



**MUSLIM WORLD LEAGUE**

**Secretariat General**

**GENERAL DEPARTMENT OF  
CONFERENCES AND ORGANIZATIONS**

*Studies*

**In Islamic Affairs**

**(3)**

**The Muslim World League**

**PERIODICAL**



**DIALOGUE OF CIVILIZATIONS :  
A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW**

**Mr Kamel Al-Sharif**  
**Secretary General**  
**International Islamic Council**  
**For**  
**Da'wa and Relief**



### **The Necessity for Dialogue:**

Dialogue between different cultures is the only way to avoid wars and establish peace among nations. This simple fact has eluded the attention of some political leaders who thought that peace can be imposed through force by the strong on the weak, and this perspective we have seen in a number of world systems that flourish for some time but ultimately flounder under the rising resistance of subordinate nations. This is how the Pax Romana and the Pax Britannica came about and vanished; but between these two fatalities, millions of people were killed and huge fortunes were wasted.

After this long and tortuous upheaval, wise men started to think and weigh the deadly consequences especially after the emergence of new weapons of mass destruction like the nuclear, biological and chemical weapons which are not the monopoly of any single party. For this reason the well-known French statesman André Malraux said his famous axiom: *“The twenty-first century would be the century of religion or it would not be at all.”*

What the French philosopher had in mind is that with the availability of such means of mass destruction, only religion with its healing and forbearing power can protect humanity from the danger of annihilation. This is true, of course, provided that religious leaders stick firmly to the spirit of religions, revealed to the prophets as means for piety, justice, peace among different nations, and refrain from using religions for political ends and the fomentation of hatred and mistrust between peoples, as it happened in many episodes of the human history.

The Holy Qur’an warned man in many forms against tyranny and suppression, which comes about with preponderance in science, technology and wealth: *“Verily man becomes grossly overweening whenever he believes himself to be self-sufficient.*

*For, behold, unto thy Lord all shall return. “(6/69).*

This means that the belief in God and the obedience of His commandments make man aware of the inevitability of his return to God, and his accountability for all his actions before his Creator. This awareness of the return and accountability, if developed by man through acts of worship and adoration, is the only guarantor for social peace and stability.

In his recent book entitled “*Jesus of Nazareth*” Pope Benedict XVI said on this issue, “There can be a thousand national objections, not only in Jesus generation, but throughout all generations, and to-day maybe more than ever. For we have developed a concept of reality that excludes reality’s translucence to God. The only thing that counts as real is what can be experimentally proven. God cannot be constrained into experimentation. That is exactly the rapport he made to the Israelites in the desert: ‘There your fathers tested me (tried to constrain me into experimentation) and put me to the proof though they had seen me work’.”— PS 95:9

We shall see later in this brief study that the only way to live harmoniously in peace and tranquility, and strive for the improvement of the human condition is to shun violence in all its forms, and adopt means of dialogue and conversation to achieve justice and good-neighborliness; otherwise, greed and expansionism which mark today’s politics will inescapably lead to utter destruction and ruination for all.

That shows—beyond any doubt—that dialogue free from self-interest and ulterior motives is the only way to achieve peace and harmony in the world, and to avoid utter destruction and annihilation. It is needless to say that Islamic ideology—if it is understood correctly—contains all the elements conducive to friendly and harmonious relations between different nations, because Islam respects all religions in the very words of the Holy

Qur'an, and believes in all heavenly prophets and considers their teachings as part of the Islamic faith. The Prophet of Islam has described his brotherly prophets as the children of one father even if their mothers are different. Also the Qur'an ascertains the major principles of all religions and unites with them in endorsing good behavior, justice, mercy and humbleness. The prophets of God were entrusted with the conveyance of one message as the Qur'an says, "*And before your time – O Muhammad – we never sent any apostle without having revealed to him that there is no deity save Me, therefore, you shall worship Me alone.*" (25/21)

Dialogue between Islam and other religions and cultures is not a new phenomenon. In fact it has not broken off since the emergence of Islam in the Arabian Peninsula; the Muslim immigrants debated with the clergymen of the Church in Abyssinia before the Hijra. Prophet Muhammad (God Bless him and grant him salvation) received a delegation of the Christians of Najran in Yathrib (al-Madina al-Munawwarah) and gave them permission to pray in his mosque, and initiated dialogue with them on religious matters. He also concluded treaties with Christian leaders in the emirates of the Gulf following the military expedition of Tabouk. These encounters, which aimed at persuading them of the message of Islam and inviting them to believe in it, ended mostly in agreements or treaties of good neighborhood and freedom of worship, and some of them stipulated the payment of *Jizyah* which is one of the methods of expressing allegiance to the current system, which does not concern this study.

Nevertheless, the delegation of Najran asked Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) to send with them one of his companions as judge to settle their differences and concluded their petition by saying, "We see you as people of clemency and trust". But it is useful to mention that the bases of dialogue with the followers of

the Book as stipulated in the Holy Qur'an was to remind both parties of the common origin of divine religions, and to revitalize the innate nature that God lodged deeply in man's soul that is the inclination to God Almighty and the submission to His will or (Islam) to Him". Hence we find that much praise in the Holy Qur'an is paid to previous prophets and the recording of their struggle for the sake of the idea of faith, and displaying their fight for the cause of what is right and good. Although the Holy Qur'an points out the human influence in the previous divine books, as mentioned above, it recognizes their divine origin and repeats the call to their followers to reexamine them in the light of this divine origin as we mentioned before: "*Be you "Rabbaniyyin" (learned men of religion) who practice what they know and also preach others, you are teaching the Book, and you are studying it.*" (3/79)

In his well-balanced and remarkable book "*L'Islam et L'Occident*" the French writer Michel LeLong says that Christians need to reread the Holy Scriptures in the light of the Qur'an.

The principles of equity and justice which governed the dialogue with the Christians were the ethical rules which direct the debates with other religions and tradition. Dr Hussein Sayd Nasser commented on the debates between Muslims, Buddhists and Hindus in the indo-Pakistan sub-Continent, and cited an example of their attempts to find common grounds, and compromises that Buddha was mentioned in the Qur'an as a prophet, in the person of *Dhu-Elkifle*, because he was born in "Kapila-Vasto". No other Muslim theologian has come to this conclusion, but it shows vividly the attempts of Muslims to find a *modus vivendi* with their Buddhist neighbors. Jewish scholars find it easy to benefit from this spirit of tolerance and forbearance to engage in religious polemics. The great Jewish philosopher "*Maimonides*" (Ibn Maimoun) made comparisons



between Islam and Judaism, in his famous book *Dalil Al-Ha'ireen "Guide to the Perplexed"*, while he was working as physician to the Ayyubid Sultan of Egypt and Syria, Salaheddin; he asked the Sultan to publish his work and distribute it, and the Sultan gave him the authorization to do so.

It is indisputable that the Islamic viewpoint that ruled the relation since the beginning of the Da'wa (appeal to Islam) is still a suitable basis for the relation in the present day, so dialogue cannot be feasible unless it is built on the principle of mutual recognition and respect. And if Islam was first in laying down this principle, it calls for optimism that the Christian camp, also, has recently tended to assume this role in this dialogue which we will take up in due time in this study.

It is needless to say that the relations between Islam and other religions have not always been friendly, because war soon broke out between Christians and Muslims in Syria, Egypt, and North Africa, due to the geo-strategic reasons, then the waves of war reached Constantinople, the capital of Byzantium itself. But in spite of this developments, the debate which started in the modest mosque in the city of the Prophet continued one way or the other. Researchers nowadays can distinguish between two sorts of methods of transactions between the two sides: War that was unleashed by special factors dictated by the prevailing political and strategic circumstances, or dialogue of intellectual nature which depends on evidence and argumentation to reach the suitable compromise. And when one looks back he cannot help but admire the level of tolerance and broad-mindedness that ruled the religious dialogue in its different stages and the depth of influence that it left on the other side in times of war or peace.

In the lands of Bilad Al-Sham (Greater Syria), we find the Arabs borrow from the East Roman State some systems of treasury books, mathematics, geometry, money coinage, and

what their scientists have achieved in astrology and medicine. The impact of the Arab-Islamic influence in Byzantium, has reached to influence beliefs and laws. In an early period the history of Arab-Byzantium relations, the Ummayyad Khalif Omar Bin Abdul Aziz corresponded with Emperor Leon the Third, and opened a debate with him on the subject of statues, saints, resurrection and immortality of the spirit. Historians of the Byzantine state were led to believe that these correspondences and contacts have influenced the policy followed by the emperor concerning the worshiping of status as they leaked to the collection of laws known by his name. What testifies to the depth of this influence is the fact that one of the distinguished Church scholars Saint John Damascene who opposed the policy of Emperor Leon the third wrote articles in which he criticized the Islamic beliefs entitled (Islamic Christian Debates), in order to counter the influence made by those Islamic beliefs inside the imperial court and among some priests. It is useful to mention that Saint John wrote those letters while roaming the regions of the Ummayyad Empire, after spending part of his life as an accountant in the court of the Umayyad Khalif using an Arab name "Al-Mansour". We cannot speak of the Islamic-Christian dialogue during the Middle Ages without referring to one of the prominent stages which reached us through highly-considered documents; these are the dialogues which took place at the time of the Abbasid Khalif "Al-Ma'moun" (813-834) between "Abdullah Al-Hashimi" and "Abdul Maseeh Al-Kindi". They were dialogues that dealt with the fundamentals of religious beliefs. The Khalif Al-Ma'moun attended some of these sessions and took part in commenting on them.

Our goal in referring to these historic incidents is not aimed in any way at glorifying Muslims or praising their spirit of tolerance, but to emphasize some facts which can form the starting points of fruitful dialogue in the present time.

**First:** Absence of ideological obstacle which prohibits Muslims from initiating a dialogue. The Holy Qur'an urges this dialogue and puts down its moral framework: "*And argue not with the people of the scriptures (Jews and Christians) unless it be in (a way) that is better*". (29/49)

**Second:** Dialogue, from the Islamic point of view, emanates from the recognition of previous divine religions, their holy books and noble prophets, in spite of the existence of fundamental differences, and invites the other side to similar recognition so that a constructive dialogue base is completed.

**Third:** Dialogue contents itself with agreement on the minimum requirements assuming that an agreement however small it may be at the start creates special dynamism which explores new horizons and the road to concord as the Holy Qur'an says "*Say O Muhammad 'O people of the scripture (Jews and Christians) come to a word that is just between us and you' ...*" (3/64)

**Fourth:** Dialogue is not confined to matters of religions and does not end against a high wall when success proves difficult for one reason or the other. It is aimed at achieving cooperation in upholding rightness and benevolence, and opening channels of communication to benefit from human experience in its wide domains.

I believe that such premises which ruled dialogue between Islam and other religions are still valid especially if the positive initiatives which appeared recently in the Church towards Islam do continue.

Unfortunately, some disturbing incidents took place recently which affected adversely the advancement of dialogue, like the discourse of Pope Benedict XVI at the University of Regensburg in Germany on September 12, 2007, and the degrading cartoons of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) in a Danish newspaper. If such

incidents are considered as ugly mistakes and unfortunate mishaps, we believe that dialogue could continue unabashed, and frank.

We should not forget with all what we mentioned that the position of Muslims in the dialogue is characterized by confidence and self-assurance. Muslims are not required to offer any concessions, because they recognize the other religions, respect their scriptures and prophets, and they are required to enter this dialogue by virtue of the text of the Holy Qur'an. If there exist ideological problems imposed by dialogue, these problems exist in the other camp and he is obliged to find solutions for it.

### **The Present World Crisis:**

There is no need for counting the dangers and diseases from which current civilizations suffer and thus make dialogue a real necessity. If I were allowed, in this limited space, to concentrate on the major issue I would say unhesitatingly it is the absence of faith in God in public relations, and in turn the loss of integrity, humbleness and mercy that goes with faith. This spiritual void is responsible for the anxieties that permeates the relationships between countries resulting from the desire to expand, control and move towards manipulating wealth and markets and fighting over strategic positions. These selfish desires are responsible - in turn - for reactions, and for the appearance of spiteful and antagonistic waves driven by the feeling of weakness, and despair, which come to justify any means that might lead to harming the powerful and domineering forces, even if those means are in contradiction with standards of justice and humanistic spirit. In the swamp of this uncontrollable struggle a lot of innocent blood was shed and tremendous energies were wasted, and many achievements were destroyed that could have been used in benefiting human beings and in making them

happier in this life.

Napoleon Bonapart was correct when he said that “all Empires perish with mal-digestion” meaning that their impulses to expand and swallow more and more territories cause their illness and subsequent fall.

From this it seems that the crisis of the modern man is one of morality before being materialistic, or rather it is from lack of morality which most economic crisis, that threatens human existence, emerges. In addition, we find nations and individuals working to amass riches that by far surpass their needs, in order to guarantee luxuries and extravagance without paying any attention to the poor and needy, despite social resentfulness, hate and tension that it might result in. Therefore we find the Holy Qur’an reminding people in more than one place that wealth is God’s gift to everyone, and everyone has the right to make use of it with justice and equity. One of the examples of the Qur’anic instructions is this: “*Believe in God and His apostle, and spend on others out of that of which he has made you trustees, for those of you who have attained to faith and who spend freely shall have a great reward.*” (7/57). The Prophet of Islam warned against becoming engrossed in forbidden pleasures, and advised his followers to “Beware of violence and indecency”, as reported in Al-Bukhari’s compilation.

Maybe one of the issues that highlight the deviation in human conduct is, for instance, the reaction to AIDS. Instead of carrying out awareness campaigns to stop the spread of depravation and corruption, and encourage marriage and the formation of families, we find that attention is directed towards creating new ways to facilitate vice and protect its perpetrators. What was said of those diseases can also be said about sexual deviation in all its different forms and the tendency towards allowing and encouraging it. We see nowadays that many

western governments have legalized sexual relations outside wedlock, which indicates the spread of corruption to all the fabrics of modern society; the Qur'an has warned: *"And do not commit adultery, for behold, it is an abomination and an evil way indeed"*.(32/17)

### **Synthesis of Civilizations:**

In the recent epoch, a cultural wave arose that predicts the inevitability of a clash between human civilizations, and it tries to place Islam as the antithesis to Western civilization. The advocates of this theory have utilized certain individual incidents here and there and have taken them out of their context, and used them for condemning a whole religion and a whole civilization. Some politicians marketed such a theory and made use of it to serve certain political interests. The reality which those people ignore is that no civilization can claim total isolation and absolute purity.

Civilization—any civilization—is but a result of the meeting of minds and experiences belonging to different peoples. Western civilization— especially—is indebted to Muslim scientists like "Avicenne", "Averroes", "Ibn Thofail", "Al-Farabi" and others who founded the rules and principles of philosophy, medicine, algebra, mathematics and astronomy. Thanks to those foundations, many scientists arose from the East and the West to build on them, to the extent that Larousse's French Encyclopedia states that philosophy in the Middle Ages was known as Islamic philosophy, because Islamic scientists were the first to translate the books of early Greek pioneers.

Many serious historians and anthropologists are of the view that the civilizations of the world are interconnected to the extent that they could be considered as one single entity.

The Encyclopaedia Britannica quotes A.L. Kroeber as saying: "The whole of European and Asian civilizations were

viewed as an interconnected whole and as the product of a unitary process.” Kroeber saw a “single great web of culture growth, reaching from Japan and China to Europe. Within it, such cultural innovations as sculpture, domesticated plants, and animals and divine kingships have tended to be transmitted from end to end”.

The Encyclopedia points out earlier to a school of anthropologists known as the “diffusionists” who would derive all the higher types of civilization—writing, metallurgy, the construction of imposing stone buildings—from a single region, and that is Egypt. They have collected much evidence to show that through the commerce with the Phoenicians, Egyptian inventions spread eastward into India, China, and Japan, and across the pacific to form the basis of the Mayan culture in Central America.

These suppositions are not—by all means—final or conclusive, but all scholars believe that civilizations and cultures borrowed from each other till they reached the contemporary stage.

We believe that the field is still open for modern civilizations to cooperate and integrate, as there is no way of accepting the fanciful theory of the clash of civilizations, or the end of history and the last man, as promoted by Huntington and Fukuyama and their followers. George Santayana in his book *Life of Reason* speculates: “Does the thoughtful man suppose that the present experiment in civilization is the last the world will see?”

Human civilization is one united whole, even if the cultural currents that contributed towards it are varied, and the springs of thought that flow into it are many. It is our duty, in our dialogue, to call for this idea and to firmly oppose those who plant seeds of discord and disagreement in order to serve their hidden interests.

Islam—as I have clarified—is not in opposition to western civilization but is a partner in its foundation and thus its twin brother. Islam’s universal nature allows it to synthesize with western civilization to form, together, one front in countering materialistic trends, agnosticism and deviation.

The Holy Qur’an stressed in many verses the unity of the origin of man and the harmony of his creation. This verse of the Holy Book is clear evidence: *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 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.*” (49/13)

As Zamakhshari put in his famous interpretation of the Qur’an, “*Tafseer Alkshaf*”, “Know that all belong to one human family, without any inherent superiority of one over the other.”

Muhammad Asa’d in his comment on this verse has this to say, “This connect with the exhortation, to respect and safeguard each other’s dignity. In other words, evolution into “nations and tribes” is meant to foster their mutual desire to understand and appreciate the essential human oneness underlying their outward differentiations.

### **Faith and Science:**

Perhaps the worst side of this tragedy is that the scientific achievements have fallen in the hands of some opportunistic politicians who manipulated it for evil, destruction and the killing of millions of people. It is certain that the circle of evil will widen, with all what it bears for the human beings of misery and hardships. This shall continue so long as the politicians remain distant from faith and the fear of God or from “Al-Takwa” that the Qur’an has referred to, meaning the feeling of the presence of God and his supervision over all deeds. It is clear that the competition for producing destructive weapons and occupying



remote planets will lead to a great conflagration if we do not abide by religion in abating evil inclinations, and in controlling the tendency to expand the illusion of manipulation and of enslaving people.

Pope Jean-Paul II in his encyclical “Fides et Ratio” (Faith and Reason) had spoken at length about the relationship between reason and his brainchild science. He said, “There is no room for competitiveness between reason and faith because one is integrated in the other, although every one has his proper field of action”. The Pope also said in another place, “In other words, man knows how to recognize his way in the light of reason, but surely he can traverse the road more rapidly without any obstacles and to the end if he, confidently, places his research in the larger perspective of faith. Therefore, if reason and faith are separated, man will lose the possibility of knowing himself, the world around him and God, in an adequate manner”.

Michel Lelong, after enumerating many European authors in his book “*L’Islam et L’Occident*”, goes on to say “that these writers remain overwhelmed by the European vision”. Then he asks ruefully: “What do they know about the Qur’an? And what do they know about the Orient’s spirituality in general?” LeLong also says in this juncture, “It is enough to follow the evolution of experimental sciences in recent years to realize that after more than one century of positivism, denying all religions and spirituality, an important part of the contemporary scientific thoughts have reached the conviction that the rationality of the researches can ultimately arrive at the eternity.”

The happy encounter between faith and science has been ushered by the Holy Qur’an in such verses: “*In time we shall make them fully understand our messages in the utmost horizons (of the Universe) and within themselves, so that it will become clear unto them that this revelation is indeed the truth.*” (41/53)

The most important contribution by Muslim scientists in human civilization is that they have abided by the Islamic perspective that unites faith with science. We should remember – first of all – that God is the source of knowledge, and science was his present to human beings so that it can aid them in controlling nature, discovering its secrets and making the utmost use of it without being a cause for deviation, greed and false pride. Divorcing science from religion under the guise of secularism, humanism and other names has impoverished knowledge, and deprived science from the healing hand of faith and morality. Humanity today is most in need of knowing the Islamic ideals and discovering its treasures.

If we understand Islam correctly and without prejudice, we shall find that it encourages the use of reason and rationality to the widest possible limits. Dozens of verses in the Holy Qur'an end with words such as: "*So that you may use your reason*" or "*would they not understand*", and thus challenging man to make use of the valuable faculty which was given by God. The Qur'an also draws the attention of man towards the marvelous phenomenon of nature and urges him to discover its treasures for his benefits; this is why we find the Holy Text full of fitting designations for earth, skies, stars, sun, winds and oceans in order to exhort man to discover the minerals and hidden objects. The Qur'an says: "Art thou not aware that God sends down water from the skies, whereby we bring forth fruits of many hues, just as in the mountains are streaks of white and red of various shades, as well as other raven-black, and (as) there are in men and in crawling beasts, and in cattle, too many hues, of all his servants, only such as are endowed with (inmate) knowledge stand truly in awe of God" 27-28/35. Thus, in Islamic philosophy the field of science is open widely for the human endeavors without any hindrance except the futile attempts to discover what is beyond the human perception and capacity; Prophet

Muhammad (PBUH) warns man of entering this forbidden domain in the well-known Hadith which says, “Think in the Creation of God, but do not think in the divine identity because you are not qualified to reach its profundity.” — Al-Asfahani’s “*Attraction and Intimidation*”.

### **The Call for Dialogue**

We do not need to ascertain that no country, no matter its power and might, can alone carry out the role of a policeman and control the world, nor it can steal its resources and force its culture and the habits it wants. It is a matter for regret that some current world powers would take that torturous course that led to the downfall of previous Empires that thought they could subjugate the world with the power of their weapons. The arrogant philosophy of domination had reached its climax when the spokesperson and wise man of the Roman Empire Ciceron said: “It is not important for people to love us as long as they fear our bayonets.” Historians of the Roman Empire era, including Edward Gibbon, agreed that the main reason for Rome’s downfall was the hatred of the people who were subjected to its power.

Saint Augustine discussed this matter in his book *The City of God* and ended by saying, “The Roman Empire was keen in the name of peaceful cooperation to force the defeated nations to adopt its own laws and language. However, the price was one war after another; destruction and horrific butchering in every place.”

It is in the nature of domineering powers not to know any limits, nor to conform to any moral values. Even world organizations like the U.N., The World Bank, UNESCO and others that were set up to keep peace, protect small nations, and endorse the development of Third World countries, are faced today with those who try to control them. They try to change

their path in order to make them mere tools in the hands of the powerful to carry out their selfish interests. There are so many decisions that the world organizations have adopted—for example, endorsing the minimum rights for the Palestinian people. However, some powers were able to obstruct and stop putting them into effect. What we witness today in the form of maneuvers and double standards in the question of weapons of total destruction are further examples. All this has almost led to the loss of faith in such organizations, and driven developing countries to hopelessness, and convinced them of the incompetence of the UN and of other world organizations. It is clear that the feelings of hopelessness and despair will help in making extremist currents have the upper hand, and will obstruct international efforts against violence and terrorism.

We still hope that reason and wisdom will prevail in the end, and that humanity would be spared the bitter experiences it has undergone more than once; and that people will resort to dialogue and mutual discussion instead of the logic of sheer power.

If the aim is to guarantee the legitimate interests for all and to remove the obstacles to sharing experiences in the different fields, and to endorse a just and universal world peace that benefits everyone, these lawful aims could be realized through decent and purposeful dialogue on all levels. The Muslim World League and the affiliated organizations have carried out a fruitful dialogue between civilizations for over 30 years in accordance with the teachings of the Qur'an, which calls for discussion between peoples of the scriptures "*in the most kindly manner*" (29/46). The Qur'an urges Muslims to be contented with the meager results in the discussions as it considers this a step towards increasing confidence and love (Verse 29/49) as we have mentioned earlier.

Of course this is not to say that Muslims were exempted from misconducts and faulty behaviors like all human beings, but there were always at least two guarantors against injustice and maltreatment: Firstly, the respect of other religious communities is an integral part of the dogma; and secondly, there were always pious men, and keen guardians of the (Sharia) who would take exception against any breach of its tenets.

The Swiss writer Marcel Boisard recalls an incident in his informative book “L’humanism De L’Islam” when a governor of Lebanon was about to impose a collective punishment on some Christian villages for an unidentified murder in their vicinity. It was enough to make him reverse his decision when Imam Al-Awza’i reminded him of an Islamic principle embodied in a famous Qur’anic verse: “*And no bearer of burdens shall be made to bear another’s burden*” (35/18)

In the modern age the Muslim World League can talk of many important results achieved in this area. In addition, many clouds of doubt have been waived, and still there are many goals waiting to be carried out. But this is on condition that everyone must believe in the utility of dialogue, and no one should resort to the logic of arms-rattling that obstruct discussion and push humanity towards crises and collisions.

We are completely aware of the fact that the efforts undertaken by good-intentioned people to make civilizations meet are moving against the backdrop of political and military confrontations that have been dictated by certain circumstances. The great challenge, facing those debating, is to succeed in freeing themselves from the bonds of a history that prevailed, which they have not participated in its making and to realize that it is not wise to remain enslaved by it.

This conscious proceeding was met with great success – as I have said – but we have to admit that the logic of siege and

threats will destroy what we have reached and will awaken old ghosts from their slumber. Thomas Jefferson was right when he said in his writings: “I have never been able to conceive how any rational being could propose happiness to himself from the exercise of power over the others.”

### **The Attack on Islam:**

I have referred to the existence of certain centers in the West that work on fabricating clashes between Islam and the West in order to accomplish many goals, amongst which is defaming Islam, in addition to creating an atmosphere for stirring sanguine turmoil between Islam and Christianity aiming at weakening both civilizations. For attaining this evil aim, they carry out massive attacks on Islam whereby they deliberately lie, distort history and the holy books.

These centers took advantage of the sorrowful events that occurred in New York and Washington on 11<sup>th</sup> September as means to attack Islam, brand a whole civilization, and distort a whole history.

Islamic countries and public organizations rushed to condemn these events, and called for a serious international conference in order to give a fair and correct definition of terrorism so that everyone would join in fighting it. However, this plausible request was not received with the hoped for cooperation, and terrorism was defined by one side. Many innocent people as a result were labeled as terrorists including Islamic countries known for their flexibility and moderation, and charity organizations which have no other aim than to work among refugees, the homeless, and war victims. This showed that the aim is not to fight terrorism, but it was meant to accuse Islam and to discredit it as a religion and as a civilization. Among the disadvantages of this indiscriminating method is the placing of the innocent on the same level with the criminal. In turn, this

weakened the seriousness of the accusations and allowed the true criminal to slip in with the innocent and enjoy the pity and sympathy that unjust accusations stir. This also makes out of hypocrisy a moral virtue and a legal order in dealings between nations. For how can an official who has self respect place a charitable association among terrorists while he truly knows that it is innocent and that it has devoted itself to feeding the hungry and healing the sick?

The case of fighting terrorism is not a police case which could be conducted by one side that claims to be accuser; judge and jailer all in one, but it is a case that needs fair and just definition with unanimous agreement so that everyone might fight it with faith and conviction.

The moderate trends that The Muslim League and its sister organizations represent do not fear for Islam, as God promised to preserve it. History records attest to the fact that Islam emerged unscathed without harm from more antagonistic tests. We only fear that the unjust attacks would result in the creation of antagonistic reactions and would produce an extremist type of Muslim youth, who find no other way in front of them to defend Islam except through wrong methods of violence and extremism. We think that the suspicious centers that work against Islam wish for such eventuality, because in this way they can achieve their goals and increase the campaign of hatred against Islam.

It has become evident now, that these suspicious and villainous centers harbor deep enmity for the idea of the one God, His transcendence and sway over the Universe, and not against Islam alone.

But they find in Islam, nonetheless, the easy target due to the prevailing political circumstances. This situation reminds us of a similar one as reported by Norman Daniel in his authoritative book (*Islam and the West*) when he said that the

Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte after reading the play of Voltaire “*Mahomet, ou le Fanatisme*” where the famous philosopher attributed false accusation to the great prophet of Islam, “Voltaire meant to attack Jesus Christ in the person of Muhammad,” said Napoleon. The same opinion was held by Pope Benedict 14; Voltaire was considered by the church as the “Antichrist” in person.

We call for the study of Islam in a logical manner, away from malicious slandering and deliberate distortions. It will seem clear that Islam is a religion that calls for peace, friendly dealings, forgiveness and accommodating other religions and civilizations. It does not call for violence except when it is necessary to repel aggression, prevent injustice and protect beliefs and homelands.

We hope that such meeting of this selection of highly cultured elite would concentrate clearly in their dialogue on the importance of the spirit of religion and moral values in national and international policies. We also hope that it works towards making these principles part of the educational curricula and cultural and media programs. We should not be content by merely issuing a decision in this meeting, but we should consider it as a sacred mission that we should all work in the light of our various religious principles. Islam stands firmly on the side of justice and peace, and strives hard to see the world enjoy the grace of God and live harmoniously without fear or suspicion.

In the Qur’an it is stated in more than one occasion: “*Don’t commit aggression, God doesn’t love the aggressors.*” (2/190)

The Qur’an also said in the same vein: “*But if they incline to Peace, incline thou to it as well, and place thy trust in God verily, He alone is all-hearing, all knowing*” (8/61)

Such social principles deserve more attention especially between men of faith of all religions to form a common front to



fight terrorism on all levels; Islam stands firmly in the combat, and furnish ways and means to cure it effectively, provided that it is studied with objectivity, and open mindedness, which seeks truth for the sake of the truth itself.



**DIALOGUE, PEACE AND  
COEXISTENCE IN  
CIVIL SOCIETIES.**

**DR. William W. Baker**  
Founder And President Of Camp,  
Christians And Muslims For Peace - USA



### 1. Definition of what constitutes a civil society?

Before entering dialogue with the goal of finding peace, we must consider what constitutes a "civil society"? One of the most enduring and widely accepted definitions is found in the Oxford.

**World Dictionary:** "An advanced level of development in society that is marked by complex social and political organization, and material, scientific, and artistic progress."

It is tempting for each of us to believe we and our respective countries and nations embody the elements of this definition. But we would be wise to recognize that ancient history is replete with the records of past civilizations much greater than our own which eventually ended in failure and ultimate destruction. It is a well known proverb that those who ignore the errors and mistakes of the past are bound to repeat them.

The Roman Empire is considered by most historians as the epitome of a civilized nation and people. I remember the thrill of my first visit to Rome as a young archaeology student realizing I would be living and studying in what remains of the once great and powerful Roman Empire. An empire credited with gifting the world with the language of Latin, the basis of nearly all Western and European languages. I found a ready use for the three years of Latin language studies I received during my preparatory education as I was enabled to read and understand a variety of foreign languages, including Italian.

It was ancient Rome which instituted the basis of Western and European systems of Law. Roman law gave its citizens the right to trial by jury, and to appeal their decision even to the Emperor of Rome. Roman architecture remains impressive and in some categories, unequalled by any other ancient or modern civilization or society.

Yet the legacy of this "advanced" civilization of law,

knowledge, and government is remembered for its attempt to conquer, occupy, and rule the rest of their world by means of an army skilled in the arts of combat, displaying no mercy or quarter towards both those they encountered defending their countries and the innocent citizens they attempted to protect.

The Roman Coliseum stands as mute testimony to the inhumanity and unparalleled savagery of what the Roman government and citizens considered "sport". Men, women, and children were forced to face each other to fight to the death, while others were torn to pieces by wild, starving animals brought from the African continent. Rome dominated the world for 400 years, but suffered total destruction and ruin from internal corruption and moral degeneration.

Ancient Greece contributed to civilization the discipline of Philosophy and the importance of the human mind and knowledge. The writings of Aristotle, Plato, Plutarch, along with many other Greek intellectuals, continue to be taught around the world in the circles of higher learning and the pursuit of academic excellence. Yet Greece, like Rome, suffered from the same moral and spiritual degeneration which eventually brought about their demise as a world power and an advance, civil society.

These and many other ancient countries and cultures made important contributions to the forming of civilization and the civil societies of today. But history clearly records the transition of society from the Age of Reason and Renaissance to the Age of Darkness. Societies crumbled, governments failed, and the once enlightened Western World languished in what became known as The Dark Ages which lasted from the seventh through the thirteenth century while at the same moment a new era began, known as "The Golden Age of Islam". While Europe languished in darkness for seven hundred years, the Islamic world advanced

intellect and culture which would once again enrich and revive the former ancient Nations and Empires to at least a semblance of their past glory. By the eighth century Baghdad was the unchallenged intellectual center of the world. "The House of Wisdom", founded by Caliph Mamum, ruler of Baghdad from 813-833, trained Muslim scientists and scholars from whom the Europeans gleaned long forgotten knowledge of ancient classical Greek thought and Philosophy.

The Golden Age of Islam produced so many of the world's geniuses in a variety of fields including Mathematics, Physics, and Medicine that it was also known as "The Classical Period." Yet little if any credit or mention is made of this important era by modern day historians and anthropologists. They continue to demonstrate what I choose to call "Eurocentricity", ascribing the inventions and innovations contributing to the betterment of mankind to the predominantly white European culture.

Europe once again gave the appearance of a civil society, but a society which produced the Inquisition, during which untold numbers of people died from unimaginable torture, burning alive at the stake, and beheading. Their crime? Failing to belong to the "Holy Church" and advocating alternative avenues of worship, and daring to print the Christian Bible and read it for themselves. The Inquisition was followed by the "Holy Wars" called The Crusades, when the kings and Church State Leaders of Europe sent their armies beneath the flag of Christianity to rid the world of the "infidels", especially the Muslims.

We who are gathered here have witnessed the tremendous advancements in modern science and technology. We have lived to see the evolution from the Russian Sputnik to moon landings, space laboratories, and now space travel for entertainment for those of wealth and riches; we have lived to see the life span of mankind greatly extended with the exception of those living in

the most impoverished of the world community.

Former Nations and Cultures long considered "backward" and underdeveloped are now fast becoming superpowers in their own right. It is now clear that such countries as China and India with their massive populations and growing economies are destined to play major roles in the future of our world.

The question is: in the face of our modern age, are societies becoming more civil, and therefore more amenable to initiate a real dialogue with the goal of creating a workable and realistic methodology and structure for producing and implementing true Peace with one another?

A second question is: are those of us meeting here today living in a safer world and society than the world of our ancestors and predecessors?

The modern age of scientific discovery has brought many benefits to mankind at large such as the elimination of numerous deadly diseases, contact and communication between nearly all the citizens of the world. But it has also brought us to the age of Nuclear weapons. Never before has there existed such a threat capable of destroying the entire world and its inhabitants. Science continues to deliver new weapons of death and destruction, as we witness major superpowers racing to place deadly laser weapons upon satellites, as the new battle between the current Superpowers is to control space, and from space, control the world.

2. I believe we must ask the question: are the world's societies truly interested in achieving a world civilization where disagreements and issues can be resolved through objective, fair, and unbiased dialogue? To answer this question let us consider the issue of the ongoing injustice against the Palestinian People. Political dialogue has been ongoing since 1948 among the members of the original League of Nations and continues more



than sixty years later in what is now the United Nations. Not only has there been no solution forthcoming, but indeed the Palestinian People continue to suffer the loss of their remaining lands to what the former President of the United States, Jimmy Carter, calls apartheid, even as the Israeli government continues unabated to build a massive wall separating not only the West Bank and Gaza from Palestinian lands taken by force and now constituting Israel Proper, but separating Palestinian families and villages as well.

Is this conflict non resolvable as many political leaders and nations have stated repeatedly during the past five decades? Or, is there no real desire or will among the world communities to render a just solution which would witness the return of all lands and properties illegally seized over the decades? His Excellency King Abdullah of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia along with the Arab League proposed the only realistic and practical solution to the issue:

Israeli withdrawal from all the occupied territories taken since 1967, and the normalization of relations by the surrounding Arab countries. This realistic resolution was ignored, and as of this moment, the community of nations remains silent, and the Palestinian People continue to suffer.

Meaningful Dialogue between societies can only occur when those societies establish the goals and principals of dialogue to be Justice, Peace, and Coexistence.

**3.** Is Peace even possible in our modern and troubled world? Within authentic history, wars have claimed the lives of twenty thousand million human beings. One hundred million died by the close of the last century marking it one of the bloodiest centuries of recorded history. If Peace is to become even a possibility, it will only emerge when men and nations agree to enter a sincere dialogue to resolve conflicts and disagreements, and they will

only enter that dialogue when they overcome the inherent fear spawned by ignorance and unfamiliarity with one another.

The Greek philosophers left the world with many human truths, and one of them has become a maxim of modern psychology which is, simply stated, men fear what they do not know or understand. A classic example can be found in the current lack of trust and amicability between the Eastern and Western Nations and their citizens, specifically, between the Arab and non-Arab populations. I can attest from my personal experience that historical, cultural, and religious ignorance supports politically motivated accusations, denigrations and distortions of another's religion, culture and nation. Speaking of my own country, I state without fear of contradiction that very few Americans have any knowledge of the origin, culture or history of the Arabic People and their societies.

I recall the comments of concerned friends when I told them of my plan to accept the invitation to visit the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Most were sincerely fearful that I as a "westerner" and American Christian would surely suffer public beheading or, at the least, imprisonment and abuse. Their fear was a direct result of the Politics of Fear in the absence of knowledge and enlightenment.

This is precisely why I chose to write my book, "More in Common Than You Think: the Bridge Between Islam and Christianity". Unlike the majority of those citizens of the Western Nations, I have had the privilege to travel, live, and interact with Arabs and Muslims throughout the world; I lived and studied in Palestine while living in the West Bank towns of Nablus and Ramallah; I have lived and participated as well in archaeological excavations in Egypt, Jordan, and Lebanon; I have met the spiritual as well as the political leaders of many Islamic and Arabic countries, and have spent nearly forty years of my life

attempting to educate and inform my fellow Americans and Westerners concerning the historical, cultural, and religious truths of their global neighbors living in the Near East and Asia.

4. If Peace is ever to be achieved through dialogue, and through dialogue Civil Societies may peacefully Coexist, we must attack and exterminate Fear, for it is fear which furnishes the lifeblood of hate, prejudice, racism, and the insecurity leading to armed conflict. Those of us gathered here are living in what appears to be a world of constant wars and conflicts without resolution.

Palestine, Lebanon, Iraq and Afghanistan; Kashmir, Bosnia and Chechnya are but a few examples of the unending bloodshed and suffering of our fellow world citizens, who have become victims of what I choose to call, the world-wide military industrial complex. There is simply too much monetary profit to be made by the continuation of the current conflicts and creation of new ones, which gives rise to the reality of Perpetual Wars for Perpetual Peace, guaranteeing Perpetual Profit!.

A new paradigm has emerged in the very early years of our new Century, a paradigm based upon fear and the threat of harm from, once again, those cultures, customs, and religions we do not know or understand.

For true Dialogue to occur and produce true Peace, new efforts must be made by the Nations and Societies of the world to build bridges of understanding through not merely political exchange, but cultural and religious exchange. This will require the expunging of old prejudices, old biases, and if established, will most assuredly banish the blocking-stone of Fear, thereby making possible a real dialogue, and through honest exchange and discussion, producing a real and lasting Peace, and bringing to an end the paradigm of endless war, conflict, and suffering.

It is to this end that I have devoted the majority of my life,

attempting to educate my fellow citizens in the West about those they fear the most, the Arabs, the Muslims, the Near East and Asia.

5. Yes, Peace among and between civil societies is possible, but a true and lasting peace must be based upon Justice! If we wish for peace, we must work for justice. Indeed, there is no peace without justice.

Justice is defined as fairness or reasonableness, especially in the way and manner people are treated and decisions are made. Peace through Justice can never be ordered, commanded, or implemented and maintained at the point of a gun. I cite as an example the Palestinian issue, which will never be resolved and there can never be a true and lasting peace if and until they receive the justice they deserve including the return of their homes, lands and orchards; the end of the brutal occupation of the West Bank and Gaza; the freedom to choose their own government and leaders, and the right of return for all Palestinians driven from their homeland.

Amos, a shepherd called to be a Prophet for Almighty God, wrote in his book contained in the Older Testament of the Bible:

"But let Justice roll on like a river, and righteousness like a never failing stream! (Book of Amos, Chapter 5, verse 24).

6. In 1984 I was visiting Damascus, Syria when I met Sheikh Ahmad Kufaro, Grand Mufti of Syria. I accepted his kind invitation to visit his home for an evening meal. We spoke for nearly six hours about Peace, Dialogue, and Coexistence. During our conversation we discussed the central doctrines of Islam and Christianity held in common by both faiths: mercy, compassion, care for our fellow man, peace, and justice.

As I departed for my hotel in the early morning hours Grand Mufti took my hand and, looking into my eyes stated: "my dear

friend, we are in the same CAMP." From that conversation, where two men from different cultures, countries, and religions met in mutual respect and appreciation, my organization over the past twenty-five years was born. On an airplane on my way to Beirut, Lebanon a few days later I wrote on a notepad the acronym C.A.M.P., Christians And Muslims for Peace. I dared to imagine a world in which the two largest religions on earth comprising nearly half of the world population, actually worked together to carry out their religious responsibilities; to care for the poor, the innocent, the widows and orphans, and to lead the way for all the world to enter a real Dialogue, producing real Peace, supporting the Coexistence of Civil Societies.

In 1993 I was asked by an American Kashmiri organization to consider entering Kashmir to document the torture and atrocities carried out daily against the primarily Muslim inhabitants. Knowing that several western journalists had been killed attempting to enter Kashmir for the same purpose, I agreed to the plan, driven by a passion for justice for the Kashmiri People even as I had done for the Palestinians.

While in occupied Kashmir, I faced arrest, interrogation, torture, and death. The last day with my Kashmiri brothers and sisters I told them: "If God spares my life and I return to my home, I promise I will never forget you, and I will tell any who will listen what I have seen, heard, and documented on film. I will be your voice."

I kept my promise, writing a book entitled "Kashmir: Happy Valley, Valley of Death." I took the story of Kashmir to the political and religious leaders of America and Europe. So many have asked me: "why did you, an American Christian, risk your life for the sake of Muslims in Kashmir?" The answer can be found in that conversation in Damascus, Syria with the Grand Mufti Kufaro. My fears or assumptions about Islam, based

primarily upon deliberate distortions and a lack of knowledge, ended in that six hour dialogue.

CAMP Chapters, consisting of Christian and Muslim citizens working together for the common good of their fellow citizens, now exist on the island of Mindanao in the Philippine Islands, in Liberia and Nigeria, Africa and, as of last year, in Khartoum, the capital of Sudan.

## CONCLUSION

The Ancient Empires destroyed one another until none remained. Why? They failed to establish an atmosphere for Dialogue, where their many issues and conflicts could have been discussed and resolved. Because there was no desire for a genuine, substantive dialogue, they remained fearful of other cultures, customs, and religions beyond the boundaries of their own empires. Without Dialogue there was no Peace, and without Peace, no Coexistence. The alternative path they chose was war. An old proverb states:

War leaves a country with three armies; cripples, mourners, and thieves.

I have seen those mourners in Iraq, in Palestine, in Lebanon, in Kashmir and the Philippines. I shall never forget a group of Kashmiri sisters and mothers gathered in one of the many graveyards especially for children. As I approached, one of the mothers took a small blanket, opened it, and crying simply said "why"? There I saw the body of an infant with three large bullet holes in its tiny body. What was my answer? What would be your answer? For there will continue to be mothers burying their young, husbands and wives separated and forced to watch the execution of first their children, then themselves.

Dialogue, Peace, and Coexistence are not simply noble ideas, they are an absolute necessity for our present world, and the world to come for our own children, our own families, and our own countries.