity to gradually develop in the ways that bring us closer to doing what we ought to do. Clearly in this way we acquire merit and have the opportunity to meet the demands set us by being alive.

There is a celebrated debate in Islamic philosophy between al-Ghazali and Miskawayh on the social basis of religion. According to the latter what religions like Islam do is build on the natural inclinations of humanity and thereby make it relatively easy for us to carry out our religious duties. Religion puts morality within a wider transcendental context which both encourages us in a certain direction and establishes rules for those actions. This is not a natural law doctrine, but it is one which suggests that our natures are well attuned to our duties, and this is hardly surprising since God created us. He knows very well what is in our interests and establishes a system of legislation accordingly. It fits us and the rest of creation, and that is the point of it, it is there for our benefit. God does not require us to act in any

particular way since God has no needs, but we should act in that way to accord with the sorts of creatures we are, and of course in Islam there is also the prospect of an eventual reward in the next life. The straight path on which we are told to travel is one where it is important to be balanced, since otherwise one is likely to fall off.

### **The Significance of Moderation**

The idea of balance in religion is always going to be crucial, and it is linked with the concept of justice, as in 2:143 where the followers of the Prophet are described as *wasat*. Sometimes the term is identified with being the best (68: 28; 1: 6-7), in the last verse contrasting sharply with the approach to religion taken by the Jews and the Christians. Indeed, Islam sees itself as standing between those who believe in anything at all and those who deny everything they cannot personally vouch for. It is a middle point between those who see the universe as the only important place and those who regard it as an illusion. In Islamic law we find a system which seeks to balance crimes and penalties, and rules such as those of inheritance are designed to preserve equity. Now, when we get to the detail of such laws we may find much in them which is difficult to accept, but the principle here is entirely acceptable, that an attempt is made to be fair to all parties, to allocate people their deserts and preserves a sense of balance. For example, when it is a matter of knowing how much money to give away to charity, and how much to keep for oneself, 17: 29 advocates taking a middle path, giving something away but not everything, which would result in personal poverty. There are *hadith* where the Prophet advocates his companions not giving all their money away to charity, but keeping some at least for their family. It is clear what the implications for hospitality are here. The identification of virtue with moderation is not difficult to understand since the universe itself was created in a balanced and presumably good way “And the earth We have spread out, and set on it mountains firm and immovable; and created in it all kinds of things in appropriate balance” (15: 19).

On the other hand, is moderation always such a desirable feature? Islam challenges the idea that the religion is a radical departure from what took place in earlier times, since Islam is an attempt at returning to an original and purer state of monotheism. That implies that it needs to reverse centuries, indeed millennia, of *kufir* and *bid'a*. This requires a total transformation of the situation, and the detail of Islamic law and practice, including of course the *Sunnah* of the Prophet, are vital steps on the way to achieving this. Since such rules may well go against the natural and social inclinations of people there will be an attempt, perhaps, to use the concept of moderation to alter or adapt the rules to local conditions, a suggestion that would not go down well among those who see such rules are God's direct plan for how human beings ought to live. This view of moderation of the central principles of Islam might be ascribed to Satan, as when we are told in 2: 208 to enter Islam whole heartedly. Being moderate in the application of Islam might seem to contravene this suggestion. Many of the characters in the Qur'an are however extreme, either in a positive or negative way, and it might be said that Iblis is punished because he is totally convinced of the superiority of creatures made of fire, as opposed to those of

earth (like us) which makes it difficult for him to acknowledge the wisdom of the divine plan. Even though God says he knows why he is acting in the way he does, Iblis ignores this and suffers as a result. Even Musa in the experiences he has with Khidr falls foul of a lack of moderation, since he is told not to question what he sees happen, but he constantly does, and in the end learns from the experience. Instead of considering the reasons for what is happening and restraining his tone as a result, Musa is indignant and demands precisely what Khidr tells him not to do, an explanation for what is happening (18: 60-82). It might be said that moderation, like patience, is something one has to learn, the end or even part of a project that we set ourselves in life, and religions are often very helpful here in helping train us in the right direction.

But moderating the word of God is to risk distorting it and to end up creating your own way of doing things which deviates a good deal from divine guidance. It is worth pointing out also that there are some dichotomies in religion that can be dealt with in terms of some principle of moderation, but others cannot. For example, there has often been a conflict between those who advocate *tasawwuf* (mysticism) as a way of being a Muslim, and others who stress *kalam* (theology) or a particular understanding of Islamic law. Mysticism seems to be specialized and based on personal training and advancement, while regarding Islam as equivalent to a series of doctrines an *'aqida*, is the reverse. Yet these could be seen as different emphases in Islam, one on *tashbih* (immanence) and the other on the *tanzih* (transcendence) of God, like the contrast between the *batin* (inner) and the *zahir* (outer), or *'aql* (reason) and *naql* (tradition). There is scope in religion for certain ideas and even practices to be restricted to a small group of people who know how to deal with them, while religion on the whole is quite the opposite of this. It is open to everyone and its whole rationale is accessibility.

As we are often told by philosophers from the Abrahamic religions, the point of religion is to address different people in different ways, and it appeals both emotionally and intellectually to a wide variety of constituencies. Some of these people are interested in acquiring a more personal access to the religion and they are prepared to undergo the sort of training that mystics engage in, while most people just expect to find in their religion some fairly simple rules of behavior and ritual which they can follow in order to do what God expects of them. The fact that both approaches can be found in the same religion suggests that there is flexibility to allow for different degrees of access to the truth, as one would expect given the variety of humanity that exists in the world. At 5: 48 we are told that God could have created one nation in the world, but instead wanted people to learn from each other, and selected variety instead. That does not perhaps just refer to Muslims and non-Muslims but also to different kinds of Muslims, and people in general. It is because of the variety of life styles that we find in the world that we can work out with some plausibility what counts for us as the right way of living, and the most moderate. This is not something we can just discover or be taught, it is a part of a process of self-discovery and reflection on experience. The Qur'an, like many other religious texts, is well adapted to helping us work out how we ought to live in a way

that fits in both with us and with our creator. Jews and Christians are also sometimes attracted to a more demanding interpretation of their religion which takes them away from most of the community into a more specialized realm of theory and practice. All three religions warn of the dangers implicit in such behavior, since it encourages the sort of extremism that is based on the idea that knowledge is restricted to a small group of people and their leaders and whatever it recommends should be done.

### **What is Balance?**

Seeking the middle position represents religion at its best, and is much more representative of how it was in the past than its present state. What is good about it is that it is difficult, it involves a balancing of texts, in Islam an assessment of *hadith*, a consideration of earlier discussions, legal material and much more, an approach to theology that the Jewish thinkers Derrida and Levinas call *solicitation*, a shaking of the evidence, rather than the easy manipulation of simple ideas. It sees theology as a serious exercise, not a formula for producing easy answers. There is a tendency to see moderation as the boring and easy position to adopt, but in fact the reverse is the case. Although we are told in the Qur'an that Islam is not a difficult religion and God has chosen it as the religion to follow, working out what actually constitutes Islam is not that easy, hence the existence of theology. That does not mean it is then a difficult religion, just that it can be difficult to work out always how to behave. This does not present a problem for most believers since they can find out how to behave in most cases and what to believe by following the rules of a particular religion. There is no need to delve more deeply, and many books on theology warn believers against doing so. This is not because they should not understand the roots of their faith, nor that they cannot, but that for most people it is neither necessary nor helpful. In just the same way it is not helpful for everyone to be trained to fix cars, some people need to be able to do it but not everyone. On the other hand, everyone needs some basic information, just enough to get by as users of cars. This sounds elitist but really is not, not everyone can be good at everything, even religion. The view of many in the past was that religion like everything else is a skill and not everyone has it to the same degree, although everyone can have enough of it to cope. The real elitists are those who think that the answers to religious questions are quite simple and should be implemented without reservation however repellent they may be to most people. Despite what they claim, these people are usually quite ignorant of the nature of their religion as a whole system of thought.

### **Extremism and Violence**

At the beginning of this discussion the problem of how to define religious extremists who resort to violence was raised, and it was said that there are difficulties both with calling them religious and also in avoiding the label. An alternative would be to accept that they are religious but with a poor grasp of their religion. This actually is a characteristic of many such violent individuals, they have a simplistic and inaccurate view of their religion. They are inspired by a scriptural quotation or two,

its interpretation by someone they respect, and then they go off and commit the evil deed. If we see religion as rather similar to a technique, on the Aristotelian approach advocated by some many philosophers in the Abrahamic religions, we can easily see what is wrong with this strategy. It is like driving through a green light despite the fact that a pedestrian is crossing the road in front of you. There is a simple rule that green means go, but one also has to look to see if anyone is in the way. The Abrahamic religions all use analogies and stories, and these are very effective at connecting with an audience and making something that might otherwise seem to be abstract to become quite personal. The thing about examples is that they never entirely fit a particular case but they often more or less fit, and they do of course make a personal connection which otherwise may be entirely lost with a much more general claim. They encourage us to be subtle in our approach to how to act since we always have to play them off against each other in order to work out what implications they have for action. Someone who adheres to a dogmatic belief is the Dajjal, the person with one eye (i.e. only one view of things) who at the end of days becomes very powerful until he is destroyed by the Mahdi. Only having one view makes life very simple and yet too simple, and that is why there is such a proliferation of stories in religions, in the *aggadah* and Talmud, in the Gospels and in the *hadith*. They are there for a purpose and that is to encourage us to think through how we should act from a variety of perspective, not from just one, and anyone who ignores this really has a highly inaccurate view of what religion is.

### **Justice and Religion**

In the Jewish Bible Moses lines up all the people in the community to be addressed by God before his death and He tells them that justice is not in heaven (Deut 30.12). There is an explanation of this verse in the Talmud Bava Metzia 59a-b:  
[An oven] that was cut into parts and sand was placed between the parts, Rabbi Eliezer maintained that it is pure (i.e., not susceptible to ritual impurity). The other sages said that it is susceptible to ritual impurity...

On that day Rabbi Eliezer brought them all sorts of proofs, but they were rejected. Said he to them: "If the law is as I say, may the carob tree prove it." The carob tree was uprooted from its place a distance of 100 cubits. Others say, 400 cubits. Said they to him: "One cannot prove anything from a carob tree."

Said [Rabbi Eliezer] to them: "If the law is as I say, may the aqueduct prove it." The water in the aqueduct began to flow backwards. Said they to him: "One cannot prove anything from an aqueduct."

Said he to them: "If the law is as I say, the may walls of the house of study prove it." The walls of the house of study began to fall in. Rabbi Joshua rebuked them, "If Torah scholars are debating a point of Jewish law, what are your qualifications to intervene?" The walls did not fall, in deference to Rabbi Joshua, nor did they straighten up, in deference to Rabbi Eliezer. They still stand there at a slant.

Said he said to them: “If the law is as I say, may it be proven from heaven!” There then issued a heavenly voice which proclaimed: “What do you want of Rabbi Eliezer—the law is as he says ...”

Rabbi Joshua stood on his feet and said: “The Torah is not in heaven!” ...We take no notice of heavenly voices, since You, God, have already, at Sinai, written in the Torah to “follow the majority”.

Rabbi Nathan subsequently met Elijah the prophet and asked him: “What did God do at that moment?” [Elijah] replied: “He smiled and said: ‘My children have triumphed over Me, My children have triumphed over Me.’”

This is a very helpful warning for those who think they are carrying out divine commands. The demand that we discuss what we think is the right way to act and defer before the opinions of others is an important part of being patient and thoughtful in behavior. The majority may be wrong, as they are here, but the process of being cautious and balanced in working out what to do cannot be wrong, and surely is a commonplace in all the Abrahamic religions. They accept that violence exists and needs to be controlled, and suggest a variety of ways of doing so. To blame them for violence is like blaming medicine for sickness.

### **Further Reading**

There is more discussion of many of these points in my

1. *Introduction to Classical Islamic Philosophy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001
2. (ed.) *The Qur'an: an Encyclopedia*, London: Routledge, 2006
3. *Jewish Thought*, London: Routledge, 2006
4. *Islamic Philosophy*, Oxford: Wiley 2009
5. *Judaism*, London: I B Tauris, 2011
6. *Controversies in Contemporary Islam*, London: Routledge, 2014
7. *The Qur'an, a Philosophical Guide*, London: Bloomsbury, 2016

*Amineh A. Hoti*<sup>1</sup>

## **Finding a Knowledge-Based Alternative to Violent Extremism**

### **Abstract**

There is a crisis of how we see the other in the twenty first century. As a world community, we need to re-think how we can and should educate our next generations in ideas of respecting and understanding the religious, ethnic and gendered other. The alternative is a clash of civilisations. The Centre for Dialogue and Action which Dr Hoti leads at the University of Cambridge and in Pakistan is at the forefront of forming courses on knowledge, respect for the other and humanity. She will explore her new textbook, *Accepting Difference: A resource book for students on understanding, respecting and engaging with the ethnic, religious and gendered other*.

### **Introduction**

As we, as a world civilization, move forward into 2016 we would have hoped that our shared world becomes more “progressive” and as a result more peaceful and harmonious. Some Social Scientists had indeed argued that there is a linear progression of societies from less to more progressive. Yet 2015 has seen more violent extremism in all parts of our shared world – from Peshawar to Paris and from Iraq to Syria – the world saw mass killings of innocent citizens caught in between – children and women were shockingly not spared. The media sensationalizing this reporting often inadvertently ends up blaming entire communities. When Muslims are involved the words like “Islamism” and “Islamic terror” “the enemy” are used frequently and thoughtlessly leading to a build up of hate for “the Muslim Other”.

This hype and demonization of the Other especially the Muslim community generally in media reporting results in terrible crimes on the streets against people who look Muslim – women in hijab have been attacked and stabbed, a shopkeeper who fitted the stereotype of being Muslim was beaten and his shop looted, a Moroccan taxi driver who was asked by his passenger if he was a “Pakistani guy” was shot in the back, mosques have been attacked and children in schools with Muslim backgrounds discriminated against. Even a non-Muslim woman of Indo-Jamaican descent, Kayla Gerber, with covered hair in winter in Toronto was attacked aggressively by a white man. A non-Muslim Sikh man with a beard was reported to have been attacked violently in New York.

This growing Islamophobia and the genuine fear of Muslims themselves always under potential attack are forcing the world apart. Worst still the spillover of these events impacts the hundreds of thousands of impoverished and desperate

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Muslim immigrants in Europe. I interviewed a 17 year old boy in Sicily called Ahmedu during our research project on *Journey into Europe* – he had spent many months escaping from violence in his own home country Gambia and after heart-breaking difficulties had entered Europe through Sicily. His journey of desperation, starvation and of hope was deeply moving and reflected the terrible affects of war on children. The Pope has called this growing violence: “World War III”. So where do we go from here? Do we continue on this path of self-destruction as a world community or do we and should we work harder to understand the other and to metaphorically build bridges?

The loss of lives on such a large scale in Paris on the 13<sup>th</sup> of November 2015, followed by Brussels in 2016 and Lahore in the same year was yet another reminder that violent extremism affects each one of us on planet earth. No one can consider himself or herself disconnected from this problem. In Pakistan, hundreds of young boys were killed brutally in schools – I visited the homes of those affected. From some homes two sons had been shot dead in school and never came back home; the 17 month old baby who lost his mother in Paris was yet again a reminder of how much our common humanity is at loss when we loose our compassion and adopt violence. The insane cycle of violence and the tragedy resulting from it seems infinite.

In this context, as a scholar who cares about her fellow human beings, I must ask: Where is our common humanity? Violence is met with violent responses and the cycle of hate and terror continues. The Sociologist, Emil Durkheim, used the analogy of the human body to describe society. I emphasize that every society must develop its scholars and thinkers as the thinking faculty of the body of society. Without scholarship being inextricably inter-linked with notions of compassion there is no right way forward when dealing with human beings. Muslims particularly need to revive their love for knowledge and cultivate scholars and thinkers who focus and encourage ideas based on *rehem* and *rahim*.

### ***Journey into Europe: Using Film and Fieldwork as Peace Building Tools***

Combining academia and inter-cultural and inter-faith work, I want to share the following projects based on research and fieldwork: 1) *Journey into Europe*. This is part of a quartet of projects led by Professor Akbar S. Ahmed with his team of three other scholars. I was privileged to be one of the team members on the project responsible for interviewing women and men and bringing out the diversity of voices and perspectives. Fieldwork took us across the UK, Germany, Italy, Spain, Denmark, France and Bosnia. We interviewed hundreds of people from taxi drivers to Archbishops to Chief Rabbis to Grand Muftis. This project included fieldwork over a period of two years. Most significantly this project reverses the trend of Western scholars studying Asian, African and Middle Eastern societies. This project shows that we outside of the West can make important contributions to understanding global societies.

The key questions the book and film project explores are: Are Muslim and European identities compatible? Did Muslims contribute any knowledge to Europe

and the West? And, how can we improve understanding that will lead to peaceful relations? Interviewing a range of religious and political leaders and ordinary people, we saw that Europe can teach us about coexistence: “*convivencia*” in Andalusia, “*benevolencia*” in Bosnia and Muslim-Christian friendship in Sicily (Italy). The latter was an example of *convivencia* in reverse when Christian rulers were accepting of their Muslim subjects after Muslim rule in Sicily – Roger the II and Frederick the II both spoke Arabic and had close relations with Muslims – their royal robes had Arabic inscribed on it – these were periods when people of different faiths reached out to “the Other” (people perceived as different from “us”).

Andalusia (and Muslim civilization) is rich with examples of how we can, as a diverse religious community, live together. This was a period in human history generally and European history specifically of Andalusia and *la convivencia*, when Muslims from 711-1492 (about 800 years), lived with fellow Christians and Jews, & were able to lead and foster a peaceful pluralist society. This era of history produced great art, architecture, and literature, and contributed immensely to European and Islamic civilizations. If we look at the map of contributions to Muslim civilization we will see substantial contributions and influences in maths, translations and architecture (see, for instance, the mosque of Cordoba and Alhambra Palace in Granada and so many other examples – the horseshoe arch was one distinct contribution and became popular in Victorian England called the “Moorish arch”). Arabesque became an art form in itself mastered by those who practiced it.

In medicine, inoculation and instruments that were invented are used today in our hospitals. There were some 2000 recipes discovered for cures then. Out of this large number, European men and women of science only took 200 of which modern medicine is comprised. The first man to fly was the Cordoban Abbas Ibn Firnas. A bridge is named after Ibn Firnas just outside Cordoba on the way to Madinat Az Zahra. The foundation of Sociology and Economics was explored by scholars like Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406). Hospitals and schools were free. Knowledge was highly respected and sought after. There were hundreds of libraries in Cordoba alone with 400,000 books in one, while in Europe in the biggest library there were no more than a few hundred books. More than sixty thousand words from Arabic came into Spanish and into European culture. Here are a few examples: *Ola* from *Wa Allah*; Admiral from *Amir al Bahar*, lemon from *limun* (in Persian) and orange from *naranj*, lilac from *lilac*, and crimson from *qirmizi* – an Arabic word for the insect that gives out the red dye. Even coffee and watches were something that came to us today from that period.

Libraries and books are closely associated with the success of societies. In Bosnia, in Sarajevo, we visited the main library which was re-built by the Qatar Foundation. I remember then how impressed we all were by the role of Qatar in re-constructing libraries and houses of knowledge. This was the true essence of higher civilization. I was equally impressed to visit Qatar at the DICID conference and mentioned this.

Unfortunately, few people in Europe and in the world elsewhere, know of the details of Andalusia and its rich history. Therefore, it is important to promote

better understanding of the time of Andalusia and highlight the great contributions of Andalusians to European society and the world at large. This shows a) that when there is knowledge there is respect for the other and for human dignity and b) that co-existence is possible and beneficial to humanity. This documentary *Journey into Europe* does that.

### ***Accepting Difference: A New Textbook for Students***

The second practical project that provides a certain framework for dealing with the challenges that threaten the spiritual and intellectual freedom and security of our times are generating an alternative narrative to that of the extremist ideology through textbooks for schools and universities and courses for educational institutes, policy makers, media and the forces – these courses allow us to understand our shared histories, respect the other (religious, ethnic and gendered) and engage with them in positive ways. One example is the book *Accepting Difference* (published in 2015 by Emel Publication). This textbook, for young people aged 16 to university-level, shows how we can teach the next generations how to understand and respect the ethnic, religious and gendered “Other”. Of course, each nation will want to produce its own books on diversity, respect for the “Other” and teach the tools of dialogue – the idea is to uncover all those examples in history and amongst local and international heroes that bind us – that takes a high stand and says here are examples of people who celebrated diversity.

*Accepting Difference* explores important concepts such as diversity, empathy and dialogue and encourages young students to become peace builders and peacekeepers. It explores the rich cultures, religions and ethnicities of society. At the back of the book, some of the religions covered and introduced by the faith believers themselves are Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Sikhism, Hinduism, Zoroastrianism and so forth. Dr. Tamara Sonn of Georgetown University writes, “*Accepting Difference* is a brilliant work with transformative power. As its subtitle – Uncovering a culture of Diversity – indicates, it goes beyond simply advocating pluralism. It demonstrates that the Qur’an not only accepts but cherishes diversity.”

### ***Teaching Acceptance: A Teacher’s Training Manual***

*Accepting Difference* is a textbook for students and accompanying this is *Teaching Acceptance* a training manual for their teachers. Step by step and subject by subject, this manual explores the tools of peace building and counters the radical extremist narrative. Based on an interdisciplinary approach, like *Accepting Difference*, it draws upon sociology, anthropology, history, religion in the social and political sciences to explore periods of conflict and coexistence. Both models show how to do (peace) and not to do (conflict). It also explores ways of conflict resolution and how to negotiate in difficult conflict situations.

The book explores a play in which different perspectives within Islam are discussed – based in South Asia, Prince Dara Shikoh is the son of the Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan who built the Taj Mahal. Unlike his younger brother Aurangzeb who took over the Mughal throne and ruled stringently, Dara and his

spiritual teacher, Mian Mir reached out to people of other faiths and tried to build bridges by befriending them and by participating in their religious festivals. Mian Mir, for instance, laid the foundation stone of the Sikh temple in Amritsar. His spiritual student, Prince Dara Shikoh in 1657 carried out a scholarly translation of the Hindu sacred texts the Upanishads called *Sir-e-Akbar* (the Great Mysteries) through which these texts were accessible to Western scholars – German scholars in particular, such as Arthur Schopenhauer were influenced by this work and praised it as “the production of the highest human wisdom”. It’s teachings that the individual is a manifestation of the one basis of reality attracted German philosopher such as Schelling and others. They saw the world differently to that propagated by the churches and the Upanishads fascinated them. These German idealists, in turn, influenced the Transcendentalists in America. Little do people who stand for president’s post, like Donald Trump, and who want to ban Muslims from America know about these connections and influences on their society. There are, of course, countless other such examples of those who, through knowledge, connect our world. We need to highlight these so that students may see role models who are positive peace builders as opposed to seeing those lead other Muslims into darkness and violent extremism.

Although these are the first books of their kind in English available in the second largest Muslim nation on earth, Pakistan, their translation is absolutely necessary in order to reach a wider audience. Therefore, the Centre for Dialogue and Action (CD&A) – founded at the University of Cambridge and based in Pakistan - has worked on these books and have translated the textbooks into the local languages of Urdu (Pakistan’s national language) and Pashto (the language of KP, Pakistan, and of many people in Afghanistan). Translation of this sensitive peace building material in itself has been a tricky area and has taken longer than expected as, working with local translators, some material was translated literally. The CD&A team had to also look out for cultural and religious sensitivities and omit these. CD&A has signed an MoU with DICID to translate the books into Arabic for the Middle East.

### **A New Subject on Accepting “the Other”**

Courses called “Building Bridges” accompanying these textbooks were taught at a number of universities in Pakistan, including at the Centre for International Peace and Stability at NUST University in Islamabad, as well as at FC College University in Lahore. In the latter, the subject was offered under the Departments of Sociology and Religion as a new subject. I was privileged to design, teach this course and train other faculty to teach further. It has been taught for three years now and is in its fourth cycle. This subject like the two textbooks covered subjects from the basic peace building blocks of religion to the dialogue of civilizations debate, to tools of dialogue and empathy and so forth. Significantly the course allowed for one subject to cover the difference between religion and culture (this is often confused in the media leading to wrong assumptions about religion).

It is interesting to note from our “before and after the course” data and questionnaires, the significant change in views and values of certain students after taking the course. Every year we encountered a small, but significant, number of students with radical perspectives, students come from all backgrounds and from all areas of Pakistan including South Waziristan and Quetta where there is raging sectarian and religious conflict. To give you a sense of perspectives held by a small number of students before the course here are some examples - At the beginning of the course, one student (very polite and co-operative throughout the course) said that dialogue was aggressive; another student (clean shaved and jeans-wearing and about to graduate from Forman Christian College: he was in his third year when he attended the CD&A course) said that people of all other faiths, except for Muslims, are, according to his uncle in the village, ‘*wajib ul qatal*’. He understood this to be a religious obligation to kill people who were not Muslim. To hear this in class at FC College was worrying as this was also the university that had produced the top leaders (presidents, political leaders, and chief justices of both Pakistan and India).

I knew that the journey of these young 21 and 22-year-old boys and girls had just begun when they entered this course (note that many of the people who carried out terrorist killings have been in the age range of 22-24 years old as in the killings on a beach in Tunisia). I responded to the boys above saying, “*beta* (son), I will ask you your opinion after the course too”. In the subsequent months, we studied the religion of Islam and the inclusive attitude of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon Him) towards “the People of the Book”, we studied the Charter of Madina, we saw a documentary film on the Abrahamic faiths, we debated the dialogue of civilizations as opposed to the clash of civilizations, we looked at Pakistan’s own founding fathers (Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, Allama Iqbal and Muhammad Ali Jinnah) who all emphasized education, the rule of law and minority rights as an absolute necessity for progress. We included two community projects in which students went out into the community to do fieldwork on perspectives, problematic attitudes and attempted to build bridges between different communities. Finally, we included a play, *The Trial of Dara Shikoh* by Professor Akbar S. Ahmed, in which students act out the role of a stringent Muslim emperor and that of his elder brother – a scholar-saint who was inclusive of all others but who is killed by his brother for holding this inclusive perspective as a heretic and apostate.

In another class we looked at the difference between religion (e.g. Islam) and culture (e.g. *Pukhtunwali*), which can be two opposites, but both people themselves (as well as the Western media confuse the two, thus honour killings which is a cultural issue is blamed on Islam; another example is female circumcision which again is culture specific and is wrongly said to be an Islamic practice). Finally, we looked at the building blocks of dialogue – what is dialogue? What is Empathy? What is respecting the other and his/her way of dress/behaviour/ideas/foods? We studied that it is necessary to understand that it is ok to disagree without resorting to violence.

At the Centre for International Peace and Stability (NUST) in Islamabad I taught the first Pakistani PhD students of the subject ‘Peace and Conflict

Resolution’. In the class I used the textbook *Accepting Difference* to teach from. On the last page we explored the building blocks of dialogue which emphasizing respecting and accepting difference without violence. A Brigadier from the Pakistan army who was doing his PhD emphasized after reading *Accepting Difference* that it struck him that he could solve difficult problems now simply through the tools of dialogue rather than by force. This, he said, is a lesson he will take away with him from this class. I was also curious to see if the course had had any impact on the students’ perspectives and perceptions about the perceived “Other”.

In Lahore, at FC College University, the young 21 year old boy who, at the beginning of the course, had told me that all non-Muslims were *wajib ul qatal* now stood before me after the last class of the course that I taught. I gathered the boys and asked, “*beton* (sons), what do you think of dialogue now?” The same boy was quick to jump in and answer, “Ma’am, I’m a changed man. I will not use violence but the pen (*qalam*) to change our world.” Both examples from the universities of NUST and FCCU in two different cities of Pakistan show that the students (whether hard boiled brigadiers or young students about to enter the world) are able to see their world through different frames at the end of the course. They had certainly changed their perspectives in the way they perceived the religious, ethnic and gendered other.

## Conclusion

If we take a quick sweeping look at our world today – wars in Iraq and Syria, a genuine fear of growing violent extremism in the world, racial and religious hatred, immigration affecting the lives of thousands of ordinary men and women from the middle east, the media reporting often bellowing Islamophobia. Terrorist incidents have risen in 2014 by 120% since previous years and we have seen more attacks in 2016. The questions we must ask are: if this violence and misunderstanding are destroying our world then what am I doing about it? If the old social scientists argued that societies shift from less to more progressive, then why is our society becoming less progressive? Is violence something new to this century or is it an innate part of our human nature? After all was not the first man on earth, after Adam, Cane – the killer of Able - the first to begin the theme of violent extremism?

If extremism is defined by promoting one idea and one way of living (e.g. you must wear your clothes like this, you must eat like this, you must do this in this particular way, you must believe in one way and only this way, even if it is literal interpretation of religion – the Prophet (PBUH) did this and, therefore, we must do this in this particular way (to follow not with reason but blindly) – all else is defined by this group of thought as leaning towards *kuffar/ kufir* and therefore *wajib ul qatal*. There are many examples of extremists who have resorted to violence and killed those who have diverted from the path or threatened their way.

People on the opposite side of this spectrum would then naturally promote not one way but multiple ways – ie the answer for those opposite to the extremists would be diversity and variety (celebrated again and again in Islam and especially in the Qur’an and the way of the Prophet of Islam (PBUH) who embraced all different

people with compassion and mercy, reflecting God's own attributes of being *Rehman* and *Rahim*). This school of thought would, of course, see Islam in its universal embrace, accepting all differences – therefore, allowing for expressions of Middle Eastern Muslims, Indian Muslims, Malaysian Muslims, Chinese Muslims, American Muslims, UK Muslims, and so forth. This perspective would also allow for engaging with people of other cultures and faiths as God's precious creation. Accepting Difference, therefore, would allow for coexistence. This perspective is, thus about bringing different ideas and ways of doing things together in a harmonious way. The key is to build mutual respect and deeper understanding through dialogue. This can be done through the efforts of peace building and interfaith centres. The work of the CD&A is one such example – a new subject on peace building, textbooks on *Accepting Difference* for students and teachers in different local languages to impact not just the elite community of English-speakers but one which is disseminated and accessible more widely. Courses of this nature must be made compulsory in schools and universities, taught at service academies, to the media, and policy makers.

To move forward, we must equip ourselves with the tools/skills of peace knowledge, which will lead to understanding, and respect for human dignity. Despite growing violent extremism, there is hope if we work towards turning the tide. What the media fails to convey is that this is not a battle between the east and the west, between Christianity-Judaism against Islam, or between civilizations, it is simply a battle between ignorance (*jahiliya*) of humankind at his/her lowest level and at his/her highest – of knowledge that is inextricably interlinked with moral goodness, between those who care and those who don't, between those who know and those who wish not to know and those who heal (by their selflessness) and those who damage the world (by their selfishness). Of course, there are shades of grey in between but largely it is a battle between those who divide and benefit from it and those who unite humanity. No matter how hard the battle personally, I opt for and dedicate my work and life to the latter with so many others – from my own and other faith communities – working hard to heal our fractured world. I was delighted, therefore, to attend and speak at the 12<sup>th</sup> Doha Interfaith Conference, which is one of the most impressive initiatives in interfaith dialogue.

*Mouez Khalfaoui*<sup>1</sup>

## **Islamic Religious Education and Critical Thought in Plural Societies**

### **Abstract**

The aim of this paper is to underline the role of the living context for the historical development of the Islamic Religious Education (IRE). In this issue I would like to argue that Islamic Religious Education, as an academic field is not only suffering from the lack of research, it suffers also from the extensive lack of theory of research and research pedagogy. The role of a research theory in this field cannot be limited to giving new impulse for new research and studies, it aims furthermore to inform decision makers and the public about what is going on and what is expected to be achieved.<sup>2</sup> In this issue I should underline that not only Islamic Education needs a theory of research, this is common for all other sorts of Religious Education without exception and it seems that Islamic Education is backward in this issue. When dealing with Islamic Religious Education we should take into consideration the changes that have occurred in this field in the modern era. Thus, Islamic Religious Education is not limited to the Muslim majority societies; it is also part and parcel of teaching curricula in Western non Muslim countries as well as in other parts of the globe where Muslim minorities exist. Therefore, the research about Islamic Religious Education is expected to study the needs of each context and conceive new methods that fit these different contexts. One of the main ways to achieving this is to compare the methodology of teaching and elaborate new teaching concepts. This issue needs to be developed deeply.

### **The Role of the Living Context in the Development of Islamic Religious Education**

Islamic Religious Education takes place on both secular and confessional forms; it is being taught at religious schools (madrasa) and mosques as well as primary and secondary schools throughout the world. In both the Muslim and European context, the reform of Islamic Education remains the subject of continuous debate and controversy. Being markedly shaped by different social and cultural environments, the specificities of ongoing discussions vary. Both educational staff and educational experts in Muslim majority societies and in non-Muslim countries are complaining about present teaching methods, as well as teaching concepts, teaching materials and predominant conditions of teaching.<sup>3</sup> In spite of the fact that many

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<sup>2</sup> See the chapter on “the relevance of research to Religious Education” in Jackson, Robert (2004), *Rethinking Religious Education and Plurality*, Routledge, p. 143ff.

<sup>3</sup> Behr, Harun, (2005), *Curriculum Islamunterricht*, published online: [http://www.izir.uni-erlangen.de/docs/IZIR\\_H.Behr\\_Dissertation\\_Curriculum\\_Islam.pdf](http://www.izir.uni-erlangen.de/docs/IZIR_H.Behr_Dissertation_Curriculum_Islam.pdf) (read 24.9.15)



reform attempts turned out to be fruitless,<sup>4</sup> a number of them are still in operation today. Reform projects within the sector of Islamic Education are not only a matter for politicians; they also involve sociologists, historians and scholars of the Islamic faith.

In Muslim majority societies, the so-called “reform” of Islamic Education is debated within the context of modernizing Muslim society as a whole. Already in 1977, during the first Islamic Conference for Islamic Education, participants agreed that the best way to reform Islamic Education would be its integration into the international system of Education, which again was dominated by the West.<sup>5</sup> While reforms in the field of Islamic Education were long inspired by an overall wish for change and modernization in the Muslim world, motivations changed after September 11. Ever since the terrorist attack of 2001, the fear of religious radicalism has driven reforms of Islamic Education in Muslim countries. Accordingly, classical teaching institutions were strongly criticized and qualified as “terror factories”. In the last years the curricula and teaching methodology of these institutions have been under continuous “reform”.<sup>6</sup>

In Western Europe, the reform of Islamic Education has long been shaped by the multi-ethnic and multi-religious specificities of European societies. Those debates have taken place in an environment in which Muslims were, and still are, a minority, peacefully co-existing with a broad range of “believers” and “non-believers”. Given its context, Islamic Education has thus always emphasized respect for “the other”. Contrary to the many regions of the Muslim world, Islam is taught in Europe on both a confessional and a secular-scientific level. Secular teaching methods which are currently used can be subdivided into at least three categories: a) anti-dogmatic, b) analytical and c) phenomenological. New methods of teaching Religious Education are continuously being developed and tested, often falling outside the schemata introduced above, leading to considerable plurality in the teaching of Islamic content in Europe. Thus contemporary teaching approaches vary in their respective focus, goal, as well as their use of teaching material and sources.

In the last years the teaching of Islamic Religious Education in Western Europe has been shaped by the establishment of new Muslim teaching institutions, namely the faculties of Islamic theology, who train not only teachers of Islamic theology, but also religion experts and researchers. Although European Universities have a long history in studying Islam and Oriental Cultures (Orientalism) as well as teaching about Islamic Religion and Culture, they do not dispose of any capacities of teaching Islam from an “insider-perspective” (Islamic Theology). This makes the task of the establishment of Islamic Theology as an academic discipline very challenging both for the Muslim minorities and the European stakeholders. Besides

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<sup>4</sup> The projects of reform and rehabilitation are countless in the Muslim world, the first of them date in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Nevertheless the majority of them are considered as misleading.

<sup>5</sup> Behr, 2005, p. 395ff.

<sup>6</sup> Khalfaoui, Mouez (2014) *Medrese: Religiöse Wissensvermittlung in der islamisch geprägten Welt und darüber hinaus*, in: Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Religions- und Kulturgeschichte, Academic Verlag Fribourg, S.449-464.

the academic difficulties there are social and political difficulties which have to be considered when dealing with Islamic Theology in Europe.

In this regard I would like to speak only of the situation of the Muslim minorities in Western Europe. There, the Social and political debates surrounding Muslim minorities are characterized by several difficulties.<sup>7</sup> The establishment of Islamic Theological institutions in Germany, England, Sweden, Netherlands, Belgium etc. is meant as a solution for these problems. Islamic Religious Education is in this regard aiming to promote integration and political participation of and among Muslims, reduce extremism, “produce” a new moderate Islam and “Muslims”, solve social and religious problems Muslims are facing in Europe, help Muslims to gain a better understanding of their own religion and improve the dialog between the majority of the population and the Muslim minority.

In this issue I would like to argue that most European countries share the same situation, with regards to these. Both the mass media and several scientific studies depict a very dark situation in this regard; they speak of “Islamization of Europe” through conservative Muslims, they depict Europe as the first place where Muslims will be the majority of the population and will “islamize” their surroundings by applying Shari`a and Islamic law. The negative image of the Muslim minority in Europe is in many cases exclusively depicted from a negative perspective. There certainly exist many positive aspects regarding the existence of minorities in Europe, it is not the appropriate moment to speak of these aspects now. All these controversial interpretations proof the lack of a well-founded research about Muslim minorities and the role of the Islamic Religious Education in this regard.

### **Concepts of Reforming Islamic Education**

Both in Muslim and non Muslim common wisdom, the current debate on Islamic Religious Education is mostly chaped by the ida of reform. In this chapter I will deal with this issue from tow perspectives: on the one hand I will deal with the issue of terminology. On the other hand I will deal with the concepts of reform that have been debated in regard to Islamic Religious Education.

The term “Islamic Education” is currently used in a number of ways and contexts, yet there is no precise and uniformly agreed on definition of it. A lot of teaching material and curricula both in the Muslim world and in the West explicitly or implicitly suggest that “Islamic Education” is a transcendental and holy activity and as such a very religious concept. In both Muslim and European contexts Islamic Education is expected to maintain norms of rationality and the human experience and to strengthen the deep rooted norms of morality and religiosity. The role of the

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<sup>7</sup> The alleged characteristics of Muslim minorities in Western socieites are failure of Integration and political participation, difficulties in matters of Education, the increasing role of political Islam, Islamic Radicalism. Besides these negative aspects there exist several positive one, but they are less relevant for Mass Media and political the discourse.

geographical, socio-cultural and political contexts in the development of new teaching concepts for this field is under debate with regard to this point. While Universalists and Essentialists argue that Islamic Education is universal and that it should be universal since the moral principles have the same roots, there exist another point of view that underline the fact that the concepts of Education should have, besides the universal moral values, a local dimension that relates it to the lived context. These different opinions are reflected in the debate about the “reform” of Islamic Education.

In Muslim majority societies, the term used for reform includes “Islah” which also means “correction” and “rehabilitation”.<sup>8</sup> These two expressions reflect a key characteristic of the ongoing debate in Muslim societies, which stands in direct contrast to the West. Reforms are being discussed and placed in opposition or in agreement with the international system, which is full of Western teaching methods and concepts. While many “reformists” think that Islamic educational reform is best achieved by incorporating Western ideas as much as possible, so called “conservatives” or “traditionalists,” argue that the reform of Islamic Education requires the emphasis of classical methods and concepts of teaching. Between those two camps, a middle way has developed, with scholars trying to combine aspects of “Islam” and Western educational concepts.

Within the European context, the discussion about Islamic Education is focused on the implications that the multi-ethnic, multi-religious and pluralistic European society may have on the teaching of Islamic content. Conscious of their existence in a multi-religious society, and of the religious heterogeneity of the Muslim community itself, people involved in contemporary Islamic Education in Europe are in constant disagreement with one another. A main topic of debate relates to the question how multi-religiosity and multi-ethnicity can be combined without the alienation of Muslim students from their faith and their Islamic cultural background.

Furthermore, the debate about the reform of Islamic Education is not only shaped by its context, but also by different political and social agendas. For European politicians, for example, the reform of Islamic Religious Education, in many ways, at the disconnection of European Muslims from religious streams and schools that is considered “radical” and “foreign”. That way, they hope to establish a “European Islam,” which is expected to be moderate and modern, especially in comparison to more conservative religious interpretations and practices. The goals of European politicians regarding this alleged reform education are undermined by technological advancements that facilitate the global communication between Muslims and this way strengthen the relation of European Muslims to their homeland and would connect Muslim youth with ultra conservative groups worldwide. Mass and social media, as well as affordable means of transportation allow Muslims to join worldwide networks, visit Islamic teaching institutes and,

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<sup>8</sup> Euben, Roxanne (1997): *Premodern, Antimodern or Postmodern? Islamic and Western Critiques of Modernity*, in: *The Review of Politics* 59(3) (429-459), S. 392-393

generally speaking, exchange ideas without the limitation of national boundaries. This is also due to the Muslim concept of Umma that underline the unity of all believers so that the global *Umma (Muslim community) transcends Muslims'* respective homelands.

Thus in the debate about Islamic Education in Europe there exist two tendencies among Muslim communities which also find support in European minority politics. These two tendencies can be identified as globalization versus de-globalization.<sup>9</sup> Overall, it seems that the reform of Islamic Religious Education in Muslim majority societies and European countries either follows the goal of further globalization, or the opposite aim of de-globalization. The leading question in both contexts of discussion remains: Is there any theory of Islamic Religious Education which meets the needs of changing ways of living in both Muslim countries and in the West? In other words, one could ask: What are the roots of Islamic E Education, which parts can be changed and adapted to changing contexts, and how (through which media) does the context influence the concepts of Islamic Religious E Education? An underlining question is also whether the context should be treated as the main determinant in the development of Islamic Religious Education.

### **Islamic Religious Education as Part of Religious Education**

The discussion about the reform of Islamic Education in Western societies is currently debated within the broader framework of reforming religious Education in general. Latter involves two types of religious Education:

1. Confessional Education: this category seeks to deepen the religious faith of children.
2. Non-confessional Education<sup>10</sup>: this category has the following three subcategories:
  - Anti-dogmatic Religious Education which claims to be neutral and objective. The religious teaching in this form consists of informing students about the main religions of this world. The aim is to inform them about important facts and interesting human religious phenomena and to understand the role of religions in human history.
  - Analytical teaching: This type of Education seeks to explore religion with regard to its implicit and spiritual aspects. Children learn how to analyze and to interpret aspects of the human condition and the beauty of nature. In the process religion is explained.
  - Phenomenological religious Education: In this form of Education, students are expected to not only know about their religion but to also practice it.

According to main tenets of contemporary Education theory there exist three goals of religious Education. First, Religious Education strives to search for the truth. This requires that children learn to criticize religious content and express their doubts

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<sup>9</sup> See about the contrast of these two tendencies Hartmut Kaelble, *Sozialgeschichte Europas. 1945 bis zur Gegenwart*, C. H. Beck, München 2007, S. 14ff

<sup>10</sup> Berglund, Jenny (2010), *Teching Islam*, Waxmann, Münster, p. 19f.

about it. This seems very difficult in confessional Religious Education. The second goal is based on comparison. This method helps children to find different and common points between various faiths (it can consist of comparing Schism with Sunnism etc.). This method is non-confessional per se. Third religious Education helps students to know their own religion and reflect it; it teaches them to be believers of their own religion and at the same time respect the belief of the others.

To summarize, the above mentioned discussion stresses the evidence that Islamic Religious Education is currently in a phase of transition from classical to modern era, from private to public sphere, from homogeneous to heterogeneous societies. Therefore the concepts and aims of the research in this area need to be renewed, too.

### **Research on Islamic Religious Education in New Contexts**

Both in Muslim states and the West the existence of a number of research projects on Islamic Education reflects the importance ascribed to this subject. In the following I will present the main issues that research should address in order to allow for effective and meaningful reform:

The research about Islamic Education should seek, as a first step, to identify what the terms “Islamic Religious Education” and “Reform of Islamic Religious Education” mean. Both concepts are frequently used and sometimes in confusing ways. It should find out which role social, cultural, economic and political context play in changing and developing Islamic Religious Education. This will allow experts to adopt appropriate teaching methodologies that take the circumstances of the living context into consideration. It should outline the most prevalent contemporary concepts and methods of teaching Islam as well as common reform proposals in both Muslim majority societies and European countries. It should suggest criteria to support one or multiple solution(s) for the dilemma of Islamic Education that are applicable within contemporary contexts.

Ideally, these steps would lead to the development of a clear and coherent concept for the teaching of Islam in multi-religious and multi-ethnic societies. Furthermore, the above-mentioned measures would help clarify the role that the respective living contexts play in the teaching of Islam.

### **The Relevance of the Context for Research Questions**

As far as Islamic Education in modern societies is concerned, contemporary research is expected to answer the following questions:

How to teach and which concepts should be used for the Islamic Education?

How to reform Islamic Education in order to adapt Islamic Education to the new contexts of living?

Is there an appropriate form of Religious Education in multi-religious and multi-ethnic societies?

What does the reform of Islamic Education mean to Muslims in majority societies and in the West, and how is it taking place?

What should be taken into consideration when teaching Islam in different contexts and what influence does Muslims' living environment has on it?

Furthermore research projects should start by choosing a region and specify the research within it instead of generalizing. The regional context, with its different cultural specificities, decides how concepts of Education, especially of Islamic Education, are understood and is thus a detrimental factor to be considered. Looking at both regions (Muslim majority societies and the West) and their respective experience in the area of teaching Islam, the first thing that stands out are the many commonalities on finds. Although different perspectives and sometimes contradictory concepts (e.g. globalization versus de-globalization) characterize Education-related debates in both regions, all seem to share the goal of reforming and modernizing Islamic Religious Education. In narrowing the regional context down to a single country, the following selection criteria, most of which are related to the reform of Islamic Education and differ from country to country, should be taken into consideration:

- The general level of Education and the importance that the state ascribes to educational matters: this is usually reflected by literacy rates, enrollment ratios and public spending on Education;
- The cultural environment and whether it favors reform of Islamic Education or not;
- The existence of experience in reforming Islamic Education;
- The existence of an appropriate socio-cultural and political context for new concepts of teaching.

### **The Methods of Research**

This chapter deals with the question of how and which method would be used to study Islamic Education in a scientific way in order to make it fit to the general aims of Education in the respective countries.

#### **A. The comparative method**

Comparative Education has become a leading field of research over the last two decades. Ongoing trends of globalization accelerated the processes that standardized teaching programs and methods and triggered further interest in matters of Education worldwide. According to David Phillips and Michele Schweisfurth the comparison between different countries in Education-related research has two main objectives: on the one hand, it is used as a simple method of gathering information and improving the understanding of differences. On the other hand, comparisons aim at finding commonalities, which often facilitates the formulation of problem-solving ideas. Solutions may evolve from comparisons that are either of a theoretical nature or hands-on and best-practice recommendations. Thus comparison is not meant to see who is doing better, it is rather aimed to learn from the experiences of other countries. In this regard, I would like to underline the fact, that comparison does not work in only one dimension; not only Muslim states are asked to compare

and learn from Western societies, Western states have to see what is going on in Muslim states in order to benefit from their experience. In fact, Muslim states have a large experience in teaching Islamic Religious Education. This teaching tradition would help conceiving new concepts of openness and living together. Therefore I argue that comparison is currently a necessity for the development of the teaching of Islam worldwide. The comparison should operate at three levels:

- the context level (between two geographical and cultural contexts)
- the country level (between the countries selected for investigation)
- the media level (between teaching material used in public institutions, which generally reflect state ideology; between teaching material used in private lessons; and between the use of teaching material developed in the West and teaching material developed in the Muslim world).

### **B. The method of content analysis**

Using the method of content analysis allows for the combination of hermeneutic analysis, thematic discourse analysis and systematic comparison. Investigations should therefore alternate between two levels: the micro level of discourse and the bi-directional relationship between teaching material and its context and secondly the macro level of inter-discursive connections between different discourses in the field of Islamic Education.

The content analysis method contains a number of different aspects, which can be summed up as the following:

### **C. Quantitative analysis**

The quantitative analysis can statistically capture the extent to which the themes of multi-religiosity and multi-ethnicity are depicted in teaching strategies and materials. It can record which topics refer to multi-religiosity, pluralism and ethnicity and how often they do so. The quantitative method is based on:

- a) "Space": The analysis examines, for instance, how much space the author has dedicated to the topics mentioned above in a given textbook or curriculum.
- b) "Frequency": How often and where in the textbook certain topics are mentioned.

### **D. Qualitative analysis**

This method is based on:

- a) "Topic": Qualitative analysis considers the topics that appear and the contexts in which they are placed.
- b) "Narrative": In which framing narratives are the above-mentioned themes featured, and/or do they constitute their own narratives?
- c) "Assessment": Are certain characteristics or values attributed to multi-religiosity or multi-ethnicity?
- d) "Evaluation": This approach focuses on the background, intentions, and ideology of the authors who produce teaching materials.

### **E. Discourse analysis**

The discourse analysis should follow a first phase of research which presents the content of the teaching material gathered. Only in a second step should discourse analysis be used to analyze the meaning behind those texts. The discourse analysis as a method combines the analysis of the textual content, the comparison of that content and the analysis of discourse that evolves from such content. The discourse analysis is oscillating between the micro and macro discourses, taking different texts and contexts into consideration. It is assessed how the materials portray Islamic Education on the macro-level of discourse; the content of materials will be compared with the public discourse of politicians and experts.

### **Conclusion**

Religious Education is still a very complex matter both for researchers, teachers and stakeholders. Though Islamic Education has been subject of several studies in the last decades, there still exists a need for new specified researches. The aim of research is therefore not limited to academic spheres, it is also relevant for decision-makers in Education policy, textbook authors and publishing houses and also for religious institutions. These actors should also be part and parcel of research projects. For their participation in a meeting, during which the results of research projects will be presented and discussed, would be an important element in disseminating knowledge to stakeholders. Dialogue on the research results and strategies for its political implementation should take place not only during meetings, but also via discussion forums and internet platforms. The research results should be utilized for revision of teaching materials and curricula, both within Europe and outside of it.

Summing up, Islamic Religious Education is nowadays a global subject, there experts are involved in political and social issues. Therefore it needs global methodological approaches. Experts from the Muslim world and the West are expected to work together in order to elaborate global approaches to this matter.



*Ernst Furlinger*<sup>1</sup>

## **The Light-Nature of Human Beings: “Metaphysical Anthropology” and Spiritual Safety in the Modern Age**

### **Abstract**

The knowledge or science of a “metaphysical anthropology” of different religious traditions explores the subtle, spiritual, non-physical dimension of the human mind and body, as a precondition for the mystical experience, unification or realization of the one, nondual reality. Is it more than a pre-modern concept which is overcome by the progress of modern science and reason? Is this spiritual science, based on subjective experiences and elaborated reflections in different civilizations over millennia, nothing more than the object for research in the intellectual history of mankind or the critical study of the development of certain religious topics by modern religious science? The paper describes some examples of this traditional knowledge, focused on particular streams within Western and Islamic traditions. It argues in what way a spiritual theory of the human nature and the living spiritual traditions in different cultures are relevant and epistemologically valid in the modern “age of criticism”. Finally, the text suggests the mutual opening of secular scientific modernity and traditional spiritual or religious knowledge, by formulating a particular interpretation of the concept of a “post-secular society”.

### **The Transcendent Dimension of Human Being According to Religious Traditions**

Religious traditions transmit a knowledge about the nature of the human being which consists, in its core, of the experience that a human being is more than the physical, material (and therefore mortal) body, brain and its facilities. Human beings are more than their limited cognition and body. It is a core element of the “memory space” of religions that the essential dimension of human nature – and reality as a whole – is precisely beyond the physical. There exists an element in humankind which transcends the physical and is one with the origin and principle of being as such. This reflection of religious traditions about the nature of human beings could be called “meta-physical anthropology”. Thus, the exceptional rank and dignity of human beings is anchored in their representing a link between the transcendent and the cosmos, the uncreated and the created, the metaphysical and the physical. It is an element of antique and Christian anthropology that humans are “a bond that

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connects God and world”.<sup>2</sup> They are a “third cosmos” (*tertius mundus*) which unites the invisible reality of the true light and the visible physical world.<sup>3</sup>

In the monotheistic religions – Judaism, Christianity, and Islam – this concept is based on the idea that man is created in the image of God.<sup>4</sup> In the tradition of Western mysticism, this biblical idea was connected with the platonic notion of *Homoiosis tò theô*, the “likeness/ similarity [of man] to God”<sup>5</sup> as the core idea of a religious-philosophical programme of education in antiquity. The idea that man is made in the image of God, and the goal of his religious and philosophical path is the *Homoiosis* to God, the realization of the divine presence in man, shaped the development of Christian mysticism in manifold ways (see Haas 2014: 218ff). In a different way, Asian spiritual traditions such as Advaita Vedānta, the nondualistic tantric Shaivism of Kashmir, Buddhism and Daoism, focus on the notion of nonduality (Loy 1997). Particular lines within both streams of spirituality, in the West and the East, are similar in many respects. They differentiate between everyday, empirical reality and the “Real”, between limited cognition and the realization of truth. They explain the fact that this actual reality, the oneness or nonduality (in monotheistic terms: of God, the cosmos and the human being) is hidden and veiled, and explore the ways to realize and reveal this deep dimension of reality, and of the human person.

Different civilizations use different terms for this act of realization (“illumination”, “liberation”, *nirvāṇa*, ...) and also for the person who has realized this oneness with the Divine during his or her life-time. For example, Islamic theologians speak of “the perfect human being” (arab. *al-insān al-kāmil*) whose prototype is the prophet Muhammad. In Sufism, attaining perfection is not restricted to Muhammad alone. Perfect human beings cognize and experience the fundamental “unity of being” (*waḥdat al-wujūd*). This human potential is an essential part of creation: human beings are created in the form (*ṣūra*) of God, the Real (*al-haqq*), who placed in Adam the traces of all the divine names. Ibn al-’Arabī (1165-1240), one of the foremost Sufī philosophers, concludes that:

“Hence everyone in the cosmos is ignorant of the whole and knows the part, except only the perfect human being. For God *taught him the names, all of them* [Q 2:31] and gave him the all-comprehensive words, so his form became perfect. The perfect

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<sup>2</sup> ‘*Homo nexus est dei et mundi*’. Albert the Great (died 1280) ascribes this expression to Hermes Trismegistos. The human being is above the world because it is endowed with a twofold form of cognition: the sensual (*physica*) and the abstract (*doctrinalis*) which enables human reason to reach its perfection (Albert, *Metaphysica* 1,1,1, ed. Col. XVI, page 2,4-15; quoted from Resnick 2013: 336).

<sup>3</sup> John Scottus Eriugena (9<sup>th</sup> cent. A.D.): Sermon *Vox Spiritualis* on the prologue of the gospel of St. John, XIX, 290-298; English translation: Eriugena 1988; see Haas 1966; Haas 1996: 221-247. - Eriugena says in his *Periphyseon*: “The highest dignity for human nature is that it uniquely mirrors transcendent divine nature. Only of human nature can it be said that it is made in the image and likeness of God. Not even the angels are accorded that honor, so in a sense man is greater than the angels. Human nature may even require the application of affirmative and negative propositions: Man is an animal and man is not an animal” (*Periphyseon* IV.758b; Sheldon-Williams/ O’Meara 1987).

<sup>4</sup> Genesis 1,27: “God created man in his own image” (cf. Gen 5,1; 9,6); Hadith: “God created Adam in His form”.

<sup>5</sup> Plato: Dialogue ‘Theaitetos’ 176a.

human being brings together the form of the Real and the form of the cosmos. He is a *barzakh*<sup>6</sup> between the Real and the cosmos, a raised-up mirror. The Real sees His form in the mirror of the human being, and creation also sees its form in him. He who gains this level has gained a level of perfection more perfect than which nothing is found in possibility.” (*Futuhat* III 398.16)<sup>7</sup>

The “perfect (or perfected) human being” in Islam could be compared with the notion of the “god-man” in the antique Christian traditions. Despite differences in terminology and between the two specific religious concepts, it is possible to understand them as “homeomorphic equivalents” (Raimon Panikkar), as symbols which occupy the same or similar functional place in distinct religious or cultural systems, and therefore build a unique relation brought about by this correspondence.<sup>8</sup>

### **The Process of Realizing Nonduality**

In some of the spiritual traditions of different civilizations, the concrete process of the realization of the nondual reality is often described as an uplift from the state of darkness to the experience of light, that is, the uncovering of the “light-nature” of man/ of everything. Plotinus, the founder of Neoplatonism and of European mysticism (204/205-269/270 A.D.) who taught in Rome, reflects in his philosophy about the universal foundation, the One (gr. τὸ ἕν).<sup>9</sup> It is the ultimate principle and origin of existence: “It is by the one that all beings are beings...” (*Enn.* VI.9,1; Plotinus 2003: 303), at the same time it is beyond “being” (III.8,10). Humans are different, but not separated from It, since the ground of the human soul touches the Divine. It is one with It, “established” in It (cf. V.1,11). It is this deep dimension of the human person which opens up a path to the One. At the centre of the spiritual path is the discovery of the truth behind the phenomenal empirical world, the realization of the nonduality of everything and the rising upward toward the unification with the One. Plotinus clearly describes the process based on personal experience. He turns from the outer things to “the Self”, the “interior man” (V.1,10), enters into the Self and “becomes one with the Divine and established on its fundament” (IV 8,1).

*Ennead* VI.9 (“On the Good or the One”), in a well-known passage, about the state of union, the unification with the Divine, characterized as the “primarily beautiful”, “formless”, “a great Light” (VI.7,33), says:

“But ‘whoever has seen, knows what I am saying’, that the soul then has another life and draws near, and has already come near and has a part in him, and so is in a state

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<sup>6</sup> arab. *barzakh*, “barrier, hindrance, isthmus”; in Islamic eschatology the intermediate state of the deceased between individual death and the “Last Day”.

<sup>7</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabī: *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya* (“The Mekkan Openings”). Quoted after Chittick 1998, 249.

<sup>8</sup> The philosopher of religion Raimon Panikkar (1918-2010) defines homeomorphic equivalents as “a kind of functional analogy of the third order” (Panikkar 1993: 55). “Homeomorphism is not the same as analogy; it represents a functional equivalence discovered through a topological transformation” (Panikkar 1978: xxii).

<sup>9</sup> On the philosophy of Plotinus see Beierwaltes 1985; O’Meara 1993; Hadot 1993.

to know that the giver of true life is present and we need nothing more. But quite otherwise, we must put away other things and take our stand only in this, and become this alone, cutting away all the other things in which we are encased; so we must be eager to go out from here and be impatient at being bound to the other things, that we may embrace him with the whole of ourselves and have no part with which we do not touch God. There one can see both him and oneself as it is right to see: the self glorified, full of intelligible light – but rather itself pure light – weightless, floating free, having become – but rather, being – god; set on fire then, but the fire seems to go out if one is weighed down again.” (VI.9,9)<sup>10</sup>

It is obvious that this state of nonduality – becoming one with the “great light”, being transformed into this supernatural light – is only possible within a trans-rational, non-discursive dimension, when the usual, limited form of human cognition is transcended, as Plotinus asserts:

“but seeing and that which is seen are not reason, but greater than reason and before reason and above reason, as is that which is seen. (...) So then the seer does not see and does not distinguish and does not imagine two, but it is as if he had become someone else and he is not himself and does not count as his own there, but has become to belong to that and so is one, having joined, as it were, centre to centre” (VI.9, 10).<sup>11</sup>

Here, Plotinus uses very lively language of negative theology as precisely as possible, which expresses paradoxes (“the seer does not see”), or says what “it” is not, or denotes only “this” without using any name or term. He reaches the borders and limits of language which belongs to the realm of duality: “For this reason the vision is hard to put in words” (VI.9.10).<sup>12</sup>

The influence of Plotinus’ metaphysics and mysticism of light (Beierwaltes 1961) continued in the works of the Christian Neoplatonist Dionysius the Areopagite (late 5<sup>th</sup> century), and later in the Christian theology and philosophy in the Middle Ages (Koch 1960; Hedwig 1980: 119-150). The mysticism of light has been also an element of Sufism from earliest times. It found its exceptional expression in works such as *Mishkāt al-anwār* (“The niche of lights”) by Abū Ḥāmid Ghazzālī (died 1111 A.D.) which interprets the Qur’anic “light verse” (*āyat an-nūr*, 24:35) and the tradition of seventy-thousand veils of light and darkness which separate man and God (cf. Schimmel 2011).<sup>13</sup> One of the foremost thinkers on the spirituality of light and illumination (arab. *ishrāq*) was the Persian philosopher Shihābuddīn Suhrawardī (1153-1191), the *sheikh al-ishrāq*,<sup>14</sup> who wrote

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<sup>10</sup> Plotinus: *Ennead* VI.9,9; quoted after Plotinus 2003: 339 (transl. Armstrong). Armstrong translates the expression “*theōn genómenon*” with “become a god”, in this way weakening the statement of the author. Therefore I have changed the translation “a god” into “god”, following here the lucid, clear German translation of Ermin Döll: “... wie man Gott geworden, vielmehr Gott ist” (Döll 2014: 21f).

<sup>11</sup> Translation: Plotinus 2003: 341.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Translation: al-Ghazzali 1998.

<sup>14</sup> On Suhrawardī and his mysticism of light see Corbin 1971.

(among many other works) his masterpiece *Ḥikmat al-ishrāq* (“The philosophy of illumination”)<sup>15</sup> and the treatise *Hayākil an-nūr* (“The altars of light”).<sup>16</sup>

Later, in Central Asia, Najmuddūn Kubrā (1145-1220), the founder of the sufi order *Kubrāwīyya*, developed an extensive reflection about illumination, focusing particularly on colours as an element of spiritual experience (see Corbin 1971: 61ff; Schimmel 2011). In his main work, *Fawā’ih al-jamāl wa fawātiḥ al-jalāl*, he reflects on the situation of man from a spiritual point of view. Man has fallen into the “well of nature” (*ābār aṭṭabī’a*) and is stuck at the bottom of the dark shaft (cf. *Fawā’ih*; Meier 1957: 70). Kubrā considers how human beings could be liberated, could seek and find God. It is a divine element in human beings, the Self, a shining core which is normally hidden or buried by “darkness”, the physical, material nature of man: “Learn, O my friend, that the object of the search (*morād*) is God, and that the subject of searching is a light from him.” (*Fawā’ih*, p. 1; Meier 1957: 155). The goal of the spiritual path is the ascent out of the well-shaft and the reunion of this light with its origin. Kubrā explains this process in a metaphorical way:

“Know, there are lights which ascend and those which descend. The ascending lights are those of the heart; the descending lights are those of the Throne. Nature [existence]<sup>17</sup> is the veil between Throne and heart. When this nature is broken through and a door to the Throne opens from the heart, like aspires toward like. Light rises toward light and light descends upon light, ‘light upon light’ (Q 24:35)” (*Fawā’ih*, p. 62; Meier 1957: 117).

Islamic spirituality does not confine itself to elaborating general expressions of the situation of man and his goal from a mystical point of view. Like other traditions, e.g. in Buddhist and Hindu tantric philosophy and practice, it developed a precise empirical description of the ‘anatomy’ of the subtle dimension of the human body – let us call it the body of the ‘interior man’.<sup>18</sup> It forms the concrete basis for this process of rising upward and entering a transformed, nondual state of trans-rational, non-discursive cognition which is denoted with different terms such as “illumination” (*ishrāq*) or “vision”. This physiology can be understood as the “deep”, spiritual, subtle, non-physical dimension of particular parts or centres of the physical human body, such as the sexual organs, the spine, the heart, the forehead

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<sup>15</sup> Edition and English translation: Suhrawardi 1999.

<sup>16</sup> Translation: Suhrawardi 1996.

<sup>17</sup> Corbin: “creatural being” (Corbin 1971: 72).

<sup>18</sup> See the reflection on the ‘inner man’ in Plato and Plotinus as well as in early Christianity (Marschies 1995 and 1998; Burkert 1999). For example, Plotinus characterizes the ‘inner man’ in the context of the presence of the three foundational elements – the One which is beyond being, of being and Nous (gr. νοῦς, lat. *intellectus*) and of the soul – in the world, and also “in us” insofar we are beyond the physical, sensual realm (cf. *Enn.* V 1,10). Augustine (354-430 A.D.) uses the Latin term *homo interior* (‘inner man’) in the context of his description of the inner, ‘spiritual senses’ (see Harrison 1999). For Augustine, the truth – which can be interpreted as the access of the human being to the actual ‘Real’ or ‘One’ - resides in the ‘inner man’: “*In interiore homine habitat ueritas*” (*vera relig.* 39,72: CCSL 32, 234).

etc. In Sufism it is called *latīfa*, in the words of Corbin “the subtle organs or centres of the man of light” (Corbin 1971: 64) or “the organs of light” (ibid: 68). It is the shining and throbbing “spiritual energy” (*himma*)<sup>19</sup> which rises up and pierces one subtle centre in the body after the other, finally leading to the state of union. Kubrā describes this process in a metaphorical way:

“The Holy Ghost in man is a heavenly subtle organ. When the concentrated power of spiritual energy (*himma*) is lavished on him, he is reunited with the Heavens and the Heavens are merged with him. Or rather, Heavens and Spirit are one and the same thing. And this Spirit does not cease to rise, to increase,, and to grow until it has acquired a height higher than the height of Heaven, and transcends the Heaven” (*Fawā’ih*, p. 59; Corbin 1971: 70; Meier 1957: 173).

Let us summarize: across thousands of years, different civilizations have established and developed a science of spiritual knowledge and metaphysical anthropology, based on empirical data of personal experience and elaborated theories.

### **Modernity and the Break with Spiritual Traditions**

The transmission of this traditional knowledge has been neglected and devalued in the context of the natural sciences, with their naturalistic paradigm and empiricist methods – originating among others in the natural philosophy of Francis Bacon (1561–1626) and represented by Isaac Newton (1642–1726) in England in the early modern period (Dijksterhuis 2002). The modern scientific mode of knowledge claims that only non-subjective experience is veridical and scientifically valid.

In the West, the modern age brought with it a brake with the Christian traditions of spirituality and mysticism, especially of the ‘mystical theology’ (lat. *theologia mystica*),<sup>20</sup> in the sense of the concrete practice of the inner path of the human soul – in the words of Master Eckhart (1260-1327/28) – which loves “to be one and to become one with God”.<sup>21</sup> Beginning in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, a growing suspicion and rejection toward mysticism developed within the catholic and protestant church which lasted till the re-discovery of mysticism at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The lines and chains of transmission of this kind of knowledge and experience were largely interrupted, even in the Christian monasteries, the traditional places of contemplation. The rise of capitalism and industry in the modern West, was based on the development of technology and science. This

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<sup>19</sup> On *himma* see Corbin 1997. - It could be fruitful to explore the reality of this phenomenon by relating it to similar (eventually homeomorphic) symbols in Hindu and Buddhist tantrism; see Silburn 1988.

<sup>20</sup> In a letter to the monks of the Benedictine abbey Tegernsee, the German philosopher, theologian and mystic cardinal Nicholas of Cusa (family name: Nikolaus Krebs, 1401-1464) says about the mystical theology: “The belief, that man can reach divinity in this way, is a very high knowledge in this world which exceeds every knowledge of this world.” (*Hec fides, scilicet, quod homo sic posit divinitatem attingere, est scientia secundum hunc mundum altissima, que eciam excedit omnem huius mundi scientiam*; Baum and Senoner 1998: 94). On the *theologia mystica* see Haas 1989; Haas 2008.

<sup>21</sup> Meister Eckhart: *Expositio libri sapientiae*, in: Meister Eckhart, Die deutschen und lateinischen Werke, Abt. II: Lateinische Werke, 2, 614, 13ff, n. 282. Quoted after Haas 1996: 97.

development required a certain rational, systematic way of thinking and behavior, as well as the control, modernization and rationalization of society. It resulted in tremendous achievements and innovations in all systems of society, also in the religious system. At the same time it seems that this was when the centuries-old traditions of Western mysticism lost the culture in which they were rooted. The cultural memory of European civilization resembles a palimpsest where the text of the spiritual traditions, which is thousands of years old, was scratched off and overwritten but is still present and partly readable.

In the Islamic world, the encounter or clash of traditional societies with the modern West in the colonial age stimulated different reform movements, especially the movement of Islamic modernism or Salafism at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Voll 1999; Brown 1996). Traditional Islamic spirituality, based on the old Sufi orders and a spiritual worldview, was wrongly seen as an inauthentic form of Islam and novelty (arab. *bid'ah*) since it developed after the first generations of Muslims, as well as a kind of pre-modern irrational attitude and a hindrance to the progress of society in the rational age.<sup>22</sup> In its scripturalist and literalist concentration on the foundational texts of Qur'an and the *hadith*, and its rejection of Sufism and traditional scholarship, Salafism – in spite of its reference to a certain idea of the early time of Islam and the pious forefathers – can be seen as a form of modernization and rationalization of religion, and as a specific modern religious phenomenon. The rigorous interpretation of the doctrine of the Oneness of God (*tawhid*), especially the strict secession of Sufism, represents an eminent danger to Islam's diversity, richness, and spiritual depth. A rigid, literalist interpretation of the Qur'an destroys the poetical openness and aesthetic beauty of the sacred scripture (Kermani 2015), and turns it into a political manifesto or legal treatise. At present, we are experiencing this at the global political level, in different places and in several cultures and religions, in a terrifying way: religious practice which is not connected to the very spring of religion and moral values is in danger of becoming hardened and violent.

Corbin, the great explorer of Islamic mysticism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, opens his book about the "man of light" by underscoring the importance of the point of reference, the North Star. For our orientation in the world, we need the "heavenly pole", the "place of the Origin and of the Return" (Corbin 1971: 2) which cannot be found on the horizontal, only on the vertical level. The loss of the spiritual dimension, of a metaphysical anthropology results in a loss of orientation, a falling short of one's own actual nature. In the context of unbridled capitalism, people are reduced to the function of permanent consumers and objects of different types of advertising and manipulation by multinationals – and still they are bearers of the dignity of being created in the image of God, created in God's likeness, having the possibility to unveil their divine dimension and return to their origin. The results of a fundamental loss of orientation can be seen not only at the individual level, but at the collective level as well. If we look at the combination of tremendous global

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<sup>22</sup> See Cornell 2004. - For this reference I would like to thank Professor Rüdiger Lohlker, Vienna.

crises that effect us – environmental destruction, climate change, social inequality, the exploitation and humiliation of one human being by another – we can perceive the loss of orientation of a whole civilization and the consequences of a “derailed modernization” (Habermas 2008a).

At present, there are various answers to this fundamental crisis of the capitalist, technocratic model based on naturalistic paradigms of modern science which exist in parallel. The predominant answer consists of continuing and intensifying this global system which destroys the natural resources of the earth, produces social and economic expulsion and exclusion on a large scale (Sassen 2014) and guarantees neither human nor ecological safety. Reactions on the part of religions are among others the fundamentalist model, the denunciation and rejection of plurality and modernity, and the withdrawal from a “world in pieces” (Clifford Geertz) into gated or walled religious communities. A current version of this fundamentalist answer to the global crisis is the approach espoused by the movements of Jihadi-Salafism, which strive for a homogeneous order of social and political purity established by coercion and violence.

We have yet to find an alternative vision and a positive direction for an evolving future. It could consist in a particular interpretation of the notion of a “postsecular society” (Habermas 2005; Habermas 2008b; Höhn 2014; Junker-Kenny 2014; Lutz-Bachmann 2015) which overcomes the conflict and the mutual degradation of secular modernity and traditional religious worldview. This model affirms modernity – especially the order of the secular, liberal democracy and the modern constitutional state which guarantees human rights, plurality, the co-existence of people with different values and world views and especially the protection of minorities – and at the same time is open to the transmission of religious ethics and the spiritual knowledge of mankind as a recognized part of its cultural memory. Here the positive affirmation of “modernity” should not be seen restricted to the realm of the social and political order, but also in its liberating and emancipatory impact and consequences for religion. In the field of religion, modernity means especially the application of the principle of historical criticism in the hermeneutics of the foundational texts of religious communities, its canon and history, the introduction of the historical-critical method which developed mainly in the European “age of enlightenment” in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. It means implementing freedom as a basic principle of the project of modernity (Höffe 2015) within the field of religion, in the form of freedom of religion in the society, as well as freedom *within* religion - replacing traditional religion and its rules as a social duty enforced by institutions and authorities against authentic spirituality as an individual, inner and free commitment.

Without rejecting enlightened modernity and modern science, we need to rediscover and recognize the traditional knowledge or science regarding the “metaphysical anthropology” and the practice of enlightenment in the sense of the spiritual traditions. This rediscovery should not happen as a form of escapism or as an element of the withdrawal of orthodox religion from modern secular society and science or even its fight against it, but within the framework of modernity, reason,



openness and plurality. The progress from a sterile confrontation or antagonism of secular modernity and religious traditions requires the reflexivity and self-criticism of modernity and reason, the acknowledgement of its own limits and its open discussion with religious convictions and knowledge – and at the same time the reflexivity and self-criticism of religious communities, and its fundamental opening towards the modern, plural, scientific age.

We need to re-establish educational programmes which focus on metaphysical anthropology and the “light-nature” of human beings, based on an authentic dialogue between spiritual traditions by using contemporary technical tools for worldwide communication and exchange. We need to develop a sustainable, non-violent social and economical system and ‘sharing economy’ redirected toward environment, justice and the common good (Schumacher 1973; Daly/ Cobb 1994; McKibben 2007; Loske 2011; Rifkin 2014) which reflects in some way the divine – that is, the shining, joyful, and beautiful – deep dimension of reality.

This approach could contribute to develop an urgently-needed new civilizing model and a new form of modernity in an age of uncertainty.

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## On Human Insecurity

### Abstract

Faith, *emunah*, in the classic Jewish tradition, leads to *bitahon*, or security. However, at the same time that one is obligated to put one's faith in God that all will be well (e.g. Psalms 116), the Jewish legal system or *halakhah* declares that almost all commandments are set aside when human life is in danger. This tension between believing and acting is illustrated in the biblical story of the Exodus. Caught between the pursuing Egyptians and the looming Red Sea, Moses prays to God. God, however, replies "Why do you cry out to Me? Tell the Israelites to go forward." (Exodus 14:15). God seems to eschew prayer while Moses embraces it. This tension between physical action and spiritual action reverberates throughout the history of Judaism to this day. In this talk I will review the history of this dichotomy and its relevance to contemporary discussions.

### Presentation

The human condition is one of essential insecurity. From the story of creation, from the moment that the Torah sanctions and records the feelings and actions of the humans in the second chapter of Genesis, the human, the *Adam*, is insecure. The creation is incomplete: the Adam has no partner. Then when the *Adam* is made into two, the male and the female, they together are unsure about their role and their actions. They abrogate the one command of God, and opt for knowledge and beauty over the physical security of the Garden. This results in their expulsion. We read in Genesis 3:

22 And the Lord God said, "Now that the man has become like one of us, knowing good and bad, what if he should stretch out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever!" 23 So the Lord God banished him from the Garden of Eden, to till the soil from which he was taken. 24 He drove the man out, and stationed east of the Garden of Eden the cherubim and the fiery ever-turning sword, to guard the way to the tree of life.

The Hebrew for "He drove the man out" is *vayegaresh* which is the same word that is used for divorce. This leads the Rabbis to make the following remark:

This teaches that the Holy Blessed One gave him a divorce as one gives to a woman. (*Eliyahu Rabbah*)

This interaction, a Divine divorce from the human, sets the stage in the Rabbinic understanding of human history, for the continued relationship of God and the people Israel. Jeremiah writes

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6 The Lord said to me in the days of King Josiah: Have you seen what Rebel Israel did, going to every high mountain and under every leafy tree, and whoring there? 7 I thought: After she has done all these things, she will come back to Me. But she did not come back; and her sister, Faithless Judah, saw it. 8 I noted: *Because Rebel Israel had committed adultery, I cast her off and handed her a bill of divorce*; yet her sister, Faithless Judah, was not afraid—she too went and whored. 9 Indeed, the land was defiled by her casual immorality, as she committed adultery with stone and with wood. 10 And after all that, her sister, Faithless Judah, did not return to Me wholeheartedly, but insincerely—declares the Lord.

Here God, in Divine wrath divorces Israel, using the legal language of divorce found in Deuteronomy. And yet only three verses later we find:

14 Turn back, rebellious children—declares the Lord. Since I have espoused you, I will take you, one from a town and two from a clan, and bring you to Zion. 15 And I will give you shepherds after My own heart, who will pasture you with knowledge and skill.

Here the language of marriage takes the place of the language of divorce. God has espoused, betrothed Israel, and therefore God promises to “take” Israel—again this is the word that is used to also mean “marry” in the Deuteronomic marriage and divorce laws.

Indeed the prophet Isaiah (Chapter 50) writes the following:

1. Thus said the Lord: Where is the bill of divorce of your mother whom I dismissed? And which of My creditors was it to whom I sold you off? You were only sold off for your sins, and your mother dismissed for your crimes.

Here the prophet castigates Israel for sin, but, at the same time reminds them that God *has not* divorced them. That indeed while Israel was punished by God for her sins, God is still invested in their redemption. Indeed in the very next chapter Isaiah writes:

1 Listen to Me, you who pursue justice, You who seek the Lord: Look to the rock you were hewn from, To the quarry you were dug from.

2 Look back to Abraham your father And to Sarah who brought you forth. For he was only one when I called him, But I blessed him and made him many.

3 Truly the Lord has comforted Zion, Comforted all her ruins; He has made her wilderness like Eden, Her desert like the Garden of the Lord. Gladness and joy shall abide there, Thanksgiving and the sound of music.

4 Harken to Me, My people, And give ear to Me, O My nation, For teaching shall go forth from Me, My way for the light of peoples. In a moment I will bring it:

5 The triumph I grant is near, The success I give has gone forth. My arms shall provide for the peoples; The coastlands shall trust in Me, They shall look to My arm.

The contradictory impulses, emotions, and even actions are strung together by the rabbis into a historical framework of sorts, an anxiety about the relationship between God and Israel. For example, one Rabbinic collection has the following comment on the first verse of the Biblical book Lamentations. The book itself is a long poem of grieving over the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, and Jerusalem itself. The verse reads in part: “Alas! Lonely sits the city Once great with people! She that was great among nations is become like a widow....” The question that is posed is: What does it mean to be “like a widow?” One is either a widow or not. The rabbis see a similarity to one who is *like a divorcee*.

The Rabbis said:

It is like a king who became angry at his consort. He wrote her a bill of divorce and gave it to her, but then he returned, and grabbed it from her.<sup>2</sup> Whenever she wished to marry someone else, the king said to her: Where is the bill of divorce with which I divorced you? And whenever she claimed support from him, he said to her: I have already divorced you. Similarly, whenever Israel wishes to worship idolatry, the Holy One of Blessing says to them: “Where is the bill of divorce to your mother whom I have dismissed?” (Isa. 50:1) And whenever they ask Him to perform a miracle for them, He tells them: I have already cast you off, as it is written, “I cast her off and handed her a bill of divorce” (Jer. 3:8).

The Rabbis use the complicated story of a king who divorces his wife (and in Jewish law, a bill of divorce must be written and delivered by the husband into his wife’s hands) and then snatches the divorce back from his wife, in order to explain the fraught relationship between God and Israel as experienced by the Jewish people. When the wife wants to use the freedom granted by the divorce to marry someone else, the king demands proof of divorce. Since he has grabbed it from her, she cannot show the proof. When she alternatively demands support as a wife, the king refuses saying “I have already divorced you.” The analogy is a way of reconciling the conflicting statements of Jeremiah in which God seems to have divorced Israel, and Isaiah in which God has not divorced Israel. The tension between these two statements, moreover between these two spiritual and mental states: of being divorced from God, that is, exiled without attachment, on the one hand, and on the other hand not being divorced, is the anxious framework of religious history as understood by the rabbis.

The anxiety may be stated straightforwardly as follows: In this state of limbo, this state of not knowing whether or not the covenant with God has been breached, or suspended, what are we to do? Do we have license to continue to pursue the relationship with the Divine? That is, to promote and develop ritual law, religious and philosophical frameworks for living. Or, alternatively, are we no

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<sup>2</sup> For an analysis of this text, and a critical apparatus for the text, see David Stern, *Parables in Midrash: Narrative and Exegesis in Rabbinic Literature* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1991) esp. 99-101. The text I am using is the one labeled Ashkenaz in *Parables*, 257. It is in Buber’s edition of *Eichah Rabbah* 46, with some differences. The translation is basically Stern’s.

longer authorized to do any of that? Are we as a people, essentially religiously paralyzed? And so we end in the tenuous place of standing in between.

There is a rabbinic debate in the earliest sources about whether or not a person is allowed to carry weapons on the Holy Sabbath. One Sage permits. One forbids. The dispute revolves around the way that weapons are viewed. One rabbi views weapons as ornaments. They adorn a man's masculinity, perhaps they define it. Therefore one can carry them on the Sabbath. The other counters that weapons are shameful, therefore only functional and not an adornment, citing a verse from Isaiah 2:4 referring to the time of redemption: "And they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more." In the time of redemption, weapons will be destroyed and turned to implements of peace.

What is the real dispute here?

The real dispute is about the Sabbath, and the way we live in the world. Is the Sabbath a portent, a vision of the world to come? The messianic age? If it is, then weapons will no longer be necessary in that time, and therefore forbidden on the Sabbath. The opposing view is: We do not yet live in the messianic age. Weapons are still adornments. Ultimately, the dispute is about whether or not we are able to bring a small piece of the redeemed world into our unredeemed world.

The rabbis who forbid carrying weapons on the Sabbath practice a Sabbath which articulates a faith in the redemptive age. It is a faith that resolves the insecurities of our unredeemed world by the act of faith—by living in a short time span of redemption. In that moment one can experience the security of faith in which weapons are not necessary. For other rabbis cannot go there the messianic age will only arrive with the messiah. Therefore, even on the Sabbath, we are in unredeemed time. We have not resolved, even for a short while, the tension, the anxiety of this world, this world off-campus doubt. Therefore our security is dependent on weapons, and our weapons are an adornment.

All Sages seem to agree that physical security is dependent on the ability to envision a time beyond the present, a redeemed time when weapons are no longer necessary or desired. Our physical security, our perception of being secure, is dependent on our ability to envision as a possibility a redeemed world. That vision of the redeemed world, the world which is, in the words of the rabbis, "a day which is always shabbat/sabbath" should be our goal. And even now, we must try to bring it into our unredeemed existence—for truly our lives depend on it.



Makoto Mizutani<sup>1</sup>

## Nature of the Contemporary Ethical Challenges and Our Responses

### Abstract

In this paper, I shall first define these somewhat intriguing terms of ethics and moral for the sake of the discussion here. Then a review is presented over some of the specific characters of the ethical issues as seen globally today, to be followed by a similar review for the case of the contemporary Japanese society. Lastly with a view to highlighting the urgency of this global problem, some proposals are advanced, including an idea of more proactive role in the United Nations Organization, and a proposal of establishing the World Prize for Ethics.

### Introduction

Ethics and moral are a puzzling question, since they are amorphous and ambiguous in many ways. Yet they are strong sinew of human life and society since the time immemorial till up to date. Now, however, many wonder if they are seriously challenged because traditional sets of values are fast melting, as it were, and, by the same token, people at large are challenged by ethics and moral principles because many of them are quite at a loss and embarrassed by the new developments such as transplanting human organs from one to another.

### Defining Ethics, Moral and Religions

With a view to pinning down the discussion in this paper, key terms must be defined in the first place. Firstly a whole set of principles relating to good and bad in human behavior is here termed as ethics, while moral would be understood more as ethics in practice. Of course, it is a fact that ethics originate originally from a Greek term of *etica*, while a Roman term of *moralis* meaning more a daily practical side turned into our jargon of moral. Hence both terms tend to be put together, with moral leaning more towards practical world for daily actions.

Religions should be considered a comprehensive world concept, mainly centering on the notion of the absolute, God, Buddha or Allah. What results from the recognition of the absolute is multifarious indeed, extending to various social practices such as funeral and garments to put on. More significant may be a set of ethical teachings; compassion, love, sincerity, repentance, asceticism, humbleness, and so on. Hence religions serve as a source of ethics and a moral incentive for actual human actions and speeches.

The intent of these definitions is not to argue that they are the only one nor are they most authoritative, but rather in my belief they would clear our mind in tackling the question before us in this conference.

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### **Characteristics of Ethical Challenges in the Contemporary World**

Ethics had been challenged and ignored throughout history just as any tax levied by governments is doomed to be a target of evasion. However, the manner in which ethics is challenged in our contemporary age seems to reflect the major difficulties which were not really salient in the past:

#### **Magnified by state involvement**

The scale of ethical challenge has been enlarged since the last century mainly due to the involvement by states in major ethical problems. One can immediately make a reference to such cases as anti-Semitism under Nazism, mass killing by Khmer Rouge in Cambodia, and an ongoing question of Palestinian people under the Israeli occupation. The fact that the utilities that became available for states in administration and military operations had been developed enormously compared to previous centuries, such as modern weapons and chemical products, made it all possible to happen. One must admit that unfortunately this process will go on as long as these tools develop further and state administration finds it more effective to make use of them for its own objectives, whether be ethically sanctioned or not.

#### **Speed and preciseness of media and internet**

The second feature of the contemporary ethical challenges is the speed and preciseness that these challenges are reported and become widely known to public at once. Reports could be exaggerated occasionally but the audience can only be its victim. It is needless to say that a rapid growth of information technology is the key player in this development. It is true that ethical questions exist no matter whether they are reported or not, however, once they become known, the perception of ethical challenges would naturally be expanded and the number of ethical issues would increase. The increment in quantity may acquire a qualitative nature, at least in setting a priority of agenda. WikiLeaks may be the latest example of this nature, though the problem so far is taken only in the context of the confidentiality of security information, and is not as yet causing any problems involving the question of privacy of any individuals, though there are no guarantee that WikiLeaks may work against any set of human rights and values as enjoyed in most countries.

#### **Loss of impact**

Enlarging magnitude and increasing numbers of issues have entailed, as I see, a loss of sharp impact of ethical arguments and moral requirements. Lying behind this development are the phenomena such as those in the following:

##### ***New issues***

New questions are replete in our contemporary world; homosexual marriage, selling of human corpus in segments, inhuman methods of mass destruction, business disinformation of merchandise and so on. These constitute challenges because ethics need to respond to them, and these are problematic because ethical codes cannot always do so timely and adequately.

### ***Pursuit of richness***

Material concern has been a major cause of human endeavor throughout world history. However, the victory of American system in the Cold War enhanced such an inclination, while newly born Russia has given a free hand to spiritual activities by allowing the rejuvenation of religious practice in the country. A call for the free market economy had soon to be accompanied by monetary greed and had to be responded by an opposition against unilateralism and impoverishing the already poor nations and people around the world.

### ***Recess of religions***

Loss of religious power and authority is too big a question to cover fully in this paper, but it is obviously a long standing issue in the world community. Religions, as defined above, has been the major fountain of ethics and nothing else could play a similar role, since reasons could not provide any real foundations for good or bad. As is well recognized, reason is not in a position to offer the teachings for ethics and could not answer the purpose of human existence nor indeed a real objective for human life. Also one could say that any development in materials has not always been accompanied by a concomitant spiritual awareness and elevation. Hence we see before us an enormous unbalance between two zones of material development and of the religious and ethical world.

### **A Glimpse into the Contemporary Japanese Society**

It may be a part of my role here to present even briefly the state of the contemporary Japanese society, although it offers no big exceptions to various problems as observed above in the world scene.

### **Problems caused by the state authority**

State involvement in many war crimes during the Pacific War is a salient fact on top of various other more recent problems of political fraud and decay in relation to some of the top political leaders. Sometimes they are sources of bewilderment in ethical judgment when, for example, the government lies to the nation on major issues such as allowing US nuclear war ships to visit Japanese ports. Since almost half a century, the Japanese government proclaimed to the nation that it never concluded a secret agreement with the US to that effect. Government harassment against ordinary citizens is not a story of the past either, such as forced testimony by police officers in criminal investigations or fabricating information by public prosecutors to support their allegations in criminal courts against innocent suspects. These and other similar cases are, however, studied and handled in a just and fair manner to the extent possible thanks to a transparent nature of the society.

### **Dissemination by media and internet**

Media seeks its own interests occasionally, in particular when faced with a competition with other agencies. Exaggeration might take place in those cases. Furthermore, we know that internet information cannot be guaranteed of its accurateness or indeed its authenticity. Leaks of government information are hard to

say whether they are bad or good, particularly when the leaked bits of information seems to serve public interests. In those cases, people might find it hard to locate exactly where the true loyalty to the nation must be fixed and relied upon.

### **Age of Atheism / radical secularization**

Pre-war experiences of religious intervention in politics gave rise to apathy towards religions at large in the post-war Japanese society. In particular, the state-religion of Shintoism had been made to work with the military government. Hence secularization policy was taken for granted under the present constitution. Presently a complete separation between religions and politics is strictly observed, though without any strong hold of ethical and religious principles to follow among the people.

### **World record of suicide cases**

Among many phenomena arising from the loss of spiritual pillars is the big number of suicide cases in Japan, that is, 30,000 a year. It is one the largest number ever recorded among all the nations in the world. The government seeks to reduce this record by way of setting special task forces and consultative offices for the youngsters here and there in the country.

### **Loss of confidence in education**

The utilitarian view in the new education system after the Pacific War has obviously been the cause of the loss of confidence and the lack of genuine spiritual activities in Japanese society in more recent years. It has a serious implication in providing inadequately an ideal to youngsters and love for nation and respect to elders. More direct daily needs of material pleasure turned out to be their usual goals. As to family education, ethics lost its essential role to play. Many young parents are facing difficulties to find what principles of values and life targets to teach to their children, while many kids go astray from both schools and homes. The present government under Mr. Abe will introduce the subject of teaching moral in public schools in Japan from this academic year, however, the Ministry of Education will first need to fix the textbooks and to raise a new group of school teachers for this new syllabus. Thus one sees clearly the seriousness and depth of the present difficulty as facing the contemporary Japanese society.

### **Confirming Some Ethical Principles**

While awaiting a recovery of religious invigoration, it is worth giving some thoughts to main ethical principles that need to be highlighted once again in this century, whether be in Japan or in the world scene at large. The references to these principles are made in a hope to stand against the loss of ethical impact as described above.

### **Human limits and asceticism**

Humans need to live on by way of balancing and to find a way out somewhere in the middle. It is because human resources are limited. Asceticism or *Zuhd* in Arabic has

been one of the ethical principles maintained in many religions in the world. A recent call for the middle-way or *al-Wasatiyya* in Arabic should be more emphasized with a particular reference to this context. It can be construed as modesty in a more conventional fashion. One may learn from thinking that less is better and the least is the best. This might have a direct implication in environmental questions, since it leads to saving energy and preserving natural resources.

### **Sincerity and honesty or *Sidq***

Being sincere and honest has been the basic ethical principle in any cultures around the world. “Honesty is the best policy” should not be taken in terms of utilitarianism. Many leaks going around in the internet world ought to be appreciated so long as they are supported by a belief in this saying. Honesty should not be judged by verbal expressions only, only because this outer side is regulated by law in many cases. Here one is reminded of his faithfulness to his inner judgment also, as it is regulated by ethics and moral only.

### **Sacrifice and altruism or *Tadhiya and Ithar***

Martyrdom is hailed in many cultures as well. Behind this act of martyrdom lies one’s preparedness for sacrifice and volunteering spirit for some major cause-celèbre. For what and how one should commit himself to sacrifice is another big question, of course, but, for the sake of a brief discussion here, let us suffice it to mention the essential value of maintaining this ethical principle as a motto. Also a psycho analyst might point out some egoistic motives behind martyrdom, but again let us put this detailed elaboration aside for the sake of this paper.

### **Justice or ‘*Adl***

Not much else is needed to discuss this element, owing to its intrinsic value and a long history behind it. Social justice has also been emphasized in modern times both in the West and the East. Compared to the above three elements, this last one of justice may still be what people are most conscious of, and is the one most actively pursued in the contemporary world. What is confusing to many is the difference between the notion of justice in a moral sense and the one in a legal context. We note many an activist goes out in streets shouting, “Justice for all,” though mostly they entertain its notion as a moral value and certainly not in any legal context. One is not allowed to enforce any actions with a claim of justice upon others unless he is empowered to do so under any specific legal stipulations. But he might enforce others as an ethical and moral code. I am afraid that many young activists are misled and are misunderstanding in this regard by mixing these two sets of regulations.

### **Some Proposals**

All the considerations above must be followed by some proposals in concrete terms, so long as one is to admit that more emphasis should be given to ethics and non-material considerations at large. Here let me cite the following two proposals as a

macro scale measures, while a more micro treatment is certainly no less important for advancing the cause before us.

### **More prominent roles in the United Nations forum**

The genesis of the United Nations, as one recalls, had much to do with moral calls for peace and mutual prosperity based on world cooperation. Once again, this aspect should be reminded by way of allowing spiritual leaders of the world community to play more prominent roles in the UN business.

Proposing what is to be done should be expected from those who are actually running the UN, that is, member governments. But one could easily imagine some clerics taking a podium at the beginning of major sessions of the organization. It is true that Vatican is represented, but it is there now merely as one member state. We should all expect that many other religious leaders could play major roles in an annual session of the General Assembly in its opening, for example.

### **World prize for religions and ethics**

Nobel Prize does not include areas of ethics and religions, though, as we all know, it awards Peace Prize. Nobel Prize does not confer anything in the fields of cultural activities such as music, paintings, sculptures, and so on. Therefore Japan has started to award Japan Prize to the international cultural achievements about two decades ago, though it might have been with a hope that it will eradicate a cynical description of Japan as an economic animal. Now this new project is well under implementation, and every year the Japan Prize is awarded to many artists and performers around the world under the patronage of the Imperial family of the country.

Here I should be duly honored to propose the World Prize for Ethics. With a view to a high esteem that Islam receives from many quarters in the world, it is well placed to start anew such a scheme. Also it will hopefully further strengthen its international position in these areas. The proposed Prize should be aimed at all those who promote the main task in the world arena, without regard to religions, colors and historical backgrounds.

The management of the World Prize for Ethics should undergo a very serious study and research, although its intent is all too clear and straightforward. It is my wish that an initial genuine intent be welcomed by the Muslim leaders and the idea be put into action in the near future.

Before closing, allow me to reiterate my highest regards to the noble task which this DICID has shouldered itself toward this troubled world. It goes without saying that its endeavor should lead to the realization of many of our hopes for peace and prosperity, and we are gathered here today basically to express our support to such an esteemed cause.

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*Omar A. Abboud<sup>1</sup>*

## **The Negative Impact of the Media in the Formation of Moral and Intellectual Principles and Values**

### **Abstract**

The mass media are major opinion makers in the modern world, and many times they tend to generalize all, especially in cases of crimes committed by individuals or groups of people. But is not only the mass media the problem: It is also necessary to agree with the different Academies of Languages upon a definition frame as well as a fair and accurate clarification of the different concepts. I am mentioning this because, for example, in the official dictionary of the Spanish language and in some definitions in dictionaries of the English language, terms such as “fundamentalism” are associated directly with Islam without explaining the true meaning of the concept. In the post-modern world expressions of fundamentalism are easily encountered in most religions, also in politics, economy and other fields of action. The problem is not only the media it is also the questionable action of some intellectuals and academy.

### **Presentation**

I come from The Argentine Republic, a very distant country on the other side of the world, where I was born and raised. Aside from enjoying the beauty and generosity of the people of this place, I am profoundly overwhelmed when I think that my four grandparents were born a few hours distance from here. Taking part in this gathering is an honour, a privilege and, above all, a big responsibility since its content focuses on one of the big issues of the modern world.

The media in today’s world is the biggest, fastest and in some cases the less objective production mechanism of opinion in the living memory of the history of mankind. One can not understand the dynamics of the present days if the principles and methods governing the media, their views and interests are not understood. The present importance of the idea of globalization is intimately related to the deployment that it has acquired in the mass media in recent decades. Historically social practice was concerned in controlling social processes. In this sense, the society influenced by the media, proposes a model in which a few fabricates the information which is afterward widely disseminated to the public. Information is a tool of power and clearly the dominant ideologies are the ones that define what sets knowledge are transmitted to society.

In recent years, technology has produced a comprehensive communication model that allows distant people the knowledge of things that are happening in different places. The global mass media communicate information to the majority of society and, among other things, install truths that agree to the hegemonic model. In

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his book *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (1988),<sup>2</sup> written in collaboration with Edward S. Herman, an American economist and media analyst, Avram Noam Chomsky, an American linguist, philosopher and pacifist, denounced the existence of a series of filters, which are suffered by all the news before publication. Filters, which combined distort and falsify the stories to serve its essential purpose. The mainstream media receive most of their income, not from their readers, but from advertising that is paid by big companies.

As the media are actually companies that aim to maximize profit, Chomsky and Herman argue that one should expect only the publication of news that reflect the wishes, expectations and values of the companies that finance them. The knowledge of what happens is built in the spaces of power and these spaces are what determine the legitimate representation of the information. Therefore, the actual information installed by the mainstream media is what indicates us the core values. The power speech is positioned from a place that does not leave much room for doubt. The building up of the story that disseminates information is often a single discourse that prevents us questioning. This is not only associated, for example, with the segmentation or editing of an event, but also a person in today's world does not have enough time to investigate and verify the accuracy of the facts received from the media: in many cases the reader is just a consumer of titles and images.

The media not only affect public opinion in their ideological position, or the election of a government but are essential to promote the consumer culture. The mass media matter is very broad and can be analyzed from many points of view. In this presentation I will try to address some perspectives related to Islam and the media as well as some general aspects regarding the dissemination of mass information. At this point I also want to clarify that not all media are equal, and above all journalists and social communicators often make the difference in favor of the truth and honest exercise of their profession.

Having said that I would like to share some thoughts:

A friend of mine often said that “the reality is superior to the idea.” Since the media often try to prove that their conceived idea is superior to reality, or reflects reality better. To carry out this action many media need to build a symbolic story that allows the recipient of the information to believe as truthful. In the case of Islam to build a negative stereotype is not new, it comes from a process initiated some years ago which also includes part of the academia that provides the ideological basis (namely, the creation of a theoretical framework), and others such as cinema and narrative, as well as the mass media.

We are going to enumerate some examples of the above. The official dictionary of my language [The Dictionary of the Royal Spanish Academy of Language], as well as some definitions in dictionaries of English, words such as “fundamentalism” are directly associated with Islam, without explaining the true meaning of the concept, because in the post modern world we can find expressions

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<sup>2</sup> Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*. New York: Pantheon, 2002.

of fundamentalism in most religions as well as politics, economy and other fields. The current definition of fundamentalism in the Spanish language says: “Mass movement which intends to re-establish Islamic purity by the strict implementation of Qur’an in social life”.

Fundamentalism today is a mental category, or a way of acting in general by minority groups. This definition, which comes from a place like an academy of language, which defines the meaning of a word often in a biased way, is nothing more than the intellectual support from which the media, movies or literature, start building reality from that idea.

Some years ago, when this process of disinformation about Islam was not as acute as it is today, it caught my attention in a journal that I found different expressions that were written to describe the same reality in two photo epigraphs. In one of them, a pilgrimage to a popular shrine was showed and the epigraph said “love and faith of the people of hope filled the streets of the city.” In the other one a few days later it showed the pilgrims circling the Kaaba. This time the epigraph read: “Religious fanaticism makes the pilgrimage to Mecca one of the expressions of the world’s largest religion.”

Then we see how from the perception of the massive media Muslims had been transformed in the bad guy of the movie, as well as a permanent link between two different realities: Islam as religious and cultural reality and fundamentalism as a way of acting and interpreting reality. Thus the idea of fundamentalism is always linked to Islam.

Roman Gubern, the historian of Spanish mass medias, says “Cinema is a universal art and a mass art. It is by television, the spokesman of the myths and the most intense emotions, that large crowds of today’s world are moved.”

In the plots of some films it can be tested a number of constant narratives. In all, the action is carried out by a “white” man that is sent to an Arab country with a mission to salvage something - people or treasures - from the hands of unscrupulous characters that, in most cases, are Arabs.

In these media and social constructions, Arabs and Muslims are characterised as different, as the “Others”. I will not emphasize historical falsehoods nor stop in commenting anachronisms. Briefly, I will make a review of some of the stereotypes presented there, while noting that an stereotype can be considered as a step to prejudice, which in turn precedes discrimination.

It is interesting to note that all these movies, without exception, seek above all the entertainment and spectacle, or as it was said by two thinkers of enormous depth and originality, Max Hokheimer and Theodor Adorno, “intellectual laziness and uncritical leisure.”<sup>3</sup>

The Arab world is presented not only as a perfect scenario for adventure and spectacle, which is never short of camels, souks and deserts, but also accompanied

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<sup>3</sup> Max Hokheimer y Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialéctica de la ilustración: Fragmentos filosóficos*. Madrid: Trotta, 2003, p. 55.

by what the American educator Shirley R. Steinberg called metaphorically “aroma vision”, a cinematographic effect described as follows: “As one could vividly the camel dirty smeared sweat clinging clothing of Muslim characters. The market scenes imply that Islamic countries center their cities and livelihoods on the market place. All this, together with the stereotypical representation of Arabs, does not favour the humanization of these characters.

The language that usually refers to the Arab characters also favours the dehumanization of this group. The word “barbarian” referring to them appears in almost all the films analyzed in particular. The use of this Orientalist stereotype is linked to others as “ignorant” and “dirty”.

Some ethnocentric speeches contain the four main problems, according to Miquel Rodrigo, an expert on Information Sciences and Law from the Autonomous University of Barcelona, that preclude a real intercultural communication: overgeneralization, ignorance of the other culture, oversizing of the differences and universalization of the own perspective.<sup>4</sup>

Following the definition of Miquel Rodrigo, the solution to these Orientalist discourses could be summarized in the following points:

1. Start intercultural dialogue (critical and self-critical) to know the “Others”.
2. Eliminate the negative stereotypes that each culture creates of other cultures.
3. Start intercultural negotiation from a position of equality. Aiming to achieve a new balance among the destabilizing political and economic international powers.
4. Highlight the relativity of our culture that will lead to the understanding of alternative values and, eventually, acceptance. Meaning to become closer and closer to an intercultural identity that will allow us to recognize that the values of our culture are not unique, but only, perhaps, preferable.

In synthesis: “The contacts between cultures have been for too long a confrontation. Multiculturalism intended, as soon as possible, to become an area of cooperation, to end up being simply a space of humanization.”<sup>5</sup>

Violence, situations of injustice or human rights violations occur throughout the length and width of the modern world. When we analyze these events, more than once we see that the media commits a mistake, at least, methodological if not malicious as Islam is concerned: a fact is shown in particular and from it a general rule is constructed. Even worse, in many cases any offense committed by a person identified with Islam, it is immediately linked to religious motivations instead of seeking its real cause. So, analysts or supposed Islamic affairs specialists analyze the facts in a way lacking real foundations, and whose sole purpose is to be functional to the interests that they represent.

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<sup>4</sup> Miquel Rodrigo, *Identitats i comunicació intercultural*. Valencia: Edicions 3i4, 2000, pp. 73-77.

<sup>5</sup> Miquel Rodrigo, *Comunicació intercultural*. Barcelona: Anthropos Editorial, 1999, p. 243.

Many media are often producers of idols or concepts that idolatrise. Also, they create influential interlocutors, who are rarely questioned and give opinions about everything, including fields that are beyond their knowledge. Whenever we talk about the monotheistic religions, we evoke the Prophet Abraham (P), as a common origin. Curious is that many of the dilemmas faced Abraham in his time come again into effect today.

In the Holy Qur'an we find an experience of Abraham in Chapter 6, Surah *Al-An'am*, between verses 74 and 79:

“74. And (remember) when Ibrahim (Abraham) said to his father Azar: “Do you take idols as *aliha* (gods)? Verily, I see you and your people in manifest error.”

75. Thus did we show Ibrahim (Abraham) the kingdom of the heavens and the earth that he be one of those who have Faith with certainty.

76. When the night covered him over with darkness he saw a star. He said: “This is my lord.” But when it set, he said: “I like not those that set.”

77. When he saw the moon rising up, he said: “This is my lord.” But when it set, he said: “Unless my Lord guides me, I shall surely be among the erring people.”

78. When he saw the sun rising up, he said: “This is my lord. This is greater.” But when it set, he said: “Oh my people! I am indeed free from all that you join as partners in worship with Allah.”

79. Verily, I have turned my face towards Him Who has created the heavens and the earth Hanifa (Islamic Monotheism, i.e. worshipping none but Allah Alone) and I am not of *Al-Mushrikun*.

In the same way that the star, the moon and the sun mentioned in the text, in the modern world there are new idolatries that appear and disappear, or that seem to illuminate but in fact obscure. In some cases, they are worse than the statues worshiped by the father of Abraham.

These statues were made of stone, they did not harm or benefit while many of the idols of the modern world speak through the media and influence many people to agree on manifest errors. Also concepts such as security and economic benefits are idolized, namely, such realities are constructed as an irreducible and almost absolute principle, placed prior to the human dimension. Security is not necessarily peace, and economic benefits are not a guarantee to social justice.

The ideas expressed above are formulated in objective terms, not much research is needed to discover them. Although they express their centrality in the relationship between Islam and the media, the problem generated goes far beyond the Muslims, since their content attacks one of the core values that we have to defend as human, and that is the idea of coexistence.

There is no more dangerous enemy of peace and human convivence<sup>6</sup> that ignorance and misinformation. Information processes that end disguising reality are

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<sup>6</sup> From Latin *convivere* (“living together”), *con-* (“together”) + *vivere* (“to live”).

the seeds that will grow tomorrow in the form of discrimination, injustice, lack of freedom and other major diseases.

At this point we must ask what is the role of religion in the modern world to preserve the values of coexistence among men. The late twentieth century and the time elapsed of the new century, show us every day that the incidence of religious identity is increasingly important in collective terms. This implies that we must reinforce the idea of dialogue not only from the leadership, but also from those aspects of which the common man is the main actor. And I mean an active dialogue.

Sometimes I think that many of the initiatives on interreligious dialogue have failed to go beyond the making of a diagnosis of reality, and were unable to do anything to change that reality. This puts the interfaith dialogue in a situation of theoretical and formal experience that just makes it a sort of sub-diplomatic experience.

A major challenge for those who participate in a vision of active dialogue, implies not only to talk to the other of a different religion, but also to sit down and work with those with whom we share the same faith to generate the necessary confidence that means the matter of the interreligious dialogue in its many expressions. For many people these formats of dialogue we raise today are relatively new. I am not saying that there have not been contacts in the past, but it is undeniable that the need for interreligious dialogue at present is increasing.

Unfortunately not all human groups are in favour of building up interreligious dialogue, either for fear to explore this road or the belief that it somehow may mix identities. Also there are arguments that postulate a possible disaffection to “what we are”, or “where we come from”.

To conclude, I would like to tell you that in my country I preside over an organization called Instituto del Diálogo Interreligioso (Institute of Interreligious Dialogue), whose foundation was driven some years ago by the former Archbishop of the City of Buenos Aires, Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio, today Pope Francis. I have had the privilege to share a lot of conversations with him, with the idea that interreligious and intercultural dialogue is one of the essentials of the times we live in. I have also better understood the verse of the Sacred Qur’an which states “you shall find closer to the love of the believers those who say we are Christian, because they have priests who are not arrogant”. I remember that in one of his speeches and during a conflict in our Nation he expressed: “bear in mind that the whole is superior to the pieces”. Inside of interfaith dialogue is the same idea.

To me it makes sense to open the door of dialogue and reasoning with the other, as there is no danger of overturning the identity if there is trust and confidence in what you believe. From here knowledge, cooperation and new perspectives are added, matters that provide the basis for convivence. In many cases we are faced with the obstacle of a historical burden that has built mutilated visions between societies and civilizations.

History is ultimately an inheritance. Then it is our responsibility how we will construct the future. In this regard, we must build a legacy that will allow generations to be more efficient in the construction of peace, justice and truth.

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## **Christian - Muslim Relations in the UAE: A Case Study**

### **Abstract**

This paper is a case study of the United Arab Emirates. It examines Christian – Muslim relations and seeks to identify the main factors which have led to an environment in which religious tolerance and freedom has flourished. Finally it suggests ways in which the Christian community can respond to the religious climate in the United Arab Emirates.

### **Introduction**

The Middle East is a diverse environment for the church. In some Arab countries the experience of the Christian community is one of extreme persecution, while in others the Christian community itself can be the aggressors. One of the little known experiences of the church in the West is the tolerance of the Gulf States on the other side of the Arabian Peninsula towards people of other faiths. This gives the lie to the belief that Islam is inherently intolerant and hostile to the religious other. Clearly other factors are at work which leads to an environment in which there is spiritual and intellectual safety within an Islamic context.

This paper examines one country in the Gulf to demonstrate factors which leads to the emergence of a society who are respected for their moderate religious approach to people of other faiths, the United Arab Emirates.

In the United Arab Emirates the level of religious tolerance is often commented on by visitors. The churches are visible, crowded and vibrant. This is in stark contrast to other countries where people of minority faiths live in a climate of fear and uncertainty. “Why does the UAE (and other Gulf countries) have open and tolerant societies and what are the factors that sustain this moderate social and religious climate?”

### **Rentier State Theory**

In the academic field of studies in the Gulf, rentier state theory predominates. Rentier state theory proposes that Gulf politics is about the rulers ‘buying out’ their citizens in a ruling bargain which promises a share in and access to wealth in exchange for their submission and commitment to maintaining the status quo - or to restate in Vandewalle’s memorable quote “the reverse principle of no representation without taxation” (1987:160).

Rentier State processes are typified by the ‘creation of a primary commodity export economy dependent on the importation for foreign capital equipment creating and perpetuating a situation of underdevelopment’ (Cockcroft et al 1972). The

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whole economic edifice in Rentier economy therefore serves the interests of small elite who rent out their assets to beneficial parties.

Rentier State theory would seem to support Weberian analysis, in which the premise that the economy and religion of a society are intricately bound in a union which shapes the destiny of their members. This theory implies that the more control that the ruling family have over the main mode of production – the less social liberties, including religious freedoms, will be enjoyed by the members of their societies. Empirical studies seem to bear this out (Buckley & Mantilla 2013, Alkhater 2012, Tarzi & Schakow 2012).

For example, the main economic engine for Saudi Arabia is the oil industry. This has resulted in the ability of the state to exercise a high level of control over her citizens including the level of religious freedom. By contrast, the Emirate of Dubai (part of the UAE) has a rapidly depleting oil supply and so has diversified the economy through promoting free market capitalism and enterprise. This means less state control over the economic modes of production and the result is the largest number of church buildings and compounds to be found anywhere in the Arabian Gulf.

The real picture however is more complex. Qatar for example shares the same Islamic epistemology as Saudi Arabia, the ruling family has control of the oil assets and yet recently has agreed to permit the building of Christian Churches. Oman, in contrast has a more diverse economy in which the oil revenues provides a smaller percentage of the overall income – yet it retains a high level of control over religious communities, albeit in a discrete way in which the churches collaborate with the government, for example on issues such as who should be given visas as religious leaders in the Christian community. This increasing complexity over control of religious freedoms has led one Omani scholar to posit that Arab Gulf States are now in a post-rentier economy in which the threat of diminishing oil supplies is enforcing the diversity of modes of production (Al-Farsi 2013).

The main criticism of rentier state theory is that it places too much emphasis on a single criterion. As Muhammad Al Rumayhi said “The Gulf is not just oil”. Other critical factors include the outworking of Islamic belief through state mechanisms, the emphasis of a particular school of Islam in informing attitudes of the faithful towards people of other faiths and the historical and cultural tradition of tribal politics. Other important factors are the pre-oil experience of Gulf States towards people of other cultures and faiths. Lastly, the personality and ethos of the rulers themselves have a big impact on the attitudes of their people.

## **The UAE**

In our case study we are going to examine some of these factors.

### **The ruling family**

These include the magnanimous character of the founding father of the UAE nation the late Sheikh Zayed. Although his education was rudimentary in terms of formal



schooling, his character formed in the crucible of tribal politics, was typified by generosity, wisdom, curiosity and an openness to new ideas and people.

In 1960 he met and invited Dr Pat Kennedy to Al Ain in order to set up a hospital. Dr Kennedy, an American Evangelical Christian arrived and within a short time lowered the infant mortality rate from over 50% down to single figures. As the sole provider of medical care in the district, the Christian Mission Oasis hospital soon won the respect and the friendship of the local people. Most of the current generation of the ruling family of Abu Dhabi were born in the Oasis hospital. A deep respect between the doctor and the sheikh flourished.

The early Christian missionaries in the UAE (and in other Gulf countries) were all people who committed themselves to learning Arabic, understanding cultural norms and becoming familiar with Islam. This helped them to serve the local Arab people more effectively. The resulting medical mission was a direct outworking of their own Christian convictions.

Sheikh Zayed had many advisers, among them he counted as a close friend the late Edward Henderson who appealed to the Sheikh to provide land for the Anglican Church in Abu Dhabi. The depth of friendship between Edward Henderson and the Al Nahayan sheikhs is retold in his book *Arabian Destiny*.

One outcome of this mutual friendship was that the visionary ruling sheikhs saw a concrete benefit of fostering religious freedom and tolerance in their own country. The result was opening the country to thousands of Christian workers who helped lead and develop the oil and gas industry, the health sector and the education sectors. In return, the Christian community got to enjoy the freedom to worship in churches (built on land donated by the ruling family) with security and confidence.

The Emirate of Sharjah, the al-Qassimi family had similarly permitted a Christian missionary to set up a medical clinic. Dr Sarah Hosman set up a clinic in 1951. A formidable and tireless pioneer of primary medical care. As in Al Ain, the Sarah Hosman hospital had an overt Christian ethos which was tolerated by the local people. Many of the current Al Qassimi ruling family were born in that clinic. Today Sharjah is home to many churches, including a magnificent Russian Orthodox Church complete with onion domes.

Over in Fujairah, the oldest maternity clinic was founded and run by Christian medics from the UK and Holland. An outreach ministry to the huge offshore anchorage in the form of a hospitality ship which provides sailors with pastoral care is supported by the ruling family. With over forty centres of worship built throughout the United Arab Emirates the presence of Christianity is not only visible but welcomed by the whole community.

## **Islam**

When we look at the role of Islam as a factor we find that different Emirates in the UAE subscribe to different schools of Islam. While Dubai and Abu Dhabi subscribe to the Maliki Islamic school, Sharjah and Ras Al Khaimah (which also hosts a growing number of churches) belong to the Wahhabi school of Islam – which is

widely perceived in the West as being intolerant to people of other faiths. Clearly the Wahhabi school is not inherently opposed to people of other faiths.

This undermines any attempt to look at the different schools of Islamic doctrine as a source for differential treatment of other faith communities. The Maliki School allows consensus of the ‘ulama, in addition to the primary sources of the Qur’an and the Hadith. This might suggest that the Malikis have a greater responsive adaptability to modernisation and changing circumstances, which would be in contrast to the Wahhabis who have closed the gates to any tradition of innovation or evolving sources of authority extra to these primary texts. The reality though is that both Maliki and Wahhabi authorities have allowed churches to flourish within the UAE.

The main role of Islam in the UAE (which is the constitutionally enshrined state religion) when it comes to legislating the presence of the Christian community are as follows:

- Christians should not proselytise Muslims (attempt to convert or change someone’s religious identity).
- Christian men cannot marry Muslim women.
- Public acts of Christian worship should only take place within officially recognised centres of worship. The growing number of worship centres in the UAE is in line with responding to the growing number of Christian expatriates moving into the Emirates.

This is reflected across all the GCC states in which barring one country, Islam is the official constitutional religion in which religious freedom is permitted, albeit within the framework of the Islamic paradigm. The UAE is not unique in the form of Islam practised and is home to several expressions of Islam including the Shi’a, the Ismailis and Sufis. It would be easy to conclude then, that Islam is not a factor in explaining the tolerance of other faiths embedded in the UAE culture. An important factor is that the UAE’s commitment to moderate Islam is promoted by the state through the mechanism of the Ministry of Awqaf (Religious Affairs). The Ministry of Awqaf in the UAE, is the main employer of imams who receive training, assessment and salaries from the state. The Friday sermon is prepared by the Ministry of Awqaf and delivered by the imams on their payroll across the emirates. This ensures a uniformity of Islamic teaching and a national ethic of religious moderation is maintained by the state.

Investment into Islamic moderation is manifest through a fiscal commitment to the Al Azhar University in recognition of its historical role as a source of authority in the Islamic world, including a recent opening of a branch of the same in the UAE itself. Other bodies who are tasked by the UAE with the promotion of a moderate Islamic world view include the Tabah Foundation and the Kalam Institute who receive state funds as a means of normalising a secure and tolerant climate.

### **Maritime heritage**

Another contributory factor to a tolerant environment is the history of trade in the region. Commercial activity by necessity, demands a level of trust and friendship which transcends nationality and religion. Dubai in particular has a long history of trading with not only other Gulf countries, but also India. Contacts with the latter country have resulted in an openness to people of the Hindu and Sikh faith. This is seen through the provision of a Sikh Gurudwara and a Hindu centre of worship. The only other place in the Gulf with a similar level of openness to non-Abrahamic religions is Muscat which also has a centuries old maritime tradition.

It must be noted that not all maritime encounters with ‘the other’ in the region we now define as the UAE have been benign. The arrival of the Portuguese Royal Navy was not an auspicious encounter between Western Christianity and the Gulf Arab Muslims. Resident historian of the UAE, Frauke Heard-Bey, also commented about this bitter legacy of the Portuguese ‘Christians’ in her book *From Trucial States to United Arab Emirates*:

“The memory of the indiscriminate killing of women, children and the old, and the mutilations inflicted on their prisoners by the Portuguese became engraved on the minds of Arabs living anywhere between the Red Sea and the Persian coast and were remembered as the deeds of Christians.<sup>6</sup> The Portuguese went on to dominate the Eastern coasts of Arabia, building forts in order to project their power over the local people. The Arabs did not take kindly to this and there was constant rebellion against these foreign ‘Christian’ invaders” (Heard-Bey 2004:282).

Likewise Dr Sheikh Sultan al Qassimi (the current ruler of Sharjah) records the clashes between the British and Indian Marine Navy and the Qawasim tribe in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century in his work *The Myth of Arab Piracy in the Gulf*.

Despite this negative history, and the awareness of the Gulf Arabs that Western powers have exploited and manipulated them as part of their imperial and political ambitions (even in the modern era there is a well-founded distrust of Western business powers as documented in Mohammed al Fahim’s book *From Rags to Riches: The Story of Abu Dhabi*) - interfaith relations have flourished. Clearly, the rise of a tolerant climate in the UAE cannot simply be a product of trade relations.

### **The Christian missionaries**

Perhaps negating the negative encounters with Western Christianity, was the arrival and work of the Arabian Mission. The rise of medical mission across the Gulf from Muscat, Bahrain to Iraq has been well documented in Scudder’s monumental work *In Search of Abraham’s Other Son* (1998). The early American doctors and nurses who served in the Mission embodied an ethic which was winsome and attractive. Serving selflessly, adapting and suffering in the same harsh environment as the people they served, they provided primary medical care without financial gain. They sought fluency in Arabic, adopted local culture, immersed themselves in understanding Islamic theology and followed tribal politics with keen interest.

Several died in post, victims of the same climate and diseases which claimed the lives of their own patients.

The ruling families in the Gulf, though wary at first, soon befriended and welcomed the American missionaries as a group who were beneficial for their own people. Although the Gospel message presented by the missionaries was by and large resisted by the local people, their nonetheless was a deep respect and affection between the missionaries and the local people which lingers to this day.

At a time when there was no oil wealth, no electricity, no state infrastructure, no creature home comforts, negated any sinister motivations that might be attributed to the missionaries. Clearly, their selfless service was primarily motivated out of religious conviction – and this was understood and respected (al-Sayegh 1996).

Yet, not all the countries in the Gulf permitted the missionaries a permanent presence in the form of hospitals or schools - this, despite the missionaries being invited into those countries on visits to provide medical treatment for members of the ruling families and their tribes. Other Gulf countries welcomed them, but as time went on, the hospitals were taken over by the emerging State Ministries of Health (as in Kuwait and Oman), or the mission hospitals simply closed due to lack of funding or staff (as in Iraq and Sharjah).

The UAE has not only permitted the Christian hospitals to remain (especially in Al Ain and Fujeirah) and also provided permission for the Christians to worship and provided land for churches to be built.

### **Tribal hospitality**

Perhaps this atmosphere of tolerance in the UAE has nothing to do with trade or religion, whether Islamic or Christian but more to do with the deeply ingrained hospitality ethic of the Arabian tribes. Gina Crocetti Benesh, in her book describing the culture of the United Arab Emirates, explains why hospitality is so important in the Arabian Peninsula:

“Hospitality may be the single most important law of the desert. Without it, people travelling in the desert away from their groups would die. Even poor people are required to feed and shelter strangers and guests for an obligatory three days. The guest may leave after a few days without ever stating his name or business because it is rude for the host to ask” (Benesh 2009: 76).

This culture of hospitality is deeply rooted in Arab culture and predates Islam and Christianity. The overall picture is complicated however, as the same environment also produces a well-established pattern of ‘anti-hospitality’ namely in the form of a tradition of tribes raiding each other’s livestock. Resulting blood feuds can also lead to institutionalised treachery and bloodshed. This culture of hospitality and ‘anti-hospitality’ transcends national boundaries and is found in all the GCC states. The UAE is part of this and yet the level of religious tolerance and welcome is not equal in the other Gulf States. Clearly this is not a sole factor in explaining the open climate of religious hospitality in the UAE.

### **Recent trends**

The growing trend of globalisation across the GCC has seen shopping malls flooded with retail brands which are familiar in the West and East. The rapid rise of social media, satellite television, and global access to media via the internet has exposed the Gulf Arab to other cultures as never before. Even more significant is the establishing of educational franchises linked with famous universities around the world. Thus Abu Dhabi boasts being home to the New York University and the Paris Sorbonne University. Private schools linked with Repton, Brighton College and Cranleigh are also sprouting in the UAE in recognition of the world class education they provide. All this cultivates an ethos of openness to the 'religious other' by virtue of bringing an international student body together into the same globalized space.

The commitment to the global community is also expressed through the UAE diplomacy and humanitarian commitments. One creative expression of this was experienced by the author of this paper, when he was invited by the ambassador of the UAE to the UK to present the story of Christianity in the UAE to the British Parliament. The underlying agenda of this presentation was to highlight an alternative narrative coming out of the Islamic world with regards to the generous level of religious freedom enjoyed by the Christian community in the UAE.

### **Conclusion**

As we have seen, there several factors which contribute to the climate of religious tolerance and security in the UAE with regards to religious freedom. Perhaps the most significant is the commitment of the ruling families to promote a moderate Islam through the state mechanism of the Ministry of Awqaf and their desire to be integrated into the global economy through trade, culture and diplomacy.

The only commensurate data we can rely on when it comes to comparisons within the GCC states are the number of churches and temples permitted within the country. On this basis, the UAE surpasses other countries in the region. Whatever the reasons are for this a critical question to ask is "how do the Christian churches respond to this generous level of religious freedom in the UAE?"

### **The response of the church**

To understand the response of the church towards religious freedom in the UAE it is first necessary to understand the nature of the church. There are several common features of the church across the GCC.

Firstly, the church is an expatriate church. With the exception of Kuwait and Bahrain the churches in the Gulf consist entirely of migrant workers drawn from India, other Arab countries, the Philippines, Africa and the West. Thus the main feature of the church is a highly transient population. The typical 'stay' of an expatriate Christian will be two to three years and they regard their 'home church' as the one which is in the country of their origin. This means that investment in 'church' in terms of finance and energy is largely diverted back to the sending countries resulting in churches which largely cater for a passive congregation.

Secondly, the churches in the Gulf are diverse in every way possible. They embrace multiple traditions and languages and nationalities and denominations and sects. The Reverend Rolf Pearson, a former liaison officer for the Middle Eastern Council of Churches (MECC), summarized the almost bewildering array of Christian churches found throughout the modern Gulf and especially in the UAE.

All the four main streams of Christianity are represented in the Gulf: the Oriental Orthodox, the Eastern (Greek) Orthodox, the Catholic, and the Protestant. The MECC is dominated by Arab Christians, and almost all the member churches of the MECC, especially of the two Orthodox families (the Oriental Orthodox and the Eastern Orthodox), have congregations in the Gulf (Greek Orthodox, Copts, Syrian Orthodox and the Armenians). (Pearson 2004).

John Gravois described a marathon day of Christian worship at one of the church compounds in Abu Dhabi. His article for The National newspaper captures the sheer diversity of the UAE Church. He wrote:

Here in Abu Dhabi, conditions were oddly perfect for a sprint through the evolutionary history of Christianity. The Jacobite Syrian Orthodox mass was about to start. Named after the Sixth Century Bishop, Jacob Baradaeus, they trace their origins to the Apostle Thomas. As the priest emerged in ornate vestments, flanked by clouds of incense and bells, the Jacobite ritual struck me as thoroughly ancient. As I headed out of the church, the priest's liturgical chants jostled with the keyboard like one century with another. I attended the Bethel Tamil church. Their worship vaguely reminded me of the American evangelism I knew from television. It therefore struck me as somewhat ahistorical as compared to the Jacobites. Meanwhile, across the courtyard in the community centre, a rock concert was in full swing. The stage was crowded with a full drum set, seven backup singers, a keyboardist, a guitarist, a bassist and a lead singer, all under a golden banner that said 'All Nations Full Gospel Ministry.' The congregation, a diverse but predominantly Filipino group, was standing and swaying in place.

The Ethiopian Orthodox mass was starting. Like the Jacobites, the Ethiopian church traces its earliest origins back to the days of the apostles. The priests and the congregation chanted continuously back and forth, with the parishioners periodically lowering themselves to the floor in deep bows, which altered the resonance of their collective hum. At around 5pm I attended 'Calvary International Ministries'. I later learnt that Calvary International, headquartered in Colombo, Sri Lanka, had sent missionaries to Iceland and North America.

Over the rest of the night, I ducked into a few more services. At one, a Tamil congregation spread out on mats and blankets in the community centre. At another, a Keralite played organ accompaniment to Malayalam versions of old Anglican hymns. Finally, I found the 'Word and Power Assembly'. The church's founding pastor had come from Nigeria, and he had congregations all over the UAE, and that he practiced his own brand of 'full gospel' ministry. His voice was hoarse. Already that day, he had presided at services in Fujairah and Dubai. That night, only seven people came, but they worshipped like they were 70. At the end of my day-

long journey through Christian history, I had arrived at a church in its infancy. (Gravois 2008).

Third, the diversity of traditions and languages usually means that the expatriate church are cocooned in a cultural bubble. They create communities from their homeland which provides security and a sense of home from home. Their social life will often revolve around people from the same congregation consolidating their linguistic, ethnic and religious identity. If they do not speak English or Arabic, then they are even more likely to be isolated or insulated from the wider communities that make up the UAE.

This cultural bubble implies that there will be little interaction with the local Gulf Arabs and indeed this does seem to be the case. Few Christians (especially leaders) actively engage with Emirati society. Even fewer engage with the Emirati people as an Islamic community. The number of priests and pastors who are known by the local Emirati and are seen at local events can be counted on one hand. There are a number of reasons for this.

They are employed to provide pastoral care for their congregations. This is their primary task and anything which is seen to distract them from this task would endanger their employment. This fundamental task is enormously time consuming. As well as preparing services and sermons, there are also small home groups to lead in week nights and pastoral visits to be made at the homes of their church members. To find time and energy outside of these tasks to engage in interfaith relations in what would be seen as a side-line, requires focus and intentionality. Many pastors lack confidence to engage with Emirati society as they feel they have no knowledge of the local culture or of Islam. Language and race can be a barrier. Arabic and English are the main access languages to the wider culture and this excludes those who speak only Korean or Malayalam for example.

Many pastors and church leaders subscribe to cultures and theologies which disable them to encounter people of other faiths in positive and accessible ways. Christianity is a missionary faith and the sole driver for many Christian workers is to 'convert' the other. Unfortunately, some Churches promote such a strong sense of identity, of 'us' and 'them' that people who are outside of that culture become dehumanised or even demonised. Some of the strict Pentecostal traditions for example would see going to the cinema as a sinful activity. So even within their own congregation, a cinema attending member would be sanctioned as a 'sinner'.

Within the theological spectrum attitudes and approaches to other faiths are found on a continuum which ranges from *exclusivism* (which emphasizes that only through faith in Christ and the specific doctrines of their church – can one be saved from eternal damnation) through to *pluralism* (a position which insists that all religions ultimately lead to God). Theologians at either end of the continuum face problems when they engage with Islam. Exclusivists can see Islam as demonic and that Muslims need 'saving', thus resulting in awkward encounters, whereas pluralists deny or undermine the distinctive integrity of both the teachings of Christianity and Islam by insisting that in essence they are the same anyway. These

theological approaches inevitably shape the behaviour and relationships between the faiths.

### **A church response**

Firstly, there needs to be a conviction within the church to engage with the local community. A scriptural mandate is often sought by churches to justify their activities. This can be presented by raising the question of ‘what does it mean to love my neighbour’ or the call to bridge building as raised by 2 Corinthians 5:16-21. The current climate of terrorism and fear highlights the urgency for Christian communities to respond in a spirit which is in line with the ethics of Jesus. ‘Perfect love drives out fear’ and fear is often a product of ignorance and isolation. The task to know our neighbour has never been so urgent as it is now.

Secondly, the church needs to provide awareness training of Islamic culture and beliefs. This is best accomplished in collaboration with local organisations or teachers. There are Christian leaders who specialise in Islamic engagement and they should be encouraged to share their knowledge widely. Similarly, there are books and visual resources which can be utilised for facilitating a better Christian understanding of Islam. Discernment is required however in order to avoid inadequate or incendiary presentations of the Islamic community.

There are imams and local Islamic organisations who would be willing to teach Christians about their culture and faith. These encounters need to be enabled within an environment of mutual trust and respect. In Oman, the unique Al Amana Centre is an excellent example of a Christian led educational centre which works in close collaboration with the government’s Ministry of Religious Affairs in providing encounters between Islam and Christianity.

In Qatar, DICID has pioneered a dialogue embodied in this annual conference. Again there is no equivalent organisation in the UAE, yet. Christians can be instrumental in partnering with governments to facilitate an institutional approach to interfaith relations. Such a mechanism will perpetuate and normalise expectations for a tolerant climate between faith communities.

Thirdly, Christians need to be proactive in speaking about their experience of religious freedom back in their home countries. Pastors and priests should be encouraged to be unofficial ambassadors for the UAE and be able to use local media (print, film and social media) in their home countries in order to promote awareness of the climate of moderation and freedom which they enjoy in the UAE. All this serves to counteract stereotypes and assumptions back in their home countries – especially in the UK and the USA.

The church in the UAE has been slow to embrace interfaith relations as an aspect of their presence and ministry, but there are encouraging signs that this is changing. Christians are responding to the government’s lead in engaging in interfaith projects. In 2014, the UAE government flew to Australia, Christian, Muslim and Sikh leaders in order to participate in the G20 Interfaith Summit. Other similar interfaith dialogue events are being initiated locally.



Finally, there are increasing media opportunities in the local market. One example is Daniel Malek's film called "One" at the Abu Dhabi film festival which celebrated interfaith relations. The National Media Council have recently endorsed the publishing of books which address interfaith relations, most recently Jesus of Arabia, a text which explores how local Arab culture can unlock the teachings of Jesus to a Western audience.

All of which is moving the UAE towards a culture of moderation and an environment of intellectual and spiritual security.

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## **The Principle of Cooperation as an Instrument for the Development of the Right to Religious Freedom: The Spanish Model**

### **Abstract**

Since 1978, Spain recognizes religious freedom as a fundamental individual and collective right in article 16 of the Spanish Constitution. The development of this right took place with the enactment in of the Organic Law on Religious Freedom in 1980. This law regulates the range and content of this right and, on the basis of the principle of cooperation, contemplates potential agreements between the State and religious denominations “deeply rooted” in our country. This paper will analyze, in the first place, the tools created to develop the right of religious freedom; secondly, the position and role of the State in relation to the religious denominations; and thirdly, it reflects on the agreements signed in 1992 between the Spanish State and several religious denominations, analyzing their origins, evolution and contents, and proposing measures that could improve the current situation, such as the involvement of NGOs.

### **Presentation**

Perhaps one of the most important aims of supranational and international law, to which they devote most of their intervention strategies, is to protect those who, for structural reasons, face discrimination under the national laws of their countries. In fact, EU law has a series of provisions that protect individuals belonging to a minority.

Currently, the European Union is searching for a legal system that can harmonise the systems of the various member countries. Thus, regulating the religious phenomenon cannot disregard the efforts made in the search for common legislation. However, we need to take into account the fact that the idiosyncrasies of the member countries are the result of their respective legal systems.

Indeed, the position of privilege that some religious confessions had, and still have, has dictated the lines of the ecclesiastical law systems in place in Europe. Even so, in most of the member countries, recognition of the fundamental right to religious freedom and the adoption of constitutional principles such as the secularity of the state, and equality and non-discrimination among religious confessions has led to changes in the regulations they had implemented until then.

In this context, Spain is one of the countries that have sought to grant individuals and religious confessions a legal system in which they could develop and exercise the right to religious freedom to which they are entitled, in line with the principles above. To that end, Spain set up an ecclesiastical law system in which all

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individuals would find their right to religious freedom recognised, regardless of their beliefs, and the confessions would enjoy a similar status under national law.

Thus, with the advent of democracy and the enactment of the Constitution in 1978, Spain experienced a change in the way the State construed the religious phenomenon.<sup>2</sup> The novel result was the recognition of a series of fundamental freedoms, including religious freedom. It is a fundamental, public and subjective right, as the Constitutional Court pointed out in one of the first judgments it issued,<sup>3</sup> that is held individually and collectively. Moreover, it is a basic law that divides into others, as the Constitutional Court has also admitted.

Article 16<sup>4</sup> of the Constitution guarantees freedom of ideology, religion and worship for individuals and organisations, with the sole limitation of maintaining public order. It states that no-one may be obliged to state their ideology, religion or beliefs. Finally, it establishes the model of a secular State in which the public authorities take into account the religious beliefs of society and maintain a relationship of cooperation with the Catholic Church and other religious confessions.

However, this is not the only article in the Constitution that refers to religion. It should be placed in relation to other articles that proclaim the responsibility of public authorities to promote conditions so that the liberty and equality of individuals and organisations will be real and effective.<sup>5</sup> The same is true for religious equality,<sup>6</sup> the interpretation of fundamental rights and freedoms in accordance with the international treaties and agreements ratified by Spain,<sup>7</sup> and the right of parents to choose the religious and moral education of their children.<sup>8</sup> In

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<sup>2</sup> Although it is true that the Concordat of 1953 was repealed when the agreements of 1979 were signed, the advantages enjoyed by the Catholic Church hardly varied. The fact that the constitutional text mentions them specifically indicates the degree to which the legislators had them in mind. The signing of the agreements, only a few days after the enactment of the Constitution, gives reason to believe that the regime the Catholic Church would enjoy had already been envisaged.

<sup>3</sup> Constitutional Court Judgment 24/1982 of 13 May, Constitutional Court Judgment 19/1985 of 13 February and Constitutional Court Judgment 166/1996 of 28 October.

<sup>4</sup> "1. Freedom of ideology, religion, and worship of individuals and communities is guaranteed without any limitation on their expression other than that which is necessary for the maintenance of public order protected by law.

2. No-one may be obliged to make a declaration on their ideology, religion, or beliefs.

3. There shall be no state religion. The public powers shall take into account the religious beliefs of Spanish society and maintain the appropriate relations of cooperation with the Catholic Church and other denominations."

<sup>5</sup> Article 9.2: "It is the responsibility of the public authorities to promote conditions so that the liberty and equality of individuals and the organisations into which they become integrated will be real and effective; to remove any barriers which prevent or obstruct their full implementation, and to facilitate the participation of all citizens in political, economic, cultural, and social life."

<sup>6</sup> Article 14: "All Spaniards are equal before the law, without discrimination on any ground such as birth, race, sex, religion, opinion or any other personal or social condition or circumstance."

<sup>7</sup> Article 10.2: "The regulations related to fundamental rights and liberties which are recognized by the Constitution shall be interpreted in accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the international treaties and agreements on those matters ratified by Spain."

<sup>8</sup> Article 27.3: "The public authorities guarantee the right of parents to have their children receive a religious and moral education that is in keeping with their own convictions."

addition to these articles, there are others that would also have an impact on the final model of ecclesiastical law, such as academic freedom,<sup>9</sup> freedom to set up educational centres<sup>10</sup> and so forth.

Moreover, four principles derive from the Constitution and direct the relationship between the State and Churches:

1. Religious freedom: Religious freedom is not only construed to be a fundamental right that must be recognised and protected, but also an attitude that the State adopts towards religion.
2. Neutrality and secularity: The State must be impartial concerning the various religious options and, therefore, professing a faith is not a freedom or right that the State can exercise;
3. Equality and non-discrimination of individuals and organisations on religious grounds;
4. Cooperation: it gives meaning to the system of State-Churches relations in Spain. The State construes cooperation as a predisposition to facilitate and promote the conditions to make faith possible, as well as the diverse aspects or manifestations arising from faith. Said predisposition finds expression in the intention to reach an agreement with the collective subjects of religious freedom to regulate the expressions of faith that have legal significance in state law. Consequently, the State assumed its duty to promote religious freedom and recognised religious organisations as the spheres through which individuals could develop their religious freedom. The State evaluated religion positively, and the principle of cooperation focused on paying specific and privileged attention to religious confessions.

The regime of tolerance to which non-Catholic confessions had been submitted could no longer be sustained in a system of freedoms because it clashed with constitutional principles. There was a need for new legislation that would recognise the confessions' right to religious freedom and provide them with a legal system in which they could exercise that right fully and effectively.

It is evident that a characteristic of all religious organisations is the impulse to create associations. Religions develop around the idea of community and practically all of them include proselytising among their activities. At the same time, a believer is an individual who joins a religious community and lives in it under the community's principles. In fact, almost all of the actions individuals carry out in the exercise of their right to religious freedom take place within a community of individuals. Therefore, the idea that anyone exercises his right to religious freedom outside of or apart from his community does not appear to be a common occurrence.

Thus, if individuals find their right to exercise religious freedom guaranteed by the State, the latter is guaranteeing the right of the religious community at the same time. If the State allows the believer to practice religious rites, it cannot deny a

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<sup>9</sup> Article 20.1 c) recognises the protection of the right to "academic freedom".

<sup>10</sup> Article 27.6 points out that "The freedom of individuals and companies to set up educational centres, providing they respect the principles of the Constitution, is recognized."

confession the right to organise said rites without falling into a contradiction. Therefore, if the system guarantees individuals the right to exercise religious freedom concerning its essential content, it will have to do the same with all religious confessions.

The Organic Law on Religious Freedom (LOLR)<sup>11</sup> was enacted in 1980 for that reason. The legislators' intention was to regulate religion in those aspects that had not been envisaged by the lawmakers at the time, or which had not been drawn up according to the principles of freedom and equality set out in the Constitution<sup>12</sup>. The law recognises that individuals and confessions are entitled to the right of religious freedom and implements the content of said right.

It is a very short law of only eight articles, which sets out the implementation of the principle of cooperation, alternating the possibility of legislating unilaterally with legislation based on agreements. Article 2 of the Organic Law on Religious Freedom enunciates and regulates various manifestations of the right to religious freedom recognised for individuals and communities, which can be divided into three large groups: individual freedoms,<sup>13</sup> the freedoms of confessions,<sup>14</sup> and the promotional role of the State.<sup>15</sup>

Although the law has been criticised and accused of being a mere declaration of intentions that does not grant rights that are not already recognised in the Constitution, on the contrary – and therein lies its value – it has created a series

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<sup>11</sup> Organic Law 7/1980 of 5 July, on Religious Freedom.

<sup>12</sup> A detailed and exhaustive study of the law can be found in Navarro-Valls, R., Mantecon Sancho, J. and Martinez-Torron, J. (coords.), *La libertad religiosa y su regulación legal. La Ley Orgánica de Libertad Religiosa*, Iustel, Madrid, 2009.

<sup>13</sup> Art. 2.1: "The freedom of religion and worship guaranteed under the Constitution comprises, with the corresponding immunity to coercion, the right of individuals to:

a) Profess their freely chosen religious beliefs or to profess none; change confessions or leave the one they had; freely express their own religious beliefs or lack thereof; and abstain from making statements in that regard.

b) Practice religious rites and receive religious assistance from their own confession; celebrate their religious festivities; hold their marriage ceremonies; receive a decent funeral, with no discrimination on religious grounds; and to not be obliged to practice religious rites and receive religious assistance that is contrary to their personal convictions.

c) To give and receive religious teachings and information of any type, whether verbal, written or by any other method; to choose a religious and moral education that is in accordance with their own convictions for themselves and any non-emancipated or disabled minors that are dependent on them, in or outside of school.

d) Meet with others or take part in public demonstrations for religious purposes or join an association to develop their religious activities as a community, in accordance with the general legal system and the provisions of this Organic Law."

<sup>14</sup> Art. 2.2: Religious confessions shall be entitled to "establish places of worship or meetings for religious purposes; appoint and train their ministers; disseminate and propagate their own beliefs; and maintain relations with their own organisations or other religious confessions, either in Spain or abroad."

<sup>15</sup> Art. 2.3: "For real and effective implementation of said rights, public authorities shall adopt the necessary measures to facilitate religious assistance in public and military facilities, hospitals, institutions, prisons and any other establishments under their direction, as well as religious education in public schools."

of instruments that enable the State to cooperate effectively with religious confessions. These instruments are: a. the creation of a Registry of Religious Entities; b. the creation of a Religious Freedom Advisory Committee; c. and, finally, the possibility for religious confessions to conclude cooperation agreements with the State.

### **The Registry of Religious Entities**

Beyond doubt, religious organisations are recognised by most legal systems as being entitled to religious freedom. However, whether a legal system recognises the legal personality of organisations is another matter. Once obtained, a religious organisation enjoys a legal status that recognises its legal rights, such as autonomy in relation to public authorities,<sup>16</sup> and grants them a series of advantages that they would not have otherwise. For this to be possible in Spain's legal system, organisations must register with the Registry of Religious Entities.<sup>17</sup> Thus, the Registry becomes a means of facilitating religious confessions' right to religious freedom.

The Registry is national in scope and its headquarters are in the Ministry of Justice. It was regulated via a Royal Decree in 1981<sup>18</sup> and currently contains more than 17,000 religious organizations.<sup>19</sup> Practice has shown that, after more than thirty years, the regulation had been superceded and did not respond to current needs. Therefore, it was amended by a Royal Decree<sup>20</sup> that entered into force in late 2015, offering stronger guarantees not only to religious organisations but also to the Administration and third parties in good faith.

### **The Religious Freedom Advisory Committee**

Envisaged in article 8 of the Organic Law on Religious Freedom, the Advisory Committee is "a stable committee made up of an equal number of by representatives of the State Administration, Churches, Confessions or their Religious Communities or Federations – at least those that have a deeply rooted presence in Spain– and eminently competent individuals whose advice is deemed to be of interest in affairs related to the current law. (...) The functions of said Committee are to study, report and formulate proposals relating to the implementation of the law. In particular, it has the mandatory function of drawing up and issuing the cooperation Agreements or Conventions mentioned in the preceding article."

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<sup>16</sup> Art. 6 of the Organic Law on Religious Freedom.

<sup>17</sup> Art. 5 of the Organic Law on Religious Freedom.

<sup>18</sup> Royal Decree 142/1981 of 9 January on the Organisation and Functioning of the Registry of Religious Entities. The regulation was completed, in some aspects, by others of an equal or lower status, such as Royal Decree 589/1984 of 8 February on Religious Foundations of the Catholic Church, and Ministerial Order of 11 May 1984 on Publicity of the Registry of Religious Entities.

<sup>19</sup> The Registry can be consulted on the website of the Ministry of Justice, at the address <http://maper.mjusticia.gob.es/Maper/RER.action>.

<sup>20</sup> Royal Decree 594/2015 of 3 July regulating the Registry of Religious Entities.

Dependent on the Ministry of Justice, it was created via a Royal Decree in 1981<sup>21</sup> and has undergone several amendments,<sup>22</sup> the last of which was in 2013.<sup>23</sup> The Advisory Committee has had several objectives:

- Assign new functions to the Advisory Committee that will enable it to improve its performance within the current legal framework and become an advisory body for the local and regional administrations as well.
- Improve the composition of the Advisory Committee by integrating similar bodies existing in other autonomous regions and the religious confessions whose declaration of “deeply rooted presence” has been recognised.
- Finally, the way the Committee functioned was improved. It could act in a Plenary Session and a Standing Committee. Working Groups that addressed the issues assigned to the Committee were set up, promoted by the Committee’s Chairman. It was not necessary to be a member of the Advisory Committee to take part in the Working Groups.

The presence of religious confessions in the Advisory Committee reinforces the idea expressed by Independent Expert Ms Gay McDougall, the Human Rights Committee<sup>24</sup> and the United Nations<sup>25</sup> in several documents that religious groups were becoming more integrated and social cohesion had improved. The fact is the dialogue between confessions and with the Administration that takes place in a body of this nature can serve to resolve disputes and give stability to a multi-religion society.

### **The Possibility of Concluding Cooperation Agreements with the State**

The State, in compliance with the constitutional mandate in article 16.3 and the principle of equality and non-discrimination, took the model of relations with the Catholic Church as an example and decided to establish relationships of cooperation with the remaining religious confessions by signing agreements with them. This possibility was set out in article 7.1 of the Organic Law on Religious Freedom. To be entered in the Registry of Religious Entities, religious confessions were required to have sufficient scope and number of followers for their “deeply rooted presence” to be recognized.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Royal Decree 1890/1981 of 19 July, constituting the Registry of Religious Entities. Subsequently, the Ministerial Order of 31 October 1983 on the Organisation and Competences of the Religious Freedom Advisory Committee was enacted.

<sup>22</sup> Royal Decree 1159/2001 of 26 October, regulating the Religious Freedom Advisory Committee and Judicial Order JUS/1375/2002 of 31 May on the Organisation and Competences of the Religious Freedom Advisory Committee.

<sup>23</sup> Royal Decree 932/2013 of 29 November, regulating the Religious Freedom Advisory Committee.

<sup>24</sup> Human Rights Committee, General Comment No 25 (1996).

<sup>25</sup> A/67/293.

<sup>26</sup> For a long time the legal concept was not defined, but it was regulated in 2015 via Royal Decree 593/2015 of 3 July, regulating the declaration of deeply rooted presence of religious confessions in Spain. Currently, that status has been recognised for the following religious confessions: the Catholic Church, the Federation of Evangelical Religious Entities of Spain (FERES), the Islamic Commission of Spain (ICS), the Federation of Jewish Communities of Spain (FJCS), the Church of Jesus Christ of



Agreements between the Spanish State and the Federation of Evangelical Religious Entities of Spain,<sup>27</sup> the Federation of Jewish Communities of Spain<sup>28</sup> and the Islamic Commission of Spain<sup>29</sup> were signed in 1992. Contrary to the Organic Law on Religious Freedom, the agreements have created a specific framework of rights for confessions whose inevitable point of reference is the rights that the Catholic Church already enjoyed as a result of the agreements of 1979.

In that sense, the wording of the agreements offered the possibility of obtaining tax benefits; give religious assistance in the Armed Forces, hospitals and prisons; teaching religion in schools; food and animal slaughter in accordance with specific religious rites; the civil effect of marriages entered into with a religious ceremony; burials according to specific religious rites; and the establishment of religious holidays in the work year calendar. However, legislation for all the above was enacted. In some cases, it already existed, whereas in others it has been developed or remains pending.

Despite the difficulties and the brief time they were in force, progress since the agreements were signed has been outstanding. From the point of view of state legislation, the civil effect of religious marriages is recognised; the ministers of worship have been integrated into the general Social Security scheme and made equivalent to employees; religious assistance in the Armed Forces and prisons is recognised, although the State has made no economic commitment to pay for it; the right to access the media is recognised, and they have the same fiscal and tax benefits and exemptions as the Catholic Church, although a direct method of funding has not yet been envisaged. Concerning labour, efforts are being made to recognise religious holidays and weekly days of rest in collective agreements, and to take account of the specific way in which religious holidays, such as Ramadan, are celebrated. All such recognitions implement the provisions of European Directive 2000/78 of non-discrimination for religious reasons that was transposed into Spain's legal system via Law 62/2003 and the effort to reconcile the interests of Muslim workers and the rights of employers by applying the principle of reasonable accommodation.

Moreover, the need to legislate on some aspects, combined with the specificity of Spain's system of political organisation means that the system of agreements operates at several levels. Thus, the Autonomous Regions also have the option of entering into agreements with the aforementioned religious organisations on areas within their competence. In fact, in recent years the Autonomous Regions have entered into several agreements for the conservation of historical and artistic heritage, teaching religion in schools and religious assistance with religious

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Latter-Day Saints, the Church of Jehovah's Witnesses, the Federation of Buddhist Communities of Spain and the Orthodox Church.

<sup>27</sup> Law 24/1992 of 10 November, approving the Cooperation Agreement between the State and the FERES.

<sup>28</sup> Law 25/1992 of 10 November, approving the Cooperation Agreement between the State and the FJCS.

<sup>29</sup> Law 26/1992 of 10 November, approving the Cooperation Agreement between the State and the ICS.

communities who had already signed agreements with the State. Even city councils and other bodies dependent on the State have established agreements on areas within their competence.

Although Spain's system may appear to establish a model in which only those confessions that had signed agreements can obtain benefits, as opposed to others, the legislators also wanted confessions that had a deeply rooted presence but no agreements conferring specific benefits. Therefore, the enactment in 2015 of the Law on Voluntary Jurisdiction<sup>30</sup> amended the Civil Code and allowed religious marriages held according to the rites of said confessions to be entered in the Civil Registry, thereby giving them civil effect.

However, there is one last instrument, also created by the Ministry of Justice in 2004, which is the Foundation for Pluralism and Coexistence. It reinforces the idea of the participation of minority groups in political and social processes and, as a result, in matters pertaining to religions. Thus, the communities can take part in the decisions that affect them.

In this sense, the Foundation aims to promote religious freedom via cooperation with minority confessions, particularly those with a deeply rooted presence, and to be a space for research, discussions and implementation of public policies on religious freedom. All these instruments are intended to normalise religious diversity and create an appropriate framework for coexistence.

To carry out its objectives, the Foundation works in three main areas: a) with minority confessions, supporting their representative bodies and activities, as well as their communities and local entities; b) with the wider community, promoting better knowledge of the minority confessions and respect for religious freedom; and c) with the administrations, equipping them with the necessary resources to manage religious diversity. With that aim in mind, in 2011, the Ministry of Justice, the Spanish Federation of Municipalities and Provinces (FEMP) and the Foundation for Pluralism and Coexistence set up an Observatory of Religious Plurality in Spain.

From that perspective, the objectives of the Foundation's work are:

Concerning religious minorities:

- To promote visibility and the participation of minority confessions in the processes of social construction.
- Encourage the dialogue between minority confessions and the institutions so those who belong to the former can exercise their religious freedom to the full.
- Contribute to activities that increase the knowledge, dialogue and rapprochement of confessions with each other and society.

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<sup>30</sup> Law 15/2015 of 2 July, on Voluntary Jurisdiction.

Concerning the wider community:

- To promote the development of informed public opinion and respect for religious freedom, with pluralism and processes that improve coexistence.

Concerning the public administrations:

- Encourage the social and institutional recognition of the religious bodies that belong to minority confessions.
- Promote the attention to religious diversity in the many areas of public management.

Evidently, much remains to be done but it is also true that in a very short span of time, Spanish society has adopted a legal framework in which individuals and organisations can exercise their right to religious freedom freely. To do so, it was necessary to guarantee individuals their rights as believers but also as groups. More important yet, they had to be able to do so in the public sphere, with everything that implies: the possibility of carrying religious symbols, celebrate festivities, marriage rites and funerals, and other religious ceremonies.

Moreover, the State has also wanted to give religious organisations importance as spokespeople for the civil society to which they belong. Apart from managing and seeking solutions to the demands of their faithful, they also need to create an area of safety and coexistence in what has become a society with multiple religions. Thus, the recognition of the legal personality of religious confessions not only recognises their rights but also allows them to participate in political and social processes. Among other things, their contribution can be useful in combating marginalisation and the exclusion of religious groups<sup>31</sup> compared to the predominant religion, and to prevent attacks against them by adopting legislative measures.

Participation of this nature by minorities has become an essential condition for securing collective identity, membership in a community, social cohesion and, in short, security. As a result of the legal framework created, individuals can develop as believers within the private and public spheres. The public authorities, exercising their promotional functions, have permitted the exercise of the right to religious freedom to be real and effective within the limits of public order.

Thus, an individual's membership in a religion recedes into the background and the term "citizenship" acquires true importance. It is that term, citizenship; membership in a political community, which recognises an individual's fundamental rights and allows them to be exercised in freedom. So it has been pronounced on several occasions by the United Nations Human Rights Council, the Forum on Minority affairs, and several European regional bodies.

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<sup>31</sup> Independent Expert Ms Gay McDougall indicated this in her Background document on minorities and effective political participation, presented before the Human Rights Council in the Forum on Minority Issues in 2009. See A/HRC/FMI/2009/3.

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## Embracing the Other<sup>2</sup>

### Abstract

Living in religious plurality can be a challenge as racism, sexism and xenophobia overcomes one's attitude towards the Other. There are also important issues of intellectual security resulting from spiritual and intellectual peace. Intellectual security has become essential in protecting human values and ideals. To counteract these attitudes, perceptions and misunderstanding of the Other, there needs to be a renewed conception of God as the Spirit which crosses cultural, religious, social boundaries to become a more wholistic and inclusive understanding of the Divine. Spirit or life energy: Chinese call it Chi, Japanese call it *Ki*, Hindus call it *Prana*, Greeks called it *Pneuma*. It is a concept that permeates cultures around the world. This paper offers new perspectives on Christianity within a pluralistic, multi-religious world by presenting a theology of Spirit God that is more inclusive and welcoming of outsiders, women and people of different ethnicities, cultures and religions.

### Religion from the Margins

In a broken world of misgivings, misrepresentations, and misunderstandings among the diverse human family created by God, we need to go to the margins to create a pathway toward healing and hope. As a poor Jewish peasant teacher from Nazareth, Jesus was marginalized and stood in solidarity with the marginalized throughout the Roman Empire. Jesus's incarnate life, kingdom teaching, and crucifixion on a Roman cross unveil God as a lover of justice, peace, and liberation.

Those in power often share a gospel of an all-powerful God that is disconnected from the poor's daily struggles through which their community resists oppression and struggles to achieve fullness of life. The God of the privileged does not exist in the margins but rather remains in the center, safe and secure from all alarm. The God of the center who may be spoken of in the margins, but never comes to live there, in the dire circumstances of dirt-poverty. The direct movement of coming towards the marginalized peoples with the intention of building deep solidarity with them as they "enflesh freedom" is an affront to the God of the privileged center.<sup>3</sup>

Asian Americans have been relegated to the margins of society. They have been neglected, discriminated against, and stereotyped since they arrived in North America.

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<sup>2</sup> This paper emerges out of my book, *Embracing the Other: The Transformative Spirit of Love* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015).

<sup>3</sup> See womanist theologian M. Shawn Copeland's *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race and Being* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009).

Pushed to the margins, Asian immigrants have an attentive sensitivity to experiences of oppression. The deep wounds of Asian American women are raw and painful within a patriarchal world. As a Canadian of Korean descent teaching theology in the United States, I have experienced the negative effects of structural racism and patriarchy in my own life. It is through entering my own places of pain that my theological vision of healing and hope has emerged. The places of pain in our heart need to be honestly acknowledged and shared with others so that healing can occur and we can do our part to work for a loving, just and sustainable world.

Traditional theologies posit that the God of the Center reaches out to the marginalized with inclusive love. Yet, in such theologies the center remains central command, determining who will be included and excluded. This creates an obvious structural disadvantage for those on the periphery. In many ways, church politics and theology still rely upon modern, masculine epistemologies<sup>4</sup> of the center and continue to institute them.<sup>5</sup> Epistemologies of the center only perpetuate the status quo and keeps power with those who are at the center. This center epistemology needs to be challenged and redefined so that the marginalized can claim their rightful seats at the table and voices in the dialogue.

### **Spirit**

The healing of the world happens through the transformative spirit of love. With restless hearts we long to connect with God, the Other, and the community of creation. Through the practice of prayer to the Triune God our longing is transformed into a Spirit of love. More than merely a longing for sexual ecstasy, our erotic power is a life energy that gives us spiritual strength to love God and love our neighbor. We need to learn to embrace the other.

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<sup>4</sup> Steven V. Sprinkle, "A God at the Margins? Marcella Althaus-Reid and the Marginality of LGBT People," *Journal of Religious Leadership*, Vol. 8 (2009): 78, 79. Cf. Ivone Gebara, "Knowing our Knowing: The Issue of Epistemology," *Longing for Running Water* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), pp 19-66.

<sup>5</sup> An example of "peripheral" epistemologies might be found in the Preface to an edition of David Brainerd's Journal, written by the Honourable Society (in Scotland) for Propagating Christian Knowledge (and not by Brainerd himself.) This Preface describes Brainerd's Indians "...who have for many ages dwelt in the grossest darkness and heathenism, and are brought to a cheerful subjection to the government of our divine Redeemer, who from generation to generation have remained the voluntary slaves of 'the prince of darkness'." David Brainerd, *David Brainerd's Journal in Two Parts in The Life and Diary of David Brainerd* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc. Kindle Edition, 2013) Location 5260 of 7127.

It also "assumes" a centrist morality when it describes "those that were sunk in the most degenerate state of human nature..." with the result that they "...at once, not only renounce those barbarous customs they had been inured to from their infancy, but surprisingly transformed into the character of real and devout Christians." Note that this is the opinion of Europeans, writing in Europe, not of Brainerd himself. Brainerd did not have universal success. The first entry in his journal speaks of his being disheartened by failed attempts of preach to Indians around the Susquehanna River. Brainerd did find that these Indians often raised trivial and irrelevant objections. One might wish we knew what these *trivial* objections were.

As we work out our differences and difficulties between people of color and whites, as men and as women, we understand that it is the Spirit God who can reconcile us and bring us together. As a step towards a loving community and intimate relationship with each other, we must consider other possibilities of experiencing care, acceptance, and love. For there to be a healing and reconciliation between men and women, we must embrace our erotic power in healthy, whole relational ways.

### **Embracing the Other**

My baptism into embracing the Other took place in India in 1989. I spent twelve hot weeks in India as a summer intern through a college travel program sponsored by the Presbyterian Church in Canada mission office. I landed in New Delhi around 1 a.m. When my missionary contact came to pick me up, I noticed so many people lying on the sidewalks and on beside the road. It was later that I realized that there were homeless people sleeping outside in the hot summer sky. In India I begin my heart journey to embrace the Other.

There were a lot of new things that I experienced during my first summer in India. I tried on a sari for the first time. I also tasted “lady fingers” vegetables for the first time. I also saw the Taj Mahal which blew my mind away with it’s multi-color, mysterious beauty. Compelled by the culture and cuisine, India also presented me with new challenges. The streets of New Delhi and in Calcutta were full of poor people begging for economic survival. Encountering lepers elicited my deepest fears. The fear of the unknown prevented me from approaching them and talking with them, much less embracing them.

I visited Mother Teresa’s Missionaries of Charity in Calcutta. There I witnessed many of the sisters and volunteers feeding, helping and changing the lepers. But even there, I just couldn’t get myself close enough to be with them, let alone embrace them. These memories have haunted me for over twenty-five years. Jesus has taught about the importance of caring for the lepers and healed them. In the Gospel of Matthew, a leper approaches Jesus and asks to be healed, saying “Lord, if you choose, you can make me clean.” Jesus reached out his hand and touched the leper saying, “I do choose. Be made clean!” (Matt 8:1-3). Jesus welcomed those who were different, ill, outcast, foreigners and the marginalized. As Jesus lived, he challenged everyone to do likewise.

As a Korean American seeking to embrace the Other forced me to do some deep soul searching. I raised the question that troubled my heart: “Can I embrace Japanese who have invaded my homeland too many times?” During the Japanese occupation (1910-1945), so many Koreans lost their lives. Many Koreans lost their lives during the Japanese occupation, while those who survived lost much of their Korean identity, culture, history and society. For example, my grandmother had to change her name to a Japanese name to survive. Other women faced even more traumatic challenges. The Japanese caused great harm to women as many were kidnapped to become “comfort women” before and during World War II.

Comfort women were women and girls forced into sexual slavery by the Imperial Japanese Army. The number of women taken as sexual slaves are estimated to be over 400, 000. Many young Korean girls were abducted from their own homes or were lured with promises of work in factories or restaurants. They were then locked up in comfort stations and placed in small quarters where they were repeatedly raped day and night. They were serving around 50 men a day.

Around three quarters of these “comfort women” died. They suffered tremendously under this oppressive system of sexual slaves, including rape, physical torture, and mental abuse. The survivors often became infertile through contracting venereal diseases. After the war, many women couldn’t return to their families as it was a shame to go back to their homes. Japanese sexual abuse and exploitation of Korean women cast a long dark shadow on many Korean communities. The legacy of Korean “comfort women” during Japanese occupation in Korea created the conditions in which Korean woman could be “orientalized” and exploited again by U.S. servicemen through militarized prostitution in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. During such a dark period in our history, like the Japanese occupation, how can we embrace the enemy who has destroyed innocent lives and our sacred culture and folkways?

Sometimes we take Jesus’ challenges wholeheartedly, but in most cases, we do not. We find it hard and difficult to follow Jesus and do what he has done during his own ministry while on earth. For me, a challenge has been to embrace those who are different or outcasts; to truly and vulnerably embrace the Other.

First, we need to overcome the doubt of whether Jesus really wanted us to embrace the Other. Did he mean it, or was it a figure of speech. It is the same way we approach the passage about the rich man giving up his wealth to follow Jesus. “Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, “You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.” (Mark 10:21). Many Christians just take this passage as a figure of speech and do not necessarily follow it. They believe that Jesus didn’t really mean it. But if this was a command that Jesus gave out, it is crucial to obey it. Through wealthy people giving their money to the poor, they enter into a deep solidarity with the “least and the lost” that we are called to care for.

However, there are examples in the New Testament where we find that Jesus went against the Other. One day when he was in the temple, Jesus “drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves” (Matthew 21:12). This occurred as Jesus recognized that they were turning a house of prayer into a house of thieves. Situations and contexts require of us to act differently.

Second, there is the fear of the unknown. We are afraid to love and embrace those who are different from us. We are often scared of those with a disease or those who physically look different from us. When I was in India, I didn’t embrace the lepers because I was all by myself in my early twenties and I was scared that I may become a leper. Yet, what I was really scared of was the fear of the unknown. Many white Americans are fearful of people from different countries, races and religions. From Muslims to Asians, people from other countries are often called “foreigners,”

distancing them from the white masculine norm. We are afraid of those whom we do not know. Subterranean fears prevent us from taking the bold and risky step to embrace the Other.

Third, it takes energy, time and commitment to embrace people. Embracing is not a verbal proclamation. It is not a simple act of getting to know another. It requires more than that. It requires patient and persist love. It requires one to get to know them, accept them and then take the erotic step to embrace them with our body, heart and soul

Fourth, we need to open ourselves to Spirit God who moves within us to move us to embrace those who are different from us and to embrace the Other. Jesus sent the Spirit as “the helper” to lead us as we seek to love and be reconciled with the Other (John 14:6). The work of reconciliation is fundamentally spiritual work. Spirit God transcends culture, race and religion and is the wellspring of healing and hope. As we recognize that the Spirit is in the Other we will be more vulnerable to share our whole soul with the other. It is through the presence of the Spirit that the wounds between women and men can be healed and new prophetic partnerships can be forged. While the Spirit is mysterious, it helps us overcome our deepest fears, enabling us to take a risk to open our selves to be intimate with the Other. Our openness to the Spirit is crucial in our step towards embracing the stranger, the foreigner, the outcaste and the marginalized. Spirit God empowers us to embrace, love and welcome the Other.

Miroslav Volf discusses the complexity of embrace in his theological classic, *Exclusion and Embrace*.<sup>6</sup> His first describes what exclusion is to gain a deeper understanding of embrace. Volf states that “exclusion can entail cutting of the bonds that connect, taking oneself out of the pattern of interdependence and placing oneself in a position of sovereign independence.”<sup>7</sup> Volf believes that Christ’s work involves not allowing an enemy to remain an enemy but rather tries to create a space for the enemy to come in. “Having been embraced by God, we must make space for others in ourselves and invite them in—even our enemies.”<sup>8</sup> As we offer hospitality to the enemy, allow them to come into our lives, we are doing the difficult work of moving toward embracing the Other.

Volf reminds us of the critical need to embrace others, since the Other is in us. We must recognize the other in ourselves and as such, we need to move towards embracement. Volf writes “There needs to be a desire for the other. We need to have an inner warmth and movement to move towards the goodness to making change in the other person. An embrace is one of the engagements needed to move forward to make a change for the better of society. Without this engagement, it becomes

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<sup>6</sup> Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996).

<sup>7</sup> Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace* 67.

<sup>8</sup> Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 129.



something shallow and non-committal.”<sup>9</sup> Embracing the Other demands deep existential commitment and persistent love to achieve reconciliation, justice and peace.

From my perspective as a Korean American feminist theologian, I pose three challenges to Miroslav Volf’s theology of embrace. First, the work of reconciliation begins with our wounds that affect the deepest areas of our heart. If we are to work for justice and reconciliation, we need to have the courage to enter the places of our greatest pain in order to be instruments of peace in the world. This will mean a deeper account of the psychological effects of trauma on the victims of disaster, war and sexual violence. Second, we have to tap into the dark abyss of our erotic power in order to claim our power as public leaders who seek to be agents of reconciliation, healing and hope. Erotic power produces both conflict and resolution in relationships between women and men. Open acknowledgement of the erotic dimensions of our relationships will foster the conditions for channeling our *Chi* toward deeper intimacy and the struggle for the common good. Third, we need a sharper analysis of the structures of exclusion in our neo-liberal global capitalist regime, where women of Asian descent are often objectified and commodified in sex trafficking rings and sweat shop factory work and domestic work abroad. It is the *han* or unjust suffering of this trans-national Asian sisterhood that I feel in my heart and soul and why I am committed to a power analysis that unveils the power differential between women of Asian descent and men of European descent as integral to the work of reconciliation and embrace. With a clear analysis of the power of patriarchy and racism in North American society, we will be in a better position to channel our erotic energy toward deep interpersonal healing and systemic transformation.

Spirit God energizes both women and men to have conflict resolution conversations where we courageously go to the places of deep division and traumatic wounds. Embracing the Other entails talking about the issues with non-violent empathetic listening, mutual understanding and heart-felt prayer. Spirit God connects us to each other, opens us up for an exchange of hearts, heals the curse between men and women that goes back to Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:14-19), and is a source of perpetual soul repair and bodily renewal as we love into a deep and disciplined spirituality that can sustain the movement to incarnate God’s justice and shalom, on earth as it is in heaven.

God took the first step to embrace us. We ought to do likewise. The Spirit of God which dances in our lives, connecting us, challenging us and comforting us, asks us to treat those who are different as ourselves. The Spirit of God teaches us to join the divine dance of love.

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<sup>9</sup> Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 141

### **Transforming the World**

Institutional racism and sexism have been so well integrated into our culture that they often go unnoticed. Society ignores their destructive realities and therefore does nothing to dismantle them. It becomes our Christian responsibility to work towards eliminating the structural evil that exists in our society, community, and churches. This can be achieved first by recognizing and then dismantling the white supremacy and patriarchy that have loomed over our Christian tradition. Connection is the basic power of all existence. All that is comes to be by virtue of connectedness. The Spirit-led life helps us to stay connected to God and the Other in deep solidarity as we engage in the work of social transformation.

As we struggle for systemic justice, we need to be mindful of restoring broken and lost relationships. Lutheran theological ethicist Cynthia Moe Lobeda understands the importance of healing in social and environmental ethics. She states: The mystery of creation “is the indwelling of God within it.” ...We “mud creatures” are home to One who breathes through creation, healing, making whole, undoing injustice, and restoring right relationships, so that all might have life and have it abundantly. Having received God’s subversive love, we are bearers of it.<sup>10</sup>

The Spirit is the source of “restoring right relationships” The Spirit keeps theological interpretations of life open for the future as well as sustaining the dangerous memories of the past. This cosmic understanding of a communion between the living and the dead has been central in Asian, Latin American, and African religions, in which ancestors have significance for the present. Since the Spirit works in memory to access both the past and the future, both need to be treated not as predictable but as open to the mystery of God’s transforming work. The memory as well as the future continuously offers thresholds for the Creator to pass over into creation. The Spirit interprets how we experience the anticipation of God’s coming and the historical experience of remembering the God who has come. It becomes a gift flowing from the past and into the future, transforming our present reality.

Spirit God energizes us for the work of healing in the world. Christian theology has many resources that are vital to the work of healing. In the Gospel of John the Holy Spirit is described a Comforter and Healer (John 14:26; 16:7-15). It is the Spirit of God that is the source of our power to heal. All people are made in the image of God; we are called to love our neighbor. Since we are created in the image of a God who loves us completely and eternally, no matter who we are or what we do, we are called to love all people with that same extravagant, inclusive love.

### **Conclusion**

Spirit God is the source and destiny of our longing. The power of Spirit God empowers us to be instruments of love, peace, harmony and justice. Our Spirit-led

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<sup>10</sup> Cynthia Moe-Lobeda, *Healing a Broken World: Globalization and God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 133.

energy inspires us to work for justice where there is no justice and to bring love where there is no love.

We need to recognize the mystery of the Divine and embrace the living experiences of broken bodies of women who have claimed the erotic power of Spirit God. God's Spirit is a healing balm restoring the broken bodies of women into the body of Christ, broken for our healing and redemption (1 Corinthians 11:24). As we cry out from our places of deepest sorrow and sadness, God hears our cry and brings healing and hope (Psalm 18:6; 34:17).

Many Asian American women experience psychological isolation through their silenced pain as victims of racism and sexism. Yet, as they surrender themselves to the Spirit, the Spirit intercedes to God on their behalf (Romans 8:26).

Embracing the mysterious grace of the Living God offers a pathway for possibility. A more just and sustainable world is possible, if we have the courage and creativity to join God in making it happen. As we open ourselves up to our erotic power, may we take each other's hand, delight in our differences, dance in harmony and share Spirit God's open, all-embracing movement of love to the ends of the earth.

This understanding of God within us as Spirit will not only comfort us but will empower us to take steps in working towards a just society, a society which will not favor one gender over another or one ethnicity over another. Embracing Spirit God who embraces all humanity can lead to the flourishing of all people and can especially transform the lives of Asian American women.

A prophetic theology of the Spirit will free us from oppressive notions of God and allow us to recognize the Otherness and holiness in God and in each other. The Spirit lends itself to a movement toward the decentering of cultures of oppression, moving us toward equality and justice for all. It is the Spirit of God who will give us life and sustain us as we maneuver through the complexities of immigrant life and embrace the foreign women in our midst. This is not only a liberating theology for Asian Americans who have experienced racism, prejudice, and subordination, but for all people who deal with estrangement in their own unique ways.

God's Spirit is within us and is empowering us to work towards the emancipation of all God's children. Embracing the understanding of the Spirit God will move us toward articulating a more inclusive Christian theology that speaks to our growing global community. Spirit God is making a difference in the lives of communities, congregations, and individuals, building healthy ecologies of relation with and among each other. Spirit-led Christians need to become courageous prophets and lead the walk towards social justice, go to the mountain top, and share the good news that Spirit God dwells in us all. As a sign of living God and our neighbors, we need to reach out to the marginalized poor and oppressed, sharing God's mercy through embracing the Other. Now is the time for us to love and embrace each other as people of the Holy One, so that the all-embracing love of God can be experienced by all God's children.

*Reuven Firestone*<sup>1</sup>

## **Destabilization of Moral and Intellectual Security: The Misguided Glory of Intolerance and the Blasphemy of Blasphemy Laws**

### **Abstract**

The paper will be about the problem of blasphemy. It will be an original and publishable paper, on a topic with which I have had a lot of experience. I will argue that blasphemy is a hateful act, and it should not occur. However, the truth is that the very creeds of Islam, Christianity and Judaism are, by definition, blasphemous to the other religions. For example, anyone who is a believing Muslim is, by definition, blaspheming Christianity and Judaism because acceptance of a new prophet is blasphemy to both (the same as a person who accepts the prophet of the Baha'is or the Ahmadis is a blasphemer to Islam). Anyone who is a believing Jew or Christian is, by definition, blaspheming Islam by refusal to respect Prophet Muhammad as a prophet. Therefore, a new approach needs to be offered to respect religious creeds and sensibilities without the condemnation of blasphemy.

### **Presentation**

It has often been argued that blasphemy laws are terrible because they are easily used to destroy a competitor or rival by accusing him of insulting God or God's prophets. For example, if I really want to get rid of an opponent, I can accuse him of cursing the Prophet. Then all I need to do is waiting for the crowd to come and lynch him. I don't even need to hurt him myself. Look at what happened only months ago to Fakhunda Malikzada in Kabul who was annoying vendors at a mosque. So, one annoyed merchant accused her of burning the Qur'an. She was groped and stripped naked, and brutally and mercilessly beaten. Then she was dragged into the street and run over by a car. Then she was set on fire.

Remember what happened to Syed Tufali Haider, who got into an argument with police officers in Gujrat Pakistan. After being accused of making derogatory remarks about the Prophet, he was hacked to death with an ax by a police officer. Did Syed Haider even make that disparaging remark? Only God knows. Haider was brutally murdered. These accusations of blasphemy were made to satisfy personal agendas. Blasphemy laws destroy human lives and destabilize the physical security of innocent people. But I don't need to restate this obvious problem today. We already know about it. These two particular cases come out of the Muslim world, but the problem of blasphemy laws exists in all the monotheist religions. In past ages, these laws were terribly destructive to Christian communities. Today, they have the greatest destructive impact among Muslims.

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Blasphemy laws evolved in order to protect religious sensibilities, but today they present a great threat to religion itself. In what follows, I will show that blasphemy laws destabilize moral and intellectual security because they, by their very definition, delegitimize all religion. Blasphemy laws insult scripture, and undermine the dignity of faith. Some have argued that blasphemy laws protect the dignity of religion. I will argue the opposite. Blasphemy laws do not protect religion. Blasphemy laws persecute religions. They degrade religion. All blasphemy laws should be abolished. Here is why.

In most of the world before the modern period, intolerance was a virtue. I am talking about chauvinism and bigotry - in Arabic, *تعصب* or *تمسك لعقيدة*, *קנאות*, *תּוֹרְפֵי* in Hebrew. Before the modern period, people tended to live in isolated communities. And they thought that unity required holding the same beliefs. Questioning belief was considered rebellious and subversive. In those days it was assumed that questioning belief would result in *فتنة*, in rebellion against truth. It would cause treason and lead people to destroy the stability of society. It would cause lawlessness, violence and many other evils. If a person deviated too far from the common assumption of religious truth, that person would be accused of blasphemy, *تجديف* in modern Arabic, but in Islamic juridical literature it is often called *سبّ* - *sabb*. In Hebrew it is called *חלול ה'* or *חרור*, desecrating the Name of God.

In the medieval world, being firm in one's commitment was expressed through *intolerance*. People thought that being chauvinistic meant being faithful to the Truth of God. They thought xenophobia kept society stable. They believed prejudice kept people happy and prosperous. According to the logic of religious intolerance, because there is only one God there can be only one Truth. God is all-knowing. God is all-merciful. God does not lie, and God does not give conflicting messages to different peoples. Therefore, there cannot be a multitude of truths, but only one *real* Truth. This has been the position of many traditional theologians in each of the great scriptural monotheisms, Jews, Christians and Muslims.

So consider this scene. One day, three great and wise men meet together. Each represents a different religion, and each man is the greatest theologian of his faith. And each carries his version of religious *intolerance*. These men are the greatest theologians of their generation. They meet together on a hill overlooking a great valley. In the valley are the greatest scientists, artists, engineers and soldiers of these three religious civilizations. They are separated into three massive armies facing one another on the battlefield. The reputation of each religion is at stake. Their dignity is in the balance. So each one invests all its wealth and strength to prove its particular view of truth. Each believes that it is right, and each believes that God loves only it. Each is steadfast. Each is proud. They are ready to give battle in order to destroy their competition – and also themselves if necessary – in order to express their absolute loyalty to God.

Could anyone think this is something God desires?

The three great religious leaders have much to argue about. But there is one key issue about which they could all agree, one central answer that they could all approve, and on this they could all find accord: “The truth is mine, only mine!” Where does that lead us? Nowhere! Or perhaps better said, it leads eventually to destruction.

In the pre-modern world, most people lived in isolated religious communities. People rarely met people with different faith beliefs. Before modernity, one could safely live without the challenge and threat of contrary ideas. When someone suggested a very different idea, intolerant people would snuff it out. The threat would be eliminated. Then all would be safe again. One was rarely challenged by new religious ideas. That ended with modernity. For the past 200 years, the world has become increasingly smaller. People of different religions, races, languages and cultures now mix together as never before.

Today, there are very few isolated communities. And even if we lived in a completely homogenous community where everybody believed in the same ideas, the power of mass communication and the internet forces us to hear new opinions and philosophies that might challenge our assumptions about faith and God. Perhaps the greatest challenge to the pre-modern habit of intolerance is the fact that believers of different religious communities live side-by-side. Jews, Christians, Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, and many others live in the same communities or near one another. In the monotheistic traditions, as I mentioned, one God meant one Truth. Why would God offer different messages to different religious communities?

It is difficult to conceive God as demanding belief that he became incarnate in the personhood of Jesus in one revelation to one community, and then demand the belief that he never became incarnate in the personhood of Jesus in the revelation of another community. If God gave these two contrary messages, then God would be lying to one community (heaven forbid). This is impossible. So who is right?

Now here is the real problem. Each of our religions requires creedal belief that represents heresy to another religion. To many Christians who believe in the divine incarnation and the saving power of Jesus as Christ and God, those who do not believe in this doctrine are blasphemers. But to many non-Christians, that very faith in the doctrine of divine incarnation is itself blasphemy.

Now we are arriving at the core problem. Every monotheistic religion, by its very essence, espouses blasphemy according to other monotheistic religions. One religion’s blasphemy is another religion’s central doctrine of belief. For example:

A Jew who hears a Muslim claim that the Torah has been corrupted would consider that claim to be blasphemy. How dare you insult my revelation and my scripture! But the claim that Jews corrupted their own scripture is mentioned repeatedly in the Qur’an (Q.2:59, 75-77, 140; 3:77-79, 187; 4:46; 5:13-15, 41, etc.).

A Christian who hears a Jew or Muslim say that Jesus Christ is not the son of God may consider that claim to be blasphemy (Mt.27:39). But it is a central doctrine of Judaism and Islam that God would not have a son.

And a Muslim who hears a Jew or Christian disrespect the prophethood of Muhammad can consider that blasphemy. But it is a central doctrine of Judaism and Christianity that there are no more prophets after the prophets of the Bible.

Some people argue that they can demonstrate the truth through reason. And some argue that they can prove religious truth through divine revelation. But if they could truly “prove” it, then everybody would agree, by definition. That is the meaning of proof.

Friends, if there is anything that people agree to disagree about, it is religion. One religion’s central doctrine of faith is another religion’s blasphemy. In each of these cases, what appears blasphemous to one religion is central religious creed to another. To consider a core principle of a religion to be blasphemy is itself a kind of blasphemy!

The act of prayer is an affirmation of faith in the particular doctrine of a religion. When we pray, we recite our faith requirements. We acknowledge them to ourselves and to the world. But these acts of prayer may be offensive to members of other religions because they are statements of faith that contradict the faith statements of our sister religions. They can be considered blasphemous. In blasphemy laws, we prevent the free expression of religion.

To conclude, it seems obvious that blasphemy laws destabilize society. Blasphemy laws undermine moral security. Blasphemy laws subvert intellectual security. Moral and intellectual security requires the elimination of all blasphemy law. Blasphemy law is, by definition, an enemy of religion. Blasphemy laws cannot avoid persecuting religious minorities. We can demand respect of other religions, but this demand for respect is an issue of education – not legislation. Blasphemy laws do not protect religions. Blasphemy laws persecute religions.

# DESTABILIZATION OF MORAL AND INTELLECTUAL SECURITY





*Javaid William*<sup>1</sup>

## **Destabilization of Moral and Intellectual Security**

### **Abstract**

Intellectual strength contributes greatly to the moral stability to an individual no matter what religion or sect they belong to. The right interpretation of one's Holy Scriptures builds further this stability and therefore has a great influence, which has for some time been exploited by various factors in one's life, both external and internal. Religion, in the present times is becoming all the more politicized, creating a deepening overlap between religion and nationality, ultimately leading to the exclusion of minority religious groups. This destabilization of ones both moral and intellectual security leads to a rise in fundamentalist inclinations, incomplete teaching on reciprocity, an attitude of exclusivity, a lack of accurate knowledge, and henceforth an intellectual conflict among religions and nations holding different perspectives. There can be deep disconnect in the social fabric when the state and religion cannot be differentiated or kept apart. There are many factors collectively which lead an individual or a group of people to fundamentalist and extremist, incomplete teaching on reciprocity, attitude of exclusivity, lack of accurate knowledge, conflict of science and religion, conflict between religions and nations and different perspectives. The effect of changes in the moral and intellectual security of society can prove to be highly destructive to social fabric where even the fittest may find hard to survive, society affects a person psychologically eventually leading to radicalization and extremism. Several complexities begin to develop within an individual with extreme thoughts of personal belief and the outright rejection of those of others to the extent of justifying violence and conflict.

### **Negative Influence of Religious & Political Leadership**

Society in general holds as leaders those who exhibit the capacity to reason with them and offer solutions to their way of life. The trend of political leaders using religion as a tool for furthering their own agendas and using the interpretation that works best for them is a large contributor to the deterioration of the moral and intellectual security fabric.

A similar situation arises when religious leaders take the form of political leaders forming parties that are motivated by a specific school of thought to further a particular political agenda also encompasses youth to take the path promoted by such leadership leaning towards radical ideologies many times involvement in party criminal activities and violence. This negative motivation therefore arises when a threat to moral as well as intellectual security becomes consolidated, when seemingly well respected and looked up to individuals lead and support not to forget encourage the path of conflict and violence. They also do not have the opportunity

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to be in a conducive environment for development and peace nor learn any kind of ethical and moral values.

It is unfortunate that leaders such as these mentioned do not recognize their responsibility towards young people and misinform them to carry out their own interests along with instilling an identity crisis and deformed personality of young people who will from there on take their place in the future.

### **Lack of Knowledge or Incomplete Knowledge**

It is a social norm that in many tribal and rural areas there are no standards of education sometimes even no education system at all. What prevails in this sort of dynamic is either religious education led by seminaries who become the biggest benefactors of the people. Therefore, the people living in impoverished areas send their children to study in the local Madaris or religious seminaries, which are owned by leaders from different schools of thought and also different sects. The instructors in those Madaris themselves lack mainstream education and exposure most predominantly rigid in their views about other schools of thought (as revealed by various research) Some are also trained and funded by banned fundamentalist organizations to bring up the spirit of false Jihad in the minds of children since their childhood or their teenage years. They tend to brainwash the mind of children by quoting them different verses from their religious books with false interpretations and prepare them for Jihad against ‘non-believers’. It is similar to the situation of the Christian seminaries where education is confined to the belief of ones own school of thought maintaining much rigidity in ones views.

### **Conflict between Religions and Nations**

Many people have closely linked their religion and their nationality. In Pakistan there are more sectarian issues than the issues against minorities, the religion of Islam is divided in different sects as are Christians and Hindus with thee caste system and schools of thought. All followers of these sects believe that they are superior from one another and the reason behind this is the uneducated clerics, who give them false briefings and hate speech against each other. In Pakistan there are 97% Muslims and 3% minorities, in 97% Muslims there are 77% of Sunnis and 20% of Shias. And in the remaining 3% there are Hindus, Christians and Ahmadis etc.

On the other hand, Asia or the subcontinent has a rich history and people living on these lands have some strong binding forces. And the strongest binding force for them is their culture, tradition and religion; no matter what faith one belongs to a Hindu, Christian or Muslim if it is taken very seriously with high sensitivity towards any negative propaganda affecting their faith.

Here it is important to understand that this is one of the reasons fundamentalism is becoming hard to tackle due to its deep rooted problems related to peace, security in countries, the economic situation with an increasingly burdened lower and middle class as well as the severe effects of climate change and food insecurity in the region. South Asia is experiencing tremendously the effects of religious violence and fundamentalism making the region a flash point on the world

map. Recent clashes and unrest in India paints a picture of communal violence in the country exhibiting extreme intolerance and a concerted effort to promote 'communal polarization'. Countries like Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh hold high counts of both reported and unreported cases of oppression.

The persecution of minorities is also taking place at various levels which greatly disturbs inclusive participation and equal citizenship in the country. Social scientists predict that scores of mass movements could continue to rise in the years to come if ruthless modern forms of fundamentalism cannot be beaten and these include using water as a weapon of war, resorting to beheadings, rape, torture and attacks. It is also important to note that psychological warfare is also being used in this latest form of fundamentalism highly using young people as a tool for more absorption and acceptance of the concept of Islamic fundamentalism such as the Shura Council of the Islamic Youth in Libya. It is also ironic that a large number of recruited youth are migrants to western countries where they have experienced a loss of their identity, disconnectedness, not being welcome or accepted at home, also not being deeply rooted in the culture and tradition of their parents. Though religious education does also induce the transition to radical views, the youth however that is seen to be integrated more with host communities shifting societies becoming more vulnerable to radicalization and religious fundamentalism seeking to be part of the 'sub-culture of jihadists'. This serves as fertile ground for youth to be engaged in radicalist recruitments. Racism experienced by minority communities, alongside failed integration, feeds the conflict between the extremes in society.

As the custodian of the Catholic faith, the Holy Father Pope Francis used strong words of condemnation of the actions of brutality against Christians at the hands of ISIS revisiting Pope John Paul II who had warned world governments and religious leaders of times to rediscover paths of peace which was not found and the lack of which is why we suffer these consequences today. What was needed more than invasions led by western countries was building the foundations of dialogue and peace where peace, security and people's solidarity are the pre-conditions for poverty reduction and sustainable development.

### **Relationship between Religion and Violence**

The concept of fundamentalism is no longer confined to the context of extreme behavior whether it be political or militant as was in the 1970s, but has rather gone much further in so that this leaves a fine line with religious violence. Generally, fundamentalism reveals a clash between the ideas of 'modern society and modern morality' (Crabtree 2012). In a broader spectrum, fundamentalism highlights oppression, violence which has resulted from Judaism and Christianity in the past and more prone in the present Islamic fundamentalism. Until very recently, the emergence of Buddhist extremist is sprouting including the increasing religious violence and oppression at the hands of Hindu extremists.

An individual becomes a 'fundamentalist' in the eyes of the other when he or she is said to uphold their belief in the very literal and strict interpretation of their scriptures. This begins to cross the line when the belief of the other is disrespected,

disregarded, offering a complete shut out to a different faith with imposition regarding one's own faith supreme rejecting the other completely. An inflexible relationship is developed ignoring different cultures and their relationships necessary to bind society for prosperity, peace, growth and development.

There were many anti-colonial movements based on Islamic revivalism in the first half of the twentieth century. In so far as these Islamists played on the insecurities of social groups that were disappearing as society was transformed by capitalism and imperialism, they cannot be considered progressive. But in so far as this Islamism were also often an appeal to the radical currents produced by society's transformation, neither can it be characterized in any straightforward way as reactionary.

As a case study of Pakistan, constant attacks on religious minorities and discriminatory laws which do not allow minorities to practice their rights.

### **Religious Diversity**

In this one world, we have multiple religions. And each religion has multiple divisions also commonly termed as sects. Each of the sects has their own beliefs and they are being followed by billions of people around the globe. Sometimes this diversity leads to rejection, redemption and conflicts, but it could have even more worst effects like mass murders, wars and genocide. A society may not be necessarily prepared to face a fast change in population composition. In particular, one can argue that change in ethnic composition is more likely to become an important issue with the rising flow of migration, especially during the current era of globalization when people from various cultural backgrounds move around the world. Ethnicity and religion become very crucial factors in determining cultural markers among people. Ideological tension will appear in the more subtle politics of identity. Sen (2006) argues that rising identity may have two opposing sides, one positive and the other negative. On the positive side, rising identity may be an asset for a society by increasing the sense of belonging in a community. On the negative side, rising identity may be detrimental to the society because a strong identity might mean that other people are excluded. A well-integrated community, with strong internal solidarity, might suddenly show its ugly side when migrants (strangers) enter the community. The adversity of exclusion might occur at the same time as the gifts of inclusion. Violence resulting from identity conflicts has occurred all around the world.

### **The Concept of Heaven and Hell**

One of the most important aspects to control the violent activities is the misuse of the context and concept of heaven and hell portrayed in religious doctrines. Banned fundamentalist organization, suicide bombers and terrorists which are being prepared by Jihadi organizations like ISIS, Daish, etc. are provoking attitude of exclusivity and dualistic thinking in the mind of teenagers they are training. They raise this concept in the minds of these teenagers that you are or you will perform this activity in the name of Allah Almighty and you will be considered "Shaheed"

and go straight to the heavens. They raise these teenagers by telling them that you are a Muslim and in order to promote your religion you have to eliminate all people who are not the followers of Islam. They tell them about the heavens and hell, and preach that the only way to reach the heavens is to protect your religion and fight for it. The Jihadi organizations use the concept of heaven and hell to promote their terrorists' activities, it is also an essential element which again falls in lack of knowledge. You will study further that it is very easy to attract or influence a young mind towards a terrorist's activity because they are unaware of the outcomes for what they are doing.

### **Attitude of Exclusivity**

This attitude of exclusivity is when a person has a firm belief that his religion is the sole true religion and uniquely possesses the only true knowledge of God. This means that followers of other religions are preaching false religions and are worshipping fake Gods. Some of these groups say that these followers worship Satan or demons. For example, back in 1980s and 1990s many Christian groups accused Wiccans and Neopagans of being Satanists. Al Qaeda is a recent example of a group that has heavily cultivated and exploited a militant Islamic identity, with Westerners as its specific target.

### **Dualistic Thinking**

Dualism is a concept raised in the mind of those people who are being prepared to perform any kind of violent and extremist activity, this concept briefly explains that the world is ruled by forces of good and evil. They have a firm belief that their own religion, race, sex, nationality, or skin color, etc. are good or superior to others, in an early age children tend to have this kind of dualistic thinking. They believe that they are on the good side and will fighting against the evil side, this also come under the lack of knowledge produced by these so called religious scholars.

Example: The issue of racism is still somewhere in USA, which has been there since Columbus has founded it. The white people of America had a superiority complex that the black people living in their country are their slaves and not equivalent to them. This is an appropriate example of dualistic thinking on the basis of race and skin color, blacks were treated as slaves and still some part of racism is present there. The same issues also arouse against the Red Indians who still don't consider Columbus as the founder of America and according to them he was the biggest terrorist of the world who killed thousands to Red Indians to get America, same was the case with the war in Cuba.

### **Acceptance in the Society**

One of the major points which play a pivotal role in a person's destabilization of moral and intellectual security is his/her acceptance in the society. When a person is not accepted in the society, he becomes isolated and lives in his own self-made world of dreams or he/she can be very vulnerable to extremist ideas and get involved in the terrorist activities to take revenge from the society which rejected

him. The “Two Nation Theory” which was presented by Sir Syed Ahmed Khan after analyzing the situation of Muslims in the subcontinent and raised his voice for a separate homeland for Muslims of the subcontinent, so they can practice their religion freely and live their life according to Islam because at that moment they were not accepted by the majority of the Indian society of subcontinent. But sadly, after the Independence of Pakistan 69 years have passed and still we haven’t accepted the minorities living in the secular nation of Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah.

Yes, all the minorities are free to practice their religion in Pakistan, but the question is that are they being given the same rights as the Muslim community in our country? Are they being equally treated like Muslims? The harsh truth is that there is still little or no respect for minorities considering them as only good enough for menial janitorial work. Minorities currently present in Pakistan live an isolated life; they have their own towns and societies in which they live in after being widely rejected by the Majority of our country.

Example: Majority of a Christian community living in Lahore is situated near the boundary line of Lahore and Kasur and the place is known as “Youhanabad” the biggest Christian community society in Pakistan according to the number of its population. Same as it is goes with the Ahmadis, majority of Ahmadis live in a city called Rubwa near Chinot.

After a thorough discussion with some Christian community members, I came to know that according to them and as per my understandings and observations, not only Christians but all the minorities are still not accepted by the society. Yes, the level of acceptance is higher in the metropolitan cities, but it is the same in the towns and villages of our country.

The points raised in the discussion were:

- The contradiction in the constitution of Pakistan, which clearly says that a person belonging from the minority will never, be elected for a higher post like President and Prime Minister of Pakistan. This is against Nationalism and the values of Human Rights.
- The quota system of Government jobs must be improved, as it is the same 5% since the Independence Day.
- The population of minorities is not accurately measured; it is the same 2% since 14<sup>th</sup> August 1947.
- The syllabus in the school must be updated, as the initial book of Islamic Studies has portrayed all the minorities as “Kafir”. This puts a negative impact on a child’s mind; they must differentiate between Kafir and non-believers.
- The negative impact of Blasphemy Law, no proper investigation before sentencing to death penalty.

### **Violence against Religious Minorities under the Blasphemy Law**

The Christian community in Pakistan has produced a lot of big names and has introduced numerous higher categories educational institutions all over Pakistan

like, Forman Christian College (Lahore), Kinnaird College (Lahore), and Cathedral School System (Lahore), St. Patrick's High School & College (Karachi), St. Joseph's Convent High School & Women College (Karachi) and St. Paul's High School (Karachi), Convent of Jesus & Mary (Karachi, Lahore & Murree) St. Bonaventure High School (Hyderabad) LaSalle High School (Faisalabad & Multan) and Sacred Heart Convent School (Faisalabad) etc.

After explaining the topic socially, politically, religiously and nationally I would like to explain it a different context in which the aspect of responsibility for each one of us in our own spheres to lead society towards moral and intellectual security comes in.

### **Social Responsibility towards Moral and Intellectual Security**

Intellectual knowledge lies in the hands of the enlightened professors, academia and intelligentsia of society to some extent we can also add religious scholars who are well versed with their subjects and can be considered moderate in its true sense. When these important members of society begin to influence minds negatively while they are supposed to form intelligent, moral, responsible and intellectual minds, instability and a destabilization of the social fabric occurs. The level of conflict and violence that can be instigated by misinformation is manifold as well as having the long term impact of disintegrating relationships and people for life a situation which becomes almost impossible to mend. Breaking down people and one human community into groups tends to create an imbalance in society and the culture of promoting power where only the most powerful in their standing whether it may be in terms of numbers or ideology can make their way through leaving the others behind with the feeling that they are inferior and less important.

On the other hand religious leaders and clerics whether they may be bishops, maulanans, or pandits all if start to propagate extreme forms of their own schools of thought without being responsible to the fragile hearts and minds of people this begins to disintegrate moral and intellectual security within society. For example even though religious leaders may be educated they however influence society with rigidity and a particular school of thought.

#### **Recommendations**

It is highly important to bring religious and political leaders of the country into a regularized system such as those of the seminaries and Madaris registered, any kind of religious institute must be registered by the government of that particular country and the teachers teaching there must be qualified. All religious scholars must stand united with each other in order to promote interfaith peace and harmony which is not only a culture in it of peace and harmony but is also our survival of the time.

Lack of knowledge or lack of education is the most important issue which raises such gaps, to tackle this problem nations must take concrete steps such as the supervision of educational content being delivered at religious seminaries and also control messages which create rifts between communities leading to deep cracks in the intellectual and moral stability of a society.



Parents have also an important role to play in the brought-up of their children; they should have a proper check and balance on their children. There should be a friendly relation between a child and his or her parents from an early age, they must be involved or somehow engaged in each and every activity done by their children. Parents should also monitor the content watched by their children and they should try to keep their child away from violent activities in an early-age because that's the time when the kids are most attracted to it and in future it becomes a part of their personality. So, until their child is sensible enough that he or she can differ in good or bad they must also monitor what content their child is being watching.

Religion is the only shield that can stop violence, if all the religious scholars are on one platform then to control these violence activities will be a much easier task.

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## **Media's Negative Role in the Construction of Stereotypes toward Muslims**

### **Abstract**

This research was carried out to improve the relationships between Muslim students and other students of diverse backgrounds at Fructuoso Rodríguez University, Cuba. In order to achieve this objective, the fundamental characteristics of the Islam as well as the main causes of the mispopularization of Muslims were exposed. The role of the media as generators of stereotypes was emphasized based on the analysis of concepts regarding its social representation, dimension and structure. Three research techniques were used; Drawing, Semantic Differential and Free Words. These methods were associated with our objective to characterize the social representation of the Muslims in a Cuban university environment. The obtained results indicate the existence of prejudices and stereotypes about Muslims due to the deformation of knowledge about the realities of Islam. Hence, recommendations are made to develop an understanding, acceptance, and respect for Islamic culture and its followers by encouraging future efforts directed at socio-cultural transformation in the university campus.

### **Introduction**

Nowadays, the media is everywhere like never before. It allows the people of different socio-cultural backgrounds can learn different matters easily. In addition, public can be well-informed and improve their knowledge on various topics. But at the same time, the media is used to spread propagandas, to distort information and to present false images or ideas according to interests of press agencies or private organizations. That happens precisely in the case of the representation of the Muslims through the Media.

The common misconceptions about Islam arise in the minds of a majority of non-Muslims because they are constantly being bombarded with misinformation about Islam. The western world mainly controls international media including international satellite channels, radio stations, newspapers, magazines or books. The internet also has become a powerful medium of information. Although internet is not controlled by anyone, one finds a large amount of virulent propaganda about Islam on the internet. On the other hand, Muslims are also utilizing this media tool to portray the right image of Islam and Muslims, but their attempts are far behind as compared with the propaganda against Islam.

The propaganda against Islam by the media directly influences the confirmation of stereotypes toward Muslims. In a way, I it provokes that non-Muslims have an unfavorable social representation of the Islamic religion and its

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followers. Many methods and techniques such as social psychology and the theory of social representations can be used to respond to the media's negative role in the construction of stereotypes toward Muslims. The study of social representations is an entrance door to the symbolic universe of people as being the first link for future actions of social transformation.

The main objectives of this practical study were: 1. to examine the Media's negative role in the construction of stereotypes toward Muslims, and 2. to analyze how Social psychology and the theory of social representations can help to change the media's negative influence, in a Cuban university environment.

### **Origin of Wrong Conceptions about the Islamic Religion**

Even though the dominant Arab culture, its philosophy and natural sciences, as well as the economic force and politics of the Islam, were highly admired in the Middle Ages, the devaluation and rejection to Arabic-Islamic culture began with the Renaissance period. Many ethnic-religious prejudices against Islam had already existed because people from other backgrounds had created them. There is now growing propaganda against the Muslims, who are labeled dreadful for the world, as part of a new clash of civilizations between Islamic and Western cultures. The wrong perception and low representation of the Islamic culture has been facilitated by the news, the film industry and the media in general. There is a communicative monopoly that publishes only biased aspects according to priorities and interests of certain media sources although many of these aspects are entirely false.

After the attack of the twin towers in New York, the negative image of the Arab culture and the Muslims were reinforced more by Western media. The media imposed an idea that to be an Arab or Muslim is equal to be a terrorist, who is similar to Satan with horrendous crimes. The media was used to create a tergiversated image of the Muslims to generate intolerance leading to discrimination, exclusion, xenophobia and even to undesirable military actions.

### **Media's Influence in the Construction of Stereotypes**

The confirmation of the public opinion and the construction of social representations about different acts in the contemporary societies depend on the media. As Martin Serrano explains (1986, p.143): "The participation of the media in the elaboration of a representation of what it happens in the world begins when the mediator institution, or other social agents (Agency of News, Writing Council, Censors, etc.), select determined events to make them publics and no select others."

The production of mediated representations is a process in which the reporter participates like mediator inside of an informative company. This process implies the selection of current social events; collecting information and construction of narrations about these actions, which are edited, recorded, published, nested and finally, offered the public as merchandise information. According to the previous idea, the workers of the media (journalists, reporters, photographers, bosses of information, writing, and directives) develop their role as a mediator of

construction of the reality, in a first way, starting from their interpretation of the facts.

These analyses are determined by their cultural baggage, ideology, professional formation, individual interests and ideally for their conception of the professional duty. Thus, the production of the media is determined in a first instance for the cognitive mediation that the reporter carries out in individual order, and in a second instance, for the mediation that, according to certain politicians, the informative companies carry out. All of that contributes to the popularization of mediatized information and many times also stereotyped information. Although it is important to point out that the popularization of stereotyped information not only brings impositions by some media for the sake of commercialization, but it also needs the repetition by the ways of popular narrating (Martin-Barber 2001).

The consumption in an accumulative way of some contents can be a major factor in the internalization of stereotypes. The stereotypes are “beliefs more or less structured in the mind of a person about a social group” (Páez, 2004, p. 760). They are generalizations made rapidly about a group, and they usually have incomplete or erroneous information (Schiappa, Gregg and Hewes, 2005). For this reason, these representations can result in the ignorance of the variability of the group members.. So, when a person is categorized within a group, for example, “group of Muslims”, receive individual attributes, usually of negative character. Since she or he is part of the group, it will be difficult to change these negative attributes (Tan, Fujioka y Lucht, 1997).

The media’s role can be significant for the pre-activation of stereotypes toward Muslims through the presentation of repetitive patrons in informative contents or contents of fiction (Dixon, 2000; Dixon and Linz, 2000). Especially when the images frequently appear they transform into crucial information taken by people as common knowledge (Brown-Givens and Monahan, 2005). So, the presented image of Muslims will be considered as valid and real by people who frequently follow the media (Fujioka, 1999).

When the images of Muslims are shown in a prejudiced way, the audience will have an erroneous idea of Muslims. This wrong presentation may legitimate social differences that can generate the discrimination of some groups in front of others (Tamborini, Mastro, Chory-Assad and Huang 2000). As Busselle and Crandall (2002) reported, the media does not transmit and generalize only stereotypes about some groups, but rather they also justify the consequences that it will have in public policies, discrimination and other actions in the social reality.

The stereotype process toward the Muslims generated by the media’s consumption is developed in two stages according to Brown-Givens and Monahan (2005). In the first stage, it will activate a system of personal beliefs that associates the Muslims with certain stereotypes. The media’s impact in this phase is stronger when it’s minor the knowledge of the audience regarding the Islamic religion and its followers (Fujioka 1999). In the second stage, the activated stereotypes are recovered to interpret the information that they receive and to improve assessment of the Muslims.

Thus, having a different religion, as in the case of the Muslims, can be a reason of discrimination induced or reinforced by the media. In this regard, non-Muslims may have an unfavorable social representation about Islam.

### **Theory of Social Representations**

From the psychological point of view, Serge Moscovici is recognized as the principal exponent of the theory of Social Representations, proposing that "...Social Representation is a group of concepts, enunciated and explanations originated in the daily life, in the course of the communications among individuals. Social representations are in correspondence with myths and systems of beliefs in traditional societies. They are a system of values, ideas and practical relative to objects, aspects or dimensions of the social life and constitute an instrument of orientation in the perception of situations and the elaboration of answers..." (Moscovici, 1981, cited by Perera, M, 2005, p. 44).

Denise Jodelet incorporates new elements to the definition of Moscovici referring that social representations are: "...condensed images of a group of meanings; systems that permit to people interpret what happens to them, and even, to give a sense to the unexpected thing; categories used for classify persons and situations" (Jodelet, D, 1986, cited for Perera, 1999, p. 9).

There are many other definitions, conceptions and notions of social representation. Therefore, the social representations are complex and versatile concepts that contain forms of social thought that facilitate the interpretation of the reality. They are forms of knowledge socially elaborated and participate in the construction of the reality. Representations are structured around three fundamental components: attitude toward the object, information about the object and a field of representation where they are organized a series of contents hierarchy. Attitude shows positive or negative dispositions that people have toward an object of representation. In the attitude, there are dynamic elements that affect the person emotionally. Information is the knowledge about the object of representation. Last and not less important, the field of representation is the order and hierarchy of elements that configure the content in the representation.

This field of representation is organized in a diagram or figurative nucleus, constituting the most solid and stable part in the representation. It also organizes the group of elements of the image giving meaning to all the elements that are in the field of representation. The rest of the elements are rounding the central ideas and they could be, in the future, at the figurative nucleus (Alfonso, 2012).

The Theory of Social Representations gives an opportunity to explain scientifically the necessity of a change in the social subjectivity if we understand that one of the main barriers in the relationship with Muslims and practitioners of this religion in general, arises just from the representations that people have about the Islam. It is critical to interpret this reality beginning with the interpretation of beliefs and opinions of social origin shared by the groups.

### **Social Representation of Muslims in Media: Experiences from Fructuoso Rodriguez University in Cuba**

Muslim students from many countries study at Fructuoso Rodríguez University, Cuba. In this university, some conflicts between Muslims and no-Muslims occurred in the past. In many cases, the own barriers that generate stereotyped conceptions limit the educational policies of the institution. Thereby,, a research was initiated to explore the social representation by students and professors at Fructuoso Rodriguez University about the Muslims, and then to establish future actions of social transformation, according to the characteristics of the social representation studied.

The results of the research showed that the majority of the persons have a wrong conception of Islam and Muslims due to the media. They told that their knowledge and ideas about Muslims arise from movies, news, Internet, TV programs and information on newspapers or magazines. Two of the techniques applied were *Technique of Drawing* and *Free Association of Words*.

#### **Technique of drawing**

The drawings were made with the title “*I see the Muslims like this form...*” With the drawings, the people should try to represent the believers of the Islam symbolically. In general, the most of the sample represented Muslims by three fundamental categories: “physical features and typical dress”, “ingrained religious beliefs” and “war and terrorism”. All these categories focus mainly in physical and external aspects but only a few persons focus on feelings and spiritual qualities. The most frequent category was: “physical features and typical dress”. In this category, there were the following drawings: men with beards, long dresses, turban and handkerchiefs, head covered with hats, veils in the women, emphasized the beards in the men and the veils in the women. (To see annexed 1).

The category: “ingrained religious beliefs” continues to the previous category. In connection with this category some symbols are reflected, for example, symbols of the meditation and prayers associated with religious centers, among those symbols that appear many times are referred to The Mecca (to see annexed 2). Many persons of the sample associate the religious beliefs with strong dogmas that contribute motivations and behaviors. According to subject of the sample, these beliefs can motivate the realization of terrorist actions, by the watchwords of “killing in the name of Allah”, the recurrent sentence in the drawings. And they affirmed that they know that thanks to the media.

Precisely related with that, the category “war and terrorism” appears with drawings with bombs, firearms, battle tanks, collapsed structures, wounded people, blood and symbols in general of fight and conflicts (to see annexed 3). Some phrases accompanied to these drawings like for example: “They are always in war”, “they are terrorist and suicidal”, “Fanatic”, “The Muslims are dangerous persons”, “it is necessary to be careful with them because they are very violent”. These sentences reaffirm the ideas, which associate Muslims with military events and terrorist acts to perceive them as violent and aggressive persons. It was found that the persons of the sample have stereotypes and prejudices toward Muslim students.

### **Technique of free association of words**

A fundamental analysis of qualitative type was made with all the answers that was originated by the word: “Muslim”. The researcher told persons of the sample to *say the first words they thought when somebody says: “Muslim”*. Some categories were analyzed according to results wherein contain a dynamic group of terms and keep relationship and proximity to their meaning. The category: “characteristic of the personality” appears in first hierarchical order. This was accordingly elaborated with the words: strange, different, people of another world, crazy, evil, disciplines, respect, antiquated, intelligent, strict, brave, perseverance, educated, cults and friendship.

“Religious beliefs” continues in order, and this is composed of the following terms: religion, religious, believers and credulous. The third was, “terrorism and war”, category in which the following words were included; terrorists, suicides, wars, battle tanks, firearm, blood, death, attacks, murderers, conflicts, fanatic, aggressive, resolved and espionage, that which denotes the existence of emotions and negative feelings on the part of the sample toward the Muslims. All the persons said they see the Muslims like this way every day on the television and in the Media in general.

“Physical features and typical dress” continue in occurrence. There are words herein including, but not limited to, dresses long, many cloths, big suits, strange clothes, bearded men and covered bodies. The category “marital customs” appear fewer represented, in this there are words and expressions like for example: many women, harem and a man with several wives. In this sense, the category of “bad habits” appears with the little frequency with terms like: alcoholic and drug addicts.

As in the technique of the Drawing, the terms used in the frequency of evocation and hierarchical order denote that the population in the study, bases their opinions in a deformed knowledge of the reality that drives not only to bad criterions, also to behavior, expressions and attitudes sustained in stereotypes and prejudices.

### **General Analysis**

From the cognitive dimension, there is ignorance of the real and specific characteristics of the Muslims, as well as their practices and moral principles. There are erroneous conceptions of the Muslim people. Likewise, there is a limited knowledge of the Muslim conception. There is a presence of prejudices and stereotypes because they have a deformed knowledge of realities about Islam, being acquired (as they affirm) from movies, novels, Internet, articles and the media in general. Thus, we can arrive at the conclusion that the consumption of media contributes to the formation of stereotypes, and at the same time, the media contributes poor social representation of the Muslims at Fructuoso Rodríguez University.

The information of students and professors about Muslims does not come from the daily experience and the direct treatment. There is a significant change

among the representation of people, who have near relationship with the Muslims and those who do not have it. It means, people, who are said to be friends of Muslims, have a different representation to other members of the sample. In fact, they have more favorable and real representation of the Muslim in reality. This situation is directly related to a principle of the Social Representation. It affirms that the representation varies depending on the proximity of persons with the object of representation.

Other opinions are also distant from the reality. For example, these opinions included the association of Muslims with wars and terrorism, as well as with bad habits. In fact, Islam rejects those criminal acts, but most of people do not know this. The Holy Qur'an tells if anyone slew a person, it would be as if he slew the whole people; and if anyone saved a life, it would be as he saved the life of the whole people (Qur'an 5:32). Clearly, Islam advocates for peace.

In general, so much in the verbal speech, in the symbolic representation, like in the extra-verbal manifestations, there are attitudes with a tendency to the exclusion, being the idea that it is better to be far from the Muslims because they are different and dangerous. There are many pejorative words, for example some people of the sample refer to the Muslims as "people of another world", "different", "strange", "terrorists" and "fanatic". The sample conceives the Muslims as individuals far of the "normal parameters".

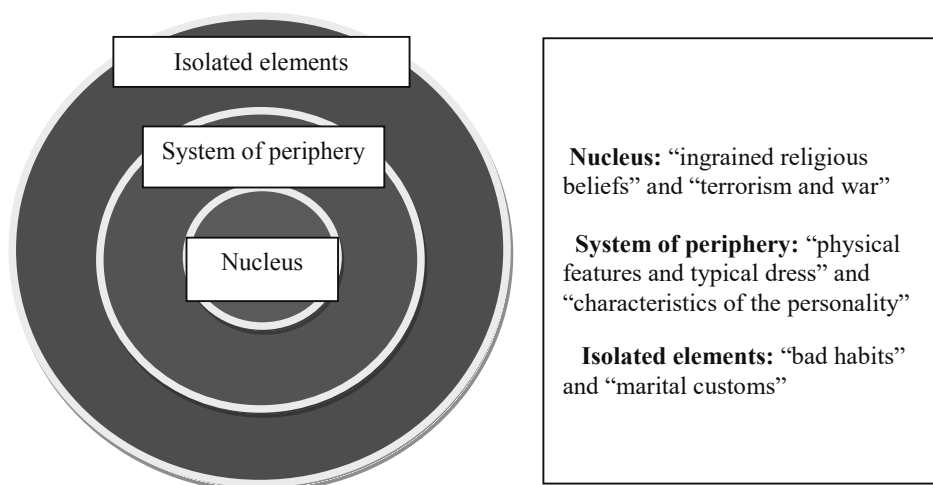
As referred previously, there is a trend to exclude the Muslims. Besides, there are a lot of prejudices about the Islam and ideas in direct contradiction to the real principles and doctrines of this religion. In summary, the ignorance about the Muslims is evident.

In relation to the attitudes of students and professors with Muslims, there are prevalence of attitudes of rejection, avoidance and evasion. These varying behaviours could be appreciated owing to the scientific observations, but in some cases there were direct manifestations through expressions, for example: "I try to stay distant of the Muslims," "I don't want to have relationship with them". And there were other pejorative expressions as: "Muslims are satanic and crazy," "they are people of another planet", "they should disappear," "they are always in war," "they are dangerous, aggressive and suicidal" and "Muslims are strange things."

In summary, the categories "ingrained religious beliefs" and "terrorism and war" are in the central nucleus of the social representation. These elements are in direct to the rest of the elements at the field of representation, which has in its system of periphery the categories: "physical features and typical dress" and "characteristics of the personality," and in a minor measure (isolated elements) "bad habits" and "marital customs." Finally, we can conclude that the nature of the central nucleus determines attitudes of rejection to the Muslims by part of the consulted students and professors.

The following graphic describes the field of representation:





The obtained results proved how the students and professors at Fructuoso Rodríguez University contribute in some measure to increase the presence of social stereotypes toward Muslims guided by many lies expanded by the media fundamentally. It represents an important dimension of the possibility of harmonic and functional relationships between Muslim students and the university community.

For those reasons, there is a necessity to elaborate socio-cultural actions that can contribute to a substantial and significant change in the social representation of the Muslims at Fructuoso Rodríguez University (keeping in mind the results obtained in the field of representation).

### **Recommendations for Future Actions of Socio-Cultural Transformation at Fructuoso Rodríguez University**

The following actions give an idea of a wide range of activities that can be developed according to the characteristics of the context of Fructuoso Rodríguez University.

The first activities were directed to work on the *isolated elements*: “bad habits” and “marital customs”. Secondly, activities were related to the elements of the *System of periphery*: “physical features and typical dress” and “characteristics of the personality”. Lastly, activities were carried out with the elements of the *nucleus*: “ingrained religious beliefs” and “terrorism and war”, keeping in mind that those include the most stable and solid part on the representation. Hence, modifications should not be made directly at this level before achieving partial results in the transformation of the isolated elements and the system of periphery.

Possible activities:

1. Conversations about the woman’s paper, the meaning of the marriage and the marital customs according to the Islam.

2. Exhibition of pictures, objects, dress and Muslim attires with comments and good explanations, also dialoguing about the human qualities that the Qur'an advises to have.
3. Conversations and exchange about bases and fundamental precepts of the Islam.
4. Conference: "Necessity to know the truth environment of the Islam nowadays."
5. Magisterial Conference: "Anti-Arab and anti-Muslim campaign developed by the media."
6. Projection of many documentaries which evidence that Islam is against of the terrorism.
7. Dialogues about wars in the Middle East and use of the Islam like a pretext.
8. Rain of ideas (ask a group of persons): "How to improve the relationships with Muslim students in the university?"
9. Game of roles (through small dramatizations to show): favorable and unfavorable behaviors with the Muslim students.
10. Great cultural activity "Approach to the reality of the Islamic culture."

### **Recommendations**

To continue studying the negative's role of the Media in the construction of stereotypes towards Muslims;

To do more research on the Islam and the Social Representation about Muslims in both Cuba and the world;

To develop projects of socio-cultural transformation at Fructuoso Rodríguez University and in other places in order to facilitate the acceptance and respect of the Islamic culture, as well as toward the Muslims.

### **Conclusion**

The propaganda against Islam by the Media influences directly in the confirmation of stereotypes toward Muslims and it provokes that no-Muslims have a social representation that is unfavorable of the Islamic religion and its followers.

There is a limited knowledge of the Muslim conception, and there is a presence of prejudices and stereotypes which have a deformed knowledge of the realities of the Islam. That does not respond to the daily experience and the direct treatment, but by the influence of media.

The Theory of Social Representations gives the possibility to enter in the symbolic universe of people as the first link for future actions of social transformation, in this way it can change the media's negative role.

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### Annexes

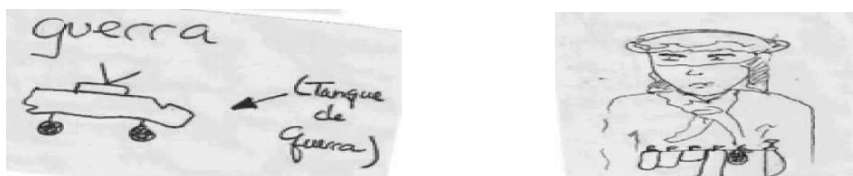
Annex 1: Drawings belonging to the category: “physical features and typical dress”



Annex 2: Drawings of the category: “ingrained religious beliefs”



Annex 3: Drawings belonging to the category: “terrorism and war”



*Keith Kahn-Harris*<sup>2</sup>

## **Responding Critically to Media Texts: Lessons from Jewish and Other Religious Reading Practices**

### **Abstract**

The article deals with media's presentation of religions and later responses to it. The author stresses in particular three modes of religious stance towards media, namely, resistance, imitation and participation. Finally, the article offers a critical religious engagement with media with emphasis on Jewish religious tradition.

### **Presentation**

It would be a mistake to see the insecurity and instability we find in today's world as a purely recent phenomenon. Values, ideologies and cultures have always been subject to change and revision; looking back to an imagined, simpler, golden age of clarity and security is inaccurate. Nonetheless, it is hard to deny that, in modernity, the pace of social, political, cultural, economic and technological change has speeded up considerably. In the post-war era this pace has further accelerated to the degree that, so it seems, it is extremely difficult to find any stability in what Zygmunt Bauman has called a 'liquid' modernity<sup>3</sup>. This liquidity means we are living in a world in which almost any idea, practice or culture is subject to fundamental challenge.

The development of a globalized mass media in the post-war period is one of the key factors in creating this liquidity. Facilitated by technological changes, media outlets have not only proliferated worldwide, they have also penetrated deep into what was once 'private' life. The internet, social media and mobile technology mean that there are few spaces left in the world that are not 'mediated' to some degree.

The effects of this mass mediatisation are paradoxical. On the one hand, the world becomes 'smaller' as once insurmountable barriers to global communication fall away. This can make the world seem for optimists like a single 'global village' in Marshall McLuhan's memorable phrase<sup>4</sup>. Pessimists point to, amongst other things, the 'cultural imperialism' of the west that can challenge global diversity. Yet on the other hand, the mediatisation of the world also has the power to increase the visibility of what were once highly marginal groups and cultures. We can point here to the prominence in 'the west' of, for example, yoga, Bollywood movies and Korean K-Pop music. So the globalized media can paradoxically increase both global homogeneity and global diversity.

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<sup>3</sup> Bauman, Zygmunt. 2000. *Liquid Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

<sup>4</sup> McLuhan, Marshall. 2003. *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. McGraw-Hill.

What the globalized media certainly does do is to relativise. What I mean by that is that it renders any religion, culture, community or practice as just one of many. It has become increasingly difficult to maintain the fiction that there can only be one ‘natural’ way to live one’s life. The media makes boundaries between groups unstable and permeable. However one choses to live, other options are constantly being publicized. Again, the effects of this are paradoxical. On the one hand, individuals and groups are subject to a constant insecurity as they can never guarantee that the foundations of their world will not crumble. On the other hand, the proliferation of options and resources in the world can be a source of empowerment and revitalization as old, engrained practices are challenged.

How then, should we evaluate the impact of globalized media on religion? And how should those committed to religions respond to the media?

It is important here to recognize that there is no one single picture. The diversity of the media, means that we cannot see its impact as homogeneous. Further, research into media has shown that the consumption of media is an active rather than passive process. We cannot necessarily assume that the media texts that an individual consumes will necessarily result in a particular outcome. In fact, the same media texts can be interpreted in radically different ways according to context. One famous example is the 1980s study of the American soap opera ‘Dallas’, demonstrated that viewers in different countries were essentially watching a different drama according to their context.<sup>5</sup>

So in evaluating the impact of the media on religion, it is better to look at how religious groups have responded to the media rather than making assumptions of what a particular kind of media text will do to religious people. In particular, we need to look closely at how the engagement of religions with the media responds to its diversity and its relativism. In other words, the media represents a challenge to religion – a challenge that has been met in a plurality of ways.

### **Religious Engagement with Media**

I want to highlight three broad modes of religious engagement with media, before going on to highlight – and recommend – a possible fourth way.

#### **Resistance**

One way in which religions respond to the media is to treat it as a threat that needs to be resisted as far as possible. Through restricting the access to the mass media, some religious groups hope to be able to prevent the erosion of their boundaries and the infiltration of ‘alien’ ideas. Attempts to do this range from simply encouraging members to restrict their media consumption to ‘approved’ outlets, to more thoroughgoing attempts to prevent them from having a choice in the matter.

The latter is only really possible when religious groups try and limit not just media consumption but any kind of interaction outside the group. Such is the case

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<sup>5</sup> Liebes, Tamar, and Elihu Katz. 1990. *The Export of Meaning: Cross-Cultural Readings of Dalls*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

with most strains of Haredi (ultra-orthodox) Judaism. In the post-war period the Haredim have attempted to enclose their communities through limiting their member's secular education and involvement in the job market. Preventing access to the media has become an increasingly important part of what Haredim see as protecting the survival of traditional Jewish life. Pronouncements and campaigns led by Haredi leaders have warned their communities against television, the internet and smartphones. In some cases, access to schools and other community resources has been restricted to those who comply with these restrictions. At the same time, the Haredim have their own media, including newspapers that carefully censor and frame news according to Haredi perspectives.

Leaving aside questions of personal freedom, such strategies may well turn out to be more ineffective and self-defeating. Given the growing ubiquity of online services, it may well prove to be impossible in the medium to long term to interact with the state and the economy without access to the internet. Further, in information-driven economies, restricting sources of information also restricts economic competitiveness. But in any case, bans on the internet and smartphones are widely flouted in Haredi communities. By refusing to engage with such media, the more conservative Haredi leaders risk being outflanked by their followers.

The Haredi example shows how refusal of the media is of limited effectiveness in the medium to long term. Indeed, examples from some of the most repressive countries on earth show that censorship today is a much more difficult proposition than it ever was. In North Korea, for example, there is a large underground trade in media that is officially prohibited, circulated through cheap usb sticks and computers.

### **Imitation**

Another option for religious groups that seek to restrict what they see as the threat of the media, is to create a media of one's own so that members will not need or be tempted to 'go outside'. To some extent even those groups that practice the first strategy do this too – there is, as I pointed out, a Haredi media. However, what I am referring to here is a much more thoroughgoing attempt to 'compete' with the wider media by creating an analogue of it. This is a colossal enterprise that can only be attempted by large and determined religious communities.

The strategy of imitation can be found in a number of world religions, but it is perhaps most highly developed within sections of evangelical and conservative Christianity in the US. Christians have invested heavily in a vast complex of online news sources, publishing houses, TV and radio stations, film studios and record labels. All the elements of a broad modern media diet are available in specifically Christian forms. What is striking about much (although not all) of the output of the contemporary Christian media is how far it is predicated on imitation of the wider media, rather than drawing on pre-existing Christian tradition.



This is perhaps most apparent in Contemporary Christian Music, which has developed since the 1960s as a response to contemporary rock and pop music.<sup>6</sup> For the most part it does not innovate musically, but follows and creates analogues of developing secular popular music genres. Essentially it strips out the problematic lyrical content and replaces it with Christian lyrics, accompanied by a competent simulacra of secular music.

There is considerable debate within evangelical and conservative Christian conservative circles as to whether this strategy is an appropriate one. There are those who argue that secular popular music cannot be rehabilitated in this way and should therefore be resisted – as in the strategy I outlined previously. But whether popular music is resisted or imitated, there is tacit agreement that, on its own, secular popular music is at the very least something that Christians should find problematic.

One of the problems with this strategy of imitation is that it usually – but not always – avoids pursuing aesthetics as an end in itself. Rather, aesthetics is an instrumental means to an end,<sup>7</sup> as a way of preventing people from straying from the fold or as a tool for evangelism. It fails to develop a specifically Christian form of culture that is not parasitic on secular culture. As such, it is not only a departure from the 2000 year tradition of Christian art, it can rarely act as anything other than a pail imitation of something else. In this way, imitation betrays a lack of confidence in religion's ability to provide alternatives to secular culture.

### **Participation**

Whereas the strategies of resistance and imitation try to reduce participation in the wider mediated world as far as possible, other religious groups and individuals have opted for a thorough participation in the media. This strategy is predicated on a recognition that not only does the ubiquity of media mean that it is almost impossible not to engage in it, doing so can actually bring advantages to religious groups. As such, to participate fully in the media is to tacitly accept – with varying degrees of enthusiasm – that it acts as a kind of giant marketplace, and that one's own point of view will become just one more item on the relativist menu. The media therefore offers unprecedented opportunities, as well as risks.

Of course, to pragmatically accept the reality of relativism is not the same as embracing relativism per se. There are many religious groups that participate in the media as a tool in proselytization and propaganda. The Islamic State, for example, is known for the sophistication of its media engagement and output, particular on social media. It does seem to have achieved some degree of success in gaining recruits through online activity. Yet there is no sense in which a free media is accepted by Islamic State as a principle; in the areas it controls it does not allow open media access. While they are an extreme case, it is common for conservative

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<sup>6</sup> Howard, Jay R., and John M. Streck. 1999. *Apostles of Rock: The Splintered World of Contemporary Christian Music*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky.

<sup>7</sup> Kahn-Harris, Keith, and Marcus Moberg. 2012. "Religious Popular Music: Between the Instrumental, Transcendent and Transgressive." *Temnos: Nordic Journal of Comparative Religion* 48 (1): 87–106.

religious groups to engage in the free media as a tool in outreach when the ultimate goal of that outreach is to restrict access to media. In this sense there is a cleavage between the outward and inward-facing media strategies of some religious groups.

More liberal religious groups would seem to have a more consistent strategy – embracing the free media both pragmatically and ideologically. Even here though, participation in the media can lead to dilemmas and compromises. How far should one make one's message easily consumable in a media age? Liberal religions are often reliant on complex and nuanced arguments that can be difficult to communicate in ways that cut through modern media noise. It is often more conservative voices with a simpler message who are able to communicate effectively. Participation in the media means losing control. Anyone who has ever published an article online knows that the risk of being misinterpreted is great. There is an inevitable pressure towards unambiguous messages in a world of ambiguous media.

### **Towards a Critical Religious Engagement with Media**

Religious groups have good reason to be concerned about the globalized mass media. Not only do the media undermine the boundaries of religion – even within those groups that resist the media – it also presents difficult dilemmas as to how to engage productively with an ubiquitous, complex and diverse media landscape. One might think that those, such as myself, who advocate liberal forms of religion might welcome these developments as positive ones. Certainly, it is tempting to point to, for example, those within Haredi Jewish communities who have used the internet to challenge the elites of those communities on issues such as sexual abuse, and view the media as a liberating force. And it can be. But at the same time, as I suggested previously, not only have some very dangerous groups used the media as a recruiting tool, liberal religious groups have found navigating the mass mediated world difficult too.

Rather than seeing the media as inherently reactionary or liberating force – it is both – a more productive approach would see the media as presenting an inescapable challenge that cannot be avoided. How we navigate the overwhelming torrent of information and the insecurity this causes is a challenge common to both religious and non-religious. The three strategies previously outlined – resisting, imitating and participating – in the media, have in common a kind of implicit surrender to the perceived omnipotence of the media. This capitulation essentially assumes that religious traditions cannot offer a way of surviving and thriving in the mass mediated world.

I would suggest though, that religious traditions do have something valuable to offer that can underpin a critical approach to media. By 'critical' I mean a questioning form of engagement that participates in media without accepting that it is out of our control. The crucial element here is the centrality of text in some religions. I am not talking about texts as sources of unquestioning dogma, but texts as sources of wonder, mystery and complexity – an approach that sees them as the focus of a lifetime of religious engagement. The insecurity provoked by the chaotic

nature of the media is too often met by a defensive emphasis on simple truths, embodied in dogmatic approaches to religious texts. Indeed, one of the paradoxical effects of modernity has been the emergence of fundamentalist religions that meet the complexity of modern life with a denial of that complexity. There are other ways of reading religious texts – often ones that are older and more deep-rooted than modern fundamentalist ones - that can undergird an approach to the complexity of modernity in which complexity is met by complexity. In other words, religious textual traditions can offer profound ways of engaging with media that do not erase the complexity and challenge that either represent.

I want to discuss here the possibilities that the Jewish textual tradition offers, as this is the tradition that I know best. That does not mean that this is the only or even the ‘best’ tradition. However it is distinctive in certain ways just as other traditions offer distinctive contributions to the development of a critical engagement with media. Three elements of the tradition seem particularly important here:

First, the Jewish tradition encourages an active process of reading. Rather than passively consuming texts, the ideal reader is one who explores, struggles with and even contests them. As Ben Bag Bag says of Torah in the Mishnah:<sup>8</sup> ‘Turn it, and turn it, for everything is in it. Reflect on it and grow old and grey with it. Don’t turn from it, for nothing is better than it.’ The practice of study is an intensely social and visceral one: in traditional Jewish learning the study hall is a noisy place, in which students struggle with Jewish texts in conversation with each other. Jewish tradition is not simply a fixed message to be communicated, it is a living tradition with which each generation must engage.

Second, Jewish tradition sees sacred texts as multi-layered. In biblical hermeneutics the surface meaning – the ‘Peshat’ – is just one level, ultimately giving way to deeper meanings until the ‘Sod’ or secret meaning is reached. Simplicity is not a virtue here. The text is more than simply a conveyor of straightforward meanings. A training in Jewish texts has no endpoint as the text itself is the object of an endless quest.

Third, Jewish tradition sees texts as intertextual, as linked to each other. The Talmud is a collation of debates that are surrounded by later debates. Jewish tradition is constantly being written and rewritten as interpretation piles on interpretation. No text is ever ‘complete’; it is studied as much for its mysteries and lacunae than its eternal truth.

Of course, none of this is to say that in the Jewish tradition ‘anything goes.’ The boundaries of this tradition and the degree to which one can re-interpret texts according to new circumstances are heavily contested – this is the root of the profound differences between reform and orthodox Judaism. Nor are all texts equally important; there are still canons and levels of reverence. It is neither appropriate nor practical to engage with all kinds of texts in the manner with which one engages with sacred texts.

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<sup>8</sup> Pirkei Avot 5:26.

At the very least though, the Jewish textual tradition offers an important model for how we might engage with media texts in a critical yet engaged manner. This is, above all, an empowering tradition, in which those who read the texts are enjoined not to be passive consumers but active ‘writers’, in which the search for complexity and nuance is encouraged, in which one should never be satisfied with one meaning and one text. It is disappointing that, all too often, both reform and orthodox Jews do not have enough faith that the skills this tradition teaches can be transposed from religious texts to media texts. A grounding in the Jewish textual tradition would seem to provide a robust basis from which to engage with the media in a proactive and critical way.

In fact, the best of popular culture already engages with the media in this fashion. There are many scenes and subcultures within which media texts are interpreted, played with and used as the basis for community. To give one example, fans of science fiction TV and fiction have, for decades, created vibrant scenes that are far from spaces of passive consumption.<sup>9</sup> Such fans refuse to simply accept fictions for what they are, they interpret them in new ways, contest them and use them as the basis for new fictions. Fan-created fiction often engaged with shows such as Star Trek in iconoclastic ways, challenging their portrayal of gender and sexuality. Music scenes such as heavy metal are another example of critical engagement with media products.<sup>10</sup> Rather than simply worship stars, metal scene members create new forms of music, often in highly innovative ways, subverting and challenging the dominance of major acts. The internet has certainly multiplied the possibilities of these kinds of engagement with media, but some of these practices and scenes have been going for decades.

The encounter between religion and the global mass media offers rich possibilities for the creation of innovative cultural practices. Both religion and mass-mediated cultures have rich traditions of critical reading that challenge notions of passive consumption of unambiguous texts. However the dominant tendency in most religious groups has been to be suspicious of the media. Similarly, the more critical forms of media engagement are sometimes buried in the constant onslaught of media products.

I would like to offer one example of a creative form of religious engagement with media texts, in the work of the Jewish rapper Y-Love. Y-Love’s work is particularly striking as he is an African-American convert to Hassidic Judaism. Y-Love began rapping in yeshiva as a way of learning Talmud. He includes Aramaic, Hebrew and Yiddish in his raps, although English is the primary language. On the title track on his 2008 album *This Is Babylon*, he plays with the notion of America as Babylon, tying in a critique of American politics with a diasporic Talmudic identity:

The beast takes many forms

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<sup>9</sup> Jenkins, Henry. 1992. *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*. London: Routledge.

<sup>10</sup> Kahn-Harris, Keith. 2006. *Extreme Metal: Music and Culture on the Edge*. Oxford: Berg.

One long night with no signs of dawn

It's been years since Reconstruction and it's still built wrong

That's why I rhyme in Aramaic, this is Babylon!

The connotations of Babylon with enslavement and exile in Rastafari and African-American culture create a connection between Y-Love's black and Jewish identities. Y-Love's work has extended to recording an acapella album called *Count It* (2007) together with the Jewish beatboxer Yuri Lane, for use during the Omer period when instrumental music is traditionally forbidden. Y-Love's work is multi-layered, with rap provides the mechanism to connect a range of identities and practices. He engages with rap as a Jew, not in order to imitate it or 'neuter it' but to treat it as a resource that can open up new possibilities for expressing what it is to be a Jew.

### **Conclusion**

Encouraging critical forms of media engagement should be a priority for religion. Not only would this offer the possibility for creating new religious meanings, it would also provide a specifically religious mode of survival in an insecure age. Given the inescapability of media today, religious attempts to push back against the media are almost always ineffective. It is far better to try shape the media landscape than it is to resist it. The methods for doing so are inherent in religious traditions – they just need to be applied in new ways.

Rod Bower<sup>1</sup>

## **Social Media and Destabilization of Intellectual Security: A Case Study of the Anglican Parish of Gosford Utilizing Social Media for the Stabilization of Intellectual Security**

With acknowledgement  
Kerry Bower – Research Assistant

### **Abstract**

The utilization of ‘experiential initiatives’ as a legitimate place for interfaith dialogue and partnerships in normalizing Muslim participation in a Western dominated culture and society, which leads to the minimization of radicalization, will be discussed. These proposals are intended to build upon existing interfaith strategies for protecting spiritual and intellectual freedom and security. This will be with special reference to the interfaith ministry of the Anglican Parish of Gosford in NSW, Australia, widely acknowledged for having built deep and abiding relationships with the Muslim community both within Australia and beyond. This advocacy predominately takes the form of the Anglican Parish Facebook page, which had a reach in 2014 of 10 million, increasing to 19 million in 2015. By facilitating a flow of positive dialogue, under strict rules and tight moderation, the page continues to exist as a global connector in promoting the protection of spiritual and intellectual freedom and security in society. This unique use of social media has been utilized as a stabilizing force, as apart from those using social media to radicalize and destabilize.

### **Presentation**

In the context of modern social media, interfaith dialogue proceeds without any intentionality and messages both positive and negative are sent back and forwards between faith communities, even if the intended recipient of the communication is someone from the same community. To place this within the framework of the continuing journey of the interfaith ministry of the Anglican Parish of Gosford, theoretical evidence will be presented to validate the extemporaneous and experiential journey of interfaith dialogue, especially with reference to social media. The first social network sites were identified in 1997, however since then have grown exponentially, as can be gleaned from the August 2015 statistics below, based on the current global population of 7.36 billion people.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Simon Kemp. “Global Social Media Users Pass 2 Billion,” *We Are Social*, August 2015, accessed December 20, 2015, <http://wearesocial.net/blog/2014/08/global-social-media-users-pass-2-billion/>.

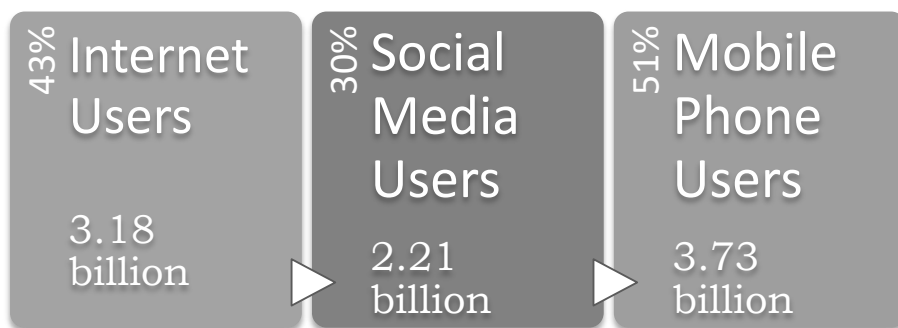


Table 1: Global Digital Statistics as at August 2015

The past twelve months have seen an increase in the use of social media by 176 million users.<sup>3</sup> In 2015 Facebook added 500,000 new users per day, which equates to one new user every 6 seconds;<sup>4</sup> and Twitter currently has 320 million monthly active users.<sup>5</sup> To illustrate the enormity of the social media sphere, in a two-minute period on a Tuesday morning in October of this year 741,000 Tweets and 7.15 million Facebook posts were recorded as sent. Research has also identified that despite Internet trolls, cyber bullying and on-line hackers, social media users are becoming kinder and gentler, and the potential for achieving social good is expanding. For example, 61% of Gen-Y believes they have a responsibility to make a positive difference in their world, while 92% believe companies should choose social impact over bottom-line profit.<sup>6</sup>

Social media networks enable instant connection; information distributed swiftly and efficiently has the ability to influence behaviours and attitudes globally. Terrorist organizations successfully use the Internet to radicalize those living in the West, especially young people, with the aim of recruiting a multitude of home-grown terrorists.<sup>7</sup> However the ‘Arab Spring’, revolutions in Northern Africa, and the ousting of the governments of Moldova, Spain and the Philippines, can all be attributed to the power of social media.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Katie Regan. “10 Amazing Social Media Growth Stats from 2015,” *Social Media Today*, August 10, 2015, accessed December 20, 2015, <http://www.socialmediatoday.com/social-networks/kadie-regan/2015-08-10/10-amazing-social-media-growth-stats-2015>.

<sup>4</sup> Katie Regan. “10 Amazing Social Media Growth Stats from 2015,” [www.socialmediatoday.com/social-networks/kadie-regan/2015-08-10/10-amazing-social-media-growth-stats-2015](http://www.socialmediatoday.com/social-networks/kadie-regan/2015-08-10/10-amazing-social-media-growth-stats-2015).

<sup>5</sup> Twitter, “Company”, <https://about.twitter.com/company>.

<sup>6</sup> Payam Zamani, “The Future of Social Media Will Be Built With Positive Psychology,” *Huffington Post*, October 2, 2015, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/payam-zamani/the-future-of-social-medi\\_b\\_8228558.html?ir=Australia](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/payam-zamani/the-future-of-social-medi_b_8228558.html?ir=Australia).

<sup>7</sup> Robin Thompson, “Radicalization and the Use of Social Media,” *Journal of Strategic Security* 4, no. 4 (December 2011): 167–190, doi:10.5038/1944-0472.4.4.8.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

An emotive figure, video or tweet posted to the Internet can be circulated rapidly, prompting further information sharing, which serves to build credibility and momentum. In some instances, responses and protests are organised, in others a revolution takes place. No leader is necessary; the synergy of the audience creates a movement of like-minded people who are free to choose whether to act or not. Groupthink is a potent and dynamic force. Six degrees of separation becomes one or two degrees in the world of social media.<sup>9</sup>

Taking these dynamics into consideration, it may be said that social media is vastly underutilized as a tool for interfaith dialogue. In a contemporary setting, interfaith dialogue is most often undertaken in the context of essential theological conversations, which endeavor to celebrate similarities while understanding and/or accepting differences. This dialogue is often held on a small scale and dominated by theologians and scholars.<sup>10</sup> While this provides a vital framework to the ongoing success of interfaith dialogue, there are other experimental initiatives that, if invited into the space, may facilitate the creation of new possibilities for interfaith discourse. In a study ‘Experiential Encounters: New Models of Interfaith Dialogue’, Moberg<sup>11</sup> discusses a number of theoretical concepts pertaining to experiential possibilities in interfaith dialogue. It is within this theoretical context the interfaith social media ministry of the Anglican Parish of Gosford will be discussed.

Since the Gulf War in 1990, a tangible shift in feeling has occurred within Australian society toward Muslims; creating an exiling as the ‘other’ exacerbated by the September 11 terrorist attacks on the United States in 2001. Conservative domestic political discourse has added to this ‘othering’, creating a foundation of mistrust whereby Muslims are portrayed as culturally and politically different. However, the myth is extended to encompass a more damaging premise; that all Muslims share a hostile view toward Western civilization.<sup>12</sup> To paranoid white Australia, Muslims represent a threat to the ‘great Australian values that bind us together’, although white Australians are not able to clearly articulate what these ‘Australian values’ represent.<sup>13</sup> As part of this narrative, the legitimizing myth<sup>14</sup> that Muslims are terrorists, serves to assign permission for non-Muslims to vilify and abuse Muslims in social and political arenas.<sup>15</sup> Rates of abuse toward Muslims increase up to 30% each time there is a domestic terrorist incident, and law

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Marci Moberg, “Experiential Encounters: New Models of Interfaith Dialogue,” (Director: Dr. Marc Gopin, George Mason University, Fairfax, VA, 2009): 5.  
[http://digilib.gmu.edu/xmlui/bitstream/handle/1920/5625/Moberg\\_Marci.pdf?sequence=1](http://digilib.gmu.edu/xmlui/bitstream/handle/1920/5625/Moberg_Marci.pdf?sequence=1),

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ghassan Hage, “Multiculturalism and White Paranoia in Australia,” *Journal of International Migration and Integration / Revue de l’integration et de la migration internationale* 3, no. 3-4 (September 1, 2002): 435, doi:10.1007/s12134-002-1023-6

<sup>13</sup> Ghassan Hage, “Multiculturalism and White Paranoia in Australia,”: 433-435.

<sup>14</sup> Felicia Pratto and Andrew L. Stewart, “Social Dominance Theory,” p. 253.

<sup>15</sup> “Muslim Australians Regularly Experience Abuse and Discrimination, Report Finds,” SBS, November 5, 2015, accessed December 5, 2015, <http://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/2015/11/05/muslim-australians-regularly-experience-abuse-and-discrimination-report-finds>.



enforcement officers are at liberty to subject them to intense surveillance and excessively orchestrated police raids.<sup>16</sup> These actions serve to reinforce a lack of belonging within the dominant space, and cause further alienation and marginalization. As Peter Gale observes, ‘whiteness continues to inform the symbolic boundaries of inclusion and exclusion in contemporary Australia’.<sup>17</sup> It is into this systemic white, Western, Christian domination that immigrant families continue to find themselves; it is in this context that young Muslim men are now being radicalized.

Following 11<sup>th</sup> September 2001, the Anglican Parish of Gosford made a decision to be more intentional in its relationship with the Muslim community. Conscious of Australia’s history of racist attitudes, the parish was concerned that following the terrorist attack there may be a backlash towards the Muslim community. After an initial approach to the Imam of the local Wyong Mosque, a relationship began to grow that led to joint participation in the nationwide Project Abraham; a conversation between Muslims, Jews and Christians, in 2002 and 2004. The project further deepened relationships between the local Christian, Jewish and Muslim communities, where an abiding trust was established.

By 2013 it was clear that anti-Muslim sentiment was beginning to take hold in Australian society.<sup>18</sup> The parish, concerned by this growing Islamophobia, made a conscious decision to use its traditional street front sign, in conjunction with its significant social media profile, to send positive messages of friendship to the Muslim Community, promote harmony, and challenge stereotypical mistruths abounding in contemporary Australian culture surrounding the Muslim community. The sign messages, consisting of no more than 56 characters, are photographed and posted to the parish’s Facebook page.<sup>19</sup> The parish Facebook page sustains a global network of like-minded individuals interested in interfaith dialogue, social justice and peace, and exists as an energetic and synergistic expression of a community of hope. With approximately 450 author posts annually, 32,452 Likes on the page, and an average reach of 14.5 million per year, the page offers a significant adjunct to existing platforms of interfaith dialogue, relationship building and peace making. Posts made to the Facebook page conveying messages of support and good will to the Muslim community laid the foundation for further contact and relationship. The parishes’ social media presence led the Grand Mufti of Australia, Dr. Ibrahim Abu Mohamed, and other Islamic leaders to make contact with the parish, and new relationships between the leadership of the Anglican and Muslim communities

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<sup>16</sup> “Lakemba Protest by Muslims Who Believe Australian Terror Raids Were Unjust Policing,” news.com.au, September 14, 2014, accessed December 5, 2015, <http://www.news.com.au/national/nsw-act/lakemba-raids-were-unjust-policing/news-story/f7dd857373d881d0d191cea7b26bf234>.

<sup>17</sup> Peter Gale and Pearson Education. *The Politics of Fear: Lighting the Wick*. Australia: Pearson Education Australia (TAFE), 2004.

<sup>18</sup> Suleiman Ali Baig. “Tony Abbott and Islamophobia: the greatest hits,” *Islam in Australia*, September 5, 2013. <http://islaminaustralia.com/2013/09/05/tony-abbott-and-islamophobia-the-greatest-hits/>

<sup>19</sup> Anglican Parish of Gosford Facebook page, accessed 15 December 2012, [https://business.facebook.com/angos/?business\\_id=907116632652304](https://business.facebook.com/angos/?business_id=907116632652304)

formed and flourished. Numerous interfaith visits, seminars, community conversations and social gatherings between communities were the result of the establishment of these initial, yet profound, foundational outreaches.<sup>20</sup>

To return to the Experiential Encounters study,<sup>21</sup> Contact Theory is based on the premise that creating personal contact between groups in conflict situations will generate positive perceptions and attitudinal shifts and forms the basis for many interfaith initiatives. Critics suggest this mode is inadequate and unsophisticated; although without contact there is no availability to meet, initiate conversation and build relationship. However, the experience of the Anglican Parish of Gosford illustrates how this foundational contact served as the starting point for deepening relationship.<sup>22</sup>

In addition, Moberg's study<sup>23</sup> suggests ritual, symbol and gesture have the capacity to evoke profound emotional responses, transcend the rational, and move beyond the spoken word. To witness two unlikely religious leaders embrace, or to acknowledge the suffering of 'the other' can be transformative, not only for those involved, but for those that witness.<sup>24</sup> Photographs of the Muslim and Christian communities interacting together; sharing food, attending gatherings and seminars, were posted to Facebook, including images of Dr. Ibrahim Abu Mohamed and the author, revealing their obvious affection for one another. Contact, ritual, symbol and gesture began to yield fruit and build bridges. This was critical for the challenges that lay ahead.

On 6<sup>th</sup> July 2014, the sign displayed a message of respect and friendship to the Muslim community in wishing them a Holy Ramadan. The sign was then posted to the parish Facebook page.<sup>25</sup> This initial post generated 46,300 views, 2,681 likes and 432 shares. At the beginning of Ramadan, on 18 June 2015, the parish repeated the previous year's Ramadan sign and Facebook post. This elicited a much greater response in both positive and negative ways. This post received ten times the response of the previous with 608,300 views, 29,677 likes, 2,704 shares and 455 comments.<sup>26</sup>

Anti-Muslim groups were more organized, and Facebook Trolls, those who post negative and/or provocative comments with the express desire to elicit a certain response,<sup>27</sup> began to post negative comments. However, the Muslim community was

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<sup>20</sup> Marci Moberg, "Experiential Encounters: New Models of Interfaith Dialogue," pp.11-21.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Anglican Parish of Gosford's *Facebook* page, accessed 20<sup>th</sup> December, 2015, <https://www.facebook.com/anggos/photos/pb.115067218523920.-2207520000.1450489275./780356341995001/?type=3&theater>.

<sup>26</sup> Anglican Parish of Gosford's *Facebook* page, accessed 20<sup>th</sup> December, 2015, <https://www.facebook.com/anggos/photos/pb.115067218523920.-2207520000.1450490402./961599547204012/?type=3&theater>

<sup>27</sup> Macmillan Dictionary, "Buzz Word – Troll", available at <http://www.macmillandictionary.com/buzzword/entries/troll.html>

categorical in their response, with 100% of posts to the page endorsing their gratitude. The overwhelmingly positive and gracious replies from Muslims produced responses from non-Muslims who began to join the conversation.<sup>28</sup> These warm and respectful on-line encounters continued to generate further responses.

A Facebook post, in part, also facilitated the dramatic increase in interaction between the parish and the wider Muslim community. On 29 October 2014, the author was photographed in front of the parish sign 'Bless The Burqa' wearing a Christian cassock to express support for religious freedoms concerning dress.<sup>29</sup> This was in response to damaging comments by the then Australian Prime Minister, Tony Abbott,<sup>30</sup> who made clear his desire that the Burqa not be worn, while suggesting he would consider supporting a ban on the Burqa in Parliament House. Prime Minister Abbott's divisive comments began weeks of inflammatory dialogue across the nation.<sup>31</sup> This post received 396,400 views, 9,585 likes, 1,765 shares and 1,436 comments,<sup>32</sup> however some were hate-filled and personally threatening to the author.

These social media communications, which are primarily expressed in the form of memes, are symbolic gestures that express the profound message of a desire for interaction, dialogue and relationship. The initial power of the messages consists, ironically, in that they are generated from a place that lies at the very heart of social dominance; a predominantly 'white', Western church. Their enduring power is found in the desire and expectation that this interaction will eventually change the social dominance culture to create something new and more life enhancing for all citizens.

Challenging dichotomies by way of altering consciousness concerning who is perceived as one's friend or enemy, by exposing simplified mistruths and countering with complex truths, is critical to experiential interfaith dialogue.<sup>33</sup> The increase in Muslim migration, and the rise of terrorist attacks on Western targets, has precipitated an identity crisis within the Australian community. As Australia is a white, Western-dominated system, any form of migration can be perceived as a threat. When the tabloid media links that migration to the possibility of violent

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<sup>28</sup> Anglican Parish of Gosford's *Facebook* page, accessed 20<sup>th</sup> December, 2015.

<sup>29</sup> Anglican Parish of Gosford's *Facebook* page, accessed 20<sup>th</sup> December, 2015, <https://www.facebook.com/anggos/photos/pb.115067218523920.-2207520000.1450489260./839426489421319/?type=3&theater>

<sup>30</sup> Emma Griffiths. "Prime Minister Tony Abbott Reveals He Wishes the Burka 'Was Not Worn' in Australia," ABC News, October 2, 2014, accessed December 5, 2015, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-10-01/abbott-says-he-wishes-the-burka-'was-not-worn'-in-australia/5782008>.

<sup>31</sup> Latika Bourke. "Jacque Lambie goes head-to-head with female Islamic Leader on Sunrise." October 2, 2014. Accessed December 15, 2015. <http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/burqa-debate-jacqui-lambie-goes-headtohead-with-female-islamic-leader-on-sunrise-20141001-10ozui.html>.

<sup>32</sup> Anglican Parish of Gosford's *Facebook* page, accessed 20<sup>th</sup> December, 2015,

<sup>33</sup> Marci Moberg, "Experiential Encounters: New Models of Interfaith Dialogue," pp. 11-21

attacks, the dominant culture becomes increasingly paranoid and exclusive. This increases the isolation of the immigrant community.<sup>34</sup>

In this setting, the Muslim community is deeply affected, being exclusively perceived by the prevailing culture as associated with the terrorist threat. The community is relentlessly expected to prove their national loyalty and condemn terrorist acts. This further serves to cause some sections of the community to feel persecuted, and therefore identify with their own ethnic and religious origins rather than the prevailing culture.<sup>35</sup>

On 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2015, a radicalized 15-year-old boy shot a police employee dead in front of Parramatta Police Station in Sydney, in what was quickly recognized as a terrorist attack. Immediate calls came from the tabloid media for the Muslim community to condemn the attack. The Grand Mufti of Australia directly issued a press statement, expressing sympathy to the family of the victim, and calling for the community not to stigmatize all Muslims because of this act.<sup>36</sup> This response was widely condemned by the tabloid press as a refusal by the Grand Mufti to condemn the shooting as a terrorist attack.<sup>37</sup> A media storm ensued, with further attacks against the Grand Mufti, some calling for him to be stood down from his position. These events prompted a press conference that included community and interfaith leaders standing in solidarity with the Grand Mufti and other Islamic leaders.<sup>38</sup> Following the press conference a powerfully symbolic photograph of the Grand Mufti, Dr. Ibrahim Abu Mohammed and the author together appeared in an article published in Australia's only national newspaper.<sup>39</sup> The standing together of these two religious leaders in a time of crisis was the culmination of a significant journey in a relationship of ever deepening trust.

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<sup>34</sup> "Divide on Migration amid Fears Muslims Won't Integrate," *The Australian Newspaper*, October 13, 2015, accessed December 15, 2015, <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/in-depth/terror/divide-on-migration-amid-fears-muslims-wont-integrate/news-story/d34d415bb7261a8aca6bc85076edfad9>.

<sup>35</sup> Rachel Eddie, Louise Cheer, and Emily Crane. 'It's as If We Are the Ones Who Are Responsible': Australia's Grand Mufti Says He Should Not Have to 'Condemn Every Single Terror Attack' - and Compares Himself to JESUS during Radio Interview. <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3323368/>, "Daily Mail Australia, November 18, 2015, accessed December 11, 2015, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3323368/It-s-ones-responsible-Australia-s-Grand-Mufti-says-NOT-condemn-single-terror-attack-Arabic-radio-interview.html>.

<sup>36</sup> Dr Ibrahim Abu Mohammed - Grand Mufti of Australia *Facebook* page, accessed 15 December 2015. <https://www.facebook.com/dribrahimsalem/photos/a.553533431423067.1073741826.161934833916264/762668560509552/?type=3&theater>

<sup>37</sup> David Meddows, "Grand Mufti Refuses to Label Parramatta Shooting a Terrorist Attack," *The Daily Telegraph*, October 9, 2015, <http://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/news/grand-mufti-refuses-to-label-parramatta-shooting-a-terror-attack/story-fni0cx4q-1227563120640>.

<sup>38</sup> ABC. "Parramatta Shooting: We refuse and reject any form of terrorism activities, Australian Grand Mufti says," *ABC News*, 9 October 2015, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-10-09/grand-mufti-addresses-community-over-parramatta-shooting/6840250>

<sup>39</sup> The Australian, "Grand Mufti Speaks on Parramatta terror shooting," <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/in-depth/terror/stop-messing-with-australia-mufti-tells-radicals/news-story/e55eff0ef6c97e9794d2ad667899550d?sv=92a811521fa02524c1c655ed3a3def57>

The plight of marginalization for the Muslim community was graphically demonstrated on 28 November 2015. A group of fourteen Muslim men, leaders and volunteers from the street charity ‘Homeless Run’,<sup>40</sup> affectionately known as ‘The White Coats’ by the many homeless people they tend to every day, set out to attend the Stereosonic Concert in Western Sydney, with the express purpose of talking to young people who were at risk of taking illicit drugs. These men in their clearly labeled bus, were well known to police for their good works in the community. Yet on this occasion, while in transit to the concert, their bus was stopped, and more than 100 police officers descended upon them. The men were surrounded by Special Weapons and Tactics Teams, were detained on the roadside for two hours, and denied access to their lawyer.<sup>41</sup> This has never happened to a busload of white Christians on their way to a youth concert. The men were finally released without charge, after being told by police they were forbidden to attend the concert for reasons of ‘their own safety’. The men used social media to broadcast the incident as it happened, which sent a very clear message to the Muslim youth of Western Sydney. This unfortunate event caused severe damage to relationships within the community, further marginalizing young Muslims, and increasing the likelihood of their radicalization.<sup>42</sup>

The White Coats knew of the social media ministry of the Parish of Gosford, so when an approach came from the Gosford community to meet with them following the concert incident, it was warmly received and welcomed. What unfolded was a gracious and inspiring meeting where the author was privileged to bear witness to the men’s stories. It also provided a forum for him to express regret and shame on behalf of white brothers and sisters who cling to their positions of dominance and ignorance. This was an opportunity for interfaith dialogue that went some way toward addressing the wound that had been created by the police operation. A subsequent Facebook post served to bring further healing and to normalize the work of these young Muslims in the consciousness of the wider community.<sup>43</sup> This post received 183,800 views, 4239 likes, 1151 shares and 187 comments, all positive and encouraging to the Homeless Run charity.

In revisiting Experiential Encounters theory, and in the context of the previous examples of Muslim / Christian solidarity,<sup>44</sup> three additional concepts may

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<sup>40</sup> Homeless Run *Facebook* page, accessed 15 December 2015, <https://www.facebook.com/Homeless-run-1518035228466538/>

<sup>41</sup> “100+ Police prevent ‘Homeless Run’ community group from anti-drug advocacy,” *Government Intervention in the Muslim Community*, 28 November 2015, <http://gimc.org.au/100-police-stop-community-group-from-grassroots-drugs-work-sydney-nov-2015/>

<sup>42</sup> Martha Azzi, “Muslim Charity Furious after Volunteers Travelling to Stereosonic Music Festival to Preach against Drug Use Were Stopped and Searched by 100 Police and a SWAT TEAM,” *Daily Mail Australia*, November 30, 2015, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3338150/Members-known-Muslim-charity-travelling-Stereosonic-music-festival-preach-against-drug-use-stopped-searched-100-police-SWAT-team.html>.

<sup>43</sup> Anglican Parish of Gosford *Facebook* page, accessed 15 December 2015, <https://www.facebook.com/anggos/photos/pb.115067218523920.-2207520000.1450490350./1045083288855637/?type=3&theater56776567588>

<sup>44</sup> Marci Moberg, “Experiential Encounters: New Models of Interfaith Dialogue,”

be considered. Integration Worldview involves moving fluidly between different religions and traditions, and taking on parts of each in an eclectic spirituality, as in ‘new age spirituality’.<sup>45</sup> For fruitful interfaith dialogue to occur, it is imperative that those participating be well grounded in, and committed to, their own tradition, while being receptive to hearing and appreciating the other’s story. It is in this openness, while remaining faithful to one’s own tradition, that productive pathways are explored, and participation and partnership in a diverse society can be found.

Reconciliation Theory is based on John Paul Lederach’s Theory of Reconciliation, which hypothesizes that societies are ecosystems that require positive relating between individuals if they are to move toward communion; based on truth, mercy, justice and peace.<sup>46</sup> *The Anglican Parish of Gosford has taken Micah 6:8 as its guiding principal:*

“He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God?”<sup>47</sup>

The Gosford Parish community recognizes that Australia is a secular democracy comprising people of many faiths and none, coming from every country in the world. Some see this as strength; others see it as a weakness. Reconciliation Theory however, recognizes that just as biodiversity is essential for a sustainable ecosystem, cultural diversity is essential for a healthy contemporary society. This cannot happen without some degree of intentionality. Interfaith dialogue is an essential part of the process that leads to healthy diversity in a multi-cultural society.

Finally, Social Network Theory has been applied to the context of interfaith dialogue. Marc Gopin<sup>48</sup> argues ‘loose ties’, networks of individuals called ‘connectors’ who are not necessarily organized around institutions or groups, are effective in building bridges with more formal and insular groups labeled as ‘strong ties’. In an interfaith context, strong ties could represent the church, while loose ties the religious, secular and all in-between. These loose ties facilitate the drawing of information and resources from a diverse pool, which then has the capacity to build a mobilized force to work toward a common good.<sup>49</sup> Religious leaders actively engaging in interfaith relationships outside the structured world of conferences and institutionally sanctioned dialogue can, at times, provoke feelings of suspicion and insecurity within their own institution. The ‘strong ties’ described by Gopin are often not present to provide structure that leads to a more controlled context.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. p. 32.

<sup>47</sup> *The New Revised Standard Version Bible*, copyright 1989, 1995 Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

<sup>48</sup> Marc Gopin *To Make the Earth Whole*, United Kingdom: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers Inc., 2009: 77-79, quoted in Marci Moberg, “Experiential Encounters: New Models of Interfaith Dialogue,” pp.11-21.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid. p. 33.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid. p. 33.

Dialogue arising from relationships developed on social media is indicative of Gopin's 'loose ties,' and is often accompanied by institutional anxiety. Leaders who best function in and facilitate dialogue through this medium are often seen as fringe dwellers in their institutional context.<sup>51</sup> In a paper exploring leadership in the Anglican Parish of Gosford, Alessandra Wollaston<sup>52</sup> describes this approach as 'igniting active self-definition':

"This style of leadership is well suited within a social network context with the ability to transcend its own cultural and doctrinal shibboleths without losing or denying its own identity. This expression of leadership does not see the other as the "enemy", but as part of the rich tapestry of cultural diversity comprising a healthy society."<sup>53</sup>

While much good has been achieved in creating positive, informative and life giving communications between Christians and Muslims, the ministry of Anglican Parish of Gosford is not without risk; threats of violence against the author are carried out regularly via social media, email, phone calls and personal letters. Fake sites imitating the Facebook account regularly appear. A post supporting the building of a mosque in the NSW town of Bendigo, under siege from white racist demonstrators trying to have the plans quashed, was posted on a bogus site with accompanying inflammatory commentary.<sup>54</sup>

Figures of the sign are often photoshopped, and slanderous character assassinations are posted online. As it is extremely difficult to have Facebook remove such posts, mostly they remain unchecked and without censure in cyberspace. At times, the local police have been tasked with responding to some of the more serious death threats.<sup>55</sup>

Much criticism also arises from conservatives within the author's own faith tradition. However, the work of the Kingdom of God persistently beckons beyond the bullying and the threats. An understanding of this Kingdom as inclusive of other faith traditions, and all people of good will, is essential for the flourishing of humanity.

"...[N]or will they say, "Look, here it is!" or "There it is!" For, in fact, the kingdom of God is among you." Luke 17:21<sup>56</sup>

The author has been involved in interfaith dialogue for twenty plus years, attending conferences and leadership meetings, yet it was the spark of social media that lit the

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid. p. 33.

<sup>52</sup> Alessandra Wollaston, "'Australia we are better than this' Igniting active self-definition, the leadership of Father Rod Bower," University of Sydney, 2015.

<sup>53</sup> Marc Gopin, "Social Networks and Intervention for Global Change," *9<sup>th</sup> Doha Conference of Inter-Faith Dialogue*, Doha, October 2011.

<sup>54</sup> Anglican Parish of Gosford Moscow Branch *Facebook* Post, accessed 21 December 2015, <https://www.facebook.com/Anglican-Parish-of-Gosford-Moscow-Branch-464074193733571/>

<sup>55</sup> Anglican Parish of Gosford *Facebook* page, accessed 15 December 2015.

<sup>56</sup> *The New Revised Standard Version Bible*, copyright 1989, 1995 Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

dialogue fire on a grand scale. Social media has provided access to a wide range of people of different faiths, and unrestricted access for those people to the author. This form of dialogue has led to a substantial level of trust between the Muslim community and Christian leaders resulting in openness to community-based partnerships, not only in civic service but also in times of crisis. The Grand Mufti, who is often criticized by Islamophobic elements of the community, has felt welcomed and has accepted a number of invitations to generously share his Islamic scholarship with gathered Christian communities, fostering understanding and resulting in the dissolution of perceived barriers. This evolving bond of affection has enabled a mutually safe environment in which people of faith have been able to explore and articulate their beliefs in an atmosphere of mutual respect and genuine interest.

It is a context such as this that best affords, not only professional theologians, but also people of faith from all walks of life the intellectual freedom and security to practice, articulate and grow in their faith. It is expected that this evolving relationship will result in a clear interfaith voice speaking to the entire community in times of celebration and crisis. It is also now anticipated that there will be greater co-operation in service to the society.

The utilization of social media by The Anglican Parish of Gosford represents a model for interfaith dialogue based upon friendship, communication and respect; loose ties and strong ties; education, modeling, moderation, integrity, authenticity; passion, resilience, courage and hope. Through creative leadership these threads continue to weave a rich and diverse societal tapestry from which the protection of spiritual and intellectual freedom and security may be formed. The author is a man with an old fashioned sign, exploiting the power of social media to connect humanity in its desiring for peace, goodwill and security. This work is done humbly with those who walk the same road, in the shared work of the Kingdom of God.

“True leadership does four things. Leadership enables us to become who we are, enables us to communicate who we are, enables us to offer who we are, and enables us to be who we are. Great leaders have a dream, they are never about power and always about service”

The Venerable Rod Bower<sup>57</sup>

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## **Beyond Unscientific Bias towards an Authentic Encounter of the Religious Other for an Intellectual Safety: A Special Reference to Bernard Lonergan's Thought**

### **Abstract**

In this essay the author will try to articulate critically that faith dimension is the core of the spiritual secularity in a human life. When modern “secularism” attempts to deny or eradicate this point, unfortunately a false impression is conveyed: an impression that faith is not normal in human life, although this kind of diagnosis is both strange and abnormal in the context of global human history. Thus, for the ultimate secularity of the human life, without a restoration of this point of view in human life, no one can expect that authentic human encounters or fruitful inter-religious dialogue will emerge within the emergent pluralism of our world. Contemporary secular culture does not concern much about our human spiritual secularity due to disregarding the fundamental principle of transcendence as faith in human life. Especially this essay would focus on this issue in relation to the works of Bernard Lonergan's cognitional development

### **Introduction**

Among other things, this essay will try to articulate that the mutual recognition of a faith dimension in culture is important for an intellectual safety in human life. When modern “secularism” attempts to deny or eradicate this point, a false impression is conveyed: an impression that faith is not normal in human life. Especially mass media is embedded to escalate further this point in contemporary human life. Secularism, however, can be seen to be problematic, simply by looking to past and present world cultures. Evidently, faith of various kinds is a normal part of human cultures. Not including this aspect introduces a block in our understanding of humanity. And, with that particular block, we certainly cannot expect fruitful inter-religious dialogue.

The problem, though, is highly complex and not merely a question of faith or faiths. Acknowledging a faith dimension is only a first step toward the possibility of being able to communicate and live with each other within and between different faith traditions. In any particular case, the faith of an individual is within a complex historical dynamic that includes and depends on series of development (and decline) in education, economics and all other aspects of culture. Indeed, each faith tradition is part of a global history of faith traditions and cultures. And any attempt to discuss faith, or to communicate between faiths, requires something more than faith.

This essay, therefore, focuses on the problem of how we are to engage “with the other,” welcome “the other,” how we are to let “the other” feel at home and enjoy spiritual and intellectual safety in our religious pluralistic environment. This

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subject, of course, is not new. It has been discussed at many academic gatherings and also at practical meetings.<sup>2</sup> There are also numerous publications on the subject.<sup>3</sup> For Asians, living in a multi-faith environment is deeply rooted in our Asian way of life. In some parts of the world, however, the perception of *the other* has often been emphasized in a negative way. In some Western religious traditions, for example, there have been and continue to be tendencies toward violence. There is the well-known history of the crusades. But, missionary zeal has endured within Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Even if not the only influence, a negative image of “the other” continues to be present in these traditions. Indeed, this inherited and negative image of “the other” is now experiencing a kind of revival within some parts of present-day European society.

Eastern traditions are not exempt from similar problems. In the Eastern religious world, especially in Hinduism and Buddhism, a negative conception of “the other” has not generally been part of the ordinary lives of people. Unfortunately, mutual intolerance has been emerging within Hinduism and Buddhism, reversing the ideals of mutual tolerance that historically has been normal within these two great traditions. Examples can be seen if we look at how religious minority groups are being treated in Sri Lanka with respect to Hindus, Christians, and Muslims. Similarly, in contemporary India and Burma, we find negative treatment of Christians and Muslims.<sup>4</sup> No matter where they exist in our world, the existence of “the other” as a minority is resulting in similar difficulties and leading to similar challenges.

Evidently, the problem is global, and we need to ask how we can make some kind of progress (individually and collectively) toward spiritual security. Why does it seem almost impossible for us to move into further transformations and enhancements of the human good? Where can we find some clues that could lead us toward a new integration of ourselves as human beings, toward living with each other in ways which would make for a friendlier form of human community? Many theoretical studies have already been made for the purpose of solving these problems in religious studies and theology, philosophy, economics, political science,

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<sup>2</sup> Academically American Academy of Religion, Parliament of World Religions, also International Association for the History of Religions and also each academic society in world religious traditions would have a section or a division to concentrate on these aspects for the human good in our world. Recently they are developed as those studies of the inter-religious or the intra-religious dialogue, the comparative theology, the religious pluralism, and the theology of religions in academic fields and practical settings.

<sup>3</sup> There are many works published on this subject. Perhaps, one of the first seminal works would be developed in Paul Tillich’s engagement with the dialogue with Japanese Zen Buddhists. Later his work was published as *Christianity and the Encounter of World Religions* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963). This book would become an historical momentum for theologians and religious scholars to begin actively to engage with the dialogue of other religious traditions.

<sup>4</sup> In the case of India the representative comprehensive work is Deepa S. Reddy, *Religious Identity and Political Destiny: 'Hindutva' in the Culture of Ethnicism* (AltaMira Press, 2006). In the case of Burma, the work is not yet critically researched as a comprehensive book but as a report: Rianne ten Veen, *Myanmar’s Muslims: The Oppressed of the Oppressed* (October 2005) by Islamic Human Rights Commission in Great Britain.

sociology, psychology, peace and conflict studies, and other modern academic disciplines.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, the problem endures.

In our days, extreme and horrific situations are being presented to us. International institutions such as the UN and NATO and various economic associations are not showing signs of being able to resolve these major issues. Instead, current trends are pointing to the emergence of increasingly extreme situations. Many criticisms about how religious extremes are working against the place and role of minorities (“the other”) are suggesting possible solutions of one kind or another, but arguments presented<sup>6</sup> either are not generally persuasive or do not gain traction. Diverse solutions are suggested, but no changes in the current reality of things are occurring. The problems appear to be deeply entrenched, and with puzzling apparent contradictions. For example, the Hindu and the Buddhist theory of the religious other historically have been more tolerant of “the other” than Judeo-Christian traditions. However, the Judeo-Christian perspective appears to be more appealing in modern times, if one attends to questions that ask about class equality, human rights, and gender equality.

Nevertheless, these points should not be overly generalized. Many aspects can be found within the Judeo-Christian tradition which, for example, does not welcome gender equality. And, as mentioned above, an absence of tolerance also is being found in various branches of Hinduism and Buddhism. We can see, however, counter-examples to such intolerance in the remarkable lives and works of individuals such as Mahatma Gandhi and Ven. Thich Nhat Hanh.

In this paper, I would like to approach the question of the religious “other” within our current pluralistic context, focusing more on the role of the human agent and how religious activities relate to “the other.” I will not attempt to articulate a doctrinal perspective with respect to the religious “other” but, instead, will point to the existence of a common context for spiritual security, a methodology structurally rooted in our human subjectivity, serving as a common foundation for mediating authentic engagement in and between all traditions. As it happens, progress toward resolving these issues calls for a comprehensive transformation of methods in collaboration. However, describing the nature and possibility of that transformation is not an easy task. The problems are complex. The solution also will be complex. In the next four sections of this article, I will draw attention to various aspects of the problem, and in the last section of the paper will point to the core solution discovered by Bernard Lonergan in 1965.

### **A Universal Play Ground: Sharing with the Religious Other**

In what often has been called scientific study of religions, the phenomenological approach to religion has contributed to the formation of an independent academic discipline differing from both theology and, later, the various social sciences.

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<sup>5</sup> If we type the subject, we could easily access the reference materials in each academic field in internet and also other resources.

<sup>6</sup> Most responses against the religious extremism seem to emphasize that it is not a genuine religious form religiously or spiritually and also morally.

Recently, this demarcation has weakened because of an interdisciplinary trend among all academic disciplines. However, the original emphasis that was given religious phenomena as something that, in some sense, is data (according to the pre-framed methodology of a researcher), continues to be useful in the study of religion, especially for religions that differ from the beliefs of a given researcher.

In the context of various phenomenological approaches, an additional emphasis is also given to the study of religious phenomena in terms of how they relate to one or more agents who function as constitutive sources for the form of different religious phenomena. In the early period, William Kristensen, a Norwegian and a successor of Cornelius Petrus Tiele, emphasized the perspective of a believer rather than that of a scholar. In his work, in his *magnum opus*, *The Meaning of Religion*,<sup>7</sup> he fundamentally underlines how the meaning of religious phenomena is located in a believer's heart. In the early period of this school, in a phenomenology of religions, he champions an approach that works from a believer's perspective.

However, under Gerardus van der Leeuw's leadership in the use of a phenomenological approach, the believer's perspective was modified in favor of emphasizing the structural aspects of religious consciousness, focusing on the subject of power.<sup>8</sup> This approach placed more stress on the structure of religious consciousness. But, unfortunately, the approach lost the dynamic of the concrete stream of consciousness which belongs to a believer. For, the static structure of religious consciousness is abstractly emphasized by Gerardus van der Leeuw and his school. For this reason, Wilfred Cantwell Smith,<sup>9</sup> the modern champion of the believer's perspective, did not hesitate to critically indicate the problems which have plagued the approach of Gerardus van der Leeuw and other, later phenomenological scholars.

In fact, Smith did not identify himself with the camp of phenomenology for the study of religion. He attempted, instead, to recover the original spirit of the believer's perspective, but, for the purpose of pointing to the comprehensiveness which obtains with respect to how believers deal with religious matters. In his work, he emphasized the value of a personal approach, if we are to understand the whole aspect of how a person participates in any religious tradition. In so doing, his approach is identified as a person-oriented study of religion. He emphasized the fact that all researchers should understand the meaning of religion by focusing on how a person is dynamically engaged with his or her religious tradition. Meaning does not exist outside a person. And, therefore, the best way to understand the meaning of religion is to be engaged in direct dialogue with those in the tradition. For this reason, Smith's approach is also identified as the dialogical approach.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> William Brede Kristensen, *The Meaning of Religion*, trans. by John Carman (Hague: M. Nijhoff Press, 1960), 20-7.

<sup>8</sup> Gerardus van der Leeuw, *Religion in Essence and Manifestation* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), 13-4.

<sup>9</sup> Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion* (New York: Fortress Press, 1965), 22.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 12. I think thus that Smith's approach is still very helpful for any researcher of religion since it urges the value of attending to how persons are dynamically engaged with religious tradition whatever it exists in their human lives. Especially is it the case that, for a researcher, the first step should be a



However, although it can be said about Smith that, for us, he elaborated a basic direction for religious studies, he did not attend to a careful study of the dynamic process of a person's interiority. This focus is more fully developed in the work of Bernard Lonergan. Lonergan advocated a generalized empirical method that invites us toward a more balanced understanding of the human subject.

Lonergan attempted to observe all of human life within our human history in terms of the human subject. The human subject engages in a struggle for biological sustenance, and also in social, scientific, technological, cultural, personal, and religious experience. Each biography emerges within accumulating and diverse engagements. Each life history is that of the whole human subject, and living one's religious tradition is no exception.

However, unlike Smith, Lonergan invites the scholar to attend to all sources of experience, namely, what can be called "data of sense and data of consciousness".<sup>11</sup> He thematized the interior process of how a human subject engages in activities that are distinctive for living a human life within history. He pointed to acts and operations constitutive of the human subject. In his book *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*,<sup>12</sup> Lonergan leads the reader through advanced and cumulative exercises in self-attention.<sup>13</sup> In that way, among other things, he draws attention to five main layerings of human activity: Experience; What-is-it? questions, direct understanding and inner formulation; Is-it-so? questions, reflective understanding and judgement; What-to-do? questions (deliberation) and planning; Is-to-do? questions, a further genus of reflective insight and choice.<sup>14</sup> In other words, questions arise about our experience. One reaches a possible understanding. One may also wonder, Is it so? However, we do not simply inquire into what is so, or what may be so. We do not merely seek knowledge about what is so. Inquiry itself, (e.g., asking 'What-is-it?' and 'Is- it-so?'), (self-) evidently proceed through decision. In other words, implicitly at least, we also ask "What-to-do?" In addition to inquiry into what is so, we also inquire into what we might bring about. And, when such inquiry rises to regard one's entire life, one asks how best to live. Together, then, the dynamics of inquiry and choice are constitutive of universal

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species of sympathetic attitude that wants to understand the religious other as a personal being. Smith's approach is such, in fact, that it recovers the original spirit of phenomenological religious studies to the degree that it looks for a personal human understanding of religion. In the recent history of religious studies, he is seen as a kind of champion in identifying religious studies with the study of the person within different religious traditions.

<sup>11</sup> Bernard Lonergan, *A Third Collection* (Jeffrey Chapman Press, 1985), 141.

<sup>12</sup> Bernard Lonergan, *Insight: A Study in Human Understanding* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992). It is originally published in 1957. Later it is published as the third publication in his complete works in University of Toronto Press. So hereafter in this paper it would be titled as CWL3.

<sup>13</sup> Lonergan was a genius and the book *Insight* is dense and extremely advanced. To help prepare one to take advantage of the book's riches, series of more elementary exercises are needed.

<sup>14</sup> The claim is empirical, for it depends on growing in being able to (self-) detect one's own acts and operations. Initially, it is possible to describe. However, contemporary neuroscience is making considerable progress in distinguishing these five layers, by determining corresponding aggregates of neural correlates. How to assemble all of these results into a unified view of human operations remains, however, a major problem in contemporary science, human science and religious studies.

patterns which exist within every human subject, irrespective of race, class, gender, nationality, education, and religion.

What, though, is the practical significance of these results. Contents vary greatly, as we move from performance to performance. In our human lives, there are practical problems to solve; we also think about politics, business, the administration of justice, and the conduct of war. However, we also think about cultural and religious activities, the arts, literature, intellectual pursuits, prayer and worship, and so on. Yet, despite these many differences, the core dynamics described above remain the same. In all cases, we find the dynamics of knowing and the dynamics of doing.

### **Unscientific Bias and the Religious Other**

Even though there are common dynamics, certainly, understandings and decisions differ greatly from moment to moment and among individuals. When individuals from different cultural and religious traditions meet, these differences can become poignant. We need to consider, therefore, problems associated with such differences. But, having the common core dynamics in mind can help us begin to glimpse reasons for differences in understanding, mutual understanding, mutual misunderstanding, and related difficulties.

Of course, here we only touch very briefly on a few aspects of the problem. Lonergan's analysis is extensive and is recommended reading.<sup>15</sup> The analysis in *Insight*, however also is extremely intensive, calling for major elaboration and expansion. Here, I make use of Lonergan's pointers to merely draw attention to a few elements of the problem. But, even these few elements help reveal the great challenges involved in efforts to communicate between religious traditions which, as modern history shows, often can seem to be at odds with each other.

*Insight* draws attention to the possibility of "dramatic bias".<sup>16</sup> While *Insight* does not deal explicitly with this issue in relation to the problem "the religious other," Lonergan's<sup>17</sup> thought on dramatic bias includes religious discrimination as a special case. In particular, his analysis points us to the possibility of making progress in understanding religious discrimination, including cases which lead to violence. With new precision we will, for example, be able to make beginnings toward identifying root causes of at least some of the difficulties.

There is, for instance, the problem that is not difference in the other as such, but "a refusal to understand"<sup>18</sup> differences in the other. In such cases, one chooses to remain within one's already familiar world. One chooses to not make the effort to understand the other, one's fellow human in a global context. Of course, for the individual refusing to make the effort to understand, there are psychological dimensions to the problem, both preceding and resulting from such refusal.

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<sup>15</sup> Bernard Lonergan, *CWL3*, Ch. 7. Discussions on bias there, and sections indicated.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 214.

<sup>17</sup> Chae Young Kim, 'Wilfred Cantwell Smith and Bernard Lonergan on Faith Experience' in *The Journal of Dharma* (Summer 2015), 14.

<sup>18</sup> Bernard Lonergan, *CWL3*, 220.

Loneragan also draws attention to the possibility of making progress toward understanding “group bias.” This is where individual bias, such as described above, becomes shared by an entire group. Familiar examples include theological or religious opinions about religious views, that is, wherein an entire group chooses to refuse to attempt understand “the others.”

Evidently, individual bias and group bias resemble each other, and even reinforce each other. Within the group, asking new questions is suppressed or discouraged in some way. In this sense, then, an attitude of spontaneous openness toward religious others can hardly exist. What we have, instead, is an enclosed pattern of behavior. One finds a blocking of desire for understanding and, from this, a further reduction in desire to reach out to others. In a religious tradition, group bias produces a collective of religious self-centeredness.<sup>19</sup>

Among other things, Lonergan draws attention to three consequences of the sustained refusal to understand: 1) *scotosis*; 2) a weakening of commonsense; and 3) the differentiation of *persona* and *ego*. Let us talk briefly about each of these.

### **Scotosis**

Loneragan defines the refusal or “the aberration of understanding” as a *scotosis* and a scotoma as a resulting blind spot in one’s view.<sup>20</sup> In the context of religious conflicts and in relating to religious others, many cases of misunderstanding exist as a consequence of *scotosis* and scotoma. In this context, if we are to understand religious others, one needs to somehow resolve the blocks to our understanding.

But, how can that be done? Difficulties are not overcome simply through making a deliberate effort. Indeed, contemporary psychology reveals that for an individual, progress in resolving a personal block is an achievement that can be a major breakthrough in one’s life and self-understanding, often only possible after long periods of therapy.<sup>21</sup> And, the challenges involved in religious plurality are much greater. For, religious plurality is not only about individuals, but groups of individuals. Evidently, and as history shows, the problem for us is enormous and not solvable within standard methods of ecumenism appealed to so far.

### **The weakening of developments in common sense**

Whether individually or collectively, there can be blocks to the possibility of further understanding. In these situations, a development in commonsense understanding of religious others is frustrated. It was Lonergan’s observation that a *scotosis* tends to undermine one’s psychological energy from the normal dynamic in which “the outer drama of human living” is revealed. Instead, a *scotosis* tends to turn a person toward

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 245.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 215.

<sup>21</sup> A reference here would be good. If nothing else, maybe use Sullivan’s work, referenced in Insight. But, something more up to date would be good. In fact, now that I have read on in the paper, I think that some up-to-date references here, on *scotosis*, fantasy world, etc would be quite important to the paper, to your claims below that follow in your paper.

a world of inner fantasy.<sup>22</sup>As we have noted, this development or lack of development inhibits ordinary understanding of the religious other, of how they relate to us, and how we should relate to them as other fellow human beings.

### **Differentiation of *persona* and *ego***

As indicated above, dramatic bias as *scotosis* provides for withdrawal from “the religious other.” Two of several groupings of problems present themselves. For instance, in *scotosis*, one’s inner fantasy is different from the reality that is the religious other. Moreover, the possibility of an otherwise healthy self-correction also is blocked. When one’s insights do not coincide with experience, normally, there is the possibility of corrective learning. However, *scotosis* also blocks that needed new understanding. Inevitably, this leads to a further narrowing of one’s horizon.

A further grouping is found in the separation of *persona* and *ego*. A dualistic perspective shapes one’s encounters religious others. Within such a context, each party encounters a religious other on the basis of an individual or collective *a priori* frame of mind.<sup>23</sup> In particular, such an orientation does not consider a religious other as a conversation partner. It does not include the other as a potential resource, that might help one grow in one’s religious views, in one’s humanity, or in being able to contribute to a common good that all can experience and live in.<sup>24</sup>

### **General Bias and the Religious Other**

Apart from individual and group biases, there is also general bias.<sup>25</sup> Individual and group bias are revealed in ranges of expectations and anticipations. General bias, however, is found in the perennial tension between different kinds of understanding and desire. General bias emphasizes the so-called “practical world.” In general bias, academic and scientific advances are valued, but mainly only when there are palpable effects; and are less valued when such palpable effects are lacking. General bias spirals toward an ethos that undervalues collaboration and knowledge that otherwise would be constitutive of human community. When development is needed, but its features are as yet unknown, so too are the possible palpable effects the as yet unknown development. General bias tends to lack patience needed for ongoing inquiry.

With its emphasis on palpable results, general bias can tolerate religious community, but again, mainly is as much as religious community produces so-called practical results. Meaning itself is undervalued. And, religion tends not to be seen as a fundamental source of meaning for the formation of humanity and community. Superficially pragmatic considerations increasingly dominate; and frequently these considerations turn on economic questions, economics in the palpable sense of being able to obtain money, goods and services. General bias leads to an increasing

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<sup>22</sup> Bernard Lonergan, CWL3, 214.

<sup>23</sup> Sadly, this attitude tends to be prevalent wherever religious conflict exists in our world *today*.

<sup>24</sup> Bernard Lonergan, CWL3, 215.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 251.

narrowness of perspective and a desire to not go beyond that which is seen to provide some “immediate advantage”.<sup>26</sup> Through general bias, individuals and groups gradually share less and less in the life of other persons and groups. As general bias gains a foothold in communities, friendly understanding of the religious other becomes increasingly trivialized. As we now know too well, general bias eventually leads to “the monster that has stood in our day.”<sup>27</sup>

### **A Science of Cosmopolis and its Implementation**

With a preliminary description of the dynamics of human knowing and doing, it has been possible to glimpse a few core features of the global challenge of interreligious dialogue and religious security. In particular, it becomes obvious that interreligious dialogue and religious security are not merely challenges for religious dialogue. Any effort to address the challenge calls for an understanding of religious traditions themselves, human meaning, human aspiration, involves language and culture; involves efforts to understand and communicate in ways that are not religious as such. And even if for some it is only in the sense of needing to support one’s religious community, economics also is part of the challenge.

As already mentioned, present-day methods are showing no signs of being adequate to the task at hand. Even in its subtlest forms, commonsense is not enough, for commonsense does not reach for explanation. And, commonsense is vulnerable to general bias that would exclude the need of explanation. But, theory too is vulnerable to bias.

What, then, is the solution to the problem? It needs to be a solution that can actually be implemented in this world, that preserves and fosters human nature as it really is. Human nature is fallible and is vulnerable to bias. Human nature is historical, cultural, religious, survives through economic collaboration, and does all of this through institutions of one kind and another. Even if one’s main interest is interreligious dialogue and religious security, the problem is unavoidably integral. Attempts to restrict the context are the product of general bias, and such restrictions only introduce new blocks and new biases that eventually would undermine the attempt to provide and implement a restricted solution.

What, then, is the solution? In chapter 7 of *Insight*, Lonergan names the solution *cosmopolis*, an unknown *X*. He was a genius, and so was able to give precise descriptions of certain preliminary aspects of the solution.

It will not be effective for me to attempt to summarize Lonergan’s already dense reflections on a few aspects of the solution. However, again merely as pointers to further study needed, it may help to include the following: *Cosmopolis* will be practical; it will be something implemented; it will not be a police force; it will not be a power structure such as UN, NATO or World Bank; it will not be a particular religious tradition but will acknowledge all religious traditions; it will not be directly involved with geopolitical or economic issues. *Cosmopolis* will be more

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 253.

<sup>27</sup> Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973), 40.

concerned with fundamental issues of “the historical process”<sup>28</sup> and the human good. It will be able to effectively draw attention to and criticize problematic trends. It will not do so by force, but through communication and persuasion and patience. Cosmopolis will be global in concern. It will care for all peoples, irrespective of class, culture, religion, race and gender.<sup>29</sup> As Lonergan reminds us, “cosmopolis (will not be) easy.”<sup>30</sup>

Lonergan was candid about the fact he did not solve the problem in *Insight*. In the last chapter of *Insight*, he spoke of the problem of human collaboration as being a key feature of the needed solution. The problem haunted his searchings for the next decade. It was in February of 1965 that he finally broke through to the solution.<sup>31</sup> Lonergan discovered the dynamic structuring of cosmopolis, an eightfold structuring for omnidisciplinary collaboration, a methodology that he called *functional specialization*.<sup>32</sup>

But, what is functional specialization? Asking the question is somewhat analogous to asking ‘What is chemistry?’ prior to having the periodic table discovered by Mendeleev. Lonergan, however, discovered a Global Table, a division of labor for scholars that will be the normative dynamics of cosmopolis. Not ignoring or trying to suppress recurrent error and sin, functional specialization will be a way to collaborate by which to effectively care for humanity and the globe - for spiritual humanity, for cultural humanity, for humanity needing security of all kinds, for economic humanity, for humanity growing toward its destiny.

As in the discovery of the Periodic Table in chemistry, Lonergan’s discovery also is the discovery of a Science, the Science of Cosmopolis, the Science of Sciences, a normative pattern of global collaboration that gives rise to sciences, theologies and scholarship of all kinds. A brief mention of the main functional specialties is needed: For scholars who focus on the past, there will be functional research, interpretation, history and dialectics. For scholars who decidedly look to the future, there will be functional foundations, doctrines, systematics and communications.

To attempt serious detail is not feasible here. However, something can be said on how to begin to see the possibility of functional collaboration. Note first, that the structuring does not arise from, nor can it be understood from conceptualist thought. The eight types of scholarship already are present in the dynamics of ongoing scholarship in the world academic communities. In that sense, the discovery is empirical, for it is a discovery of a possibility pre-emergent in human nature, in ongoing collaborations. The structuring, though, is pre-emergent, for while the eight types of task already are present, they are not yet adverted, not yet differentiated, and most often are found confusedly combined. To make beginnings in discerning

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<sup>28</sup> Beranrd Lonergan, CWL3, 263.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, especially see the whole section of chapter 7.8.

<sup>30</sup> *ibid.*, 267.

<sup>31</sup> Philip McShane and Piere Lambert, *Bernard Lonergan: His Life and Leading Idea* (Axial Publishing Press, 2010), 79.

<sup>32</sup> See Chapter 5 of his book *Method in Theology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973).

the types of task, one must attend carefully, and self-attentively, to the workings of ongoing scholarship. Such is the omnidisciplinary relevance of the discovery, that any area of scholarship will do.<sup>33</sup> In particular, one may look to religious studies and theology, to begin to discern the presence, and potentialities, of differentiating the eight main tasks.

An introduction to modern chemistry usually begins with a simplified diagram of the periodic table. Readers of the chemistry book then gradually grow in understanding the significance of the preliminary diagram. In a similar way, here I include a simplified diagram for the Global Table, the functional division of labor that will be needed to promote, among other things, effective interreligious dialogue and global spiritual security.

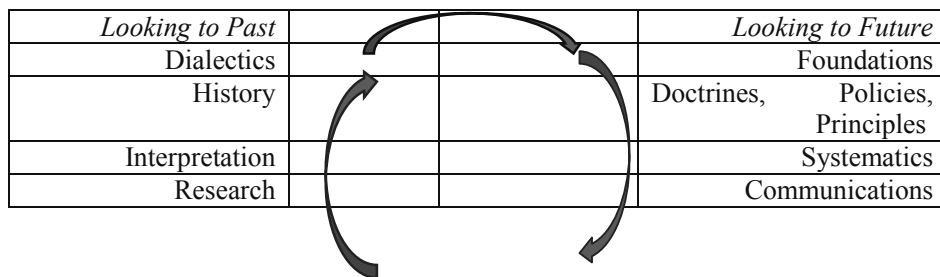


Figure: Global Table: Functional Specialization

## Conclusion

The initial problem addressed by the paper is interreligious dialogue and intellectual safety globally in a pluralistic environment. Ongoing history shows that present-day methods are inadequate to the task of making significant progress toward solving the problem. On even preliminary analysis, it becomes evident that we will not be able to solve this problem without considering all sources and the actual global context, namely, the dynamics of human knowing and doing, cultural dimensions and economics. All of these tend to suffer from bias of various kinds. And there is the real problem of accumulation of error and bias. This is sadly evident in today's difficulties in interreligious dialogue, and in the ongoing destruction of ecosystems, organic cultures and human cultures. Note too that much of this is justified by appealing to obviously flawed economic theories.

What, then, can we do? Lonergan provided important hints of a solution that initially, in *Insight*, he called *cosmopolis*. In the decade following the publication of

<sup>33</sup> Terry Quinn, 'Community Climbing: Toward Functional Specialization' in *Journal of Macrodynamic Analysis*(2015), 63-5.

*Insight*, Lonergan went on to discover the structure of cosmopolis. I have pointed to the relevant discovery page, and to his initial brief description of his solution. I have also provided references to the work of numerous scholars who have been making initial progress in confirming the presence of the eight main tasks, and who have been making beginnings in realizing the potentialities of the functional division of labor. I end this paper, therefore, by inviting my colleagues in religious studies not to reject this idea out of hand, but to take the possibility seriously that Lonergan's discovery might be exactly what we need.

On what grounds does one immediately reject the solution? If the solution is rejected out-of-hand, without honest inquiry, would that not be giving into bias, refusing the possibility of new understanding? If it is rejected out-of-hand because it sounds like it will be too difficult to implement, is that not also giving into the impatience of general bias? Rather, if there is even the slimmest possibility that Lonergan's discovery might be relevant to global problems and progress, are we not obliged to at least look into the possibility for an intellectual safety toward our human good? Present difficulties, though, call for practical solutions. And so, before long, there is also the need of implementation.



*David Mivasair*<sup>1</sup>

## **Not in Heaven: Social Media and the Destabilization of Intellectual Security**

### **Abstract**

Social media have accelerated the destabilization of intellectual security because of the unprecedented near-universal access to uncontrolled discourse that social media permit. However, the tension between established intellectual frameworks that provide security and various heterodoxies which challenge them has prevailed in human society since ancient times. Every traditional religion's own history reveals the dynamic of new truth claims challenging the old. I will give outstanding examples from Jewish religious tradition to suggest that in our contemporary intellectual environment, the exchange of ideas through social media cannot be controlled in order to preserve an established intellectual security. Consequently, a new understanding of intellectual security needs to be based on accessing and assessing a variety of truth claims. All who have an interest in intellectual and spiritual security need to fully participate in the world of social media in order to shape its impact.

### **Presentation**

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

לשם יחוד קודשא בריך הוא ושכינתיה

In the name of Allah, the most Merciful, the most Compassionate

For the sake of the unification of the transcendent Holy One and its imminent Presence, May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable before you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.

I very sincerely thank the organizers and sponsors of this blessed conference and all of you who left your homes and workplaces, many so far away, and have come together here - and I thank the Holy One, the Source of all Being and all learning - for the opportunity during these days in Doha to share in exploring and learning from everyone, from so many different points of view, so many sources of truth and understanding.

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In this talk, I aim to share with you my thoughts about the topic of this session -- social media and the destabilization of intellectual security – which might help us overcome the challenge that it presents to many of us.

Every religious community which has survived long enough and has grown large enough to create intellectual security also experiences challenges to that security. Challenges that threaten to destabilize intellectual security are age-old, as old as civilization. They have existed for centuries in many forms and have been met for millennia in many different ways. Now, in our times -- in this age of social media -- the challenges to intellectual security are stronger and more widespread than ever. This is because with social media, the established authorities cannot control communication as they have in the past, even in the very recent past which all of us here in this hall today remember as yesterday. Challenges to intellectual and spiritual security are nothing new. Throughout our common human history, this destabilization has been part and partial of the story of the human discovery of truth and of the revelation of God's will. I will talk about how we can learn from our past. We can learn from the teachings and practices of our traditional religions when their intellectual security was challenged in former times. I would like to explore with you some of the responses in the traditional religion which I know best – the Jewish tradition that grows out of the Bible – and how they might help us in our own times, regardless of who we are or where we live. I will also, to some extent, at the end of my talk, reference past developments in the great religion of our host country, Islam.

When a system of belief and practice becomes established, new ways of understanding and of responding brought on by new social situations challenge the stability and security of the old. Some challenges are self-serving and dangerous. They lead to violence and destruction. Other challenges bring about a greater, more complete understanding of the truth than was perceived in earlier times. Those challenges are one way that God and God's truth become more revealed in this world among us humans. Those challenges help our human family move forward on our collective journey to more and more understanding and revelation of the ultimate truth.

In our Jewish story, Abraham, the father of our religion – and of Islam and Christianity as well – certainly challenged the security and stability of his time. In an ancient telling,<sup>2</sup> he literally smashed the idols made by his own father which were worshipped by the people of his time as they had been by older generations. Progress came to humankind through Abraham and we are where we are today only because he dared to destabilize the intellectual security of his father and his entire generation.

Jesus also challenged the security of the established religious, spiritual and intellectual system of his time and the society into which he was born and lived. He was so disruptive, so destabilizing, that the prevailing authorities chose not to tolerate his message or him and had him killed in an attempt to preserve the stability of their time.

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<sup>2</sup> Genesis Rabbah 38:13.

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ too destabilized a long-established set of social rules and assumptions about the truth. He was a challenger and disrupted a form of intellectual security which resisted change so much so that a plot was laid to murder him. He and his followers were forced to flee from Mecca to Medinah, unable to return until years later.

As we look into our own religious traditions, we see that some challenges to the intellectual and spiritual security of their time come from people who truly bring a greater awareness of divine revelation with no self interest but nonetheless challenge the pre-existing order. Yet other challenges come from people who are motivated by self-interest, by personal gain or by false visions and distorted, unhealthy psyches. We may be able to learn how best to respond in our own times to such challenges by looking at the memories carried in our religious traditions.

First, I'd like to look with you into the Bible, into the Torah, which is the first five books of the Bible. In the Bible, a classic example of a self-interested challenge is in the Book of Numbers, chapter 16. A powerful tribal leader named Korah gathered some 250 men around him, all of them influential leaders themselves, and directly defied Moses, the prophet chosen by God. In the language of the Torah, *vayyaqumu* - they rose up against Moses, demanding, 'Ye take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them; wherefore then lift ye up yourselves above the assembly of the LORD?' In this case, faced with this attempt at destabilization, Moses responded by asking God to show whose interpretation was right – and Korah and his followers were swallowed up by the earth and disappeared forever.

However, the Bible gives us an opposite example, also in the Book of Numbers. This example is a sincere, thoughtful caring challenge to an established way, a potentially destabilizing challenge to a form of intellectual and spiritual security based in what Moses heard God command him. What greater intellectual security could there be than God's own chosen prophet Moses hearing God speak and telling the people what God said? Nonetheless, five sisters – let me honour them by saying their names: Mahlah, No'a, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirtzah – challenged Moses' teaching of one of the ways he heard God command him. Again, the language of the Torah is instructive. It says *vattigravna*, and they approached. Moses again appealed to God, and God responded saying: "Yes, the daughters of Zelophahad speak rightly."<sup>3</sup> Their willingness to challenge – and Moses' response to their challenge – enabled a new understanding of God's truth to come into the world. If they had not challenged or if Moses had not been willing to explore their challenge but had just immediately reacted by rejecting it, that new understanding of truth would not have come into the world – at least not at that time, not in that way. God needs us humans to be the conduits, the channels, for revelation. In fact, in this example in the Bible, Moses, in our tradition the greatest prophet chosen by God, did not get all the revelation right. And, the sisters who challenged his teaching, these young, unmarried women who dared to destabilize that particular intellectual

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<sup>3</sup> Numbers 27:7

security, were the instruments through which God brought that truth into the world at that time.

And now, in our times, long after the chosen prophets of God have ceased to walk among us here on this earth, what shall we do? Our knowledge of religion and God's will has come from them, but then has had to be interpreted, as is necessary, through the generations, through the centuries and millennia since they lived. For most of our religions, authority has for centuries resided in the hands of men who are understood by the religious community to be reliable interpreters of God's will as revealed by the prophets. They are not prophets, but they know how to interpret, how to apply the teachings God gave through our prophets. They lay the foundation for the intellectual security which flows from their interpretation.

In every large, historic religion, different interpretations compete with each other. What was at one time very sure, the bedrock of intellectual security, was at some other time challenged. In Christianity, the intellectual security of the Roman Catholic Church was in time challenged by the Protestant Reformation. In Islam, the intellectual security of one method of *khilafah* and one school of *fiqh* is challenged by that of another. Within Judaism as well, of course, the established intellectual security of one time and place, of one group of scholars, is always challenged by others who are just as pious, just as wise, just as knowledgeable and understanding, just as righteous. The result is dialectic, a process. Competing claims of truth, wisdom and understanding are able to encounter one another, to interact with one another and to ultimately lead to new, more comprehensive understandings.

This dialectic is seen in the Talmud, the major source of Judaism after the Bible. The Talmud is an enormous collection of disputes among rabbis following the close of the Bible. The disputes took place roughly 1,800 years ago and were written down about 1,600 years ago. The Talmud applies the Bible to life as life continued to develop and progress, often in unexpected ways. The brilliance of the creators of the Talmud is that they preserved competing, conflicting points of view. Often the same foundational Biblical material resulted in opposing conclusions. So, where is the intellectual security in such a confusing situation? I would like to share with you one classic story from the Talmud, a story which I love and am grateful to have taught many times, which I believe illustrates and sheds light on this question.

The great leading scholar of his age, Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus, was known to be an absolute authority on the Torah. He was blessed with absolutely perfect memory. There was no one like him. He was able to recall not only the verses in the Torah – which is not at all unusual – but the entire chain of tradition of interpretation from generation to generation of scholars with all the competing concepts and the final outcome in each case. If Rabbi Eliezer asserted that something was true, it was true! He was an absolute authority about the received tradition.

However, in one case, called the *Tanur shel Achnai*,<sup>4</sup> Rabbi Eli'ezer said the ruling went one way. Rabbi Yehoshu'a, another great rabbi of that time, stood up

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<sup>4</sup> Baba Metzia 59b

and disagreed. It quickly became clear that all the rabbis supported Rabbi Yehoshu'a in this case against Rabbi Eli'ezer, even though Rabbi Eli'ezer was known to be an absolutely reliable authority. Rabbi Eli'ezer's authority and the intellectual security based on his authority, was not convincing. All the other rabbis dared to disagree with his conclusion.

Rabbi Eli'ezer then proclaimed, "If the ruling is as I say, let that carob tree prove it!" No sooner had the words left his mouth, than the carob tree jumped out of the ground and flew the length of a field before it fell back down to earth.

Rabbi Yehoshu'a was not impressed. He responded by saying, "Since when do we decide rulings based on trees?"

Rabbi Eli'ezer then cried out, "If the ruling is as I say, then let the water in this aqueduct prove it!" And the water began to flow uphill.

Again, Rabbi Yehoshu'a spoke up and said, "Since when do we decide rulings based on water?"

Then Rabbi Eli'ezer demanded, "If the ruling is as I say, let the walls of this House of Study prove it!" The walls began to shake, crumble and fall until Rabbi Yehoshu'a commanded them, "What business do walls have in deciding a ruling?" And, the Talmud says, the walls stayed just that way, broken and partially falling down, until this very day.

Finally, Rabbi Eli'ezer could stand it no more and shouted, "If the ruling is as I say, let the very heavens prove it!" Just then a voice came down from heaven and proclaimed, "The ruling is as Rabbi Eli'ezer says!"

Rabbi Yehoshu'a rose once again and said, quoting the Torah itself, "It is not in heaven!"<sup>5</sup> – meaning that authority to decide religious matters within our human society does not reside in heaven, but among us here on this earth. The greatest authority, who can be completely relied upon for accuracy, who embodies intellectual and spiritual security, is not the final arbiter of truth in the realm of human endeavors, where we live our lives with each other, simply because of their authority. Instead, a more integrative, more comprehensive, and more actionable truth emerges from our own sometimes-messy human interaction and exploration.

My view of social media and the destabilization of intellectual security derives from the value given to discourse in my religious tradition. My view is to suggest that we allow ourselves to see social media as just that – a medium of discourse, a way of exchanging ideas, which is being used by more and more people and more and more

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<sup>5</sup> Deuteronomy 30:12

groups than have ever before been able to share and communicate their ideas. Some of those ideas are deadly – and absolutely dead wrong. Some are murderous and hugely, vastly destructive. But we cannot stop those ideas from taking place or being exchanged. We must participate in this exchange. We too must use social media, to join in its many, many conversations. All we can do is bring our own understanding into the discourse as skillfully and sincerely as we can and trust that, if it is God's truth, and if we share it skillfully, it will be heard and accepted, and that ultimately God is still guiding the whole messy process of human life. Social media is not the problem, it is only the medium in which the problem is taking place. To deal with the problem, we need to be present and active in the arena where the problem is occurring. Again, we must participate in social media, use clear understanding of true values to influence for good those who are susceptible to being influenced for bad.

The controversy and concern about today's social media echo earlier fears about other technological changes that threatened the established intellectual security of earlier times. If we look at earlier attempts to control the media of communication, we may learn lessons for our own times.

In the Muslim world of the fifteenth century, the invention of the printing press was seen as such a threat and was resisted with such force that in the Ottoman Empire in 1483, Sultan Bayezid II prohibited printing in Arabic script on penalty of death. Interestingly, the *Ahl al-Kutab*, the Jews and Christians in his realm, were permitted to print freely in their own scripts, in Hebrew, Greek, Armenian and so on – but no one was permitted to use a printing press for Arabic script, regardless of the language or content of the text. Only some 250 years later in 1727 did a daring young man named Ibrahim Muteferriqa persuade the sultan of his time, Sultan Ahmed III, to grant his *ferman* (permission) and gained a *fatwa* from the *Sheikh al-Islam* allowing him to use a printing press to print in Arabic script – and then only to print secular works; printing religious publications still remained forbidden. Printing did not really become widespread in the Muslim world until the 19th century. Strange as it seems now, the printing press was seen as a disruptive technology which would destabilize the intellectual security of a mighty empire.

Not very long ago, in the age of our grandparents, maybe even in our parents' time, radio was seen as beyond *haram* – prohibited -- and was considered by significant authorities to be *sihir* – black magic, absolutely demonic. And even more recently, not long ago at all, certainly within my own lifetime, television was prohibited in many countries as a source of terribly negative social and intellectual influence. But, of course, both radio and television have become so widely accepted that it is laughable to think of them as threats to intellectual security. Instead of attempting to suppress them, nearly every sector of society, including very conservative authorities, use these media to spread many kinds of knowledge, including religious knowledge and devotion, to every place on this earth where humans live and search for meaning in their lives.

Similarly, social media in our time is in some ways destabilizing. However, it is only the medium through which the discourse, the exchange of ideas and

perspectives, is taking place. The medium itself is not the problem and cannot be stopped. It can, however, be used, just as printing and radio and television and even the medium of speech itself, to bring the clearest light, the highest ideals, the purest truth to the widest audience that we can achieve. Throughout the world, there are those who use social media to engage young minds, to reach searching hearts and to truly shine the light of God where confusion and darkness prevail. Social media present an opportunity, just as verbal discourse, printing and more traditional electronic media did in earlier times. May God help us reach for the courage and the skills to become effective in using these media, as we have so many others, to bring light, love and life to our sisters and brothers throughout this miraculously wondrous and deeply broken world.

*Marcelo Polakoff<sup>1</sup>*

## **Negative Influence of Radical Clergy and Political Leadership on Youth**

### **Abstract**

In this presentation we will explore which are the main psychological characteristics of the youth in order to become the focus of the preaching of radical clergy in every religious tradition. At the same time we will consider how our faiths could distinguish between the moderate messages of religion and the radical and dangerous ones, by recognizing the differences in the methodology of preaching and teaching. Through a practical tool we will display a clear way to disguise the extremism hidden in some of our educational communities. But the way of teaching is not the only factor in the negative influence of radical clergy; we will also consider how the fanatics reach the sacred texts of our religions with a special “pre-text” in order to find there the excuses to justify violence and discrimination against the others.

### **Main Psychological Characteristics of Youth**

As Dr. Leela Francisco comments, adolescents of ages 13 to 16 years may experience a great deal of ambivalence and conflict, often blaming the outside world for their discomfort. As they struggle to develop their own identity, dependence upon parents gives way to a new dependence upon peers. The adolescent struggles to avoid dependence and may belittle or devalue their parents and past attachments. These early teens often find a new ego ideal that leads to idealization of sports figures or entertainers. Adolescents at this stage are particularly vulnerable to people they would love to emulate, including religious leaders.

The development of a self-concept is crucial at this stage. The adolescent must explore his or her own morals and values, questioning the accepted ways of society and family in an effort to gain a sense of self. They make up their own mind about who they are and what they believe in. They must reassess the facts that were accepted during childhood and accept, reject, or modify these societal norms as their own. The here and now thinking of earlier childhood gives way to a new capacity for abstract thought. These adolescents may spend long periods abstractly contemplating the “meaning of life” and “Who am I?”

### **Ages 16-19 years**

In most cultures, a gradual development of independence and identity is expected by the age of 19. The physical manifestations of approaching adulthood require numerous psychological changes, particularly the development of how one views oneself in relation to others.

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### **Self-certainty and confidence**

The development in the ability to think abstractly changes along with physical development, becoming more refined. Late adolescents are less bound by concrete thinking. A sense of time emerges when the individual can recognize the difference between past, present, and future. They can adopt a future orientation that leads to the capacity to delay gratification.

### **When conflicts are left unresolved**

Most psychologists identify three categories of adolescent problems:

- Emotional distress: The teen shows symptoms of emotional distress, which may include fearfulness, social withdrawal, depression low self-esteem, anxiety, low frustration tolerance, a lack of self-confidence, poor social skills, school avoidance or poor academic performance. The teen may complain that no one likes him or her and may cry or become upset easily.
- Rebelliousness: There is excessive conflict, anger, resentment, rebelliousness and poor communication in the parent-teen relationship. In this case the normal desire of the teen to assert his or her individuality has taken on a distorted and conflict-ridden form. In being responsible for the control, discipline and education of their children, parents “may often frustrate the child’s desires and impulses which may lead to anger or resentment in the child. Sometimes these feelings can be handled successfully by the family but there are many complicating factors which may prevent a successful resolution of these problems. The temperaments and personalities of the parents as well as the child, the parents’ own upbringing, the child’s relationships with brothers and sisters, the quality of the marriage, the impact of divorce and the influence of our changing social environment are some of the complicating factors to be examined.”
- Chemical abuse and addictions: The third category of problems involves alcohol or other drug abuse. In this case the problems discussed above are complicated by the destructive effects of alcohol or drug dependency or addiction. The substance abuse problem must first be addressed in order to then deal with the other problems.

Seeking the help of a doctor/psychologist/counselor or a priest who is specially trained to help in counseling these issues, is the other alternative when parental guidance cannot be depended on. This would be necessary especially when there is a breakdown in parent-child communication, or when the teen is from a broken family background. It is often these situations that lead the teen into more serious social and psychological problems.

### **Youth as the Focus of the Preaching of Radical Clergy**

A study published at CatholicCulture.org states as following: The most vulnerable groups, especially the youth, seem to be the most affected. When they are “footloose”, unemployed, not active in parish life or voluntary parish work, or come from an unstable family background, or belong to ethnic minority groups, they are a more likely target for the new movements and sects. In this context, mention must be made of university campuses which are often favorable breeding grounds for sects or places of recruitment.

The phenomenon seems to be symptomatic of the depersonalizing structures of contemporary society, largely produced in the West and widely exported to the rest of the world, which create multiple crisis situations on the individual as well as on the social level. These crisis situations reveal various needs, aspirations, and questions which, in turn, call for psychological and spiritual responses. The sects claim to have, and to give, these responses. They do this on both the effective and cognitive level, often responding to the affective needs in a way that deadens the cognitive faculties.

These basic needs and aspirations can be described as so many expressions of the human search for wholeness and harmony, participation and realization, on all the levels of human existence and experience, so many attempts to meet the human quest for truth and meaning, for those constitutive values which at certain times in collective as well as individual history seem to be hidden, broken, or lost, especially in the case of people who are upset by rapid change, acute stress, fear, etc.

The fabric of many communities has been destroyed; traditional lifestyles have been disrupted; homes are broken up; people feel uprooted and lonely. Thus, the need to belong. The sects and radical clergy appear to offer: human warmth, care and support in small and close-knit communities; sharing of purpose and fellowship; attention for the individual; protection and security, especially in crisis situations; resocialization of marginalized individuals (for instance, the divorced or immigrants). The sect often does the thinking for the individual. In complex and confused situations people naturally search for answers and solutions. The sects appear to offer: simple and ready-made answers to complicated questions and situations; simplified and partial versions of traditional truths and values; a pragmatic theology, a theology of success, a syncretistic theology proposed as “new revelation”; “new truth” to people who often have little of the “old” truth; clear-cut directives; a claim to moral superiority; proofs from “supernatural” elements, etc. Many people feel that they are out of touch with themselves, with others, with their culture and environment. They experience brokenness. They have been hurt by parents or teachers, by the religion or society. They feel left out. They want a religious view that can harmonize everything and everybody; worship that leaves room for body and soul, for participation, spontaneity, creativity.

The sects and radical clergy appear to offer: a gratifying religious experience, being saved, conversion; room for feelings and emotions, for spontaneity (e.g., in religious celebrations); bodily and spiritual healing; help with drug or drink problems; relevance to the life situation. In many Third World

countries the society finds itself greatly dissociated from the traditional cultural, social, and religious values; and traditional believers share this feeling. The sects and radical clergy appear to offer: plenty of room for traditional cultural/religious heritage, creativity, spontaneity, participation, a style of prayer and preaching closer to the cultural traits and aspirations of the people.

People feel a need to rise out of anonymity, to build an identity, to feel that they are in some way special and not just a number or a faceless member of a crowd. Large parishes and congregations, administration-oriented concern and clericalism, leave little room for approaching every person individually and in the person's life situation.

The sects and radical clergy appear to offer: concern for the individual; equal opportunities for ministry and leadership, for participation, for witnessing, for expression; awakening to one's own potential, the chance to be part of an elite group.

This expresses a deeply spiritual need, a God-inspired motivation to seek something beyond the obvious, the immediate, the familiar, the controllable, and the material to find an answer to the ultimate questions of life and to believe in something which can change one's life in a significant way. It reveals a sense of mystery, of the mysterious; a concern about what is to come; an interest in messianism and prophecy. Research suggests that a surprisingly large proportion of the population will, if questioned, admit to having some kind of religious or spiritual experience, say that this has changed their lives in some significant way and most pertinently add that they have never told anyone about the experience. Many young people say that they have frequently known difficulty in getting teachers or clergy to discuss, let alone answer, their most important and ultimate questions. The sects and radical clergy appear to offer: a sense of salvation; gifts of the Spirit; meditation; spiritual achievement. There may be a lack of parental support in the seeker's family or lack of leadership, patience, and personal commitment on the part of religious leaders or educators.

The sects and radical clergy appear to offer: guidance and orientation through strong, charismatic leadership. The person of the master, leader, guru, plays an important role in binding the disciples. At times there is not only submission but emotional surrender and even an almost hysterical devotion to a strong spiritual leader (messiah, prophet, guru).

The world of today is an interdependent world of hostility and conflict, violence and fear of destruction. People feel worried about the future; often despairing, helpless hopeless, and powerless. They look for signs of hope, for a way out. Some have a desire, however vague, to make the world better. The sects and radical clergy appear to offer: a "new vision" of oneself, of humanity, of history, of the cosmos. They promise the beginning of a new age, a new era.

By way of summary, one can say that the sects seem to live by what they believe, with powerful (often magnetic) conviction, devotion, and commitment; going out of their way to meet people where they are, warmly, personally, and directly, pulling the individual out of anonymity, promoting participation,

spontaneity, responsibility, commitment, and practicing an intensive follow-up through multiple contacts, home visits, and continuing support and guidance. They help to reinterpret one's experience, to reassess one's values and to approach ultimate issues in an all-embracing system. However, although all this counts mostly for the success of the sects, other reasons also exist, such as the recruitment and training techniques and indoctrination procedures used by certain sects.

### **Recognizing the Differences in the Methodology of Preaching and Teaching**

Some recruitment, training techniques, and indoctrination procedures practiced by a number of radical clergy, which often are highly sophisticated, partly account for their success. Those most often attracted by such measures are those who, first, do not know that the approach is often staged and, second, who are unaware of the nature of the contrived conversion and training methods (the social and psychological manipulation) to which they are subjected. The fanatics often impose their own norms of thinking, feeling, and behaving. This is in contrast to the approach of the main streams of the different religious traditions, which implies full-capacity informed consent.

Young people are at loose ends and are easy prey to those techniques and methods, which are often a combination of affection and deception. These techniques proceed from a positive approach, but gradually achieve a kind of mind control through the use of abusive behavior-modification techniques.

In a paper published in the web ([http://www.orange-papers.org/orange-cult\\_q0.html](http://www.orange-papers.org/orange-cult_q0.html)) we can trace 100 different characteristics that depict a cult, under the title "The Cult Test", which I find very useful in order to disguise several fanatic movements that in a certain way kidnap our youngsters, regardless of their faith.

It is very easy to find most of the elements of the list directly linked to the way that radical clergy create their loyalty groups.

The Cult Test by A. Orange:

1. The Guru is always right;
2. You are always wrong;
3. No Exit;
4. No Graduates;
5. Cult-speak;
6. Group-think, Suppression of Dissent, and Enforced Conformity in Thinking;
7. Irrationality;
8. Suspension of disbelief;
9. Denigration of competing sects, cults, religions, groups, or organizations.
10. Personal attacks on critics;
11. Insistence that the group is "the only way";
12. The group and its members are special;
13. Induction of guilt, and the use of guilt to manipulate group members;
14. Unquestionable Dogma, *Sacred Science*, and Infallible Ideology;
15. Indoctrination of members;

16. Appeals to “holy” or “wise” authorities;
17. Instant Community;
18. Instant Intimacy;
19. Surrender To The Group;
20. Giggly wonderfulness and starry-eyed faith;
21. Personal testimonies of earlier converts;
22. The group is self-absorbed;
23. Dual Purposes, Hidden Agendas, and Ulterior Motives;
24. Aggressive Recruiting;
25. Deceptive Recruiting;
26. No Humor;
27. You Can’t Tell The Truth;
28. Cloning - You become a clone of the group leader or other elder group members;
29. You must change your beliefs to conform to the group’s beliefs;
30. The End Justifies The Means;
31. Dishonesty, Deceit, Denial, Falsification, and Rewriting History;
32. Different Levels of Truth;
33. Newcomers can’t think right;
34. The Group Implants Phobias;
35. The Group is Money-Grubbing;
36. Confession Sessions;
37. A System of Punishments and Rewards;
38. An Impossible Superhuman Model of Perfection;
39. Mentoring;
40. Intrusiveness;
41. Disturbed Guru, Mentally Ill Leader;
42. Disturbed Members, Mentally Ill Followers;
43. Create a sense of powerlessness, covert fear, guilt, and dependency;
44. Dispensed existence;
45. Ideology Over Experience, Observation, and Logic;
46. Keep them unaware that there is an agenda to change them;
47. Thought-Stopping Language. Thought-terminating clichés and slogans;
48. Mystical Manipulation;
49. The guru or the group demands ultra-loyalty and total commitment;
50. Demands for Total Faith and Total Trust;
51. Members Get No Respect. They Get Abused;
52. Inconsistency. Contradictory Messages;
53. Hierarchical, Authoritarian Power Structure, and Social Castes;
54. Front groups, masquerading recruiters, hidden promoters, and disguised propagandists;
55. Belief equals truth;
56. Use of double-binds;
57. The group leader is not held accountable for his actions;

58. Everybody else needs the guru to boss him around, but nobody bosses the guru around;
59. The guru criticizes everybody else, but nobody criticizes the guru;
60. Dispensed truth and social definition of reality;
61. The Guru Is Extra-Special;
62. Flexible, shifting morality;
63. Separatism;
64. Inability to tolerate criticism;
65. A Charismatic Leader;
66. Calls to Obliterate Self;
67. Don't Trust Your Own Mind;
68. Don't Feel Your Own Feelings;
69. The group takes over the individual's decision-making process;
70. You Owe The Group;
71. We Have The Panacea;
72. Progressive Indoctrination and Progressive Commitments;
73. Magical, Mystical, Unexplainable Workings;
74. Trance-Inducing Practices;
75. New Identity — Redefinition of Self — Revision of Personal History;
76. Membership Rivalry;
77. True Believers;
78. Scapegoating and Excommunication;
79. Promised Powers or Knowledge;
80. It's a con. You don't get the promised goodies;
81. Hypocrisy;
82. Lying. Denial of the truth. Reversal of reality. Rationalization and Denial;
83. Seeing Through Tinted Lenses;
84. You can't make it without the group;
85. Enemy-making and Devaluing the Outsider;
86. The group wants to own you;
87. Channelling or other occult, unchallengeable, sources of information;
88. They Make You Dependent On The Group;
89. Demands For Compliance With The Group;
90. Newcomers Need Fixing;
91. Use of the Cognitive Dissonance Technique;
92. Grandiose existence. Bombastic, Grandiose Claims;
93. Black And White Thinking;
94. The use of heavy-duty mind control and rapid conversion techniques;
95. Threats of bodily harm or death to someone who leaves the group;
96. Threats of bodily harm or death to someone who criticizes the group;
97. Appropriation of all of the members' worldly wealth;
98. Making cult members work long hours for free;
99. Total immersion and total isolation;
100. Mass suicide.

### **Treatment of Sacred Texts**

No text exists in the air. There is no way to conceive the existence of any text, and also the sacred ones, in a plain vacuum. The context in which a text is read influences the interpretation of that text in an absolute manner. The different efforts made throughout the centuries in order to isolate the texts from their contexts were always meant to be useless, because no one can escape from his time and space.

Needless to say, almost the same happens with the one who leads the reading of a specific text. In this scenario, the reader brings within himself a unique approach which will unequivocally tinge his particular reading with his own individual history. We could call that “the pre-text”, because it is already well nurtured before the opening of the very first page of the future text which is about to be read.

This “duo”, the context and the pretext, will eventually lead to a special interpretation of our sacred texts, that will produce several and different trends in the actions carried out by the members of the group involved in that matter. This is one of the reasons that explain why we should stress the moderate and peace-centered way of our religious traditions. In the Jewish world, we call it “derech hamelech” (the royal path), and if I am not wrong, in the Muslim world the middle path is also highly valued, and the Qur’an designates Muslims as the “*ummatan wasata*” - the middle community.

It is obvious and well known that the Mishnah and the Qur’an clearly declare that killing an innocent person was tantamount to killing all mankind and likewise saving a single life was as if one had saved the life of all mankind. (Mishnah Sanhedrin 4:5, and the Qur’an, *Al-Maidah* 5:32). In the same fashion any form of extremism is to be utterly and completely rejected by Jews and Muslims everywhere.

At the same time the social culture of Islam is based on the principle of inviting people towards good, courteously and wisely - with Hikmah and mawizah Hasana. (The Qur’an, *Al-Nahal* 16:125). Judaism and Islam also strictly condemn religious extremism and the use of violence against innocent lives. Targeting civilians’ life and property through suicide bombings or any other method of attack is haram – or forbidden – in our faiths, and those who commit these barbaric acts are criminals, not “martyrs”. We must be very active in order to denounce the fanatics and the radical clergy that inoculate the minds and souls of our youth with the poison of extremism, drawing us apart from each other.

Let me finish by telling you a beautiful story from the Talmud (Eruvin 13b):

*Rabbi Abba stated in the name of Samuel: For three years there was a dispute between Beth Shammai and Beth Hillel, the former asserting, ‘The halachah (law) is in agreement with our views’ and the latter contending, ‘The halachah (law) is in agreement with our views’. Then a heavenly voice issued announcing, ‘The utterances of both are the words of the living God, but the halachah (law) is in agreement with the rulings of Beth Hillel’. Since, however, both are the words of the*

*living God' what was it that entitled Beth Hillel to have the halachah (law) fixed in agreement with their rulings? Because they were kindly and modest, they studied their own rulings and those of Beth Shammai, and were even so humble as to mention the actions of Beth Shammai before theirs...*

Let's keep moving forward into a world of dialogue and learning from each other, where the Presence of God could fill each and every human being.



*Arif K. Abdullah*<sup>1</sup>

## **The Concept of Jihad and Its Impact on Interfaith Communication**

### **Abstract**

This study critically examines the notion of jihad which has acquired a pejorative connotation largely due to widespread perception as a religiously motivated military action. In his analysis, the author makes an attempt to determine the meaning of jihad by tracing its linguistic usage in three important texts, pre-Islamic Arabic poetry, the Qur'an and Hadith. The researcher also tries to observe the evolution of jihad in different contexts. Through such a method, the analysis reveals that the meaning of jihad in pre-Islamic Arabic poetry and Makkan verses of the Qur'an is not associated at all with military actions. The action of jihad is presented in the poetry merely as efforts to survive in the context of challenges and in the Qur'an as perpetual struggle for intellectual, moral and spiritual excellence in the field of good deeds. In addition to this principal meaning, the concept of jihad in the Madinan verses and Hadith is mentioned as a need for making efforts in the context of fighting against previously waged war and oppression. The broad scope of jihad, however, was later restricted by the influence of socio-political circumstances and heavily emphasized as strategic military fighting against "the infidels." Based on its findings and outcome, the study recommends that, with globally growing population of Muslims in contemporary life, it is of paramount importance for interfaith and cross-cultural relations that the concept of jihad ought to be vividly proclaimed and signified in its original and deep meaning as a driving force of individual and public progress.

### **Presentation**

The model of jihad that is being spread is directly connected to non-Muslims and their religions. For centuries on end, the relations between Muslims and non-Muslims have often been demonized precisely by means of the word jihad, which attributes military essence to Islam. The stereotypical military portrait of Islam is commonly illustrated through the image of the prophet Muhammad, who, in a state of jihad rises above the "infidels" – holding a sword in one hand and the Qur'an in the other, restricting their choice to death or Islam.

Let us start our analysis in order to define the meaning of jihad prior to its transformation into a synonym of military action. For the purpose of our analysis it is necessary to totally distance from the phenomena and processes, characteristic of the shaping of the military meaning of the concept of jihad. Such a distance can be achieved if language is taken as a starting point as the Qur'an is presented in the form of letter signs, which comprise a clear language material. The very Qur'an says

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that it is revealed “in the clear Arabic tongue.”<sup>2</sup> This shows that the linguistic capability and Arabs’ language tradition before the appearance of the Qur’an made these people capable of understanding its content correctly. Therefore, this fact obliges us to explore the usage of the word *jihad* in the Arabs’ vocabulary before its appearance in the Qur’an. A similar exploration will throw light on the meaning of the word before its peregrinations through centuries and its later layering with additional dogmatic and sociopolitical layers, brought onto it by the circumstances of times.

Arabs’ pre-Islamic poetry from the 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 7<sup>th</sup> centuries is the most significant source that has reached us, from which we can draw information on the usage of the Arabic language before the appearance of the Qur’an. Today we have at our disposal the poetry collections of dozens of pre-Islamic knights of Arabic language. However, it is interesting to note that in the works of poets such as ‘Antarah ibn Shaddad (d. circa 608 C.E.), Muhalhal ibn Rabia (d. circa 520 C.E.), and even in al-Shanfara (d. 525 C.E.) - one of the most famous wretches, fighting in the desert - the word *jihad* and its verbal base are not used, although these authors’ works are dominated by military vocabulary. The words which resurface in their poems and through which military action is described are as follows: *al-harb*, war; *al-qital*, military action; *al-ghazu*, battle, combat, and others.<sup>3</sup>

Derivatives from the root morpheme /j-h-d/, and more precisely, forms based on the verb of the first group *jahada*, are used in pre-Islamic poetry. For example, glorifying the attack of his steed, Imru al-Qais (d. 565 C.E.) says:

فَأَذْرَكَ لَمْ يُجْهِدْ وَلَمْ يَنْشَأْهُ<sup>4</sup>

And he caught up [the victim] without effort, in one leap.<sup>5</sup>

In another verse where he describes the camel he is riding on his long journey to the Byzantine emperor Justinian I (527-565 C.E.), seeking support from him to take revenge on the tribe Banu Asad, Imru al-Qais says:

بَسْبِيرٍ يَضِجُ الْعَوْدُ مِنْهُ يَمْنُهُ أَخُو الْجَهْدِ لَا يَلْوِي عَلَيَّ تَعْدَرًا<sup>6</sup>

Sobbing on the road, the old camel, made weak/by the persevering, with great determination.

However, when advising a boy how to ride the strong horse in hunting, Imru al-Qais guides him with the words:

فَقُلْتُ لَهُ صَوِّبْ وَلَا تَجْهِدْهُ<sup>7</sup>

And I told him: handle him lightly and do not strain him.

<sup>2</sup> Qu’ran 26: 195; Muhammad Asad, *The Message of the Qur’an*.

<sup>3</sup> See M. Mawlawi, *Diwan Antara* (Al-Maktab al-Islami), n.d.; T. Harb, *Diwan Muhalhil ibn Rabia* (Al-Dar al-Alamiyyah), n.d.; T. Harb, *Diwan al-Shanfara* (Beirut: Dar Sadir, 1996).

<sup>4</sup> M. Abdu al-Shafi, *Diwan Imru al-Qais* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah, 2004), p. 35; the underlined words in the verses are the author’s.

<sup>5</sup> The translation of all poetic verses is by the author.

<sup>6</sup> M. Abdu al-Shafi, *Diwan Imru al-Qais*. Op. cit., p. 62.

<sup>7</sup> M. Abdu al-Shafi, *Diwan Imru al-Qais*. Op. cit., p. 106.

In a similar manner, al-Sulaik ibn al-Sulaka (d. 605 C.E.), when mourning for his horse al-Naham, points out the merits of his stallion before death:

وَ يُحْضِرُ فَوْقَ جُهْدِ الْحُضْرِ نَصًّا<sup>8</sup>

And he rushed without a stint against the exertions of the fierce beast.

The root morpheme /j-h-d/ in the form of verbal noun from the verb of the fourth group is also to be found in the poems. Comparing his camel to a taurus (wild bull), caught up in an ambush by hunting dogs in blood, Al-Asha (d. circa 633C.E.) describes the taurus with the words:

فَجَالَتْ وَ جَالَتْ لَهَا أَرْبَعٌ جَهْدَنْ لَهَا مَعَ إِجْهَادِهَا<sup>9</sup>

He went round and his legs made efforts to go round with him, as the [whirlwind] made him to strain himself.

Of course, for our exploration it is of utmost importance to trace the usage of /j-h-d/ in the third verbal form, from which in fact derives the word jihad as its verbal noun. We find the following verse again in the poetry of Imru al-Qais:

كَأَنَّ الصُّوَارِ إِذْ يُجَاهِدْنَ غُدُوَّةَ عَلَى جُمْدٍ خَيْلٌ تَجُولُ بِأَجْلَالِ<sup>10</sup>

As if the tauruses, struggling in the morning against the rocky earth, are roaming horses, covered over by horse-cloth.

The context where the verse appears, is the arrival of Imru al-Qais amidst a stud of wild bulls, who - upon seeing the brave horseman - are seized by fear and begin running randomly along the difficult terrain in order to find a refuge. The meaning of the verb *ujahid*, conduct jihad, is directed towards the action of the bulls, triggered by the nature of the terrain they move on. The rocky terrain challenges them as the rocky peaks obstruct their movement on their way to reach a safe place. In order to meet the challenge and reach their destination, the bulls make efforts and try to overcome the difficulties on the way to their goal.

In a verse the poet Al-Nabigha (d. circa 604 C.E.) describes the endurance of a donkey, who stubbornly follows his mate: when she speeds up, he speeds up, too; when she slows down, he, too, slows down, though not because of fatigue:

وَ إِذَا جَاهَدْتُهُ الشَّدَّ جَدُّ وَ إِنْ وَنَتْ تَسَاقَطَ لَا وَانَ وَ لَا مُتَخَاذِلُ<sup>11</sup>

Should she challenge him into a gallop – he gallops/ should she trudge on – he stands put, neither trudging, not lagging behind.

The striving of the female mate to escape the chase of the male is rendered by means of the verb *jahada*. The female makes an effort to get away as a reaction to the actions of the male, who follows her. She gallops on the verge of her strength, then she trudges along weak, whereas he invariably, without effort, stays close to her.

<sup>8</sup> T. Harb, *Diwan al-Shanfara* (Beirut: Dar Sadir, 1996), p. 89.

<sup>9</sup> M. Al-Raduani, *Diwan al-Asha al-Kabir*, (Doha: Wizarat al-Thaqafa, 2001), vol. 1, p. 237.

<sup>10</sup> M. Abdu al-Shafi, *Diwan Imru al-Qais*. Op. cit, p. 128.

<sup>11</sup> H. Hitti, *Diwan al-Nabigha al-Dhubiani* (Beirut: Dar al-Kitab al-Arabi, 1991), p. 138.

The actions of the female mate, accompanied by overcoming the difficulties, imposed by the tough male, are rendered by Al-Nabigha with the word jihad.

In Al-Asha's poetry again we come across /j-h-d/ in the third verb form. Describing again a wild bull, chased by a pack of dogs, Al-Asha portrays through the activity of jihad the efforts of the bull to run away from the dogs' attack, and to save himself:

لَأَيُّهَا يُجَاهِدُهَا لَا تَأْتَلِي طَلَبًا حَتَّى إِذَا عَقَلَهُ بَعْدَ الْوَيْ تَابًا  
فَكَرَّرَ دُو حَرْبِيَّةٍ تُحْمِي مَقَاتِلَهُ إِذَا نَحَا لِكَلَاهَا رَوْقَهُ صَابًا<sup>12</sup>

He struggles painfully with them, hard in their chase/ until he fell in exhaustion, but did rise.

He turned head to defend himself with the horns/and if he managed to aim at their flanks – he would pierce them.

With the action of jihad Al-Asha describes the efforts of the bull in response to the challenge - the attack of the hunting dogs. The bull fights, making efforts in order to overcome the danger. He fights, running away from the dogs in order to save his life. It is only when he is exhausted and he has been caught up by the fierce dogs that he turns against them, trying to protect himself.

In Al-Asha's poetry the word *al-jahad* is also used. He uses the word to name the difficult terrain, which demands efforts to be crossed over, as it is rocky, with no greenery and no shade.<sup>13</sup>

It has become clear that in Arabs' pre-Islamic poetry and in the Arabic language prior to the revelation of the Qur'an, the action jihad is invariably used to express the necessity to make efforts in order to overcome difficulties. In the Arabs' language prior to Islam jihad means diligence and struggle in response to challenges. And although the life of pre-Islamic Arabs is centered on war and the war is their life, nowhere in their language the activity of jihad is connected to military action or assault.

Moving onto the content of the Qur'an itself we find the word jihad used for the first time in chronological terms in *Sura al-Furqan*, which according to al-Zarkashi's classical chronology,<sup>14</sup> as well as Nöldeke's modern one,<sup>15</sup> is dated approximately in the mid-Makkan period - between 610 and 622 C.E. In the context of discussing the arrogant behaviour of a group of people who call the Qur'an "a lie" and a "legend," and the prophet Muhammad an "enchanted man," and who reject the message unless it has been revealed to them personally by the angels or directly from God, it is said:

فَلَا تُطِعِ الْكَافِرِينَ وَجَاهِدْهُمْ بِهِ جِهَادًا كَبِيرًا

<sup>12</sup> M. Al-Raduni, *Diwan al-Asha...* Op. cit., v. 2, p. 244.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, vol.1, p. 237.

<sup>14</sup> B. Al-Zarkashi, *Al-Burhan fi 'Ulum al-Qur'an* (Cairo: Maktaba al-Turath, n.d.), vol. 1, p. 193.

<sup>15</sup> W. Watt & R. Bell, *Introduction to the Qur'an* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994), p. 110.

Hence, do not defer to [the likes and dislikes of] those who deny the truth, but strive hard against them, by means of this [divine writ], with utmost striving.<sup>16</sup>

The whole Makkan period and especially its middle part, where the omen is dated, is characterized by religious persecution and repressive measures against the prophet Muhammad and the believers. This fact has been mentioned by all historians and chroniclers who have studied the Makkan events during the Era of the prophet. Under the circumstances, the prophet, hence, the believers - were ordained to disobey the pagans' demands to abandon Islam and accept the idols as deities, and to conduct a grand battle in defense against them through the Qur'an.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, in response to the repressions, imposed by the Makkan pagans against the Muslims, the Qur'an prescriptively commands to struggle against this type of behaviour by means of the clear arguments in the Qur'an. Obviously, the first use of jihad and the first imperative to its action in the Qur'an are in accordance with the pre-Islamic understanding of jihad, i.e., the efforts to repress Islam demand corresponding efforts of resistance, which the adverbial clause of manner definitively frames as arguments and facts, leading to the truth. In such a way, for the first time the Qur'an presents jihad and its imperative as an intellectual striving against repression and the suppression of liberty. It is precisely this striving - intellectual one - that is perceived according to the Qur'an as a great and big jihad, and not the popularly accepted ascetic opinion, based on a falsified text - attributed to the prophet Muhammad, that the great jihad is struggle with the soul.<sup>18</sup> Although this is true in terms of its meaning, it is only one part of intellectual jihad.

Again, during the Makkan period, in surah *Al-Nahl*,<sup>19</sup> "The Bees," the action jihad is found in the following Qur'anic text:

ثُمَّ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ لِلَّذِينَ هَاجَرُوا مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا قُتِلُوا ثُمَّ جَاهَدُوا وَصَبَرُوا إِنَّ رَبَّكَ مِنْ بَعْدِهَا لَغَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ

And yet, behold, thy Sustainer [grants His forgiveness] unto those who forsake the domain of evil after having succumbed to its temptation, and who thenceforth strive hard [in God's cause] and are patient in adversity: behold, after such [repentance] thy Sustainer is indeed much-forgiving, a dispenser of grace!<sup>20</sup>

The context again is the telling of lies concerning the prophet Muhammad and the message he delivers, whereas in historical terms the text again is related to the persecution and the suffering of the believers by the Makkan pagans. The pagans kill brutally whole families who have accepted Islam. In Makka the Yasir family is killed in front of their son 'Ammar, who escapes death by seemingly renouncing his faith.<sup>21</sup> Atrocities and suffering make people leave their native place. It should also

<sup>16</sup> Qur'an 25: 52; Muhammad Asad, *The Message of the Qur'an*.

<sup>17</sup> Ibn Jarir Al-Tabari, *Tafsir al-Tabari* (Beirut: Al-Risalah, 1994), vol. 5 p. 476.

<sup>18</sup> A. Al-Qari, *Al-Mawduat al-Kubra* (Beirut: Dar al-Amana/al-Risalah, p. 206, hadith 211; no hadithologist considers the hadith about the "lesser and greater jihad" as authentic, said by the prophet Muhammad.

<sup>19</sup> B. Al-Zarkashi, *Al-Burhan...* Op. cit., v. 1, p. 193; W. Watt & R. Bell. Op. cit., p. 110.

<sup>20</sup> Qur'an 16: 110; Muhammad Asad, *The Message of the Qur'an*.

<sup>21</sup> M. Al-Hudari, *Nur al-Yaqin* (Damascus: Maktaba al-Ghazali, 1990), p. 55.

be noted that the emigration mentioned in the text is the emigration of some of the believers to Abyssinia as observed by Ibn Ashur - unlike other commentators who mistakenly think that this concerns the later emigration to al-Madina in 622 C.E.<sup>22</sup> The *surah's* chronological classification and its thematic progression, as well as the morphological tense category of the verbs do not justify any other migration unless the one to Abyssinia (circa 615-616 C.E.).

Contrary to the pagans' atrocities, the believers' reaction is described in the text with three activities: emigration, struggle and patience. The emigration is a categorical act of distancing from the field of violence. In this sense, here it is unjustified to understand jihad struggle as military action. The verb *jahadu* describes the efforts made by the believers to defend themselves from terror. Leaving their native place behind, they struggle and run away from atrocities in order to preserve their faith and lives. Even the very stay in Abyssinia, where they find protection from a Christian ruler,<sup>23</sup> needs perseverance and making efforts to overcome the difficulties in a foreign land.

The meaning of the activity jihad in the abovementioned Qur'anic text corresponds to the meaning of jihad, used by al-Asha to describe the bull's efforts in escaping the attack of the hunting dogs, as already discussed. In this case jihad corresponds again to the pre-Islamic use of this action. This is why the opinion of the great historian, chronicler and exegete Ibn Jarir al-Tabari (d. 923 C.E.) sounds strange - in his commentary of this specific text he talks about "fighting with sword."<sup>24</sup> The reason why such a commentary cannot be accepted will be discussed later.

During the final Makkan period, immediately before the emigration to al-Madina, the activity of jihad resurfaces again several times in *surah al-'Ankabut*,<sup>25</sup> "The Spider." The *surah* begins by reminding the people who have declared their faith that they will be subject to trials so that the sincere will be distinguished from the lying ones. And for those who hope to meet Allah – this moment will come. This is why whoever strives, only strives for himself. Allah needs nothing and nobody:

وَمَنْ جَاهَدْ فَإِنَّمَا يُجَاهِدُ لِنَفْسِهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَغَنِيٌّ عَنِ الْعَالَمِينَ

Hence, whoever strives hard [in God's cause] does so only for his own good: for, verily, God does not stand in need of anything in all the worlds!<sup>26</sup>

The jihad activity here is presented as a principle, unchangeable in time. The text stresses the need for striving as permanent. Contextualized within the frame of meeting Allah, jihad in this specific text is perceived not simply as a striving to exist but as perseverance and efforts to accumulate good deeds, which give meaning to the hope of meeting the Lord. The efforts to do good are expressed here with the action of jihad in the context of the Makkan persecutions, which makes jihad

<sup>22</sup> M. Ibn Ashur, *Al-Tahrir wa al-Tanwir* (Tunis: Al-Dar al-Tunisia, 1984), vol. 14. p. 299.

<sup>23</sup> A. Ibn Hisham, *Sirat al-Nabiyy*, (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1981), vol. 1 p. 343...

<sup>24</sup> Ibn Jarir Al-Tabari, *Tafsir al-Tabari*... Op. cit., p. 562.

<sup>25</sup> B. Al-Zarkashi, *Al-Burhan*... Op. cit., v. 1, p. 193; W. Watt & R. Bell. Op. cit., p. 110.

<sup>26</sup> Qur'an 29: 6; Muhammad Asad, *The Message of the Qur'an*.

synonymous with the principle of “repaying good for evil.”<sup>27</sup> There is hardly anything that demands greater effort than repaying good for evil.

The understanding of jihad in the abovementioned text is provoked by the analysis of one of the earliest exegetes of the Qur’an - the linguist Muqatil ibn Sulayman al-Balkhi (d. 767 C.E.). His exegetic work is considered to be the earliest manuscript that has reached us, which provides an overall interpretation of the Qur’an.<sup>28</sup> The author clarifies that the phrase “And whoever strives, strives only for himself” means “Whoever does good, he does it for himself.”<sup>29</sup> The rendering of good deeds through the action of jihad, whose verbal matrix signals primarily a corresponding reaction to another action, raises some questions: What hinders this type of actions that they should need striving for their realization? Why are efforts necessary to do good? Al-Sha’raui responds that the obstacles that prevent doing good are many and of a different nature: the instincts, which man does not manage to balance; the unfavorable circumstances surrounding someone; the power of authoritative behavior, and others.<sup>30</sup>

In its final part the *surah* turns attention once again to those who make up lies about Allah and His message, and contrary to such behavior, it calls for striving, jihad and good deeds:

وَالَّذِينَ جَاهَدُوا فِينَا لَنَهْدِيَنَّهُمْ سُبُلَنَا وَإِنَّ اللَّهَ لَمَعَ الْمُحْسِنِينَ

But as for those who strive hard in Our cause - We shall most certainly guide them onto paths that lead unto Us: for, behold, God is indeed with the doers of good.<sup>31</sup>

Muqatil ibn Sulayman is consistent in his analysis, and he notes that striving here means “doing good”.<sup>32</sup> The expression “in Our cause” reinforces stylistically the motivation for sincerity and purity of intentions when doing good,<sup>33</sup> and in such a manner prevents benevolence from the impurities of malice and hypocrisy. Whereas “Our paths” are described by al-Zamakhshari (d.1143 C.E.) as the “ways of good”.<sup>34</sup> Thus, defined as sincere efforts for doing good, jihad in this text is in complete accordance with the ending of the text – Allah’s support for the doers of good.

If we accept al-Zarkashi’s statement that in Ibn ‘Abbas’s opinion *surah Al-Ankabut* is literally the last Makkan *surah*,<sup>35</sup> or the claim by Muqatil ibn Sulayman, who does not exclude the possibility that its content was revealed during the emigration from Makka to al-Madina,<sup>36</sup> we can get an additional idea of the action jihad in the specific historical context of the migration. The latter gives no ground to

<sup>27</sup> Qur’an 41: 34; 23: 96.

<sup>28</sup> Muqatil ibn Sulayman, *Tafsir Muqatil ibn Sulayman*, Abdulah Shahata (ed.), (Beirut: Al-Tarih al-‘Arabiah, 2002), vol. 1 p. 1.

<sup>29</sup> Muqatil ibn Sulayman, *Tafsir...* Op. cit., v. 3, p. 373.

<sup>30</sup> M. Al-Sha’raui, *Tafsir Al-Sha’raui*, (Akhbar al-Yawm, n.d.), vol. 18, p. 11 073...

<sup>31</sup> Qur’ān 29: 69; Muhammad Asad, *The Message of the Qur’an*.

<sup>32</sup> Muqatil ibn Sulayman, *Tafsir...* Op. cit., v. 3, p. 390.

<sup>33</sup> M. Ibn Ashur, *Al-Tahrir...* Op. cit., v. 21, p. 37.

<sup>34</sup> M. Al-Zamakhshari, *Tafsir al-Kashahaf* (Beirut: Dar al-Ma’rifa 2009), p. 824.

<sup>35</sup> B. Al-Zarkashi, *Al-Burhan...* Op. cit., v. 1, p. 193.

<sup>36</sup> Muqatil ibn Sulayman, *Tafsir...* Op. cit., v. 3, p. 371.

define jihad as military action as the believers' departure from Makka is in fact leaving the conflict zone.

As promised earlier, let us now return to al-Tabari, who insists to interpret jihad during the Makkan period as military action, *al-qital*. Even if we assume that he uses the word *al-qital* in a metaphorical sense,<sup>37</sup> without imbuing the meaning of military clash onto it, his unanimous clarification "fighting with a sword"<sup>38</sup> disarms us. Al-Tabari's position is puzzling and it cautions once again to be careful with classical literature and never to consider its authors faultless.

What Qur'anic imperative of fighting with a sword does al-Tabari talk about during the Makkan period - i.e., from a distance of approximately three hundred years later? His statement is not supported by the thematic content of the Makkan *surahs*; neither by the authentic tradition of the prophet Muhammad, which explains that the Qur'anic use of the word jihad in this period signifies military action; nor by the historical reality as reflected in sources, where no one talks about a military battle between the prophet Muhammad and the Makkan opposition in the period 610-622 C.E. And why Muqatil ibn Sulayman, who lived about two hundred years prior to al-Tabari does not even hint at the possibility of perceiving jihad action as synonym of military battle?

However, the most significant and basic argument against al-Tabari and anybody who defines jihad as synonymous with military action is provided by the Qur'an itself. As Professor Jeffrey Lang correctly points out,<sup>39</sup> the Qur'an postulated jihad as principle in times as early as Makka (610-622 C.E.), when "warring with a sword" was *haram* - banned and unacceptable in religious terms. This issue is undisputable among Islamic scholars from the dawn of Islam to nowadays. Shaykh al-Sawi, one of the great scholars in Islamic law argues that military action before the migration to al-Madina was forbidden, *haram*.<sup>40</sup> Because of this fact we are also suspicious about some poetic verses, most probably attributed to Abu Talib (d. 619 C.E.) from a later moment, where appears the expression: "And struggles [Muhammad] with them (a group of Jews) in the name of Allah in a devoted struggle."<sup>41</sup> It is clear that Abu Talib, the uncle of the prophet Muhammad had died before the migration to al-Madina when there was no military struggle. At the same time, the very structure and vocabulary of the poetic verse resemble to a great extent the Qur'anic text from *surah Al-Hajj*,<sup>42</sup> revealed about ten years after the death of Abu Talib. So, if we have to accept this poetic verse as authentic, then we have to accept that the struggle that is being talked about in it is intellectual struggle against opponents by means of clear arguments - as already discussed in *surah Al-Furqan*.

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<sup>37</sup> See Qur'an 63: 4.

<sup>38</sup> Ibn Jarir Al-Tabari, *Tafsir...* Op. cit., v. 4, p. 562.

<sup>39</sup> J. Lang, *Struggling to Surrender* (Beltsville: Amana Publications, 1995), p. 186.

<sup>40</sup> A. Al-Sawi, *Bulghat al-Salik li Aqrab al-Masalik* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1995), vol. 2 p. 176.

<sup>41</sup> M. Al-Hatib, *Ghaiat al-Matalib* (Tanta: Al-Shuara, 1950), p. 63.

<sup>42</sup> See Qur'an 22: 78.



It is precisely in the Makkan period that the moral and conceptual system of Islam was formed and its world view was established, whereas its practical aspect and the regulation of its world view came to the fore in al-Madina.<sup>43</sup> Therefore, in the period when the concept and the world view of Islam were being formed and evolved the Qur'an presented jihad in a more general sense as making efforts, which are impossible to be associated with military action because at this moment it was forbidden. Obviously, the Qur'anic use of the action jihad in the Makkan period corresponds to the pre-Islamic practice both in terms of the general meaning of making effort as well as in its detachment from the concept of "war".

On the basis of the analysis so far of the Makkan Qur'anic texts, their context and historical specificities we could argue that the basic understanding of jihad in the Qur'an is a perpetual struggle for intellectual, moral and spiritual excellence on the way of good deeds.<sup>44</sup> The struggle on this way is provoked primarily by the free will a person is endowed with, which gives him the opportunity to make a free choice: should his deeds and behavior be in accordance with prudence and decency or not. Hence, jihad remains permanent. In addition, the struggle is often provoked by hardships in life as well as oppression.

After the emigration to al-Madina (622 C.E.) in the Qur'an's content there appears a clearly defined term, signifying military action. However, the term is not jihad but *al-qital*, a widely circulated term in pre-Islamic Arab vocabulary, too. Military action is prescribed after the violation of the established and generally accepted constitution of al-Madina, which announced diverse religious groups as one community, *umma wahida*.<sup>45</sup> After the peace and cooperation agreement, war was declared against the prophet Muhammad and the believers on three different fronts: first, by the Makkan pagans who did not stop their aggression even after the emigration; second, by specific Jewish circles in al-Madina who were hostile to the Muslims; and third, the most aggressive one, by the desert bandits, driven by personal gain and unscrupulousness.<sup>46</sup> Under such historical circumstances and after the attempt to distance from the conflict zone the Qur'an prescribes military action as a right to self defense against aggression.

Therefore, in the Madinan period (623-632 C.E.) the Qur'an used the concept *al-qital* and its verbal variants as a precise term for military action. Despite that, the action of jihad is not simply present in Qur'anic content in this period but its usage is increasing as it starts to appear more and more often with the explanations "in the way of Allah" and "through their property and souls". The expression "the way of Allah" deserves an exploration on its own. Here it would

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<sup>43</sup> W. Watt & R. Bell. Op. cit., pp. 110-111.

<sup>44</sup> This understanding of jihad is invariant in the imperative Qur'anic form and in an affirmative, positive context, whereas wherever in the *Qur'an* the action of jihad is used in a negative context – as in the case of the parents who force their children to make allies with Allah - the meaning stays within the frame of making efforts and striving for the realization of something, but it abandons the sphere of good deeds and excellence. See Qur'an 29: 8; 31: 15.

<sup>45</sup> A. Al-'Umari, *Al-Sira al-Nabawiyah al-Sahihah* (Al-Madina: Maktaba al-'Ulum wa al-Hikam, 1994), p. 284.

<sup>46</sup> F. Osman, *The Other* (USA: Pharos Foundation, 2008), p. 37.

suffice to say that this is a metaphorical expression where the word “way”, which literally means a patch of land leading to specific geographical locations, has been borrowed to express the deeds, which lead to Allah’s approval<sup>47</sup> - impossible to attain according to Islamic teaching without justice and goodness. Thus the explanation “in the way of Allah” carries a motivational essence, urging for sincerity and purity of intentions in any action. Another characteristic feature of this expression is its detachment from any form of belonging: national, ethnic, political and so on, which makes the field of its action not only humane but also universal.

It is only natural that the idea of exerting efforts through property and souls, i.e., totally devoted in the way of Allah, finds broader application in al-Madina, where new challenges emerge - of a different nature from the ones in Makka. In Makka the believers are subject to persecution and terror, whereas in al-Madina a life of prosperity emerges, with more freedom and opportunities - not in a homogeneous space but in a space of religious diversity. This is why the concept of “religious hypocrisy” is unfamiliar in Makka under the conditions of suffering but it is quick to appear in al-Madina where benefits exist. Thus the increasing al-Madina usage of the action of jihad, parallel to the explanatory expression “through the property and souls in the way of Allah” corresponds to the type and scope of the new challenges where the permanent striving for intellectual, moral and spiritual excellence on the way to good deeds is more threatened to change its direction because under the conditions of prosperity “property and souls” demonstrate a higher selfish magnitude and influence in a contradictory manner the intentions and deeds in the sphere of common good. Hence, in the Madinan period the Qur’an states by principle that: “never shall you attain to true piety unless you spend on others out of what you cherish yourselves”<sup>48</sup> as well as: “And whoever remains safe from the greediness of his soul – they will prosper.”<sup>49</sup>

The understanding of jihad as a principle drawn from the Qur’anic use during the Makkan period is preserved in al-Madina until the final revelation of the Qur’an. In *surah Al-Hujurat*, one of the last *surahs* in the Madinan period,<sup>50</sup> belief and sincerity are described as follows:

إِنَّمَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا بِاللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ ثُمَّ لَمْ يَرْتَابُوا وَجَاهَدُوا بِأَمْوَالِهِمْ وَأَنْفُسِهِمْ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ ۗ أُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الصَّادِقُونَ

[Know that true] believers are only those who have attained to faith in God and His Apostle and have left all doubt behind, and who strive hard in God’s cause with their possessions and their lives: it is they, they who are true to their word!<sup>51</sup>

Al-Zamakhshari does not restrict the jihad striving in the above-mentioned text to a particular sphere, and by providing examples he explains that it can include devoted

<sup>47</sup> M. Ibn Ashur, *Al-Tahrir...* Op. cit., v. 14, p. 326.

<sup>48</sup> Qur’an 3: 92; Muhammad Asad, *The Message of the Qur’an*.

<sup>49</sup> Qur’an 64: 16; trans. by the author.

<sup>50</sup> W. Watt & R. Bell. Op. cit., p. 111.

<sup>51</sup> Qur’an 49: 15; Muhammad Asad, *The Message of the Qur’an*.

exertion of efforts in any aspect.<sup>52</sup> Al-Zmakshari's opinion is shared by Al-Baidawi (d. 1292 C.E.),<sup>53</sup> whereas commentators such as al-Qurtubi (d. 1273 C.E.)<sup>54</sup> and al-Shawkani (d. 1839 C.E.)<sup>55</sup> claim that the concept of jihad in the text includes all righteous deeds.

Undoubtedly, there are various commentators who define the meaning of jihad in *surah Al-Hujurat* as synonymous with military action. However, one wonders what methodology such statements can be grounded in if we consider the following: the semantics of the action jihad renounces such an interpretation; the overall content and the conceptual axis of the *surah*, which emphasize moral and decency in society, do not allow such an interpretation; the very context in which jihad features here, is the Qur'anic principle of mutual acquaintance of people, who stay different regardless of their common origin. Hence, the realization of mutual acquaintance on the basis of overall diversity in which humanity exists, combines with the striving and efforts to mutual understanding, cooperation and support, and does not combine at all with military action in this context.

Yet another Madinan *surah* where jihad is understood as a principle of striving and exerting effort is *surah Al-Hajj*:

وَجَاهِدُوا فِي اللَّهِ حَقَّ جِهَادِهِ

And strive hard in God's cause with all the striving that is due to Him!<sup>56</sup>

Ibn Jarir has pointed out that commentators diverge in their interpretations of the meaning of the striving in the text. Further, he introduces various opinions, including the interpretation that the imperative concerns military action.<sup>57</sup> Al-Zamakshari does not restrict the order to military action and includes in its scope the struggle with the vices of the soul.<sup>58</sup> Al-Razi (d. 1209 C.E.) sums up that the most justified meaning of struggle in the text is observing all established norms in seeking Allah's approval.<sup>59</sup> Contemporary commentators also leave the scope of struggle rather broad without limiting it to military action.

The context of the above-mentioned text is not military. The semantic entity which includes the word jihad is argument, not sword. Allah challenges those who make allies with him to unite their efforts and to create a fly, and if they fail, to bend to Him and do good. This context allows for formulating the meaning of jihad as efforts to perform the norms of behavior.

Of course, during the Madinan period the concept of jihad is also found in *surahs*, whose content involves norms and guidance about military deeds. The most illustrative example in this respect are *surah At-Tawbah* and *surah Al-Anfal*, where the context is often purely military. In these cases jihad is mentioned in the context

<sup>52</sup> M. Al-Zamakshari, *Tafsir...* Op. cit., p. 1042.

<sup>53</sup> N. Al-Baidawi, *Tafsir al-Baidawi* (Beirut: Dar Ihiah al-Turas al-'Arabiyyah, n.d.), vol. 5, p. 138.

<sup>54</sup> M. Al-Qurtubi, *Al-Jami'u li Ahkam al-Qur'an* (Beirut: Al-Risalah, 2006), vol. 19 p. 423.

<sup>55</sup> M. Al-Shawkani, *Fath al-Qadir* (Beirut: Dar al-Ma'rifa, 2007), p. 1395.

<sup>56</sup> Qur'an 22: 78; Muhammad Asad, *The Message of the Qur'an*.

<sup>57</sup> Ibn Jarir al-Tabari, *Tafsir...* Op. cit., v. 5, p. 346.

<sup>58</sup> M. Al-Zamakshari, *Tafsir...* Op. cit., p. 702.

<sup>59</sup> F. Al-Razi, *Mafatih al-Ghaib* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1981), vol. 23 p. 73.

of military action, rendered with its precise term *al-qital*, and its various verbal forms. There is no doubt that involving in war, as stated above, demands efforts and struggle both on the battlefield as well as in terms of soul and conscience because entering a military action is a hard task in any respect. The necessity of bearing all that hardship under the circumstances of war is rendered by means of the activity of jihad. But even in the context of these *surahs* there are debates surrounding the very field of the efforts to be exerted. Here is an example from *surah At-Tawbah*:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ جَاهِدِ الْكُفَّارَ وَالْمُنَافِقِينَ وَاغْلُظْ عَلَيْهِمْ

O Prophet! Strive hard against the deniers of the truth and the hypocrites, and be adamant with them!<sup>60</sup>

Commentators find it difficult to interpret jihad here as synonymous with military action, therefore they do not restrict its scope to war. The difficulty is due to the doubling of the direct object attached to the imperative. It is precisely the second direct object - “the hypocrites” - that does not allow jihad to be understood as military action because of normative and historical facts. It is well known that the prophet Muhammad knew who the hypocrites were, yet he treated them as Muslims because of their statements that they had accepted Islam as their religion - as a result, he never fought against them. Hence, scholars’ uncertain treatment of the meaning of jihad in this text. Al-Zamakhshari initiates a certain trend in interpretation by defining jihad as struggle with a sword against those who do not believe and struggle with arguments against hypocrites.<sup>61</sup> As commonly observed, once Al-Tabari and Al-Zamakhshari launch a certain tendency in the interpretation of a given text, it has been followed as a whole by the next generations of commentators until nowadays. This is why the interpretation of jihad in the above text remains split between “struggle with a sword” and “struggle with arguments.”

The splitting of the meaning of the imperative, equally addressed to the two subjects in conjunction, seems biased. First, the word “hypocrites” certainly does not allow for jihad to be interpreted as military action. Second, the object “unbelievers” does not imply such an interpretation because, as already explained, according to Islam it is not the lack of faith itself that is the motive behind military action but the declaration of war and the manifestation of physical aggression. Third, literally the same text resurfaces in *surah Al-Tahrim*,<sup>62</sup> whose context has nothing to do with war as it deals with the theme of redemption on the Judgment Day, primarily within the frames of family responsibility. It refers to the example of the families of the prophets Noah (Noi) and Lut (Lot), whose wives were unbelievers, although they had been married to divine prophets.<sup>63</sup> Unlike them, the Pharaoh’s wife accepted the faith although she was married to the biggest dictator and unbeliever.<sup>64</sup> These examples show clearly that faith is not imposed by force but

<sup>60</sup> Qur’ān 9: 73; Muhammad Asad, *The Message of the Qur’an*.

<sup>61</sup> M. Al-Zamakhshari, *Tafsir...* Op. cit., p. 442.

<sup>62</sup> Qur’ān 66: 9.

<sup>63</sup> Qur’ān 66: 10.

<sup>64</sup> Qur’ān 66: 11.

by arguments. Consequently, the context of *surah Al-Tahrim* establishes the meaning of jihad as struggle with arguments, intellectual jihad. On the other hand, it tips the balance in favor of this interpretation in *surah At-Tawbah* too, which contains the same text. It seems that al-Qurtubi noticed this nuance in the context of *surah Al-Tahrim* as he changed his position. After convincingly interpreting jihad against the “infidels” as “fight with a sword” in *surah At-Tawbah*, he shows a certain degree of lenience regarding *surah Al-Tahrim* by stating that the fighting against the “infidels” is “with a sword, good guidance and appeal to Allah”.<sup>65</sup> Yet, the author does not explain how these so contradictory approaches can be combined.

The use of the concept of jihad as principle of making efforts in righteous deeds is clearly expressed in the discourse of the prophet Muhammad. To Abu Dhar al-Ghifari’s question (d. 652 C.E.): “Which deed is best?,” the prophet Muhammad answered:

إِيمَانٌ بِاللَّهِ وَجِهَادٌ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ

Faith in Allah and jihad in the way of Allah.<sup>66</sup>

Abu Dhar al-Ghifari was among the first people converting to Islam in Makka, in the beginning of the prophesy era. It is logical to assume that he did not ask the question about good deeds fifteen years after his conversion to Islam, when Muslims were allowed to fight in self-defense against aggressors. The natural context surrounding his question is the time when he gets to know the new religion in Makka. It is also acceptable to assume that the prophet’s answer uses the early content of the word jihad because the Qur’an itself, as already explained, speaks about jihad in the Makkan period. So, if jihad could not refer to military action at that historical moment, then it has to be understood again as striving for doing good. The lack of a definite article before the word jihad supports this statement as well as the resurfacing of the common Qur’anic expression “who have faith and do righteous deeds”, which can be recognized in the given answer.

In another Hadith the prophet Muhammad ordains Abu Said al-Khudri (d. 693 C.E.) to keep away from sin, to call the name of Allah etc. Yet, among these pieces of advice we find the following expression:

وَ عَلَيْكَ بِالْجِهَادِ فَإِنَّهُ رَهْبَانِيَّةُ الْإِسْلَامِ

I bequeath jihad to you – it is the monasticism of Islam.<sup>67</sup>

The Qur’an says that it was not Isa (Jesus) but his followers who invented monasticism: “[...] But as for monastic asceticism - We did not enjoin it upon them: they invented it themselves out of a desire for God’s goodly acceptance [...]”<sup>68</sup> It is precisely this striving and efforts at righteousness and good deeds in places bustling

<sup>65</sup> M. Al-Qurtubi, *Al-Jami’u...* Op. cit., v. 21, p. 102.

<sup>66</sup> A. Al-Nisai, *Sunan al-Nisai*, Muhammad al-Albani (ed.), (Riad: Maktaba al-Ma’arif, n.d.), p. 482, Hadith 3129.

<sup>67</sup> M. Al-Albani, *Sahih al-Jami’i* (Beirut: Al-Maktab al-Islamiyyah, 1988), p. 498, Hadith 2543.

<sup>68</sup> Qur’an 57: 27; Muhammad Asad, *The Message of the Qur’an*.

with life and full of challenges that is rendered in the Hadith with the word jihad - contrary to the understanding of monasticism as a form of isolation.

The prophet himself also clarifies explicitly that the just words represent the best jihad. In an authentic Hadith he states:

أَفْضَلُ الْجِهَادِ كَلِمَةٌ عَدْلٌ عِنْدَ سُلْطَانٍ جَائِرٍ

The best of jihad is a just word spoken to an unjust ruler.<sup>69</sup>

The text indisputably proves that the prophet talks about intellectual and moral jihad without restricting the concept to military action. The striving to stand witness for justice and arguments under circumstances, which put pressure against law, is the great jihad as the benefits are for all in this case.

The prophet Muhammad explains that jihad is a broader concept even in certain Hadiths, where the word jihad is used by people as synonymous with military action. One Hadith tells about a man who asked permission from the prophet to participate in jihad, and he asked him if his parents were living. Upon his positive answer, the prophet ordained him:

فَفِيهِمَا فَجَاهِدْ

Do jihad for their benefit.<sup>70</sup>

The process of taking care of parents, the striving and efforts for their prosperity and health – all this is reflected in the Hadith by means of the activity jihad.

In addition, the prophet explained to his wife Aisha, who wanted to take part in the military marches and make efforts on the battlefield that:

أَحْسَنَ الْجِهَادِ وَ أَجْمَلُهُ الْحَجُّ حَجٌّ مَبْرُورٌ

The best and most perfect jihad is hajj, righteous hajj.<sup>71</sup>

Thus the tendency to present jihad as synonym of military battle cannot be supported by the use of the concept in the very discourse of the prophet Muhammad. As it has become obvious, he uses the concept of jihad as principle to express the necessity for exerting efforts in the sphere of good deeds such as public engagement, intellectual activity, moral, and rituals.

However, the semantic field of jihad has been restricted to the meaning of fighting against unbelievers due to incorrect understanding of the early compilations and treatises on jihad which were produced in the context of interfaith wars and conflicts. The most influential of these compilations was the work *Al-Jihad* by Abdullah ibn al-Mubarak (d. 797 C.E.), where the concept of jihad is understood primarily as synonym of military action, motivated by the enemy's war and aggression. Other major works on jihad written by Ali ibn Tahir al-Sulami (d.1106 C.E.), Ibn Asakir (d.1175 C.E.), Ibn Nuhas (d.1411 C.E.), were deeply affected by Ibn al-Mubarak's work and thus preserved the conceptual kernel around which the

<sup>69</sup> M. Ibn Maja, *Sunan Ibn Maja*, Muhammad al-Albani (ed.), (Riad: Maktaba al-Ma'arif, n.d.), p. 663, Hadith 4011.

<sup>70</sup> A. Al-Nisai, *Sunan...* Op. cit., p. 478, Hadith 3103.

<sup>71</sup> M. Al-Bukhari, *Sahih al-Bukhari* (Damascus: Dar Ibn Kathir, 2002), p. 448, Hadith 1861.

jihad concept develops as equivalent of military action, *al-qital*. Another important aspect worth paying attention to is the fact that Ibn Mubarak's written work on jihad preceded the basic period when concepts entered Islamic law and the thematic classification into sectors was introduced in Hadith literature. This is why it is small wonder that the established definitions of jihad in the four legal schools of Islam have frozen into the same interpretation, restricting jihad to military action. Even in the lexicographical works after Ibn Duraid (d. 934 C.E.) and Ibn Faris (d. 1004 C.E.) jihad is explained as military action aiming at the spread of Islam.

In conclusion, the critical analysis so far shows that in a purely linguistic and normative aspect the concept of jihad has a broad semantic field which includes a permanent striving for intellectual, moral and spiritual excellence on the way to good deeds and exceptional progress. In this sense, the nature of contemporary society and today's way of life justify and motivate us to update and emphasize the essence of jihad as a driving force of evolution and not to sterilize it into bipolar positions: war-asceticism, lesser and greater jihad propagated on the basis of inauthentic texts. What is more, from a linguistic and normative perspective, the understanding of jihad as a principle of constant perfection, changes undoubtedly the attitudes to evolution and communication with people in the context of diversity whereas its restriction to war or asceticism inevitably triggers intellectual impotency and opposition on religious and ethnic basis.

The broad and mass understanding of jihad as synonymous with religious war is the result of a tendency to primarily emphasize that aspect of the meaning of jihad which was motivated and rationalized by the historical and socio-political situation, marked by inter-religious conflicts and wars inside and outside.

*Malkhaz Songulashvili*<sup>1</sup>

## **The Challenge of Christian Clerical Radicalism and an Opportunity for Robust Interfaith Cooperation: Georgian Muslim-Christian Case Study**

### **Abstract**

There are very little studies done about the influence of radical Christian clergy and Christian politicians on contemporary youth in general. In my paper I am going to take up a case study from Georgian context and analyze the radical messages coming from Christian clergy and politicians in Georgia and find out what nurtures such radical discourse. From local Christian context we can address global issues of Islamophobic influences among Christian clergy and Christian politicians.

### **Introduction**

I would like to take this opportunity to express my profound gratitude to Doha International Centre for Interfaith Dialogue (DICID) which has been deeply committed to the dialogue among the representatives of Abrahamic faith traditions. My special thanks go to Prof. Ibrahim Al-Naimi and Ms Nadia Al-Ashqar whose friendship and encouragement in my own interfaith journey has meant a lot. The DICID creates an international space where theologians, clergy, scholars, politicians of Abrahamic legacy can meet and establish lasting friendship and partnership. Owing to this space I have gained friendship with formidable Muslim and Jewish scholars.

### **Rise of Religious Nationalism**

The collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990th marked dramatic changes in our region. Instead of one large, seemingly homogeneous country, we got fifteen independent nations. Georgia was one of those independent nations. One of the main things that kept the Soviet Union together was one common religion for all fifteen republics, numerous autonomous republics and autonomous districts – the religion in fact was the Irreligion, the state sponsored atheist ideology. In 1985 old gerontocracy of the Soviet politburo started to change. Younger generation of people, with the leadership of Michael Gorbachev, Iakovlev, and Shevardnadze, came to power. The Soviet state gradually changed its hostile policy towards religions that had been suppressed for more than seven decades. With the revival of various religious traditions in the Soviet Union the Irreligion declined and

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ultimately became irrelevant. The death of the Irreligion paved the way to the collapse of the Soviet state.

Out of the fifteen newly emerged countries two were Protestant Christian (Estonia and Latvia), one Catholic Christian (Lithuania), four Eastern Orthodox Christian (Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Georgia), one Oriental Orthodox Christian (Armenia), six Muslim (Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Kirgizstan, Uzbekistan). In all these countries both nationalism and religions had been suppressed. With the rise of the new fifteen countries almost in every single country religion and nationalism were merged and instead of the ideology of Irreligion we received religious-nationalism. The degree of religious nationalism varied from country to country but it was noticeable everywhere.

During the Soviet past all religions were under the control of the state ideology and therefore there was a sense of solidarity among all religions. With the dissolution of the Soviet state the sense of solidarity was sadly lost. Religious groups which used to be suppressed by the dominating authoritarian ideology, once they found themselves in majority position, started suppressing religious minorities. This was a usual development with exception of a few former Soviet countries. Some of those countries have already been comfortably incorporated into the European Union. Georgia where our case study is based has not escaped the trap of religious nationalism.

## **Georgia**

Georgia is one of the oldest Christian nations in the world. Christianity came to Georgia as early as the first century CE and became the state religion in about 326 (this is the traditional date of the conversion which has been contested by some scholars). The Georgians had to live on the cross roads of Christian and Muslim civilization. After the fall of Constantinople the country found itself completely surrounded by Muslim nations. In East Georgia the Royal family decided to seek the protection of the co-religionist country of Russia which understandably upset our Muslim neighbors Iran and Turkey. Nobody wanted Russians in their neighborhood. By seeking friendship with Russia the Georgians lost sympathy of Muslim neighbors and never gained genuine friendship with Russia. Between 1801- 1810 all Georgian kingdoms and principalities were annexed by the Russian Empire. Georgian statehood was completely abolished, independence of the Georgian Orthodox church was abolished and the Georgian language became unofficial. After the Great Revolution in Russia Georgia became independent again but her independence was short lived. In 1921 Georgia was invaded by the Soviet troops and the country became a part of the USSR.

When I was growing up in Georgia we were taught that Tbilisi was the capital of Georgia and Moscow the great capital of ours. Presently 83 % population is Orthodox Christian and 9.9 % of population is Muslim (in Georgian Sunni

Muslims, in Azerbaijani Shia and Sunni Muslims and in Chechnya and Dagestan Sufi Muslims).<sup>2</sup>

The independence that came into being with the dissolution of the Soviet Union was welcomed by all citizens of Georgia. It was seen as chance to build a country based on democratic values of good governance and in respect of human rights. But soon after the establishment of the new Georgian government both Christian and Muslim religious minorities realized that they were looked down by the representatives, clergy and politicians representing majority religious group. Georgia as an emerging democracy failed to create new national narrative based on citizenship. The narrative, which would comfortably accommodate representatives of various ethnic and religious groups or people of no faith, rather unfortunately in the new narrative was seemed to be a mere replica of mediaeval narrative when Georgianess was equated with Orthodox Christianity. This was an invitation to the national disunity and fragmentation.

At first it was the suppression and even persecution of the small Christian groups (Roman Catholics, Armenian Apostolics, Baptists, Pentecostals and Jehova's Witnesses, etc). Then it moved to a large scale Islamophobic campaign. The primary target of attacks, suppression and humiliation became ethnically Georgian Sunni Muslims. Although ethnically Azeri Shia communities, they were not left without suppression either. Agents of suppression have been both government officials and radical Christian clergy.

Here we might need to have a definition of the word "radical" in this context. The term radical applies to the members of clergy who have been influenced by exclusivist and isolationist theologians and propagate among laity anti-western, anti-non-Orthodox, anti-Muslim ideas through preaching, manipulation of politicians, ordinary faithful and the youth. Recent studies have indicated that their share in propagating hate, xenophobia and Islamophobia in media is rather considerable.<sup>3</sup>

### **Ethnically Georgian Muslims**

The South Western region of Georgia, which has been known as Ajara, has always been ethnically and culturally Georgian. In 1547 this region became a part of the Ottoman Empire and came back to Georgia in 1878 as a result of Ruso-Ottoman wars. By that time most of Ajarians had become Sunni Muslims.

Bishop Gabriel Kikodze of Imereti welcoming the return of Ajara to the Georgian land maintained:

*"We Georgian Christians, will always be the protectors of your faith [Ajarian Muslims] ... Nobody will ever infringe upon your faith, family, rules or traditions."*<sup>4</sup>

Bishop Gabriel's contemporary, Georgian thinker and writer Ilia Chavchavdze also very famously declared:

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<sup>2</sup> 2002 Census Report, p. 132.

<sup>3</sup> T. Kintsurashvili, Hate Speech, Media Report 2014-2015 (Tbilisi: Media Development Fund), p. 54.

<sup>4</sup> Bishop Gabriel Kikodze, Mitsa, No. 10, 1920.

*“Faith does not determine nationality - a Georgian always remains a Georgian whatever his religious orientation.”*<sup>5</sup>

Both Gabriel Kikodze and Ilia Chavchavadze have been canonized by the Georgian Orthodox Church, but this does not stop certain representatives or radical Christian clergy to ignore their admonishments.

Despite Bishop Gabriel’s hopes and expectations Christians failed to become “protectors” of Muslim faith in contemporary Georgia. Georgian NGOs voice their concern about “*systematic religious persecution of Muslim community*” and call the Georgian authorities “*to stop religious persecution.*”<sup>6</sup>

### **Discrimination of Georgian Muslims**

The NGOs are right in making reference to the “systematic” nature of violation of the rights of Muslim community. The Most conspicuous cases of the human rights violation in relation with Georgian Muslim Community have taken places in Nigvziani, Tsintkharo, Tsikhidziri, Chela, Kobuleti, Mokhe.

In the western Georgian village of Nigvziani in the predominantly Christian district of Guria on the 26th October 2012 the Christian-majority villagers demanded that their minority Muslim neighbors stoped praying in their own prayer room. According to Levan Sutidze “those demands were accompanied by physical and verbal abuse.”<sup>7</sup> Allegedly local Christians shouted at Muslims: “*Tatars can never pray in Guria!*”; “*What gives followers of some foreign religion the right to pray in a Christian country?!*”; “*You will never be allowed to build a mosque in Guria!*”<sup>8</sup>

In November 2012 conflict erupted in the village of Tsintskaro. There were three cemeteries in the village equally used both by Christian and Muslim villagers. Several years ago cemeteries were fenced and crosses were installed on the gates of all three cemeteries but Muslims did not want to make fuss about it. The conflict started when some strangers removed crosses from one of the cemetery gates. Muslims were blamed for it. Christians started suppressing Muslims. Christians “forbid us to pray but we will not obey”<sup>9</sup> Muslims complained. Christians attacked Muslims and the bloodshed was barely avoided.

On the 14th of April 2013 in a Black Sea village of Tsikhidziri a group of drunken military policemen physically and verbally abused local Muslims after having checked that they were not wearing crosses on their chests.

In August 2013 another conflict erupted in the village of Chela, in southern Georgia over a minaret that was dismantled by the government forces. It was a full

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<sup>5</sup> Ilia Chavchavadze, Works, Vol. 15.

<sup>6</sup> Common Declaration of NGOs concerning dire violation of Muslim rights in Mokhe, 23 October 2014.

<sup>7</sup> Levan Sutidze, “Nigvziani Spiral”, Tabula, Friday, March 22, 2013.

<sup>8</sup> Levan Sutidze, “Nigvziani Spiral”, Tabula, Friday, March 22, 2013.

<sup>9</sup> Natia Danelishvili, “Orthodox Christians Opposed Muslims in Tsintskaro”, 05.12.2012 <http://www.humanrights.ge/index.php?a=main&pid=15985&lang=eng>.

scale military operation with troops in balaclavas, guns, cars and a helicopter. This led to a conflict between Muslim and Christians, where they used to live in friendship for decades.<sup>7</sup>

On the 10th of September 2014 in the Black Sea resort town of Kobuleti a group of local Christian faithful in opposing to the opening of a Muslim school in their neighborhood, slaughtered a pig at the entrance of the school building and nailed pig's head to its door.<sup>10</sup> These are only some of the most well known cases. But there are more cases that deserve attention both by the authorities and the wider Georgian society.

If we go upstream of Islamophobia and fear of otherness in our cases we will sadly discover that radical Christian clergy play a regrettable role in stirring up faithful against Muslims and poisoning minds of young people with fears and hatred. The director of the Tolerance Center at the Public Defender's office has recently maintained that since 2012 there have been 150 cases of religious violence motivated and supported by radical clergy.<sup>11</sup>

Desmond Tutu, the former Archbishop of Cape Town and a Champion of Justice and Reconciliation movement in South Africa has stated that *"There comes a point where we need to stop just pulling people out of the river. We need to go upstream and find out why they're falling in it."*<sup>12</sup>

I can't agree more with Archbishop Tutu. On the one hand we need to do our best to support all the victims of religious violence. We need to pull the "people out of the river", as so to speak. On the other hand we need to find out what nurtures these wild expressions of hatred and irrational fear. It is necessary to find out "why they are falling in" the river of hatred and fear.

### **How to Pull People Out of the River?**

In the above mention cases of Islamophobia the authorities were reluctant to offer robust steps either to duly prosecute the violence or to take necessary preventive measures. In the case of the Chela minaret the authorities themselves were responsible for the violence.

Along a number of NGOs voices that came to rescue the victims of religious violence in Georgia there was a distinct voice of a group of Christian clergy who gave whole hearted support to the suffering Muslim brother and sisters.

Bishop Rusudan Gotziridze, the first female bishop of the Evangelical Baptist Church of Georgia representing a tiny Christian minority group, was the first Christian clergywoman to speak up in solidarity with Muslims of Georgia. Bishop Rusudan spoke at the 6th UN Forum on Minority Issues on 26 November, 2013. As it was reported:

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<sup>10</sup> "Pig's Head Nailed to Planned Muslim School in Kobuleti", Civil Georgia, March 23, 2013.

<sup>11</sup> Beqa Mindiashvili, "The Enemies of Orthodoxy are those are involved in violence," Tabula 14 January 2016. See: <http://www.tabula.ge/ge/verbatim/103637-mindiashvili-martlmadideblobis-upirvelesi-meri-isaa-vinc-dzaladobs>.

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.azquotes.com/quote/916110>.

*“Her intervention raised the issue of recent discrimination and attacks on religious minorities in Georgia and the failure of the authorities to provide adequate protection.”*<sup>13</sup>

Bishop Rusudan and I then as the Archbishop of the Church were found ourselves fully engaged in advocacy work for Muslims of Georgia. We were soon supported by prominent clergy from various parts of the world. There was Bishop Stephen Platten, the member of the House of Lords in Great Britain who came and visited Muslim communities in Georgia in 2011. There was a group of American Baptist women led by then the General Secretary of American Baptist Churches, Dr. Roy Medley, who is pastoral and administrative leader of the 1.3-million-member denomination with over 5200 congregations who met with Georgian authorities and expressed their explicit concern for Georgian Muslims.<sup>14</sup>

Donald Reeves, an Anglican priest and the Founder and the Director of the Soul of Europe, visited the village of Chela where the minaret was dismantled by the authorities and gave a clear signal to the Georgian authorities that the humiliation of Muslims was not compatible to the European value to which Georgia is aspiring. A Lutheran pastor from Finland, the Very Reverend Johan Candelin of the First Step Forum was most instrumental to raise awareness about the humiliation of Muslims in Georgia both with the Georgian authorities and in Europe.

Symbolic actions in support of the Muslim Community were also very important. In 2011 in the aftermath of the first attacks on Georgian Muslims I went to Ajara and took with me twenty Christians with me: men and women, English Anglicans, Georgian and American Baptists. We stayed at Muslim families. That was the first time for the most of Christians to be hosted by Muslims and Most Muslims to host Christians. Owing to this encounter within two days Muslim perspective of Christians and Christian perspective on Muslims dramatically changed! Strong and durable friendship was established between the representatives of these Abrahamic legacies.

I personally found it important to give a sign to the Majority Christian population that persecution of Muslims by Christians was betrayal of Christian faith values in 2013 when Muslims were beaten up by Christian policemen for not wearing crosses on their chests I felt strongly that I had to take a symbolic step to point to the devastating nature of the incident. I took off my encolpion, which is a symbol of episcopal office, and pledged not to wear a cross or the encolpion in Georgia as long as Muslims are being humiliated by Christians.

In the village of Samtatskaro where Muslims were not allowed to pray their Friday prayers I went with my Muslim friend, Taniel Nakaidze, on one of the Fridays and together with him prayed in the local Mosque upsetting a lot of Christians and encouraging Muslims not to give up praying together.

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<sup>13</sup> “Georgia: Bishop Rusudan Gotsiridze speaks at the 6th UN Forum on Minority Issues.” See at: <http://www.minorityvoices.org/news.php/en/1540/georgia-bishop-rusudan-gotsiridze-speaks-at-the-6th-un-forum-on-minority-issues#sthash.Z0gyo8E6.dpuf>.

<sup>14</sup> See at: <http://www.abc-usa.org/medley/>.

There are some good tidings about our struggle in solidarity with Muslims. The Minaret in Chela is back, even though neither the authorities nor representatives of radical clergy have ever offered their apologies. The struggle continues. Now we realize that Christians and Muslims have to stand together to combat the violence.

### **Why People are Falling into the River of Hatred?**

There are two main reasons: narrowness of the national narrative and ignorance of Muslim faith tradition.

#### **National narrative**

Georgian national narrative is deeply rooted in Georgian nationalism and identity. Adrian Hastings, in his monograph on the construction of nationhood, is insisting that nation-formation and nationalism have nothing to do with modernity and they became a part of modernity, ‘almost accidentally’.<sup>15</sup> He also argues that: “*The nation and nationalism are both characteristically Christian things which... have done so within a process of Westernization and of imitation of the Christian world, even if it was imitated as Western rather than as Christian.*”<sup>16</sup>

He is convinced that the more influential religion was in the construction of nationhood, the more nationalism is likely also to influence every expression of the religion; whereas a nation whose basic construction owes little to religious factors is far less likely later to generate nationalism with a religious character to it.<sup>17</sup>

Contemporary Georgian National Narrative is heavily influenced by its culture, identity and national heritage. To sum it up: Georgia is a country of Georgians who have been chosen by God by allotting her to the Blessed Virgin Mary. Thus they are special people. Georgian language is special, at the great judgment Christ will judge the living and dead in this language. Georgia has suffered a lot under Muslim enemies when one Georgian was to confront ten Muslims. Georgia is a country of beauty music, poetry, and dance. It has produced Shota Rustaveli, Vaja Pshavela and other poets.

To claim your belonging to this narrative there are certain preconditions related to ethnicity and religious affiliation. Of course none of these are encoded in the Georgian Constitution but they are a part of oral ‘Torah’ (*‘Torah sheba’al pe’*) as so to speak. These preconditions often nurture xenophobia, Islamophobia, homophobia and discrimination of religious minorities. Without expanding the national narrative which will be wide enough accommodate all the citizens of the country, regardless religious, ethnic and other difference, there will always be people “falling into the river”.

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<sup>15</sup> A. Hastings, *Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion and Nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p.205.

<sup>16</sup> A. Hastings, p. 187.

<sup>17</sup> A. Hastings, p. 186.

### **Humility and mutual understanding**

Christian clerical radicalism is primarily nurtured by ignorance. It is almost universal that very often Christians and Muslims have extremely vague or caricaturist understanding of each other's faith traditions. Kenneth Cragg was a pioneer in the domain of bridge building efforts between Christians and Muslims. Cragg, affirming both Christianity and Islam as missionary faith traditions, wrote:

*"Mission, from whatever quarter, respects convictions and exists to commend its own. But commendation today has to coexist with that of others. The unresolved question today has to coexist with that of others. The unresolved question is what that does for our convictions. It can be resolved only in mutuality and in humility... A faith, such as Islam or Christianity, that is denied if not commended, cannot be satisfied merely to coexist. Yet only in coexistence can it pursue its commendation."*

Key words in this statement are mutuality and humility. Humility is about offering our gifts and our spiritual treasures to each other without faintest notion of coercion. Mutuality is about recognizing values, Holy Scriptures and spiritual practices of each other. On the way to resolution of this question with mutuality and humility there are monumental misunderstandings on either side that should be somehow removed. This is not easy but not impossible. Determination, patience and good will should be our food if we decide to embark on this road. Because we do not talk to each other as often as needed or do not talk to each other from equal footing, we do not understand each other and in our imagination have rather caricature views of each other.

Because of the lamentable lack of understanding we as Muslims and Christians, often hurt each other's religious feelings. For instance Christians in my part of the World often call Muslims Mohammedans without ever realizing that terms like Mohammedanism and Mohammedan are completely unacceptable. To Muslims their faith means living in accordance with the will and pleasure of God and thus God, and not the Prophet Muhammad is the center of Muslim religious life and spirituality. Christians never recognize that for Muslims Prophet Abraham/Ibrahim is regarded as the "First Muslim"<sup>18</sup> not Muhammad. As Christians we fail to understand that for Muslims the Prophet Muhammad is a 'universal messenger.'<sup>19</sup>

Religious feelings of Christians are also hurt when their belief in Oneness of God is questioned by Muslims. Trinitarian language of Christian theology should not be interpreted as our allegiance to three Gods. Muslims should not think that Christians believe in more than one God. In the words of Prof. Paul S. Fiddes, Trinitarian theology is an attempt to understand "*relationships of love in God and world, since 'God is love.'*" *We can know these relations, not by observing them or*

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<sup>18</sup> Al-Hajj 22:78

<sup>19</sup> An-Nissa 4:70.

*examining them, but only by participating in them as God calls us to share his life.”<sup>20</sup>*

We should first recognize that the religious diversity is the will of the creator. And more than that religious diversity is a precious gift. Otherwise we should consider Judaism, Christianity and Islam as mere accidents of human history. We may not completely understand why the gift of religious diversity is so valuable or how this gift is to be used in our lives and relations, but humility and mutuality inspired by each other’s love should enable us to see and understand its significance.

The Qur’an offers most beautiful affirmation of religious and cultural diversity: *“Had your Lord willed, all the people on earth in their entirety would have acknowledged. Would you force the people to make them acknowledge?”<sup>21</sup>*

This means that had the Lord wanted everybody to be Muslim, than everybody would be Muslim. The Qur’an goes even further affirming various religious communities of the time of Prophet:

*“Those who believe [in the Qur’an] and those who follow the Jewish [scriptures], and the Christians and the Sabians, and who believe in God and the Last Day, and work righteousness, shall have their reward with their Lord; on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve.”<sup>22</sup>*

Or another fascinating statement:

*“Say: “We believe in God, and in what has been revealed to us and what was revealed to Abraham, Isma’il, Isaak, Jacob, and the Tribes, and [in the books] given to Moses, Jesus, and the Prophets, from their Lord: We make no distinction between one and another among them, and to God do we bow our will [in Islam].”<sup>23</sup>*

The Qur’an also affirms wider cultural diversity:

*“O men! Behold We have created you all out of a male and female, and have made you into nations and tribes, so that you might come to know one another. Verily, the noblest of you in the sight of God is the one who is most deeply conscious of Him. Behold God is all-knowing, all aware.”<sup>24</sup>*

Our religions are meant to bring us to God and to each other. Jesus offers us a fascinating definition of religion. *“People were not made for the good of the Sabbath. The Sabbath was made for the good of people.”<sup>25</sup>* If we seek for a more

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<sup>20</sup> The Baptist World Alliance Response to the Common Word document. See at: <file:///C:/Users/Admin/Downloads/ACCommonWord-Baptist-World-Alliance-Response.pdf>.

<sup>21</sup> Yunus 10:99.

<sup>22</sup> Al-Baqarah 2:62

<sup>23</sup> Al-Imran 3:84

<sup>24</sup> Al-Hujurat 49:13

<sup>25</sup> Mark 2:23-27-28, Luke 6:1-).



meaning based translation of the verse we can render it the following way: “People were not made for the good of the religion. The religion was made for the good of people.”

What is the point of religion which separates people from God and each other!? Rabbi Heshel rightly noticed that:

*“Religion is a mean, not the end. It becomes idolatrous when regarded as an end itself. Over and above all being stands the Creator and the Lord of History, He who transcends all. To equate religion and God is idolatry.”*<sup>26</sup>

If we honestly recognize that religious diversity is God’s will, then we should also admit that it is God’s gift. Arguably we need to find out what shall we do with this gift. Because of our allegiance to God we need find a common ground where we can explore this gift of religious diversity and make good use of it. Theologians both from Muslim and Christian background should help us in this matter.

## **Conclusion**

In the Talmudic tradition there were discussions between Rabbi Akiva and Ben Zoma as to which was the most important line in Torah. Rabbi Akiva argued that it was “Love your neighbor as yourself”. Ben Zoma argued that it was “these are the generation of Adam” that was most significant. This rather boring line is a starting point of the genealogical list of descendants of Adam. Akiva ultimately had to admit that Ben Zoma’s line was far more significant than the one he had suggested. They agreed that it is not sufficient “to love other people as yourself” because this is dependent how much you love yourself. Self-hating and self depreciating people therefore must be exempt from loving others.<sup>27</sup> Ben Zoma’s choice has to always remind us that all human beings whomever they are, whatever they believe and not believe, since they are all related to Adam who was created in the image of God, they all deserve love, respect and acceptance.

Clergy and laity of the Abrahamic tradition can learn a lot from this story. The radical ideology of Christian clergy or clergy from other faith traditions should be handled through the inter-faith and inter-cultural dialogue. Much has been done in this direction. But more work is to be done on the grass root level. I do understand that these sorts of activities are bound to be costly. For instance this week according to an article the Illinois college began to make that decision, recommending the termination of Larycia Hawkins’s professorship, saying that a post on her Facebook page last month violated the college’s statement of faith. Professor Hawkins’s post announced that she would wear hijab as an act of Advent devotion: “*I stand in religious solidarity with Muslims because they, like me, a Christian, are people of the book*” she posted on Dec. 10. “*And as Pope Francis stated last week,*

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<sup>26</sup>Rabi Heshel, *No Religion is an Island*, 1991.

<sup>27</sup> P. Morgan and C. A. Lawton, *Ethical Issues in Six Religious Traditions* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), p. 192.

*we worship the same God.*"<sup>28</sup> She is an inter-faith heroin. People like her deserve universal support and encouragement.

In the past inter-faith dialogue various levels of academic and society life used to be a matter of luxury. Nowadays, bearing in mind political and ideological developments in the Middle East, it becomes the necessity of highest importance. Muslims and Christians taken together make more than a half of world's population. Unless they develop ways of meaningful and sustainable cooperation between them, the future of the planet earth will be endangered. Time has come for Christian and Muslim leaders and theologians to act more strongly, to advocate reconciliation and mutuality between these two great faith traditions.

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<sup>28</sup> Harry Bruinius, "In Treatment of Professor, Wheaton shows split among US Evangelicals," Christian Science Monitor, January 7, 2016.

*Mohammad Mushtak<sup>1</sup>*

## **Shaping the Social Ground for Religious Dialogue and the Impact of Religious Thinkers and Clergy on Muslim Youth in India**

### **Abstract**

Religion has always been and continues to be a dominant influence in human life and in shaping the identities and thoughts of people. The overarching purpose of all religions is to know God and understand the purpose of human life; to promote better mutual relations among human beings; and to protect human and religious values. However, organised religion has a tendency to downplay these core objectives of religion in favour of more specific and detailed aspects of ritual law. In an era when religion has become increasingly important in shaping the world and our relations towards each other, it is essential for religious societies to reassess their priorities in light of these core values. Whereas a small section of gullible youth have been influenced by religiously-motivated extremist groups that promote hatred and the idea of a ‘Clash of Civilisations’, the dominant, traditional counter-current that influences ‘the silent majority’ continues to emphasise the importance of empathy, mutual understanding, and dialogue. The present study seeks to highlight the role of traditional ‘Ulama in India in this regard, who are playing an important role in directing youth towards fostering an environment of pluralism, tolerance and interfaith dialogue in the country.

### **Presentation**

India, historically and by its nature, is a thoroughly religious society. Since India has historically been a multi-religious society, religious tolerance and pluralism have been part of its very identity since time immemorial. Even in the face of the vast majority, religious minorities have always been able to safeguard and protect their identity and uniqueness without feeling any threat. At least during the last 3000 years, we have many indicators and examples from history. When Buddhism enjoyed a majority in India, Jainism and Hinduism and various other tribal faiths has not only survived, but thrived in the country. When Islam reached India and came into power, it took care of Hinduism and Jainism and ensured that their beliefs and culture could thrive during Muslim rule. Muslim rulers gave grants to their temples and religious institutions.<sup>2</sup> In this way, we observe mutual relationships and tolerance between various faiths in each age. And the followers of various religions coexist and interact with each other while maintaining their respective religious identities.

During Muslim rule in India, there existed two kinds of educational setups in the country. The first was represented by Hindu *pathshalas* and institutes of

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<sup>2</sup> Om Parkash: Cultural History of India, New Delhi, 2005 pp. 45.

religious instruction, where students were taught the Sanskrit language and fundamentals of the Hindu faith and scriptures. The second was the *madrassa* system, wherein Islamic religious instruction was given to students along with the secular and scientific knowledge of the time. Therefore, Hindu and students from other religious communities studied alongside Muslims at these *madrassas* in order to familiarize themselves with the sciences of the age and to acquire jobs in the government and other business setups. Even at the *maktabs* inside of mosques that provided elementary education, Hindu students would sit shoulder to shoulder with Muslims to learn. The founder of Sikhism Guru Nanak acquired his primary education at a mosque. The noted educationist and Hindu social reformer Raja Ram Mohan Roy was a product of Madrasa Shams-ul-Huda in Patna. Renowned higher institutes of Muslim religious education such as Dar ul ‘Ulum Deoband had non-Muslim students as well during their initial stages.<sup>3</sup> Apart from *madrassas*, even at religious monasteries (*khanqah*) and shrines (*dargah*) one would find Muslim, Hindu, Jain and Sikh devotees present with the same regard for these places as Muslims.<sup>4</sup> In social gatherings, local village councils (*panchayat*), and solving common socio-economic problems, Hindus and Muslims stand side by side and work together to achieve common goals.<sup>5</sup> The social, cultural, and economic relations of the communities are so closely intertwined that none can independently exist without the other.

In creating this environment of mutual respect and coexistence, Muslim religious leaders (‘Ulama) have traditionally and historically had an important role to play alongside other players. The focus of the present study is to take a closer look at some of the major contributions of contemporary Muslim ‘Ulama in working towards this lofty goal and responsibility.

When we attempt to analyze this question from a modern lens, we find its roots firmly grounded in the role the ‘Ulama had traditionally play in India throughout its rich history. Even in recent history, we find multifaceted efforts by the ‘Ulama in this regard. And the common thread that binds these efforts together is that Indian ‘Ulama have never talked about a particular Muslim identity that separates them from the rest of Indians. The call to accept and act upon the message of Islam had always been given through an affirmative rather than a negation-based approach that emphasized common values in opposition to differences. Even when Hindus are referred to in Muslim religious discourse, they are always called ‘fellow countrymen’ (*Biradaran e Watan*). This usage itself indicates that Muslims perceived Hindus as brothers through the bond of loyalty towards one’s country, notwithstanding the difference in religious outlook. Apart from specific religious rituals and events, the rest of social and economic life has to be firmly based on close cooperation with other religious communities. For example, in virtuous deeds

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<sup>3</sup> Rizwi, S. Mahboob : History of Darul Uloom Deoband, V. 1 pp. 6.

<sup>4</sup> The Hindu, July 5 2011.

<sup>5</sup> Prof Mohamma Umar and Tara Chand both the authors discussed in detail the cultural and social exchanges between Muslims and Hindus In their books cultural influence of Islam on Hindus and cultural influence of Hindus on Muslim society.

and towards achieving communal goals, there should be no difference between Muslims and non-Muslims.<sup>6</sup> One must work together with everyone to ensure common human interests are met. Another example is that the ‘Ulama stated that the charity given on the occasion of Eid al-Fitr (Sadaqah al-Fitr) can be given to non-Muslims in need. Similarly, the meat from the sacrifice (‘Udhiyah, or Qurbani in Urdu) can be shared with non-Muslims. If one’s parents have not accepted Islam, one is still commanded towards maintaining good relations with them and being available in their service as in the case of a Muslim parent. These are just a few examples of such teachings that promoted good relations between Muslim and non-Muslim communities.

For the purpose of understanding and analysis, it is possible for us to categorise the efforts of Muslim ‘Ulama in this regard into a few categories:

Books

Movements

Religious sermons (on Fridays and the two Eids)

Religious gatherings

Communal and public supplications

Social services

### **Books**

The authoring of books dealing with the subject of interfaith harmony and coexistence played a critical role in shaping Muslim perspectives, particularly within the emerging cosmopolitan and modern, educated sections of society in India. Among such books are those that dealt with the status of a multi-cultural nation such as India in the Shari’ah – whether it should be considered a Dar al-Islam (Abode of Islam) or Dar al-Harb (Abode of War), or a third category altogether. For example, one of the leading religious figures of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and a founder of Deoband, Mawlana Rashid Ahmad Gangohi wrote a book bearing the title *Fatwa Dar al-Islam*.<sup>7</sup> In it, he convincingly argues that India is a Dar al-Islam. Similarly, a leading ideologue of the Barelwi movement, Mawlana Ahmad Raza Khan Barelwi wrote a treatise called *I’lam al-A’lam Fi ‘Anna Hindustan Dar al-Islam*, in which he too argued and demonstrated that India was to be considered a Dar al-Islam. Another great scholar and the Shaykh al-Hadith at the famed seminary Dar al-’Ulum Deoband authored the book *Composite Nationalism and Islam*, in which he presented the view that Muslims and Hindus together constitute a *qaum* or *millah* (community), and demonstrated it through clear religious proofs and logical argumentation. He stated that Indian national identity cannot be based on religion, but the notion of community is in fact based on geography and being sons of the same soil and products of the same language and culture. This shared language and common heritage is what renders India a community that stands united in spite of religious differences. He referred to the Prophet Muhammad’s historic agreement

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<sup>6</sup>Shiekhul Hadith molana Zakarya: Fazaile Aamal V. 2 pp. 97.

<sup>7</sup> Mawlana Rasheed Ahmad Gangohi: Baqiyaate Fatawa, M.I. Bakhsh Acadmy Kandhla, 2012 pp. 451-505.

with the Jews of Madinah – the Mithaq al-Madinah – where he declared the Jews and Muslims to be part of one Ummah (nation) through the statement *إن يهود بني عوف* *إنا مسلمين* as proof for his stance. In a similar fashion, the Qur'an quotes several prophets who referred to their people by saying *يا قومي* (My community!) even though they did not follow the religion – Islam – that these prophets called towards. While mentioning the story of the Prophet Lut it is mentioned that he was sent to deliver the message to his 'brothers', although they were also polytheists. This proves that to be one community and brotherhood, it is not essential to follow the same religion. Mawlana Madani makes his case using these and other arguments from the Qur'an and Sunnah.<sup>8</sup>

In the last century, there have been numerous 'Ulama who have given the same message through various means that Muslims should not view their fellow countrymen as separate from their community. Not only does Islam permit, but it encourages healthy coexistence with people from other religions so that human society progresses as a whole and people live with each other with mutual trust and cooperation. Mawlana Sa'id Ahmad Akbarabadi in his *Nafathah al-Masdur* wrote a book in which apart from Shar'i proofs also quoted the opinion of senior 'Ulama in favour of the position that Hindus and Muslims constitute a single community in India. Some scholars took a step further and initiated the tradition of studying the religious texts of the Hindu religion in order to better understand it. This saw the authoring of several books in which the Hindu religion and its teachings were analysed vis-à-vis Islam. Maulana Syed Ahkmaq Husaain Dehlawi wrote the book *The Vedic Faith and Islam* in which he presented the common teachings of both religions. Maulana Shams Naved Usmani wrote the legendary book '*Agar Ab Bhi Na Jaage Toh*' (If We Don't Wake Up Even Now!) in which he has done a deep and well-thought comparative analysis of the two faiths and attempted to find new common ground between the teachings of these two great religions.<sup>9</sup> Maulana Syed Hamid Ali researched the Hindu and Jain religious traditions and texts, and attempted to locate the teachings of Tawhid and other Islamic doctrines in these faiths. The Muslim religious tradition of intellectual inquiry into other faith traditions such as Hinduism, Jainism and other Indian religions that gained strength through the efforts of the Mughal ruler Akbar, the prince scholar Dara Shikoh, Mohsin Fani,<sup>10</sup> the famed Sufi and scholar Mirza Mazhar Jan e Janan,<sup>11</sup> and others, further established itself in recent times through the efforts of these extraordinary scholars and had a far-reaching impact on society. The 'Ulama of the two intellectual streams of Deoband and Bareilly deem it preferable for the Muslims of India to live in religiously plural and interdependent societies. This is one of the main reasons why the longstanding tradition of inter-religious tolerance has remained strong in

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<sup>8</sup> Mawlana Husain Ahmad Madni: *Masalae qaumiyat aur Islam* pp.80-96.

<sup>9</sup> Shams Naved Uthmani: *Agar Ab Bhi Na Jage To...* New Delhi.

<sup>10</sup> Mohsin Fani and some others wrote collective the very famous book of comparative religion "*Dabistane Mazhib*".

<sup>11</sup> Mirza Mazhar has the opinion that Hindus sacred books are perhaps revealed, he discusses the issue in his latter which is published from Delhi many time.

India to this day. However, it is also true that a few ‘Ulama disagreed with this widespread perspective and opined that Hindus and Muslims constitute two distinct communities that can only thrive and safeguard their religious and cultural traditions when they live independent of each other. For them, this was the best way to ensure complete religious freedom at all levels for both communities. These ‘Ulama came under the influence of Muhammad Ali Jinnah’s two-nation theory and the Pakistan movement led by the Muslim League.

In the present times, a significant number of ‘Ulama have authored books on Muslim-Non-Muslim relations. They have been well-received by audiences, particularly young people. These books have clearly argued from Islamic sources that at a societal level, it is imperative for Muslims to interact and maintain healthy relations with people of other faiths. Among such authors are renowned scholars of the likes of, Maulana Jalaluddin Umri,<sup>12</sup> Maulana Khalid Saifullah Rahmani,<sup>13</sup> Maulana Sa’ud Alam Qasmi,<sup>14</sup> Maulana Akhtar Imam Adil etc., whose books have been greatly appreciated within academic circles as well as by the common reader. The Islamic Fiqh Academy of India organised a seminar of this topic through which the opinion of leading ‘Ulama of the country from various schools of thought have been compiled in one place.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, several madrasas and modern Muslim universities have also organized seminars on the subject which have contributed towards the propagation of this discourse in academia as well as the public sphere.

Maulana Wahiduddin Khan is an internationally renowned traditional Muslim scholar and religious thinker. He has a significant influence among modern, educated youth. The basic stream of his thought is focused that Muslims should single-handedly work to create an enabling environment for inter-religious dialogue so that it opens the door for improved mutual understanding and also opportunities to propagate the Islamic faith. Additionally, it is also imperative for maintaining peaceful coexistence between the communities. In this regard, he emphasises the principle of peaceful coexistence that drove the Hudaibiyah treaty devised by the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ with the people of Makkah. He has authored two highly influential books: ‘Islam and World Peace’<sup>16</sup> and ‘The Ideology of Peace’ to propagate these perspectives.

## **Movements**

There were many Indian ‘Ulama that made it their mission to promote communal harmony in Indian society and initiated social movements to further this goal. The most prominent role in this regard was played by Maulana Hussain Ahmad Madani and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad. Maulana Hussain Ahmad Madani led the Jamiat Ulama e Hind in the direction of uniting the Muslims of India under the leadership

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<sup>12</sup> Umari, Jalaluddin: *Islam, Musalmaan aur Gher Muslim*, New Delhi 2011.

<sup>13</sup> Khalid Saifullah Rahmani: *Musalmaan aur Gher muslimon ke drmiyaan Rawabit : Islami taalimaat ki Roshni men*, New Delhi, 2013.

<sup>14</sup> Aktar Imam A’dil: *Islam aur Gher muslim Taaluqaat*.

<sup>15</sup> The seminar was held in 20-22 Jun 2004 at Hayderaabaad.

<sup>16</sup> Mawlana Wahiduddin Khan: *The Ideology of Peace*, New Delhi 2010.

of the ‘Ulama and establishing close ties with the secular Indian National Congress to achieve the national and political objectives of Hindus, Muslims and other communities in India. This movement was very successful and gained significant traction among all sections of Muslim society.<sup>17</sup> Maulana Abul Kalam Azad was a prominent member of the Indian National Congress and promoted this unity from the Congress’ front alongside leading figures of the nationalist movement such as Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru. Maulana Azad considered this unity one of his most significant achievements and contributions to the Indian nationalist movement. He was so serious in this regard that he considered any harm to this unity a threat to human existence itself, since these two communities collectively constituted a major section of the world’s population. He once said: “If an angel descends from the sky today proclaiming the news that India will be liberated were it to forego the principle of Hindu-Muslim unity, I would refuse to accept it because a delay in India’s freedom is a loss for India alone, but a rift in Hindu-Muslim unity would be a loss for all of humanity.”<sup>18</sup>

After the independence of India, other prominent mass movements for communal harmony and interfaith dialogue arose from the ‘Ulama such as the Payam e Insaniyat movement initiated by Maulana Syed Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi.

These movements created a platform through which public intellectuals from both communities could jointly share their thoughts and combat the divisive policies of communal politicians. They were significant in challenging religion-based politics and promoting a counter-narrative that encouraged practicing the tolerant teachings of one’s faith while respecting other faiths at the same time.

### **Sermons**

Mosques are important public spaces where religious leaders are able to influence the minds of young Muslims. The ritual sermons that are part of the Friday prayer and the congregational prayers on the two Eid festivals hold particular significance in this regard. India has followed the tradition of delivering the ritual sermon at these prayers in Arabic, but these are usually preceded by a public talk in the local language. The Imam usually delivers his message for the community in this talk. The pre-prayer sermons are usually focused on social issues such as the rights of neighbors, the importance of good character, the rights of children and the elderly, cleanliness, charity, and other moral and religious teachings. These speeches and talks play a significant role in influencing societal behavior at the grassroots, and it was observed that the mosques that had preachers who focused more on social subjects saw a greater attendance in prayers.

The impact of the Friday sermon in influencing behavior change is so central and widespread that the government of India has also utilized it as an important avenue to promote key messages for its social and health programmes. A good example of this was in the case of the immunisation drive for the highly

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<sup>17</sup>Smith, Wilfred Cantwell *Islam in Modern History* pp. 285.

<sup>18</sup> Abul Kalam Azad: *Khutbaat*, New Delhi 2012, pp. 205.



successful pulse polio control programme in India. The importance of the Friday sermon has also been highlighted by several ‘Ulama such as Maulana Abdullah Tariq and others who have authored dedicated books on the Friday sermon, its etiquettes, and also provided sample topics and talking points for Imams to present in their Friday sermons.<sup>19</sup>

### **Religious gatherings**

Public conferences, events and gatherings are an important part of the religious fabric in India. People from all religions have multiple mass gatherings and motivational lectures throughout the year. In this regard, the Muslim community, in spite of being in minority, is perhaps the leading religious group with the maximum number of religious gatherings and attendees across the country. Some of these gatherings are around occasions of religious significance apart from the two Eids such as Milad un Nabi, Muharram, Chehellum (Arba’in), Shab e Baraa’at, etc. Others are in commemoration of the lives of leading Sufi saints such as Khwaja Muinuddin Chishti, Qutubuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki, Nizamuddin Awliya, Amir Khusru, Syed Muhammad Hussaini (Gulbarga), Shah Madar, Sharafuddin Yahya Maneri, Haji Ali, etc., which are usually held as gatherings called ‘Urs at the burial shrines of these saints. These gatherings are attended by thousands of people from all corners of the country, including many non-Muslims. Regardless the Shar’i status of these gatherings, the primary motivation of the vast majority of attendees at such gatherings is reviving religious values in their lives and demonstrating their devotion to senior religious figures and scholars. The confluence of so many different sects and religious groups at such gatherings is an importance avenue of strengthening interfaith understanding and breaking stereotypes about each other’s religious beliefs and practices. The ‘Urs culture at Sufi shrines has therefore been an important platform for communicating the communal harmony and intercultural understanding within the Indian religious fabric.

Apart from ‘Urs, there are many other avenues for public gathering of Muslims in India such as the various Ijtima’at of the Tablighi Jamat, reformational and motivational public lectures of ‘Ulama, annual conferences of various madrasas and other religious institutions, etc. Themes such as communal harmony, respecting other faiths, collaborating in nation-building, cooperating with wider society to fight common social ills such as dowry, ill treatment of women, etc., are commonly discussed topics at such gatherings.

### **Communal supplications**

Public Du’a (supplication to God) is an important tradition at religious gatherings across the Indian subcontinent, particularly towards the end of Friday sermons, Tablighi Ijtimas, public lectures, Urs gatherings, etc. In events that are spread over a few days, the attendance on the last day is the highest as most attendees wish to participate in the concluding Du’a. The supplications at such gatherings usually

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<sup>19</sup> Mawlana Abdullah Tariq: *Khutbae Juma Usool w Adab*, New Delhi.

concentrate on beseeching God to assist them in doing good deeds, remaining steadfast on the religion, forgiveness for sins, safety and security of communities, communal harmony and human progress, patience in the face of strife, etc. Although du'a is widely regarded as a personal act of worship between the devotee and God, the communal aspect of public du'a has given it an important social dimension. Public du'a therefore becomes an important vehicle of communicating religious ideals and motivating people towards attaining them. This behavioural and transformational aspect of this largely personal devotional exercise is often ignored by academics, but has a widespread impact on society. The subject matter of these supplications thus plays an important role in giving a public voice to the religious aspirations of common people, and also guides them towards imbibing core religious values such as tolerance, interfaith collaboration along with other common social values such as treating your neighbor well and respecting differences. Another aspect of Du'a is that it is timely, and relates to events and happenings as they occur, and steers the community in how to deal with them and figure out the appropriate religious response. This aspect of the practical translation of religious values to actual circumstances, and along with its timeliness and relevance is what makes public Du'a such an important and potent transformational tool. In times of religious strife and fear of rioting, religious leaders play an important role in dismissing rumours and calming down the community from taking any violent action.

### **Social service**

Most religious institutions are nonprofits and have dedicated units and teams for providing social services such as feeding and clothing the poor, providing winter essentials such as blankets, health services and hospitals, orphanages, etc. These services are usually provided irrespective of the religion of the beneficiary. This helps promote a culture of tolerance and mutual concern among both the people providing these essential services as well as the persons receiving them. Particularly in emergency situations such as floods, earthquakes and other natural disasters, religious groups join hands to work together for the common benefit of society. The recent floods in the South Indian city of Chennai provided a beautiful example of this interfaith service for humanity, with mosques and temples opening their doors to all people affected by the floods, as well as offering emergency medical aid to those in need. There were also instances of Muslim youth helping clean and reinstate temples in flood-struck areas.<sup>20</sup>

The institution of 'Langar' (open banquet for all) at most Sufi shrines is also a great example of providing social services irrespective of religion and promoting religious values such as giving, fighting greed, and sharing concern for all. It is an Indian Muslim tradition that was borrowed by the Sikhs, and perfected and further strengthened by them at an even greater scale.

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<sup>20</sup> The Daily Siyasat, 6 December 2015; such news is spread in many news papers and was on air by many channels.

In light of the preceding discussion, it becomes abundantly clear that among the core and foundational objectives of the Indian ‘Ulama with regard to societal reformation, communal harmony and better understanding between people of all faiths occupies a particularly important and lofty place. This is due to both the traditional importance given to healthy interfaith relations in Indian society as well as the ongoing confrontation between religious and secular political groups at a global level. The sermons, gatherings, books and other forms of intellectual production and avenues for mass communication are all heavily utilized to promote dialogue between followers of the great religions. The ‘Ulama consider this an essential responsibility with a strong religious basis, and therefore regard exemplary behaviour towards other communities as a core Islamic value and part of what makes one a good Muslim. They view it as an important means of coming closer to God, and a manifestation of key religious principles such as justice, treating everyone fairly, exercising patience and sacrifice in order to maintain good ties, forgiveness, and service to the people. These are all godly traits that are expected of each Muslim, and the ‘Ulama therefore propagate these teachings as their core religious duty.

*Abdalahadi Alijla*<sup>1</sup>

## **Negative Influence of Radical Clergy and Political Leadership on Youth**

### **Abstract**

This paper is an interdisciplinary consideration of the negative influence of clergy and political leadership on youth in particular and society in general. The negative role of clergy was explored, as well as the role of political leadership in the Arab world. The negative influence of clergy is greater than what it depicted in media and scholarly studies. This paper argues that clergy and religious institutions in the Arab world have a negative influence on youth and society in respect to extremism. Religious leaders exploit the trust they gain through their symbolic position in society to mobilize against political rivals of the ruler or the political Islam movements. The paper discusses the role of political leadership on youth and how they radicalize them by abusing their power, corruption and oppression. The paper colludes with recommendations on how can the negative role of clergy and political leadership can be minimized contained through educational programs and self-censorship mechanism between clergymen. The paper argues that eradicating the negative influence of political leadership should be started by applying the basic concept of good governance in the states and their institutions.

### **Introduction**

In recent years, there has been an intense rise in extremism across the Middle East, Europe and North America. Extremist's impact is felt on daily bases, watching TV, walking in the streets, in schools on colleges and in entertainment places. Although it is usually rooted in its local context, extremism has impact on global and regional level. Its consequences are being watched in front of our eyes in Sweden, Germany, Italy, UK, USA, Lebanon, Iraq, Egypt, Syria, Palestine and elsewhere.

There have been enormous numbers of studies on how to counter extremism. Considering the huge number of these reports and studies, there have been varieties of wording for the issue of countering extremism. Some prefer to counter extremism, while others prefer to fight extremism, while others prefer building resilience in the face of extremism. However, these studies focus on Europe. There have been very few, if any, reports and studies on how to counter extremism in the Middle east and Islamic majority countries. Moreover, there is a limited studies and focus on the cause roots of extremism and radicalism aside from the political and economic reasons. A major source of extremism among youth is religious leadership and clergy.

There has been a very little attention paid to the negative influence of clergy and youth leaders in the Arab World. How they include them? Why? And how can

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we minimize the role of the negative influence of clergy and youth leaders on the Arab and Muslim youth. This paper will discuss the different issues related to the question, and draw out recommendations to the policy makers, policy agencies, civil societies and religious leadership. First it examine the role of religious institutions and how it, non-intentionally, contribute to the radicalization of youth. It also discusses the potentials of negative effect of using the political discourse in Islamic centers, mosques and religious institutions. Second, it focuses on the economic and political inequalities which provide radical clergies and youth leaders to mobilize and influence the young Muslims.

Religious clergy are a very crucial element in the process of societal reform and daily life. More importantly, the Arab and Islamic world give clergy a symbolic and high position in the society, where their words are listened and more effective than many other types of leadership. After what so called the Arab spring, a great debate has been initiated on the role of religion in the public sphere, which directly triggered a discussion among politicians and citizens to answer the question of, “how much clergy and religion we want in politics and public life”. Obviously, many scholars and politicians accuse clergy and religious institutions of triggering and fueling extremism across the Muslim World and in Europe<sup>2</sup>. At the same time, clergy and religious institutions defend themselves by issuing statements against extremism, mobilizing people to counter extremism and radicalism by adhering to the teachings and traditions of Islam. However, these calls and statements are in vacuum, as the religious institutions does not adhere to the principles it invites people for. For instance, Egypt’s capital, Dar Al Ifta closed the Hussein mosque during the Ashora’a time, issuing a statement, inciting violence against Shiite Muslims. This cannot be tolerated, as Dar AL Ifta is the highest religious institution, which should guide youth and society to be more tolerant.

The Muslims, in general follows and adhere to the opinions and teachings of two types of clergy; Marja’ (source of Imitate) and Khatib (the person who delivers the sermon during Friday prayer and lead Muslims in their prays). Muslims usually follows them because they are capable of deriving different explanations of Islam and provide Muslims with religious teachings based on the different context, history and time. Moreover, they are prepared to answer questions related to Islam and its daily life. However, the different schools of Marjia’ and Khatib/Imam can derive different explanation and interpretations of the same questions. For example, the Salfis Whabist explanation of the role of women in society is totally different than the Shiite/ Sunni-Lebanese explanations.

The power of clergy resides in their wide popularity among citizens, and the religious legitimacy. For instance, the personal opinion of Patriarch will influence huge number of Christians. Another example, watching a Muslim clergy fighting against fellow Muslims, will definitely affect thousands of Muslims, especially how they see the others. Of course, these examples may trigger a flashback where other

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<sup>2</sup> [http://www.huffpostarabi.com/hadi-alajala/-\\_2187\\_b\\_8406932.html](http://www.huffpostarabi.com/hadi-alajala/-_2187_b_8406932.html).

leaders may respond to their opinions and actions or trigger a public debate/ hate speech across the society.

Opposite to high-level clergy, the imams, Khatib and what so-called Sheikhs (religious term in some countries) have a greater influence on youth and society because of their daily encounter. This was not only in the mosques, but also outside. For instance, most of the time, people approach clergy to ask for consultations in many issues regarding society and their daily life/ public affairs. As the Arab and Muslim societies have been politically polarized, clergy also may have a political ideology and could exploit their position in order to support one political party at the expense of the others, uncovering the position of clergy to be more politicized, which in turn will lead to a less trust in clergy in the society.

### **Types of Clergy**

Based on the influence of clergy on society and youth, they can be categorized into two categories:

#### **Politically/ideologically engaged clergy**

This type of clergy is usually politically affiliated with the state or the political Islam movements, such as the Muslim brotherhoods. They usually try to influence youth in order to defeat the other side/opposition/state/ruling party. They exploit the religious texts to achieve political benefits. They are the category where youth are negatively affected and end in extremist groups. For instance, Hamas clergy in the Gaza strip mobilized youth to be part of the military wing of Hamas. However, after Hamas took over the Gaza strip, a good number of them left Hamas and formed Al-Qaeda affiliated groups. Their justification was that Hamas does not follow Islamic teachings anymore such as applying Shari'ah in the Gaza strip or declaring Islamic states, as they were taught at the beginning. This ended up by a violent conflict between two Islamic groups, killing dozens of them in the name of Islam. Mostly the clergy who play the role of the political leaders for the groups symbolizes these conflicts.

#### **Independent-clergy**

This type of clergy does not belong to a political group, yet they have a stance regarding specific public affairs. They see their responsibility as preachers from Islam and teachers of the holy book. Their influence on youth can be negative sometimes, but they are rarely engaged in politics or public affairs in general, which makes them a passive group. An example of this group is the Salafi group (Salafi Da'wa), which is completely opposite to Salafi Jihadists who believe in violence as a means to achieve political, religious and societal changes.

#### **How Negative is the Role of Clergy?**

The negative role of clergy cannot be separated from the influence of the political leadership. The political oppression of political Islam movements, and forming coalition with regimes, usually results in negative consequences and effects on

youth and societies in general. Exploiting religion to gain political benefits will weaken the competition between political actors based on the good conduct, competitively, political agenda and delivery of public goods to the wider society. On the other hand, political Islam parties exploit the trust in clergy. In the Arab and Islamic world, people tend to take what clergies say for granted, and few try to check the truth behind the so called facts these clergies pass to their communities. Same for political leaders, everyone is just biased towards their own political leaders and never question whether what they are saying factually correct or not. For instance, during the 2011 parliamentary elections in Egypt, Salfi clergies who are also political leaders of Salfi parties asked people to vote for their candidates because voting for them is “voting for Islam”. Citizens never questioned and they got the second most seats just behind the Muslim Brotherhood who used somehow a similar technique. In 2006, during the Palestinian elections, Hamas Muslim clergy initiated a campaign states that voting for Non Islamic parties is forbidden, according to Qur’an. The same political party refused to participate in 1996 elections, which claimed that God and Qur’an forbid elections and democracy. Moreover, Hamas, as an Islamic movement, has gained a status of influence by its use of mosques, ideologically and politically driven clergy to pass its political message to the people. Being Islamic movement, it educates its members and followers that the conflict with Israel is religious and not political. In this context, Hamas’s discourse is infused with religious symbols and values that motivate Palestinian youth (Personal communication, 2015).

In Yemen, religion plays significant role in all life aspects of Yemeni youth, as the country traditionally is one of the most conservative states across the Arab region, moreover, the majority of Yemenis practice the religious rituals regularly, and there is a solid linkage between Yemenis and religious bodies. The spiritual manifestations can be palpably seen in all Yemeni areas particularly in rural areas where the tribal communities form the majority of Yemeni population, more importantly, 99% of Yemenis are Muslims, yet there are various of religious groups among them and those groups located geographically in different Yemeni places, for instance, Zaidis centred in north of north of Yemen, Salafis in South and Sufis in south-east of the country.

In Indonesia, some Ulama/Islamic scholars issues Fatwa ban greeting fellow Christians by saying “Merry Christmas” and another Fatwa forbids wearing Santa Claus’s hat. They believe that these will damage the faith of the Muslim population (Personal communication, September 2015). It could be weaken relationship in multicultural life. This negative influence or misunderstanding of the message of clergy will definitely lead to harm of a diverse society.

As the clergy have influential role in their societies, their negative influence on youth is found in two directions: First, the extremist views regarding other groups in society, and the world. Second the views on public issues such as governance, curricula and women’s rights. The first one is usually driving the youth to be more radicals.

The first direction is the most harmful, and has very destructive consequences on societies. When clergy claims monopoly of the truth, express their negative views against others and impose the concept of “otherness” in the minds of youth; the glorification of death and violence, anti-modernity and anti-democracy. Many clergy, indirectly and directly, have contributed somehow in implanting the culture of hate, isolation and rejection of modernity. My argument goes that Muslim clergy not necessarily contribute to the spreading extremism among youth. Yet, the political and societal conditions prepare marginalized or affected youth, leading them to be influenced and negatively affected by the narrative of the clergy.

The Muslim world is living the conundrum and paradox of two lives. The first life is the one of the 21<sup>st</sup> century represented by technology, cheap transportation and on-time communication. While the second life is the one driven by fundamentalist clergy who use these technologies, yet refuse to accept the outcomes resulted from their usage, by freezing the religious texts to its original interpretation. The refusal of such development and the current historical, societal and political context is driving youth to live hidden life.

Another example is the concept of governance according to Al-Mawdudi and Sayeed Kutub is for God, and no one can alter governance scheme except God. By this argument, local policies, good governance factors and programs, such as transparency and accountability tools can not be applied by human beings as the Qur’an have not mention any of these programs. By sticking to the literalist interpretation of religious text, they are not giving any room for societies to be part of the ongoing development and reform of society. Many clergy are using such ideas and ideologies to mobilize youth against basic needs in our daily life that range from diversity to the usage of technologies. As the youth absorb these ideologies as facts and complete truth, they will see others as disbelievers and infidels to Islam, which require fighting them violently.

They succeed in doing this mostly through the manipulation of truths and the use of sensational and provocative language. They manipulate facts by exaggerating certain parts of the truth and omitting others. For example, in the Nahda and Rabaa protests, the extent of weapons possessions of the protesters was highly exaggerated by political spokespeople. Of course, this is not to say that there was not similar manipulation of the truth by politicians and media representatives from the other side of the political spectrum. Furthermore, religious clergy and politicians use sensational language in order to stir certain emotions that will serve in their favor. For example, in the immigration debate, words like “economic migrants” are used to instead of “refugees” to downplay the human suffering and limit feelings of sympathy associated with the Diasporas (Personal communication, 2015). In this way, the youth form their opinions and base their behavior towards others based on incomplete information at the very best.

In my opinion, the destruction of the religious infrastructure in the region’s countries, the struggle against traditional forms of Islam during dictatorships and the attempts to eradicate it played one of the decisive roles in spreading extremism in



the region. It is a combination of religious and political factors that influenced youth, leading them to extremism.

### **The Political Leadership: Driving Youth to Extremism**

The political leadership negatively contributed to radicalism in their societies. As the Arabic political leadership feared the political left and secular parties, the presence of Political Islam increased. The Political leadership believed that countering secularism, liberal and communist parties could be achieved by allowing political Islam. By imprisoning secular and liberal intellectuals, the Arab regimes facilitated the activism and influence of clergy on youth and societies.

In Yemen, the political leadership usually exploits the religion and has impact on youth who are 53% of Yemeni population so as to strength its power. However, It is obvious true that throughout the Yemeni history there was a blend between political authority and religious authority and in many times Yemen witnessed united command for the two authorities, for example (Mutawakkilite Kingdom of Yemen 1918-1962).

In the late 1980s, the Saleh regime fostered jihad in what was then North Yemen by repatriating thousands of Yemeni nationals who had fought the Soviets in Afghanistan. Saleh dispatched these mujahadeen to fight the Soviet-backed Marxist government of South Yemen in a successful bid for unification, and subsequently, to crush southern secessionists.

The returning Yemenis were joined by other Arab veterans of the Afghan war, foremost among them Osama bin Laden, who advocated a central role for Yemen in global jihad. A corps of jihadists who had trained under bin Laden in Afghanistan formed the militant group Islamic Jihad in Yemen (1990–94), one of several AQAP predecessors. Other such groups include the Army of Aden Abyan (1994–98) and al-Qaeda in Yemen, or AQY (1998–2003).

Currently, Yemen is witnessing one of the hardest times in its history, the current fighting in this war torn state has had a massive effect on its entire population, especially within the minds of its youths. Since the 1990s, thousands of young men and women in Yemen have become radicalized under the influence of religious and political thoughts fuelling the massive conflict amid Yemeni parties. Furthermore, the religious terms and slogans can be seen palpably in Yemeni conflicts not only words but also the religious institutions are used to promote the ideological thoughts and ideas against each other and usually youths are the target groups of such this discourses (Personal Communication, 2015).

Political leadership could give negative influence by using religion for politics strategies. For instance in Indonesia, in the name of teaching of Islam, some politicians collaborating with some ulama spreading out ban choosing Christian or non-muslim as a Mayor leader. Other case, Majelis Ulama Indonesia (Indonesian ulame Council) ever issued fatwa that Ahmadiyah and Shia is astray/ deviate. The implication was violance against Ahmadi and eviction adherent of Shia from their environment.

Usually religious institutions are funded from different resources, mainly governments and political parties, sometimes charities and individuals. Therefore each religious institution follows the ideologies and political doctrine of the funding parties. The goals of any institutions usually carry out the thoughts of founders, and their ideologies. These goals are achieved through clergy and the religious discourses. Usually those institutions contribute in community or part of community by their published materials regardless the tool. It can target the youth to spread their radical thoughts, if their agenda to do so. Again we have to look to their feeders and how they are being sponsored (Personal communication 2015). The youth easily can be negatively influenced due to accessibility and this depends of tools are being targeted. Some can use youth activities to feed them with their thoughts, and some can use traditional ways like conferences targeting youth or publishes directed to them.

If the institution has school investment or university, they can be most influential tool to rise a part of generation holding their thoughts and ideologies, which of course will be spread over the school or university community. For instance, Hamas runs, informally, the Islamic University of Gaza, which has been criticized over extremism and radicals thoughts among its students and staff (professors). The criticism came for its discrimination against women, public opinions of its staff and students.

### **Marginalization of Clergy: Road to Extremism**

The policy of marginalization of clergy and religious education reform that political leadership pursue in the face of radicalism and extremism lead to a negative influence of the clergy on youth. The Political leadership, and in order to avoid the influence of mosques and political Islam in society, marginalized the role of clergy and state's religious institutions in the process of reform and orientation of the youth and society to the right path. The state symbolized the clergy and religious departments students in a very traditional way where they lead the pray in most of the time. On the other hand, the state appointed a loyal clergy and religious leadership, which caused a very serious harm to the society and youth. This depicted the religious institutions and clergy of the states as a loyal to dictatorships, represented them as partners in oppressing youth and the citizens, working for political leadership agenda.

The alternative was the opposition clergy, which is the political Islam clergy who mobilize and preach for a political Islam against the state and the state's institutions. As a consequences, the youth either accept the political Islam narrative, which mostly a reality in the Arab world, or disagree with it and move to more radical and extreme groups such as ISIS or ISIS-like ideology.

### **The Impossible Promise: Minimizing Negative Influence**

The main core of balanced communities is the openness, and what can make openness among any community whatever big or small is the dialogue, so dialogue

and communication among group of people is a reason to build a structured and balanced one.

Through dialogue all the misconceptions and poisoned thoughts can be clarified, and because the main cell in any community is the family, so dialogues among the family members are good tool to eliminate any odd or poisoned thought that any of the family member could pick from his surroundings. Knowledge, this is the filter to any odd or extreme thought, and to spread the knowledge is not only by school/ university curriculum but also by targeting the youth through TV shows or by eliminating the unusual tools can be used by clergy or extreme parties. And knowledge is not only to teach the youth by what is wrong and right but also how to determine what is wrong and what is right and how to differ among right and wrong. And this of course requires strategy from the country to build this in their curriculum and their media strategy.

Another important aspect is how to guide the youth to follow the right role model and mentors, as clearly known youth usually looking to follow role models in different aspects in politics or music or others, so guiding the youth for a right role models could help in having a right direction and eliminating the influence of extremists.

Another important way to minimize the negative influence of clergy on youth is elimination of the factors that target youth and spread their influence through media, music, religious speeches, mosques and churches, and others, but on the contrary to build strategy as mentioned to spread the balanced thoughts and moderate thinking and avoid the extreme concepts.

Initiatives must start from the schools and religious classes. In Tunisia, most students do not adequately know Islam or the messages of other religions; for those young people those who are not Muslims or disbelievers. Change of the system of education teaches these young people the principles of peace and human rights. These lessons must be done within the school but also within the family, parent awareness is also very important. The State must also play its part by monitoring mosques and Qur'an schools that some of them have become dangerous after the 2011. By maximizing the positive influence of well-educated clergies and political leaders, through education, we minimize the negative role of clergy.

Religious institutions contribute to the radicalization of youth by giving extreme or fundamental interpretation of holy texts. These interpretations are used in specific contexts to reinforce religious aspects and messages that represent religious institutions. These messages are nowadays distributed mostly online. Another way is isolation of youth socially from their community or society. This way leads young men to turn to extremism in searching for their identity, acceptance and purpose in another community. In this context, integration into a community could be seen another angel for the cause of radicalization especially in western communities. This relates to discrimination, segregation, and alienation to misinformation Moreover, religious institutions can cause a huge problem if they adopt an extreme view. For example, when a fatwa comes from Al-Azhar it is much harder to convince people

to criticize than when it comes from a self-proclaimed clergy like most of the clergies these days who appear on religious channels.

Besides that, the discriminatory policies that ignored the religious curricula at schools, and self-censorship imposing on clergy, lead to institutional failure concerning spread of extremism and extremist vies. Such policies excluded the religious institutions from the national educational curriculum. This contributed in the appearance of private religious schools that taught radical version of Islam.

### **Conclusion**

It should not be denied that radical clergy in presenting a weird culture of extremism and violence which distort meaningful message of religion, which is peace and acceptance of other. From Friday sermons to daily lectures in the mosques, radical clergy injects youth with doses of hate speech and political turbulence whose consequences are tangibly observed in the Muslim world such as violence against religious minorities and even some Muslims. As it is clear, radicalization introduces ideological views and beliefs from moderate, mainstream views towards extreme views, and in recent definitions that is related to terrorism and violence against moderate communities. It also causes big threats on communities which currently all world forces focus to eliminate and cut. And because world is changing rapidly towards fast, open and close; the youth are the most influenced by this change, which is driven by technology as first and most influential tool, beside the new movements of independent groups towards passion of power and spreading their radical thoughts, and drag as much as they can from followers to maximize their popularity.

Those groups are usually targeting the youth, because they believe they can easily drag the youth to their traps by their tools, which mainly aims to brainwash young people to their ideological thoughts. The main direction for those groups are the clergy whom are using the religious speeches to drag the youth, this is the most and the easiest way to deal with such cases. And because the youth are not structured and cannot acknowledge the behind purposes of those groups, they can be easily influenced by the clergy or any radical groups. Besides looking at what some youth are missing, like money or knowledge or materialistic things, it can be easily dragging them by any mean and they can use drugs to trap them.

Usually, ignorant/non-educated and psychologically-vulnerable youth are the most trapped, and unbalanced raise youth also, when they start to believe that those clergy or whatsoever will be their hope for better life and for more beneficial situations, but actually it is not. Among the aforementioned landscape in a country that third of its population are illiterates, Yemeni youth are increasingly becoming the violence victims due to the negative influence of clergy and political leaders who are sacrificing thousands of youth for the sake of their personal interests.

All of the above examples illustrates the negative impact on young communities and thus leads to extremism and finally to terrorism. The negative role of clergy stems from two major sources: the implementation of the religious discourse and the political abuse of religion.

The first is connected to the religious studying and the desire of the clergy to keep their stereotypes of influence in their societies, through using an attractive discourse, whatever it is negative or positive, so they always try to attract the youth as they are considered the major component of the society, through such discourses, the clergy tries to get the youth influenced, especially in the Arab communities where there is always a deep debates about the role of the religion in the country.

The second is related to the attempts of the political leadership to justify any of its actions by a religious discourse, especially in communities which give an important role to religion in their lives, so we may see the government and opposition using a religious discourse to justify their stance from one issue or more, just to convince the people they are representing the word of god more than the other party, and they're going to protect the religion more others.

To minimize the role of the negative influence of clergy and youth leaders on the Arab and Muslim youth, I would suggest two steps:

- There should be a media strategy to focus on moderate parties that basically accept the other.
- Reinforce the moderate understanding and hermeneutics of religious values and instructions to lead to a change in the discourse of fundamentalist ideologies.

#### **Note**

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## **What Drives Human Beings to Commit Violent Acts Such as Murder and Suicide and to Reject Peace and Harmony?**

### **Abstract**

This presentation sets out to describe how we are to understand the rise of jihadism and particularly the jihadism of the so-called Islamic State. I stress **our**. By **our**, I mean the developed world's failure to acknowledge our part in this modern phenomenon. I conclude by proposing what needs to be done. Crucial to my argument is a brief overview of the questions surrounding human nature: who do we think we are? And a brief foray into the myth of redemptive violence.

### **Understanding the Process of Radicalizing Young People**

'I always wanted to live under Shari'ah Law but this will never happen in Europe,' declares a nineteen year old woman from Bradford now living in Syria. The attraction of Islamic State is succinctly expressed by Abu Bakr al Baghdadi, the self proclaimed caliph of the newly established caliphate: 'Hold your heads up high for today you have a caliphate that will restore your dignity, power and rights.'

Through social media Islamic State offers an idealised version of the Islamic life and the opportunity to participate in new utopian politics. Setting aside the raping, crucifixions, beheadings and all manner of atrocities, the appeal is to a Golden Age of Islam. In common with other revolutionary movements Islamic State is characterized by a potent obsession with apocalypse.

The Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby in his 2015 Christmas Day Sermon at Canterbury Cathedral said: 'This is the time of an apocalypse which is igniting a trail of fear, hatred and determined oppression... confident these are the last days, using force and indescribable cruelty that seems to welcome all opposition. The certainty that warfare unleashes confirms that these are indeed the end times... the Christians face elimination in the very region where the Christian faith began.'

The Islamic State presents through skilful and sophisticated use of the media the possibilities of heroism, opportunities to live out what is presented as the true Islamic community and above all establishing a land which their followers can call home in spite of the horrors they commit.

But why has this manifestation of a fanatical cult emerged now? It has nothing to do with the clash of civilisations, even less to do with a distorted view of the Qur'an. Many who have joined Islamic State know little about their own religion except for a few texts. With some exceptions, it is not the imams and mosques which attract potential jihadists. It is messages disseminated by the social media which appeal to a younger generation. This is how recruiting takes place.

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The answer is that the propaganda to attract new followers is best understood in the words of Professor Olivier Roy as the ‘Islamisation of radicalism, rather than the radicalisation of Islam’.<sup>2</sup>

What the world is witnessing in this region is the birth of a political radicalism - a hatred of dictatorships, a demand for some sort of democracy, and a society where there are opportunities for work, jobs and security. The internet has made us aware of our interdependence. What this means in practice is that for the first time all of us have what Hannah Arendt called a ‘common present’; all of us are immediate neighbours and feel the shock of events taking place elsewhere. Over the years the Soul of Europe has been trying to help a family of Iraqi Kurds. It is disturbing in the relative safety of the UK seeing our friends on Skype who are on the front line with the Islamic State military. It is frustrating not to be able to do anything to protect them. But this sense of a ‘common present’ can also be, for many, markedly negative. It feeds on frustration and increases mutual hatred.

One of the memorable moments of the gatherings in Tahrir Square in 2011, celebrating the resignation of President Mubarak, was the sheer number of young people - a conservative estimate of 300,000. Across the region there are thousands of unemployed young men and increasingly young women whose talents and energies have no outlet. Such conditions are breeding grounds for revolution, including the Islamic State.

So the words of Baghdadi are an appeal to those disaffected both in the region and beyond - particularly those on the edge in Europe. ‘Join us and create a golden age for Islam’ is the message. Those who make the journey to Syria are already radicalised. They then become caught up in the violence and brutality; they become killers. At the root of this radicalism is a realisation among young Muslims that they have become the victims of a cruel hoax.

Developed countries promised them democracy, prosperity and freedom. But they have not experienced the benefits of these promises; they see that prosperity is only for the few. Humiliation turns to anger and then to revenge and despair. Suicide offers a better alternative. It might have been better not to have been born.

One way to grasp these ideas imaginatively is through film - the most accessible and popular cultural medium. *Britz* is a two part film shown on British television in 2007. It tells the story of a brother and sister, Sohail and Nasima, both born in Bradford, home to a large British Pakistani Muslim community. Sohail is studying law. He feels he owes something to the UK and wants to protect his country from terrorism so he joins MI5. Nasima is studying to be a doctor. She organises a peaceful demonstration to protest against the arrest of one of her friends. She has a black Christian boyfriend, Jude. She knows he will never be accepted by her family. She is sent to Pakistan for an arranged marriage with her cousin, and she refuses him. Alienated from her family, she becomes involved with a Pakistani

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<sup>2</sup> Professor Olivier Roy at the European University Institute in Florence is an expert on Muslim extremism.

terrorist training organisation. Her death is then faked and she returns to the UK with a new identity. She had been made homeless in every sense of the word. So she is perfectly prepared to commit suicide, and turns herself into a human bomb. The film ends as her brother intervenes, but we can only assume that she succeeds in her mission. Their hands join as he attempts to stop her pushing the button. The unresolved ending illustrates the dilemma trapping Muslims in the West.

The film also shows how British Pakistanis have to cope with multiple roles and identities. The parents of Sohail and Nasima are portrayed as traditional, conservative Muslims - they could never accept Jude, Nasima's boy friend, and when he arrives in Pakistan to rescue her, he is badly beaten up by Nasima's family. Sohail is torn almost from the start between loyalty to his family and being a British Muslim who wants to give something back to his country. He works for MI5 to spy on potential terrorists; some he recognises as his friends and neighbours.

Religion plays almost no part in the film - there is a scene at the mosque where Nasima is told by the men that 'this is no place for women.' Religion represents the conservative, traditional face of Islam. Nasima is made to put on her suicide vest with the promise that: 'You will sit at God's right hand.' She however makes the observation: 'That is not why I am doing this.' As the film makes clear it is the continual slights and intimidations by racist police, by her family's refusal to welcome Jude that intensifies her sense of not belonging anywhere and that brings her calmly to prepare for death. The bonds of family are simply not strong enough.

The 'homelessness' I have described is a modern phenomenon - it is not some ancient mediaeval conflict between Islam and Christianity but a result of the assumptions which inform our politics and economics, our whole way of life. Pankaj Mishra's magisterial essay on 'How to understand the Islamic State'<sup>3</sup> quotes the Russian writer Fyodor Dostoyevsky's experience of the Great Exhibition in London which he visited in 1862. The Exhibition was a celebration of the might of the British Empire and the extraordinary legacy of the Industrial revolution. He conveys his misgivings about the exhibition: 'You become aware of a colossal idea. You sense that it would require great and everlasting spiritual denial and fortitude in order not to submit, not to capitulate before the impression, not to bow to what is, and not to deify Baal - that is not to accept the material road as your ideal.'

The intense frustration with the West and the cynicism and discontent this has given birth to is born from awareness that most young people are losers, and that only the privileged have a chance of winning.

It is this awareness which radicalises young Muslims. Many who witness the prosperity of the West through the internet and social media see it as beyond their reach. Some have difficulty in recognising their traditions, because they have been removed from them.

European Muslims from different post colonial backgrounds have to negotiate a difficult and arduous journey from traditional societies to secular

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<sup>3</sup> Pankaj Mishra is an Indian author, writer of literary and political essays. His articles published in the Guardian on 'How to think about the Islamic State' and 'After the Paris attacks; it's time for a new Enlightenment' inform much of my analysis.



modernity - where individual freedom, gender equality, secularisation, and the diminishment of religion are commonplace. Adrift and uprooted many are on a collision course, not made easier to overcome by the growing influence of the Far Right in Europe which wishes to expel them. It is surprising that so many Muslims manage to make sense of the Western world they have been born into and still reject the seductive message of Islamic State and similar groups.

The Islamic State may well fall or at least become considerably weakened. No one knows; but what is certain is that this resentment, frustration, humiliation and rage will find other outlets.

So the question has to be asked - What can be done? Should the West talk to terrorists? How can Judaism, Christianity and Islam contribute? These questions are dense, difficult and there are certainly no short term answers because what my analysis shows is that the West has to recognise how it has betrayed our Muslim neighbours. Our history books airbrush their presence in the West out of the picture; many will read the histories of their adopted countries and not recognise themselves. The West promised to deliver prosperity and freedom for all and it hasn't. The West insists that every society should evolve as it has done, so preventing nations developing in their own way. The belief in irreversible progress under the umbrella of growth is absurd, given climate breakdown, and although we are aware of this we carry on regardless in the vain belief that somehow technology will bail out the world. These are critical issues and given the new phenomenon of global migration, explosion of world population and the vast amounts spent on military hardware, all these threaten an uncertain and dangerous future.

Dostoyevsky said that it will require 'great and everlasting spiritual denial to resist the seductions of materialism'. Spiritual is the key word. Because what I am trying to convey is the specific nature of a change which is positive and realistic and which is truly a struggle of the spirit.

Thus one of the first steps in facing up to the violence in the West by Islamic State groups and others is to acknowledge our historic responsibility for the present situation: our imperialistic past of over-reach. A dose of self-criticism is in order. Meanwhile the best weapon is to sit and talk with each other. The rest of this paper describes how interreligious dialogue and action could make a difference.

But first I will answer the question: 'Who do we think we are?'

This question cannot be ignored because the answers determine how dialogue, particularly with enemies, should take place. One answer is pragmatic - that is what diplomacy does. It eschews big philosophical or theological questions. Diplomats and international officials do what they can. The difficulty with pragmatism is that it easily tips over into cynicism – in the words of an ambassador who told me with a sigh about Bosnia: 'Well at least people are not killing each other.' Cynicism is the best way to rob anyone of hope.

The second answer has to do with the currently fashionable belief that our nature is aggressive and malevolent: human beings are fundamentally monsters. Violence is seen to be a fundamental part of our nature, so public and political life is

characterized by fear. It is as if we live in a dark, airless and dank room. This way of thinking therefore demands strong government. Dialogue, if it has any meaning in this context, is to keep control: all opposition has to be removed at any cost, even depriving democratic societies of their hard-won freedoms.

The third answer has to do with the recognition that there is indeed a dark room; but the curtains can be drawn aside, the windows opened and light can flood in. The darkness is not denied. Archbishop Desmond Tutu describes the light like this: ‘We are made for goodness. We are made for love. We are made for togetherness. We are all made of the beautiful things you and I know. We are made to tell the world there are no outsiders.’

‘We all belong to this family, the human family, God’s family.’ Elsewhere he says: ‘Hope is being able to see there is light despite all of the darkness.’

Human beings are not just a puff of air here for a moment then gone into a cold universe. We are more significant and more interesting than that. Dialogue recognises both the darkness and the light in every human being. No one is beyond the reach of light. No one can be written off. This is a fundamental tenet of belief for those engaged in dialogue.

If this begins to sound sentimental and trite, then pause a moment and look what our thinking is up against. The myth of redemptive violence is one of the major lies of our age. Redemptive violence believes that the survival of the nation is the highest earthly goal. There are no other Gods before the nation, and national security makes nationalism supreme. This belief makes people expendable; whereas the nation is not expendable.

The theory of redemptive violence states that the Islamic State needs to be defeated and obliterated by military means. As Senator Ted Cruz is reported to have said: ‘We will carpet bomb them into oblivion. I don’t know if sand can glow in the dark but we’re going to find out.’ This is the belief that peace can be secured through violence. The problem is that those who think and speak like this mirror the views of those whom they wish to destroy.

Focusing on the theme of this paper, I have been haunted by the words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount: ‘Love your enemies’ (Matthew 5, verse 44), and a little later: ‘God makes the sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and unrighteous.’ (Matthew 5 verse 45).<sup>4</sup>

How is it possible to love your enemy? To take these words seriously means acknowledging the humanity in ‘the other’; to recognise that ‘the other’ is also a child of God. No one is beyond the reach of the love and mercy of God, no one. Sooner or later terrorists will want to talk. Before any negotiation there has to be conversation in which a modicum of trust can grow. Talking does not mean agreeing

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<sup>4</sup> Walter Wink’s theological studies have been an inspiration over many years, particularly on his understanding of Redemptive Violence. I draw on them here.

with the enemy. The talking must begin even if there may well be fighting going on at the same time.

The sooner these conversations can begin in secret far away from the media; the sooner there is a chance of positive results however modest. This work is difficult, risky and dangerous. It requires courage and tenacity. It takes a lot of time, not days or months but years.

Jonathan Powell, chief of staff when Tony Blair was Prime Minister, describes how the British government opened a discreet channel with the Irish in 1972 but negotiations did not take place until twenty years later.<sup>5</sup> But is it at all possible to have conversations with the Islamic State - a death cult in which women and other religions are treated as less than human? With the Irish it was possible to identify clear objectives, but with the Islamic State the objectives are hideous and fanatical. How can conversations of any sort take place?

But at the end of the day there is no alternative. So the first step in 'loving your enemies' is to try and bring some humanity to the situation. The sooner such conversations begin the better. But as I said earlier there is also the need for us to acknowledge our part in creating the situation.

So what can dialogue and peace-building offer? I write from a European perspective.

There are some important intellectual tasks to be undertaken. One is a study of how the Abrahamic religions deal with secular modernity; how to assist those who have to make that arduous journey. This study needs to be scholarly but it should also be accessible. Another is to see how our different religious traditions interpret their scriptures. This is important because both Christianity and Islam use their scriptures in different ways. Moreover in terms of interfaith dialogue the study of scriptures helps to highlight what our religious traditions have in common as well as what divides them. This writing should be scholarly but also accessible. Given the sophistication of many terrorist groups in their use of the internet and social media, film and video will also help to make ideas and concepts accessible.

In the European context, there needs to be a common space where religion can take part. The Enlightenment enthroned reason, free of religious authority, reducing it to personal beliefs. The European Union and its powerful secretariat the European Commission only recognize religion in this way. So when The Soul of Europe tried to engage the interest of the EU Parliament in the project to reconstruct the Ferhadija Mosque in Banja Luka as a commitment to assist in the reconstruction of the community decimated by the ethnic cleansing during the Bosnian War, there was no interest. The Ferhadija has now been reconstructed as it was - a mosque designed by Sinan - marking a unique partnership between the Islamic community of Bosnia and the Soul of Europe - a Christian organisation. The mosque is now in

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<sup>5</sup> Jonathan Powell is the Founder of an NGO - Inter Mediate. His 'Talking to Terrorists - how to end armed conflicts' is essential reading for peace-builders.

use for prayers and will be formally opened in May 2016. This provides a significant example of the process of dialogue we are talking about here. In spite of danger, apathy, discouragement and despair, it is possible.

This formal public indifference to religion has meant that many international officials, diplomats and bureaucrats are illiterate about religion, not least in failing to understand that as far as the Balkans are concerned religion is as much about identity as it is about belief and practice.

Therefore in the European Union there has to be a common space where different religions can be heard and can contribute to debates about Europe and its future.<sup>6</sup> There is much that religion can contribute. For example secularism cannot easily explain evil, a matter which I have skirted around in this paper. Secularism has difficulties in finding a language to talk about evil. But theology has much to say about evil and can help our understanding of it.

We should also celebrate those communities where inter-religious dialogue for the good of the community has taken root. While the media reinforces the idea that the far right have the last word there are any number of places where relations between the religious communities together have enriched the community. Europe and beyond needs to know about these initiatives, many of them established in their communities over many years.<sup>7</sup>

Finally, it is time for global initiatives to help those engaged in the sort of peace-building/dialogue activities I have outlined. When the Soul of Europe was founded in 2000 I knew little about peace-building so I set about finding out all I could. I discovered quickly there is a great deal of thinking, experience and action on these matters: committed academics, practitioners of every sort who are called to work on alternatives for a more just and peaceful world. It is time to set up peace-building task forces in those regions where there is conflict, ongoing or frozen, drawing on this experience. Those taking part in these initiatives should be ready to open the lines of communication I outline above with 'the enemy' well before negotiations officially begin. All religions and none should be invited to participate. How these task forces are formed, and who will provide the resources for them are questions which need to be addressed.

When I started learning about Inter-religious dialogue I sometimes felt impatience with endless verbiage and exhortation. But now as I have tried to show, we have an enormous agenda before us. We must do it. Let us make it happen. Amen.

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<sup>6</sup> Rowan Williams has written much about 'Faith in the Public Square' and informs my thinking about this part of my paper, but space did not allow more detailed argument.

<sup>7</sup> I have come across many stories of inspiring interreligious initiatives over the years - one recently from the Ruhr in Germany in the town of Marl where there have been educational, artistic and political community projects involving all the religions for over fifteen years there under the guidance of Pastor Hartmut Dreier. How can we get these and other initiative better known so everyone can learn from them and be inspired by them?

*Edina Vejo*<sup>1</sup>

## **The Value of Tolerance as a Contribution to the Prevention of Cultural Alienation**

### **Abstract**

The spirit of tolerance as a fundamental backbone of human relations is (not) the pillar of social life in Bosnia, ‘the land of the east exposed towards the west, and the west turned towards the east’. Since an individual development occurs through interaction with the environment, preventive interventions need to focus on creating different opportunities for young people to experience various interactions that promote positive developmental outcomes (Basic, 2009). The purpose of the current study is accepting tolerance as one of the positive developmental outcomes of the multicultural lifestyle of the youth. Hence, the aim of this study is to find out whether there is tolerance among the youth in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and what values lie behind this concept. A sample of 168 male and female students aged seventeen participated in the study. The students completed a questionnaire on (non) tolerance which consisted of two parts. Three expert interviews with Bosnian intellectuals have been conducted within the approach for further interpretation of the research questions. The results show that there is a statistically significant difference in the chosen answers expressing intolerant attitudes. The differences are due to several variables, such as the attending high school, the environment and mother’s level of education. The explanations of the (in) tolerance provided by the expert interviews show a necessity for transposition, which is quite dominant in the pedagogy of applicable normative discourse. The conclusion articulates the development of a universal preventive program for the youth encompassing multiple social domains such as family, school, and community.

### **Background and Rationale**

Tolerance as a call for cooperation, respect, understanding and interactive life with the differences gets its international framework on 16<sup>th</sup> November, the International tolerance day. Tolerance means respect, acceptance and acknowledgement of the rich diversity of our cultures, expressions and ways of being human. It is fostered by knowledge, openness, communication and freedom of thought, conscience and belief. Tolerance is harmony in difference. It is not only a moral duty; it is also a political and legal requirement. Being tolerant does not mean tolerating social injustice or rejecting and weakening other people’s beliefs. The practice of tolerance does not mean toleration of social injustice or the abandonment or weakening of one’s convictions. It means that one is free to adhere to one’s own convictions and accepts that others adhere to theirs (UNESCO, 1995). The Bosnian society, entwined in diversities, is becoming an inevitable topic of discussions on tolerance.

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After the war, numerous non-governmental and governmental organizations have promoted, organized and carried out projects and workshops to promote tolerance among the young people from different ethnic groups (“Tolerance among the youth”,<sup>2</sup> “The Culture and Tolerance Park”,<sup>3</sup> “Building bridges”,<sup>4</sup> “TNT FEST – We Need Tolerance”,<sup>5</sup> “Climbing for Tolerance”<sup>6</sup>). The projects were based on the national disruptions evident at all levels – from the “dominant ethnic entities” to “ethnic hierarchical institutions” and even “segregated schools” (*Two schools under one roof*). This proves that the environment in which young people in Bosnia grow up is negative and inevitably results in prejudice, discrimination, and even hatred and aggression. The goal of prevention is “to develop intellectual, personal and social competence in children and young people” (Basic, 2009: 65-66). Taking the previously mentioned ethnic segregation into account, it can be stated that tolerance among the youth of different ethnicities in Bosnia should be one of the crucial social competencies. Thus, the aim of this study is to determine whether there is tolerance among the youth in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and what values lay behind this concept

The study aims at answering the following research questions: Do the young people show respect for their own ethnicity and culture, and do they live in their closed system? Is there a tendency to reject others and everything else that is different from their own culture? What is the young people’s view on the nature of tolerance in the Bosnian society? Are there differences in the (in)tolerant attitudes of the young people in relation to the attending high school, the environment they live in (mononational, a single dominant ethnicity in combination with others and multinational) and the parents’ education?

The current study, and tolerance as a phenomenon, is based on the preventive concept of developmental advantage. The reason for this lies in the fact that this concept defines social competence (Water & Sroufe, cited in Basic, Feric, Kranzelic, 2001) as the ability to create and orchestrate flexible, adaptable reactions to the requests, and creating and taking advantage of the opportunities in the environment. Social competence includes personal skills, such as planning, decision making, interpersonal competence, cultural competence, the ability to withstand negativities and the ability to resolve a conflict in a peaceful way. A child develops these skills to cope with decision making or challenges and chances it comes across in life. If the researchers’ belief in the need to invest in developmental outcomes and positive development of children and young people resulted in the concepts of prevention, we believe that further investment in developing tolerance for diversities is crucial since it shows cultural competence. Thus, the phenomenon of tolerance is

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<sup>2</sup><http://www.omladina-bih.net/tolerancija.htm>.30 June 2012.

<sup>3</sup>[http://www.cem.ba/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=137:kulturoloki-park-tolerancije&catid=25:the-project&Itemid=54](http://www.cem.ba/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=137:kulturoloki-park-tolerancije&catid=25:the-project&Itemid=54). 30 June 2012.

<sup>4</sup>[http://www.oscebih.org/documents/osce\\_bih\\_doc\\_2010122614413843bos.pdf](http://www.oscebih.org/documents/osce_bih_doc_2010122614413843bos.pdf). 30 June 2012.

<sup>5</sup>[http://www.tolerancija.ba/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=2&Itemid=330](http://www.tolerancija.ba/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2&Itemid=330) June 2012.

<sup>6</sup><http://www.banjaluka.com/vijesti/drustvo/2012/08/21/zblizavanje-uz-ekstremno-penjanje/>.30 June 2012.

situated within the advantages of a young man's internal development. These advantages are often seen as cultural competence including knowledge of, respect for and ability to effectively interact with people from different ethnic, racial and cultural backgrounds. The advantages also include recognizing and preventing injustice done upon others, and fighting for social justice (Kostelnick, 2002, as cited in Hand and Kemple, 2006).

The previously mentioned projects and programs were named after tolerance and other synonyms of preventive endeavours that were taken into account when creating conditions for prosocial behaviour of the young. These projects are another reason why cultural competence as a developmental advantage served as a basis for this study. Tolerance as one of the preventive imperatives is reflected through the possibility for prosocial interaction and working with the differences as well as conscious thinking about the inevitable existence of otherness around us, beside us and within us. The experiments of the non-profit organization justCommunity, Inc.<sup>7</sup> emphasize the importance of tolerance and cultural awareness among other things, and even list some of the programs that support the outlined goals. Some of the resources mentioned in the experiments are: Teaching Tolerance<sup>8</sup>, which provides free educational materials to teachers and other school practitioners, and is dedicated to reducing prejudice, improving intergroup relationships and supporting equitable school experiences, and Pennsylvania Inter-Agency Task Force on Civil Tension<sup>9</sup> – a group of governmental and private agencies working together on preventing and responding to bias-related incidents.

## **Methodology**

### **Participants and procedures of collecting and analyzing data, hypothetical framework of the study**

Two hundred students from three secondary schools in Zenica and Travnik participated in this study. Thirty-two questionnaires were not included in the analysis because some of the items in the questionnaires were left unanswered, or the answers could not be deciphered and so on. Thus, a total of 168 students aged seventeen participated in the study – 64,9% girls and 35,1% boys. The study was conducted bearing in mind the variable of the attending high school – hence 35,1% of the subjects attend Second Grammar School, 29,8% attend the Elci Ibrahim-pasina medresa (eng. Islamic high school) and 35,1% attend Catholic School Centre 'St. Paul'. The students have completed the questionnaire on (non)tolerance that consists of two parts. The first part contains 28 items adapted from the research conducted by Gajic. The items refer to the second factor of the research that

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<sup>7</sup><http://www.justcommunity.com/about/> 6<sup>th</sup> February 2012. justCommunity is a non-profit organization based in Quakertown, Pennsylvania. Its mission is to provide consultation, education and training services in the areas of youth development, community mobilization, substance abuse prevention etc. justCommunity is the coordinating agency for the Upper Bucks Healthy Communities/Healthy Youth Coalition committed to advancing the presence of the 40 developmental assets in all children.

<sup>8</sup>Interesting educational and practical materials for promoting tolerance in schools can be found on this website: <http://www.tolerance.org/> 6<sup>th</sup> February 2013.

<sup>9</sup><http://www.stopbias.org/> 6<sup>th</sup> February 2013.

emphasizes the differences between people and the superiority of one nation over others. In addition to this, it also accentuates whether there is a closed system, or intolerance and rejection of all things that are different than our own culture (Gajic, 2005). Gajic's research showed that the appreciation of one's own culture does not come first, but rather the rejection of others. According to the research, the most common problems were religious intolerance and rejection of everything different. Hence, the mentioned research provides the hypothetical background for our study. In other words, our study will show whether the subjects will show the same closed system and appreciation of one's own culture while rejecting others.

The second part of the research aimed at examining the students' points of view regarding the nature of tolerance in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In this part, the students were asked to put the following terms in order: balance, relativity, tolerance, hatred, denial, alienation, indifference. The assumption in the second hypothetical framework was that the perceived nature of tolerance would vary from tolerance, alienation and hatred to balance as the most distant term for tolerance in Bosnian society. The second framework was in accordance with the first framework and the mentioned ethnic bias in Bosnian society.

The analysis of the data collected from the questionnaires included descriptive statistics presented as a part-whole relationship (percentages were determined for some variables) and the results of ANOVA to gain insights into the existing differences within the variables.

It can be concluded that the first quantitative part of the research aimed at gaining insights into the existence of (in)tolerance, or the attitudes of the young people towards their own and other different cultures. In order not to merely focus on some insights into the phenomenon, we decided to consider the deeper ideas and thoughts about tolerance. That would enable us to get a better understanding of tolerance, its background and values as well as the phenomenon of tolerance within the pragmatic and theoretical thinking in Bosnian Society. For the purposes of triangulation, several methodological approaches were used within which three expert interviews with Bosnian academics and intellectuals have been conducted. The purpose of such a methodological design was to gain different, yet complementary data for the research in order to get a better understanding of the problem at hand (Morse, 1991 cited in Jenkins and Carrol, 2001). Mixed methods research involves different combinations of qualitative or quantitative research either at the data collection or at the analysis levels (Dörnyei, 2005). Gläser and Laudel (2006: 11) define expert interviews as the reconstruction of situations or processes in an effort to find scientific explanations. The first expert interview was with a full (ordinary) professor of sociological science,<sup>10</sup> the second was with an assistant professor (docent) in pedagogical sciences<sup>11</sup> and the third with the Doctor of Theology.<sup>12</sup> All the interviews have been transcribed, and the text in the interview

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<sup>10</sup>Labeled EI 1 in the transcript.

<sup>11</sup>Labeled EI 2 in the transcript.

<sup>12</sup>Labeled EI 3 in the transcript.



was categorized in five content areas: the rooted understanding of tolerance, considering tolerance within the context of liberal ideas and the traditional religious beliefs, tradition as the underlying reason for the bias in Bosnia, the relationship between religion and modern life and different approaches to achieving tolerance. The interviews were read several times to get the idea of a whole. Then, the text was divided into meaningful units which were then codified. Different codes were compared in terms of similarities and differences and sorted into three categories which constitute a manifest content: nature and roots of tolerance, opposing bias and sources of intolerance and religion-modern life-tolerance.

### **The Results**

The first part of data analysis in the mixed methods design involves the presentation of the results gained from the (In)Tolerance Questionnaire which aimed at exploring the (in)tolerant attitudes of the students. Special attention was drawn to the variables which could be the source of (in)tolerant attitudes. In addition to descriptions (parameters) of the students' (in)tolerant attitudes, the research also included exploring the differences between the (in)tolerant attitudes present in three different secondary schools - Second Grammar School, Elci Ibrahim-pasina medresa (eng.Islamic high school) Catholic School Centre 'St. Paul'. Furthermore, the differences in the attitudes towards the environment the students live in (mononational, a single dominant ethnicity in combination with others and multinational) and the parents' education were explored. The assumption within the third hypothetical framework was that there would not be any statistically significant differences between the variables.

The second part of the analysis encompassed the qualitative part of the research which involved the analysis of the structured expert interviews. Furthermore, it included the attempts to explain the sources of the intolerant attitudes and provide insights into the underlying values of the concept and phenomenon of tolerance.

### **The results of the questionnaire**

The descriptive parameters of the questionnaire, without its modified part, focus on the differences between the people and the perceptions of superiority of one's own nationality over others. For example, 31.0% strongly agree and 11.9% agree with the statement "*When I claim that my nationality is superior to others, I show appreciation for my own nationality.*" On the other hand, 25.6% strongly disagree and 10.7% disagree with this statement. Similar even distributions of answers were found at other questionnaire items as well, such as "*I cannot feel as close to people of other nationalities as I am to people of my own nationality,*" "*I don't think that a marriage between people from different nationalities/religions is a good thing,*" "*The sense of belonging to my nation is what defines me best as a person,*" "*I can only see my future with people of the same nationality as my own,*" "*Nationality is as important as family.*" There is slight positive agreement with statements according to which identifying with people of the same nationality is a result of a

common sense of success (43.5% strongly agree with this statement, whereas 20.2% agree with it). Furthermore, there is positive agreement with statements about the importance of a person’s own ethnic identity (31.0% strongly agree and 15.5% agree), ethnicity as an important segment in life (42.9% strongly agree and 18.5% agree) and the statement “*Glorifying one’s own nationality is absolutely normal*” (32.7% strongly agree and 23.2% agree with this statement). The descriptive parameters of the items show a slight devotion to one’s own nationality and personal ethnic identity. On the other hand, there is slight openness towards the others which is manifested in terms of respect for other people’s religious beliefs. Thus, the assumption of the first hypothetical framework that the subjects live in closed systems has not been confirmed because the final evaluation shows that the rejection of others and living in closed systems are in arithmetic mean (see Table 1), thus supporting the previously mentioned variables (M=32.54).

*Table 1: The mean of the intolerance variable*

	M	Maximum	Minimum	Standard Deviation
Intolerance and rejection of everything different from one’s own nationality	32.54	56.00	12.00	11.14

*Table 2: The nature of tolerance in Bosnia according to students’ attitudes*

Order	Balance		Relativity		Tolerance		Hatred		Denial		Alienation		Indifference	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
1.00	51	30.4	25	14.9	20	11.9	33	19.6	5	3.0	10	6.0	25	14.9
2.00	29	17.3	33	19.6	36	21.4	13	7.7	16	9.5	10	6.0	32	19.0
3.00	23	13.7	31	18.5	34	20.2	8	4.8	19	11.3	19	11.3	33	19.6
4.00	7	4.2	26	15.5	35	20.8	8	4.8	39	23.2	32	19.0	22	13.1
5.00	12	7.1	21	12.5	21	12.5	13	7.7	40	23.8	40	23.8	20	11.9
6.00	15	8.9	24	14.3	12	7.1	15	8.9	39	23.2	41	24.4	21	12.5
7.00	31	18.5	8	4.8	10	6.0	78	46.4	10	6.0	16	9.5	15	8.9
Total	168	100.0	168	100.0	168	100.0	168	100.0	168	100.0	168	100.0	168	100.0

The traditional definitions state that tolerance is toleration and that different people have the right to live in peace even if their points of views and ideas are not accepted by others. Lately, tolerance is defined as acceptance –acceptance and acknowledgement of the rights of others that result in the ultimate virtue of appreciation of diversities (Von Bergen and Bressler, n.d.). This research has examined the attitudes of students towards the nature of tolerance in Bosnia. Table 2 presents an overview of all the terms believed to describe the nature of tolerance by the students in Bosnian secondary schools. In the table, number 1 refers to the notion closest to tolerance, while number 7 refers to the notion that is the furthest from tolerance in meaning. The analysis presents the frequency of pupils’ answers as well as their percentile values. The order was established according to the greatest percentage/frequency of answers within a rank. The results show that the majority of

students put balance first (30.4%), while 46.4% believe hatred is the least important factor for the tolerance in Bosnia. Furthermore, the majority of students believe that toleration/tolerance comes after balance (21.4%), and are also in the third place, according to the beliefs of 20.2% of students. Denial is in the fourth place (23.2%), and it shares the fifth place (23.8%) with alienation (23.8%) that is also in the sixth place (24.4%). Thus, it can be concluded that the young people that participated in the research believe that the nature of tolerance in Bosnia lies in balance and toleration, while it is negatively affected by hatred and alienation. This partly confirms the assumption in our second hypothetical framework according to which the nature of tolerance is reflected in toleration, alienation, hatred and balance.

Table 3: The results of ANOVA on the differences between secondary schools and the intolerant attitudes

Intolerance and rejection of otherness. LSD				
(I) Name of secondary school	(J) Name of secondary school	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
Second Grammar School	Elci Ibrahim-pasina medresa Travnik (eng. Islamic high school)	-8.42678*	1.77297	.000
	Catholic School Centre 'St. Paul'	7.30508*	1.69820	.000
Elci Ibrahim-pasina medresa Travnik (eng. Islamic high school)	Second Grammar School	8.42678*	1.77297	.000
	Catholic School Centre 'St. Paul'	15.73186*	1.77297	.000
Catholic School Centre 'St. Paul'	Second Grammar School	-7.30508*	1.69820	.000
	Elci Ibrahim-pasina medresa Travnik (eng. Islamic high school)	-15.73186*	1.77297	.000

\*. Significance level of 0.05

The results of the ANOVA and the post hoc analysis show that there are statistically significant differences ( $p = 0.000$ ) between the students attending three different secondary schools in terms of the expressed intolerance toward other ethnic groups. Thus, the students attending Elci Ibrahim-pasina medresa Travnik (eng. Islamic high school) show more intolerance towards others than the students attending Catholic School Centre 'St. Paul' or Second Grammar School. On the other hand, the students at Catholic School Centre 'St. Paul' show slightly more tolerant attitudes toward other ethnicities than the students at Second Grammar School (Table 3).

Table 4: The results of the ANOVA indicating the differences between the environment the students live in and the expressed level of intolerance

Intolerance and rejection of otherness LSD				
(I) The environment you live in is:	(J) The environment you live in is:	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
mononational (there is only one nationality)	dominant (my nationality is dominant, but there are people from other national backgrounds)	3.57854	2.20854	.107
	Multinational (there are people from different cultural backgrounds)	12.84755*	2.14818	.000
dominant (my nationality is dominant, but there are people from other national backgrounds)	mononational (there is only one nationality)	-3.57854	2.20854	.107
	Multinational (there are people from different cultural backgrounds)	9.26901*	1.67692	.000
Multinational (there are people from different cultural backgrounds)	mononational (there is only one nationality)	-12.84755*	2.14818	.000
	dominant (my nationality is dominant, but there are people from other national backgrounds)	-9.26901*	1.67692	.000
*. Significance level of 0.05				

In order to broaden the framework and provide the insights in the environment the young people live in, the arithmetic mean was derived. According to the arithmetic mean, the greatest intolerance was expressed by students living in mononational environments (M = 39.6897; SD = 9.14995). Slightly less intolerant are the students living in an environment where their nationality is more dominant than the others (M = 36.1111; SD = 9.18468). Finally, the students living in multinational environment showed the least intolerance (M = 26.8421; SD = 10.58811).

Further analysis (table 4) shows that the results have the p-value of 0.000. The comparison of the answers shows that the students living in mononational environments and environments with one dominant ethnicity express less tolerance toward other ethnicities than students who come from a multinational environment. However, there are no statistically significant differences between the intolerant attitudes of students who live in mononational or environments with a dominant nationality (p=0.107).

Students whose mothers have or have not completed primary education have showed less tolerance than the students whose mothers have completed higher education. Further analysis of the results (table 5) shows that there are statistically significant differences between the mentioned variables. Hence, students whose mothers have not completed primary education show lower levels of tolerance toward others than the students whose mothers have completed secondary school (p

= 0.003) and faculty or more (p = 0.002). Pupils whose mothers have completed primary school show less tolerance towards others than pupils whose mothers have completed secondary school at the level of 0.000, and at the level of 0.001 in comparison to the students whose mothers have completed faculty, or have earned a higher degree. The analysis of the influence of father’s education on the intolerant attitudes is particularly interesting. The arithmetic mean shows that father’s education has a slight influence on the intolerant attitudes of the students. Thus, there are statistically significant differences in the expressed intolerant attitudes of the students with regard to their father’s education (p = 0.736; p = 0.568; p = 0.262; p = 0.361; p = 0.187).

Table 5: The results of the ANOVA indicating the influence of mother’s education on the intolerant attitudes of the students

Intolerance and rejection of otherness				
LSD				
(I) Your mother’s education	(J) Your mother’s education	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
Hasn’t completed primary school	Secondary school	10.23814*	3.33643	.003
	Faculty degree and higher	12.72727*	4.00240	.002
Primary school	Secondary school	7.91627*	2.03589	.000
	Faculty degree and higher	10.40541*	3.00537	.001

### The results of the expert interviews

#### The nature and the roots of tolerance

The theoretical framework of tolerance is usually defined by the philosophical and political issues (Raz, 1986; Mendus, 1988; Gutmann, 1994; Pleckaitis, 1995 in Chreptaviciene and Urboniene, 2005) and by the sociological and educational discourse (Morrow and Torres, 1995; McLaughlin, 1997 in Chreptaviciene and Urboniene, 2005). This gives rise to the question if tolerance as a basic quality of the modern society finds its roots in the traditional religious beliefs or it emerged as a “worldly political solution that resulted from the context of European religious conflicts in the 16<sup>th</sup> century in order to form the norms of the secular social systems and western society by the use of liberalism, enlightenment and the modern democracy of the 20<sup>th</sup> century” (Sarcevic, 2003: 434-435).

*“John Locke, the modern British philosopher, initiated the idea of the political articulation of the term ‘tolerance’ in his book ‘A Letter concerning*

*Toleration” (Epistola de Tolerantia) published at the end of 17<sup>th</sup> century. The idea of the political concept of tolerance is explicitly or latently based upon two facts of great importance. First, Locke’s Epistola de Tolerantia was completed during Locke’s political exile, and it resulted from a fear of possible political and public safety changes that would occur if England fell under the rule of Vatican. Secondly, Locke’s ideas were clear – the state looks after the external aspects of a man’s life, while the ‘internal’ aspects of a man’s life (the soul and the spirit) are governed by religion. Therefore, it is important that all the religions present in a country (and all moral values) are loyal to the authorities. The implementation of liberal political concept of tolerance rests on two premises: that the plurality of religions inevitably leads to violence, and that the religious beliefs of individuals have to be separated from the civil activism (state). This approach excludes the traditional principles of the religious pluralities (Kur’an, 30:22) and dialogue as an imperative (Kur’an, 3:64). The quintessential differences between the concept of inter-religious relationships (conceived in the post-enlightenment years) and the traditional understanding of differences as realizations of God’s will have been further deepened in the period of neoliberalism and global capitalism. The traditional beliefs do not acknowledge the principle of separating the “internal” from the “external” factors, even if it is merely a theory. Religion literally insists on the integrity of human existence – it includes everything from the internal factors (religiousness) to their external manifestations that guide human behavior and actions in the society. Nowadays, there have been numerous examples of obvious hostility between people of different religions in the economically developed societies, namely in Western Europe and the USA. This gave way to the most practical system of well-arranged human relations – a democratic social system that is based on a form of government in which the supreme power is vested in the people, or the majority. The increased social dynamics lead to the idea of liberal democracy that would protect minority interests from majorities in representative democratic bodies. Under these circumstances, the practical meaning of tolerance was conceived, and it shifted from the initial ‘openness’ toward others to literal ‘tolerance of’ or ‘putting up with’ others. This is the very reason why many theologians and religious officials accept, and sometimes even equalize the liberal concept of tolerance with the traditional principles of the religious pluralities and dialogue as an imperative. The core difference between these two concepts has become quite apparent in the period between the late seventies and now. The current principle of neoliberal democracy where elite groups have power over the broader (‘global’) community shows the significantly different concept of ‘tolerance’. The neoliberal concept of tolerance implies the real possibility of realizing the theoretical right to protect the interests of the weakest in the market on one hand, and the practice of providing such protection for the economically stronger groups with the power to impose ideas and values on the weaker groups on the other. Therefore, it is crucial to distinguish between the principle of tolerance as it is perceived by the neoliberalism and the traditional principle of the religious pluralities and dialogue as an imperative in the analysis” EI 3 (R20-65).*

*“Some social indicators, such as the lack of a high-quality everyday interaction, show a complete crisis and tolerance, and above all acceptance of differences in this fragmented world of postmodern system. Nowadays, the illusion of the central crisis is mostly seen as a result of the violent functional education and social and political pressures expressed in a form of violent behavior of the members of community. The very character of the direct and obtuse violence that became meaningful leads to the disappearance of authenticity of all the ideas we know – whether they are “Right”, “Left” or “Political Middle”, and as such labeled liberal or traditional. The meaning should be sought in non-violent ideas that oppose the violent ways of promoting tolerance – ideas that can be found only in people who favor authenticity, honesty and Truth. We will find the authentic roots of tolerance where we find the Truth” EI 2 (R13-23).*

### **The Conflicting Divisions and Sources of Intolerance**

The conflicting divisions that are symbols of intolerance are nothing strange in Bosnian society, where many incidents related to ethnic segregation have occurred even after the war. Thus, “between 1 January and 18 May 2011, EUPM reported a total of 32 ethnically or religiously motivated security incidents, 11 of which were registered as violent inter ethnic incidents; the remainder were actions targeting cemeteries or religious/ethnic facilities or symbols. The monthly average of 7.2 inter-ethnic incidents in 2011 is a slight increase compared to 2010 (5.0), but a reduction compared to 2009 (12.5) (Nansen dialogue center Sarajevo, Safeworld, 2012).

*“Taking into account that tradition clearly outlines a person’s authentic identity, it only makes sense to conclude that it is not tradition that causes the conflict between people. What causes misunderstanding and hostility is a non-authentic, egotistic representation of tradition (traditia interpretativa)” EI 3 (R70-73).*

*“... the conflicting divisions result from non-authentic, ideologized idea of tolerance that was reduced to monopolization, privatization or an effort to deify an ethnicity, a nation and even religion. Unfortunately, it is evident that reducing the universal properties and positive effect of tradition to private possessions is a dominant behavior pattern in our everyday lives. Such an interpretation of a boundary confined tradition is incorporated in the collective violent education and ideas about acceptable social and political behavior. This attitude, however, is not rooted in tradition – I am sure” EI2 (R25-31).*

### **Religion-Modernity-Tolerance**

Appleby (1996, in Rasul, 2009) states that religion “is a source not only of intolerance, human rights violations and extremist violence, but also of nonviolent conflict transformation, the defense of human rights, integrity in government and reconciliation and stability in divided societies”.

*“It is important to emphasize that the principle of coexistence and theory of tolerance are one and the same thing, especially in Bosnia. Taking into account the*

*larger urban centers and rural areas, as well as numerous oral and written records, the principle of coexistence was present in Bosnia before the war. This means that not only were all religious traditions (different ceremonies, festivities etc.) acknowledged and respected, but absence of a deeper understanding of such traditions in terms of theoretical explanation was evident. After the war and the aggression, different interreligious projects and theories of tolerance have been used to try to compensate for the faulty principle of coexistence. The theories of tolerance do not emphasize the honest respect of other traditions as much as the need to theoretically explain other religions (traditio explicative). Simply put, an individual is not expected to honestly respect other people's religion, but rather to have a broad theoretical background on their religion itself" EI3 (R104-122)*

*We have all witnessed the coexistence, mutually opposing tendencies to promote tolerance (as a basic principle of a democratic society) and the reinforcement of the political options that work hard on limiting human rights of any kind. Such conflicting views push the modern man into a closed circle, a machinery of a violent learning about accepting the different which inevitably leads to more violence. A different point of view takes us back to the values system that is protected by a set of norms. Learning about the system of values means learning about norms that defend the real values from opposing, invalid and quasi-values. Protecting the real values from the opposing values is often aggressive in nature (protecting the value of life, possessions and so on implies sanctions for imperiling such values). In order to tolerate something different, we have to make sure that it does not threaten our system of values (in terms of violence). This will inevitably lead to learning how to tolerate in accordance with the dominant system of values. The dominant system of values is designed by whoever holds social, political, economic, military and educational superiority. Achieving dominant status is hard if some violent strategies are not used. Being dominant means having an exclusive right to make decisions on what can be tolerated and in what way. Therefore, different is possible only if it is the new dominant. An example of coexisting irreconcilable tendencies can also be found in proclaiming the right for gay and lesbian couples which are becoming more and more violent. The reason for this lies in the fact that sexual preferences are no longer seen as a right in teaching tolerance, but are aggressively promoted instead, thus setting up violent attitudes for generations to come. The dominant position is a logical apory (puzzlement) of Tolerance. The odds are that people, the unfinished projects they are, will wait for someone different to take the dominant position using nonviolence and tolerance" EI 2 (R50-71).*

*"Bosnia and Herzegovina suffers from a syndrome of returning to early medieval religiousness, just like many post socialist countries. This often has nothing to do with the traditional religious beliefs, but rather with political clericalism or clerical politics. Hence, it can be said that religions do not have the characteristics of modernity, but rather some sort of tradition, or better yet opinion that operates on exclusion as its own modus vivendi" EI1 (R26-32).*



## **Conclusion**

The present study was governed by the evident divisions in Bosnian society, and it aimed at explaining the aspects of tolerance, its existence among the young people and the attitudes towards the nature of tolerance. The results show that the young people show appreciation of their own culture and ethnic identity, but are also somewhat accepting of the others, especially in terms of respecting other people's religions. These findings are alarming, but the attitudes towards otherness are significantly more intolerant among students who attend mononational school than students who go to multinational schools. Furthermore, young people living in mononational environment showed statistically significant intolerant attitudes, which proves that tolerance is conditioned by interaction, acknowledgement and respect of others.

The analysis of the quantitative part of the research showed that the perceived idea of tolerance in Bosnian society is related to the traditional definition of tolerance ad balance and toleration. The results show the need to invest in the positive development of the youth that will enable interaction with other ethnicities who are different through active cooperation and coexistence. Thus, the young people in Bosnia would use that experience to strengthen their values. Intolerant attitudes are evident in the environment that lacks interaction with other ethnicities.

The qualitative part of the research presents the existing ideas about the concept of tolerance. The results of the analysis show the need to overcome the pedagogy of applicable normative discourse and makes way for the critical transformative discourse. Thus, the need to extract the construct of tolerance from the autistic confinement set by liberal democracy becomes apparent. Furthermore, there is a need for reaffirmation of the traditional principles of the religious pluralities and dialogue as an imperative. There is a deep convergence of these needs and epistemological findings in the modern science, such as the ones outlined in Bohr's complementary principle according to which two conflicting terms are seen as complementary rather than exclusive. In the age of seeking authentic pedagogical concept, we emphasize the importance of creating a plan for acquiring cultural competence based on truthful, honest and, most importantly, positive interactions with people coming from different cultural backgrounds.

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# PROTECTING YOUTH FROM INTELLECTUAL AND MORAL VIOLATION AND CULTURAL ALIENATION



*Osman Bakar*<sup>1</sup>

## **Spiritual and Intellectual Empowerment of Contemporary Youth: Defining Strategies and Methods**

### **Introduction: The Significance of Youth Life to Societal Health**

In the domain of human life and thought we usually assume that if and whenever we wish to make a good attempt to empower some aspect of it we are already familiar with the prerequisites of this empowerment and the main issues it raises that need our attention. This statement is especially true of youth life, by which I mean life of the young generation, which is not only an integral part of societal life as a whole but also a unique determinant of its health. A society invests heavily in youth life for the sake of a better future not only for them as a distinct social group but rather for all its age groups. The common wisdom in all societies is that youths of today will be the elder leaders of tomorrow. Traditionally, investment in youth life and thought relies mainly on the official educational system as run by the state for its future returns. The assumption underlying this traditional social investment is the strong faith that the official educational system would be able to effectively deliver good returns for a society's future wellbeing, both tangible and intangible, notwithstanding the various kinds of challenges that appear before them every now and then. Rather unfortunately, in many contemporary societies, Muslim and non-Muslim alike, this faith has been shattered.

### **Decline of Quality of Spiritual Education in Contemporary Society: An Institutional Perspective**

Modern work culture that at first only encouraged but then later compelled practically every adult in the family to find a job usually in the name of family security has deprived society of its most reliable educational institution, namely home education in a real family environment. In many parts of our contemporary world the traditional home and the traditional family environment have been disfigured. In modern society we have reached a critical point in our socio-economic development where the so-called formal education in the form of state-run schools, colleges and universities as well as their private counterparts has assumed the function of being the sole provider of knowledge, skills, and instructions for both personal and societal developments rather than of being continuously a complement to home education, albeit a major complement, as it should have been. This development is not good to society, and there is ample evidence gathered during the last several decades to show that its general impact on the world of education has been destructive, especially when seen from the perspectives of the traditional Islamic goals of education.

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Philosophically speaking, formal education, whether in public or private educational institutions, is not meant to replace or take over the traditional role of the home or family as one of the providers of education in the production of the complete human person no matter how indispensable formal education is to the progress of society. Informal home education too is indispensable to society. A society dispenses with it, willingly or unwillingly, only at its own peril! Indeed, from the institutional perspective, in order to produce the good human person as well as the good citizen, the traditional triad – family, school, and community – is needed to play their complementary roles in education. It is the collective task of religious, intellectual, and political leaders to ensure that these three traditional educational institutions with their respective distinctive environments will play their educational roles in the best complementary manner.

However, knowing the state of affairs the world is now in, this is easier said than done. Challenges abound to attempts at restoration of the traditional triad. Each of the triad is facing its own challenges and problems that are increasing by the day. Problems affecting these three institutions have become so acute that some social thinkers are of the opinion that it is justifiable to speak of them as being in a state of crisis. Regardless of whether or not one agrees that a real crisis point has been reached in the evolution of our modern education system it is an undeniable fact that the health of our family, school and community institutions is fast deteriorating. Our society is also becoming less secure by the day not only in terms of jobs and financial standing but even in terms of our own physical security. As a result, more and more people begin to have doubts about the soundness and ability of our formal education system to guarantee a secure future for today's young generation despite the huge investments in the education sector not only in monetary terms but also in terms of human resources.

The resulting problem and its consequences for education may be stated as follows. As the great majority of parents, including young mothers find themselves economically pressured to leave their homes for daily work to earn income for the family society faces the specter of homes without real homemakers. What this means is that family-based home education is no longer a significant part of social reality. There is now a widespread realization in societies transformed by modernization that the traditional family-based home education has been marginalized to the periphery of society if not entirely lost. To compensate for this great loss in family and societal life working parents tried with the help of some social groups and institutions, including the government itself to introduce a substitute – albeit a poor one – for the traditional homemaker in the form of the modern house maid.

With the parents themselves having little faith in this poor substitute, quite often not even as a good house keeper, let alone as an effective educator of their young children, they began to adopt the new attitude of entrusting entirely to the

schools of their children the task of providing them with a “complete education.”<sup>2</sup> However, the reality is that, for many reasons, schools by themselves are hardly in a position to deliver this extremely important societal task. The new attitudinal change among parents regarding their role in the universally aspired complete education of their children is not at all for the better of society. Educational developments during the last several decades have demonstrated in a very clear manner that this parental attitudinal change, which is essentially negative in nature, has significantly contributed to the qualitative decline of education. This social fact proves the claim that traditional family-based home education is indispensable to quality education and to every society deemed as healthy. In practical terms, what this modern generation of parents is actually doing to their young children is none other than vacating their role as home educators that has been traditionally reserved for them. The core concern in this home education throughout human history prior to modern times is transmission from parents and guardians to children in their care, of the kind of knowledge and practical guidance that would help guarantee the latter spiritual, intellectual and moral security in this very earthly life, what more in the post-humus life. The Qur’an reminds parents and guardians of their responsibility to provide this genre of security to their household members in this way: “O you who believe! Save yourselves and your families from a fire whose fuel is man and stones...”<sup>3</sup>

When it comes to this kind of security that is understood as something distinct from social and physical security and to the kind of knowledge and practice that is needed to achieve it then it is home education that should bear the main responsibility of delivering the task. However, this traditional parental task has been abandoned. The abandonment of this traditional parental role to provide guarantees for the spiritual, moral and intellectual security of the next generation has resulted in the creation of a social vacuum that could never be entirely filled by schools and other educational outlets such as personal or group tuitions, whether these are held in the home or somewhere else. The foundation of the spiritual, moral, and intellectual security of the young generation is to be built in the home. The expected complementary role of schools is to help strengthen this security for them. Admittedly, when it comes to intellectual security of the young generation it is generally the schools more than the homes that should be at the forefront of organized and systematic efforts in the development and strengthening of this security to the point of being able to ward off challenges and threats that come from the world of ideas and thoughts. One of the main aims of formal education as provided by the schools is to enable the young to acquire intellectual maturity and such rational virtues as honesty, certainty, objectivity, and mental health through the development of the faculty of intellect-reason (*‘aql*). From the Islamic perspective, school education that is aimed at the attainment of intellectual health and security is

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<sup>2</sup> By “complete education” we mean the kind of education that will cater to the multi-dimensional needs of the human person – physical, psychological, rational-intellectual, and spiritual-moral – all of which are natural to the human constitution, thereby helping to produce the complete human person.

<sup>3</sup> *The Qur’an*, 66:6.



therefore an important means of realizing one of the classical purposes of the divine Islamic Law (*maqasid al-shari'ah*), namely the protection of intellect-reason ('*aql*).

Indeed, the abandonment of the traditional parental role in the spiritual and moral education of their young children has proved to be highly consequential on modern society. Generally, it may be claimed that the quality and efficacy of spiritual education both in the home and in schools is very much in question, notwithstanding the efforts made to give more time and space to religious education at all levels of schooling as found in a good number of Muslim countries. Formal religious education does not appear to have succeeded in delivering the kind of spiritual-moral security to the young generation that enables them to thwart evil influences from the midst of society. Neither has it succeeded in delivering intellectual security and rational power that is strong and sophisticated enough to help them thwart ideologies, philosophies of life and transient mental fashions that could threaten the very health of their intellect-reason, the protection and preservation of which is one of the purposes of the Divine Shari'ah.

The weakening of the traditional family institution happens at the same time that vices and evil influences are spreading and multiplying in society much to the detriment especially of youth life. In fact, there is a kind of vicious circle inflicted on the contemporary relationship between the family institution and societal health. The more the family institution weakens the more widespread the phenomena of vices and evil influences, or what the Qur'an calls the phenomenon of *munkar* ("distasteful and unhealthy human action")<sup>4</sup> become. And the more widespread *munkarat* (plural of *munkar*) in all their forms, old and new, become the weaker the family institution will further become. Left unchecked the phenomenon of *munkar* can become cancerous to society. Our contemporary society is indeed suffering from this social cancer. Given this unhealthy situation in which the societal body finds itself and with all their limitations it is beyond the capability of schools alone to deal with this threat to the traditional moral fiber of society. The situation has become worse, because modern media technology has made it possible for visual images of the *munkarat* to penetrate the walls of our homes with far reaching consequences on the family institution. Consequently, home security has to acquire a new and broader meaning. The idea of home security has to embrace its hitherto neglected dimension, namely spiritual and intellectual security that has always been emphasized in traditional societies as one of its strategic integral components.

The foregoing discussion of the general decline in the quality and efficacy of spiritual education in contemporary society and the weakening of the family institution that has traditionally served as a major source of empowerment of spiritual values serves here as an important background to our current quest for a spiritual and intellectual empowerment of our youth. We are quite clear on the meaning of this quest and what it takes to realize its objectives. The empowerment in question essentially takes the form of knowledge acquisition and character

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<sup>4</sup> Thus the divine calling to man to forbid evil becomes a major moral and ethical theme in the Qur'an. The repeated phrase used in the Qur'an is *nahy 'al-munkar*, meaning forbidding what is destructive to both individuals and society.

building. The knowledge to be acquired concerns truths provided by revealed religions that if these were to be well understood and meaningfully realized in the life of every individual youth would confer on him or her the kind of spiritual and intellectual strengths that he or she needs to confront challenges to youth life. A meaningful realization of revealed truths in one's life is what we mean by character building.

### **Contemporary Youth Life: The Key Challenges**

We further expand here our brief reference to the contemporary challenges to youth life and thought. Undoubtedly, there are many such challenges if we are to enumerate all of them and detail each out, but it would be sufficient for the purpose of our present discussion if we just reduce them to the two most essential ones, namely challenges to youth thought and challenges to youth life. In the personal development of each individual, life and thought, however, are found to be very closely intertwined. Thought is supposed to influence and shape life, while life is expected to enrich thought. This is generally the case in theory, especially for adult life and thought. In practice, however, the intertwining pattern between life and thought is much more complex, and it varies from individual to individual. In the case of youth, age and environment matter a great deal more. In the development of the human person the period of adolescence or the formative period of adulthood is generally acknowledged as the most critical. This is the period when vulnerability to negative external cultural influences is at its greatest possible level.

The issue of the intertwining pattern between life and thought during the period of adolescence needs to be deeply studied so that we can better understand youth psychology with the view of providing better perspectives for high quality education for youth and more effective responses to the challenges facing them. The issue in question is both about ways of thinking and ways of acting and doing things. In the contemporary education of Muslim youth we find that much less attention is being paid to the issue of ways of thinking. As a core concern of education, external behavior and the art of making things, of which technology is the most obvious and also the most impactful in our times, appear to be emphasized at the expense of inner life and the art of thinking. We argue that the main reason for this imbalance of attention to the things that matter in personal development is the predominance of the perspectives of behavioral psychology over the perspectives of cognitive psychology in educational theories and practices. The current neglect in schools on the subject of the science and art of thinking is not without undesirable consequences on the quality of education. But even when the subject of thinking is taught to Muslim students, usually under the name of "creative thinking," it is not done so in light of the Islamic intellectual tradition that also concerns itself with thinking about spiritual matters.

There is a widespread belief that there is no place for rational thinking in the domain of discussion of spiritual issues. This belief is being propagated and perpetuated by those ideologies and currents of thought that posit the view that religious beliefs and rational thinking are somehow antagonistic to each other. The

impact of this erroneous belief on the minds of youth has been enormous. A mental space has been created in many of our youths in which faith (*iman*) and knowledge (*'ilm*), and spirituality and intellectuality become separated from each other, with certain ideological forces rather determined not just to perpetuate this gulf of separation but even to further widen it. This ideologically generated gulf of separation has the unfortunate effect of undermining both the intellectual and the spiritual strengths of our youth. When faith and knowledge begin to be viewed as two mutually exclusive domains in a person's inner reality then that faith will be deprived, albeit in a gradual manner, of its intellectual and rational support that is so much needed by the youth. It is not only spiritual but also intellectual strength that is undermined as a result of the separation. In view of the major shortcomings in the contemporary education of our youth as just discussed we argue for their spiritual and intellectual empowerment, the strategies and methods of which will be discussed in the following section. A restoration of Islam's holistic ways of thinking to their rightful place in theoretical and applied epistemology would be an indispensable component to this empowerment. It has often been said that Islam is a complete way of life. However, we could hardly claim Islam to be as such if we were to exclude its dimension of thinking, which is so central to this religion.

Posing as challenges to youth thought are the numerous currents of thought competing for influence. These currents of thought pertain to practically every aspect of human life. Their sources may be either from within or outside Islam, or both. Of central concern to us are those currents of thought that could cause great confusion in the minds of our youths. Currents of thought that are paraded and championed in the name of Islam but that are in actuality deviations from the true teachings of Islam are most likely to cause the greatest confusion in the minds of young Muslims. How youths perceive these contending currents of thought and react to them would depend very much on the kind and level of knowledge already in their possession. It is a question of whether or not their state of knowledge is sufficient to deal with these currents of thought and the issues they raise. The nature of the issue at hand is thus essentially an issue of personal knowledge sufficiency and competency. This issue brings to the fore the question of the place and role of knowledge in the problematic encounter between youths and the diversity of contemporary currents of thought. Muslim youths need to be informed that Islam is essentially a religion of knowledge and as such is blessed with a treasury of knowledge that could serve as a source of criteria to distinguish between truth and error and, therefore, as a source of effective responses to the contending currents of thought in question.

Posing as challenges to youth life are the various life styles currently pursued in society that are also competing for influence and adoption. These life styles may be transient in nature but in many of these cases their adoption has already proved the kind of harm they could do to their way of life that is inherited from tradition. In a free and open society where there is an ever-present clash of life styles, between the good and the bad or between the healthy and the unhealthy, youths are under a strong temptation to experiment with the unhealthy life styles.

The challenge faced by the youth boils down to how to secure ways and means of self-empowerment that would enable them to resist this temptation. We have briefly discussed the crucial role of education in the process of self-empowerment. It is important to note though that, by education, we do not mean just any kind of education but rather an education that would help deliver spiritual and intellectual strengths to the student. In addition to the role of education there is the role of civil society groups or of the whole community. More particularly, we are speaking here of the role of *ummatic* consciousness and solidarity and the idea of collective-empowerment. While having intellectual strength may be enough for some individual youths to resist evil temptation from external sources it may not be so for some other youths. It is the intellectually and spiritually weaker and vulnerable youths that need group or community help.

As a religion, Islam possesses the resources to help actualize and facilitate both self and collective empowerment. But collective empowerment itself has the goal of helping to realize self-empowerment. Islam's complete resources are of two types, inner and outer. Its inner resources comprise that part of its teachings and practices pertaining to self-empowerment, which are essentially intellectual and spiritual in nature. As for its outer resources, these are understood to mean the remaining part of its teachings and practices that pertain to collective life or community living and social institutions. The outer resources provide external support and protective shell to the self throughout its developmental process in terrestrial life. In Islamic terms, these resources refer specifically to the Shari'ah understood as embracing the totality of the Divine Law. Traditionally, the Shari'ah with its injunctions and the social order and institutions which they generate have the twin functions of serving as external support as well as protective shell to the individual self. As external support, the Shari'ah helps to stimulate inner growth and development that could be actualized, however, only through intellectual and spiritual comprehension and exercises. As a multi-layered protective shell to the self, the Shari'ah functions as its defense mechanism against possible infection from social virus that could have a detrimental effect on its health.

From the perspective of traditional Islamic social thought, family, mosque and religious school (*madrassa*), and the Shari'ah laws governing community life, are seen as the three most important protective layers of the individual self against viral infection from social diseases. The family institution is usually viewed as the last layer of protection or line of defense against social diseases on which we could count for help. However, we are living in a time when all the three layers have lost much of their power of resistance to evil. With even the family no longer resilient enough to withstand the onslaught of immoral forces embedded in modern society and its bigger and bigger waves of social epidemics today's youths are practically left on their own on how to deal with this challenging situation. With the introduction of cyber space in our time the challenge to the youth becomes all the greater. Cyber space with its attendant technology that keeps on developing makes it possible and also easier for everyone to access its information world where the true and the false exist side by side and the useful and the harmful can intermingle in any

manner one wishes and in a “googling” speed that is faster than the elapsing time between the rubbing of Aladdin’s lamp and the appearance of the obedient genie before his summoner. In this kind of information world at our disposal, the responsibility of protecting the individual self ultimately falls back on the individual himself or herself. In other words, self-protection is the basis of group protection. The Qur’an is emphasizing this fact when it calls on the believers to “save and protect yourselves and your families,” (66:6).

The implications of these revolutionary changes in the information world for spiritual and moral education of contemporary youth are quite obvious. In both, contents and methods there have to be corresponding changes in their spiritual and moral education. A re-thinking is also needed concerning the societal role of the Shari’ah. In light of the above discussion the main emphasis in education should now be on understanding the efficacious role of the Shari’ah in realizing self-empowerment and only secondarily on external empowerment. Externally, Islam prescribes a variety of social mechanisms that have the capacity to promote *ummatic* consciousness and solidarity and collective-empowerment, including in forbidding *munkarat* (“things that are known to be bad, destructive or unhealthy to man”) and even the possibility of eradicating them. However, the efficacy of Islam’s external measures will itself be put into doubt if self-empowerment is lacking and if those measures are too legalistic in their approaches and understanding.

The divinely ordained social mechanism referred to in the Qur’an as *nahy ‘an al-munkar*, which is often understood as a purely external measure devoid of spiritual input that can lead to self-empowerment of those individuals committing or indulging in the forbidden acts, needs to be properly comprehended, contextualized, detailed out, and applied in the context of twenty-first century society in which numerous new forms of *munkar* have appeared, if we are to minimize the sources of unhealthy influence on the youth. In fact, according to the Qur’an, success (*falah*) in curbing *munkarat* could only be possible if it is done within the framework of a collective empowerment hand in hand with a cultivation of spiritual and moral virtues. The verse in view<sup>5</sup> appeals to the believers to create functional groups with an *ummatic* character that will pursue the spiritual and intellectual empowerment of each individual self through the cultivation of good personal qualities or virtues (*amr bi’l-ma’ruf*), and an impoverishment of *munkarat* in the community through the shedding of negative personal qualities or vices. It is such groups that will attain success.

The Qur’an seems to be insisting that *ummatic* or community success will only come about if virtuous qualities present in the members of this functional group are to supplant in a permanent manner negative qualities or tendencies in the soul of a doer of *munkar*. This is perhaps one reason why in the Qur’an *amr bi’l-ma’ruf* and *nahy ‘an al-munkar* are always mentioned together and in that order. *Munkarat* cannot disappear from a cultural environment unless there is a flourishing of

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<sup>5</sup> The Qur’an, 3:104. The verse says: “Let there arise out of you an *umma* inviting to all that is good, enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong: they are the ones that attain success and felicity.” See also verse 3:110.

spiritual, moral, and intellectual virtues. In the Islamic perspective, empowerment of social activism needs to be understood in light of this spiritual relationship between virtues and vices. Again the issue that surfaces pertains to the meaning of spiritual empowerment, although the focus this time is on its external or societal dimension. It may now be emphasized that both self and collective empowerment in the sense we have explained have important implications for contemporary Muslim education.

There is another way of looking at the Shari'ah and its role and function as a source of spiritual empowerment of our youth. In addition to its facets already discussed the Shari'ah may also be seen as a treasury of social medicine meant to cure social illnesses and diseases. If we examine this treasury closely we will realize that it possesses both preventive and prescriptive medicines for human society. Guided by the traditional wisdom both in physical and social medicines that prevention is better than cure the Shari'ah's priority and emphasis are on the former rather than on the latter. The divinely revealed forms of spiritual practices or worship such as canonical prayer (*salat*), fasting, and wealth tax (*zakat*) as detailed out in the Shari'ah are primary examples of Islam's preventive social medicine. Once illnesses and diseases occurred cure is needed. There are several different forms of prescriptive social medicine that the Shari'ah has provided for the purpose of treating the diseases or illnesses at hand. Muslim youths should be educated to appreciate the role of the Shari'ah as a provider of preventive social medicine so that their health in all its dimensions could be guaranteed. The challenge for them is therefore how to empower themselves with the kind of knowledge that would guarantee their health.

### **Spiritual and Intellectual Empowerment of Contemporary Youth: Strategies and Methods**

As to what needs to be done by individuals and the community in treating the many social ills in contemporary society that claim youths as the majority of their victims, spiritual and intellectual empowerment seems to be a popular suggestion. Furthermore, education is considered as the best way to go about realizing this empowerment. However, beyond generalities, not much has been done thus far in exploring strategies and methods that are needed in our present time for the realization of spiritual and intellectual empowerment of our youth. Our foregoing discussion is aimed at emphasizing the need for a re-thinking of the whole way in which problems and challenges of the youth have been approached and treated. We have emphasized a number of points relating to the nature of the problems facing the youth, the declining efficacy of formal spiritual education, and the glaring shortcomings in the wise use of the resources embodied in the Shari'ah in the treatment of the youth's problems.

There are new problems facing the youth that have not been dealt with before by the religious authorities. These problems include negative life styles and destructive currents of thought and the threat of new social diseases. Socio-cultural environments inhabited or frequented by youths have drastically changed. And yet approaches to religious knowledge, spiritual education and the understanding of

youth life and thought have hardly changed. It is in the context of these changes and problems that this article proposes a re-thinking on the subject of empowerment of the youth. Studies of youth life and thought, especially from the Islamic and the contemporary perspectives, need to be re-energized and re-articulated. The strategic thrusts will be in the areas of youth psychology and mindset, spiritual education that is appropriate for them, youth and religion, youth and trans-generational issues, youth and socio-cultural challenges, and youth and cyber culture. Our idea of spiritual and intellectual empowerment of the youth will embrace concerns with all of these areas of strategic thrusts.

Islamic perspectives have to be developed and articulated on each of these strategic thrusts. Epistemologically speaking, new disciplines in youth studies have to be created and old disciplines reformulated. These disciplines, which include the science and art of thinking and cognitive psychology as primarily applied to the youth and spiritual psychology, need to be structured in conformity with Islamic epistemology. New teaching methods have to be developed that would synthesize the best of the traditional and the best of the modern. The role of informal education in the spiritual development of youths needs to be revived.

### **Conclusion**

If the concept of spiritual and intellectual empowerment is well understood, the urgent need for its application to the youth is appreciated by the State and the community, the resources needed for its realization, both inner and outer are identified and assembled, and the strategies and methods for the use of these resources and the processes involved are clearly spelt out, then we have gone a long way toward solving the problems confronting our contemporary youth.

Ed Kessler<sup>1</sup>

## Protecting Youth from Alienation

What is your favourite hobby? Eating? Reading? Let me tell you mine: Discussing. Well, let's not be too polite but call this for what it is: arguing. Years ago, there was a TV series in the UK called *The Long Search*. When the presenter came to religion, he was in a state of shock and called the programme *The Holy Argument*.

If you think about it, what is a biblical or rabbinic commentary or tafsir? There is a kind of argument going on. In fact, in the surrounding small print there are arguments about the arguments about the arguments. If I were to describe the literature of the Abrahamic faiths, the best I'd come up with, is that it's an 'anthology of arguments'; or even a millennial chat room. Not only that. What do we call those arguments? They are arguments for the sake of heaven.

And the question is not just: why do we argue? I suppose everyone argues. The question is: why is argument central to the religious experience? Why is it the very structure of religious thought?

I wonder whether it is to do with our opposition to a fundamental principle of logic: the 'law of contradiction'. The law of contradiction says that a statement and its negation cannot be true at the same time. Logic says it cannot be both Tuesday night and Friday morning. That's the law of contradiction. Yet, I have learnt from studying the encounters between religions that the law of contradiction does not apply. Why? Because we reject the idea that truth is two-dimensional. Very often it is not a matter of either true or false. Two conflicting propositions may both be true! It just happens to depend on where we are standing and what is our perspective.

A Jewish philosopher from Columbia University, called Sidney Morgenbesser, was attending a class on logic in which the lecturer pointed out the logical asymmetry between negation and affirmation, and that two negatives make a positive but that two positives don't make a negative. Sidney, at the back of the room, shouted, "Yeah, yeah." He wanted to show that the fundamental principle of logic does not always apply.

The Nobel prize-winning scientist, Niels Bohr suggested "The opposite of a simple truth is a falsehood. The opposite of a profound truth is very often another profound truth." In other words, one approach to protecting young Jews, Christians and Muslims against various types of propaganda and all sort of extremism is to engage both sides of what often looks like a contradiction. We are not concerned with a two-dimensional world but rather with three and four-dimensional reality.

When you see everything in terms of two dimensions, it is either true or it is false. And there can only be one perspective! That is what we reject. There is always more than one perspective. And that is the vision of the Woolf Institute and those of

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us, such as Dr Al-Naimi and friends in the Doha International Centre for Interfaith Dialogue, who are touched by the angel of interfaith dialogue. If I am standing here, things look different from what you see if you are sitting there. We are seeing the world from different perspectives. In the Institute's teaching, in Cambridge and around the world, we seek to confer dignity on how the world looks to me and how the world looks to you.

There is, in other words, an attempt to do justice to the fact that there is more than one point of view; more than one truth. Now supposing you and I see things differently. We have different perspectives on reality. Is that it? What can we do under those circumstances? Well, we can meet and talk. We can engage and converse. You can tell me how the world looks to you. I can tell you how the world looks to me. We can have a dialogue, an encounter. We can, through that dialogue, learn what it feels like to be different. We can bridge the distance between two perspectives.

One approach I use in the classroom is to ask my students to reflect on language, to meditate on the power of words to build or destroy, heal or harm. In words, God created the universe. In words, we are taught, God reveals himself to us. The first thing God gave Adam was the gift of naming the animals, using words to categorise and thus begin to understand the world around us. According to one religious tradition, *Homo sapiens* is described as "the speaking being."

Yet, the great irony of our time is that, having created technologies of instant global communication, we find ourselves talking less and less with those with whom we disagree. The Internet and the social media allow us to choose the news we hear and the voices to which we listen. What were once mixed communities that read the same papers and watched the same TV news, have become groupings of the like-minded. Our prejudices are reinforced and our views become more extreme.

This makes our work urgent and pressing. As Revd Dr Martin Luther King said, we live in the fierce urgency of now. Our goal is to face the danger that as a new generation emerges, it is unwilling to giving a respectful hearing to the other side. When that happens, violence is waiting in the wings.

Our task is more than logical: it is dialogical and gives dignity to the multiple perspectives from which we perceive reality. And the only ways we can handle that are by meeting, having a dialogue, learning how to disagree and managing difference. Argument, in other words, becomes holy when it does justice to more than one point of view.

One way to strengthen spiritual and intellectual security within a society is to oppose the attempt to impose my truth, my culture, my way of doing things on you. No people is entitled to force its beliefs on any other people. 'Down here, in the world that I made', God said according to the Abrahamic story, 'there are many cultures, many faiths, many civilisations – each of which was made by God, each of which therefore has its own integrity, its own gifts to humanity, its own contribution to make, its own voice, its own language, its own character.'

The Qur'an is representative when it states, "We have created you male and female, and have made you nations and tribes that ye may recognize one another" (Qur'an 49:13). This principle also lies at the heart of Judaism and Christianity. We all proclaim the unity of God and the diversity of human existence. Most of us in this hall serve to educate and preserve the lives of this and the next generation so that they are better informed to pursue the tolerance and dignity, which this world so urgently needs.

However, we need to do more than we are doing and more than we have done in order to sustain those things, those visionary horizons, which we need in order to remain human in a society, which somehow seems obsessively to want to be less than human.

Bigotry has no place in a civilised society and yet we remain afflicted by it. The rise in Islamophobia, antisemitism and anti-Christian hatred highlights the simmering distrust and fear that plagues our societies. Across the world, people of all faiths and none are persecuted because of their beliefs, or rather, because of other people's misconceptions about them. Ignorance breeds fear which in turn lies at the heart of religious discrimination. Fear fosters hatred and conflict, dehumanising those we do not know or understand.

I present to you 4 strategies applying encounter and dialogue in education to overcome youth alienation:

1. Encourage, through education, mutual understanding between people of differing religious perspectives and none. Affirm shared values and establish trust so as to provide a framework within which to learn to accept difference, and to address contentious issues positively.
2. Encounter people from different religions to move beyond just learning about each other's traditions. At the heart of encounter lies the sharing of personal stories, which help the listener to see beyond their own experience and counteracts the de-humanising of the 'other' which exists, in a greater or lesser degree, in all of our communities.
3. Engage with one another with respect for what the other is and has to say. This begins with the individual, and is never less than personal, but can develop in such a way as to be extended to a group and even to communities. We can no longer afford to avoid difficult issues or leave these to be resolved outside the educational system.
4. Encourage leaders of faith communities, parents and teachers to ensure children and/or students are secure in their own faith and so experience encounter in a confident and positive way. Encounter serves not to confuse but reinforces religious identity and its aim is conversation not conversion, dialogue not monologue.

It is in hearing, we listen; it is in listening that we start to understand. And it is upon understanding and facilitating encounters that we should base our education.

*Meriem El Haitami*<sup>1</sup>

## **Women as Providers of Spiritual Security: A New Paradigm from Morocco**

### **Abstract**

This paper addresses Morocco's innovative counter-radicalization strategy, based in part on training and deploying female religious leaders to preserve the nation's tradition of cosmopolitanism, tolerance, and moderation. Morocco's deployment of women as active actors in preserving the country's 'spiritual security' highlights the role of religious actors in local, national, and international life, from providing religious and social counseling to their communities to shaping larger social and political debates. They are a model of faith-based engagement and constitute potentially important partners in promoting socio-political cohesion and maximizing opportunities to include religion as development model as it touches on areas of socio-economic development and women's empowerment. In brief, the paper will try to highlight organized women's agency in influencing at-risk members of society and the role of the formal political sphere in developing a strategic approach to counter-radicalization through soft power initiatives and religious branding.

### **Introduction: Moroccan Islam and the Promotion of 'Spiritual Security'**

The Arab spring has brought religion to the fore of political debate, because of the rise of Islamism in countries in transition. This presents new challenges to the intersections between religion and politics and how contemporary religious actors and structures are impacting international politics, especially that Islamism is largely viewed with concern because of its perceived incompatibility with democratic values. Such anxieties present a challenge to effective diplomacy and engagement with the global community, especially in a world of globalization, where inter-religious and intercultural engagement is a priority and where religions have a key role to play in global ethics.

Morocco is the country where the revolutionary fervor of the Arab Spring produced significant reforms without threatening the legitimacy of the regime. This has presented Morocco as a model country due to its moderate increment of democratization and its resilient protection of human rights. According to Mohamed Daadaoui, regime stability in Morocco has relied on the interplay between symbolic, historical, and coercive means subsumed under the authority of the state. The latter operates at two levels: rational-temporal and symbolic-religious which coexist in the face of modern challenges to regime stability. Daadaoui informs that post-colonial Morocco adapted new constitutional and administrative structures while retaining its historical, symbolic rigor and authority. Thus, according to Daadaoui, the duality of the monarchy as a modern and traditional authority created through colonial rule is

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difficult to challenge by any other opposition discourse. The monarch's spiritual hegemony, that is endorsed by his status as 'the commander of the believers', frustrates the opposition's attempts to challenge the legitimacy of the regime.<sup>2</sup>

The exceptionalism of Morocco also hinges on the reforms which Morocco engaged in over the past decade to preserve the 'spiritual security' of the country and promote a more 'moderate' Islam which counters the rising momentum of Islamism. Driss Maghraoui argues that the restructuring of the religious field has taken on a security dimension, "security is perceived here as part of a 'moral security' to guarantee a particular kind of 'Moroccan moral order'."<sup>3</sup> Maghraoui further notes that Morocco has, for centuries, been a Muslim society in which religion plays an important role as a generalizing ideological force for politics, cultural identity and nationalist consciousness and where Islam has been ideologically constructed to be attached to a number of components<sup>4</sup>, namely Malikism and Sunnism that the Moroccan state has over the years aspired to keep central to a certain conception of 'Moroccan Islam'. Therefore, concepts such as 'moderation', 'tolerance', 'openness' become part of the lexicon of the official discourse which defines Moroccan Islam. Hence, with the emergence of terrorism, reliance upon such a lexicon becomes even more compelling, in order to have further control over the religio-political sphere.

The concept of 'spiritual security' emerged in the context of the 2003 terrorist attacks which took place in Casablanca. The tragic magnitude of this event urged Moroccan authorities to reconsider the state's religious policy, and redefine 'Moroccan Islam', based on three strategies or components: Endorsing the monarchy as a source of national security, promoting Maliki-Sufi Islam and reforming the religious sphere.

### **The Monarchy**

The monarch is considered as the grantor of national and religious security. The Moroccan monarchy has managed to navigate the recent events largely through exploitation of its symbolic power and traditional capital; this interplay of the traditional within the edifice of the modern state is constant and at the core of the political authority in Morocco.

According to Mohamed Daadaoui, there are four symbols that imbue the king with religious authority: his role as *amir al-mu'minin* (commander of the faithful), his *baraka* (the monarch's perceived "blessedness"), his sharifian lineage (descent from the Prophet Muhammad), and the *bay'a* ceremony (an annual oath of allegiance). These symbols, according to Daadaoui, uphold the monopoly of the regime over the religious sphere in Morocco and facilitate state co-optation and

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<sup>2</sup> Daadaoui Mohamed, "A Moroccan Monarchical Exception?", December 20, 2012, [http://mideastafrica.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2012/12/13/a\\_moroccan\\_monarchical\\_exception#sthash.0QTeYMb7.dpuf](http://mideastafrica.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2012/12/13/a_moroccan_monarchical_exception#sthash.0QTeYMb7.dpuf).

<sup>3</sup> Maghraoui Driss, "The Strengths and Limits of Religious Reforms in Morocco". *Mediterranean Politics*, Vol. 14, No. 2, 195–211, July 2009, p. 197.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 198.

“bureaucratization of religion”, which weakens the resilient oppositional forces, especially the Islamists’ challenge to the monarchy.<sup>5</sup>

### **Maliki-Sufi Islam**

Morocco prides itself on its moderate form of Islam. The country follows the Maliki school of religious law which is believed to have a flexible interpretation of religion. This is combined with promoting Sufism as a peaceful form of religiosity that counters radical tendencies and is enjoying tremendous state support, including monetary support. Sufism is also promoted in the media, and television channels are dedicated to broadcasting programs on Sufi thought. A series of lectures and seminars has also been launched recently in order to familiarize Moroccans with its principles and practices.

Rashid Moqtader, an expert in Moroccan Islamic movements, says that the Moroccan government deals with emerging powers depending on their nature and influence in the political arena. He says, “the state uses one power against another... through financial, legal, or moral support.”<sup>6</sup>

On the other hand, Abbas Boughanem, an expert in Islamic movements and Sufism, says that the government is currently promoting Sufism as an educational rather than a religious trend, “because Sufis are generally not interested in politics and are totally involved in their rituals, they can teach people who follow them some kind of political passivity”. According to Boughanem, Sufism encourages religious practice without showing opposition to the regime, “the government is, therefore, involved in a plan to restructure the entire religious scene in Morocco,” this according to Boughanem includes organizing local and international seminars as well as music festivals.<sup>7</sup>

### **Religious Reform**

Another measure of Morocco’s counter-radicalization strategy is the restructuring of the religious sphere which began in 2004 to protect the country from invasive and extreme religious expressions. This measure was marked by the training of male and female *imams*; reforming religious structures and monitoring places of worship; and launching radio and television channels to promote moderate teachings. These efforts are particularly salient given that Morocco has around 50,000 trained *imams*. In June 2014, the King inaugurated a “religious support plan” that puts 1,300 trained *imams* in places of worship to monitor religious discourse.

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<sup>5</sup> Daadaoui Mohamed, « New Texts Out Now: Mohamed Daadaoui, "Moroccan Monarchy and the Islamist Challenge", Sep 27 2011, [http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/2772/new-texts-out-now\\_mohamed-daadaoui-moroccan-monarc](http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/2772/new-texts-out-now_mohamed-daadaoui-moroccan-monarc).

<sup>6</sup> Al-Ashraf Hassan, “Morocco fights Islamist extremism with Sufism”, September 26, 2010, <http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2010/09/26/120366.html>.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

### **Female Religious Leaders as Providers of ‘Spiritual Security’**

The mainstreaming of gender approach to the country’s counter-radicalization strategy is particularly compelling. State-sponsored Islamic feminism appeared in the aftermath of the 2003 terrorist attacks in Casablanca as a state’s endeavor to control and monitor the religious field, in order to eradicate terrorism and construct a new competing force to the activism carried by Islamist movements whose strength both within and outside of formal political institutions had grown considerably. This also serves to develop a positive international image of Morocco. Since 2003, women have been participating in the Hasaniyya Ramadan lecture series<sup>8</sup>; they have also been assigned significant responsibilities within the Supreme Religious Council as well as local councils, this includes offering spiritual counseling and religious instruction to different social segments.

The king’s ascension to the throne in 1999 marked a new era. Marvine Howe says that “the new king appeared determined to correct the cruel abuses of a despotic state and lead the country firmly on the path to a modern democracy.”<sup>9</sup> A number of reforms and initiatives, which mainly included recognizing women’s issues and honoring their demands, were introduced. This included revising the family law in favor of women to achieve an egalitarian family model and a rethinking of gender dynamics at both the social and political levels. The new family code was introduced in 2004, which sought to reconcile Morocco’s adherence to the Maliki school of jurisprudence to secular standards of women’s rights. This engendered reconsiderations of sacred texts to empower women and counter discriminatory cultural tendencies. This was further complemented by including female religious guides (*mourchidat*) and scholars whose vital role lay in reaching out to women in underprivileged and marginalized areas of the country.

The term *mourchida* (singular form of *mourchidat*) translates to religious guide. The *mourchidat* are state-trained preachers or religious leaders who offer religious talks and counseling in mosques and other institutions including schools, hospitals, prisons etc... The *mourchidat*’s mosque based activities take the form of structured classes addressing specific disciplines and attracting regular attendees; these, most of the time, include classes on Hadith (Prophetic tradition), Seerah (life of the Prophet) or Qur’anic exegesis. The latter is most of the time complemented with literacy classes as well as Qur’an recitation classes. A *mourchida* Fatima Nezza notes that one of the program’s goals is to “teach principles of Islam and apply those to society at large. We want women to understand their roles as women and others in relation to others as well.”<sup>10</sup> Another element of the female *mourchidat*’ work is to guide and educate women in good parenting techniques. The old adage of “peace

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<sup>8</sup> The Hasaniyya lectures are a series of lectures presided by King Mohammed VI every Ramadan in his royal palace, and are attended by high ranking officials and religious authorities from all over the world.

<sup>9</sup> Howe Marvine, *Morocco : The Islamist Awakening and Other Challenges*, (Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 126.

<sup>10</sup> Couture Krista London, “a gendered approach to countering violent extremism”, Brookings, July 2014, <http://www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/papers/2014/07/30-gender-conflict-prevention-countering-violent-extremism-couture/women-cve-formatted-72914-couture-final2.pdf>, p. 31.

starts at home” is the foundation of this initiative. The *mourchidat* arrange field trips with women and youth to places such as hospitals, prisons and youth centers for enhanced exposure. The women’s programs always focus on what the women in the community feel they need to make themselves successful mothers and members of their communities. The *mourchidat* then arrange appropriate training to achieve this goal.<sup>11</sup>

The *mourchidat* are appointed by the Ministry of Islamic Affairs after they complete a 12-month training program, during which they take a variety of courses, with the main focus on religious training. The *mourchidat* serve in different mosques across the country in both urban and rural settings. The program is selective and graduates 50 women every year.

The *mourchidat*’s primary role is to fight the growing extremist tendencies within Moroccan society by disseminating a moderate version of Islam. They have the responsibility of protecting Morocco’s religious identity that comprises honoring King Mohammed VI as the commander of the faithful and promoting a Maliki-Sufi doctrine. The Moroccan *mourchidat*’ influence and power, driven by their optimism and tireless efforts, greatly impact their ability to contribute to de-radicalization. By educating women and mothers, providing a safe and productive avenue for youths, and providing positive alternatives for prison inmates, the *mourchidat* are changing the tide of terrorism by blunting potential catalysts.<sup>12</sup>

Their newfound political and religious empowerment in the fight against extremism enables them to have a significant impact. Mothers, wives, and sisters with questions, and who are perhaps “in need,” are now able to turn to other women with authority who can help and offer guidance. For example, if a woman feels a family member is becoming radicalized, it is now a real possibility that such a concern can be conveyed to a *mourchida* when that avenue for action never existed before.<sup>13</sup> The increased participation of Moroccan women in the religious domain represents thus a significant shift in the structures of religious authority; they are appropriating such core religious spaces as mosques, medersas, and religious councils as well as attracting a broad female following.

Therefore, the *mourchidat* are deployed across the country with a twofold mission: to raise women’s status in Moroccan society and combat extremist thought. Their speeches are an interesting blend of traditional religious sermon and feminist activism. Through restructuring the role of the mosque as a center for educational and social exchange, the *mourchidat* are particularly invested in addressing the socio-economic and political grievances of the youth in particular and come in close contact with extremist tendencies among the youth.

Although most of Morocco’s mosques were officially under the supervision of the Ministry of Islamic Affairs prior to 2003, many mosques especially in marginalized and underprivileged neighborhoods functioned outside of the control of the ministry. Driss Maghraoui notes that the independent but radical voices of

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 32.

many of the preachers who run these mosques started to become popular and attract the poor segments of society, especially the youth, “in addition to denouncing ‘western influence’ and US wars in different parts of the Islamic world, radical preachers started to target the Moroccan regime and the religious role of the king also came also under harsh criticism.” As a result, the state launched a crackdown on mosques associated with radical groups. Maghraoui argues that while this clampdown may result into the emergence of more clandestine activities, it nevertheless highlights the importance of security measures in controlling the religious sphere.<sup>14</sup>

Also, with the youth’s disenchantment with the monitored religious discourse and the dominant political ideologies; other platforms have emerged as alternative sources of knowledge and practice, creating multiple forms of religiosity and realms that intersect in complex ways. At the micro level, Morocco is witnessing peculiar mixtures of what could be perceived as traditional practices and norms with entirely new religious interpretations and sets of values that originate in the emerging diverse social arenas in the context of dynamic cultural processes as well as the hybridized local and global influences.

Technology plays a particularly important role in constructing collective and individual identities. It provides easier access to religious scholarship beyond the authority of local preachers, and gives a voice to young Muslims who have become more engaged in criticising religious establishments and creating their own interpretations. Dale Eickman notes that access to new technologies has multiplied the channels through which ideas and information can be circulated, “It has eroded the ability of authorities to censor and repress, to project an uncontested ‘central’ message defining political and religious issues for large numbers of people... Censors may still restrict what is said in the mainstream press and broadcast media, but these media have lost the exclusivity they once had. Mass education and the availability of alternative media have irrevocably altered how ‘authoritative’ discourse is read and heard.”<sup>15</sup>

The proliferation of new, uncontrolled, self-authorizing clerics urged the inaction of a comprehensive reform covering religious personnel, the issuing of fatwas, and the media, among many other institutional aspects of religious life. Official television and radio have thus been used to communicate tenets of Moroccan Islam and provide a platform for programs that challenge ideas that are perceived as foreign to the country’s religious tradition. The Ministry of Islamic Affairs has established nation-wide programs that target youth development in both urban and rural areas and engages the youth’s awareness and eventual rejection of extremist ideology despite the dominant social and global influences.

Therefore, the *mourchidat*’s work is being instrumental in maintaining social and political order and addressing the needs of struggling youth. Morocco’s

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<sup>14</sup> Maghraoui Driss, “The Strengths and Limits of Religious Reforms in Morocco”. *Mediterranean Politics*, p. 201.

<sup>15</sup> Anderson, Eickelman, *New Media in the Muslim World: The Emerging Public Sphere*, (Indiana University Press, 2003), p. 33.



deployment of women as active actors in preserving the country's 'spiritual security' also highlights the role of religious actors in local, national, and international life, from providing religious and social counseling to their communities to shaping larger social and political debates. They are a model of faith-based engagement and constitute potentially important partners in promoting socio-political cohesion and maximizing opportunities to include religion as a development model as it touches on areas of socio-economic development and women's empowerment.

### Conclusion

On the one hand, religious reform provides a space for women to work within the system in order to create incremental, yet lasting change in their respective communities. El-Katiri explains that "there is, however, potential for the future development of their role; an example could be their involvement in family tribunals, and advising the other half of the society, men- as opposed to their use restricted currently to women only."<sup>16</sup> Nonetheless, the authority threshold of the *mourchidat* is limited to focusing on security measures. The *mourchidat* as well as other religious actors can play an important role in advancing a more tolerant interpretation of Islam, if more independent exercise of theological knowledge is encouraged, especially that they have better access to different social categories and social institutions due to their official status. A comprehensive approach to reform should also promote collaboration with secularly-oriented civil society actors to encourage better dialogue in order to avoid societal polarizations that could be conducive to a culture of violence. Therefore, the *mourchidat* could play a better role if they are part of a more comprehensive and sustainable approach to countering extremism. *Moderate* religious teaching and counseling is not sufficient in eradicating the sweeping threat of extremism.

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<sup>16</sup> El Katiri Mohammed, "The institutionalization of religious affairs : religious reform in morocco", The Journal of North African Studies, 2013, vol. 18, no. 1, p. 59.

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## Islam and the “Other”: Historia Teaches!

### Abstract

To understand the perception of the “Other” according to Islam, in religious, social, economic and political terms, historical knowledge is highly necessary for “the how” was protoformed and transformed Islam’s first political entity. The multiracial inter Arabs firstly and the multiracial later on, internationally, the religious pluralism and multiculturalism, mark a historic area of research, search and display of the relationship between Islam and the “Other”; the seemingly different. With this modus operandi we will be tempted to try to determine what is Islam or Islamic mainstream and what its relationship with the “Other” is! Islam is not only religion and politics, but also culture. How Islam sees as a religion other religions, as politics the other policies and as culture with its social dimensions the other cultures, it is a matter of historical approach of Islam itself. The long close geographical proximity, the historical coexistence and therefore the cultural symbiosis between Islam and the “Other”, from its very beginnings up to date, displays diverse formats and media, means of communication, sometimes peacefully and sometimes war. The hope and the prospect of peaceful coexistence which were put forward, as far as history naturally preserved and allowed us to know, determined the meaning, the content, the duration and the scope as well as the quality of Islam’s relations with the “Other”, transferring important messages for the contemporary man! Education constitutes the “Prima Causa” of mental, intellectual, spiritual and physical safety. The historical knowledge is the Master key. The roles of the Teacher as well as the Language of Teaching are crucial. Defensive Shield is who I really am!

### Presentation

I was born in Egypt, Upper Egypt. I completed my university studies in BA and MA degree levels at Cairo University, Faculty of Arts, Dept. of Classics, i.e. Ancient Greek and Latin studies, Ancient European Studies. My next step transferring my great expectations into action was to come to Greece for my PhD. As it is said: “We become what we think”; accordingly I got a PhD scholarship granted by the *State Scholarships Foundation* of Athens in order to conduct my PhD thesis in Arab Islamic and Byzantine Studies at Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece. I had a special feeling of love towards Ancient Greek History and Civilization due to its ecumenical and diachronic dimension and interaction with Islamic thought. Those feelings became stronger while learning more about the close relationships between ancient Greek and Islamic culture.

Arriving to Greece, as a PhD candidate, in spite of the great Greek hospitality and sociability, I understood how conservative, guarded and

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uncommunicative they are regarding my name and my religion, i.e. as to Hassan and Muslim/Islam. Quickly I understood why they are so cautious to me. There was a misunderstanding, misinformation as well as a collective unconscious fear of Islam, in name and fame. Then I thought, from the historical point of view, that such negative feelings towards Islam might be due to the four century Ottoman occupation and also to their ignorance of Islam as a religion and civilization.

It was something that I did not like at all and I felt that it is my duty to find the points of approach between Islam, Christianity and Hellenism, thinking of course that Arabs and Greeks have always had good relations since the dawn of history.

In Greece then, and now as well, there were many Arab students, who concluded mixed marriages. At the same time, in Thrace, in north-eastern Greece, there is also a large Muslim minority, which has about 250.000 Muslims. The inhabitants of Thrace, both Muslim minority and Greek-Orthodox, were unaware of each other's religion back then, having the impression that each one is better than the other. Meanwhile, I finished my dissertation and I was fortunate to be appointed as a Professor of Medieval History of the Arab Islamic World at Aristotle University of Thessaloniki.

Such evolution in my life paved to me a relatively easy way to implement my vision for peaceful and cooperative symbiosis between the followers of both religions, because as a specialist already, I decided to start a series of different actions aiming at changing the image of Islam that prevailed until then. So I started taking part in different conferences and give various seminars and lectures mostly-always, with almost the same title: points of approach between Islam and Christianity, the Philhellenism of the Arabs, the acquaintance of Islamic thought with Aristotle etc.

Over the years, and even now, and in order to achieve my vision, I visited many major and minor cities and islands: Athens, Crete, Corfu, Rhodes, Florina, Joanna, Komotini, Kavala, Pyrgos Ilias, Santorini, Skopelos, Thassos, Alexandroupolis etc., giving seminars and lectures, projecting the common diachronic human values and doctrines of both religions through history, the positive side of things, presenting the positive perspective towards Islam and the Arabs, with the aim of peaceful coexistence and co-understanding between the followers of the two religions, two cultures and the two worlds of the same Cosmos.

The Greek people heard for the first time something positive about Islam and its close relationship with Christianity and Hellenism, something completely different to the existing image of a barbaric religion that creates terrorists that will come to kill us... In this direction it was very helpful being known as philhellene and academician and thus Greek society entrusted me. So the communication with the mass media and the cultural institutions of public and private sectors grew rapidly and became regular to such an extent that my participation in their various activities was necessary and sometimes imposed by the audience. Such success is literally due to what is called Love...whoever loves heartily will be cordially loved back...

Speaking of peaceful coexistence between Islam, Christianity and Hellenism, I saw a cordial acceptance by the Greeks (Christians). So I started these, appearing to broadcasts on public and private even ecclesiastic radio and TV shows, participating in seminars and lectures even within the School of Theology and religious organizations, and the YMCA, which honored me with its membership in Thessaloniki, talking all about common timeless human values between Islam and Christianity, between Islam and Hellenism, always aiming at peaceful coexistence and acceptance of the other among the followers of these two ecumenical religions. This was happening mostly by viewing the common timeless values of both religions and cultures and highlighting the common cultural background of Christianity and Islam - Hellenism -, and of course by supporting my stand point through Arab Islamic primary sources regarding Dhul Qarnein, Al-Rum, Qur'anic words of Greek origin and generally the coexistence of two holy languages of Islam and Christianity, i. e. Arabic and Greek respectively, and the various Qur'anic Suras, that refer directly or indirectly to Christianity as one of the peoples of the Book, known better as Ahl AL-Kitab and or Ahl Al-Dhimmah .

Thus, I participated in many broadcasts and programs of major channels of the Greek media. In addition, I started writing articles in one of the most serious newspapers of Greece "Eleftherotypia" and its weekly magazine "Historika" about Islam and Arabs through the primary Arabic sources and their deep rooted relationships with Hellenism and Christianity, which after all is my research field, always promoting the eternal human values and the common virtues of the two religions, the two worlds, of Love and of "ye love one another" and of Peace, i. e. of the Al-Salam Alaikoum.

What I have always been looking for and shared with people are the points of approach, the connecting links emphasizing on the role of Islam in the preservation, transmission and retransmission of Hellenism mainly in Europe e. g. *Bait Al-Hikmah*, the First Arab Islamic University... I mention the continued existence of the main Seats of Christianity in the heart of the Arab Islamic world, demonstrating the guiltlessness of Islam, its innocence and does not justify this current image about Islam and the Islamophobia phenomenon... I stress that both two religions, and Judaism, belong to the family of Abramic religions, i. e. we are first-degree relatives and that Islam always, in the Qur'an, emphasizes the common kinship by blood and by faith through Abraham. And how the term "peace be unto you", i. e. the Christian greeting is purely sharing ... is the Islamic Salam Alikum and the Jewish Shalom.

Example consensus of the other, of the peoples of the Scriptures, where Islam allows a Muslim to marry by Christian and Jews and are creating the conditions for mutual support: the patrons of the first believers of Islam were Christians of Ethiopia ordered by Byzantium... the first hijras, i. e. the escapes by the first Muslims appealed to Ethiopia, the Christian realm, Muhammad married Maria the Egyptian who had Greek mother, that many leaders of the caliphate had a Greek mother... the example of John of Damascus... Finance Minister of the Omayyads, Al-'Akhtal... how Byzantium respected Islam, by building a mosque in

the capital to meet the religious needs of prisoners and ambassadors and traders of Islam...

Of course I soon realized that it all starts with the youth, tomorrow's society, and I had a lot of BARGAINS to do this because education is everything. I am fortunate to courses I do to have a large attendance-influx of students (about 1000-1570 on each semester), who started- began to be interested in the history and culture of Islam. So I started alongside my official course of teaching, teaching Arabic at the AUTH unpaid for over a decade to students passing about very positive messages of positive and optimistic content about Arabs and Islam [through common words, concepts etc.].

Unfortunately, I discovered that the scientifically, ecclesiastically or popularly written materials like books, monographs and articles in Greek were very few and mainly translations from different out of date-old fashioned European languages and that they include many errors and inaccuracies in propaganda against Islam unprecedented. As for the Qur'an there are many translations from various European languages in such a way which does not correspond to its original text or meaning and in most respects does not make sense, except of a very good translation directly from Arabic, but old one, written mostly in ancient Greek rather than in modern Greek, in such a way which is mostly a language that is incomprehensible to anyone.

This of course led me to give priority to my scientific projects to be in Greek and to cover this gap in Greek bibliography. So I wrote almost 99% in Greek (please for detail for books, monographs and articles-papers, see my CV), e. g. three volumes entitled: Introduction into the History of Islamic World, mainly based on the primary sources of Arab Islamic, Ancient Greek as well as Byzantine sources, trying at least through them to present the real value of Islam, as a religion, as a civilization, as a tradition, as well as a way of living.

Fortunately these books<sup>2</sup> are taught since 1996 onwards, not only at Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, where is my seat, but also in many other Greek

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<sup>2</sup> a) *The administrative organization of Egypt after the Arab conquest. Similarities and differences to the Byzantine model, second edition, Thessaloniki*(1994, Dissertation, PHD ). It reveals the depth of Arab Islamic and Byzantine inter action in multifarious levels. It aimed at and approved that civilization, peoples, religion and languages do not come into clash and confrontation but into a fruitful cooperation and peaceful symbiosis. This work depends only in its sources on the trilingual papyri Arabic, Greek and Coptic, Arab Islamic, Byzantine and Coptic primary works. b) *An Introduction to the History of the Islamic World*, vol.1, Thessaloniki (2003-more than ten editions), in 432 pages. Emphasis is given on the ancient Greek and Latin primary as well as Islamic sources. It mostly deals with Islam as a religion, Arab Islamic conquests, but mainly it presents the depth of Islamic civilization in its relationship with the Greek one c) *An Introduction to the History of the Islamic World: Administration, Society, Economy. The Pre-Islamic Age (440-610 A. D.)*, vol. 2, third edition, Thessaloniki (2013). It covers the pre Islamic period between 440 to 610 AD. Emphasis is given upon Arab Islamic and Byzantine primary sources in an analytical manner. The pre Islamic Arab Byzantine relationships are presented as the main basis for the formation of the relations between Islam and Christianity as well as Arabs and Byzantines. d) *An Introduction to the History of the Islamic World: Administration, Society, Economy. The Dawn of Islam (610-632 A. D.)*, vol. 3, Thessaloniki (in press). It deals with the earliest period of Islam, of Muhammad The Prophet Himself, as Messenger of God as

Universities. The most important thing is that many of my students loved Islam and the Arabs through the courses, since knowledge brings nearer and dearer, and left abroad for postgraduate and doctoral studies on the field, directly or indirectly through comparative studies Graeco Arabica, Graeco Islamica, something which is still virgin soil in Greece and manipulating scholarships granted by Arab Islamic embassies in Athens for learning Arabic in the universities there...

Of course I quickly realized that I had to deal with the other side simultaneously. Taking into account that in Greece there is a considerable Muslim minority, my first action was to ensure my presence and even as a visiting professor at the Democritus University of Thrace in Komotini, where most students there are Muslims as it is actually the heart of the minority. For over five years teaching in Democritus University of Thrace, I was able to penetrate the hearts of the residents there, Muslims and Christians, and the media in the region to that point that they entrusted me with various regular cultural programs, e.g. Delta TV, writing articles for the print media there, e.g. "Chronos," "Paratiritis" - and give lectures and seminars. I visited many schools of the area esp. of the Muslim minority known as "Ierodidaskalia" or Al-Ma'ahid Al-Diniyah in the area and I was shocked by the level of knowledge of Islam - ignorance and religious fanaticism and caging of the teachers and muftis, who were teaching that they are the best and the heterodox are infidels or unfaithful.

The teachers of minority schools, since everything starts there, had to carry concurrent and reliable information about their work and the importance and value in relation to the peaceful coexistence and acceptance of the other, since they do coexist with the other, with the Greek Christian. The real picture I met, however, was just the opposite.

In Thessaloniki, where I teach at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki and where I live, a special academy called EPATH, meaning special pedagogic academy, was put into operation and young people of the minority get the chance to study there in order to become the future teachers in the minority schools. From 1989 to 2014, when the Special Academy stopped operating due to the financial crisis, I was teaching, on a permanent basis, unpaid, disciplines that aimed at searching and viewing points of approach between Islam and Christianity, as well as between, Hellenism and Islam through Islamic sources even the Qur'an itself, in which there are many reports of positive content about Christianity, Hellenism and Byzantium. This task at EPATH proved to be very difficult for me as for 25 years I was trying to teach to Muslims what is Islam after all, and to convince them that Islam has nothing to do with fanaticism and caging and that they can coexist

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well as Statesman. Great emphasis is given on the Umma's Constitution, known as Sahifat al-Ummah, the primary model for the future political Islam, where relationship between Islam and the other is very clear, especially the peoples of the Book- Ahl Al-Kitab, Ahl Al-Dhimmah., e) Islam a short History, f) Alexander the Great according to the Arab Islamicprimary sources.....etc.

peacefully with another religious communities. Moreover, I teach them what Islam did from its very beginnings and during its early conquest. Now why can not we?

Indeed, students who graduated from “EPATH”, had become open minded as their perception is extended and they now carry proper information. The problem that arose now of course was how to replace the old teachers with finite perceptions, with young people, the new generation. I always believed that when you play well intentioned for the good of the society, and I do play in favor of a peaceful coexistence for the society I live, God always creates the right conditions to achieve your goal.

Eventually, my incessant efforts in this field have not gone to waste. The many contacts with leading figures in the Ministry of Education and Religions for issues related to peaceful coexistence between Islam and Christianity through education left the ground. Thereby, Ministry of Education notified me almost four years ago and announced that I was the most suitable candidate to contribute to the projects of the Ministry for the upgrade of the education system of minority schools in Greece because of my academic status but mainly because they knew my character through my relentless efforts during all these years. Consequently, they announced my appointment as president of a seven-member committee that would undertake the upgrading and modernization of the educational system for the teaching of Islam. This appointment passed through the Greek Parliament and then I was also informed about the need of developing a curriculum in minority schools.

The Committee consisted of me as president, the three muftis of the minority, the counselor of the Minister of Education for religious issues, the secretary of the SG. Ministry for religious issues and a Professor from the Theological School of the Aristotle University. The goal of this serious effort was to change the teaching spirit that prevailed until then and be improved based on the search for points of common approach and principles of the two religions that emphasize the peaceful coexistence through the acceptance of the other.

The Second Committee where I was again appointed by the Ministry as president, targeted, in spite of the financial crisis, at establishing specific criteria for the selection and appointment of 240 teachers in minority schools, carriers of new concepts of a modernized educational system that guarantees the peaceful coexistence through the acceptance of the other. Within a year, the curriculum was drawn up, radical changes took place not only on the disciplines but also their contents, and it was done a strict qualitative selection of teachers, so as to contribute to the implementation of the philosophy of upgrading aimed at getting rid of outdated systems of teaching religion, which emphasized to the superiority of the religion, compared to the other and the characterization of non-Christians as unbelievers.

What I also suggested and was approved by the Ministry was the teaching of Arabic as it is the language of the Qur’an, aspiring this way to the direct use of the Qur’an and Shari’a i.e. the original language without dependence on others with other considerations and having direct access to the sources of Islam.



A large number of newly appointed preachers were interviewed. Following my proposal for the need of changing the language of religious discourses and preaches of Fridays as well as of the language of the religious celebrations in schools of catechism, which easily influence the followers of a religion and beyond school, it was considered necessary to interview the preachers operating in mosques as well, in order to be trained on and to consolidate religious values for the treatment of the issues and problems that interested the local residents and with primary aspiration the understanding and peaceful coexistence of different conceptions and cultures. Thereupon, within a year 240 religious teachers and preachers were appointed and was essentially completed an important and necessary step concerning the enhancing of the orientation of the youth of tomorrow's society and of their spiritual and mental abilities for a peaceful co-existence and acceptance of the other among the followers different religions.

Third Committee..., was a place where I was again appointed me by the ministry as President for the close follow up of the implementation process of the aforementioned projects of Committees. This program up to date has proved to be of great success and its acceptance by local residents is increasing steadily despite the obstacles arising from the implementation and other factors that wish the prevalence of confusion and are contrary to the spirit of dialogue.

I think that the Muslim minority in Greece, after these efforts indeed emerges as model to be emulated and it is shown interest by other European countries for the adoption of this effort for upgrade of the religious educational program of different religious minorities, and not only in the Balkans but mainly across Europe and especially during these turbulent times. At the same time Greece appreciating my effort all these years for a peaceful coexistence at different levels and for the simplified academic acquaintance between Hellenism and Arab-Islamic culture in Greece and abroad, honored me with the title "Ambassador of Hellenism." My struggle has not stopped, but it continues to this day. I do not belong to and I have no leading position of any political party or organization. Just fighting for the sake of the timeless universal human values and accepting the other.

Heartily I do thank the Embassy of Qatar in Athens that proposed me, Greece that entrusted me and strengthened this role, and congratulations to you for undertaking such initiatives internationally.

*Saeed A. Khan*<sup>1</sup>

## **Creating a Safe Space for Interfaith Difficult Dialogues: A College Course on Christian-Muslim Understanding at an Evangelical College in America**

### **Abstract**

Interfaith cooperation is often impeded by the inability or unwillingness to engage in difficult discussions between religious communities. Contentious issues are avoided for fear of causing disengagement. Such a challenge underscores the need to establish a safe space for trust building and fostering a climate for meaningful and constructive dialogue. The university campus is an ideal venue for such activity, and such a safe space has been developed at an American Evangelical college to foster Christian-Muslim understanding. This paper examines the example of Rochester College in Michigan, which offers the first and only course on Christian-Muslim dialogue at an Evangelical Christian college in the United States. In its fifth year, this course, with Christian and Muslim co-instructors, creates both the space and the discursive climate to discuss and debate contentious issues across faith lines in a constructive manner that develops a model for such dialogues in other spheres of engagement.

### **Presentation**

Relationships are forged glacially, not seismically. They are predicated by the establishment and then further fortification of trust among people. The course, Christian-Muslim Dialogue at Rochester College, has been the result of a relationship among its instructors that was cultivated over a decade before its inception. It is a unique phenomenon as it is the only such course offered in the United States at any Christian campus. Rochester College is a small Christian institution, founded in 1959 in Rochester Hills, Michigan, a suburban town located approximately 30 miles north of Detroit. The college has nearly 700 undergraduate students and adheres to the ethos of the Church of Christ denomination.

For a few years, Professors Keith Huey and John Barton had been taking their World Religions classes on field trips to various houses of worship to provide exposure to the students of different faiths and practices. Once a semester, they would come to the Islamic Association of Greater Detroit (IAGD), the closest mosque to Rochester College, about 5 miles away. Visiting on a Friday, the classes are privy to the Friday sermon and prayer of a congregation numbering a few hundred. Professors Huey and Barton would always make prior arrangement with the mosque to confirm whether they could come for a particular Friday session; this advanced notice would allow the mosque to have someone available to deliver a short lecture on Islam and to preside over a question/answer period.

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A few weeks after the September 11, 2001 attacks, I happened to be at the mosque on the Friday when the Rochester College class made its visit. Upon completion of the prayers, I was informed by the IAGD board president that this class was visiting and whether I could lead them through a tour of the facilities and answer any questions they may have. I was only too happy to oblige. An encounter that easily could have been a one-off meeting in fact blossomed into a sustained interaction. Soon, Keith and John started to invite me to give guest lectures to their world religions class each semester to coincide with their coverage of Islam.

I developed a routine for these sessions, furnishing the same disclaimer each time. First, I would state that there would be no questions that would be off limits; my philosophy is that I would rather someone ask the question than leave with it being unaddressed. For those seeking knowledge, especially of a topic that may be contentious and uncomfortable, the absence of an answer could appear evasive. Instead, I assured the students that if I could not answer the question, I would be happy to provide them an answer via email later and/or a source that they could consult themselves that would give them the necessary information. Additionally, I always mentioned that, despite being theologically Muslim, I was reared culturally Christian. This disclosure comes with the desire to build trust between myself and the students as well as to give them an utterly honest assessment of my own background, one that I share with millions of Muslims who live outside Muslim-majority countries. Having spent the first 8 years of my life in the United Kingdom, the rest in the United States, and irrespective the official secular position of the state in both locales, it is beyond dispute that I have set my proverbial watch to a Christian rhythm, such as holidays, the work week and being privy to the civil religion of Christianity in the public sphere. Most critically, I make sure to impart upon the students the fact that I, like so many other Muslims similarly situated, live this reality without protest or resentment, and that the Christian cultural experience is harmonious to our day-to-day lives, free of anomaly or ontological compromise. This point becomes essential to emphasize at a time when Muslims in Europe and the United States are constantly having their loyalties challenged with accusations that they seek to disrupt and subvert the cultural landscape of dominant culture, either by wishing to implement Shari'ah or suing for greater public visibility through their apparel.

While the regularity of delivering talks at Rochester College were beneficial to the World Religions classes by giving texture and a personal face of Islam to the students, the true achievement of the series of engagements was the genuine friendship that developed between Keith, John and me. Students may be rightly skeptical when they hear certain platitudes conveyed upon my arrival in the class, out of a sense of courtesy and even professional cordiality. But the sincerity and open, expressive quality of our interaction in the classroom affirmed the true nature of our relationship as being without guile or contrivance.

After being an invited guest speaker in class for a decade, John decided to propose something that was a significant leap forward. Having assumed the role of provost at the college, John was now in a position to leverage his role to attain a

paradigm shift in the curriculum. Along with Keith, John suggested we design a full course for the schedule entitled “Christian-Muslim Dialogue”. John believe that the discourse within the Evangelical community about Islam required clarification not just regarding theological issues, but also the equally important attitudes about Muslims, neighbors living in the same locale, but under a cloud of ambivalence or antipathy. Unable to conceal my excitement, I said yes before John was even able to divulge all the details for the course. All three of us saw our interaction as natural, organic and genuine. We also, acknowledged, however that our experience and perspective was not the common experience for many, particularly Evangelical Christians in America, for whom Muslims were at best an unknown commodity, and at worst, a perceived threat.

Academicians, especially those who have limited exposure to the administrative side of the academy, may not appreciate certain political and financial realities that affect curricular decision-making. While Keith, John and I were clearly enthusiastic about our proposed course, there were some who did not share our excitement. It is, in fact, nothing short of a minor miracle that the course came to be at all. John informed us that despite his position and ability to proffer the course, some faculty, administration and even donors had grave reservations about the course, both on ideological and economic grounds. A course of this type was not only unprecedented at Rochester College; it was unique to any Evangelical college in the country! There are those who prefer avoiding being trailblazers, especially with subject matter for which there is a deeply entrenched apprehension to exposing the topic to impressionable young minds on campus. John took a serious risk, mortgaging his reputation, as well as that of the college, to push through the course. There were threats from donors to withdraw their funding for the college and some nervous members of the community that worried the college would face ridicule and anger from local and national voices.

The first course of Christian-Muslim Dialogue convened in the fall term of 2011, exactly a decade since 9/11 and approximately ten years from my initial interaction with John and Keith at the IAGD. The first batch was 30 students, a sizable matriculation for a brand new, unknown course, meeting twice a week. We kept the syllabus and course requirements intentionally relaxed. Each student would be responsible for submitting a weekly reflection paper, expanding upon a theme or point of discussion from the prior week. In addition, each student was required to submit a question on any topic that interested him/her. At the beginning of the next class session, each of the instructors would respond to the question in 5-minute segments. After we provided our reflections, we opened the question to the students and spent the remainder of the class time discussing the topic collectively. This proved to be a highly successful method, as it allowed for a conversation with depth and nuance on a subject chosen by a student that ostensibly would have been on the minds of other students as well. Given our preference for a discussion driven course, we decided to keep the reading requirements light as well. We assigned a single book, Yale scholar Miroslav Volf’s *Allah: A Christian Response*. Volf had spoken at Rochester College a few months before the course began, and his book made a

profound impact on all of the instructors with its thesis that a rational, constructive discussion between Evangelicals and Muslims was not only possible, but also necessary.

Volf's text was a perfect companion to the discussions that Keith, John and I had planned to have with the students in the class, and mirrored our own ethos of tackling difficult subjects without compromising our own respective beliefs founded upon our respective faith traditions. We recognized that there were some topics that were irreconcilable differences between Islam and Christianity. Yet, according to Volf, these were very few in number and hardly ones that should deter interaction and even cooperation between members of each religious community. Moreover, Volf contends that the doctrinal issues that Muslims maintain vis-à-vis Christianity have been debates within Christianity itself. As a result, Keith, John and I made sure to address the differences with candor and thoroughness, respecting the distinctions that exist between Islam and Christianity, while also asserting that the vast majority of interaction between members of the two faith communities, in practical terms, exists outside the realm of religious ideology, but rather, a matter of finding common areas of cooperation and collaboration to fix problems both groups face in their shared society.

The natural, friendly interplay between Keith, John and me was well on display during the class. Students were able to witness firsthand the ability of committed Christians and Muslims engaged in a genuine friendship and asserting both the importance and possibility for students to do the same. The early perceptions of the students ran a fairly comprehensive spectrum. Some approached the course with a spirit of eagerness to seek understanding. Many seemed curious—the fact they had enrolled in the course was proof enough that they at least sought further knowledge and insight—about what was being offered. There were some, however, that had fairly intractable views about Islam and Muslims.

While it is difficult to remember those students who maintained a positive outlook throughout the semester, there is always one student whose strident attitude makes him/her memorable. In that first class, we shall call that student Phillip. Phillip was a non-traditional student, meaning he was in his early 50's instead of the more conventional post-high school age individual. A few weeks in to the term, Keith and John approached me with a look of slight embarrassment on their faces. They had the reflection papers from the prior week and warned me that while they knew I was a "big boy" and was unfazed by any criticism or aspersions, they were reluctant to show me one of the student papers because they felt it was egregious in its tone. After such a disclaimer, my curiosity to read it only piqued. As I read it, I discovered why my co-instructors were troubled. The excerpt that bothered them read, "As I see Professor Khan lecture in front of the class, I cannot help but think I see the devil standing next to him." I read this passage a few times, and with a chuckle let them know that it was clearly not the worst thing I had ever read that had been written about me. I also commented how the author of that passage ironically had written a very "Islamic" paper, as the devil, according to Islamic tradition, is a jinn, and that some people reputedly have the ability to see the jinn whereas others

do not. A week or so after this revelation, Phillip approached me after class ended and asked if he could speak to me. I said, “Of course,” and he proceeded to ask me whether Muslims believe in supernatural experiences. I informed him that we are obliged to do so, especially with our belief in the existence of the jinn and of angels. He proceeded to tell me that when he was younger, he had been a very “bad” person, indulging in drug abuse and illicit sexual deviance. He said that a few years ago, the apparition of his deceased brother and deceased father appeared before him and admonished him that he was on a very dangerous path and that he ought to change his ways. The very next day, he claimed, an apparition of Jesus Christ appeared and reiterated his family members’ warnings. Phillip said that he immediately accepted Jesus as his lord and savior and had been “clean” ever since. But he lamented that when he recounted this story to others, they were either dismissive or disturbed at his experience. I assured him that the issue was mostly like due to the fact that he was conveying an episode for which people lacked a common frame of reference, and I asked whether there was anything that significantly changed in his life subsequent to his conversion. He replied by saying that the relationship with his mother, fractured throughout his dark period, had now been restored and that he was a dutiful son, caring for her in her advanced age. I told him that this should be the part of the story that he should emphasize as everyone has a mother, and anyone would immediately respond to an aspect of the narrative to which they could relate. Phillip became very relieved to hear that, and commented on how he was both surprised and genuinely glad to see my lack of judgmentalism. Phillip then mentioned that he felt ashamed that he had improperly prejudged me because I was a Muslim and that I had shown him greater empathy than he had experienced among so many Christians. At that very moment, it occurred to me that Phillip was in fact the author of the infamous essay that saw claimed to see me in the company of Satan.

Textbooks and theory play an important part in framing the debates and discussions of any topic; Christian-Muslim interaction is no exception to this potential method. At the same time, the key to understanding experience is the sharing of experiences among people who may perceive living divergent lives. In the classroom, there is an emphasis on recounting life stories, in part, to break the proverbial ice and build trust through the sharing of personal accounts. At the same time, this approach helps expose the commonalities of Muslim and Christian experiences in life. During the term, I would share stories about how my family celebrates the American holiday, Thanksgiving. Many students appear genuinely surprised when I mention that not only is it one of my favorite holidays on the calendar, but that I am vehemently insistent that the menu be very “traditional” to the Thanksgiving orthodoxy of turkey, mashed potatoes, gravy and pumpkin pie. I also talk about how there is the inevitable encounter with relatives who speak in unparliamentary ways about a myriad topics that are inappropriate for polite company and for a day that is supposed to signify gratitude. A smile grows on more than one face among the students as they hear a common experience to ones they have encountered in their lives. They become increasingly receptive to share their

similar stories as a result of this process. There are also the unforeseen consequences of this sharing of Thanksgiving stories. On more than one occasion, students have come to class after the holiday and mentioned how they had to endure anti-Muslim pronouncements by an uncle, grandfather or some other relative. These students then proceed to say that while such conversation was commonplace from year to year around the holiday dinner table, this time, they felt compelled to offer a rejoinder to the relative in question, and corrected the individual in his/her misconceptions. The fact that the students were becoming ambassadors of dialogue was a welcome discovery and affirmation of the decision to develop the course in the first place.

While Thanksgiving served as a nice point of convergence, students were equally intrigued to hear that debates within Muslim circles mirrored those within their own community, particularly over Halloween. I recounted for the class, in a session prior to the annual candy-collecting holiday that many Muslims object to their children participating in the activities of the day because they are uncomfortable with the pagan origins of the holiday and its association with demonic imagery. Many students admitted that they did not or were not permitted to celebrate Halloween for exactly the same reasons. I also recounted how some Muslims celebrated Halloween with considerable fanfare, while others sought to achieve a middle ground, observing something facetiously called “Halaloween.” Muslims would not allow their children to go trick-or-treating, but instead, they would let them participate in functions that were organized by mosque youth groups in family restaurants, where face-painting, pizza, video games and other activities were available. These alternate-space opportunities showed creative ways of acknowledging American cultural events, yet adopting their commemoration to their own respective religious sensibilities. It was a surprise to many that Muslims and Christians shared common concerns about American cultural activities that were based on similar religious sensitivities. It also allowed the students to realize that Islam was no more or less monolithic in its ideology than was Christianity.

It was always a key objective of Keith, John and myself that the class we were teaching be transformative for the students. We did not ever imagine that it would be for so many and so quickly; after all, a fifteen week term with classes only twice a week for 90 minutes each session is hardly a long time to nurture and create lasting change- or so we thought. On the last day of class for the term, the three of us brought coffee and donuts for the class and kept the session open for a discussion on reflections the students had regarding the class. Every single student commented on how it was such a positive experience and each one felt they had gained a much better, deeper understanding of Islam and Muslims. I commented that my hope for the class was not to make them Muslim, but rather, that they become better Christians, as it was my belief that Christian values of humanity and understanding were the goal. Phillip walked up to me and said that the most significant experience in his life was when he accepted Jesus Christ as his lord and savior; the second most important experience was taking this class.

Two years ago, the trio that developed our class became a duo. John accepted a wonderful opportunity to move to Pepperdine University in Malibu,

California to join its faculty, as his wife Sara had a position at the college as well. It was sad that a friendship and collaboration that had been cultivated for over a decade was now going to be affected by distance. While the class continues with Keith and me, it is certainly a different dynamic than when John was part of it. At the same time, it is wonderful that John has been able to attain such a career promotion, and the friendship remains as close as ever. We have now completed our fifth year teaching the course. Each semester, we experience a new mix of students and with it, new discussions, new challenges and new modes of engagement and understanding. The adage, “never a dull moment” may appear to be clichéd and hackneyed. Yet, when it comes to Christian-Muslim dialogue, especially as it is offered as a course at Rochester College, there is hardly a more appropriate description of a fascinating and fulfilling experience bringing together genuine opportunities of understanding and shared humanity.

Several studies in the United States have shown that the public’s negative perceptions of Muslims have grown since 9/11. At the same time, however, those same studies, as well as others, assert that the vast majority of people who harbor such sentiments have never in fact met a Muslim in person. Moreover, attitudes toward Muslims have a very strong correlation to having a personal interaction with a Muslim. It is in this capacity that the work of creating safe spaces of engagement, with healthy conversations that focus less on pedagogy and proselytization and more on finding common experiential ground, is the formula for understanding and coexistence. Our course at Rochester College continues to draw students each term on campus as well as the curiosity and interest of others across the country. There is the potential to replicate this course at other Christian colleges. Keith, John and I hope that happens, but when asked, we recommend that the due diligence that is required before embarking upon such a project is developing real friendship among the instructors as a prerequisite. That is the strongest foundation upon which to build a class and understanding.



*Ellen Weinberg Dreyfus*<sup>1</sup>

## **The Role of Family and Educational Institutions in Establishing Intellectually and Spiritually Peaceful Generations**

### **Abstract**

The family is the oldest institution in human society. When parents and grandparents model behavior of respect for all people, children learn to honor their neighbors. When families practice charity and work together to help others, children learn that they have responsibilities to the people nearby and around the world. The Bible says, “You shall teach them diligently unto your children” (Deuteronomy 6:7). The obligation to instill spiritual consciousness is the responsibility of individual faith communities. Teaching the values of peace and justice is incumbent upon the entire society, through families, schools, and community institutions.

### **Presentation**

The family is the oldest institution in human society, and continues to be the strongest way in which we transmit our religious and moral values from one generation to the next. In the Biblical story of Creation, we read that every person is created in the image of God. (Genesis 1:26-27) It follows from this that every person is deserving of respect and dignity, since no person of faith would want to disrespect the image of God. Even more, we can learn from this that harming another person is harming God’s creation. As we read in the Talmud, “Whoever destroys a soul, it is considered as if he destroyed an entire world. And whoever saves a life, it is considered as if he saved an entire world.”<sup>2</sup> A similar teaching is found in Islamic tradition, in the Holy Qur’an: “...if any one killed a person, it would be as if he killed the whole of mankind; and if any one saved a life, it would be as if he saved the life of the whole of mankind...”<sup>3</sup> This understanding is basic to our faith traditions. Every individual, created in God’s image, is unique and precious. The institutions we create must foster this basic idea, and help all children grow knowing that they are precious and a world unto themselves.

The home is the first and most important educational institution. When parents and grandparents model behavior of respect for all people, children learn to honor their neighbors. If the home itself is a place of love, where elders are given the honor they deserve, where each person has the opportunity to contribute and to be heard, then children will learn by example. Conversely, when children hear unkind words, racial and ethnic slurs, or bigoted comments from the adults in their household, they will grow up believing that such prejudiced attitudes are acceptable

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<sup>2</sup> Mishnah Sanhedrin 4:9; *Yerushalmi Talmud*, Tractate Sanhedrin 37a.

<sup>3</sup> The Holy Qur’an (Chapter Five, Verse 32).

and correct. If they see family members taunted or intimidated, they may lack self-confidence or grow to be bullies.

Edmund Cahn, a 20<sup>th</sup> Century American attorney and philosopher of law, summed up the ideal of the home for teaching and learning values. Where could there be a more favorable background for sympathetic instruction and effortless learning than a really harmonious family home? For security is in such a home and the awareness of being loved, guidance on the one hand and the relaxation that comes from confidence on the other. In a world full of doubts and disapprovals, here may be faith, unreserved acceptance, and fond admiration to blandish away that carking distrust of oneself.<sup>4</sup>

As a parent, I know that it is not always easy to impart values to children, and to practice what we preach on a daily basis. Raising children to be good and moral and considerate of others is enormously challenging, takes tremendous patience and creativity, and does not happen by itself. In the words of Rabbi Neil Kurshan:

“A six-year-old brother does not instinctively get along with his four-year-old sister. A teenager does not automatically help around the house. A parent does not always react with patience to a misbehaving child. Ultimately, the right thing to do is not always clear and is not simply a matter of common sense – either to children or adults.

Children do not magically learn morality, kindness, and decency any more than they magically learn math, English, or science. They mature into decent and responsible people by emulating adults who are examples and models for them, especially courageous parents with principles and values who stand up for what they believe.”<sup>5</sup>

When families practice charity and work together to help others, children learn that they have responsibilities to the people nearby and around the world. It is not enough to write a check and tell your children that you donate to charitable causes, although that is certainly admirable. Children learn by doing, so hand-on projects that they can experience will teach them more.

A personal example: When my children were young, we had our own Thanksgiving project. Each November, we would go together to the grocery store and buy a complete, traditional American Thanksgiving dinner for four families – four whole turkeys, four packages of stuffing, and sweet potatoes, and cranberry sauce, and dinner rolls, and vegetables, and pumpkin pies – the whole dinner. And then we would pack it up into four big cartons and take all this food over to the local food pantry and ask them to give it to families who needed it. As we did this, we talked about the fact that some families did not have enough money to buy their own dinner for the holiday, and that this would be a special treat. It was not a huge effort, but one that enabled them to see what others might need. My comfortable, well-fed

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<sup>4</sup> Edmund Cahn, cited in *Day by Day: Reflections on the Themes of the Torah from Literature, Philosophy, and Religious Thought*. Edited by Chaim Stern, CCAR Press, NY 1998, p.280.

<sup>5</sup> Kurshan, Neil; *Raising Your Child To Be A Mensch*, Atheneum, New York, 1987, p.12.

children learned about hunger and poverty as they learned to give and share. Now I watch in pride as my grandchildren learn similar lessons from their parents.

The Bible says, “You shall teach them diligently unto your children.” (Deuteronomy 6:7) The obligation to instill spiritual consciousness is the responsibility of individual faith communities. My perspective is from the Jewish tradition, and Muslims, Christians, and others will undoubtedly see similarities to their own traditions. Dr. Wendy Mogel writes as a psychologist who explores the spiritual aspects of rearing children:

“Through the study and practice of Judaism, I learned that the parents I counseled had fallen into a trap created out of their own good intentions. Determined to give their children everything they needed to become “winners” in this highly competitive culture, they missed out on God’s most sacred gift to us: the power and holiness of the present moment and of each child’s individuality.

Three cornerstone principles of Jewish living are moderation, celebration, and sanctification. Through these principles we can achieve a balanced life, no matter what culture we happen to inhabit. The Jewish way is to continually study, learn, question, and teach these principles. By applying them to our family life, (we) have found some mooring and meaning in an unsteady world.

The principle of moderation teaches us to do two seemingly incompatible things as once: to passionately embrace the material world that God has created – “And God saw that it was good” – while exercising self-discipline. Judaism clarifies our proper perspective on engagement with the world. We are not to emulate animals, who act on instinct; the pagans, who worship nature and the senses for their own sake; the angels, who don’t struggle with longing; or the ascetics, who shun earthly pleasures. God created us with intense desire and free will on purpose, and it is up to us to use this endowment for good or ill.

Moderation leads to the second principle, celebration. We are obliged to embrace God’s gifts moderately but enthusiastically; in other words, we are obliged to give thanks and to party. Celebration takes hundreds of forms: the Jewish liturgy contains blessings over food, rainbows, new clothes, a narrow escape from danger, a day of rest, doing something for the first time, and even earthquakes. We are commanded to be constantly on guard for opportunities to be grateful for the richness of the world and for our good fortune, whatever form it takes. Through its spiritual calendar, rituals, and blessings, Judaism offers families many ways to practice and teach gratitude and joy.

Sanctification, the third principle, is the process of acknowledging the holiness in everyday actions and events. Since the Second Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 C.E., the place of greatest holiness has become not the synagogue but our own homes. In Jewish tradition, there are rules designed to help us sanctify all our daily enterprises, from the way we treat our spouses to the way we treat our children, our household help, even our pets. There are rules for reproof, for praise,

for greeting in the morning and going to sleep at night, because in Jewish tradition each of these activities is holy.”<sup>6</sup>

A child who grows up with a consciousness of God’s gifts, with a sense of joy and celebration, and with a realization that material possessions are not the only important things in life; that child will not see religion as something evil or useless. These essential values are instilled by the family at home, and by the faith community in its religious centers and houses of worship. Each religion will interpret the path to seek God and spirituality differently, which is how it should be. There are essential similarities and essential differences, as we seek to do God’s will as our traditions teach us.

Teaching the values of peace and justice is incumbent upon the entire society, through families, schools, and community institutions. Peace and justice are religious values, and are also civic and public values as well. Therefore, while they are not only within the purview of religious institutions, religious traditions have wisdom to share. In one collection of Jewish texts, *Midrash Rabbah*, the Rabbis expound upon the virtues of peace.

Great is peace for it outweighs everything. We say in morning prayers: “(God) makes peace and creates everything.”

Peace is a great thing, for even in war, peace is necessary; as it says: “When you approach a town to attack it, you shall offer it terms of peace.” (Deuteronomy 20:10)

Great is peace for even the angels in heaven need peace, as it says: “(God) makes peace in the high places.” If peace is necessary in a place where there is no hatred or enmity, how much the more so is it necessary on earth, where so many conflicts are found.<sup>7</sup>

Before anyone can make peace between nations, we need to learn to make peace between individuals. That is where educational institutions come in. Based on the respect for others that we hope children learn at home, schools need to establish guidelines for respectful interaction between students. For many children, school is the first institution where they confront people they do not know, people who do not automatically love them and understand their idiosyncrasies. It is therefore important for schools to provide an atmosphere where children can grow without fear and intimidation. They should be challenged to learn and to do their best, but not punished or harassed when their work is below the standard. Perhaps that child needs extra help – perhaps he or she has intellectual deficits or emotional problems. Better that the teacher and the school administration should seek the proper remediation than ridicule or punish the poorly performing student. Teachers, like parents, model respect for those created in God’s image. All children should be

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<sup>6</sup> Mogel, PhD, Wendy; *The Blessing of a Skinned Knee, Using Jewish Teaching to Raise Self-Reliant Children*, Penguin Compass, 2001, p.33ff.

<sup>7</sup> *Midrash Rabbah: Numbers, Volume I*, Translated and edited by H. Freedman & M. Simon, Soncino Press, London, 1939, p.441.

taught to honor their teachers and also to respect their fellow pupils. Respect and honor are the beginning of peaceful interactions.

At the Saul Mirowitz Jewish Community School in St. Louis, Missouri, they are dedicated to creating “a culture that reinforces ethical values... teaching honesty and kindness, compassion and responsibility.”<sup>8</sup> These values permeate the culture of the school in large and small ways. The children are regularly told, “You have the power to make a difference,” and “What you do makes a difference to the people around you.” If a child sees another sitting alone and invites him or her to play on the playground, the teacher compliments such behavior, and even the youngest children are told that they are using their “power” in good ways. Some of the younger students receive “*Hesed* Stars” for acts of kindness like helping another child or cleaning up without being asked. [*Hesed* is the Hebrew word for kindness.] At some schools, students might get a gold star for finishing their assignments and excelling academically. At Mirowitz, academics are also rewarded, but kindness is held up as one of the most important qualities a person can demonstrate.

In America, many middle school students are self-centered, feel lost and confused, do not really understand their purpose in life, and are mired in a social scene of vying for popularity in a very superficial environment. In the Middle School at Mirowitz, the staff chose to face the difficult pre-teen years in a purposeful way, by putting serious world issues in front of the students. “Each year of middle school includes an adventure designed to enhance personal growth, strengthen teamwork skills and offer a deeper understanding of our collective responsibility to better the world.”<sup>9</sup> In each of the three years (grades 6, 7, and 8), there is a major theme with a significant field trip at the beginning of the year, and the students then focus on that theme and try to solve some aspect of the problem throughout the year. The themes are: Hunger and Poverty; Civil Rights; and Environment. The students focus their energy on these projects rather than on worrying about whether their shoes match their outfit or other trivial matters. They learn that they can make a difference. They are taught that their responsibility as Jews is to make the world better.

While most American children attend public schools where there is no religious instruction, some attend religious schools. Not all schools are equal in their quality of educational instruction; nor are they equal in the way they present religious subjects and values. So it is especially exciting to find a school that excels in teaching and practices its faith in a joyous manner. In conversation with Cheryl Maayan, the Head of School of Saul Mirowitz Jewish Community School, I was struck by her dedication to shaping the character of every child who attends the school. She told me about the Thursday morning Torah Study, when 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> graders read from the Torah and teach about the weekly Biblical portion. Other children ask questions or make comments and really profound observations, and no one laughs or makes fun of the presenter or of any of the comments. She said she

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<sup>8</sup> “About Us – An Extraordinary Childhood”, [www.mirowitz.org](http://www.mirowitz.org).

<sup>9</sup> “Middle School”, [www.mirowitz.org](http://www.mirowitz.org).

has watched a new student who has transferred from another school come into the session for the first time. He or she would start to smirk or giggle, as kids might do in another setting, but the new child quickly saw that no one else was making light of the situation, and immediately stopped. The culture of the school is such that the students have all learned to listen respectfully and honor the ideas of their peers. Ridicule or shaming are not acceptable, and are simply not done.

Ms. Maayan also told me that the students who graduate from Mirowitz after learning “to use their power to make a difference,” go on to public high school equipped to handle challenges in a different way. They are often surprised to see other students acting disrespectfully and speaking unkindly. But, she says, they have developed the inner strength to deflect this behavior. While there are no guaranteed results, the children who attend this school are taught ethical and moral values along with reading and math, and they come out understanding their responsibilities to their community and to the world around them.

All of the Abrahamic religions praise the role of the peacemaker as an important person in every generation. Is it outrageous to imagine that we could train an entire generation to be peacemakers? What if that were our ultimate goal: to implant within every child the tools and ability to “seek peace and pursue it” in his or her everyday life, from home to school to the world outside? Many of our basic assumptions would need to change. For one thing, we would need to emphasize cooperation over competition. When we establish so much of our lives to have winners or losers, we are bound to create disappointment and enmity among those who do not come out at the top. But in reality, many of those competitions could function just as well or even better if we structured them as teamwork projects where everyone contributed and the entire team succeeded. The traditional Jewish style of learning is called “*chevruta*” – partnership. Study partners learn together, not in competition, but questioning each other and sharpening each other’s wits, more than either could learn alone. Encouraging children to learn together rather than pitting them against one another will make for better academic outcomes and will also foster better human relations.

The questions we ask in academic settings may also reflect a worldview that is less than peaceful. How many times are students asked to “compare and contrast” various facts or ideas? This encourages them to find differences and polarities, dividing the world. What would happen if sometimes we invited our students to “compare and relate” – to find the similarities and connections where they might not have seen them before? It seems trivial, but mindset is important. How do we want our children to think about “the other?” Do we want them to categorize everything in polarities – black or white, mine or yours, good or bad, in or out? How, then, will they learn nuance? Education is a process of discerning degrees and shades and poetic license. “Compare and contrast” limits thinking into a binary view of the world. If the world is binary, people are categorized as “us versus them,” and then “the other” may not have the potential to be their friend. If we open up the possibilities of how children think in school, we open up how they can think about people in the world. In this way, we might train the next generation to see their

mirror image in the other, the image of God, perhaps before they see a stranger whom they fear.

If a school has a prayer component (either a religious day school or a supplementary school for children who attend public school), the prayer services geared toward children can also be an opportunity to ask questions and help children open up spiritual possibilities. At the Saul Mirowitz Jewish Community Day School, the daily prayer services are a time to set the children's intentions for the day. The leaders stress mindfulness, being aware of what they do and what they say. Different questions might be asked on different days, depending on which prayer is emphasized. If they are carefully reading a prayer about giving thanks to God, the leader might ask the children to think about "what do I feel grateful for?" If they are reading the passage about leaving slavery, they might be asked to consider "what can I do because I am free?" In this way, not only to the prayers in the daily liturgy gain more significance to the students, even at a young age, but they also begin each day with intention and a spiritual calmness. The school's purpose is that they hope that the children will grow to be more thoughtful about their actions.

Peace is not only between individuals, but, of course, is a condition of society. Religious tradition teaches us that in order for there to be true peace, there must also be justice within the society.

Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel said: "The world rests upon three things: On justice, on truth and on peace."<sup>10</sup>

In the same collection of Talmudic wisdom, we read:

The Rabbis taught: The sword comes into the world because of justice delayed and justice denied.<sup>11</sup>

The connection between these two passages is justice. True peace requires justice. Peace is more than the absence of war, but rather *shalom* – which means wholeness or completeness – that reflects a just society.

The Bible teaches us that justice will not just automatically or magically happen, but that we must pursue justice in order to create a just society. "Justice, justice shall you pursue." (Deuteronomy 16:20) Likewise, in the Psalms, we are taught that we must pursue peace. "Shun evil and do good, seek peace and pursue it." (Psalms 34:15) Like much of biblical poetry, this verse has two sections that stand in parallel, each defining or enhancing the other. My commentary on this verse is that the parallel phrases give us insight into the meaning of the verse, each phrase informing the other.

"Shun evil" is parallel to "seek peace." From this we learn that simply seeking peace passively is only avoiding evil.

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<sup>10</sup> Pirkei Avot 1:18

<sup>11</sup> Pirkei Avot 5:8

“Do good” is parallel to “and pursue it,” teaching us that in order to do good, we must actively pursue peace.

As people of faith, we want to transmit our values to the next generation, so that they and their children after them may live in peace and security. Throughout the ages, we have understood that our children are the most precious gems we have; a gift from God that God has entrusted to us to nurture and educate and guide in the right direction. This we do through our families and schools and communities, with all our resources and creativity. We understand the crucial importance of this sacred task, and we ask God’s help and guidance as we do our very best.

Rabbi Meir taught the following:

When the Israelites came to the mountain of Sinai to receive God’s word, the Torah, they discovered that God was not willing to give it without proof that they would cherish this precious gift. So God said to Israel: “Give Me guarantors that you will treasure My Torah.” The people of Israel said, “Our ancestors will be our guarantors.” God answered: “They are not sufficient. I have found fault with your ancestors. They would need guarantors for themselves!” The Israelites spoke again: “If You will not accept our ancestors, accept our Prophets – they will vouch for us.” But God answered: “I have found fault with your prophets as well. They too would need their own guarantors. You may try one more time.” The Israelites, newly freed from the slavery of Egypt, looked up to the heavens and said to God: “If You will give us Your Torah, we will offer You our children.” And God said: “Since you offer Me your children, I will give you My Torah.”<sup>12</sup>

This Midrash is teaching us that God has entrusted us with the Torah, the first part of the Holy Bible, the source of our wisdom and guidance, for the sake of our children who are our future. There is a mutual agreement here: we offer our children as guarantors, and God gives us the tools with which to educate our future generations and teach them how to walk in God’s ways. It is our responsibility to see that we guide them with spirituality and meaning, as it is written about Scripture: “Its ways are ways of pleasantness and all its paths are peace.” (Proverbs 3:17)

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<sup>12</sup> Song of Songs *Rabbah* 1:4, cited in Wolpe, David J., *Teaching Your Children About God*, Harper Perennial, New York, 1993.



Safaa Fouda<sup>1</sup>

## **Interfaith Dialogue Experience: First Hand Reflections from Ottawa**

### **Abstract**

This paper describes the experience of a first generation immigrant Muslim woman who was different in terms of gender, faith and non-traditional profession. Yet she chose to be involved in interfaith dialogue since the early 1990's. This involvement, knowledge sharing, and raising awareness helped not only removing misconceptions about Islam but also enriching one's own faith. The dialogue evolved with time especially after 9/11; it moved from conversation to actions to benefit humanity. It demonstrates that when sincere people from different faiths communicate, they get to know one another, alleviate fear and discover common values, motives to work together, build peace and generate harmony. Diversity then becomes a celebrated source of unity. The charitable projects show that both the volunteers and the recipients come from multi-faith background.

### **Introduction**

When I moved to Canada in 1969, globalization was not as prevalent as it is today. Knowledge about other parts of the world was a luxury among the highly educated main stream select segment of the society. As a first generation immigrant, I was part of an ethnic minority of Muslims who made Canada home. Even within the Muslim community there was diversity as Muslims came to Canada from more than 50 different nations. Being a minority among a majority that knew little about my roots, I had three options for defining a comfortable identity for myself. One option was to leave my roots behind and blend in the melting pot assimilating with the culture to ensure that I was accepted; the second option was to isolate myself, confine my social circles to friends who came from the Arab world and share the same religious belief to ensure that my religious values were maintained. The third option was to integrate in the Canadian fabric as a productive professional citizen, while preserving my roots. Between assimilation, isolation and integration, I chose the latter. Integration made the most sense to me as I felt that I owed it to Canada to be a good citizen and I owed it to myself to maintain the precious values which made me who I am. Fortunately there was nothing at odds between mainstream Canadian values and my own. Moreover Canada is a land of immigration; diversity is normal; a good portion of the population was either born outside the country or have parents who were.

The Islamic perspective on diversity is clear in the Qur'an. We were created in different nations and tribes so that we may know one another and the best among us is the most pious. [49:13] "*O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a*

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*male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know each other. Verily the most honored of you in the sight of God is the most righteous among you. And God has full Knowledge and is well-acquainted (with all things)."*

If God willed, He would have created us in one nation but He deliberately created us different to test us on how we will get along. He tells us to race for good deeds. [5:48] *"... If God had so willed, He would have made you one nation, but (His plan is) to test you in what He has given you; so strive as in a race in all virtues. The goal of you all is to God; it is He that will show you the truth of the matters in which you differ."* Therefore it is a Muslim duty to accept that humans were created different and that Muslims must strive to be good to all humanity as they will be judged by how well they did in this respect. Muslims are also told to be gentle when dealing with other humans following the example of Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.). [3:159] *"It is part of the Mercy of God that you deal gently with them. Were you severe or harsh-hearted, they would have turned away from around you: so be clement towards them, and ask forgiveness for them; and take council of them in affairs. Then, when thou have taken a decision, put your trust in God. For God loves those who put their trust (in Him)."*

With this Islamic perspective in mind and seeing what we face today including violence, violation of nature, poverty and hunger, it is clear that there is a need for human effort to create understanding among diverse communities and develop a sense of brotherhood and sisterhood among people. Usually conflicts come from fear and fear in turn comes from not knowing one another. Hence tackling the problem begins with creating a safe environment for communication and knowledge sharing among people with different backgrounds. The need for dialogue is therefore the first step in the thousand mile trip towards global harmony. In this paper, my first hand experience with the Ottawa Christian Muslim Dialogue group which evolved to other interfaith encounters is described as an example for outreach and bridge building. The impact of the dialogue and related interfaith activities in this local community indicates that the dialogue approach is effective in peace building, removing boundaries and creating unity.

### **People of Faith Coming Together**

I was invited to join the Christian Muslim Dialogue group in Ottawa in the early 1990's, about a year after it was formed. The founders are two Muslims and two Christians who shared the view that there was a need for such platform for exchange to enhance mutual understanding. I met them through a mutual friend in a Multifaith peace prayer at a church during the first Iraqi war. The premise was explained to me in a respectable manner right at the outset. Upon attending two or three meetings I came to realize the dynamics of the group and felt comfortable being part of it.

The objective was to exchange information in order to understand one another, hence respecting each other's beliefs. No one was there to proselytise others. Both Muslims and Christians in the group were interested in understanding

and being understood; looking for enlightenment and appreciating the commonalities between the two Abrahamic faiths.

A Planning Committee, consisting of the original four members, would prepare an initial list of topics for discussion and invite members to suggest additional subjects. One speaker from each of the two faith groups would research the topic and present his or her findings in about 15 minutes each, participants could then ask questions as well as contribute to the discussion. The presentations would be based on respective scriptures and related sources. The meetings were held in homes of members once a month. The host may invite a limited number of friends to a meeting. Other members may do so also with the agreement of the host. A coordinator was selected to look after correspondence and chair the meeting. It alternated bi-annually between Christians and Muslims. Although there were about 60 people on the mailing list, the number of participants at one meeting was about 20-25. This was adequate to create a forum for dialogue rather than information meetings.

In the beginning, the topics were selected to highlight commonalities and emphasize the shared Abrahamic origin. Known doctrinal disagreements were initially avoided to create and establish mutual trust among participants. Examples of common topics which were initially discussed are the role and status of parenting in both traditions, the life stories of Prophets: Abraham, Moses, Joseph, Jesus, and Muhammad, peace be upon them all, the role of scriptures, forms of worship: prayers, fasting, pilgrimage, marriage, family life, Shari'ah and Canon law, religion and science. Forgiveness, justice, mercy and repentance were also among the topics discussed in the early years. The above mentioned examples show that there are plenty of common areas shared between the two faith traditions. We also discussed life after death and more modern issues such as organ transplant and euthanasia.

As the years went by, we evolved into friendship and mutual trust. This allowed for asking questions to learn more and more about each other. It became easier to open up topics and we found our meetings to be a safe forum to speak freely. I recall discussing with one of the Christian members that Muslims experience supplications over and above the ritual prayers performed five times daily. I mentioned a supplication: "Oh God You are peace; from You we get peace; glory be to You, the Exalted." At the next meeting, she brought me a booklet of Christian prayers and pointed out the exact peace phrase in it, saying that we have more in common than we think.

We also decided to hold a summer picnic every year where more people would join and we had a chance to socialize and bond in friendship outside the regular dialogue meetings.

Immediately after 9/11, the dialogue group participated in a multi-faith prayer in memory of those who lost their lives in New York, at the Ottawa City Hall building. Subsequent to 9/11 events, it became necessary for the Muslim community leaders to work harder at alleviating misconceptions about Islam. The Christian members of our dialogue group showed every possible support when needed. In

several occasions we would receive news about violence abroad and arrests made locally for national security issues. I recall receiving a letter from a Christian member after one of these arrests, saying that she felt for how difficult it must be for the Muslim faith community to keep hearing such news. In her letter she confirmed that we will continue to work together towards our shared desire for peace. Her letter was moving and much needed at this particular moment of frustration for me as a Canadian Muslim. It was inspiring; it gave me hope that we can generate an environment of understanding within our small community circle which is bound to ripple to larger societal circles. It also gave me reassurance that our dialogue activity is evolving from conversation to friendship and understanding. Moreover, I was so optimistic that people of faith have a lot in common. Upon receiving my friend's note, I wrote a letter to the editor of Ottawa's newspaper "The Citizen" explaining my gratitude as to how this note alleviated my frustration about the image of my faith and enhanced my optimism. Publishing this story took the impact of the dialogue beyond the membership to the sphere of the city at large.

### **From Conversation to Action**

In addition to sharing knowledge and conversation, the best way for people to know one another is to work together for a common cause. In 2004, the Christian Muslim Dialogue Group decided to launch a fundraising event to help the victims of the Earthquake which devastated Bam in Iran in December 2003. The desire of humans to help humans was the glue that bonded the group and the drive for both faith groups to help others. An open forum was held in St. Paul University in Ottawa and the funds were forwarded to the Red Cross and Human Concern International to support the victims of Bam.

We also raised funds to build a water purification facility to help the flood victims in a village in Pakistan in 2010. The joy of helping out was shared by both faith groups. Donating for a good cause is one thing but sharing this desire with friends of other faiths brings our souls to a higher spiritual state.

In 2012 we were discussing pilgrimage and the story of Prophet Abraham's sacrifice from both the Christian and Muslim perspectives. An idea was generated that night. The group decided to donate a lamb at the time of Hajj (pilgrimage) every year to the Ottawa Mission to feed the needy. Members of the Dialogue group would physically serve the meal at the Mission. The beauty of sharing the purchase and serving the lamb at this most blessed time is beyond words. This event is now a yearly tradition and the volunteers race to do the serving at the Ottawa Mission.

More recently, subsequent to the Paris violent events, a mosque in Peterborough, Ontario, was attacked and severely damaged by Islamophobic groups. The main stream community of Peterborough offered space for Muslims to pray and helped repair the damaged Mosque. Our dialogue group published a letter to applaud the actions of those who supported the Muslim community in Peterborough and to encourage Canadians to open their hearts and arms for the Syrian refugees and help them settle in Canada. In fact, members of the dialogue group donated funds to the Ottawa Muslim Women's Organization to sponsor a refugee family from Syria.

### **Enlarging the Circle of Interfaith Dialogue**

As time went by, the Dialogue group became known in the city. We came to know about other faith groups involved in interfaith projects. It was heart warming to be invited to interfaith projects and events with different emphasis and objectives.

The Ottawa School of Theology and Spirituality invited me and a Catholic Sister from our Dialogue group to develop, organize and facilitate a ten-week adult education course entitled “*Christianity-Islam, History, Relations, Issues and Perspectives*” in 2008. The enrolment for this course was four times as high as the average enrolment in the school. The course covered Muslim Christian relations from the 7<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It was so well received that the audience asked for a subsequent course on “*Islam – a Closer Look*” which I organized and facilitated in 2009. As a result of the positive image created, a cross cultural reading club was initiated, which continues to this day. The selection of books aims at alleviating misconceptions and generating mutual understanding.

In 2013 the Ottawa School of Theology and Spirituality celebrated its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary by holding an interfaith colloquium with speakers from the three Abrahamic faiths. They also published a book “*The Triumph of Hope*” containing essays by authors from several faith communities. My humble participation in this book was an article on the “*the Contribution of Islam to Civilization.*” The colloquium and the book are memorable indications of how inclusive the City of Ottawa has become. This is only because of the drive and the desire of the faith communities for pluralism and peaceful co-existence

Interfaith Ottawa is a City driven initiative which was founded in 2003. Interfaith Ottawa decided to establish a photo exhibit displaying the history of 10 faith communities in Ottawa. I was invited to the project’s organizing committee to undertake the Muslim contribution to the exhibit. This photo exhibit was opened in June of 2010 in the lobby of Ben Franklin Building. The display lasted for a week with thousands of viewers watching it. This project epitomized the equality, unity and diversity of Ottawa’s community. It was significant to show the history of faiths in the National Capital side by side in a mutually respectful manner.

Because of my involvement in interfaith dialogue, I was invited along with my colleague to offer a four-hour Primer on Islam to Faith Communities we developed and delivered this elaborate primer to clarify the status of the *People of the Book* in Islam, in order to alleviate misconceptions about Muslim/non-Muslim relations, this was presented to the Jewish, Christian and Muslim communities in separate sessions. It created an opportunity to speak face to face in a sincere genuine environment encouraging questions respectfully and openly. An article in the Ottawa Citizen was written about the content and the impact of these sessions. Such educational sessions enabled the ordinary main stream citizens to inquire and correct many ideas acquired from biased media reports.

The Multifaith Housing Initiative is an organization that offers affordable rental homes for low income people. The organization relies mostly on volunteer service providers from multi-faith traditions. The beneficiaries are also from diverse ethnicities. I was fortunate to serve on the board of directors for 6 years and chair

their biggest fundraising event that takes place in the Tulip festival, for three years. Working together for a good cause allows people to discover the good inside and what they have in common. It is the most effective form of interfaith dialogue.

The Ottawa Muslim Women's Organization was established in 2001, shortly after the September 11 attacks with the objective of building bridges with all faith groups and the community at large. I serve as vice president to this inclusive organization. We hold an annual dinner each spring to bring together the diverse Ottawa community. The attendance includes city officials, law enforcement, members of parliament, faith leaders and grass root diverse community. While prominent speakers are usually invited, the beauty of the event is in benefiting the community with the raised funds. The benefits from this Festival of Friendship dinner are donated over the years to main stream charities such as: CARE Canada to benefit Afghani Women and Children, Ottawa University Heart Institute; Tsunami victims; Haiti Earthquake Relief Fund, Canadian Cancer Society, Terry Fox Cancer Foundation, Multifaith Housing Initiative, Osteoporosis Canada; The Carleton Centre for the Study of Islam; Women shelters, Ottawa Hospitals, Élisabeth Bruyère Hospital. The organization also works vigorously with Ottawa food banks. It also raised funds to sponsor a Syrian refugee family which will settle in Ottawa.

October has been pronounced as Islamic History Month in Canada. During October, the Muslim community aggressively organizes several events, ranging from panel sessions to formal lectures to screening of documentaries followed by discussion. The information provided goes beyond the doctrine of the faith. It addresses more general topics such as the history of countries from the Muslim world, the contribution of Islam to science and cultural aspects including poetry, spoken word and ethnic food. The attendance includes all age groups and a variety of ethnic backgrounds. This creates an opportunity to present the faith in a positive, peaceful and friendly light.

The evolution and expansion of interfaith activities included delivery of presentations to several groups. We presented at government departments, places of worship, board of education, universities and private clubs as well as the Ottawa Carleton School District. The latter included presentations to high school students as well as to teachers during their professional development day. There is a particular need to develop cultural competency among teachers as they can influence impressionable children at a young age. I remember participating in a "human library" event in a Catholic school where students rotated around community leaders to ask questions about different faiths. I was also asked to be a panellist at a conference on Muslim philanthropy "Diversity in Giving" organized by the Association of Fundraising Professionals. Such activities open up the channels of communication and offers learning opportunities which come with the warmth of human touch. Hence it leaves people with a lasting memorable impression to counter misconceptions effectively.

The above are examples of activities in Ottawa in which I was personally involved. However, interfaith dialogue groups in Ottawa and Canada at large are numerous. For example the Capital Region Interfaith Council has been in place for

many years. It encompasses several faith representatives. I usually attend an annual event that they hold called “The Joy of Faith”. Young people from various faith communities present, poetry, musicals or readings from the scriptures to bring across a spiritual message of unity among people of faith. There are many other interfaith organizations in Ottawa and in Canada with varying emphasis. These organizations are lead by faith communities from all backgrounds. There are also groups which work on intra-faith or ecumenical issues. I kept the scope of this paper on the activities in which I have first hand experience.

### **Challenges and Opportunities**

In conducting and or participating in interfaith dialogue, one must be conscious of certain sensitivities in order to maximize the benefit and ensure continuity. For continuity one must find incentive for coming back. Furnishing respectful environment along with learning opportunities about one another motivate members to come regularly to the meetings. It is also important to be sincere and speak from the heart while maintaining respect to self and to others. Sincerity generates a special spiritual connection that bonds people together irrespective of their faith tradition.

It is an accepted fact that being a person of faith entails three components: believing in articles of faith, performing acts of worship and following a code of conduct towards society, nature and all God’s creation. A well balanced person of faith strives to address all three components – faith, worship and conduct – equally. Emphasizing one component at the expense of the other upsets the balance and distracts us from realizing peace within ourselves and around us. The articles of faith and the acts of worship define one’s relationship with the creator whereas as the code of conduct is guided by our scriptures and impacts on one’s relationship with others.

While difference in the theological side of the doctrine of each faith tradition may be regarded as a challenge, it is imperative to realize that everyone’s truth is truth to them. Therefore, respect and understanding are crucial elements of a healthy dialogue. Understanding where the other is coming from can very well happen while keeping the respective beliefs to oneself non-negotiable and intact [109:6] *“Unto you, your moral law, and unto me, mine...”* The interest in interfaith dialogue stems primarily from interest in being treated respectfully and kindly by others. It is therefore important to put in action the teachings of our faith. Certainly the Qur’an guides us to this principle in [6:108] *“But do not revile those whom they invoke instead of God, lest they revile God out of spite, and in ignorance...”* In other words, it is a Muslim duty to respect other faiths. Moreover, it is important to be conscious of the Abrahamic connection which bonds all three faith traditions. Muslims are reminded in the Qur’an in [3:64] *“Say: O followers of earlier revelation! Come unto that tenet which we and you hold in common: that we shall worship none but God, and that we shall not ascribe divinity to aught beside Him, and that we shall not take human beings for our lords beside God...”* Muslims are urged to do this in the most gentle manner [29:46] *“And do not argue with the*

*followers of earlier revelation otherwise than in a most kindly manner - unless it be such of them as are bent on evil doing and say: "We believe in that which has been bestowed upon us, as well as that which has been bestowed upon you: or our God and your God is one and the same, and it is unto Him that We [all] surrender ourselves."*

With this guidance in mind, rather than dwelling on the doctrine, it is much more effective to dwell on how our faith inspires certain values in us. Suddenly we find a broad base of commonalities in the code of conduct. This is therefore the most relevant component in establishing successful dialogue environment. Values such as respect, equality, honesty, transparency and compassion quickly surface to play a role when involved in interfaith dialogue. The challenge is to bring these values to the fore and keep the doctrinal aspect of the faith aside especially in the formation stage of the dialogue.

Muslims have a wealth of guidance in the scriptures ranging from love of humanity to love of peace to helping the needy and more. [60:8] *"As for those who do not fight against you on account of [your] faith, and neither drive you forth from your homelands, God does not forbid you to show them kindness and to behave towards them with full equity: for, verily, God loves those who act equitably"*. In the universal Hadith: *"None of you has faith until he loves for his brother or his neighbor what he loves for himself"*, we find the Golden Rule loud and clear. This very rule is found in the scriptures of all faith traditions. The neighbor in the Hadith is inclusive and plural; it refers to humanity at large. It is this guidance in the Qur'an and Hadith that drives us to engage in gentle conversation with our communities, neighbors and friends to [49:13] *"...know one another..."*

It is also important to realize that conversation between respectful parties is as much about listening as it is about speaking. Listening to others with interest, compassion, humility and suspended judgment, assuming they may be right, and expecting to learn and be affected by them. Disagreement is likely to be encountered; however, respect must always be observed. Understanding how the other feels is a key element to the continuation of the process. In terms of speaking, the objective is to clarify what one's own faith is about and how this faith shapes our values and code of conduct. This is what defines our relationship with others. The essence of the doctrine is not crucial to the success of the dialogue. Discussing acts of worship can be relevant as it may impact relational issues. For example meeting times may be affected by fasting or offering daily prayers or observing the day of rest. In speaking, one must share air time and avoid monopolizing the conversation remembering that, unlike lectures, a dialogue is a forum where all need to be heard.

Often we find that we mix between our personal opinions and what the faith calls for. As we exchange information with others in dialogue, we must rely on the scriptures for information; our personal opinion must be noted as such. Relying on the scriptures allows us to convey what our faith guides us to do and not our personal interpretation of it. Similarly we need to distinguish between the ideal faith and what some who claim to belong to the faith do. In comparing one faith to



another, we must compare ideal with ideal and real with real. Case in point is women's rights in Islam. Our scriptures place women in high esteem (in his Farwell sermon, Prophet Mohammed [p.b.u.h.] said: "*Treat your women well and be kind to them for they are your partners and committed helpers*"). The practice in some parts of the world is far from this ideal. It is important to point out the distinction between what the faith teaches and what the culture or political agendas drive people to do.

We must be conscious of the difference between dialogue and debate. Dialogue is about collaboration not opposition or winning. It looks for commonalities and understanding rather than flaws. Dialogue allows one to search for strengths rather than seek final conclusions. Dialogue is a continuum of relationships and actions it is an open ended collaboration rather than a definitive conclusion. Achieving the objectives of the dialogue is gradual and at times subtle. As time goes by, extreme ideas fade away and knowledge, learning and appreciation grow. The emotional boundaries between people are replaced with friendships and love. The opportunity to speak from the heart allows for openness and mutual trust. The final challenge is to forego the idea of proselytizing.[28:56] "*Verily, thou can not guide aright everyone whom you love: but it is God who guides whom He wills [to be guided]; and He is fully aware of all who would let themselves be guided.*" The dialogue experience is about peace building and living in harmony in a pluralistic society, with respect and understanding among all parties. The success of the dialogue is gauged by the mutual respect, friendship generated within people of faith and cooperation for the good of humanity.

People of faith have the most important common ground to build on; that is being people of faith. This offers a golden opportunity for a healthy involvement in dialogue. This opportunity is particularly true when the faiths share the Abrahamic origin. The opportunity to create harmony becomes more meaningful if the experience is transferred to the youth instilling the spirit of peaceful coexistence in future generations. This is all the more reason to bring the dialogue idea to the education system. Children learn what they live; and the opportunity to create peace starts at young age where children learn to accept and respect the other regardless of race, culture or religion.

Finally, as a lay person who lived as a scientist, I found that my involvement in the dialogue gave me a unique opportunity to learn more about my own faith. When questions are raised, I had to do my own research to bring back reliable answers to the group. This process took me beyond being a practicing Muslim to be more confident, more comfortable and more at peace with my own faith. I learned enormously from both the Muslim and the Christian members of the group.

## **Conclusion**

Involvement in this Christian Muslim Dialogue group has been an enriching experience where one tends to enhance one's knowledge of the other faith as well as one's own faith. The evolution from conversation and exchange to actions and involvement with the larger circles in the City reaffirms the impact of the dialogue

on the community. The relationship among members also evolved from mutual respect to friendship and affection. The positive message ripples continuously from the members to their organizations, and networks. The dialogue experience is a good model for youth to get involved in similar dialogues creating an environment of peace and harmony.

In December 2015, it happened that the Birth date of Prophet Mohammed “peace be upon him” fell on December 24<sup>th</sup>, the evening of Christmas. We received greetings from our Christian friends; below are two of the messages we received:

*“At our Christmas Mass this evening, my thoughts and prayers were with you and for you as we Christians celebrate the birth of Christ and you celebrate the birth of Mohammed (p.b.u.h.)! May each of you and your families be blessed abundantly? And may our dialogue continue to be an example of people growing together in understanding and friendship!”*

*“I have found it really heart-warming to receive the generous messages of good wishes from Muslim members of the CMD to Christian members celebrating Christmas, a very special moment as Sr. Jean pointed out since the Muslim community was celebrating at the same time the birthday of Mohammed(p.b.u.h.). May that celebration have been a blessing to you also? I share Sr. Jean’s hope that through the CMD all of us may grow in understanding and friendship.*

The above messages are indications of the spirit in which the Dialogue group operates. I am convinced that the impact of this small community will echo in larger communities and hopefully it will inspire the youth to follow the path of dialogue in all its forms, from conversation to friendship to action for humanity and desire for peace.

*Elaine Alam*<sup>1</sup>

## **Protecting Youth from Intellectual and Moral Violation and Cultural Alienation**

### **Abstract**

In this modern era of 21<sup>st</sup> century, we have exhaustively debated the pros and cons of this globalised world and the advent of technology, which is constantly advancing with the growing passage of time. Due to today's globalised world, the people living in the periphery or the less developed sections of the world today have more access to the latest technology. While this technology has helped reduce the chasm between the North and the South, it has resulted in another significant dilemma. It has cost the developing world its culture and heritage. The more that the South has attempted to emulate the North, the more it has compromised on its own cultural uniqueness and individuality. Today's global world might have reduced distance between continents, but it has created a wide gulf between people of same society, let alone those that differ from them on the basis of religion, race or creed. This advent of technology has created high superficial standards that serve as yardsticks through which people continue to judge and alienate others within the same culture, society and community. Moreover, people have lost the one thing that tied them - culture. These cultural ties that could be dated back to antiquity, are now weaker than ever before, as people living in South Asia, for instance, continue to be more 'Westernized' with the growing cultural invasion by the West. And as a direct consequence, the rich cultural heritage of South Asia is slowly finding itself in ruins. Our point of discussion remains the cultural invasion of the West in South Asia, in particular. While it may be easy to place the entire blame on the West for eroding our rich culture and heritage that finds itself in ruins in Taxila and Harappa, one cannot overlook the role of our domestic media which itself completely unrestrained. The freeing of media from state control might have benefitted in many ways, but it has created certain moral ambiguity, with news channels reporting news that can be deemed questionable and sensational, merely for the purpose of increasing their viewer ratings. The issue at hand is not the adopting of Western culture per se, but adopting it at the expense of our own cultural heritage and belonging is posing a huge dilemma for future generations to come. Therefore, amidst this cultural dilution, our task remains to protect our current and future generations from such cultural invasion, and guiding them towards learning more about our rich history and cultural heritage. The aim of this paper remains to arrive at some form of a solution to save our young masses from such intellectual propaganda that is internationally conducted vis-à-vis international media. Young people undoubtedly constitute the future of the world; a crucial component the international community must lay great focus on in terms of their moral and

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intellectual development. The rapid globalization and continuous advancement in technology is not only driving the developed world but the underdeveloped and developing countries away from their roots among the certainly many positives held by the new technological era. Human beings are increasingly developing a consciousness and complexity on the basis of the latest information and innovation they have the ability to acquire where according to a study in Pakistan almost 30% young people of the urban areas are alienated from their cultural heritage compromising on their moral and intellectual understandings. South Asia is a prime example of the rich cultural and traditional strongholds that exist in all its countries; however, it is becoming increasingly important to protect young people from the violation of their moral and intellectual values directly relevant to their cultural roots mostly prevailing through the lack of an equally intellectual buffer from other external influences. Preserving history and culture is therefore becoming a need to safeguard young people from propaganda and elements, which play with their emotions, and sensitivities towards their local heritage. It has become increasingly important to engage young people in activities and attractions which help them to continue to appreciate their culture to avoid the identity crisis prevailing from the intellectual and moral violation and cultural alienation.

### **Introduction**

The aim of this paper is twofold. One is to devise a strategy to save or culture and heritage from being acculturated into the more overpowering Western culture that is so widely propagated through the Western media. Second, is to incorporate a sense of self awareness within our youth to be able to protect them from this intellectual, international propaganda. These are the two most important points we will be discussing in this paper, now the question is that what importance do they carry? Without comprehending the significance of these two aims, the entire point of this effort remains futile. The significance is that culture defines a lot - our sense of identity, our relations with those existing within the same community, and even provides us with a sense of moral compass and values that have been embedded in our culture for centuries. Let's take the example of a man that travels from his home country to a country abroad. As a traveler, or a visitor, he carries throughout the world, the identity of his country. It wouldn't be misleading to say that he serves as a civilian ambassador to the nation - one that represents his own country in the most casual and yet significant of ways. However, being a representative of your own country is a responsibility not everyone can shoulder with much ease. Because at that moment you represent your culture and your entire nation, for that you must know the importance of your culture and you must respect it so that others may treat it with the same respect as you are treating it. This culture not only defines how people see your country, but is also a major determining factor of how they picture and envision your fellow country brethren to be. And therefore, the level of devotion and commitment you reflect towards your own culture, your country, your language will result in the people you interact with to admire and respect your culture for how it has shaped your life and personality. After all, we are all the product of our

environment. For instance, a show of lack of respect for your country, culture and language, which essentially defines you in front of people who come from different countries and culture, will result in them not owing customary respect to you, your country and your culture.

An important point of concern to highlight is to protect our young and upcoming generation from this intellectual propaganda. But before we ponder over ways to protect our youth, it is extremely important to understand what this intellectual international propaganda really is. Today's uncontrolled media and latest technology is the answer to that question. While the freedom of the media enterprises has enabled us to remain connected with news across the borders, it however brings in more influence and a possible violation of moral values among young people who are most vulnerable and take to what seems more attractive. International affairs are of little concern to them. And with the presence of latest technology and fancy gadgets, our youth is constantly involved in their little bubbles, encapsulating their lives on social media, and remaining aloof from what is happening within their own country. It wouldn't be misleading to term this level of engrossment as 'addiction' to gadgets and social media, because it keeps them hooked to the screen for hours on end and infiltrates their minds with outside influences to the extent that their own culture begins to look rather inferior to them. Here it may be very easy to only blame the West but how we have been able to convince our youth in appreciating their own culture also remains one of our own society's failures including lack of government support and insecurity for the promotion of local performing arts, literature and cultural festivals. There has also been a dearth or a lack to produce new icons or heroes young people can look up to and relate to nor has there been significant recognition of 'newer' national heroes or icons. And so, the youth today rebels against their cultural heritage and aspires for a more Westernized environment around them, thereby undermining their own culture and heritage.

It is unfortunate that society in recent times has focused so much on individuality and individual human rights but fail to teach young people responsibility, rights in their rigidity alone can prove to be detrimental to the social fabric building exclusivity and selfishness, however, when teamed with reciprocal rights it creates a balance in society where each human being realizes their ethical and moral responsibility towards each other and to nature and creation. For example, the man made legitimacy of homosexuality, please bear in mind that this is different from the biological difference of development of sex as well the outright promotion of this on social media platforms which is taking away from moral values and ethical responsibility and does not allow for a natural development of human life and generations and to come.

### **Methodology**

It is important to note that this paper is based on qualitative findings. To understand how and why the youth needs to be protected from intellectual and moral violation and cultural alienation requires a subjective undertone, as a qualitative study being

based on interviews, analysis and observations. On interacting with young people of institutions, which highly lack in promoting local cultures and literature leaving a dearth of understanding and a confusion of identification to one's culture alongside having a broad horizon and openness towards enculturation, integration and acceptance of others differences whether they may be cultural, social etc.

### **Intellectual Propaganda and Moral Violation**

In 20<sup>th</sup> century before the era of science and technology, free media and social media, interaction within society and the family unit in particular was common where moral and intellectual knowledge basically started from that is, their parents, teachers, elders and peer groups. They use to gather the knowledge from their surroundings or the environment in which they were living and set their parameters or boundaries of moral values. Social interactions and exposure to the outside world through educational activities was more common through which young people gained understanding in understanding values, morals and culture. However, in todays rapidly advancing times the misuse of technology and the easy access to it is driving young people away from their foundations and towards what seems to be a more attractive prospect for them. Here, to understand Intellectual violation, nowadays our youth and younger generation is gaining information, exposure and knowledge from media or social media and they are setting their parameters, standards and boundaries of moral, intellectual and social values from the knowledge they are receiving from the media which is being exploited, and misused by young people driving them towards negative engagements rather than positive and constructive ones.

Certain trends are also changing in how people which to interact ,talking about latest technologies, tools or gadgets like iPhones, iPads, laptops and other android phones, all of which are easily available and accessible to the youth in our country. A special thanks to those parents who make the profiles of their newly born babies on Facebook themselves and when the baby starts to grow or turns two to three years old they buy him an iPhone or iPad, instead of giving him a toy, or a book that can help him develop his linguistic skills from early on. Currently, in our country, children from an early age are using new technologies without restrictions or any form of check and balance by their parents. This leaves the child, who is still unwise to differentiate between right and wrong, is able to access any form of information through a click of a button or a tap on the screen. Moreover, there is one more common thing in our society that the people living here, in the subcontinent, are mired by some form of inferiority complex that causes them to follow an image that looks more westernized. Their choice to look at those above and not below them creates a sense of deprivation in our society that gives rise to crime rates and a lack of law and order.

Another very important factor is how material possessions have become more representative of one's class and status within the society which is taken very seriously by young people, which means young people living in subcontinent are striving to be more status conscious and pretentious. The more expensive the car,

mobile and clothing is, the richer the person is. The general thought is shifting towards one's outer image and what others can see on people in terms of their possessions as a gauge for respect rather than one's moral values, intelligence and intellectual capabilities.

With regards to local media, we would like to share that in the late 80s and 90s we had just one TV channel called Pakistan Television (PTV) and one radio station called Radio Pakistan, on which we could only listen to our cultural and national songs and watch TV Dramas that promoted the heritage and culture of Pakistan. However, in the current times, we have more channels and radio stations than we can absorb to entertain ourselves. The wide selection of radio channels and TV channels though adds to knowledge and information and connects everyone around the world with the latest information, it leaves the fear of being exploited, misused and politicized also many times leading to misinformation. Also, there seems to be little effort not to say that this is completely absent, towards the appreciation of our own roots, foundations, heritage and culture as well as intellectual values as brought forth by our literature and arts. So as a result to all of this, what happens is that we learn from this media and we end up adopting all that attracts or appeals to us. And we make room for it in our own culture, sometimes at the expense of our own cultural traditions and practices.

Human beings develop their own justifications very easily for all our actions whether they are right or wrong criminal or not and therefore also in the name of rights every one makes their own justifications for what they are doing.

According to this research in the late 90s, when the cable television system had been newly launched to our country it was the turning point in our entertainment industry. It gave the people access to watch shows from all over the world. In those days, there was a TV serial which was watched all around the world. This drama serial was loved and liked by the people living in Asia, but their love and likeness exceeded to an extreme level that they started to live their lives like these characters. The extent of this love and admiration for this TV series has increased to the extent that today, we have our own similar themed cafe as the one in the famous serial in a local area in the city of Lahore. This reflects upon our admiration towards the portrayed lifestyle that is painted all over our history of the subcontinent. In the past and even today, we consider a separate lifestyle to be superior. This is also a very valid reason of why our younger generation is attracted to their culture.

In late 90s we were attracted by just one or two TV serials, but now as the world has moved towards new forms of entertainment, our young generation is attracted to different drama serials. Now let's focus on why these TV serials are undermining the moral and cultural values of our society. One is a show plagued with inappropriate scenes for the youth today, to the extent that it contains explicit sex and rape scenes. Another is all about a drug dealer and how he manages to escape the law every time. One other serial is a tale about endless dating and notorious sex lives. This is the kind of entertainment our youth loves to watch. And while one can argue that it might not directly affect their lives, it does influence their mindset which begins to view such detestable things as a norm. This is the point

where Media Studies comes in to educate the viewers that the media is only there to serve as a source of entertainment for us and to help refresh our minds, but instead of getting simply getting entertained; we adopt those stories and their culture and implement them in our real life. Now in result our film industry is also producing and promoting the culture we want to see.

In order to enjoy this culture and to be part of this young people need resources if they do not already have them they need to generate an income of course, exploitation also starts from here where the youth belonging to small towns and villages remain alien to this and when exposed do not understand how to handle the change and experience what is commonly known as ‘culture shock’. On the other hand the youth that is disadvantaged and is desperate for resources especially when faced with disasters which affect their lives badly, they engage in criminal activities or join radical religious seminaries which use their young minds for extremism in exchange for resources given to them and their families.

Now let’s focus on the news content that our media produces. First of all, big media houses should follow media ethics, which they have continued to overlook from time to time. For instance, if you turn on the TV to watch a news bulletin or watch the headlines about a bomb blast or any terrorist activity, the media must inform viewers and citizens but only in accordance to the media ethics. Instead, our media violates the respect and integrity of the dead; showing live close ups of dead bodies, blood stains, broken limbs, body parts separated from the rest of the body. They not only seem to zoom in on such visuals, but consider it as a job well done. This merely reflects upon the lack of sensitivity on part of the media in our country. Whenever it reports a tragic incident, like the APS attack that resulted in the death of nearly 144 innocent school children on 16th of December, the media anchors could not help but enunciate that they were the first ones that broke the news. There was little concern shown over how many innocent children had lost their lives, but what remained more important to our media representatives was their ability to broadcast the news before all other news channels - a fact they couldn’t help but mention countless times. Such insensitivity at a time that the whole country’s spirits had fallen to the ground brings into questions if our media ever truly follows any media ethics guidelines at all. It also reflects that they’d go to any lengths to gain a few more performance rating points. Contrary to popular practice, according to media ethics, the reporters are not allowed to show the live visuals, blood strains, dead bodies because these visuals promote violence and generate negativity in the minds of the viewers. Such form of negativity has left many viewers in the grips of depression and paranoia as they continue to feel like it is safe for them to leave the house. Such form of reporting leaves the country more damaged than ever, as it ruins the image of the country both on a domestic as well as international level.

### **Culture Alienation: Enculturation and Inculturation**

The living standard or the lifestyle of the majority of wealthy people living in our country is a perfect example of cultural alienation; back in 2008 a young wealthy



business man stated while drinking in a party at Lahore that “Do you know what’s going to happen here for the next three years? New Year’s Eve will fall in Muharram and we’ll just have to party in New York or London.” Another very astonishing example is my Uncle’s daughter who is very fluent in English and when I ask her that why don’t you speak in Urdu, she replied, “it’s a servant’s language.” Now we are living in a country whose native language is Urdu, but the circulation of the largest selling English newspaper is just less than 10% to its Urdu equivalent as per a survey conducted in 2008.

The modern colleges, universities and even schools for young boys and girls spell out a new and different culture from what the eastern society actually is. You will witness majority of male and female students wearing jeans and smoking off and on campus. This is not to criticize their freedom of choice to wear whatever clothing they so desire. But, the harsh reality remains that the misuse of this freedom along with the unfamiliar reactions of people to this change brings around many moral violations when the incidences of rape and abuse become higher in number. Society still does not know how to handle this change which disrespects culture ethics, and morals where change is taking place in just one direction but fails to open the minds of society in general. It doesn’t take much effort to notice that the generations find it endearing to disrespect their adults, especially their parents, as they define it under the pretext of rebellious teenage years or a right to make their own life decisions. A comparative analysis of today’s generations with the past few ones will reveal a stark plunge in the level of respect. And I attribute the credit for declining morals and values to the unrestrained media.

Apparently now in every reputable school, college and university English language is compulsory. In some universities, you are not allowed to speak Urdu in your class while communicating with your friends, classmates and teachers. In fact, it is a common practice for several institutions to fine the students for speaking in Urdu. Such a negative punishment associated with the usage of Urdu language has been engraved in the minds of the youth as they have come to see it as an inferior language that represents a lack of high social standings and low class. What we have observed after visiting these institutions is that majority of our youth who are living in metropolitan cities feel ashamed to speak Urdu and as a result, students who travel from different provinces, cities, villages and towns for higher education also adopt this culture with the burning desire to somehow fit in. Currently in universities you will witness DJ nights and concerts, which are again, surely not the part of our culture.

Culture is a very powerful form of association that binds us together. However, we see no celebration of cultural events such as Basant which has infact been banned by the government. If we stop celebrating the key components of our culture, it will continue to be overpowered by other dominant cultures of the world. It is also very important that citizens take up realization of promoting and protecting culture alongside managing the access to ethical and just information to young people. Currently, our cultural heritage is being threatened by the construction of the ‘Orange Train’ that has witnessed a strong social media backlash from the civil

society which has convinced the government to change its route to protect local heritage.

While human rights and freedom of information and expression is an important subject it seems that human responsibilities are also being forgotten and an abuse of nature and human values is distancing from us. An example is that of the legalization of homosexuality which recognizes human rights but fails to look at the abuse of nature taking place through this. This completely rejects the natural process of creating a family and henceforth destructing the concept of any sort of family values which could be passed on to further generations. This is therefore understood as an unnatural and irresponsible way of life where many countries have legally recognized homosexuals. It is becoming increasingly difficult for other members of society to instill a sense of responsibility and moral values in young people while religious leaders who can play a convincing role are becoming weak in explanations and the capability to counter immoral transformation of the family unit such as these.

### **Recommendations**

It has become increasingly important that young people are not only convinced that they owe every human being basic human rights as well as themselves but also have a responsibility towards their families, the unit that brought them into this world and to society from which moral values and culture binds people in harmonious relationships rather than opposition, anarchy and criminality.

Religious leaders also play a pivotal role who need to introduce the moral and intellectual values of the world religions and the message of peace and togetherness they bring with them in so that a motivation towards acceptance and tolerance is built rather than a push towards conflict, violence and war. In order to disengage young people from extremism religious leaders must in today's times be in line with modern technology as well serving as guiding lights to young people in ways that secure their moral values and intellectual security.

With regards to the media there should be a proper check and balance on it through the regulatory body. We must showcase shows and dramas which represent our culture or are close to our societal norms. Stories revolving around divorces, run away brides, should have a counter narrative of the family unit as responsible for creation of generations and securing each others moral values alongside keeping individuality and freedom as a Centre point. We ought to promote love and respect by showcasing a relationship of respect towards all individuals. Media productions need to worry less about their performance ratings, and more about the impact that their productions leave on the minds of young and old individuals. They need to conduct themselves as responsible media organizations that strictly adhere to media ethics and guidelines, and are determined to portray our moral values and practices as best as we can.

It is very important that we stay in line with the globalized world and motivate young people towards progression rather than regression but it also requires the right sense of responsibility towards ones society and its values. Nature

has played a role in our nurturing as human beings and inhabitants of this world and it is important that young people are made to realize the value of moral, intellectual and cultural contributions towards this alongside realizing positive contributions that they can make towards sustaining these values also as a responsibility towards their future generations.

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## **Role of Educational Institutions in Establishing Ecovillages for Spiritually Peaceful Generations**

### **Abstract**

Environmental education can enhance our efforts to act in a sustainable manner by changing the mindset from “Me” to “We”. With teaching respect for earth and life in all its diversity, educational institutions may help to establish more ecovillages throughout the world. Ecovillages are usually small communities, who share common ecological, socio-economic and spiritual values. They serve as educational sites of a sustainable lifestyle, particularly for young people. Since spirituality and sustainability are mutually dependent, ecovillages can promote more peaceful generations thanks to the integration of components such as ecological building, alternative energy, green production, and permaculture. The symbiosis in ecovillages may lead to the greater quality of life based on internal and external harmony. In this environmentally-friendly atmosphere, we can maintain the interconnectedness with nature that gives us love, goodness, happiness, and peace. Examples of ecovillages around the world, including the Ottoman-era village in Jordan, were provided.

### **Introduction**

Spirituality and sustainability are mutually dependent on each other. They begin with respect to life, not only to our life but also to the lives of others. We can not become a spiritual person without working for a sustainable environment, and the sustainable environment can not exist without spiritual people (Carroll, 2004). Unlike many human beings, nature is not wasteful, and it continues to create against what man leaves behind. The more we learn about nature, where everything is in balance, the more empathy we build up.

Nature harbors the four basic elements; earth, wind, fire, and water (Rashed, 2005). Therefore, we must refrain from disrupting the harmony of nature, which in turn may harm our body and mind (Badiner, 1990). Jonas Salk quoted that (Chang, 2006) “If all the insects were to disappear from the earth, within 50 years all life on earth would end. If all human beings disappeared from the earth, within 50 years all forms of life would flourish.” Despite our selfish presence, we must shift our thinking as well as our actions toward a flourishing natural environment. Our commitment and motivation for the environmental protection are inherently spiritual. On the spiritual side, we should look inward to see our internal ecosystem, which is in harmony with nature. We need to consider the internal and external balance of Yin and Yang to attain the greater quality of life. If the balance between humans and the rest of nature is upset, it should be restored.

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Education for environmental sustainability may cultivate connection, care, and love between people and the natural world. In fact, environmental education can enhance our efforts to act in a sustainable manner by changing the mindset from “Me” to “We”. With teaching respect for earth and life in all its diversity, educational institutions may help new generations to understand the environmental problems such as global warming, excessive pollution, desertification, and destruction of forests, we have created thus far. If we aim to help young people establish positive environmental habits, changing everyday behaviors, like saving off electricity, using less water and recycling can have a big impact on the health of our planet. At the deepest level, every single one of our behaviors counts and our eco-friendly behavior matters.

### **Ecovillages**

The concept of ecovillages was first initiated in Sweden in the early 1980s. In the beginning, a small number of people came together to protest the use of nuclear energy, but the movement suddenly turned into finding new ways to live sustainably in the urban environment. Ecovillages spread rapidly across Europe and the US in the 1980s, and even to Australia. In the 1990s, there was an increasing interest to ecovillages due to concerns over climate change (Taggart, 2009).

According to Dawson (2006), ecovillages are grassroots initiatives of small communities ranging from 50 to 150 people, who have nothing to do with government-sponsored projects. These people value and practice community living. They are committed to living in an ecologically, economically, and spiritually sound way. Having been not overly dependent on government, residents provide their own resources for water, food, shelter, power and other basic necessities. Ecovillages serve as educational sites of a sustainable lifestyle, particularly for young people. Examples of ecovillages around the world, including the Ottoman-era village in Jordan, are given in Fig. 1.

Ecovillages fulfill the desire of many people to live in a community with a supportive social network and a sense of shared purpose. The simpler, more environmentally friendly community lifestyle in ecovillages is an attractive alternative to wasteful consumer driven lifestyles, resulting in natural habitat



**A**



**B**



C

D

Fig. 1. Ecovillages around the world: Sieben Linden Ecovillage, Germany (A), Govardhan ecovillage, India (B), Eco Truly Park, Peru (C), Matan Ecovillage, Jordan (D) (Source: Wikipedia, [www.matanecovillage.com](http://www.matanecovillage.com))

destruction and overuse of fossil fuels. In contrast to the modern suburb settings, ecovillages provide a more isolated, safer, and rural living opportunity for their small communities.

Ecovillages aim to build a positive community. In these small communities, it is important to make the people being empowered feel comfortable in speaking and sharing ideas. Cultural and spiritual practices in ecovillages enable them to gain a basic understanding of the interconnectedness of the earth. People develop ever-growing respect to their environment because they depend on nature for their sustenance. Practices such as water conservation and organic farming are used for sustainable agriculture. Ecovillages have their own characteristics that make them unique economically. They generate income from the retail sale of their products and services, which is generally shared among members to help everyone in the community (Kellogg and Keating, 2011).

Since spirituality and sustainability are mutually dependent, ecovillages can promote more peaceful generations thanks to the integration of components such as ecological building, alternative energy, green production, and permaculture. The symbiosis in ecovillages may lead to the greater quality of life based on internal and external harmony. In this environmentally-friendly atmosphere, we can maintain the interconnectedness with nature that gives us love, goodness, happiness, and peace.

Govardhan ecovillage provides a good example of alternative energy, eco-friendly construction, and sustainable living (Fig. 1B). It is situated at the foothills of the Sahyadri Mountains about 110 km north of Mumbai, India. In this model farm community, people are living in their humble way to give an example to humanity. To reach their ultimate goal of the most fulfilling and productive life, they show compassion and respect to all living beings as well as to mother earth. Following the teachings of Bhagavad-gita, the residents are well aware of the fact that nature is a wonderful gift of God entrusted to them. This wonderful gift can only be used in a sustainable way in a spirit of compassion and love.

One of the key activities in Govardhan ecovillage is organic farming. Owing to the “Food is life” concept among the community members, all other activities are centered on ecological food production. According to the Vedic system, the food we eat is interconnected not only with our physical being but also with our mental consciousness. In order to ensure the safety of the land, the farmers and the consumers, only chemical free farming practices are adopted. These practices include, but not limited to, crop rotation, composting, biological control, and mulching. In addition, this ecovillage is renowned for the extensive use of permanent raised vegetable beds made by construction waste material (Bakshi et al. 2014).

Water contamination due to sewage is a serious problem in India. In this village, a new method was invented to process waste water using soil biotechnology. This method involves the application of soil, bacteria culture, and earthworm for processing of waste water (Das and Palaniappan, 2014). This unique waste management system is connected to biogas generation site as well.

India’s rich culture and heritage can be preserved in ecovillages. Members of Govardhan ecovillage found a way to use unusual cow products inspired by the power of Ayurveda. They successfully prepared natural bathing powder, which is effective against dandruff and other skin diseases. Distilled cow urine is used either to develop non-foaming hair shampoo or to make health tablets, known as Ghanvati (Pundarikakshudu and Bhatt, 2015).

### **Ecovillages and Ecotourism**

The symbiosis between the environment and spiritual community in ecovillages is likely to lead to ecotourism. Such a beautiful example can be found in the ancient village of Matan, Jordan (Fig. 1D). Overlooking the fertile valleys surrounded by a ring of mountains, this Ottoman-era village stands testimony to a time when people lived a natural way of life in total harmony with nature while maintaining the bonds of a close-knit community that were essential to survival. However, this ancient town now uses the latest green technologies, with solar panels heating up water. In this open community, ecotourism activities are supported by teaching visitors how to play the oud, rababa or nai made of local materials. Using hand-made sticks, residents play tab, a game very similar to golf, with newcomers.

Eco Truly Park ecovillage was established to stimulate ecotourism in Peru, in the province of Huaral, which is located 63 km north of the capital city, Lima (Fig. 1C). It is a Pacific village close to Chacra y Mar beach. This ecovillage attracts people who are willing to live happily in harmony with nature in an atmosphere of love, tolerance, compassion and patience. It is such a unique place that encourages growing and learning by sharing and helping. Indian traditional teachings and lifestyle were used to represent the architecture and values of the residents. In this community, visitors can find many ways to practice simple living and ethical thinking in a peaceful environment (Sanjay 2002).

The artistic community in Eco Truly Park follows the rules and regulations of the Vaisnava principles. They are trying to be as tolerant as a tree and as

submissive as grass. In this ecovillage, the traditional Peruvian lifestyle, coupled with beautiful ecological conditions, is likely to foster conservation of wildlife habitats and ecosystems in remote areas thanks to the respect for local cultures. Reverence for nature is a principal motivation factor, especially for those who are involved in permaculture and organic farming.

### **From Ecovillages to Eco-Spirituality**

There is widespread agreement among many religious groups that pollution, deforestation, endangered species, and climate change demonstrate a failure of environmental stewardship. Several scholars believe that religion may stimulate a pro-environmental stewardship effect (Shibley and Wiggins, 1997; Sherkat and Ellison, 2007).

Religious bodies and communities may also act as educational players by creating a place of worship that works in harmony with the environment. For example, the residents of the Turkish village of Buyukeceli installed solar panels on the local mosque (Fig. 2A). Thanks to its green roof that minimizes carbon footprint, it also became the first ‘Eco-Mosque’ in Europe. By taking a bigger step towards environmentally-friendly technologies, the government of Jordan launched a plan to install solar panels on 6,000 mosques in 2015.

Likewise, a Mormon church in Farmington, Utah placed solar panels on a meetinghouse to create environmental awareness among the younger generation in 2010 (Fig. 2B). The church is entirely powered by its solar panels. It also includes energy-efficient heating and cooling system, landscaping designs, and plumbing fixtures that reduce water use by more than 50 percent.

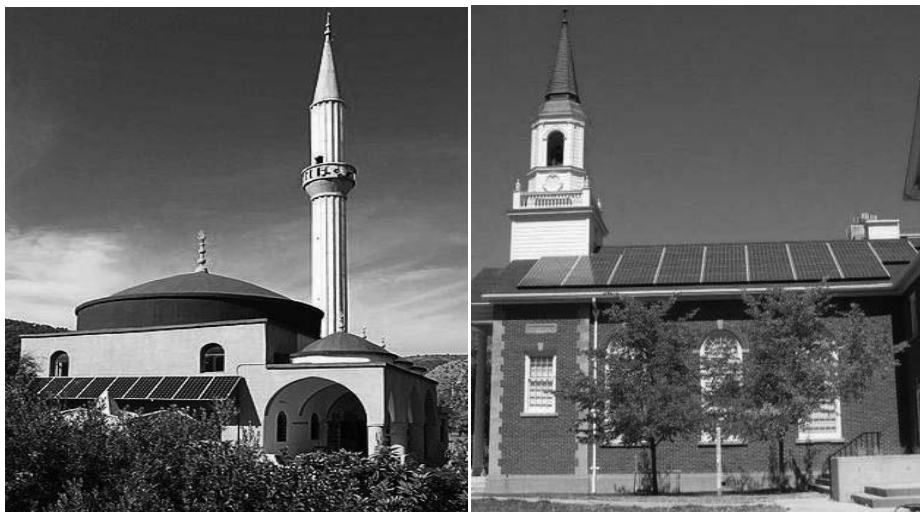


Fig. 2. Buyukeceli Mosque with a green roof in Mersin, Turkey, and the First Unitarian Church of Salt Lake City, USA with solar panels. (Source: [www.greenpeace.org](http://www.greenpeace.org), [www.deseretnews.com](http://www.deseretnews.com))



### **The Role of Education and Ecovillages**

However interesting it may sound, ecovillage life is not for everyone. Some people may find it difficult to adapt to such intensive community life. The big shift from “all about me” in normal life to “all about us” in an ecovillage may come as a bit of a shock. Some may fail to conform to the eco-design principles for housing or to the restrictions on the use of common land. For this reason, guidelines must be strictly observed to avoid such problems. Besides, experiential learning is needed about ways of meeting human needs for shelter, food, energy, livelihood and social connectedness.

Universities must not be isolated from ecovillages, and they must engage in education for sustainable behavior, permaculture and organic farming practices. As a matter of fact, ecovillages can be used as a dynamic teaching resource by universities, schools, and professional organizations to train spiritually peaceful generations. They offer a unique learning environment for young people from different social, cultural, religious and economic backgrounds.

Courses on ecological, social, and spiritual topics will help young people to develop life skills related to peace, sustainability, entrepreneurship and human flourishing. Young residents will be able to develop a common vision for a collective project as well as to make decisions that everyone can accept and support. In ecovillages, practice opportunities to hone facilitation skills for participatory learning and education are plentiful. Social interactions are likely to lead to critical thinking and spiritual enrichment among the group members.

To educate can be to give young people a chance for a different life. As education is an act of love, it is so demanding that the competent and qualified teacher needs to be patient with young people. To cultivate a rich sociality, and identity, a teacher must be rich in humanity. Owing to their pedagogical skills, teachers are capable of transforming their knowledge to human and spiritual growth. The quality of education our youth receive can be improved by the values they witnessed in the ecovillages.

A permanent formation is necessary for teachers as well. Teachers are expected to continue their professional development while maintaining their faith and spiritual strengths. Ecovillages provide an excellent setting for retreats and spiritual exercises for both teachers and students. A teacher should concentrate not only on professional courses but also on spiritual exercises and retreats! Ecovillage life creates a consistent and an innovative teaching and learning environment. For instance, yoga postures and simple breathing exercises can be used to energize the body and calm the mind of students. Young people can be given the space to find expression through music, dance and performance.

By learning permaculture principles, design practices, and their application, young ecovillagers will understand the philosophy of working with nature.

Because gardening and landscaping are hard physical works, practitioners can generate a profound sense of gratitude while honoring their pain. Furthermore, they will learn how to work with feelings and emotions, how to deal with conflict and explore how to create peace and well-being.

It is our responsibility to reach a higher level of consciousness how modern life has damaged our natural ecosystems. Globalized industrial production continues to take its toll on the earth while earth is suffering even more as consumerism spreads. Vaughan-Lee (2013) described the earth as a living, spiritual being with a beautiful soul called the ‘*anima mundi*’. We must give our utmost attention to the earth because we deeply hurt its soul by treating it with disrespect and forgetting of its sacred nature. Reckless exploitation of Mother Earth by humans is a sacrilege. People need to go beyond self-centeredness and open their hearts to the suffering of the earth. Only when we remember the fact that we need the earth more than the earth needs us can we raise any real awareness to our present predicament. Educators can help earth heal its body and “the *anima mundi*” by nurturing a love of nature in people, particularly children, and teaching them to learn from life through careful mentorship.

Nature can be a great teacher. According to the Zen spiritual teachings of Thich Nhat Hanh, “What we most need to do is to hear within us the sound of the earth crying.” Earthquakes, tsunamis and hurricanes are clear signs of global imbalance and climate change. It seems as if they are trying to get our attention and wake us up. We don’t need to ask for whom the bell tolls. It reminds us the most famous lines in John Donne’s oeuvre that “No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main. If a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as if a manor of thy friend’s or of thine own were: any man’s death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind, and therefore never send to know for whom the bells tolls; it tolls for thee.”

Ecovillages are one of the best ways to listen to the sounds of Earth for diverse audiences. By exploring the real sounds of the sacred nature of creation, people can improve their relationship with the environment, becoming more aware of oneness. The awakening into oneness will generate a spiritual response among young people to the current ecological crisis from climate change to pollution. In other words, there is a unity in all things as implied by the Arabic word “Allah”, which means divine “unity” or “oneness”. The divine oneness of life is always within and all around us.

We are interconnected with the earth more than we know. Therefore, there is a great need for interfaith and interreligious dialogue to focus on our awareness of the interconnection of spirit and matter. All in all, each of us is responsible for our environmental footprint, but it is also important to live by example and help educate those around us on how to live more sustainably.

## **Conclusion**

Climate change, water scarcity, deforestation, and pollution are continuing environmental problems that affect all of us. Ecovillages may help improve our human relationship with the earth. Cultural and spiritual practices in ecovillages enable people to gain a basic understanding of the interconnectedness of the earth. Ecovillages can be used as a dynamic teaching resource by universities, schools, and

professional organizations to train spiritually peaceful generations. Courses on ecological, social, and spiritual topics will help young people to develop life skills related to peace, sustainability, entrepreneurship and human flourishing. Social interactions are likely to lead to critical thinking and spiritual enrichment among the group members. Religious bodies and communities may also act as educational players by creating a place of worship that works in harmony with the environment. It is hoped that environmental issues will be taken more seriously by getting the interfaith community involved.

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*Susana Mangana*<sup>1</sup>

## **Averting Islamophobia in Latin America: The Media Coverage: From Orientalism to New Fears and Positive Counter- Constructions**

### **Abstract**

This article deals with the media coverage of Islam and the Middle East in Latin America where up until recently, basically until 9/11, news from this region were almost nonexistent and little attention was paid to events happening in the Islamic and Arab world. Although not always a negative reporting, the picture that emerges is often mixed. Islam, as a religion, is still presented as a key element of conflicts in the Middle East and beyond. Hence, the article will suggest potential measures to enhance the task of the media by improving the knowledge and sensitivity of the presenters and editors towards specific issues and conflicts so as to avoid the “Us” and “Them” dichotomy.

### **Introduction**

Current events in the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region continue to attract significant attention from news agencies and media around the globe. However, lack of background information or pre-established stereotypes continue to play against adequate narratives on major conflicts involving complex situations such as the war in Syria or the rise of new groups that exploit religion and beliefs to pose a threat to security, both on a regional and international level.

As an academic that enjoys constant presence in the media at the national level in Uruguay (South America) and internationally through frequent interviews with CNN, for example, I experience at firsthand how mainstream media works. I understand journalists, as well as presenters and analysts share a crucial role in shaping viewers' ideas. Hence they contribute constantly towards constructing an image based on their narratives. Thus, it is vital to have adequate and sufficient background information on their stories and they must address conflicts carefully, from an unbiased perspective, avoiding the temptation of simplifying complexities or conflicting narratives that can ultimately lead to either misinformation or leaving a negative impression on their readership.

### **Background**

Contrary to what happens in other countries in the West, mainly in Europe and the U.S. the media in Latin America has kept a different editorial line from that followed by the main international newspapers in which old prejudices about Islam and Arabs prevail. Despite being neighbors and after living together for centuries,

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the West does not fully understand Islam yet and there is still confusion about basic concepts such as Arab and Muslim identities.

There are different degrees of ignorance in Latin American countries in relation to Muslims and Islam. Ignorance contributes to a sense of unease especially against a background of increased alarms with regards international security. However, Latin American citizens are well aware of their own history of a colonial past and constant interference from their northern neighbor the U.S. in their sovereign matters. Thus, this helps against mainstream racism and xenophobia attitudes in the media. Although major newspapers in Latin America are not islamophobic, the representation of Islam and Muslims is not problem-free. As Akbarzadeh and Smith comment on Australian journalism (2005, pg. 36) journalists are shaped by their social environment and are open to a range of political and ideological influences, some of which are openly hostile towards Islam.

### **Qualitative Analysis**

The coverage of the arrival of the first Syrian refugees to Uruguay in October 2014 and the news about their daily activities after that, revealed the lack of journalists' familiarity with Islam and professionalism. This situation repeated itself after the arrival of six former detainees from Guantanamo in December 2014. News content went from stereotyping and inducing negative feelings towards the presence of these individuals in Uruguay to naive and basic representations of a monolithic Islam, failing to explain the diversity of the Islamic community. Old clichés and basic arguments were raised again to refer to the risks of Syrian women using their veil or *hiyab* in public and newspapers reproduced political debates about the suitability or inconvenience of building a mosque in Uruguayan territory.

In fact the media coverage of the situation in Syria and Iraq, the “war on ISIS and terror” and the Paris attacks last 16 November 2015, finally had a negative impact on public opinion in Uruguay but also at the Government level. As a result of an increased sense of vulnerability towards the terrorist threat and unease in society, the Government of President Tabare Vazquez, who visited the Middle East in several occasions and established embassies in the State of Qatar and U.A.E. during his first mandate (2005-2010), decided not to continue with the implementation of the Program of Asylum and Refuge for Syrian refugees and declined bringing the second group of refugees from Lebanon as had been planned and agreed with international organizations such as the IOM (International Organization for Migration) and UNHCR (United Nations' Refugee Agency).

This is an obvious case in point of how the content of news and editorial stories about terrorism and radical interpretations of Islam is anchored in the shocking negativity of these events, and the senseless nature of terrorist attacks. Even informed journalists with a high sense of professionalism and a commitment to avoiding stereotypes find it difficult to escape from the negative impression that links Islam with violence and barbaric acts. Reputed Latin American journalists who contacted me after the Paris attacks tried to use careful language and avoided profiling Muslims in a conscious attempt to avoid linking well established Muslim

communities in Latin America with terrorist groups that exploit Islamic jargon and faith to excuse their violence. Hence, major newspapers and media groups in Mexico and Colombia like “Excelsior” and “Caracol” or important radios from Venezuela and Bolivia could not be blamed after the Paris attacks last November for negative and bias coverage and their stories did not try to leave a negative impression on purpose. Yet, this happened nonetheless.

This was the case in Uruguay where society was already sufficiently bias against the arrival of more refugees from Syria and other Muslim countries after the first Syrian families who arrived in late 2014 staged a very controversial protest in front of the Government offices in September 2015.

### **Research Findings**

Having exposed the degree of ignorance about Islam and Middle Eastern issues in Latin America and its negative impact on news contents and coverage of Islam in the media, it is important to highlight that the relationship between most Latin American countries and Islamic nations, at both the diplomatic and commercial level, has changed over time. As countries like Brazil or Argentina and Mexico developed economically, so did their interest in exploring new markets.

Despite current political turbulences in Brazil, the Latin American giant enjoys great influence and power in the continent and under the rule of former President Luiz Inacio Lula Da Silva (alias Lula) Brazil attempted to play a bigger role in global issues such as trying to build bridges of understanding between Iran and the West. Although there was always great domestic and regional skepticism about the political relationship between a left wing and progressive Government run by a former syndicalist like Lula of Brazil and the theological Government of Iran, they shared a common interest and position about confronting the U.S. influence and narratives on Islam in their countries.

Once again, when President Dilma Rousseff arrived to power in 2010, a piece of news coming from Iran opened the door to a heated debate on the Brazilian media that finally paved the way for President Rousseff to stand up true to her gender condition and avoid a political relationship with a country such as Iran perceived as unfair to women. We are herein referring to the Sakineh affair. Sakineh Mohammadi Ashtiani, an Iranian woman was accused of adultery and murder and she received a death penalty by stoning in 2006. An international campaign to outcry this type of legal decisions in Iran and other Muslim countries where *Shari'ah* is applied resulted in suspending the stoning sentence which is still pending.

Brazil has enormous potential for trade and commerce with countries that exhibit high purchasing power and investment capacity, like all Arab monarchies in the Gulf. Hence, a deeper and more solid knowledge about the history and political systems of countries like Qatar or Saudi Arabia is much needed in this country. From journalists to businessmen and lawyers there is a need to offer University major degrees and diplomas to study current events in the Middle East from an

academic, unbiased and well documented perspective with a multidisciplinary approach.

Most governments in Latin America are currently run by left wing parties which traditionally pursue a more objective analysis on events happening in the Middle East. In the age of globalization worldwide anti imperialism and anti US feelings have a direct impact on speech and opinion building. Citizens in Latin America in general mistrust the US media. It is also true to recognize that in most Latin American countries journalism was not considered a profession until recently. Hence it was a vocational option for many radio commentators and skilled editors. In fact, international journalism is hardly ever offered in most Communication majors at undergraduate level in all Latin America. Journalists wishing to pursue a career in that field must later follow a postgraduate study.

Hence, Latin America suffers still from an acute lack of professional journalists with an expertise on global issues, which results in articles and news that reproduce contents provided by international news agencies, often with a very ethnocentric vision of the tensions between the West and Islam. As said before, although in principle major newspapers and media outlets in Latin America cannot be categorized as islamophobic or bias against Muslims, they fall into this trap due to their lack of background knowledge on Islam and Middle Eastern issues.

Hence, it is important to improve educational programs at the High School level but also at University so as to avoid resorting to long standing stereotypes. Current events in the Middle East allow space for new prejudices and myths. Before, Arabs and Muslims in Latin America were traditionally called Turks. From Colombia to Argentina the adjective Turkish is well known. In Brazil they are called *mascates* and they used to travel from one city to the next on foot while selling door to door. This has been the traditional representation of Arabs and all migrants coming from the Middle East to Latin America from the early days of the XX Century to practically 11/9 and the subsequent launch of the “war on global terror” campaign.

However, nowadays the term “Turk” or “Turkish” has been left aside and instead one hears adjectives such as “Taliban” or “jihadist”. This type of irony or sarcasm employed in normal daily conversations unveil old clichés and renewed fears that reconfirm bias against a community of believers much misunderstood by citizens in Latin America, who are still influenced by the dominant religion Christianity, albeit the loss of centrality and power that the Catholic Church enjoyed once upon a time. In all Latin American countries there has been a de-privatization process by which religion is not monopolistic any longer. In fact, Pentecostalism is rising fast in all countries from Colombia to Chile, following the trend of North American protestant and evangelical churches.

Therefore, it is vital to address these new myths that are being created on a continuous flow of negative contents and oversimplified representations of Muslims in the news in Latin America, too. The traditional image spread in Latin American media used to be that of a witty, unclean and not very well educated salesman but basically a person with a good heart. Arab communities in Brazil or Argentina and

Uruguay contributed greatly towards State and Nation building, especially in the fields of culture with press publications, and commerce, implementing revolutionary methods such as credit programs. Today we must add to these, other, more negative, perceptions such as social deviants and security threats. It is of the essence to address this situation rapidly and improve the background information that teachers and Professors have about Islam in Latin America so as to help them tackle these new stereotypes in a suitable manner, especially since most Governments in Latin America are truly concerned with implementing educational programs that avoid any type of discrimination on grounds of race, gender, religion or sexual orientation.

Having better educated professors and teachers can only result in bridging the psychological wall that is being built by the impact of the media coverage and hence, avoiding falling into the trap of the “Us” and “Them” dichotomy again.

Arab migrants that arrived to Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay formed the *Mahyar* movement that gave its title to a new type of literature genre: the literature of “exile”. This movement was especially strong and influential in the U.S. too. Among its major representatives we can mention the famous Lebanese poet Gibran Khalil Gibran.

In countries such as Uruguay, which ranks high among the top countries of non beliefs, the overzealous defense of laicity, from the State first and society next, has played against teaching students about the importance of religion, not with an aim to impose one faith over the rest or to indoctrinate but in order to explain ways in which religion and politics mix in many societies. Even religious citizens in Uruguay belonging to different faiths such as the Afro umbandan movements or Evangelicals understand there is a divorce between religion and Statehood. Hence they find it especially difficult to understand the interaction between religious beliefs and political ideologies that currently take place in many Muslim countries. As a result, they fall into the simplification process of blaming religion as the basic reason behind armed conflicts in the Middle East and Africa. News contents lack the depth and background information needed to explain all the causes behind these conflicts and some reputed editorialists still prefer to exploit sentiments against imperialistic foreign policies that drive major powers in the Middle East. Hence, Latin American citizens, regardless of their faith, adopt a paternalistic attitude and emphasize the need for Islamic societies to abandon religion at least at the public level.

It is desirable, therefore, to promote instances for debate and reflection between the three Abrahamic religions, which are indeed the basis of religiosity in Latin America, despite the growth of syncretic religions mixing ancient native practices with monotheistic beliefs in Brazil and other countries in Central America.

On the other hand it is important to remember that Latin America has focused in recent years, on overcoming its own wounds after the wars for independence from the Portuguese and Spanish Empires and more recently pursuing justice and truth after the return of Democracy and the end of Dictatorship in Chile, Argentina or Uruguay. On the academic and analytical level, this traumatic past has nourished a geopolitical approach by which the emphasis was always on the



continent and the Latin American region. Nowadays, major faculties in State and private universities recognize the need to train more professors of History, Political Science and International Relations, to mention only a few disciplines, on Middle Eastern Area studies. In comparison to Europe, there are still very few academic associations that specialize in the study of Asia and Africa. Hence, it would be desirable to promote educational cooperation agreements between Latin America and Islamic countries in order to have exchange programs and start building a network of professors and researchers with shared interests. As much as I criticize the ignorance about Islam prevailing in our region, it is also true that the same happens in the Middle East with regards to Latin America.

Very few Muslims know basic facts about our region, except for clear exceptions like Brazil or Mexico, two major markets in the continent and the source of a continuous flow of news. Even then, the image of “latinos” is reduced to the representation that Hollywood movies offer of Hispanic immigrants, often linked to negative stories like narco-traffic, money laundering, rogue states and “guerrilla” movements.

### **International and Somestic Events**

Scholars and other professionals in Latin America recognize the imperative need to abandon the ethnocentric vision of the world. At times when much is being written and disseminated about a new paradigm of international cooperation and financial aid, from a southern perspective, major countries in Latin America have the chance to build a relationship based on complementarities and away from imposed agendas by third parties, usually located in developed countries.

Some attempts have already been made. The highly advertized Alliance of Civilizations in which many Latin American countries participate or the more recent ASPA scheme initiated by President Lula of Brazil in 2005 by which Arab countries celebrate summits where they meet all Latin American nations, are two examples of the above mentioned. However, it is regrettable that the news coverage of these summits is either too limited or nonexistent. Hence, a beautiful opportunity to explain to the Latin American readership about other relationship possibilities based on something different to violence, threats or economic goals is lost up until today.

Arab and Muslim nations are in need of redefining their image and perceptions at the international level. Hence, Latin America can become a more reliable partner since both regions can attempt to establish a more just and balanced relationship, given the common colonial past they share. Latin America is still very dependent on its commercial and political ties with major powers like the U.S. and the European Union and nowadays China, too. This is another similarity with major Islamic and Arab countries.

The recent arrival of TV stations like Al Jazeera and Hispan TV (from Iranian origin) to Latin America has opened the door for new sources of stories and different narratives. The latter is less known but it is important to emphasize the role it is playing in explaining to Latin American audiences the ordinariness of Muslim families and converts to Islam in Colombia, Argentina or El Salvador. Hence, this

type of documentaries satisfies a genuine public curiosity to learn about authentic Islam without stereotyping. It would be interesting to promote distribution of these programs through other state and private TV channels so as to educate in a multicultural approach, thus contributing to overcoming religious and racial tensions. This is especially important for countries like Brazil or Argentina since they receive a significant number of migrants from other Latin American countries but also from Africa and Asia.

This article summarizes research efforts to analyze the images and narratives generally used in Latin American media to refer to Muslims and Islam which finally affect the public perception of Muslim and Arab communities living in Latin American countries, especially after new arrivals of recent migrants like Pakistani and Iranian citizens in Ecuador.

The “war on terror” meant in fact a sort of waiver for journalists and media commentators to slip into prejudices and a process of essentialization of a preconceived Muslim behavior. Thus, assigning certain characteristics to all members of a group, regardless of their context. Essentializing advocates ultimately argue that these characteristics are permanent, unchangeable and eternal, even if they have not been expressed yet due to lack of opportunities. However, scientific research shows that human acts are not programmed in our DNA. Rather, they are the natural consequence of our upbringing, education and social codes, on the one hand and our efforts to align our acts with the principles we have chosen in life, on the other. In sum, our genetics only provide us with the necessary biological tools to learn, decide and execute.

### **Positive Counter-Constructions**

Stereotypes about Muslims and Arabs in Latin America are thus very similar to those in most Western societies. We can thereby draw the conclusion that they are built on a long standing orientalist tradition born out of the colonial processes lived in the MENA region.

I consider this stigmatizing discourse particularly dangerous given the current international situation and in light of efforts made by some countries in Latin America to approach both politically and economically Islamic countries in recent years. The local media faces the challenge of contributing with positive stories and narratives towards building a culture of tolerance and coexistence with these “Others”. Migrants from the Middle East and Asia continue to arrive to Latin America. Hence, it is vital to learn to adapt to other cultural realities perceived as very distant by any ordinary citizen in Latin America. In my capacity as Professor of Islam and Arabic studies but also as a regular analyst on international politics in the media I wish to continue with my efforts to fight recent episodes of Islamophobia. It is important that Latin America does not fall into the temptation of importing conflicts and tensions occurring in Europe, for example, where Muslim communities are much larger and hence experience other difficulties to adapt to the dominant society.

## **Conclusion**

The conclusions inherent in this article point to the importance of balanced news coverage of events related to Islam. So far, the coverage of Islam in the Latin American media increased and gathered momentum only after the “war on terror” was launched by former President George W. Bush. In that sense news contents and narratives fell into the simplification of terms, essentialization of Muslim behavior and reproduced old fashioned clichés so frequent in Western media elsewhere.

However, not all editorial lines and programs can be faulted for disseminating negative perceptions about Islam and Muslims given the current situation in the Middle East and Africa where radical groups are also guilty of jeopardizing the Islamic language and beliefs to exploit sensitivities among alienated and radical youths in the Islamic world, as well as in the West. They are later categorized as “jihadists” in the media against a backdrop of increased security threats. The recent arrival of migrants from countries like Pakistan or Iran for economic reasons and others such as former Guantanamo detainees to Uruguay sparked public debate and social unease about potential threats to domestic security.

The unsolved cases of terrorist attacks against Jewish and Israeli centers in Buenos Aires, the capital of Argentina in 1992 and 1994 nurtures a discourse on the side of Jewish communities in Latin America based on denouncing an increased presence of Iranian organizations charged with disseminating Shia ideology in the Latin American continent. Although intelligence reports from Latin American agencies minimize this risk, the coverage in the media capitalizes social fears and negative perceptions, hence contributing to a misrepresentation of all Muslims.

Besides, occasional reports from different newspapers and agencies in the U.S. contribute to stigmatize the triple frontier between Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay as a nest of terrorists. This has been the case since 9/11 and until Bin Laden’s death it was rather common for ordinary citizens in South America to refer to that frontier as a stronghold of Al Qaeda and other “sleeping Islamic terrorist cells”. Today the security threat appears to be far more distant but bias analysts intentionally exploit current events to raise alarms about the possibility of ISIS recruiting combatants in Latin American countries currently undergoing economic and social difficulties and with a high level of social unrest.

It is widely acknowledged that the term fundamentalism does not exclusively address radical groups in Islam. In fact the term was first used by North American protestant churches in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Yet, journalists in the Latin American media lack the background information on religion and other social and historical aspects of Islam and other far distant cultures for that matter, such as the Indian or Chinese cultural traditions.

It is thus important to revisit educational programs at the Secondary education and University levels in order to obtain graduates with adequate knowledge and understanding capacities about Islam and Middle Eastern issues in the near future. Meanwhile, pursuing more careful narratives with a polished and selected language to avoid stereotyping and building new myths that could open the window for more negative perceptions is a good starting point. Professional and

unbiased reporting can contribute significantly public education so as to avert Islamophobic feelings and inform the current debate on Islam and the future of Muslims in Latin America.

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## **The Moses / Joshua Paradigm Fostering Inter-Generational Faith Leadership Dialogue**

### **Abstract**

The author in this paper discusses an interfaith initiative called The Moses/Joshua Project founded in New York, USA. Its founders are aiming to tackle the challenges of our century by different modes of learning and communication. Apart from this, the author also deals with the demographic changes in USA, especially in New York and how much impact these changes have upon current generations of various faiths.

### **Presentation**

Rabbi Richard Marker, a past chair of the International Jewish Committee for Interreligious Consultations and part of the Jewish leadership that had helped to guide that community in the later part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, while addressing a multi-generational leadership group, turned his remarks to the younger leadership present. He asked them to stand and stated “We are guests in your century.” With this statement he then went on to challenge those present to develop a pathway for intergenerational dialogue and partnership in fashioning the future while fully acknowledging the need to transfer the reins to a next set of leaders. This opportunity and challenge of creating a pathway for intergenerational dialogue and learning that would allow for not only the transference of power, it would likewise provide a roadmap for meeting the need for older leaders to speak to and teach a next generation with an eye to the convergence of the past and future.

The opening of the 21<sup>st</sup> century has witnessed changes that have challenged a generation of leaders to respond to what seems like a quantum leap in the how younger populations view their world, relate and communicate with one another. Facebook and twitter, just two of the many social media tools of instantaneous communication embraced by young activists across the globe, have enabled a form of dialogue and exchange of information, concepts and ideas within this age group that is not fully understood nor appreciated for its impact by an, and in many cases only slightly, older generation. This form of communication has jumped off the screen of computers onto the smart phone. This leap of technology and access, wholly embraced by this generation, has indelibly changed how they communicate, organize and exchange information and ideas with each other. Some have compared this technological leap to the impact of the printing press and how the world was inalterably changed by its invention that created the first information revolution.

The power of this form of communication has, as witnessed by recent world events, shaken some society’s most basic assumptions and in some cases power structures. This shaking has catapulted what was called the generation gap into what

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now is chasm of a divide between generations. One of the most disturbing consequences of this instability and the vacuum of leadership that it creates is an increased fertile ground for the forces of intolerance to fester and grow. The need for a methodology of allowing for effective communication and dialogue between generations on issues of respect, diversity and understanding has become an imperative, which if not met, could have a rather negative effect on the ability of these societies, as they go through such shakings, to create the pathways of the transmission of faith based values so needed meet the challenges before them.

Since it's founding in the 18<sup>th</sup> century immigration to the United States of America has been consistently changing the demographics and the nature of its diverse faith communities. Initially the faith communities of the U.S. predominantly reflected the Protestant movements of Western Europe. Later it then witnessed a large influx of Catholics and Jews also from European origins. While there was always small pockets of other faith groups such as Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist it was not until the enactment of Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 by the Congress of the United States was there a watershed in changing immigration patterns to the this country. For all intents and purposes this act abolished the National Origins Formula that since the 1920's, severely limited immigration from major parts of the world other than Europe to the United States. This change led to opening paths to immigration for populations from Asia, Africa and parts of the Southern Western Hemisphere.

New York City has long been the epicenter and the bellwether of the effects of immigration on American urban society and a destination for many of these new immigrant groups. In the opening of the 21<sup>st</sup> century New York is witnessing an era of change almost unprecedented in its history. In 2016 more than 40% of the population of New York are immigrants many coming from countries and societies that prior to the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century had a limited imprint of the city and its neighborhoods and institutions including the faith community. Central to this change is an extremely complex diversity born out of these new immigration patterns that not only reflects dramatic changes in ethnicity and country of origin it also includes growth of religious communities that are now becoming integral to the fabric of the city's faith groups. Coupled to this shift is the aging of the faith leadership of the *Baby Boomer* generation that in many instances served other populations and has guided the city's faith communities through the past half century.

Coupled with these demographic shifts there has been a technological mega-revolution that has made the global; local. This revolution is literally reshaping how our society thinks, communicates and relates to others; ourselves and the world around us. As these local and global tectonic shifts and other trends creates new opportunities and challenges the Faith community of New York and its leadership is likewise experiencing the strains of change and the role that it and its leadership will play as these faith leaders, of varying generations, continue to build the city and it's communities and being able to partner in these endeavors of society building.

As a generation of faith leaders age and younger leadership steps up to its role of guiding our society and a next generation, sadly all too often, the impact of

these tectonic changes does not allow for the flow of intergenerational communication, cooperation and learning between those faith leaders who represent the shifting of leadership as profoundly illustrated by the biblical Moses to Joshua paradigm. This vacuum of the successful intergenerational transmission comes at the same time that society building begs an intensified integration and need for faith leadership stepping up and generationally integrated

As interfaith cooperation has become more complex and therefore that much more of an imperative, recent tragic event, many sadly cloaked in the name of faith, have further challenged how faith leaders can work and strive together. At the center of the need for faith leaders of different generations to enter into sustained dialogue, learning and partnership is the notion that the older generation has built up a deep well of experience, access to power and resources that would be otherwise lost to the majority of emerging leadership. These older leaders have spent a lifetime building connections to the present power structure, understanding of how the system works and needs to be navigated. Without a formal path of intergenerational transmission of knowledge much of this understanding and resources would be lost or need to be redeveloped by the emerging leadership.

Coupled with a lack of a formal methodology of transmission of knowledge between generations of leadership is a younger generation who embraces these new technologies, ideas and cultural norms that this new cadre has acquired and uniquely understands. While each new generation always brings with it a fresh perspective and newness, this cadre; in large part due to the timeline of these rapid changes in technology and how we communicate i.e. social media; have developed a world view that is altered and in some cases wholly different than that of its predecessors. In some ways the quickness of many of these changes in in technology has almost outstripped the adaptive behavior of society. As noted earlier that while the older generation of leaders may have adopted many of these new technologies as tools, their base line methodologies of communicating and problem solving have remained intact. This embracing of these technologies and formats of communication is somehow seen as accenting or enhancing their present world view. The new generation that has grown up within the compressed time span of this vast change and have wholly integrated these new technologies into their modes of communicating and problem solving into a world view formed and fashioned within this context. While the “Moses” leader may utilize email or Facebook as a form of social connection and dialogue their long-term notions of problem solving are overriding forces in how they use and contextualize these new tools. Within the “Joshua” generation social media is a reality they helped to fashion and shape. It is not an addendum to a previous notion of communication or social order; it is communication and social order as seen and expressed through the lens of this leadership cadre.

The Moses/Joshua Project now in its planning stages in New York City is designed to meet the multiple challenges and expressed need of creating a pathway for intergenerational learning and communication. The Moses/Joshua Project will identify up to 25 “Moses” generation leaders who have demonstrated histories of

guiding the faith communities over the past half century along with an equal number of “Joshuas” who have exhibited impact and leadership trajectories that will affect the next half century. This effort is a partnership between The Center for Community Leadership at the JCRC and the New York Clergy Roundtable. Efforts will be made to insure that those chosen to participate within this process will identify leadership representing the full diversity, in all its iterations, of New York’s faith tableau. It is understood that leadership of the “Moses” generation from the “newer” faiths that represent the immigrant influx after 1965 will be fewer in number than their counterparts in the “Joshua” cohort. The era of the “Moses” era reflected the demographics of New York of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Abrahamic faith dominated this cohort with the largest from the various Christian and Jewish denominations.

Within these dominant denominations in New York City there have also been some marked shifts since the turn of the century. A paradigm of change is the Jewish community of New York; the largest Jewish urban community in the world the later part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed a larger liberal Jewish community than today’s community. Within the past 20 years there has been a decrease in the size of the Conservative and Reform movements and with a marked increase in the size of the Orthodox adherents. According to a 2011 demographic study of the Jewish community approximately 78% of Jewish children under the age of 18 years are now growing up in Orthodox homes. This is almost an inverse of the Jewish population of the earlier segment of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Within the Christian community those adhering to the Roman Catholic Church have been a majority since the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Over the past 19 years the Catholic population was predominantly white ethnic representing populations that came to New York from European roots. Large immigrations from Ireland, Italy, Poland and other parts of Europe have shaped the nature of this faith community. The second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century also witnessed a large Latino population primarily Puerto Rican and Dominican that bolstered the Catholic community of New York. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century there is an ever decreasing and aging white cohort and increasing populations from Africa, Asia and other parts of the Latino world including Mexico and Central America. Likewise there has been a marked increase of Latino church leaders from the evangelical community as an increasing number of Latinos now attend evangelical and Protestant churches.

The size and diversity of the Muslim community of New York City has increased over the past 25 years. The majority of Muslims in New York City today have their roots in South Asia, Pakistan, Bangladesh and India. There are likewise increasing numbers from Africa and the Middle East as well as other parts of the Muslim world. Visible Muslim leadership in New York in the 20<sup>th</sup> century very often reflected the convert community of African Americans. Today’s emerging Muslim leadership reflects the increasing immigrant communities with a marked increase in engaged leadership emerging after the events of 9/11. The size and impact of the growth of the Muslim community in New York is evidenced in the recent decision by the New York City Department of Education to close schools on



*Eid Al Fitr* and *Eid Al Adha* so as to allow for the religious observance for Muslim students and teachers.

Immigration from Asia and other parts of the world that prior to 1965 was severely limited has contributed to a growth of faith groups whose roots are not in the Abrahamic traditions. The Hindu community from India and across the India diaspora was less than 2000 in 1970 when the Hindu Society of North America central Temple was founded in the borough of Queens. Today there are dozens of temples and hundreds of thousands of Hindus living throughout the New York Metropolitan area. The Sikh community likewise has grown geometrically in the later part of the 20<sup>th</sup> and opening of the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. The Buddhist community has exploded in New York with the New York City Department of Planning predicting that the Chinese community will be the largest immigrant population within the next ten years. Again the Department of education of New York closed schools for Chinese New Year for the first time in 2016. There are likewise a number of other faith groups that represent immigrations from Africa and other parts of the globe that here to fore had little or no presence in New York.

As second and third generations of these groups join the immigrant base of many of these faiths there is now a common challenge that being how to teach the basic tenets of faith and traditions of the home country to a generation living within and often embracing a dominant American culture.

Again turning to the Jewish community as a paradigm the Jewish community has long faced this issue over its long history of immigration to the United States. Allegiance to its various more liberal denominations such as the Reform and Conservative movements gained ascendancy particularly over the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. By the late 1960's the majority of the American Jewish community embraced the more liberal Reform with the Conservative denomination closely behind. Orthodoxy was predicted by many ready to virtually disappear. As noted above, in 2016 in New York City both the other two liberal movements have shrunk precipitously in size and numbers while the Orthodox movement, mainly through birthrate has grown to almost 40% of the Jewish population of New York. The other group of Jews that has likewise grown in a similar proportion as the Orthodox is what has been dubbed "Just Jews" or those belonging to no movement or formal Jewish institution and whose allegiance to the community and faith is noted as peripheral to their understanding of self-identity. The challenges of transmission of foundations of faith are dramatically highlighted by this generational phenomenon of "Just Jews" juxtaposed to a growing more traditional group where language and points of reference between these two segments is at best limited. This paradigm is playing out amongst many other immigrant, ethnic and faith groups in the city.

The challenges that lay before us of transmission of the tenets of faith as foundational and a guide to building and instilling a better quality of life for all, understanding and respect within our various individual societies and the world as a whole. As the waters of social unrest continue to become stormier it will be the ability of the faith leadership of the various generations to partner in navigating

these storms that will determine what lies on the other side. Likewise, as the waters settle, successful models of such partnerships will provide one of the essential tools for fashioning societies that will not only provide the best quality of life for all but likewise engender respect of the other and promote the positive value of diversity and difference. The success of The Moses/Joshua Project and the programs emanating from it is one such model of success and hope.

*Bilal Ahmad Malik<sup>1</sup>*

## **Concept of ‘Religious Tolerance’ in the Socio-Religious Construction of Islam: A Critical Study of Prophetic Era**

### **Abstract**

The identification of intellectual flaws in the doctrinal construction of other faiths has become a dominant theological discourse among the religions. The overwhelmed practice of proselytization, motivated by a typical ‘superiority’ psyche, has steered one religious identity to supplant the ‘other’ (*al-akhar*). Consequently, this scrimmage of ascertaining dogmatic and intellectual ‘supremacy’ over the other has mechanized a feeding womb for the upbringing of the unwanted phenomenon called as ‘religious intolerance’ or ‘religious extremism’. Imbibed in its very foundations, ‘religious intolerance’, as a result, has divided the entire human race into ‘watertight compartments’ with least possibility of interaction and exchange. Being primarily incompatible to the philosophy of coexistence and multiculturalism, it further operates into the mechanism of ‘exclusivism’- a tendency to disown the other. Many societies, particularly of the West, erroneously believe that Islam, as a driving religious ideology, has strong receptivity towards violence, intolerance and extremism. Consequently, it guides its followers to challenge the existence of discordant ‘other’ and fight with them for the ‘divine cause’ of religion. In this context, the present paper would be an attempt to examine the correlation between Islam, tolerance and extremism in the light of its ‘theological’ and ‘ideological’ underpinnings. While giving emphasis on the formative period of Islamic thought, it will also discuss the contemporary relevance of this ‘formative model’ as a source of coexistence, interfaith dialogue and equally a significant tool against all radical manifestations.

### **Introduction**

The contemporary world has turned out to be a phase of diverse conflicts and ideological confrontations. People are turning pugnacious for a number of reasons varying from socio-political and economic domination to intellectual and religious indoctrination. In its latest report on religious freedom, the US State Department concluded that year 2013 saw the largest displacement of religious communities in recent memory with millions of individuals from all faiths forced from their homes on account of their religious beliefs in ‘almost every corner of the globe’ (Limon, Ghanae and Power; 2014). Though, the ever fast advancement in communication technology and social media has largely empowered people, of diverse geographical, cultural, ethnic, and religious upbringings, with a constructive perception of ‘global living’ and embracing the ‘multiple origins’. However, there are obviously certain miscreant religious traits, not following the essence of religion,

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which are concomitant to aggravate ‘differences’ by misconstruing and fabricating the meaning, application and scope of religious doctrines. These traits are sometimes ‘reactionary’<sup>2</sup> but mostly ‘implanted’ for ‘specific and motivated’ political interests and sectarian purposes.<sup>3</sup> It is from here, the unsolicited phenomenon of ‘extremism’ takes off its journey. Instead of linking such activities with a particular ‘mis-knowledged’ group, the whole mechanism is mistakenly made relevant to the fundamental teachings of any particular religion without even knowing what the ‘original religious text’ has to say about. Furthermore, it culminates into a state of ‘indifference’ in one’s ‘individual’ and ‘collective’ conscience about that particular religion.

Among all world religions, Islam alone has become centripetal to all Eastern and Western criticism. Today, more than ever, the fundamental ‘war doctrines’<sup>4</sup> of Islam are being deliberately distorted by some ‘mis-knowledged’ extremist tendencies, from within and outside, as a means to achieve the ‘other ends’ which are mostly unjustified and even anti-Islamic in nature. Therefore, Islam in many occurrences seems to be simply ‘hijacked’ and disconnected from its essential qualities such as love of God, love for His creation, love and respect for whole humankind, peace and harmony within one’s own soul and with his or her surrounding, social and economic justice, inspiration for various artistic expressions and other noble qualities which are fundamentally engrossed in its socio-religious construction. What has turned out of this wretched conundrum so far, is an overwhelming wave of anti-Islamic discourse called as Islamophobia.<sup>5</sup> The bulk of literature produced after the ‘unsolved’ incident of 9/11 about Islam, particularly in the West, intensified the Islamophobic mindset. Though, it would be right to claim that most of the writings produced about Islam vis-à-vis extremism, terrorism and intolerance are unsubstantiated and equally biased. However, it would be a ‘rosy approach’ from Muslim intelligentsia if the odd episodes, which of course should

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<sup>2</sup> For example in case of Al-Shabab (Somalia) and Taliban (Afghan), the atrocities and persecutions brought upon them are also to be condemned but it doesn’t justify their ‘hate’ and ‘reaction’ against innocents and state.

<sup>3</sup> The formation of ISIS in Middle East, Boko Haram in Nigeria, TTP and Hizb Al-Ahrar in Pakistan and Indian Mujahedeen in India are such examples. The mainstream religious scholars like Taqi Uthmani (Pakistan), Al-Qaradawi (Qatar), Abdul Aziz Al-Shaikh (Saudi Arabia), Shaikh Ali Gomaa (Egypt), and Syed Jallal-ud-din Umari (India) and Islamic organizations like Jamati Islami, Deoband, Tableeghi Jamat, and Ikhwan-ul-Muslimoon have vehemently criticized their ‘extremist’ religious philosophy. Such extremist tendencies have been categorically referred as un-Islamic because of their self-styled interpretation of *Shari’ah* rulings and clear deviation from the methodology of *Jumhoor Ulama* (majority of Ulama) and *Salaf al-Saliheen* (righteous predecessors).

<sup>4</sup> The conceptualization of ‘war doctrine’ in Islam is based on those God’s commandments (Qur’an), Prophetic traditions (*Hadith*) and *Fiqh* (Juristic) elucidations which describe the nature and scope of war in Islam.

<sup>5</sup> Literally translated as “fear of Islam”, Islamophobia is one of the most contentious terms that have emerged in recent years. Chris Allen, the author of *Islamophobia* has rejected this ‘sponsored’ thesis on the grounds that accepting it (Islamophobia) tantamount to legitimizing indolent stereotypes like equating all Muslims as terrorists, which actually is not the reality.

not be used as ‘reference point’ as they are being, produced at the hands of ‘mis-knowledged’ extremist tendencies are ignored and outrightly nullified.<sup>6</sup>

### **Tolerance: A Conceptual Discourse**

The word ‘tolerance’ generally entails “to recognize and respect” the ‘other’, in word and practice, without merging. In the declaration of principles of tolerance, UNESCO defines tolerance as, “respect, acceptance and appreciation of the rich diversity of our world’s cultures, our forms of expression and ways of being human”.<sup>7</sup> In his book, *Theory of Justice*, Rawls, a prominent Western thinker, has provided pragmatic elucidations regarding the conceptual framework of tolerance. While discussing tolerance and its boundaries, he formulates an opinion that a political establishment must entail pluralism including religious diversity. If Rawls theory of liberalism is compared with Ottoman Empire’s Millet system<sup>8</sup>, which can be called as a ‘pre-modern model’ of religious pluralism, one finds both are practically close to each other. This type of political structure emphasizes that there is possibility of coexistence and creation of a natural form of religious tolerance. Today, this structure of governance is used in its varied forms in different countries of the world like Sri Lanka, India, Bangladesh, Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and USA etc. The governance based on this form of system accentuates that the primary duty of a liberal state is to protect the individual’s basic liberty and rights which obviously include the right to religious affiliation as well.

Another political philosopher, Michael Walzer has explained the significance of tolerance in the political perspective of ‘regimes’ and defines it as an institutionalized arrangement of social coexistence. What makes Walzer’s social philosophy of tolerance different from the other explanations is his uniqueness in the examination of tolerance and its applicability. According to Walzer, tolerance does not only mean harmony and respecting the other but it also means lower classes can compete and they can move forward (Walzer 1999). Rainer Forst, a contemporary scholar, explains tolerance with much clarity and defines ‘toleration’ as a virtue of justice and a demand of reason. According to Forst, tolerance plays an imperative role for the safe existence of cultural and minority groups in the current clash of civilizations. In his article *Toleration, Justice and Reason*, he describes about the pattern of tolerance through four attitudes; Permission conception, co-existence conception, Respect conception, and Esteem conception (Forst 2003).

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<sup>6</sup> Abdullah Faliq, Head of research of Cordoba Foundation and editor of Archives Quarterly, admits the same reality and writes in editorial message, “Conversely, the Muslim civil society has to accept responsibility for its part in contributing to the rise of Islamophobia”, in *Islamophobia and Anti-Muslim Hatred: Causes and Remedies*” fourth volume of Archives, published in 2010.

<sup>7</sup> The 1<sup>st</sup> Article (Meaning of Tolerance) of UNESCO’s 1995 Declaration of Principles of Tolerance.

<sup>8</sup> The *Millet* system, developed by Ottoman’s, was a somewhat improved version of Islamic *Zimme* system. They introduced it in order to create a more effective rule over a multi-religious empire. Under Millet system they placed the non-Muslims under the direct authority of the leading church officials, namely Greek Orthodox, the Armenian patriarchs, and Jewish grand rabbi.

Now coming back to actual side of the discussion, that is conceptualizing the nature of relation between tolerance and Islam. Here one has to be very scrupulous about the application of terminology because what generally people do, they treat Islam and Muslims as synonymous and mutually interchangeable terms, often saying Islam where they ought to say Muslims and vice versa. This misuse of terms in media and literary discussions about Islam has created a lot of controversy and has added 'blood and flesh' to slogan of "Islamic terrorism".<sup>9</sup> Hence, to know what Islam has actually said about the tolerance, intolerance and extremism, one has to objectively research its roots in the formative period of Islamic civilization. When we read *Qur'an* thoroughly, as objective researcher, we definitely come across a number of 'sacred' testimonies encouraging the recipients of its divine message to develop the culture of coexistence. It unambiguously talks about the diversity of faiths and advocates the philosophy of *takreem-i-adam* or dignity of man.<sup>10</sup> According to this principle, all human beings, irrespective of their religious affiliation, must be given due respect and honour. Embracing the nature of diversity, *Qur'an* equals the renunciation of rights of others, to hold beliefs not compatible to Islam, with the denial of God's absolute wisdom-Who Himself willed the diversity to prevail. As is mentioned in the *Qur'an*:

"If your Lord had so desired, all the people on the earth would surely have come to believe, all of them; do you then think, that you could compel people to believe? (*Qur'an*, 10: 99)"

Affirming the God's absolute wisdom in allowing divergent views about the relation of man (creation) with God (Creator), *Qur'an* declares:

"And had your Lord so willed, He could surely have made all human beings into one single community: but (He willed it otherwise, and so) they continue to hold divergent views (*Qur'an*, 11:118)."

Both of these, authoritative, verses establish the principle of 'freedom of belief' and determine its scope in the socio-political philosophy of Islam. In the concluding part of the first verse (10: 99), even the Prophet is directed to adopt this principle in his *dawah* (inviting people to Allah) methodology. He is told for not being 'over-enthusiastic' in convincing people to accept Islam and abandon their ancestral religion. Through the divinely inspired Prophetic channel, the fact is impressed upon the whole *Ummah*, that the difference in beliefs and religions is not an accidental manifestation. Instead, it is the God's 'divine will' which has qualified human being with the capacity of 'acceptance and rejection' in the matter of religion. This unique quality to express and determine a particular choice makes human race *ahsan al-*

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<sup>9</sup> Any action or statement coming from a *Muslim* and found in ratification with the socio-political applicability of the sources i.e. *Qur'an* and *Sunnah* is genuine to be called as *Islamic*. If the case is otherwise, then it is merely a 'misguided' and 'mis-knowledged' disposition wrongly attributed to Islamic credentials.

<sup>10</sup> Allah mentions this principle in chapter *Bani Isr'iel* (17:70). It says, "Indeed we have honoured the children of Adam...and conferred on them special favours". This principle of 'human dignity' is universal in application and its violation on the name of religion is nothing except maltreatment to Gods' word.

*khalaq* (perfect creation) otherwise in many biological characteristics we are same as animals. Furthermore, it categorically invalidates the human being's claim of powerlessness and makes him/her accountable for his/her actions and statements in this world and world hereafter.

The Qur'an fundamentally emphasizes to cultivate a peaceful, stable and patient human psychology. To realize this objective, it inculcates a specific quality of tolerance called as beautiful tolerance (*sabrun jameel*) in its followers against all odds. One of the ideological 'odds' for a Muslim is outright rejection of his/her message, that is, if his/her invitee or a society, where he/she lives, doesn't support and believe Islam as a revealed religion. In that case, the reflection of beautiful tolerance is required from both individual as well as society. That is why, while discussing the proper balance in behaviors to reach the correct path, Muslim society, as a collective force, is being advised to stand moderate in all walks of life. In this regard Qur'an says:

"We have made you a moderate nation (Qur'an, 2: 143)"

The use of word '*wast*' or moderate in this verse is general and encompasses the concept of balance ('*adl or meezan*) in all spheres of a Muslim society; its ideology, culture, worldview, war, peace and finally its relation with the 'religious other'. When Prophet started his *dawah* work in Mecca, of course he had to face a severe kind of 'ideological contrast' with the prevailing socio-religious construction. As a foremost remedial measure, to avoid any direct confrontation, God revealed to him that to indulge in such affairs in part of his noble mission. Hence, he is advised to deal with the people of other religions with 'constructive neutrality'<sup>11</sup> or in other words 'live and let to live' policy. The very basis of this policy can be best described in the verse of the Qur'an, which says:

"To you be your religion, to me be mine (Qur'an, 109:7)"

One of the fundamental truths established by the sacred text is that no one can be compelled to accept Islam against his or her choice. Because, being a universalistic message, Islam never believes in philosophy of coercion- '*end matters not means*'. Its target is not body but heart and heart never accepts what is forced on it. Though, *dawah* is imperative on all Muslims but it must not involve any form of extremism, violence and harm. Among many decisive statements in this regard are the following. God says:

"Let there be no compulsion in religion. Truth has been made clear from error (Qur'an, 10:99)"

At other place, God says:

"So, if they dispute with you, say 'I have submitted my whole self to God, and so have those who follow me.' ...But if they turn away, your duty is only to convey the message. And in your God's sight are all of His servants (Qur'an, 3: 20)."

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<sup>11</sup> By writing 'constructive neutrality' I mean that Prophet never compromised to keep silence on the prevailing social evils like female infanticide, social discrimination, lending money on interest, exploitation of 'weaker' sect of society and so on.

It is worth to mention that these verses were revealed at Medina when Islam was a recognized political authority and Prophet as a well-accepted statesman. After coming across these and similar authoritative statements, some people may start thinking that if Islam indeed advocates such a tolerant philosophy, then what is all this we hear about *Jihad*?<sup>12</sup> The simple answer to this complex question is that *Jihad* in *Shari'ah* (Islamic law) can be waged for a number of reasons such as corruption, injustice, oppression, social evils and so on, but compelling people to accept Islam is never one of them (Mawdudi, 1996, p. 23-46; Bashir 2015).

Taking such unequivocal references from the sacred text, contemporary Muslim scholars have evidently mentioned the responsibility of Muslims to promote the culture of religious tolerance, interfaith dialogue and mutual existence in a violence-hit world. For example, Ghazzali, in his book, *On the Boundaries of Theological Tolerance in Islam*, questions the criteria in differentiating belief and unbelief (*kufir*) in an intolerant way. He holds the opinion that theology functions as a category of exclusion which in other words means that conflicting theologies can coexist based on mutual recognition (Ghazzali 2004). Ghazzali's description of theological coexistence provides a room for tolerance as well as religious diversity. To counter 'mis-knowledged' radical elements, Fatullah Gulen, a Turkish Muslim modernist, emphasizes liberal, tolerant and moderate views of Islamic epistemology and proposes to use reasoning in Islamic issues which actually is similar to Ghazzali's view. According to Bulent Aras, Gulen has advocated '*Anatolian Islam*' as model to promote tolerance and pluralism as means to exclude fanaticism in socio-religious structure of Islam in the modern times. Gulen proposes to keys to provide peace in society: tolerance and dialogue. He says:

"We can build confidence and peace in this country if we treat each other with tolerance (qtd. in Bell 1995)."

While, explaining tolerance metaphorically, Gulen says:

"We all live in this world and we are passengers on the same ship (qtd. in Erol 2012)."

To conclude this theoretical discourse, I would prefer to quote Tariq Ramadan, the grandson of Hassan al-Banna (founder of Egyptian Islamist Muslim Brotherhood),

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<sup>12</sup> From the Lexicographic point of view, the word *Jihad* is derived from root word *jahd*, which means "to struggle, to put efforts". Technically, *Jihad* refers to any action, including war against those who try to demolish Islam and wage war against Muslim territories, performed to seek benevolence and mercy of Allah. Prophet has defined many levels of *Jihad* and fight against one's own *nafs* (ill desires and ugly temptations) has been declared as the higher quality of *Jihad*. Today, misconceptions about *jihad* have got exacerbated by those who claim to be engaging in global *Jihad* while committing acts of terrorism against innocent civilians. Although such acts are completely at odds with Islam's basic principles and even with the fundamentals of *jihad* itself but still the claims of perpetrators have led many less-informed to non-Muslims understand *jihad* as an antagonist approach to 'dialogue' which actually is not true.



who describes tolerance and pluralism as a condition of humility and a mode of protection against potential excess. Ramadan, like Ghazzali, agrees that appropriate application of reasoning in Islamic issues helps one to become reasonable. He argues that, diversity and equality are the prerequisite for respect, as he says:

“If I can tolerate and suffer the presence of what I do not know, I cannot respect others without trying to know them. Respect, therefore, calls for an attitude that is not passive but active, and proactive, towards others; Being curious of their presence and their being and attempting to know them after recognizing them... Tolerance can reduce the others to the simplicity of his presence; respect opens us up to the complexity of his being. As in a mirror, it means recognizing the other to be as complex as oneself: He is the equal, the mirror, the question; the other in me and myself in him (Ramadan 2013).”

### **Tolerance in Practice: An Example of Prophetic Era**

It is obligatory on all Muslims to follow the supreme model of the Prophet in all walks of life. His *Sunnah* is described as an indivisible reality from the Qur’an, for it is the living interpretation of the Qur’anic text<sup>13</sup>. As it is mentioned in Qur’an:

“You have indeed in the Prophet of God a best example” (Qur’an, 33: 21); “Allah Showed great Kindness to the believers when He sent a Messenger to them from among themselves to recite His signs to them, purify them and teach them the Book and Wisdom, even though before that they were clearly misguided” (Qur’an, 2: 164).

In light of the above Qur’anic verses, any methodology developed pertaining to dawah would be baseless until it is not in concordance with the foundations of dawah laid by the Prophet himself during his *khair al-kuroon*, the blessed period. From different historical narratives, it is established that Prophet right from his childhood would think of peace and reconciliation between ruthlessly fighting Arab tribes. For example, before proclamation of his Prophethood, he played a significant role in the historical ‘inter-tribe’ peace agreement called as *Hilf al-fudul* to take fighting tribes out of perpetual war, which had already destroyed thousands of innocent lives (Mubarakhpuri 1988; Haykal 2009). Though the pages of history reveal many glorious examples of tolerance practiced by the Prophet during his thirteen years stay in Makkah, after proclamation of Prophethood, it may be incorrectly understood that this character was merely a ‘emotional display’ to raise the profile of the Muslims and the social status of Islam in general. Thus, to critically analyze the Prophets’ exemplary model of tolerance, one must look into the period in which Islam had formally developed into a state with its own specific laws laid down by the God and further explained and implemented by the Prophet himself.

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<sup>13</sup> Once some companions approached Hadrat Ayesha (mother of believers) and questioned her about Prophet’s character . In reply she said, “His *khuluq* (behaviour) is *Qur’an*”.

### **The Constitution of Medina and ‘Coexistence’**

If we study the development of philosophy of coexistence, we find the Charter of Medina (*Methaq or Sahifat al-Medina*) as a remarkable constitutional document describing the borders of a pluralistic society (Akram 1995). Chronologically, it predated the English Magna Carta by almost six centuries and was executed for 10 years (622-632 A.D.). After migration to Medina, Prophets’ extraordinary statesmanship was relatively ostensible and under his capable leadership new laws of governance were being drafted for a ‘joint society’ to ensure harmony, stability and peaceful coexistence (Haykal 2009). His objective was to safeguard Medina against all odds by simply providing political governance to society comprising of different religious identities. To achieve this goal, the Prophet documented the historical ‘Constitution of Medina’ consisting of 47 clauses, detailing the responsibilities of all parties residing in Medina. All parties were to obey what was mentioned therein, and any breach of its articles would be regarded as an act of treachery. It protected fundamental human rights for all citizens, including equality, cooperation, freedom of conscience and freedom of religion (Kurucan & Kasim 2012; Yildirim 2006).

The first article of the constitution was that all the inhabitants of Medina, the Muslims as well as those who had entered the pact from the Jews, Christian, and idolaters, were ‘one nation’ (*Ummatun wahidah*). The fact that the article applies the word ‘*Ummah*’,<sup>14</sup> which implies that all parties would coexist peacefully and in pretext of ‘otherness’ no party shall be abandoned of its rights. Through the adoption of this article, people of all faiths were considered equal and ‘parcitary citizens’ of the reformed Medinian society. Since the upper hand was with Muslims, the Prophet paid due consideration to the protection of religious status, lives, and wealth of the followers of other faiths. The Prophet is reported to have said:

“Whoever kills a person who has a truce with the Muslims will never smell the fragrance of Paradise. Verily, its fragrance can be found a distance of forty years of travel (*Sahih Bukhari, Kitab-ud-diyat*).”

“Whoever hurts a non-Muslim citizen of a Muslim state hurts me, and he who hurts me annoys God (*Sahih Bukhari, Kitab-ud-diyat*).”

He strictly warned against any maltreatment of people of other faiths, in this regard he said:

“Beware! Whoever is cruel and hard on a non-Muslim minority, or curtails their rights, or burdens them with more than they can bear, or takes anything from them against their free will; I (Prophet Muhammad) will complain against the person on the Day of Judgment (*Sunan Abu Dawud, Kitab-ul-jihad*).”

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<sup>14</sup> The word *Ummah* is phenomenal to Islamic worldview which actually not only promulgates ‘mutual support and service’ of world-wide Muslim community but also determines their political consolidation. Applying the word ‘*Ummah*’ within the given context, it describes that all the parties under agreement were prompted to cultivate the culture of ‘inclusion’, co-operation, and mutual trust in their relations through active process of interaction and social involvement.

In its 25<sup>th</sup> article, the constitution states, ‘*the Jews have their religion and the Muslims have theirs*’ which unequivocally outlines that anything other than ‘coexistence’ would not be tolerated. This article guaranteed free practice of different religious beliefs without any state interference (Lecker 1998). The 42<sup>nd</sup> article states, ‘*If any dispute or controversy likely to cause trouble should arise, it must be referred to God and His Messenger.*’ Recognizing Prophet at higher level of authority was central to this article but for individual tribes who were not Muslims, to refer to their own religious scriptures and their learned men regarding their own personal affairs was also approved which in modern day judicial philosophy developed as ‘Personal Law’.<sup>15</sup>

In contemporary times, the critical analysis of ‘Constitution of Medina’ would obviously bring new insights in the politico-legal philosophy of Islam (Sachedina 2001). In short, the Constitution of Medina serves an example of finding resolve in a dispute where peace, tolerance and pluralism were not achieved through military successes or ulterior motives rather through respect and acceptance. That is why, in praise of ‘constitution’ Mark Graham writes:

“It was a treaty and city charter between Arabs and Jews of the city. All groups (Muslims, Jews, and non-Muslim Arabs) pledged to live in civic harmony, governed by mutual advice and consultation... This amazingly foresighted document was a revolutionary step forward in civil government. Despite the ultimately tragic end of Muslim and Jewish cooperation in Medina, this blueprint of interreligious tolerance would serve Islam and its subject peoples well in the future (Graham 2006).”

### **Prophet’s *Dawah* Methodology: Letters Sent to Kings and Emissaries**

After the treaty of *Hudaybiyya*<sup>16</sup> in 628 A.D. which itself is a great illustration of peace and tolerance, the Prophet of Islam, decided to send ambassadors to various rulers around the Arabian Peninsula as a part of his *dawah* strategy. Different historical anecdotes reveal, about 25 letters were sent by the Prophet to various rulers and tribal leaders. Among those who were sent to the Christian rulers and tribes, we see the following names: Dihyah al-Kalbī sent to Heraclius, the Emperor of Byzantine; `Amr bin Umayyah Zamrī to the Negus, the King of Abyssinia; Hāt’ib bin Abī Baltā’a sent to the Muqawqis, the King of Egypt; and the tribes of Ghassan and Ḥānifāh (in northern Arabia). The characteristic feature of all these Prophetic letters is their similarity in content and orientation. For example, in his letter to Heraclius, the Byzantine Emperor, the Prophet Muhammad wrote:

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<sup>15</sup> For example, Muslim Personal Law in India saves the rights of Muslims in legal family matters like divorce and inheritance.

<sup>16</sup> Since the Prophet wished to avoid war at all costs, he strove to bring about a peace agreement with him and the Makkans called as treaty of *Hudaybiyya*. During this important meeting, Makkans insisted on a number of extremely provocative acts. For insistence, the agreement mentioned the Prophet’s name as “*Muhammad-ur-Rasullullah* (Mohammad, the messenger of Allah)”. They insisted to replace it by “son of Abdullah”. Similarly, they made the condition that if they could lay their hands on any Muslim they would make him a hostage, but if the Muslims succeeded in detaining any non-Muslim, they would have to set him free. The prophet accepted peacefully and deleted the appellation.

“...Peace be upon him who follows the guidance. I invite you to accept Islam. Accept Islam and you will prosper and Allah will give you double rewards. But if you refuse, then the sin of your people also will fall upon your shoulders. O People of the Scripture, come to the word common between us and you that we shall not worship anything but Allah, and that we shall not associate anything with Him, nor shall some of us take others for lords besides Allah. But if you turn back, then say: Bear witness that we are Muslims (qtd. in Haykal 2009).”

In another letter to the Negus, the King of Abyssinia, the Prophet Muhammad wrote: “...Peace be upon him who follows the guidance. Praise be to Allah besides whom there is no other god, the Sovereign, the Holy One, the Preserver of Peace, the Keeper of the Faithful, the Guardian. I bear witness that Jesus, son of Mary, is indeed a spirit of God and His word, which He conveyed unto the chaste Mary. He created Jesus through His word just as He created Adam with His hands. And now I call you to Allah who is one and has no partner and friendship in His obedience. Follow me and believe in what has been revealed to me, for I am the Messenger of Allah. I invite you and your people to Allah, the Mighty, the Glorious. I have conveyed the message, and it is up to you to accept it. Once again, peace be upon him who follows the path of guidance (qtd. in Khan 1998).”

In the letter sent to the Muqawqis, the King of Egypt and a Coptic Christian, the Prophet Muhammad wrote:

“...Peace be upon him who follows the guidance. I invite you to accept the message of Islam. Accept it and you shall prosper. But if you turn away, then upon you shall also fall the sin of the Copts. O’ People of the Scripture, come to a word common between us and you that we shall worship none but Allah and that we shall ascribe no partner unto Him and that none of us shall regard anyone as lord besides God. And if they turn away, then say: Bear witness that we are Muslims (qtd. in Margoliouth 1905).”

The methodology celebrated, in the Prophetic text, to address the invitees, principally architect a ‘choice based’ approach and not a single evidence of coercion could be brought against it. This configuration of *dawah*, totally left against individual’s psychological response to ‘accept or reject’, is actually central to Prophetic methodology. The instantaneous transmission of Prophetic principles, in thought and practice, helped the early Muslim civilization to produce a way forward for ‘peaceful dialogue’ with the people of other faiths. It enabled Muslims of that period to maintain a ‘patient psyche’ which could qualify their manifestation of Islam of being universal and tolerant irrespective of unwanted response from their invitees. The context of these letters highlights the fact that Prophet never used his missionary efforts as a war-tactic to subordinate the existence of other religions. Instead, he wanted to develop a clear and comprehensive understanding of Islam among those who were not known to it. In other words, it was a kind of pre-modern ‘sensitization’ project about Islam in a dominant culture where there was no scope

for discussing and practicing Islam. Thus, the Prophetic methodology of *dawah*, purely based on ‘dialogue’, is totally in contradiction with all those ‘individual’ and ‘organizational’ tendencies, which are directly or indirectly promoting the notion of perpetual war and ‘forcible conversion’. Moreover, it categorically denounces all means of ‘violence and hate’ used against the people of other faith or culture. Had there been any scope of intolerance towards the people of other faith than Prophet would have never said “*I have conveyed the message, and it is up to you to accept it*” which simply carry forward the message that every single individual is free to decide his or her religious affiliation. This statement is an open verdict to all contemporary missionary organizations that they must avoid ‘judgmental statements’ and should not indulge in affairs of violence, intolerance, and hate speeches.

The above mentioned letters were from Prophet to Kings; now let’s take another case, where Prophet writes to his own emissaries. For example, while writing to his emissary to the religious leaders of Saint Catherine in Mount Sinai called as ‘Charter of Privileges’, the Prophet has emphasized on the protection and realization of certain fundamental human rights. He has stressed upon the protection of religious sentiments and religious institutions of the people who are in the protection of Islam. In spite of all religious differences, the Prophet orders his emissary to promote a sense of ‘belongingness’ among the non-Muslim subjects and not to treat them with a state of ‘socio-political otherness’. They should not be kept away from day-in and day-out social engagements which other way would give them a sense of inferiority. It is much appropriate to put it in exact Prophetic words<sup>17</sup>:

“This is a message from Muhammad ibn Abdullah, as a covenant to those who adopt Christianity, near and far, we are with them. Verily I, the servants, the helpers, and my followers defend them, because Christians are my citizens; and by God! I hold out against anything that displeases them. No compulsion is to be on them. Neither are their judges to be removed from their jobs nor their monks from their monasteries. No one is to destroy a house of their religion, to damage it, or to carry anything from it to the Muslims’ houses. Should anyone take any of these, he would spoil God’s covenant and disobey His Prophet. Verily, they are my allies and have my secure charter against all that they hate. No one is to force them to travel or to oblige them to fight. The Muslims are to fight for them. If a female Christian is married to a Muslim, it is not to take place without her approval. She is not to be prevented from visiting her church to pray. Their churches are declared to be protected. They are neither to be prevented from repairing them nor the sacredness of their covenants. No one of the nation (Muslims) is to disobey the covenant till the Last Day (end of the world) (qtd. in Ahmad 2010).”

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<sup>17</sup> If the content of this letter could have been made a reference point than many sad episodes like destruction of historical standing Buddhas of Bamiyan<sup>17</sup> at hands of Taliban would have never happen. Rather they would have protected it and allowed the Buddhists to make it as religious pilgrimage site

This charter consists of several clauses covering almost all important aspects of ‘minority rights’ including freedom of worship, freedom to adopt legal and judicial perspectives, and freedom to own and maintain their property, exemption from military service, and the right to protection in war. It appears quite strange when non-Muslims living within Muslim states as minorities discuss their plight situation through media and literature. Under the effect of such fundamental teachings of Prophet, non-Muslim minorities such cordially feel a sense of ‘belongingness’ with the Muslim majority. While analyzing the scope of ‘Charter of Privileges’, the Western Islamic scholar, Marmaduke Pickthall, comments as follows:

“The charter which Muhammad (saw) granted to the Christian monks of Sinai is a living document. If you read it, you will see that it breathes not only goodwill, but also actual love..... The story of his reception of Christian and Zoroastrian visitors is on record. There is not a trace of religious intolerance in any of this (Pickthall 2004).”

### **Delegation of Najran and Prophet’s Exemplary Tolerant Attitude**

In the 9<sup>th</sup> year of *Hijrah*, Prophet of Islam received a delegation of sixty Christians from the region of Najran, then a part of Yemen, in Madinah. Amongst the Christians were their main chiefs and they stayed with the Prophet for three days as guests. During this time, they held frequent discussions with the Prophet about the position of Jesus. The questions like whether Jesus was really God?, the divine son of God?, or a Prophet of the God? were intellectually discussed. Not only the Christians debated with Prophet they also performed their religious practices in the mosque and faced the direction of east during their prayer. Some Muslims tried to prevent them from doing this but Prophet stopped them and said, “*Let them pray*”. This example stands as a ‘torchbearer’ for today’s Muslim in the promotion of coexistence and acceptance.

It is worth to mention that Christians eventually didn’t come to an agreement with the Prophet, concerning matters of faith. They held to their Christian beliefs, but a treaty was made with the Muslims. The Prophet gave them the accord: “The people of Najran and their dependents shall remain under the protection of God, and Muhammad, the Messenger of God. Their persons, their religion, their lands, their possessions and their churches shall remain safe. This treaty holds good for all people of Najran, whether present or not. No bishop shall be removed from his bishopric, no monk from his monasticism and no devotee from his devotions. Whoever fails to follow these rules will be violating God’s treaty and opposing His Messenger. No *Jizya* (poll tax levied on *dhimmi*s (people living under a *dhimma*, protection of Islam) shall be collected from priests, clergy, people who dedicate themselves to prayer, monks, or those who occupy themselves with worship in isolated places and mountains... No Christian shall be forced to convert to Islam; ... ‘Do not dispute with the People of the Book except by what is best.’ They shall be treated with compassion wherever they are, no harm shall come to them... If a Christian woman joins (marries) a Muslim man of her own accord, the Muslim husband shall consent to her Christianity, allow her to fulfill her religious duties and shall not forbid her to do so. Whoever fails to do this and exerts pressure on her

regarding her religion will be violating God's promise and His Messenger's treaty and he is a liar before God... If they (Christians) need help from Muslims with repairing their churches, monasteries or any other religious or worldly business, Muslims shall help them without placing them under any obligation; help and support for their religious needs shall be provided out of abiding by the promise of God's Messenger, as a donation and as God's grace (Ibn sa'd 2009)."

The treaty of Najran is an illuminating proof of how Prophet unreservedly conferred upon the Christians not only religious freedom but also granted them the power to decide their own civil matters through establishing judicial autonomy which was not only pertinent to personal status but also covers civil and penal affairs. It laid the foundation of a true confederacy which had constitution through which people of different religions became an integral part of a political arrangement by means of a social contract. The integration of non-Muslims in the political life through becoming real contributing players marked a milestone in the history of human rights. It is under impact of such clear references that even non-Muslim scholars like Stephen Humphreys were impressed upon to admit:

"Christian theologians under Muslim rule were free to pursue their debates without concern for imperial favor or disfavor or for that matter, fear of evidence from rival sects (qtd. in Jhon 2010)."

### **Interfaith Dialogue: An Antidote to 'Extremism'**

Interreligious or interfaith dialogue<sup>18</sup> is not something to be invented but something to be revived. It is not mere communication, rather it a meeting of heart and mind between the followers of different religions. The philosophy of dialogue is frequently associated with particular socio-religious goals, such as 'cultivating new' and improving 'old broken' relations between different religions. It is a natural manifestation of our humanness that we, as human beings, love to live in peace, tranquility and brotherhood without having conflicts and confrontations (Cf. Arinze 1990, p.332, Humaid, 2010 p.25). Both, the text of Qur'an and seerah (life and ideology) of the Prophet have shed enough light on the realization of this natural manifestation. Apart from the verses mentioned in the beginning of this paper, the Qur'an at many other places has mentioned about the fundamental oneness of all human beings and comprehends their ethnic, geographic and linguistic plurality as a means of understanding an identifying one another. It says:

"O, People, We created you all from a single man and a single woman, and made you into races and tribes so that you should get to know one another..." (Qur'an, 49:13).

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<sup>18</sup> The two Arabic words used in the Qur'an to convey the dialogue are *Hiwar* (positive dialogue) and *Jadal* (negative dialogue). The former involves clear intention to correct mistakes and rebut specious arguments. The latter is based on ill intention to overcome the other even if the argumentation is not convincing.

The inherent value of interreligious dialogue becomes perfect once the whole creation is recognized as intelligible, demanding to be responsive to it and to engage with it materially, intellectually and spiritually. As Said Nursi stated:

“Beauty and fairness desire to see and be seen. Both of these require the existence of yearning witnesses and bewildered admirers (Nursi 1993).”

The dealings and interactions that are purely motivated by racial superiority, or civilizational supremacy or cultural dominance aren't part of dialogue. The contemporary Muslim scholars like Al-Habash, Al-Qardawi, Al-Alwani, Jamal Badawi, Wahid-ud-din Khan, Javid Ghamedi, and Tariq Ramadan etc. recognize interfaith dialogue as the only opportunity to talk to and listen to each other, getting to know and learning to understand the 'other'. Their general perception about dialogue is that it inculcates spirit of tolerance, sincerity, love, and mutual respect without persuading the 'other' to accept one's own beliefs or ideas.<sup>19</sup> While considering the practice of dialogue from Islamic perspective, the first question arises whether or not it is necessitated by the fundamental doctrines of religion. Because mere scholar's 'socialized' opinion can't be treated as enough, until it is extracted from sources of Islamic law. The answer to this question is obviously a big 'yes' because Qur'an has put a lot of references to affirm that dialogue, not conversion, is a religious duty for Muslims. The following are a few examples of those verses:

“People, we created you all from a single man and a single woman, and made you into races and tribes so that you should get to know one another. In God's eyes, the most honoured of you are the ones most mindful of Him: God is all knowing, all aware” (Qur'an, 49:13).

“Say, ‘People of the Book, let us arrive at a statement that is common to us all: we worship God alone, we ascribe no partner to Him, and none of us takes others beside God as lords” (Qur'an, 3:64).

“We have assigned a law and a path to each of you. If God had so willed, He would have made you one community, but He wanted to test you through that which He has given you, so race to do good: you will all return to God and He will make clear to you the matters you differed about” (Qur'an, 5:48).

“[Believers], argue only in the best way with the People of the Book, except with those of them who act unjustly. Say, ‘We believe in what was revealed to us and in what was revealed to you; our God and your God is one [and the same]; we are devoted to Him” (Qur'an, 29:46).

The verses concerning difference of faith encourage a Muslim; (i) to accept that some individuals and groups will not believe in your faith however much you may desire them to; (ii) to live with the resulting differences in compassion and

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<sup>19</sup> Freedom of religion involves the four elements of freedom to believe in any religion, to practice its values, to communicate them to others, and to associate and organize with one's fellow believers. Freedom of religion obtains only where and when all four elements are in place. The lack of one of those elements in any country means that there is a lack of freedom of religion there.



acceptance; and (iii) to explore each other's faith and religion with respect and in an attempt to understand one another. Consequently, today when issues like Islamophobia, radicalization and Islamic terrorism have polluted the original construction of Islam, the process of 'interfaith dialogue' appears to be the only way to challenge stereotypes, correct misconceptions and denounce 'hate' culture. The Qur'an's 'positive dialogue' engagement with non-Muslims on the basis of justice, kindness, civility and courtesy and similarly examples from the *Sunnah* of Prophet encourage Muslims to engage in peaceful relations with other groups, not limited to only Semitic religions.

Today, the biggest hindrance in the way of dialogue is wrongly constructed theory of global *Jihad*, which has everything except Islam. The 'unsolved' 9/11 terrorist attack on World Trade Center, emergence of Islamic State (ISIS) and recent Paris attack have enthralled media and civil society to look into Islamic theology, especially its 'war doctrine' called as *Jihad*, with suspicious eye. These inhuman incidents, unfortunately involving word Islam, even dismantled the textual 'peace culture' of Islam. People in the West started to think Islamic Law at odds with their liberal and democratic values. It advocated a 'new rationale' that Islam promotes perpetual war with 'non-Muslims' and teaches a belligerent sense of supremacy vis-à-vis the other. Obviously, if the Qur'anic verses and Prophetic deliberations pertaining to practice of *jihad* will be discussed out of specific socio-political context than *jihad* merely remains an indiscriminate armed struggle against non-Muslims. Such absurd application of *Jihad* is a clear contradiction with theological legitimacy of dialogue.<sup>20</sup> However, it is a gross misconception of *jihad*, which needs to be corrected and for that there is dire need to revive 'formative model' of tolerance and dialogue developed by the Prophet.<sup>21</sup>

## Conclusion

The roots of 'tolerance' and 'interreligious dialogue' are fundamentally engrossed in Qur'an and *Sunnah*- the basic sources of Islamic law. Thus, in the development of this paper many passages, from basic sources, have been critically analyzed to answer the question, whether Islam promotes religious fanaticism or religious tolerance? In considering the sources, both at theoretical (Qur'anic injunctions) as well as practical (Prophetic practice) level, it becomes evident that Islam is primarily based on the principle of peace, tranquility and tolerance. Nevertheless, some 'mis-knowledged' extremist elements, by their words and actions, have maligned the 'socio-religious' construction of Islam to meet their political, economic and other

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<sup>20</sup> For example, Joseph Schacht, in his book *An Introduction to Islamic Law* describes Jihad as "The basis of the Islamic attitude towards unbelievers is the law of war; they must be either converted or subjugated or killed (excepting women, children and slaves)". Similarly, Salman Rushdie's most controversial novel "*The Satanic Verses*" is an apt example, wherein he obviously quoted many 'war verses' out of their historical context.

<sup>21</sup> I must say it clearly that even a large number of mainstream Muslims are confused about meaning and application of *Jihad*. Sometimes they call civil wars as '*jihad*', for example in case of Syria. Sometimes the (violent) reactionary approach against despotic governments including civil society is labeled as *Jihad*, for example in case of Tarikh Taliban of Pakistan (TTP).

material ends. In such a scenario, Muslim scholar's, theologians, academicians, and politicians share the fundamental responsibility to present the world an authentic framework of Islam. It is the right time, when Muslim intelligentsia , both at regional and global level, should come forward to rescue Islam and Muslim societies, especially the growing youth bulk, from the evil clutches of 'mis-knowledged' extremist tendencies like ISIS, Boko Haram, TTP and others. They must take a unanimous stance against all forms of prejudice, hatred and intolerance and advocate peaceful resolutions of conflicts both within and outside the Muslim communities. In spite of all odds, Muslim policy makers should develop relevant institutions and associations to facilitate active engagement with other religions through sustained 'dialogue' and 'interaction'. This would in turn permit each group to understand the deep meanings, associations, and implications of the prevailing clash of symbols. It is only by the means of active engagement that one could understand and recognize the true expressions of human religiosity and protects him/herself from the politics of manipulated symbolism. Those Muslims who really don't want to be misrepresented by terrorists groups like ISIS must come up with 'Prophetic model' of religious tolerance and speak out loud and clear. The mainstream Muslim organizations must introduce a kind of institutionalized 'intellectual protest' through conducting conferences, seminars, and workshops against all those who have simply hijacked the peaceful message of Islam and are using it as 'tool of violence' to meet their personnel interests. They must play a significant role in denouncing all suspicious interpretations of *Jihad*, in light of *seerah* (life) of the Prophet. Because the wrongly branded Islamic *Jihadists* like ISIS, TTP, Boko Haram and similar organizations apply this misinterpreted 'theory of *jihad*' to justify their killings. As Prophetic character is central to Islamic world view, his 'tolerant psyche', both as a preacher as well as a statesman, should be inclusively and extensively exposed to public through literature and media. By referring to his model of tolerance, Muslims will be successful in eradicating the ignorance that leads to negative stereotyping of Islam and enmity between Muslims and people of other faiths.

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## **Mobilizing the Great Resources of Our Respective Religious Traditions to Take Action Together to Counter Terrorism**

### **Abstract**

The paper deals with various approaches to counter violent religious ideologies and extremism. It stresses the importance of different religions coming together and jointly stand against all sorts of religious teachings used or misused for other purposes than that for which they were initially revealed.

### **Foundation of Religion**

Religion is inspiring ethical and spiritual force that aims to heal human society, provide security and peace among people and ensure human dignity and the rights that flow from it. However, some extremists abuse their religion, distort its image and use it to achieve non-religious objectives. They project violent images that contradict and violate the essence of their religion.

### **Categorical Rejection of Violent Extremism and Its Claimed Justification**

Religion is increasingly being abused in support of violent extremism that is violence justified by an extremist religious ideology which does not acknowledge and honor human dignity and the rights that flow from it. There are other forms of violent extremism, for example, political and ethnic violent ideologies that purport to justify the killing of the innocent. While we deplore and condemn all forms of violent extremism, we, as religious leaders, accept a special responsibility to reject, condemn and take action against violent religious extremism.

Today, violent extremism causes the murder of innocent, immense suffering, the erosion of trust between different groups and fuels social hostility. In addition, violent religious extremist ideologies perversely twist and distort the religious heritages they purport to represent. Violent religious extremism is not limited to one group, region, culture, religion or historical period. Today, it is an epidemic to the entire world.

### **Tackling the Drivers of Violent Extremism**

While we categorically reject all justifications for violent religious extremism, we recognize that it is often “driven” or “promoted” by a variety of factors. Understanding these factors, can guide our efforts to overcome violent religious extremism. There drivers can be grouped as the following:

- Religious ideological drivers which are misinterpretations of religion that attempt to justify violent extremism by building upon the fact that all religions have texts that have the potential to be misused in support of

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violence. These religious ideologies present themselves as narratives purporting to represent the truth of a given religion. These false narratives must be unmasked, debunked and replaced by authentic “counter-narratives” that bring to the fore each religion’s respect for human dignity and rejection of violent extremism as well as other forms of cultural violence. In fact, these “counter-narratives” of Peace are religions’ “primary narratives.”

- Socio-economic drivers which include widespread abuses of fundamental human rights, poverty, lack of opportunity for upward mobility and the failure of governments to provide basic services to people, including education. The link between these deplorable conditions and violent extremism needs to be frankly acknowledged and responded to by promoting good governance, the rule of law, tolerance and addressing global poverty, thereby removing many of the factors that can “push” people towards violent religious extremism.
- Psychological-spiritual drivers which include the psychological and spiritual need to belong and desire to be part of something bigger than one’s self. These may also include to desire to respond to affronts to one’s personal or collective senses of dignity. The psychological attraction of violent extremism must be countered with true opportunities to build a meaningful life, including genuine ways of addressing historical long-standing injustices and contributing to the common good.

Each religion is invited to “re-inventory” itself through the lens of each driver: what social, moral and spiritual assets does it have to address the drivers? How can these “assets” be mobilized and engaged? However, this list of drivers is incomplete. There is an additional driver. It is global, interactive, menacing and only growing in importance. Let me name it *The Vicious Cycle of Increased Social Hostility*. What do I mean? A “vicious cycle” is the exact opposite of a “virtuous cycle.” In a virtuous cycle the “good” builds upon and adds to the “good.” Good calls forth good. In the Vicious Cycle of Increased Social Hostility, the brutal, the bad and the disordered call forth the same from the other. Violent extremism causes fear and that fear can be channeled into Islamophobia. In turn, expressions of Islamophobia can be sized upon by the presses, communicated widely and further alienate youth and tempt even some into violent extremism. Thus turns the Vicious Cycle: intolerance summons intolerance, and violence can summon violence.

This *Vicious Cycle of Increased Social Violence* makes clear the fundamental advantage of multi-religious cooperation. Multi-religious cooperation strikes at the roots of the vicious cycle. It makes clear therefore that the “other” is not my enemy, but my ally in overcoming extremism. It places us “shoulder to shoulder.”

We believe that each of these so called “drivers” of violent religious extremism must be further analyzed and responded to with the capacities and resources of the religious communities. In addition, we note again that the impact of

these drivers is being powerfully amplified in the new forms of media and skillful and well-founded campaigns designed to recruit people into forms of violent religious extremism. Thus, in addition to responding to the four sets of drivers, there is the great need to engage the media, especially social media to counter violent religious extremism.

### **The Need for a Multi-religious Approach**

Our religious communities can and must respond to all of the “drivers” of violent religious extremism. A multi-religious response is a concrete and effective religious demonstration against violent religious extremism. It shows clearly that diverse religious communities share common concerns and are ready to engage together, while respecting religious differences. Multi-religious approaches build solidarity around areas of shared concern and make clear that the religious “other” can be recognized as a moral ally, as opposed to an enemy. It also makes clear that an attack on any religion is – at root – an attack on all.

The strength and power of our multi-religious responses are rooted in each believer’s fidelity to his or her respective religion and the shared commitment to collaborate in tackling violent religious extremism. We agree that peace, which is far more than absence of conflict is “positive,” and that it calls each religious community to stand in solidarity with the dignity, vulnerability and well-being of the “other,” with the full force of its respective spiritual and moral teachings. Such teachings are specific to each religious tradition. They include: the frank recognition of mutually inflicted injuries, striving for justice, accepting self-sacrifice for the well-being of others, bearing innocent suffering, returning good for evil, seeking and extending forgiveness and reconciliation and expressing unrestricted compassion and love in action.

### **The Need for a Multi-Stakeholder Approach**

To effectively respond to the “drivers” of violent religious extremism, we need a multi-stakeholder approach, with governments, civil society, and religious communities each playing their decisive and complementary roles. Each must see their strength to blunt the drivers of violent religious extremism and each must contribute its own way to a positive state of peace that advance justice, encourage reconciliation for past injuries, uphold the dignity of all people and promote shared human flourishing. Additional mechanisms to enhance collaboration at all levels must be created.

### **Call for Religious Communities**

From religious communities is expected to:

1. Take the lead in unmasking, debunking and rejecting the misuse of religion as a (false) justification for violent extremism by presenting the authentic teachings of their respective religions that reject violent extremism and affirm universal human dignity, particularly through religious education that takes place in local sites of worship.

2. Advance human dignity through concrete programs designed to overcome the abuses of human rights, poverty, the lack of basic services and other grievous threats to human dignity, such programs to include special attention to empowering youth and women.
3. Engage in dialogue to resolve conflict and increase inter-communal understanding to promote coexistence and respect for human dignity. Imams engage in interfaith dialogue are better.
4. Equip religious youth groups for peer training and programs designed to provide religiously sensitive counseling that reject violent religious extremism and affirm human dignity.
5. Stand in solidarity with all religious believers and men and women of goodwill to condemn violent religious extremism.

In addition, multi-religious cooperation has practical advantages such as the following:

1. Align the complementary strengths of the diverse religious communities in addressing the common problem of extremism.
2. It offers efficiencies in mobilizing and equipping the religious communities for action, as we have found that most training can be done across community lines.
3. It equips religious communities for multi-stakeholder partnerships. Once they cooperate among themselves, they learn to both honor their distinctive heritages and speak a common language. This is the same language used in the public square. Thus, together the religious community enters the public square as public actors with discerned shared moral commitments.

## **Conclusion**

Violence extremism is, of course, a multi-faceted and complex issue, no matter whether it is cloaked in religious “garb” (language, ideology, symbols, etc.) or not. A couple things that seem pretty consistent across the board, from white supremacist shooters to ISIS supporters, is a desire to be part of something “bigger” (community, even if it’s abstract) and a sense of correcting injustice. Inter-religious cooperation and engagement provides a non-violent way of addressing injustice and building inclusive community. A lot of focus right now is on current strains of extremism that invoke Islamic symbolism and language, and those types of extremism thrive on perpetuating a “civilizational narrative” of Muslims vs. Christians or Muslims vs. the West-- inter-religious engagement explicitly counters this narrative by furthering a vision of all religious communities being part of the same community and sharing values, rather than being separate & divided ways of life.

In a society we need multiple sources of norms. Law is one source of norm. Morality and social convention are some other forms. And these come from societal groups, such as family, religion and civil society.



Mesut Idriz<sup>1</sup>

## **Applied Interfaith through Cultural Interaction and Education: The Case of International University of Sarajevo**

### **Abstract**

As the years 2015-2016 commemorates the 20th year of the ended war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the International University of Sarajevo (IUS) since its inception in 2003 has played an important role in creating bridges not only between Turkey and Bosnia and Herzegovina, but beyond this. In its 12 years of age, it has managed to bring students from all the world continents, from 55 countries at the present. In addition, the academic staff is another reflection of this significant move where it has gathered experienced and qualified people from 27 countries. IUS as a higher learning institution has managed practically to bring together the “I” with “US”, without any religious preconditions. This young yet dynamic institution has been identified to be a unique in the Balkan Peninsula. In this presentation, we will try to elaborate on how all these steps have been achieved and what is awaiting IUS in the future.

### **Sarajevo Revisited**

Before proceeding with our subject matter as it is explicitly stated in the title, we should briefly shed the light on the city of Sarajevo, which has been not only the administrative capital of Bosnia and Herzegovina but also the spiritual and intellectual capital of the central Balkans. In addition, it is impossible to discuss almost anything about Sarajevo without referring to the history of establishment of the city of Sarajevo. Therefore, in the following we will shortly review three important issues regarding Sarajevo, before giving further elaborations, and they are a) Ottoman history and heritage; b) history of interfaith; and c) unique form of coexistence.

Firstly, under the Commander of Isa Beg Ishak who was the first Ottoman Governor of Bosnia and founder of the city of Sarajevo, the Ottomans conquered the central region of the Balkans beginning from the early 1460s. During the early days, Isa Beg resided in the township of Vrhbosna until he laid the foundations of today's Sarajevo as a *Waqf*. After the conquest of Bosnia, a new borderland of the Ottomans was established, and it was called Bosansko Krajishte or the Bosnian borderline. Certain buildings that still exist today in Sarajevo are the testament of it. It is highly significant to mention here the Decree (*Ferman*) issued by Sultan Fatih Mehmet, called *Ahdname* which can be translated as ‘social contract,’ was given in Fojnica, a region in Bosnia, in 1463 by the Ottoman Sultan himself to Franciscan Christians in order to protect them and their religion against the others. There are some claims that this is ‘the first human rights declaration in the world’. Thanks to the *Ahdname*,

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Franciscan Christians lived in their region with their own belief under the protection of the Ottoman Sultan.

Secondly, it is well-known that after the withdrawal of the Ottoman from Bosnia in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Austro-Hungarians ruled Bosnia until the eruption of the World War One. In both Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian eras due to economic development, trade, migrations and other activities, people from various ethnic groups and religions settled in the region. Hence you could find a Catholic Christian living next to Orthodox Christian, Jewish, or Muslim, without any ghetto between the neighborhood, particularly in the city of Sarajevo. Again thanks to the social policies of both the Ottomans and the Austro-Hungarians.

Thirdly, the city of Sarajevo experienced in the past and it still ongoing experience, other than the period of brutal war that took place in Bosnia between 1992-1995 and the Sarajevo Siege between 1992-1996 by the criminals of Yugoslav Serb leaders, a unique form of coexistence that is not found in any European cities. Jews, Muslims, Roman Catholics, Serbian Orthodox, and all forms of secular, a-religious, non-religious, agnostics and others form the fabric of this beautiful city of Sarajevo. Due to these different communities living in harmony and cohesion from the time of Ottomans until the present, major commentators commonly referred to Sarajevo as “The European Jerusalem” (or Jerusalem of Europe). In this context, it is perhaps significant to refer to the message of peace and reconciliation of Pope Francis during his recent visit to Sarajevo on the 6<sup>th</sup> June 2015. The Pope said: “I am pleased to be in this city which, although it has suffered so much in the bloody conflicts of the past century, has once again become a place of dialogue and peaceful coexistence. Sarajevo and Bosnia and Herzegovina have a special significance for Europe and for the whole world. The mix of distinct religious, ethnic and cultural groups has led some to call Sarajevo 'The Jerusalem of Europe', representing crossroads of cultures, nations and religions, a status which requires the building of new bridges, while maintaining and restoring older ones”.<sup>2</sup>

The above brief survey is highly considerable for any kind of theoretical and practical framework of any modern city of our time, where Sarajevo though it is a small yet a distinctive place as well as a city where lessons can be learned and taught to the others. Now we shall proceed with the role of educational institution in fostering the interfaith activities through cultural interaction and earning knowledge where the case study will be the International University of Sarajevo (IUS).

### **International University of Sarajevo beyond Borders**

After having briefly mentioned the “meaning” of Sarajevo from socio-cultural and religious perspectives, we may proceed with our case study of the International University of Sarajevo (IUS), its historical background, vision and mission as well as its interdisciplinary exposure with the focus on cultural, ethnic, racial and religious elements.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://edition.cnn.com/2015/06/06/europe/bosnia-pope-francis-visit/> [Accessed on 20<sup>th</sup> December 2015].

IUS was established in the year of 2003 and students began officially to be enrolled in 2004. And yes, it is not a public university but private. The distinction here is that IUS, although it falls under the private higher learning institutional status, is based on the long historical tradition of *waqf*, i.e. foundation/endowment, especially being within the context of continuous and perpetual Ottoman flavor. In order to protect its rights and any kind of future “threats,” IUS was legally designed to be under the registered foundation, namely SEDEF Foundation for Education Development Sarajevo.<sup>3</sup> What are the reasons that underlie the establishment of a university in the capital city of Bosnia and Herzegovina? To answer this question, as it was indicated earlier, it is important to consider the various social, cultural, religious and political contexts in which the decision to establish a university in Sarajevo was made. Being situated in a city unique for the special character of its heritage, city of peace and understanding where Muslim, Orthodox, Catholic and Jewish traditions have coexisted for centuries despite persistent attempts to destroy this harmony, IUS as a higher learning institution in Bosnia and Herzegovina aimed to provide exceptional conditions for developing research and educating students in the fields of various social and applied sciences. In addition, as the meeting place of different civilizations, it was aimed to help enlarge the knowledge and the values of our global heritage in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Since its establishment, the vision and mission of IUS was and still is to inquire of becoming one of the largest educational projects in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Balkan region at large. At the very beginning, as a relatively young academic institution, IUS managed to create an open, tolerant and international environment for its students, where young people have the opportunity to acquire new and exchange the existing knowledge and experiences with their fellow students and professors from around the world. Within a decade, as higher educational institution, it made possible to offer education to local and foreign students at the world standards, in both undergraduate and graduate study cycles. The University developed intensively throughout the years, and became among the first in Bosnia and Herzegovina who adopted the European standards of teaching. As a result, during the Academy of “Day of Europe”, which was held on the 7<sup>th</sup> May 2014 in Sarajevo, European Movement in Bosnia and Herzegovina in recognition of successful individuals and institutions the International University of Sarajevo was awarded as “European University and Employer of the Year” in the region of Western Balkan. A year later, IUS for the second time received the similar prestigious award from the same above mentioned movement in the District of Brcko, Bosnia and Herzegovina, on the 29<sup>th</sup> June 2015. In addition to the stated

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<sup>3</sup> SEDEF Foundation for Education Development Sarajevo was founded in Sarajevo in 2001 as a non-governmental organization with characteristics of endowment as it stated in the Law of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Federal Ministry of Justice registered it as a legitimate institution whose sole purpose is to seek and create academic, material and legal conditions for the advancement of education in Bosnia and Herzegovina. As founders, a group of businessmen from Turkey and several intellectuals from Bosnia and Herzegovina have been working jointly on the realization of SEDEF Foundation plans. See <http://www.sedef.ba> [Accessed on 20<sup>th</sup> December 2015].

ones, IUS was distinctively received various awards on different scales, both locally and internationally.

Needless to mention about its programs offered in the university, IUS major role was to bring together students from various countries, ethnic groups, world continents, as well as with different religious backgrounds with the aim of equal treatment towards all. In a very small country, it reached to gather more than 2100 students from all around the world of 55 countries at the present status. In addition, the academic and administrative personnel consist of 27 countries, ranging from the continents of Europe, Africa, Asia, Australia, and North America. Students and academic staff enrolled and employed at IUS come from all the religious and non-religious backgrounds without any kind of restriction whatsoever. There are students and staffs belong to religions of Islam (both sects of Sunni and Shi'i), Christian, Jewish, as well as atheist, theist, agnostic, etc. All enjoy IUS as a meeting point of the East and the West, where Sarajevo has already been as a place of co-existence. Hence it is understood that IUS, from an educational perspective, has been and committed to play its role as the melting pot of colors, faiths, beliefs, ethnicities, etc.

It is very significant to mention that IUS did not stop with the above mentioned achievements. From 2012 onwards, it began to break-the-ice of traditional culture departmental/areal teaching forms and norms, IUS began to be engaged in as well as promoting local and international activities, establishing and offering various teachings, such Leadership and Entrepreneurship Center (LEC), IUS Life Long Learning, Balkan Studies Center (BSC), as well as IUS Student Center and IUS Student Cultural and Sports Activities (SCASH) catering more than 20 student clubs in various activities. In addition, IUS through its International Relations Office (IRO) has played among the most important role in promoting highly attractive and prolific programs to internal as well as external students and staff (academic and administrative). It is significantly important to mention that IRO, besides other activities, for the first time introduced a tradition, perhaps for the first time in the Balkan countries, the so-named "Ambassador Talk", where the ambassadors of accredited countries in Sarajevo began to come to IUS, deliver a talk on an agreed topic to the students mainly and the staff. IRO of IUS also began to be involved in promoting various international activities such ERASMUS+, MEVLANA Exchange, and other exchange programs. IUS through IRO also introduced an award giving certificate to various internationally known figures such as Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, Former Prime Minister of Malaysia, and Dr. Ahmad Mohamad Ali, President of Islamic Development Bank (IDB). Through this office of IUS, it is aimed to continue presenting awards to other personalities who contributed to humanity from all kind of religious and applied aspects.

With reference to the above contexts, perhaps it is relevant to cite an article by Michael Birnbaum entitled "In Bosnia, Turkey brings back a gentle version of the Ottoman Empire," which was published in the *Washington Post*, where he mainly refers to IUS and its activities in the sphere of "cultural exchange." Significantly, a photo accompanying the article was taken from the IUS canteen wall, in which five large photos that decorate the wall are directly adjacent to each

other, one from Istanbul, one from Paris, one from New York, and two from Bosnia and Herzegovina.<sup>4</sup> Right at the center is the photo of Sarajevo taken from a famous monument of Sebilj (in Arabic, *Sabil*) located on the old town of Bashcarshija and it is a fountain that is considered as a symbol of harmony, where people from all the folks would be able to drink water for free. Birnbaum further asserts that cultural exchange is attractive to students, because the “classes are held in English, and there is a Western curriculum heavy on practical subjects such as business and engineering.” However, he further states that “students say that part of the attraction of the school is the cultural exchange that takes place.”

It is though social interaction and intercultural communications that relationships are formed and stereotypes are dispelled. If a person goes through the academic calendar of IUS will definitely notice that besides national days, religious days of each religion are observed as Non-Working Day(s). It is suffice with the background of IUS in the area of applied intercultural engagement through education. Now we shall proceed with an important ongoing issue that is IUS Center for Religious Studies.

### **Establishing IUS Centre for Religious Studies: A Prescript**

Since its establishment, IUS has made the major world cultures, their rich traditions and contributions to human knowledge – an important part and focus of its heritage, research focus and academic inquiry. Today, as we strive to prepare our students (both undergraduate and graduate) as well as young academic staff for active citizenship in the world in which borders are not important, cross-cultural communication, understanding as well as cooperation is needed, we recognize that the imperative to open a productive dialogue as well as research among world founding civilizations is growing and its importance and urgency is needed in order to foster peace, security and prosperity. Therefore, IUS as leading research-based foundation university can and has to play significant role in deepening intercultural and interreligious dialogue in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the region.

In this endeavour studying the religion is an important pillar. Formation of all of present civilizations was inspired by major world religions, and it has enormously contributed to the human knowledge in all areas of scholarship in every part of the world. Almost 90% of world population identified themselves as religious, and more than 55% belong to one of the Abrahamic religions, namely Christianity, Islam or Judaism. Despite Sarajevo’s cultural, social and traditional richness in religious pluralism, misconceptions about religions, religious peoples as well as religious pluralism continue to abound in social and political landscapes. These misconceptions form the popular perceptions but also influence public policies in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the region. Societies, worldwide have reached a critical point in dialogue that could and should be shaped by academic understanding of religions. Various universities in the English-speaking world have also risen to the challenge of promoting genuine dialogue and understanding by

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<sup>4</sup> *The Washington Post*, 24 March 2013.

creating centres for the study of religions. Based on its current strengths in research and teaching, IUS has a pivotal intellectual leadership role to play for Bosnia and Herzegovina, region and the world in advancing scholarship in religious studies. While some faculty and department-specific programs already play prominent roles in their respective disciplines, to fully realize the transformative potential of these disparate faculty and programs, it is critically important that the University create the institutional capacity to bring them together in a sustained, integrated, and multi-directional intellectual home dedicated to the study of religions. The creation of Centre for Religious Studies (CRS) will support research across all relevant departments and faculties at International University of Sarajevo. Following that, the primary mission of CRS will be to enhance religious studies research at IUS by helping to train religious studies researchers in advance and innovative research methods; encouraging high-quality interdisciplinary research across departments and faculties; supporting grant proposals that effectively promote scientific research; and disseminating research findings that address significant challenges in the Bosnia and Herzegovina, Balkan region and the rest of the world.

CRS will be modelled as other similar religious studies centres in the Balkan region as well as in the world, but tailored to the particular challenges confronting religious studies in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Therefore, CRS will focus on multidisciplinary approach of studying the religion, its impacts, correlation and significance within the society. IUS already has an advantage which is several faculty members whose core expertise directly or indirectly related to the field of religious studies or whose research interests are closely related to the religious studies.

Leveraging the strong educational programming already in place across the University, the Centre for Religious Studies would focus primarily on research and outreach, creating a coordinated program of activities to provide a focal point for scholarship on the religions worldwide, advance understanding about religions in society, inform public policy, and raise the profile of the religious studies endeavours at IUS. The primary mandate of the Centre for Religious Studies would be to foster advanced research by nurturing an interdisciplinary, collaborative community of religious studies scholars. The Centre would also be an important resource for various sectors of society—government, civil society and the general public—and inform the legal and policy community at all levels of government, non-governmental agencies and organizations. It could formulate or be commissioned to undertake research projects around topical matters.

The CRS would make the breadth of scholarship activities at the University visible and accessible both within the institution and externally. The Centre would develop a web portal to showcase religious scholarship and teaching across the University. The portal would serve both as an electronic resource and provide information on Centre events, including links to the rich set of activities in other academic units across the campus. The site would also include links to the programs and faculty of the many units engaged in religious studies. It would create both a physical and virtual space where IUS scholars can meet, as well as organize

conferences and seminar series. In the longer term, the Centre would sponsor distinguished visitorships, exchanges and fellowships.

Consequently, it is proposed to establish the CRS as an extra-departmental unit with its own budget. The Centre would not offer academic programs nor make primary faculty appointments, as it is critical that all faculty members have a base in disciplinary and professional IUS units. Standards of scholarship and teaching should be at the level demanded by those units. The head of the center would be responsible for all activities of the centre, under the approval of relevant upper bodies. Responsibilities include the general operational and financial management of the centre and its initiatives. The head's mandate also includes responsibility for consulting collegially with relevant communities of religious studies scholars within IUS. Part-time administrative personnel would support the operations of the centre; additional administrative staffing may be considered in the future based on the needs of the centre's activities.

The International University of Sarajevo would serve as the lead administrative home for the proposed unit. Following which, the head of the CRS would report administratively to the chief office the International University of Sarajevo (or designate) for financial and administrative matters. Yearly report will be prepared for the University authorities by the head of the center. Other committees and activities would be organized as needed with other academic units and events at the University.

The IUS Center for Religious Studies would be the first institution in the Balkan regions conducts the above mentioned activities. However, the major obstacle faced by the university is financial funding. Since the idea and ultimately the proposal was put into the proper format and endorsed by the university authorities during the late 2015, it has yet to strive to seek funding from both local and/or international organizations at all levels.

**STRATEGIES FOR  
PROTECTING SPIRITUAL  
AND INTELLECTUAL  
FREEDOM AND SECURITY:  
FUTURE EXPECTATIONS**





İbrahim Özdemir<sup>1</sup>

## The Role of Critical Thinking to Prepare Youth to Live in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

### Abstract

We are living an ever interconnected and changing globalized world. It is difficult to understand the dynamic of global world with classical education systems that was built for an economy and a society that no longer exists in many parts of the world. In the traditional education it was enough to master the “*reading, writing, and arithmetic*” skills; in the globalized world, these skills simply aren’t enough. Today, global warming, international terrorism, immigration, pandemic diseases, financial meltdowns, poverty, and inequality are jeopardizing the security of global community. If we want today’s students to come with new solutions and alternatives to solve these challenges, we must prepare them for the future. This paper will discuss and defend the role of critical and creative thinking in preparing students for 21st century as *an educational and moral imperative*. I will support my arguments with the Islamic teachings from the Qur’an and exemplary life of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh).

“There’s nothing like a dream to create the future. Utopia today, flesh and blood tomorrow”.

Victor Hugo

“An ignorant people is more tractable than an educated one.”

(Egyptian ruler Muhammad Sa’id Pasha, circa 1860). UNDP Report, p.98.

### Introduction

These two quotations summarize the main ideas addressed in this paper. To paraphrase Victor Hugo, we are the creators of our future. However, there are forces and factors in our environment today that we do not control, but that are pushing and prodding us to change if we want to be successful. Even though these powerful economic and societal forces are creating different criteria for success in the 21st century, our schools are not making corresponding modifications (e.g., Robinson, 1992).

In other words, we have been living in “a rapidly changing society, in the age of globalization and the information and communication revolution”. Therefore, he suggests, “we must accept the reality of the dramatic changes that are affecting *our lifestyles, our ways of thinking, feeling and acting*. As educators, we must guide our students to discern between *the potentials and prospects, the benefits and opportunities of globalization and the new information technologies on one hand, and the dangers, threats, and pitfalls on the other*” (Lourdes R. Quisumbing, italics added). However, our leaders prefer “an ignorant people” than “an educated one”

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for obvious reasons. The future of our countries depends on our children's ability to dream the future first and then create it. We have to shape and make our future.

If we want a better and bright future for ourselves and our societies, we have to decide today as French futurist Jacques Attali warned us a few years ago: "It's today that we decide what the world will be in 2050 and it's today that we prepare what the world will be in 2100.

Depending on how we behave, our children and our grandchildren will live in a livable world or they will live hate us to death." This paper, therefore, will argue that we cannot create a better and brighter future with traditional and out modeled education systems which was enough to master the "*reading, writing, and arithmetic*" skills. We may use critical think as a tool and skill to unearth the potentialities of our children and youth and encourage them to be actors of change in a positive and creative way.

In fact, many educators and politicians have been aware of this phenomenon in recent decades and some developed countries took revolutionary steps while leaving behind the old paradigm and developing a new one, which is described as critical/creative education. EU leaders, for example, launched a ten-year jobs and growth strategy in Lisbon in 2000 than updated it with a new vision Lisbon 2020 and five headline targets have been agreed for the EU to achieve by the end of 2020. These cover employment; research and development; climate/energy; education; social inclusion and poverty reduction. As it seems, to understand and respond the complex challenges and problems of globalized world, EU using a new paradigm. President Barak Obama also underlined and reminded this fact to Americans as follows:

"I'm calling on our nation's governors and state education chiefs to develop standards and assessments that don't simply measure whether students can fill in a bubble on a test, but whether they possess 21st century skills like *problem-solving and critical thinking and entrepreneurship and creativity* [author's underlines]." (Obama, 2009)

In fact, "parents, educators, and concerned citizens throughout the world are discussing ways to best prepare children and youth for successful adulthood in the global, digital, information-based context of the 21st century". Scholars and experts on the subject stated the task quite clearly: "[there is a need to produce] graduates who can live, work and contribute as productive citizens in an increasingly fluid and borderless global context". (Huitt, W. (2013). Thus, a new vision for educating children and youth, both formally and informally, is required if they are to become successful adults in the twenty-first century.

So, it is an ethical imperative for contemporary Muslims societies, to reconsider our educational polices and curricula for at least two major practical reason. First, economic outlook of the Muslim societies with the exception of few states. Second, the wars, conflicts, and sectarian disputes, which jeopardize the regional and international security. Therefore, the Muslims youth needs a new education paradigm in the Twenty-First Century to respond economic challenges

and have descent work on the one hand to have *critical/reflective minds* to overcome ideological, authoritarian, and marginal ideologies de-stabilizing our region.

Today, indoctrinated and brainwashed by ruthless and marginalized ideologies, sometimes in the name of religion sometimes in the name of ethnic nationalism, young people easily used in terrorist acts over the globe. If our educational system does not provide a better future and employment as well as a critical mentality to understand the realities of modern World, unemployed, marginalized and uneducated youngster can easily be used by marginal groups for so-called self-claimed lofty causes in seducing language. (Stern, 2003).

It is time to think deeply on these issues and discover the root causes of the problems at hand. Different responds and alternative views of education should not be feared and seen as a threat to society and policy makers. As John Dewey recommends that “individuals” and communities can and should grow through seeking insight into and solution of problems. Problems, contrary to the wishes of many, should not be ignored or avoided in the interest of harmony (1938/1963, p. 5).

If want to understand our problems and their root causes we must dig deep and develop new hypothesis and answers to respond the dire challenges of our time. As Simpson underlines boldly “*brief discussions and simplistic answers by busy people are unlikely to be genuinely fruitful on these topics*” (Simpson, 1998).

In short, we should “dig deep” to understand the present situation of education in the region and the root causes of educational problems, then propose a new system based on the spirit of critical thinking. Albert Einstein observed that problems cannot be solved at the same level at which they are created. This insight seems profoundly relevant today as we humans need to step back and gain a whole-systems perspective if we are to respond effectively to massive ecological problems.

### **The Landscape of Education in MENA Region**

This study will be limited with the MENA region. I also should note that by “Arab world”, I refer to 22 countries, including Morocco, Yemen and the Gulf States, and the 350 million people living in this vast land. The most visible characteristics of this geography, host to a number of religions and civilizations throughout history, are under development, poverty, unemployment, environmental issues, ethnic issues, migration, violence and internal conflicts. Research sponsored to date by international organizations, including OECD and UNESCO underline that lack of quality education is the biggest problem in this region. (Ozdemir, 2011).

As eloquently stated by Dr. Don Olcott, chief executive of the Observatory of Borderless Higher Education (OBHE); the nations of the Middle East need to sense **the power of education** *to transform life, cities, nations and regions, and to realize that efforts ignoring the importance of education will be inconclusive and ineffective.*

If we sincerely wish to make progress in our educational thinking and practice, we have to dare to evaluate our educational systems and understand the root causes and offer new alternatives including those concerning both quality and quantity.

Today, more so than at any time in recent memory, MENA region countries are on a quest for knowledge that will prepare the next generation of leaders for what lies ahead. Throughout the region, education reform initiatives, new universities, international campuses, research institutes, and increasingly sophisticated ICT infrastructures are redesigning the landscape. But is the current situation? (U.S.-Arab Tradeline, Fall 2010).

The first document to objectively discuss the state of education in the Arab world, the probable reasons for the situation and recommendations to resolve the problems was the Arab Human Development Report in 2002. The report is particularly important, since it was drafted by a group of courageous Arab researchers under the auspices and sponsorship of the UN. The report's content was not likely to have pleased some rulers, underlining that the underdevelopment in the Arab world was attributable to a lack of education, democratic deficit and eagerness to keep the people out of the political processes. It is tragic to observe and witness that leaders who did not understand the full and deep implications of this and following academic reports either are not in power or still struggling to solve economic and political problems. As these reports made it clear the root of problems in the region are mainly educational. However, some Arab leaders took the report seriously and introduced some reforms to their education system accordingly, while the majority remained indifferent to its recommendations.

The Arab Knowledge Base 2009 report confirms these findings. According to this report, knowledge and freedom cannot thrive without the other. Knowledge, in both its enlightenment and developmental aspects, is freedom itself. The report makes the following points:

- Arab countries have the greatest unemployment rates in the world; the average in the Arab world in 2009 was 14.4 percent, whereas the world average was 6.3 percent.
- One in five persons in the region lives below the poverty line (\$2 per day). Almost half of the population is deprived of basic needs.
- The number of people suffering from malnutrition due to unemployment is growing in Jordan, Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco, Saudi Arabia and Yemen. In the event the current trend continues, the Arab world will fail to meet its goals on food security and the elimination of hunger.
- The population growth rate is also cause for alarm. Under current projections, the population in the Arab world will reach 385 million by 2015. This means the rulers have to secure employment for 50 million young people by 2020.
- One in three in the Arab world is illiterate, despite the allocation of 5 percent of GDP and 20 percent of budget to education in the last four decades. In total, 60 million people are illiterate. Two-thirds of these 60 million are women.
- About 9 million children in Arab countries are unable to go to school at all; a huge number of children also do not attend secondary schools, jeopardizing economic growth and sustainable development.

- Arab countries do not allocate sufficient funds to research and development; this naturally affects innovation and invention. In most Arab states the funds allocated to research and development activities represent no more than 0.3 percent of GDP.
- The amount reserved for scientific research per head in Arab countries is \$10, whereas it is \$33 in Malaysia and \$1,304 in Finland.
- The quality of college education is poor.
- The number of publications by Arab scholars is small.
- The number of registered patents is also low.
- Arabs read relatively less because of the high rate of illiteracy, poor education, poor purchasing power and cultural factors.
- The presence of different education models in Arab countries leads to serious problems in education systems.
- The curriculum is outdated and ideological.
- The teachers are not qualified.
- The methods are outdated; new technology is not used in education
- Arab Knowledge Report 2010/2011 and Arab Knowledge Report 2014 confirmed some developments but still major problems remained to be solved. We can conclude, on the bases of the findings these studies, that the Arab world lacks a youth with the necessary competence and skills to offer solutions to the existing problems, introduce innovations and deal with the growing problem of unemployment. We should remember that The 2009 report refers to three major reasons for the current situation: lack of democracy and freedom, the poor status of women, and the inability of uneducated women to contribute to society and the economy.

### **Critical Thinking**

The literature on critical thinking has roots in two primary academic disciplines: philosophy and psychology (Lewis & Smith, 1993). Sternberg has also noted a third critical thinking strand within the field of education. These separate academic strands have developed different approaches to defining critical thinking that reflect their respective concerns (Sternberg, 1986). According to the philosophical approach the history of critical thinking can be traced back to Socrates famous motto “unexamined [uncritical] life is not worth living”. In other words, he tells us to examine our lives to the extent that it can challenge our lives. With his tragic death, Socrates stick to what he advises to coming generations. Moreover, critical thinking and examining life was an imperative of moral life, that is what is good and what is bad; what is just and what is unjust. Therefore, it differs little bit from the narrow meaning of learning critical and problem solving skills just for better job and career.

It is not surprising to see the same spirit of critical thinking in life and the writings of Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Kant in West; Ibn Sina, al-Ghazali, and Ibn Rushd in the Muslim world. When we look at the history of philosophy, it is difficult to reach a consensus on a definition of what they understand by “critical”. However, **the American Philosophical Association’s** consensus portrait of the

ideal critical thinker is very meaningful and important for our case here. According to this definition, a critical thinker is “*someone who is inquisitive in nature, open-minded, flexible, fair-minded, has a desire to be well-informed, understands diverse viewpoints, and is willing to both suspend judgment and to consider other perspectives*” (Facione, 1990, italics added).

Linda Elder, a guru on critical thinking, summarizes all these with a new emphasize on the role of critical think for education and society. According to her, “critical thinking is self-guided, self-disciplined thinking which attempts to reason at the highest level of quality in a fair-minded way”. Moreover, people who [learn how to] think critically “consistently attempt to live rationally, reasonably, empathically”:

- They are keenly aware of the inherently flawed nature of human thinking when left unchecked.
- They strive to diminish the power of their egocentric and sociocentric tendencies.
- They use the intellectual tools that critical thinking offers – concepts and principles that enable them to analyze, assess, and improve thinking.
- They work diligently to develop the intellectual virtues of intellectual integrity, intellectual humility, intellectual civility, intellectual empathy, intellectual sense of justice and confidence in reason.
- They realize that no matter how skilled they are as thinkers, they can always improve their reasoning abilities and they will at times fall prey to mistakes in reasoning, human irrationality, prejudices, biases, distortions, uncritically accepted social rules and taboos, self-interest, and vested interest.
- They strive to improve the world in whatever ways they can and contribute to a more rational, civilized society.
- At the same time, they recognize the complexities often inherent in doing so.
- They strive never to think simplistically about complicated issues and always consider the rights and needs of relevant others.
- They recognize the complexities in developing as thinkers, and commit themselves to life-long practice toward self-improvement. They embody the Socratic principle: *The unexamined life is not worth living*, because they realize that many unexamined lives together result in an uncritical, unjust, dangerous world. (Paul-Elder, 2008).

In short, critical thinking, as we see, refers to “a persistent effort to examine any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the evidence that supports it and the further conclusions to which it tends”. (Glaser, 1941, p. 5). Now, we can look at Islamic history to see examples of critical thinking.

### **Rekindle an Old Flame: Critical Thinking and Muslims**

When we look at classical Muslim legacy it is not difficult to see the flames and spirit of critical thinking kindled by the very teaching of the Qur’an and Sunnah of

the Prophet. It is evident that a critical spirit has been central to Islam from its inception.

The Qur'an is generously sprinkled with references to thought and learning, reflection and reason. The Sacred Text denounces those who do not use their critical faculties in strongest terms: "the worse creatures in God's eyes are those who are [willfully] deaf and dumb, who do not reason" (8:22). The Holy Qur'an even directs the Holy Prophet to seek more and more knowledge (v. 3). It is in fact full of praise for knowledge: the words *ya'lamûn* (they ponder), *yatafakkarûn* (they reflect), *yatahdhakkarûn* (they meditate) and other similar expressions occur on almost every page of the Holy Qur'an.

A cursory look at the life of the Prophet Muhammad reveals that his strategic decisions were an outcome of critical discussions—the way he decided, for example, to fight the Battle of Badr outside Medina, or, later on, defend the city by digging a trench. Moreover, The Holy Prophet made it incumbent on those who came to him to seek knowledge to impart the same to others, and desired even those who were considered to be in the lowest strata of society to be uplifted to the highest level through *education*. It was the case of a deputation of the Rabî'ah tribe that came to the Holy Prophet from Bahrain on (the Persian Gulf). They were told to remember all that they had learned in their residence at Madinah and to teach it to their people. The duty to teach others is laid on all Muslims in the early days of Islam. Let's remember that The Prophet's basic advice to his followers, in one version of his "Farewell Pilgrimage", was to "reason well".

So, when we look at Islamic History there are abundant scholars with a spirit of "burning for learning" and "a critical mind" to study and understand what they come across on their long journeys seeking wisdom and knowledge. Jus to mention few influential thinkers from the East and West of Muslim World:

- Ibn Hazm (994-1064),
- Ibn Sina (990-1037),
- Al-Ghazali (1058-1111),
- Ibn Rushd (1126-1198).

Critical discernment is clearly evident in the work of Muslim scientists of classical period:

- Al-Haytham (965-1040), who excelled in optics,
- Al-Biruni (973-1048), the natural and social scientist,
- Al-Battani (858-929) the astronomer.

Debate and discussion, as for example the one between Ghazali and ibn Rushd, were the norm in classical Islam.

### **Al-Ghazali**

Ghazali is acclaimed by a number of historians of religion as the most influential Muslim thinker after the Prophet. According to T.J. DeBoer, for example "Ghazali is without doubt the most remarkable figure in all Islam." His biography—as a student in search of knowledge, as a teacher propagating knowledge and as a scholar



exploring knowledge - provides a good illustration of the way of life of students, teachers and scholars in the Islamic world in the Middle Ages and may be a good example to re-ignite the same spirit today.

R.J. McCarthy underlines in his introduction to *Deliverance from Error (Munqidh)* that “I have to some extent found, and I believe others can find, in words and example of Ghazali: a true ihya’ [quickening, revivification, bringing back to life, causing to live]; -an ihya’ from the dark, dead coldness of atheism, or, more accurately, “without-Godness”; an ihya’ from lifeless and spiritless intellectualism; an ihya’ from the tepidity and listlessness and uncaring of social and moral mediocrity” (*Deliverance from Error*, p. 51).

*Deliverance from Error* (literally, ‘What delivers from error’-*al-Munqidh min ad-Dalal*), is the source for much of what we know about Ghazali’s life. Ghazali introduces his discussions in a manner reminiscent of Descartes. The ‘**bonds of mere authority**’ ceased to hold him, as they ceased to hold the father of modern European philosophy. Looking for “necessary” truths Ghazali came, like Descartes, to doubt the infallibility of sense-perception, and to rest his philosophy rather on principles which are intuitively certain. With this in mind Ghazali divided the various ‘seekers’ after truth into the four distinct groups of *Theologians, Philosophers, Authoritarians and Mystics*.

Then, he decided to study these disciplines in depth with a critical mind. In the case of Greek Philosophy, he confesses that:

“I knew, of course, that undertaking to refute their doctrine before comprehending it and knowing it in depth would be a shot in the dark. So I girded myself for the task of learning that science by the perusal of their writings without seeking the help of a master and teacher. I devoted myself to that in the moments I had free from writing and lecturing on the legal sciences – and I was then burdened with the teaching and instruction of three hundred students in Baghdad. As it turned out, through mere reading in those embezzled moments, God Most High gave me an insight into the farthest reaches of the philosophers’ sciences in less than two years. Then, having understood their doctrine, I continued to reflect assiduously on it for nearly a year, coming back to it constantly and repeatedly re-examining its intricacies and profundities” (Ghazali, 1980, 70).

He goes on:

“From my early youth, since I attained the age of puberty before I was twenty, until the present time when I am over fifty: I have ever recklessly launched out into the midst of these ocean depths, I have ever bravely embarked on this open sea, throwing aside all craven caution; I have poked into every dark recess, I have made an assault on every problem, I have plunged into every abyss, I have scrutinized the creed of every sect, I have tried to lay bare the inmost doctrines of every community.

All this have I done that I might distinguish between true and false, between sound tradition and heretical innovation. Whenever I meet one of the Batiniyah, I

like to study his creed; whenever I meet one of the Zahiriyah, I want to know the essentials of his belief. If it is a philosopher, I try to become acquainted with the essence of his philosophy; if a scholastic theologian I busy myself in examining his theological reasoning; if a Sufi, I yearn to fathom the secret of his mysticism; if an ascetic (*muta'abbid*), I investigate the basis of his ascetic practices; if one of the Zanadiqah or Mu'attilah, I look beneath the surface to discover the reasons for his bold adoption of such a creed" (Ghazali, 1980, *italics added*).

It is not difficult see and understand the spirit of critical think and burning for leaning in this confession of Ghazali.

### **Ibn Rushd**

Ibn Rushd is another Muslim Philosopher and Jurist with a critical spirt for learning. Ibn Rushd (520/1126-595/1198) lived under the Almohad (*al-Muwahhidin*) dynasty in Andalus in the 6ih/i2lh century. Ibn Rushd wrote a treatise entitled "*Fasl al-Maqal*," from whose title and content, it is possible to deduce some insights into what kind of a book it is, and in what kind of cultural context Ibn Rushd wrote it. He studies the Greek philosophy and wrote one of greatest commentary on Aristotle which is still considered by philosophers as unique in many respects. For him, for example, "*the Law [Shria'a] encourages and exhorts us to observe creation*", means to look at the whole creation with a new perspective which different from the conventional one.

Moreover, as "the Law urges us to observe creation by means of reason and demands the knowledge thereof through reason". This is evident from different verses of the Qur'an. For example, the Qur'an says: "Wherefore take example from them, you who have eyes" [Qur'an 49.2]. That is a clear indication of the necessity of using the reasoning faculty, or rather both reason and religion, in the interpretation of things. Again it says: "Or do they not contemplate the kingdom of heaven and earth and the things which God has created" [Qur'an 7.184]. This is in plain exhortation to encourage the use of observation of creation. And remember that one whom God especially distinguishes in this respect, Abraham, the prophet. For He says: "And this did we show unto Abraham: *the kingdom of heaven and earth*" [Qur'an 6.75]. It is the burden of Muslims to understand and decipher what "*the kingdom of heaven and earth*" means.

Further, Ibn Rushd also reminds us of the verse "Do they not consider the camels, how they are created; and the heaven, how it is raised" [Qur'an 88.17]. Or, still again: "And (who) meditate on the creation of heaven and earth, saying, O Lord you have not created this in vain" [Qur'an 3.176]. He presents many other verses on this subject to support his argument that understanding nature as such is a religious duty for Muslims. (Ibn Rushd, 1921).

Ibn Rushd concludes, "The Law makes the observation and consideration of creation by reason obligatory -- and consideration is nothing but to make explicit the implicit -- this can only be done through reason". Therefore, he argues, "we must look into creation with the reason".

All that is wanted in an enquiry into philosophical reasoning has already been perfectly examined by the Ancients. All that is required of us is that we should go back to their books and see what they have said in this connection. If all that they say be true, we should accept it and if there be something wrong, we should be warned by it. Thus, when we have finished this kind of research we shall have acquired instruments by which we can observe the universe, and consider its general character. For so long as one does not know its general character one cannot know the created, and so long as he does not know the created, he cannot know its nature. (Ibn Rushd, *ibid*)

### **Conclusion**

To conclude, “the need to develop an approach to schooling and education that both prepares individuals to live successfully in the current context as well as prepare for flourishing in a more sustainable future is just one of the challenges facing educators and societies” (Huitt, 2012). However, new solutions require new paradigms, mindsets of critical and creative thinking in preparing students for 21st century as an educational and moral imperative.

Therefore, it is necessary to replace traditional educational systems in the Muslim societies in general, MENA region in particular with a critical and creative education. To that we have to re-ignite the spirit of critical thinking of Muslim civilization and scientific tradition. Of course, we cannot neglect the achievements of modern world regarding educational theory in general and critical thinking in particular as our beloved Prophet says: “The seeking of knowledge is obligatory upon every Muslim.” The words *every Muslim* include both men and women, while another version adds *and every Muslim woman*. The Prophet also remind us that “the word of wisdom is the lost property of the believer, so wherever he finds it he has a better right to it.” [Al-Tirmidhi].

Instructively, The Holy Qur’ân even directs the Holy Prophet to seek more and more knowledge. In the Holy Qur’ân, (2:269) knowledge is spoken of as the greatest wealth: “And whoever is given knowledge (hikmah), he indeed is given abundant wealth”. (Ali, 1944). “The desire to have knowledge is here made akin to the desire to possess wealth which is a natural desire in every human heart, and thus it is made clear that the acquisition of knowledge is as important as that of wealth, and every human being should acquire both. The desire to possess either, however, is made subject to a further condition: the possessor of wealth spends it in the cause of Truth, and the possessor of knowledge teaches it to others, so that the benefit of humanity is the real end in view” (Ali, *ibid*).

In a nutshell, we have to re-ignite this spirit of “burning for learning” and “seeking wisdom” with a critical mind in our educational systems for a better and brighter future.

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## **Advancing Interfaith Cooperation as a Movement**

### **Introduction**

We have been asked for the past two days of conferencing to tackle the misuse of religion and blockages to presenting the best contributions of our religious traditions in order to support a healthy state of spiritual and intellectual freedom of security. Many of you have shared unique ideas about how this can be achieved by:

- advancing physical security, moral values, and human rights;
- working with the media and social media;
- addressing directly the scourge of religious extremism; and
- protecting youth and the role of the family in our society.

### **Presentation**

I have had the privilege of working for and with many of the leading international interfaith organizations, each doing meaningful work and making important contributions for the common good. As my dear friend Patrice Brodeur's KAICIID research showed at the beginning of our experience together, the contributions of many good people and organizations on many different levels and through many different vehicles are necessary and valuable. As he shared, we need to ground our learning and engagement in both ethical and spiritual praxis through on-going "dialogues" which integrate the activities of our heads, hands, and hearts. This session calls us to look towards the future. I wish to argue that we need to become far more strategic and tactical in our collective work in interfaith cooperation.

Frequently, I am asked the question about where the religions and religious leaders are in the face of violence in our world. That is to say, about whether there is "a movement" for interfaith cooperation or not. Of course, there are many "interfaith movements" of people and organizations connecting and doing meaningful things. But I think people are talking about a Movement, as in with a capital M, a large and obvious public reality. Movements have cooperation, coordination, and purpose. They have moments of congealing, interlacing strategies, and development of a truly public face, despite the multitudes of personalities and organizations that contribute to them. Think for a moment, if you will, of the evolution and maturation of movements for the environment, persons with disabilities, women's rights, human rights, and civil rights, just to name a few.

I argue that we need to be much more intentional and strategic about building a collective and shared movement for interfaith cooperation. In order to come on to scale in the way that other movements for cultural progress have, we

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need to take several paths of action, which I will outline as accessing and advancing the five C's:

- developing clarity,
- enabling coordination,
- identifying capital,
- prioritizing communication,
- fostering creativity.

This presentation will look at that how that might happen in interfaith cooperation and how it has happened in other movements. First, let's acknowledge and celebrate that interfaith cooperation has "grown up" in the past two decades, now with many organizations enjoying dozens of staff and millions in budgetary resources, each with their own large convenings and programmatic prowess. Still yet we need to be a movement in the sense that we have some clear, shared strategies, because we are still losing when it comes to the game of recognition, let alone valuation, of religious pluralism by the general public. Disappointingly, religion seemingly only comes into the public frame through the media when it evidences one of the other 5 C's: controversy, character, conflict, color, and/or change. This means its portrayals are most often negative.

Let's start with task 1, developing clarity. Few people understand what "interfaith" or "religious cooperation" is or means. The language we use to describe people of distinct faiths (and even of no faith) working together via dialogue and service is unfortunately so misleading and confusing, especially to the un-attuned ear, which is the case for most. This is reinforced every time I speak to my many religions reporter friends about their scouting possible coverage of interfaith issues. They see "interfaith" as "fuzzy" and "confusing." And these are people who know and understand religion for the most part. For one, we don't have common words we use to describe what this thing is that we are talking about. The words we do use – like interfaith, interreligious, multireligious, multifaith, religious cooperation, and so on – are so rife with different meanings as to be rendered meaningless to the general public. And this does not even take into account the people who have multiple religious belongings, which I will call "interspiritual," or those who see themselves as "spiritual-but-not-religious" or those parts of the growing number of "nones" and "nons," people who aren't comfortable with the boxes for affiliation on common surveys. All of these things further complicate our task. Put simply, if we have to explain what we really do every time we share it, I will argue it doesn't count.

At the recent Parliament of World Religions meeting, the *Salt Lake Tribune*, a leading regional newspaper, dubbed the event an "Interfaith Lovefest" in its cover story. The event received little media attention. I asked myself "how on God's green earth can I get governments, funders, and policy leaders to take interfaith cooperation seriously when this how 'our' story gets told again and again?" Where is the actionable purpose, the measurable impact, or the argument for social cohesion if the uninitiated see "us" as all about inaccessible dialogue that doesn't go anywhere or as some shoes-off "lovefest" singalong?

There can't be an "interfaith" or "religious cooperation" movement – like there is a movement for the environment, persons with disabilities, women's rights, human rights, civil rights – unless there is better clarity and common agreement on language, especially one that meets the public digestibility test.

Next comes our second task, enabling coordination. Other successful social movements have at some point in their life cycles enjoyed moments of creative collusion and coordination that led to changes in how their movements were perceived. Such moments, whether planned or serendipitous, are sorely lacking in interfaith. I have worked to advance interfaith cooperation for 15 years now inside of large nonprofits, higher education institutions, and philanthropic foundations. As brilliant, visionary and gifted as many interfaith leaders are, they spend the majority of their time looking at their own organizational bottom line. It's natural, human, of course. But, at the end of the day, it makes all of us spin our wheels harder than we need, because we don't have a larger game plan. Something greater must happen, beyond the interests of our individual affiliations and alliances. We have to start asking the questions about what we are *not* yet doing together as a movement that could help move the attention for interreligious cooperation into the mainstream.

In a post 9/11 world, we have all been put on high alert for what are (often wrongly!) thought to be the causal and correlational connections between religion and violence or conflict. Yet, we have not been able to turn this high issue visibility into lasting victories of deeper appreciation for religious diversity and religious pluralism. Nor have we been able to counter the perception of religion's principal or leading culpability in violence, despite having excellent data such as Brian Grimm's late 2014 research in coordination with the Institute for Economics and Peace that shows that religion is not solely responsible for any of the armed conflicts in the world and only plays a secondary or tertiary – and most often co-opted role – in 14 of 35 armed conflicts.

And, now, our third task – identifying capital. Interfaith cooperation is embarrassingly underfunded. Compared to the inordinate resources that are spent on promoting religious division and hate, the resources applied to religious cooperation are paltry. Having worked for three large funders of interfaith cooperation, most of my work is now concentrated in this arena. In one example from the United States, the Center for American Progress catalogued tens of millions of dollars coming from just a small handful of foundation sources to fuel the manufacture of hatred towards Muslims and Islam. The resources on the other side of the coin are scant in comparison. Along with many good colleagues, I have spent years trying to marshal such resources and have only been able to secure a few million in US dollars for counter efforts. That is a promising sum, but, in proportion to the funding for the forces of hate, it is disheartening.

In late 2014, I started the Interfaith Funders Group to try to encourage new donors and galvanize existing funders, both individuals and foundations, to try to support this work, to see this movement as worth investing in. Most funders still look at "interfaith" like a wet fish flopping on a hot summer dock, not certain whether they can get their hand on it or whether they even want to try, frankly.



There are encouraging signs, however. Some interfaith organizations have become quite large and stable over the past few years, garnering trust with foundations. One flagship organization, Interfaith Youth Core, just landed a USD\$12M gift in order to advance research. Governments continue to show valuation of interreligious cooperation as a method and partner in many causes. The Qatari and Saudi Arabian governments, for example, have each invested tens of millions into centers, research and activities.

This brings us to our fourth task - prioritizing communication. This is not just a matter that interfaith organizations have trouble getting their message out and lack savvy and investment in communications. That will come in time, when they see communication as fundamental to the mission, rather than simply a tool serving it. There is a much bigger problem, as there are virtually no positive images of exchanges of religious diversity in our mainstream media, in movies or on television. There are a few remarkable exceptions, like the widely popular Canadian Broadcasting Corporation television show “Little Mosque on the Prairie.” In television and in movies, the religious dimensions of people’s lives are sanitized (too often) from story lines, or the characterizations rely on stereotypes and prejudices for humor or effect. The effect is damaging and results in unconscious delivery of cultural standards that become expectations and norms. Either religion becomes diminished or the religious “other” is stigmatized, or both.

We have to demand to see the religious diversity that is our world reflected in the media that we consume. Speak up. Encourage different choices in our consumption. An interesting example from the US is the effort called MOST, Muslims on Screen and Television, whereby advocates are approaching Hollywood producers and directors to invite and encourage more balanced and constructive portrayals of religious diversity. The effort is just starting to increase the odds of positive, healthy, and integrated images of the religious ‘other’ being seen in the larger culture.

Finally, we need to foster creativity in order to stimulate our strategic and tactical engagement. Other social movements have at critical points in their maturation become really creative and savvy in efforts to advance their cause. One example is looking across disciplines for answers – such as turning to the insights of neuroscience, into how the brain is wired and humans process their senses of identity and framings of “the other.” The El-Hibri Foundation is doing this today to challenge the assumptions upon which many interfaith and peace advocates execute their work. What we have discovered is that the means to persuade people to embrace and accept the other is attainable because human brains are much more malleable than what we once thought. We also learned that the style and frequency of personal contact with the other and the methodologies for fostering empathy are vital to our success.

Another example is the commissioning of public opinion and sentiment research, especially when combined with convening focus groups. By doing this we can learn how people actually perceive what we are talking about in engaging people across religious lines and what the barriers folks have in coming to embrace

more positive dispositions to “the other.” As a result of such strategies, people who work in interfaith cooperation might well change our language and tactics and get more tactical about our specific audience sets.

Those combatting Islamophobia in the US discovered many helpful changes by using such approaches. For example, the great difference you can have in reception of your ideas by simply speaking about “American Muslims” vs. saying “Muslim Americans.” A surprisingly simple, but powerful perception change results. By using humor and advertising, face-to-face outreach, non-traditional channels, and multi-level saturation approaches, other movements have creatively widened attention for their cause and deepened understanding of their purposes.

Regardless of how you may feel about the outcome, you cannot argue, for example, with enormous change in public opinion realized in just a very short period of time by the organizations advocating for gays and lesbians in the United States. Why were they successful? Public opinion did not just organically change. It was accelerated because pro-gay and lesbian organizations used exactly these tactics and learned to stop talking about “rights” and to start focusing on personal contact and empathy development with persuadable audiences. Opinion surveys and focus groups taught LGBT activists how to stop beating their heads against a wall, as they were for decades. Today, gays and lesbians are treated markedly differently in the US, to the wide support of the majority of the American public. We can learn from their success.

Let me conclude by saying that, yes, we have many highly talented people in various organizations who are developing clarity, enabling coordination, identifying capital, prioritizing communication, and fostering creativity. However, they are far too often doing so in silos. In time, we must do it on scale and with multi-level coordination. We must have shared strategies and tactics in order to advance positive appropriation of religious difference in our world. In the end, I am hopeful about what is possible for the movement for interfaith cooperation. Let us remind ourselves that we are a young movement. But the need for our work in this religiously divided and conflict-ridden world is beyond obvious. Possibilities abound. Let’s get started.



## **Final Statement - DICID Conference, Doha 16<sup>th</sup> -17<sup>th</sup> February, 2016**

**Doha International Center for Interfaith Dialogue – DICID** has organized its **12<sup>th</sup> Doha Interfaith Conference** entitled “**Spiritual and Intellectual Safety in the Light of Religious Doctrines**”, which was held on 16<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup> February, 2016. As on the previous major international events, **DICID** has invited numerous Muslim, Christian and Jewish religious leaders, scholars and other notable activists in inter-religious domain from more than 60 countries around the world to participate in this conference and contribute with their knowledge and expertise to its success.

Being directly under the patronage of the Emir of Qatar, His Highness, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, the conference was inaugurated with a noble speech by His Excellency, Dr Hassan Bin Lahdan Al-Hasan Al-Mohanadi, the Minister of Justice of the State of Qatar, followed by an intensive two days’ discussions of the major issues related to the conference theme.

During the conference, **DICID** also presented its **3<sup>rd</sup> Doha Award for Interfaith Work**. This year, the prize was awarded to three international associations and two individuals for their intensive work and significant contribution to interfaith dialogue and understanding, especially in domain of intellectual and spiritual security across the globe.

After the two days’ lasting event that consisted of four open sessions, nine small group seminars and one hundred and eight presentations dealing with the conference theme from various perspectives, we have reached to the final statement of the conference “**Doha Statement for Spiritual and Intellectual Safety**” The participants of the Conference have underlined the following notes:

1. “**Istanbul Process 16/18 on combating intolerance and discrimination based on religion and belief**” and “**Marrakech Statement**” are the most important pillars that contribute to the establishment of mechanism which protects religions and ensure spiritual and intellectual safety for societies;
2. Commitment to the brotherhood of the divine religions, and commend cooperation among the followers of these religions in the search for peace, love and stability;
3. Call against radical and violent religious rhetoric, both intellectually and socially, through the establishment of an effective media and academic structures, in order to develop an enlightened discourse of tolerance and mutual respect;
4. Appeal for holding an international conference to address all forms of contempt and insult of the sacred symbols of all religions;
5. Condemnation of all forms of hatred and intolerance propaganda that lead to violence;

6. Establishment of a real partnership between international and local associations committed to interfaith dialogue and promotion of the value of common action;
7. Re-evaluation of school curricula in order to replace anything that ignites violence with emphasis on the values of tolerance, peace and mercy among people;
8. Solidarity with countries under terrible conflicts, and support of international efforts to resolve such conflicts and bring back peace and stability.

Doha, 17th February, 2016

## **Afterword**

Praise be to Allah, and peace and blessings be upon Muhammad bin Abdullah and the other prophets and messengers.

It is a pleasure to contribute to this collection of research papers presented to the 12th Doha Interfaith Conference. This outstanding book discusses topics and theses related to spiritual and intellectual security in the light of religious teachings. We must say that the researchers have all done their best and put all their experience and knowledge into the various papers they presented.

This conference was a continuation of what the Doha International Center for Interfaith Dialogue initiated from its inception, as well as the approaches adopted during its previous conferences. Among other topics, those conferences addressed the role of religions in achieving security and peace, focusing particularly on difficult circumstances in the Middle East and, indeed, throughout the world, which increase the spread of violence and terrorism. Such violence targets the lives and minds and capabilities of states and the security of their people. It also increases wars and conflicts that harm people and property and violate religious sanctity. All faiths and common human virtues reject and condemn such behavior.

Although we have focused in previous conferences on the role of religions in building civilizations, the impact of spiritual values and virtues in our lives, and their role to inculcate the spirit of peace, we are now in dire need to repeat and emphasize the message of this book, as well as scholarly debates about the role of spiritual and intellectual security in spreading peace, whether at the individual or community or humanitarian level.

We must thank the Doha International Center for Interfaith Dialogue and all those who support this organization and help accomplish this important work. We ask God to award all those who have promoted and struggled to maintain peaceful coexistence between people all over the world, and to strengthen intellectual and spiritual security in order to create a better world.

Prof. Aisha Yousef Al-Mannai

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