

# An Islamic Perspective of the Interfaith Dialogue amidst Current Inter-religious Tensions Worldwide

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## Abstract

The call for interfaith dialogues is sine qua non with the diversity of world religions and multi-ethnicity. The world has witnessed unaccountable important and tragic historical events. The September 11 attacks, Arab-Israel conflict, invasion of Iraq, aggression against the Afghans, clashes between Muslims and Buddhists in Southern Thailand and other incidents have set a new pace on the socio-political development in the world. The objective of this paper is to identify how the Muslim's contributions toward a civilized society and play a significant role in fostering good relationship among the world community. The Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists and other world religions have experienced by leaps and bounds the struggle for their religious destiny according to their own connotations and interpretations. This article highlighted and discussed the very pertinent issues concerning the call for interfaith dialogues among world religions. It also highlighted some of the important facts and its implications which surround the dialogue especially the socio-religious factor. As far as interrelationship with other faiths is concerned, Muslims are not left in the lurch without any divine guidance. The Muslims have certain unique approaches and methodologies based on the Quranic teachings and the prophet's traditions in dealing with multi-ethnicity and multi-religious background.

**Keywords:** Al-Quran; Interfaith dialogue; Religious issues; Unity

## Introduction

One of the most obvious phenomena of the

world today concerning religion is the call for interfaith dialogues. We are living in a globalised world, with diverse religious, ethnic, cultural, social, economical and political backgrounds. All these suggest the importance for a better understanding one another through interreligious dialogues. The initiatives are vital for the cause of human future upbringing, survival and moral dignity. We have lived to witness unaccountable numbers of important and tragic historical events. The September 11 attacks, for example have changed the whole scenario of religious interrelationship. Muslim-Jew conflict due to harsh relationship of Israel-Palestine, invasion of Iraq, aggression against the Afghans and other incidents like the recent Arab Spring has set a new pace on the socio-political development in the Middle-East and the Indian sub-continent. Hence, this has resulted in a revision of the world super-power's foreign policies. Now that the Arab Spring protests swept Mubarak from power, the US and Israel have entered a new ballgame with new players. In the immediate aftermath of the revolution, Egyptians' euphoria is focused on ending decades of dictatorship and fixing longstanding internal problems, another new development surfaced up, the interreligious tensions between Coptic Christians and Muslims have mounted. In the Far-East, series of violent encounters between Muslims and Buddhists have also risen in Southern Thailand. Since 2004, almost 3,500 people have died from interreligious conflicts. About 80% of southern Thailand are Muslims, an area was once ruled by the Islamic Pattani sultanate and was annexed by Thailand two centuries ago. Muslims continue to feel alienated from the predominantly Buddhist Thai government. In an effort to reach out to the largely Muslim

south, the Thai government has introduced a stimulus package in order to mitigate feelings of distrust towards the Thai state.

The objective of this paper is therefore to identify very pertinent issues concerning the call for interfaith dialogues among world religions especially the socio-religious factor. It is hoped that this could shed light as to how Muslims can contribute toward a civilized society and play a significant role in fostering good relationship among the world community. It will also highlight who and what prompted the call for the dialogue in the wake of dramatic development which has taken place among the world religions. As far as interrelationship with other faiths is concerned, Muslims are not left in the lurch without any divine guidance since they have unique approaches and methodologies in dealing with multi-ethnicity and multi-religious background.

### **The Coexistence of Religious Multiplicity among World Community**

The Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists and other world religions have experienced by leaps and bounds in the struggle for their religious destiny according to their own connotations and interpretations. The Jewish people (especially in Europe) for instance have experienced the most deplorable times in their history. Judaism, for example, has two manifest characteristics: it is an ethnic religion, the religion of the people, but at the same time it is a religion which has made a world history. Its history is full of tension, deep and radical change sat all events deeper than a Jewish and Christian orthodoxy bent on continuity is ready to perceive. Kung (1992) cited the remarks made by the Director of the Martin Buber Institute for Judaistics in Cologne, Germany: "The Jews were in existence at the end of antiquity 'as the only people - though scattered- with an unbroken unity and continuity of culture, civilization and organization, and therefore came to be 'to a particular degree the vehicles of an urban, civilizing colonization ...

especially as from the Diaspora of Antiquity they already had a relevant tradition of trade. Neither the migration of Germanic people nor the Islamic conquest resulted in a paradigm change for Judaism itself. Rather with amazing constancy and resistance, the same rabbinic paradigm had been able to maintain itself from Roman and Byzantium rule, through Islamic rule, into the Christian high Middle Ages, the time of Reformation and long into the modern period in Europe". He also remarked that fresh thinking of the Christians and Jews has been a remarkable historical move to understand and improve each other since the declaration of The Second Vatican Council in 1965 where it has been the emergence of a significant move toward a just and civilized society. He too stressed that an important landmark in this development has been the Christian thinking on its traditional "exclusivism" towards Jews. It has also called the Muslims to forget the past and strive sincerely for mutual understanding.

### **Interfaith Dialogue Terminologies**

To some Western theologians like Kimball (1991), dialogue is defined as a conversation, a process of communication through speech. It is a reciprocal relationship in which two or more parties endeavour both to express accurately what they mean and to listen to and respect what the other person says, however different her or his perspective may be. In a fundamental sense, dialogue is a perspective, a stance, openness, in which it is differentiated into three common terminologies; interrelated to each other. They are Interreligious Dialogue which Kung (1992) asserted that interreligious dialogue is held separately from debate and evangelism. It involves a meeting (or series of meetings) between scholars from two or more religious communities. The meetings consist of discourse on key components of the religions that may need clarification for the members of the communities. Discussion of the religions is included, but conflicting claims to truth are not debated. Dialogue should ideally precede debate and evangelism, although the latter two

encounters are frequently what inspire dialogue. Werblosky and Wigoder (1997) viewed that dialogues should take place on the basis of full equality between partners. It is not intended to convert the other to one's own beliefs; an effort is made to exclude any attitude of triumphalism, which has so often in the past characterized religious attitudes.

Meanwhile, Werblosky and Wigoder (1997) also stated that religious debate is held separately from formal dialogical encounters. It is, in effect, a form of evangelism: the purpose is to convince the audience of the superiority of one's religious position. Unlike typical evangelism, the debates are highly structured, with opportunities for both participants to present their positions and formally rebut the positions of the other participant. Audience participation is frequently allowed following the official debate. As for evangelism, they stressed that it should be held separately from formal dialogical encounters. The purpose of evangelism is to convert others to one's religious position. For Christians, this involves sharing the gospel with non-Christians. The modes in which evangelism can occur are endless, although many participants differentiate between formal evangelism and "lifestyle" evangelism. Evangelism usually occurs, unlike formal dialogue and debate, in informal circumstances.

### **New Developments of Interfaith Dialogue**

After the September 11 incident, under the leadership of interfaith trailblazer, The Very Rev. James Parks Morton, Dean Emeritus of the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, The Interfaith Center of New York's mission became increasingly centered on providing assistance to immigrant and disenfranchised communities whose religious leaders were often the only source of knowledge for new immigrants about coping with a new life in an urban environment like New York City. New programs were launched that responded to the needs of these constituents, combining practical information about establishing civic

connections and information about other religions. New programs included Religious Communities and the Courts System (2003), Teacher Education in American Religious Diversity (2003), Mediation for Religious Leaders (2005), and Religious Diversity Training for Social Workers (2005). On October 13, 2007 Muslims expanded their message. "*In A Common Word Between Us and You*", 138 Muslim scholars, clerics and intellectuals unanimously came together for the first time since the days of the Prophet[s] to declare the common ground between Christianity and Islam. In 2008, through the collaboration of the Hebrew Union College, Omar Foundation, and the University of Southern California Center for Muslim-Jewish Engagement was created. This inter-faith think tank began to hold religious text-study programs throughout Los Angeles and has an extensive amount of resources on its website including scholarly articles about Creationism, Abraham and Human Rights. A historical interfaith dialogue conference was initiated by King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia in 2008 to solve world problems through concord instead of conflict. The conference was attended by religious leaders of different faiths such as Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Taoism and was hosted by King Juan Carlos of Spain in Madrid.

In January 2009, at Gujarat's Mahuva, the Dalai Lama inaugurated an interfaith "World Religions-Dialogue and Symphony Conference convened by Hindu preacher Morari Bapu from January 6-11, 2009. This conference explored ways and means to deal with the discord among major religions, according to Morari Bapu. Participants included Prof. Samdhong Rinpoche on Buddhism, Diwan Saiyad Zainul Abedin Ali Sahib (Ajmer Sharif) on Islam, Dr. Prabalkant Dutt on non-Catholic Christianity, Swami Jayendra Saraswathi on Hinduism and Dastur Dr. Peshtan Hormazadiar Mirza on Zoroastrian. In July 2009, the Vancouver School of Theology opened the Iona Pacific: Inter-Religious Centre for Social Action, Research, and Contemplative Practice under the leadership of Principal and

Dean, Dr. Wendy Fletcher, and Director, Rabbi Dr. Robert Daum.

### **The Openness between the Christians and Jews**

Kimball (1991) asserted that during the past quarter century, the two largest global Christian institutions namely the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Roman Catholic Church have initiated programmes for interfaith dialogue. It started with the Christian-Jewish dialogue. These institutional dialogue programmes mark the beginning of a new chapter in the history of interreligious relations. Kung (1992) described that prior to the Declaration in which Christians were posed by economic sanctions, hatred, discrimination towards the Jewish; they were times of segregation and torture by Christians towards the Jewish people. The clash between Jews and Christians was a dispute in Rome as early as the year 49/50 when Emperor Claudius banished both parties from the capital for a time. Kung (1992) also asserted that it was Pope Gregory the VII (1073-1085), known as the first Pope to exercise absolute rule as a result of a revolution that he issued the first degrees against Jews in state office. Here the anti-Jewish theology had an influence on legal judgements, and these in turn had an effect on theology. At the same time this anti-Judaism, too, had economic, psychological and theological roots.

However, that there are other revised declarations made by Pope John Paul II after the holocaust incident (a totally different stand towards Jews which the Vatican had never made before which recognized the acquittal and innocence of the Jews namely no Jews involvement in the killing of the God (God Killing) i.e. Jesus, the Poisoning Well and Passover. Hans Kung viewed that to the Jewish people, the holocaust is not an ordinary genocide like the atomic bomb caused by America or the killing of the innocence in Cambodia by Khmer Rouge. These and others alike, to them were instrumental acts, as barbarous as they might have been,

aiming at the defeat of, the submission of the enemy and not annihilation. Klausner (1995) cautioned that the Jews were murdered for being what they were, rather than for what they did. The murderers cloaked the act in an ideology of Jewish misdeeds and of their sanctified role as avenging angels. The perpetrators were idealists, ordinary people doing ordinary jobs. They did not “use” torture but “worshipped” it. Jews must refuse any attempts made by the Germans to dissolve Auschwitz into suffering-in-general. He also regarded that this most horrified massacre is not simply the Nazi, the German, the silent European nor American. The animating motive is derived from the Christian civilization which has for two millennia cast the Jews as demonic. “Without Jew-hatred in Christianity itself, Auschwitz in the heart of Christian Europe would have been impossible. (p.28-29)” The Jews rejects a doctrine of German exceptionalism. To them Germany may have organized and led the slaughter but found willing allies in other Christian peoples, in Poland, the Ukraine, and the Baltic countries, implicating Protestant, Roman, and Orthodox Christianity. Conceiving the holocaust as inspired by Christian theology suggests other Christian societies as potential perpetrators. It could have happened in France, Great Britain or the United States.

He also highlighted that, principally however the Jewish attitudes toward these developments are best expressed by the statement of the American Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum concerning the Declaration of the Jews by the Catholic Church in 1965. This declaration received far more attention than the Protestant Declaration in 1961. Not only because the number of Roman Catholic Christians is so much greater than the number of non-Catholic Christians, but also because Roman Catholic Christians can speak with one voice, having no denominations. It is significant that the principal Jewish respondent to these declarations is an American. We have already seen that American Christians were important contributors to the discussions that led to these declarations in the first place. Now

American Jews responded, and spoke for world Jewry. Fackenheim (1994) told Christians what the necessary redemptive attitude must be. "The post-holocaust Christian must repent of the sin of supersessionism and Zionism must become a Christian commitment". Falk (1992) noted that the reactions of Christian and Jewish theologians to the reformulation of Christian attitudes toward the Jews have determined the progress of the Christian-Jewish dialogue since the Declaration by the World Council of Churches in 1961 and the Conciliar Declaration "*Nostra Aetate*" by the Catholic Church in 1965. Subsequently many Protestants denominations issued their own declarations on the subject of the Jews. There are still Christian theologians who have steadfastly ignored these teachings and continued to view "the Jews" as reprobate enemies of Christ and deserving of hatred. Further there are Jews who still view all Christians as potential persecutors and Christianity a form of irrational paganism, not worthy of serious attention.

### **Nostra Aetate**

One prominent paper presented before the delegates is *Nostra Aetate*, which affirmed, as did the documents of the 16th century Council of Trent, that the Jews of the time of Christ, taken indiscriminately, and all Jews today are no more responsible for the death of Christ than Christians are (see Catechism of the Council of Trent, Article IV). Pope Paul VI, declared on October 28, 1965, that *Nostra Aetate* is the Declaration on the Relation of the Church with Non-Christian Religions of the Second Vatican Council. Passed by a vote of 2,221 to 88 of the assembled bishops, this declaration was promulgated on October 28, 1965 by Pope Paul VI. The title means "In our Time" in Latin and is from the first line of the declaration as is customary with Roman Catholic documents. Pope Paul VI proclaimed as mentioned in the *Nostra Aetate*, "True, the Jewish authorities and those who followed their lead pressed for the death of Christ; still, what happened in His passion cannot be charged against all the Jews,

without distinction, then alive, nor against the Jews of today.

Although the Church is the new people of God, the Jews should not be presented as rejected or accursed by God, as if this followed from the Holy Scriptures. All should see to it, then, that in catechetical work or in the preaching of the word of God they do not teach anything that does not conform to the truth of the Gospel and the spirit of Christ. Furthermore, in her rejection of every persecution against any man, the Church, mindful of the patrimony she shares with the Jews and moved not by political reasons but by the Gospel's spiritual love, decries hatred, persecutions, displays of anti-Semitism, directed against Jews at any time and by anyone." As for Pope Benedict XVI, he takes a significant step forward in furthering the cause of inter-religious dialogue by explicitly exonerating the Jewish people from all blame for the Crucifixion and death of Jesus. In 1971 the Catholic Church established an International Liaison Committee for itself and the International Jewish Committee for Interreligious Consultations (this Committee is not a part of the Church's Magisterium).

### **Post-Holocaust Relations**

In many nations there has been a remarkable decline in anti-Semitism after the horrors of the Holocaust were made public to the larger world population. Anti-Semitism among Christians has not died out entirely, and anti-Semitic acts have been perpetrated by some Christian leaders. Nonetheless, the leaders of many Christian denominations have developed new positions towards the Jewish over the last thirty years, and much progress in interfaith relations has occurred. In March 2000, Pope John Paul II went to Holocaust memorial Yad Vashem in Israel and touched the holiest shrine of the Jewish, the Western Wall in Jerusalem. On May 4<sup>th</sup>, 2001, at the 17<sup>th</sup> International Catholic-Jewish Liaison Committee in NYC, Church officials stated that they would change how Judaism is taught about within Catholic

seminaries and schools.

This new understanding of the relationship between Christians and Jews is reflected in the revised liturgy of Good Friday in a particular way. The 1962 edition of the Good Friday Prayer had Catholics praying for the “perfidious Jews” that they might convert to the truth. The current prayer prays for “the Jewish people, first to hear the word of God that they may continue to grow in the love of His name and in faithfulness to His covenant.”

### **Religious Scholars on Interfaith Dialogues**

One of the highly respected scholars who has the authority in the field of Comparative Religion and the Sophia Perennis is Frithjof Schuon, in which his book called *The Transcendent Unity of Religions* focuses on the unity of religious wisdom (Schuon, 1984). It is essential to observe that this unity is also transcendent with the terms esoteric and exoteric to distinguish the transcendent spirit of religions from their diverse formal expressions. As Smith (1989) pointed out very clearly in the Introduction to Schuon’s book, “the defect in other versions of this [esoteric/exoteric] distinction is that they claim unity in religions too soon, at levels where, being exoteric, true Unity does not pertain and can be posited only on pain of Procrusteanism or vapidty. Once we identify any particular thought system, no matter how comprehensive, as the truth, then we have excluded other thought systems and denied the Truth its unity and its infinite possibilities for expression. The unity of Truth must therefore be a Transcendent Unity. The fact that it is transcendent,” Smith writes, “means that it can be univocally described by none.” Thus, while there is one and only one Truth, there are many expressions of it. The following observation provides a suggestive illustration of the above idea. The natural numbers  $\{0, 1, 2, 3, \dots\}$  have many different descriptions in mathematics. They can be described by the Peano axioms, or by von Neumann’s recursive construction within set theory. They can also be described

by the very abstract mathematical language of Category Theory, and in a variety of other ways.

Smith (1989) again asserted that, none of these descriptions is the description of the natural numbers. They are all different, but equivalent, descriptions of the same underlying unity. Nor can we ever pin down one description of the natural numbers as the description. The reason for this inability of description to grasp the natural numbers is not because our language is somehow ambiguous or imprecise. To the contrary, our descriptions are mathematically precise and unambiguous. The reason is that the natural numbers transcend any particular description or expression. That is what makes them of a universal nature. The natural numbers themselves cannot be known except through realizing directly that to which all these descriptions point. In particular, we can’t uniquely describe them with some meta-descriptive synthesis of all the various descriptions. Their uniqueness and transcendent unity can only be known beyond any particular symbolic representations, no matter how abstract. There are also a worldwide acceptance among comparative religion scholars and even the scholars of certain faith notes that every religion is heading to the same direction (Chia, 1998), FSC – Malaysia, *Dialogue with Religions of Asia: Challenges from Without*. The paper is prepared primarily for an international audience of Catholic Religious having leadership roles in their respective Religious Congregations .

### **Interfaith Dialogue - an Islamic Perspective**

As for the Muslims the call for the dialogue has resulted in a new phase in the history of dealing with religious issues such as interreligious-relationships and co-existence with the multi-religious societies of the world today. With this emerging new phenomenon encountering the Muslim world, how do they response to these new realities that could trigger some sensitive repercussions pertaining to the very bottom of their faith? Having cited the background of the whole scenario what are the Muslims moves

towards this call for an interfaith dialogue. To this day the move is debatable because it is an accepted fact that this dialogue was initiated by the Christians and the Jews. What would be the reactions by Islamic countries, Islamic organizations, Islamic-based NGO's and Muslims Scholars behind these scenarios of political and economical agenda surrounding the issues between the Christians and the Jews? This latest challenge to the Muslims has created some mixed reactions among them because the move initially was not initiated by them. Whatever it is, religious dialogue among Jews and Christians, Christians and Buddha's, Jews and Hindus has been ongoing for quite sometimes. The questions are: How can the Muslims contribute with other religious faiths towards a civilised and just world? At this juncture, are they telling the world that they are going to exclude themselves from the rest of the world's religion? Do they perceive that religions other than Islam should not be tolerated and it is useless and not worth having a dialogue with the unbelievers?

There are verses from the Quran advocating the believers of faith the call for religious dialogue. The principle of universalism which is the essence of the Islamic messages was not possible to realize without a sincere openness for others. To deliver our divine messages it is ridiculous to exclude ourselves from the rest of world religions. Allah says in the al-Quran: *We sent thee not, but as a Mercy for all creatures* (Al-Quran 17:701). In Islam, Muslims are told to deal with non-Muslims kindly and justly. Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) once said as mentioned in his traditions. *Whosoever is cruel on zimmi or curtails his right or burdens him more than he can endure, or take anything from him against his free will, I shall myself be a complainant against on the Day of Judgment.* The Quran prescribed how Muslims should take into account and be able to foresee the different backgrounds of human beings and teach its followers ways and means to deal with these diverse and mixed society. *O humankind! We (Allah) have created you from a single (pair)*

*of a male and a female and have made you into nations and tribes, so that you may come to know one another. Verily, the most honoured of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous (or Allah-conscious) of you. Surely, Allah is All-Knowing, All-Aware* (Al-Quran 26:13). There are on-going heated debatable arguments among the Muslim clerics as to whether to participate or otherwise in an interfaith dialogue. If the Muslims decide to participate in the dialogue, do they have a universal and coherent formula in facing with the challenges and consequences threatening the Muslim community? What are the best methods and approaches that the Muslims can offer to the world population, that not only the Muslim Ummah can benefit from it, but to a greater extend the entire world will take shape for a more promising future?

Despite tough challenges confronting this new phenomenon, Muslims by now should come-up with a clear guideline in delivering its mission to the rest of the world. It evolves around monotheism and recognition of divinity and lordship of Allah alone. They are certain quarters among the Islamic authorities who are very keen and wilfully without any signs of caution on their part for having like this form of religious dialogue. At this juncture, Kimball (1991) quoted the words of one of the most prominent among them, Mohammad Talbi. Nevertheless they are certain Islamic countries, organizations and clerics who support the move, but with words of caution. They are normally extra-careful in their approach and lay certain methodological conditions before entering any form of religious dialogue. Scholars like Prof. Dr. Ismail Ragi A. Al-Faruqqi and Prof. Dr. Irfan Abd al-Fattah, are well-known figures who supported the idea for interfaith dialogue but has outlined certain pre-conditions, approaches and methodologies.

### **Inter-Religious Dialogue - The Quranic Method**

Co-existence with the non-Muslims is not a new phenomenon in Islamic countries. Muslims

have shown kindness and sincere sense of maturity and openness towards their non-Muslims counterparts. Muslims once ruled most part of the world until the fall of the Ottoman Empire in Turkey in 1924. The Jews, The Christians and other religions can themselves judge the magnitude of openness towards the others as exercised and practiced by Muslims in the light of the Noble al-Quran. There are many verses in the al-Quran which mentions the following teachings: Nevertheless there are certain situations and conditions whereby dialogues could be welcomed and at times it could be unaccepted. Here are some of the verses from the al-Quran which gives room to dialogue, so that men can communicate the sake of seeking the truth. Below are the verses from the Quran (the ultimate source for the Muslims) that exemplify the call for a dialogue in dealing with multi-religious society:

*And dispute ye not with the People of the Book, except with means better (than mere disputation), unless it be with those of them who inflict wrong (and injury): but say, "We believe in the revelation which has come down to us and in that which came down to you; Our God and your God is one; and it is to Him we bow (in Islam)"(Al-Quran 21:46) Those who believe (in the Qur'an), and those who follow the Jewish (scriptures), and the Christians and the Sabians,- any 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 (Al-Quran 1:62). To thee We sent the Scripture in truth, confirming the scripture that came before it, and guarding it in safety: so judge between them by what God hath revealed, and follow not their vain desires, diverging from the Truth that hath come to thee. To each among you have we prescribed a law and an open way? If God had so willed, He would have made you a single people, but (His plan is) to test you in what He hath 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 ye dispute; (Al-Quran 6:48)*

*Revile not ye those whom they call upon besides God, lest they out of spite revile God in their ignorance. Thus have We made alluring to each people its own doings. In the end will they return to their Lord, and We shall then tell them the truth of all that they did. (Al-Quran 7:108).*

*We only send the apostles to give Glad Tidings and to give warnings: But the unbelievers dispute with vain argument, in order therewith to weaken the truth, and they treat My Signs as a jest, as also the fact that they are warned! (Al-Quran 15:56). Say: "O People of the Book! Come to common terms as between us and you: That we worship none but God; that we associate no partners with him; that we erect not, from among ourselves, Lords and patrons other than God." If then they turn back, say ye: "Bear witness that we (at least) are Muslims (bowing to God's Will)" (Al-Quran 3:64)*

As we examine the above verses of the al-Quran, *al-Hiwar* is the word frequently used in matters pertaining to dialogues. Al-Asfahani asserted that *Al-Hiwar* in the al-Quran as stated in the following word means that it is one form of a communicational dialogue and it is one of the means to attain the truth and to make readjustments to maintain a correct direction (Al-Asfahani, al-Raghib,(1992), Mufradat Alfaz extracted from the Quran:

*God has indeed heard (and accepted) the statement of the woman who pleads with thee concerning her husband and carries her complaint (in prayer) to God: and God (always) hears the arguments between both sides among you: for God hears and sees (all things).(Al-Quran 28:1).*

### **Extremism and Religion**

Extremism is a world problem and apparently it has been of late highly regard as politically motivated. It creates chaos and makes the world an unsafe to live in, for it is exposed to terror. The world is terrified with innocent killings. The Christians are terrified, the Jews and the Muslims themselves feel even worst

unsecured. Terrorism whatever it would be, which victimized the innocent civilians should be condemned. Islam advocates peace and tranquility among its believers unless they are aggressed upon. So the world body and religious groups should come-up with an earnest solution to go down to the root of the problem. The word extremism has several connotations and meanings. It need to be redefined by the world body especially the United Nations, because everybody is giving its own definition which suites its own interest. For example the Israel Government are blaming the Palestinians for the extremist attacks which caused many lives but to the Palestinians they feel otherwise. They said that they have every reason to fight because their basic rights were deprived by the Israeli Government. They claim that Palestine is their land and the Jews who settled in their country are aggressors. At this juncture who are the one who had caused misery and public insecurity and who should actually be labeled as extremist? To the West, terrorism is interlinked with religious extremism. Numbers affected by terrorism has risen lately and has caused fears all around the globe. But the irony behind these kind of blanket statement on terrorist attack, why must Muslims be primarily linked with this attacks and not from other religious groups?. Muslims was and still being portrayed as the perpetrators for any massive extremist atrocities, so much so to a certain extent there are churches blatantly remarked the Prophet (pbuh) was himself an extremist. The Muslims across the globe retaliated with this irresponsible statement with condemnation and hatred.

Terrorism must not necessary have got to do with religious extremist There should be a separation between these two issues. The reason to participate in an interfaith dialogue is not solely due to extremism alone. There other factors too. Earlier encounters held between religious groups have shown that the dialogues were not linked with extremisms. Since the translation of extremism and terrorism in the Arab and Muslim world which widely referred as *al-ghulu* and *al-Irhab*, we should analyze a

little bit further and differentiate between these two connotations in the light of the Quran, the al-Hadith and Arabic lexicons. There are many instances especially from the Orientalist has mistakenly or deliberately construed these two words as carrying the same meaning. But the actual meaning is otherwise. We shall now examine the two words.

### Definitions of Al-Ghulu and Al-Irhab

Al-Asfahani (1992) asserted that *al-Ghulu* in Arabic derives from the root word *Ghala* which means: to exceed (or go beyond or surpass) the limits. Ibn Manzoor (1995) in his *Lisan al-Arab* stated that *al-Ghulu* derives from the Arabic root word *ghala*, *yaghlu* and *Ghuluwan* which implies exceeding the boundaries and overdo it. *Al-Ghulu* is rejected because the essence of the Islamic methodologies call for *al-Wasatiyyah* (a well-balanced style of approach) which is oppose to a hostile form of handling human beings. It calls for an amicable approach for it is a very well known fact that in the Islamic history where Islam and Muslims was accepted and looked upon to be more appealing by this kind of approach.

Ibn Manzoor (1995) stated that in Arabic *al-Irhab* refers to as a peculiar attribute of a warfare. *Al-Irhab* is derived from the root word (verb) *rahiba*, *yarhabu*, *rahbatan* which means: to frighten. *Tarahhaba* (verb) threatened or exhorted. *Turhibu* (verb-to-be) to frighten the enemies. Allah the al-Mighty mentions the following verse in the Quran:

*Against them make ready your strength to the utmost of your power, including steeds of war, to strike terror into (the hearts of) the enemies, of God and your enemies, and others besides, whom ye may not know, but whom God doth know. Whatever ye shall spend in the cause of God, shall be repaid unto you, and ye shall not be treated unjustly.* (Al-Quran 10:60). Al-Asfahani (1992) elaborated that the word *turhibu* (to strike terror) means to bring to a certain condition in order to make

them (enemies of war) feel afraid and terrified. Abdullah Yusuf Ali in his commentary about the word *al-Irhab* refers to the strike of terror into (the hearts of) the enemies of God and the Muslim's enemies. Creating terror into the hearts of the enemies of war or frightening them is the expected strategical and tactical set-up in any warfare and so did the Muslims towards their enemies, as advocated by the Quran.

As mentioned above, the Jewish people in the past had also a deplorable experienced themselves, faced with an Anti-Judaism campaign against them which later on reached to the unforgettable highest peak i.e. The Holocaust. The Christians and the Jews in particular when pressing the urgent need for interfaith dialogue have been arguing on the precepts that the world is becoming more vulnerable due to religious extremism. These are among the main reasons behind the call for an interfaith dialogue. They are pursuing hard for this kind of dialogue to enable various religious groups, to sit together, exchange ideas and find ways and means to put an end to extremism. On the other hand, does Islam absolutely reject inter-religious dialogue? Or do they consider their participation with the rest of the world religions would jeopardise the sacred truth of Islam? In what way the participation with other religions would undermine Islam? These are some of the questions raised by Muslims in the pursuit to preserve Muslims from discursive and meaningless discussions. These are some of the common and regular issues pertaining the dialogue which undoubtedly worries many Muslims who remain sceptic and pessimistic of its prime objectives. These are common phenomenon in this age of life where we have to face realities and accept the facts of our times. Things have changed drastically so much so that understanding one another is so essential these days. Having this state in mind, only then can we understand the complexities and features of man. Therefore, the Muslims should prepare themselves for an amicable solution through inter-religious dialogue with the rest of world religions in order to shape for a better world to live in. This could be achieved through interfaith

dialogues. Through interfaith dialogues, mutual understanding and respect would be achieved and resolving their predicaments only then we hope we can live side by side will help us in shaping a new and just world.

## Conclusion

It is clearly stated in the Quran text and the Prophet's Tradition that Muslims should feel free to share their set of belief systems with other faiths. Having engaged in inter-religious dialogues with the non-Muslims does not implicate is contrary to the teaching of Islam but in actual fact it is the other way round. The universalism concept makes Islam different for the others because it is a divine methodology. It is commonly understood that Muslims for so many centuries and until now directly or indirectly are suppressed by the so called "The New World Order". History has shown that countries like Malaysia, Indonesia, India, Palestine, Middle Eastern countries where the great majority Muslims were for so many centuries under the rule of the colonial Christendom super-powers, namely Great Britain, The Netherlands, Portugal, France and Spain. To add to the on-going misery inflicting the Muslim world, is the latest foreign aggression (Christian Americans and her allies) on Muslim land (Iraq) which is explicitly under the banner of human liberty.

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