

# ENGAGING WITH MUSLIMS THROUGH DIALOGUE

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**■ ABSTRACT**

Religions are supposed to be a force for peace and reconciliation; however, history tells religious violence and war stories. Although crusading was not exclusively responsible for the deterioration of relations between Christianity and Islam, it could be seen, at least by Muslims, as a series of military campaigns fought mainly between Christian Europe and Muslims. The Muslims' religiously motivated attacks against the West that are condemned by the majority might be interpreted by some writers as a "clash of civilizations." Ignorance may lead to intolerance, and conflicts that may promote fundamentalism and radical beliefs. Muslims are no longer a people who live somewhere far away; they are almost everywhere in the world and are there to stay. This significant change has led to increasingly pluralistic, multi-faith societies that ought to live together. This paper aims to answer the questions concerning engagement with Muslims through dialogue. It intends to set some guidelines for avoiding two extremes, that is, the claim that one faith (Christianity or Islam) holds the truth and the other needs to listen, and the passive position that both faiths are similar and offer different ways of reaching the same goal.

**Keywords:** Interfaith Dialogue, Crusading, Radicalism, Civilization

## I. INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS

In our increasingly pluralistic societies, interfaith dialogue and cooperation become more needed, especially when conflicts can be fuelled by radical beliefs. In this context, it is important to note that the word “dialogue” is referring to the act of seeing through and should empower one to see through the faith of the other. Two or more parties seek to express their views and listen respectfully to their counterparts. Interfaith dialogue leads to developing greater mutual understanding between different religious traditions. Its chiefs are respecting diversity, looking through<sup>1</sup> to explore others’ beliefs and traditions, and accepting them as valuable resources.<sup>2</sup> Dialogue refers to cooperative and positive interaction between people<sup>3</sup> that define a greater mutual understanding of their different religious traditions. In the course of dialogue, the process of self-definition requires each group to express itself based on its own terms and for the partner in dialogue to accept and respect that context of self-definition in discussing the controversy.

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1 *Dialogue* comes from the Greek *διάλογος*. The prefix *διά* means “through, by, among,” and *λόγος* “word, reason.”

2 There is a tendency to idealize Western values and contrast them with those of Islam in general, but also with radical Islam in particular. See, for instance, Paul Johnson, “Why West Is Best: Secrets---or Rather, Obvious Ingredients---of the Good Society,” *National Review*, December 3, 2001. Such concluded reaction does not invite dialogue.

3 Dialogue should not be limited to leaders. In my view, it is important to develop modes of dialogue which include ordinary people and radical groups, rather than leaders only.

Islam and Christianity are two major religions. Islam came about seven centuries after Jesus Christ. Among the major world religions, Islam is the only non-biblical faith that includes teachings from its texts (The Qur'an and the prophetic traditions) about biblical prophets and biblical theology. Many Islamic texts interact with biblical teachings. Some refer to the People of the Book, Jews and Christians, while others have much to say about Jesus, his mother, his birth, his mission and tribulations. They mention the ascension of Jesus and his return before the day of judgement. However, the teachings do not always reflect similar views as biblical theology, especially in teaching about Christology, Christians and the gospel. In general, the Islamic views are mixed and can be classified into three categories which either affirm, deny or add to biblical theology. It is obvious that Muslims have developed tools to justify their mixed Islamic views on biblical theology. Furthermore, Islam sees itself as being the first and the last religion. It is first in the sense that all prophets were Muslims by virtue of receiving revelations and submitting to the same God; it is last in the sense that Muhammad was the last prophet and the seal of the prophets.

There is no explicit mention in the Bible about Islam. In particular, the New Testament focuses on the coming of Jesus in fulfilment of God's promises. The biblical theologians' self-understanding concerning Islam is mostly based on their interpretations of the biblical texts.<sup>4</sup> However, relations between Chris-

4 See Clare Amos, ed., World Council of Churches, *Current Dialogue*, no. 52 (July 2012).

tians and Muslims and the call to maintain peaceful co-existence through dialogue have been a major concern of the present day.

## II. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Dialogue between Muslims and Christians is not a new phenomenon. In many parts of the world, both have been living side by side for centuries. Islamic self-understanding joins an awareness of the biblical traditions. Their encounter goes back to the dawn of Islam in the seventh century. Islamic expansion, from the early medieval period to the Crusades, asserts an undeniable influence, and past joint errors appear to be transposed onto the present generations. Indeed, the history of violence may make dialogue more difficult but also more necessary for creating harmony, since they have been linked by their geographical nearness and theological identifications. Islamic texts comprise distinctive views on Jewish and Christian faith communities, calling them the “People of the Book.” The fourteenth-century Muslim scholar Ibn Taymīyah illustrates the point. In his book *Al-jawāb al-ṣaḥīḥ li-man baddala dīn al-masīḥ* (The Correct Answer to Those who changed the religion of Christ), he listed the major Islamic theological and philosophical criticisms of Christianity: changing the divine revelation, circulating errant doctrine, and making grievous mistakes in religious practices.<sup>5</sup> Searching for

5 Ibn Taymīyah Aḥmad ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥalīm, *A Muslim Theologian’s Response to Chris-*

meaningful dialogue between Christianity and Islam begins with understanding how they see each other, and how people from other faiths define their views based on their own religious texts.

When Christians are accused of not being enough open for interreligious dialogue with Muslims and of not even expecting to find part of God's revelation and truth in Islam, people often do not keep in mind that convinced Muslims would never accept such an approach to dialogue either. Contrary to the Christian who has to find his own position concerning Islam, the Muslim picture of Christianity and the Christian faith is already relatively fixed.<sup>6</sup>

Islam came about seven centuries after Jesus Christ. The Christian views of Islam, and maybe concerning other faiths, are based on interpretations of their own texts. Muslims also evaluate Christianity and Judaism, drawing from the Islamic texts that speak about them. The Islamic texts, the Qur'an and the prophetic traditions, include views about Jesus and his followers. Texts affirm and deny convictions about Christ. In addition, they add claims about him that the Bible does not. Furthermore, Islam transformed the character and culture of many so-called Christian lands. Subsequently, Christian writers, particularly those living among Muslims, expressed their views on this new religion. The Prophet Muhammad encountered Christians and

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*tianity*, trans. Thomas F. Michel (Delmar, NY: Caravan Books, 1984).

6 Christine Schirmacher, "The Islamic View of Christians: Qur'an and Hadith," 2008.

Jews present in Arabia during his time. The Jewish and Christian presence in Arabia was quite significant. When the prophet received the first revelation, he was frightened and confused. The prophet's wife, Khadijah, who was a Christian, brought him to see Waraqa ibn Nawfal, her cousin, a Christian monk who informed Muhammad of resemblances between the revelation that he experienced and that of Moses. During a time when the prophet was unsure what was happening to him and wondered if he was possessed, Waraqa reassured him and expressed how he hoped to live to see the day when the revelation of Islam was complete. Thus, the prophet's first wife Khadija and her cousin Waraqa influenced him considerably. Furthermore, while travelling to Syria to do business for his wife Khadija, he encountered Christians and had discussions with many of them. Growing opposition to the new religion pressured the prophet to seek refuge for his early followers. He commanded them to emigrate to Abyssinia, a Christian land. They were welcomed there.

In Mecca, where Muhammad's mission started, there were no Jews. His encounters were mostly with Christians. When he immigrated to Medina, he met with the Jewish communities living there. He made a treaty with them, through which Muslims gained a new support base that expanded their number. The religious practices of Muslims in Medina were very similar to that of the Jews. The prophet's interests started shifting to political pursuits. A system of alliances led to the so-called

Constitution of Medina, including the Jews as part of the new *Ummah* or community of Muslims, allowing them to maintain their Jewish traditions. Medina offered the prophet rule over the city (622–632 CE), and he was able to establish a state that was to later become the Islamic or Muslim Empire.

Muhammad's prophethood was thoroughly rejected by the Jews of Medina, and this rejection led to a negative and violent attitude toward them. Thus, encounters shifted over time. The theological conceptions and the degrees of acceptance of Muhammad's prophethood often influenced relations. Muhammad tried to show the Jews that Islam was the true fulfilment of the previous revelations of Judaism and Christianity, but despite what he claimed to be mentioned in their texts, they refused to follow him. Nevertheless, the prophet believed in the truthfulness of their revelations, reserving his critique for their interpretations. While the Jews rejected Islam, Muslims increased in number and became a strong force, occupying more territories and eventually, the whole of Arabia. In 636 CE, the Byzantine Empire was defeated and finally fell in 1453, after the Ottoman army took over Constantinople. The Sassanians, an ancient Iranian dynasty that ruled an empire (224–651 CE), were defeated, leaving their territories to Muslims. Former Christian civilizations also fell into the hands of Muslims.

While Muslims respect Jews and Christians as People of the Book, Muslims are also cautioned not to become close friends,



as the Qur'an gives guidance on how to deal with non-Muslims. Under Islamic rule, Christians and Jews were treated as *dhimmī* (protected peoples); the practical implications concerned rules imposed on their public behaviour and *jizyah*, a tax paid by non-Muslims. The People of the Book's status fluctuated from time to time and from place to place. Worries were related to the different status of living together as individuals and communities of two faiths, and the Christians' self-identification and expressions were challenged by the teaching of Islam. False images of the other developed in both communities, which resulted in fear and misunderstanding. Tensions were quite high in the beginning. Even in the best of circumstances, it was difficult for Christians and Muslims to engage one another as equals in dialogue. Early Christian and Muslim theologians critically wrote about each other's faith.

Significant Muslim-Christian discussions were formulated during the Umayyad period (661–750 CE). The conversation revolved around the Trinity, Islamic Christology, and the nature of Christ. John of Damascus (675 or 676–c. 749) provided the first coherent treatment of Islam. His encounter with Muslims in the Umayyad administrative of Damascus led him to regard Islam not as an alien tradition, but as a Christian heresy.<sup>7</sup> Theophanes (752–818) was highly critical of the Prophet Muhammad, in particular, and of Islam in general. In the time of the Abbasid caliph

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7 Daniel J. Sahas, *John of Damascus on Islam: The "Heresy of the Ishmaelites"* (Leiden: Brill, 1972).

al-Ma'mūn (813–833), there was a tradition of Christian-Muslims debates. Christian leaders, in their dialogue with Muslims, tried to defend Christian traditions, especially that of the personality and mission of Christ. They attempted to bridge the gap by reexplaining the Islamic views of Christology. Two important leaders of the Melkites and Nestorian denominations, the Melkite Theodore Abū Qurra (750–820) and the Nestorian 'Abd al-Masīḥ al-Kindī, played important roles.<sup>8</sup> They were reported to have engaged in religious dialogue with Caliph al-Ma'mūn. Abd al-Masīḥ al-Kindī wrote an apology of the Christian faith around 215 AH/830 CE, while serving in the court of the Caliph Ma'mūn. St. Francis of Assisi (d. 1226) visited the sultan of Egypt in the period of the crusading and instructed fellow Christians to live among Muslims in peace.

Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328) wrote a detailed response (e.g., *al-Jawāb al-saḥīḥ li-man baddala dīn al-Masīḥ*; literally, *The Correct Response to Those Who Changed the Religion of the Messiah*) to a work against Islam written by Paul, Bishop of Sidon and Antioch. In his response, Ibn Taymiyyain reproached Christians for having falsified the original revelations (*tahrīf*). Martin Luther also wrote several treatises discussing Islam, the Qur'an and Muhammad, motivated in part by the threat of Ottoman Turks advancing on Europe. Luther held the position that Islam was a

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8 See Ivor Mark Beaumont, *Christology in Dialogue with Muslims: A Critical Analysis of Christian Presentations of Christ for Muslims from the Ninth and Twentieth Centuries* (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2011).

post-Christian false religion.<sup>9</sup>

Carl Gottlieb Pfander (1803–1865), in his dialogue, appealed to evidence from Islamic texts to defend Christology and to address the authenticity of the Bible, the truthfulness of the Trinity and the claims about Jesus. He hoped to present a Christology that Muslims would accept. His findings were published in Mizanu'l Haqq (*The Balance of Truth*)<sup>10</sup> and has been translated into different languages. Several developments in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries set the stage for organized Muslim-Christian dialogue. Muslims became active actors in the West, not just people who lived somewhere else.

Immigration from Muslim countries to the West and waves of refugees have led to direct, personal contact with Muslims. Their presence inspired the experience of inter-relations. The dialogue movement started in the 1950s, when the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Vatican organized several meetings between Christian leaders and representatives of other religious traditions. The Vatican's initial efforts resulted in the formation of new institutions. In 1964, toward the end of the Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican (Vatican II), Pope Paul VI constituted a Secretariat for Non-Christian Religions to study religious traditions, provide resources and promote interreligious dialogue. Major documents and papers assumed at Vatican II

9 Mark D. Tranvik, "Martin Luther's Treatises and Essay," in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion*, 2017.

10 Carl Gottlieb Pfander, *The Mizan Ul Haqq; or, Balance of Truth*, trans. R. H. Weakley (London: Church Missionary House, 1866).

(1962–1965) focused on interfaith relations. Pope John Paul II (1978–2005) became a strong advocate for the new approach to interfaith relations. In 1989, Pope John Paul II renamed the Secretariat for Non-Christian Religions to the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. Moreover, in 2005, the former Pope Benedict XVI asserted that “Interreligious dialogue and intercultural dialogue between Muslims and Christians . . . [are] in fact a vital necessity, on which in large measure our future depends.”<sup>11</sup>

In 1971, the WCC set up programmes for Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies (DFI). In cooperation with WCC member churches, the DFI concentrated on providing educational materials to promote dialogue. Together with the Vatican, they publish books, articles, reports and working papers by both Christians and Muslims. By the 1980s and 1990s, the Muslim World League, the World Muslim Congress and the Middle East Council of Churches developed formal and informal programmes for Muslim-Christian dialogue.

The nature of dialogue differs from place to place, and organized efforts adhere to a particular type of dialogue. Several distinct but interrelated modes were developed. Vejbjørn encouraged directing the Christian Muslim dialogue process toward practical questions about peaceful coexistence and away

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11 Address in a Meeting with Representatives of Some Muslim Communities: of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI” Cologne, August 20, 2005, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-See also: Rocco Viviano, Benedict XVI, Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations, SAGE journals Volume 135, Issue 1 https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0012580616676234](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-See%20also%3ARocco%20Viviano%2C%20Benedict%20XVI%2C%20Islam%20and%20Christian-Muslim%20Relations%2C%20SAGE%20journals%20Volume%20135%2C%20Issue%201%20https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0012580616676234)

from theological issues.<sup>12</sup> He proposed the use of critical textual analysis on various texts to gain meaning through their interaction. In sum, despite the history of hostility in Christian-Muslim relations, significant changes in recent history have been pointed out to promote inter-faith dialogue.

### III. THE EXPEDIENCY OF DIALOGUE

Christian individuals, as well as churches, are challenged to relate to people from other faiths. The WCC and the Vatican encouraged publishing books, articles, reports, working papers and reviews by both Christians and Muslims.<sup>13</sup> Accordingly, and despite the differences, there are common values, norms of mutual ethics, shared faith-based issues, and common doctrines in both Islam and Christianity that can bridge gaps. Among the more important are the following: belief in one God; Creation; belief in moral absolutes; and acknowledgement of revelation from God and in the prophets. Some issues about these common doctrines may present a central controversy between Islam

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12 Vebjørn L. Horsfjord, *Common Words in Muslim-Christian Dialogue: A Study of Texts from the Common Word Dialogue Process* (Leiden: Brill-Rodopi, 2018).

13 See, for instance, *Current Dialogue* (Geneva, 1980-ongoing) a journal on interreligious dialogue published by the WCC; *Encounter: Documents for Muslim-Christian Understanding* (Rome, 1974-2017), a periodical on Muslim-Christian dialogue published by Pontifical Institute for Arabic and Islamic Studies; Byron L. Sherwin and Harold Kasimow, eds., *John Paul II and Interreligious Dialogue* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999).

and Christianity. However, some theologians argue that the disagreements have much to do with the distancing between their respective understanding of divine-human relations. Dissimilarities between Islam and Christianity pervade all the themes of revelation, prophetic vocation and the ways of divine mercy. It extends to the categories of law and love, the degree of God's self-emptying in Creation, and the question of Jesus and the cross; such issues cannot be ignored.

Muslim-Christian encounters and relations have historically been overshadowed by confrontation and conflict. These include events such as the defeat of the Christian Byzantine Empire by Islam in the seventh century; the brutal fightings of the Crusades in the eleventh and twelfth centuries; the expulsion of Muslims from Spain in 1492; the creation of the State of Israel in 1948, and the current global resurgence and reassertion of Islam and its radical version. All of these events affect Islamic worldviews and can be more visible in radical ideas.<sup>14</sup> Dialogue provides access to windows of understanding of how others define their respective view or create space within oneself for the other to resolve such historical conflicts.

Furthermore, while it is true that there is much that is distinctively Islamic or Christian and radical movements exist in each, there is also much in common between Islam and Chris-

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14 See Carole Hillenbrand, *The Crusades: Islamic Perspectives* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018) pp. 257–327; Norman Housley, "The Crusades and Islam," *Medieval Encounters* 13, no. 2 (2007): 189–208.

tianity, whether radicals or moderates participate in interfaith dialogue. Dialogue provides a display place to fight against radicalism. Neither the West's fear of demographic changes in favour of Islam nor the phenomena of radical fundamentalism should limit or discourage dialogue. The claims of radicalism are an issue that might attract younger generations. It should be considered that radicalism developed largely as a reaction to both the internal challenges of radical Islamic groups against Western ideologies and the external influence of Western involvement in Islamic countries. Some of the challenges to dialogue are seeking out common grounds and becoming willing to engage a wide range of groups. In my perspective, dialogue might even include those who do not represent official or mainstream Islam or Christianity. There is a tendency to establish dialogue with a partner one feels comfortable talking to. However, this would further perpetuate the conversation between dominant groups and alienate the voices of minority groups. Radical Islam is ever present in Islamic countries and abroad, and it is even more visible in the public sphere when Muslims represent minorities. Thus, radical groups should be involved.

The root and development of radical Islam go back to the dawn of Islam. However, in the nineteenth century, when the Ottoman Empire collapsed, Muslims questioned what had gone wrong. Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703–1792) of Arabia provided a response that Muslims had arrived at their low and

humiliating situation because they had deviated from the true Islamic path. He felt that nothing less than a return to the pure, original Islam would permit Muslims to regain their past glory. His followers were called Wahhabis. They wanted to purify Islam of all that they considered distortions of Islam's original intent and the wrongly accepted novelties of Islam. The Wahhabis were convinced that Islam was not simply, or even primarily, to be seen as a set of pious practices, but to be meant as a programme for every aspect of society. They wanted humans to live in accordance with the Islamic revealed rule of God. These new Wahhabi ideas had political implications. They held that the state existed to permit Muslims to foster the whole of Islamic concepts and to forbid and punish wrongdoings. To pursue this goal, the Wahhabis sought to create a state that would favour and implement these concepts. The Wahhabi ideas, although developed in Arabia, quickly spread to other parts of the Muslim world. As a result, at least two organisations emerged to articulate this concept of the Islamic state: the Muslim Brotherhood (al-Ikhwan al-muslimun) in Egypt and the Jamiat Islami in the Indian subcontinent, who held that Islam offered the world an Islamic solution to every modern problem and all aspects of life. This ideology strove for a reality reflected upon everyday life, creating a radical sort of Islam that seeded conflict against Western concepts and spread radical ideas to resist foreign or Western ideologies. Radicals hold a strongly negative perception of



the West, considering them “the source of the evils that are devastating Muslim societies and corroding their authentic Islamic identity and cultural patterns.”<sup>15</sup> It was in such a climate that Al-Qaida was formed and attracted radical Muslims who saw in it the hope for change using revolution and violence. Westerners considered it primarily as a clash of civilizations, without digging deeper into the root. These issues should provide topics for dialogue that could function as the outlet for potential struggles. The other alternatives that the West had experienced are the attacks that seemed to provide the only possible outlets at the time to express anger over undesirable events. Dialogue may help as a mechanism for seeking peaceful ways to settle conflicts.

In the West, radical Islamization discourse tries to convince Muslims to undertake jihad (peaceful or violent struggle) to establish Islamic communities, Islamist forms of government and ultimately the Islamic Empire. Radicalism is not the product of religious crises alone, there are political, socio-economic and cultural local factors that also contribute to its growth. As a result, “the new radical Islamic resurgence and revolt . . . are not only directed against Western political hegemony, but also and primarily against the dominance of Western norms and values as well as against the world order they underpin.”<sup>16</sup> The strug-

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15 Gubara Said Hassan and Timo Kivimäki, “Dialogue and Tensions between Islam and the West,” in *Islam, the West, and Violence: Sources, Catalysts, and Preventive Measures* (Helsinki: Hakapaino Oy, 2005), 116-45.

16 Gubara Said Hassan, “Europe and Radical Islam: Confrontation, Accommodation or Dialogue?” (the Fifth Pan-European Conference on ‘Constructing World Orders,’ The Hague, 2004), 25.

gle of radical Islam involves identity assentation. Radicals often claim to be the conservative group, an issue that might attract younger Muslim generations. Much of extremism in the West started as a reaction to the internal challenges of modernity and the external influence of Western involvements in Islamic countries. Dialogue can function as an outlet, replacing conflicts or attacks as the only possible outlets for expressing anger over undesirable events. Serious, well-prepared and honest dialogue can offer a better alternative and serve as a means of peaceful conflict resolution.

Muslims emphasized the necessity of dialogue among civilizations. Some references in the Qur'an encourage them to peruse interchange. Qur'an 3:64 reads: "Say, 'O People of the Scripture [Jews & Christians], come to a word that is equitable between us and you—that we will not worship except Allah and not associate anything with Him and not take one another as lords instead of Allah.' But if they turn away, then say, 'Bear witness that we are Muslims [submitting to Him]'" (Sahih International). Furthermore, dialogue is critical to Muslims, as they are called to be witnesses over the nations: "And thus, we have made you a just community that you will be witnesses over the people and the Messenger will be a witness over you" (Surah 2:143). Dialogue provides a platform for Muslims to show what they are perceived to be. For example, the Muslim World League promotes dialogue among civilizations.<sup>17</sup> Also, Muslim organi-

17 "Promote Peace, Human Rights and Dialogue among Civilizations," Muslim World

zations such as the Centre for the Study of Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations in Birmingham and the Islamic Foundation in Leicester are active concerning the Muslim diaspora in Great Britain and seek to establish dialogue through contact with the Church at the level of social services and education.

The notion of “Dialogue among Civilizations” was introduced, to a great extent, to refute “the Clash of Civilizations,” a theory put forth after the Cold War by Professor Samuel Huntington, an American scholar. Distinctiveness may remain, yet dialogue may help both parties in readiness to understand and re-think thoughts and responses. Interfaith dialogue must enable re-examining false assumptions of the other based on one’s self-definition. It could be true that Islam reflects distinct civilizational orders with a specific understanding of the cosmos, social existence and interaction with non-Muslims. Christianity may differ from Islam. However, in a reaction to the seeming “civilizational clash,” an “inter-civilizational dialogue” vision deserves increasing attention from both Muslim and non-Muslims. Dialogue provides a platform for people to acknowledge the contrast between violence (or clash of civilization<sup>18</sup>) and perpetration against peace and acceptance of the other. Unfortunately, the designated year of dialogue was 2001, the year of 9/11,

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League, November 29, 2020, <https://themwl.org/en/node/38028>.

18 Since September 11, 2001, a new sense of urgency in the West appears to assert secular values against religious values. This opposition is often expressed as “the West and Islam,” as according to Huntington’s theorised “clash of civilizations” (1996) or in general, as expressed in Kirk’s *Civilisations in Conflict?: Islam, the West and Christian Faith* (2011).

giving great vigour to the dialogue of civilizations. The forces of dialogue used the forum of the United Nations as a vehicle for combatting the inevitable logic of clash politics. Thus was born the Alliance of Civilizations at the United Nations (UNAOC) in 2005, under the leadership of then-Secretary General Kofi Annan and Spanish Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero.<sup>19</sup>

Additionally, EU policymakers encourage religious leaders to dialogue to settle issues of concern, resolve conflicts and contribute to social peace.<sup>20</sup> They aim to enhance peace and harmony in two broad ways. The first is to engage in conflict resolution after conflicts have broken out. The second is to engage in constant dialogue to prevent or at least to minimize the conflicts that are, at any rate, inevitable. The EU seems to put significant emphasis on promoting formal dialogue and discussion between religious leaders to foster more harmonious inter-community relations.

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19 For more details, see Solon Simmons, "The Aging of Empire and Future of the Inter-Civilization Dialogue," Aljazeera Center for Studies, September 29, 2019, <https://studies.aljazeera.net/en/reports/2019/09/aging-empire-future-inter-civilization-dialogue-190929093813064.html>.; Seyed Mohammad Khatami, "Dialogue Among Civilizations: Contexts and Perspectives," UN Chronicle, September 2012, <https://www.un.org/en/chronicle/article/dialogue-among-civilizations-contexts-and-perspectives>.

20 Mohammad El-Sayed Selim, "Assessing the Dialogues of Civilizations between the Western and Muslim Worlds," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 31, no. 1/2 (2009): 49–68.

## IV. APPROACHES OF DIALOGUES

The methodology used in dialogue often includes panel presentations and group discussions. Panel presentations offer the possibility of learning from a variety of leaders. Group discussions take into account a Christian-Muslim interaction among people. There are different approaches or moods of dialogue. In general, they might include:<sup>21</sup>

- **Peace dialogue:** This is a model of dialogue carried on between organizations or leaders from different faiths. It is an organized effort to initiate and facilitate various kinds of dialogue meetings. It focuses on improving cooperation among religious groups and promoting peace. In addition, this approach seeks to establish and rear communication between institutional representatives of religious organizations and leaders. This approach to dialogue incorporates much of the work carried out through the Vatican and the WCC, with numerous variations at the local level.
- **Theological dialogue:** This approach includes structured meetings in which theological and philosophical issues are the primary emphasis. Muslims and Christians, for exam-

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21 The following list of dialogues is adapted from the four forms of dialogue (life, deeds, specialists, and religious experience) discussed in the "The Attitude of the Church Towards Followers of Other Religions: Reflections and Orientations on Dialogue and Mission," *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 75 (1984): 816-28, as well as the four forms (life, action, theological exchange, and religious experience) in "Joint Document of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and the Congregation for Evangelization of Peoples" (Rome, May 19, 1991).

ple, may concentrate on issues such as understanding God, revelation, human responsibility in society, and the role of religion. Theological dialogue refers to the conversation of the meaning of different sacred traditions in the context of religious pluralism. It aims to promote awareness of religious practices and feasts.

- **Dialogue of life:** This is a type of dialogue concentrating on practical issues of common concern, for example, the proper relationship between people from different faiths, the rights of religious minorities, interaction with the other, issues arising from interreligious marriage, and public education. This type of dialogue is often designed to encourage common action from people. Another important function of dialogue in the community is to stimulate more intentional and informal daily interaction between people of different convictions at work and in public places.
- **Dialogue of religious experience:** This is a dialogue of purposefully sharing the diverse experiential aspects of religion, such as spiritual disciplines, personal faith, religion-based ethics, and other aspects of living out a religion.
- **Dialogue of conflicts:** This is a dialogue specifically for confronting radicalism. Relevant issues of concern, whether internal or external should be discussed. By meaningful listening to the perspectives and experiences of the other parties, those participating must proactively strive towards a “process of reconciliation . . . lead[ing] to a common search for understanding, and to a shared sympathy for those who are

suffering, together with a readiness to acknowledge wrongdoings, whether individual or collective.”<sup>22</sup>

- Other modes of dialogue could be developed when needed to deal with pressing social issues.

In our interfaith dialogue, we succeeded to develop topics that attract most groups. These include:

- Visiting different places of worship and listening to the other explaining their respective faith
- Discussing different, important religious feasts and their significance
- Talking about topics that present common intersections, such as child-rearing or preparing inter-cultural couples for marriage or counseling
- Dietary regulations of different religious groups
- Creative tools for breaking walls of separation
- Speaking openly about things that one might dislike in the other and how to enhance mutual respect
- Digging deeper into the root of conflicts
- Conflict-resolving frameworks

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22 Thomas Reese, “Is Dialogue with Islam Possible?,” *National Catholic Reporter*, March 13, 2015, <https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/faith-and-justice/dialogue-islam-possible>.

## V. CHALLENGES AND SABBATICALS

Some Muslims and Christians not only resist dialogue, but often also make their own claims for dominance, claiming that their faith contains universal value and consequently should be acknowledged by everybody. Islam appears to think that it offers the best foundation for new world order and a relevant solution to the present world crisis. Furthermore, the claim that the Islamic nation (*Umma*) is the best solution for Western individualism and its negative influence on family values may discourage dialogue with other faiths that Muslims may consider as inferior. In contrast, Christians insist that the biblical principles are the custodian of universal values and Jesus is the saviour for all. While these differences may always remain as alternatives to each other, people cannot be absolutely superior in everything.

The fear of dilution of personal faith is often expressed in that dialogue may undermine a particular faith commitment. Experience teaches us otherwise; interreligious encounters actually strengthen the commitments of those who are faithfully and knowledgeably rooted in faith, helping to define and articulate one's own obligations.

There are Muslims who may express reservations about dialogue, seeing it as a covert form of Christian intellectual colonialism. Muslims in the West are aware that Judaism and Christianity have historically shaped the collective identity and



remain culturally influential. As such, Muslims feel confronted with the choice between integration through greater participation in public life or preserving their particularities as individuals and communities. The problems of integration and identity affirmation strongly impact attitudes toward dialogue. It could be true that Muslims often affirm that Islam does not distinguish between religion and politics. Yet the notion that the Islamic community cannot distinguish between political power and religious authority may cause them to suspect Christian agendas and motives for interfaith dialogue. Self-understanding incorporates an awareness of a direct link with people's interactions.

Negative experiences may challenge the validity of dialogue. On the Christian side, some consider dialogue with Muslims as marked by naïve idealization, which fails to confront the apparent threat of Islamic fanaticism. Christians also tend to assume that Islam is monolithic and the same throughout the world. In fact, Muslims present considerable diversity in theological, philosophical, and legal schools of thought. In addition, the rich texture of popular devotion results in religious communities that are far from homogeneous. The same concern could be seen in the Islamic perspective of Christianity. These factors need to be considered as part of any attempt to understand faith in any given context.

There is also a challenge due to a lack of clarity that dialogue is supposed to be conducted between equals. The exclusivist

attitude is that only one side holds absolute truth and the other must only listen. The reality of “otherness” should not shun dialogue but open possibilities in areas of common interests. In addition, those who are engaged in dialogue are expected to be ready to critically look at their own attitudes towards the others’ traditions and practices, while wanting to understand their convictions and beliefs.

Modern Muslim-Christian dialogue represents a new and major effort to understand and collaborate with others in increasingly religiously diverse societies. However, an absence of conceptual precision has required experimentation. Issues about planning, representation, and topics need magnanimous consideration and careful collaboration to result in positive consequences.

The confrontation between the West and the Muslim world has become so strong that some lose hope in the fruitfulness of any dialogue. Dialogue can be a way to heal the past. Having a positive, meaningful relationship with someone of a different background and learning about their identity can help one to view the other more favourably.

One challenge concerns the attitude of minimizing differences, to the point of viewing all religions as basically the same, each having its own way leading to the same conclusion. Another challenge for interfaith dialogue comes from the post-modern attitude insisting that each religion or culture is a complete-

ly self-contained system that should express itself on its own terms. This leads to the claim that dialogue is useless, because the participants do not speak the same language or mean the same things.

Finally, there is an anxiety that dialogue may provoke the leaders or representatives of radical groups who believe that dialogue would undermine their faith.

## VI. CONCLUSION

Some may think that Christianity and Islam came from the same God and that both lead to him, ignoring how their respective teachings on major doctrinal and ethical issues are not identical. Although there are similarities, their teachings on key doctrinal and ethical issues are widely divergent and contradictory. Islamic texts partially affirm certain biblical traditions, while partially contradicting others, taking the liberty to expand and add to biblical doctrines. Searching for a dialogue with meaning between Christianity and Islam begins with understanding how they see themselves and each other, as well as understanding the concepts behind shared religious terminologies. Ignorance of these distinctiveness might lead to unmeaningful dialogues. Furthermore, interfaith dialogue with all groups being represented in society could build human dignity and secu-

rity, eventually reducing future clashes. Strain and tension between people of different faiths has caused society to function inefficiently. Inter-religious dialogue is therefore vital in order to contribute to social peace and ensure that the capacities of all are used to achieve the common goal of building a better community. Dialogue fosters understanding, stimulates communication, corrects stereotypes, and works on specific problems of mutual concern. It aims to explore religious and cultural distinctiveness to facilitate means of interaction, cooperation, and practice of personal faith with integrity, all the while respecting “the other.” In the dynamic process of interfaith dialogue, one’s self-perception changes.

This study pointed out the need to contain all peoples in dialogue, including radical groups. The rise of radical Islam is a reality that should not be neglected in any possible interfaith dialogue. Radicalism presents a challenge for Islamic countries and the rest of the world. One must avoid downplaying any significant room for radicalism in dialogue or overlooking existing characteristic differences. New opportunities for dialogue may lead to the development of new approaches.

The usefulness of dialogue in fostering evangelism was also highlighted. One common definition of theology is “faith seeking understanding.” As Christians work to build the kingdom of God, they need to relate the message in the context of the world’s spiritual traditions. Dialogue enhances understanding.

Islam, as well, involves a missionary mandate to discuss with and witness to others.

The Islamic mandate da'wah, or calling people to Islam, is the equivalent of the Christian missionary mandate. Muslims view their message as universal and calls all people to recognize the Qur'an as God's final revelation and to acknowledge the significance of Muhammad's life as an exemplary source of guidance (Surah 33:21). This right and duty are not to be denied. Dialogue is not only a conversation of thoughts, but also an encounter between people. Thus, it could present an active, practical channel for sharing one's faith.

Finally, it is crucial for the continuing advance of relations, that everyone makes effort to learn about each other's faith. One of the characteristics of modern society is its pluralistic nature. Varied social groups of people from different backgrounds, in terms of language, culture, ethnic origin, socioeconomic class, race, and religion, all open opportunities for greater knowledge.

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■ 한글초록

## 대화를 통해 무슬림들에게 다가가기

Ishak Makram Ghatas

종교는 평화와 화해를 위한 힘이 되어야 하지만, 역사는 도리어 종교적인 폭력과 전쟁으로 점철되어 있다. 기독교와 이슬람의 관계 악화의 책임이 전적으로 십자군운동에 있는 것은 아니었지만, 적어도 무슬림들의 입장에서는 기독교 유럽과 이슬람교 사이는 일련의 군사적 충돌로 이어져 왔다고 보여질 수 있다. 이슬람이 다수의 비난을 받는 종교적인 동기에 의한 서방 공격을 일부 작가들은 '문명 간의 충돌'로 해석하기도 한다. 무지는 불관용을 낳고 갈등은 근본주의와 급진적 신념을 조장할 수 있다. 무슬림들은 더 이상 어딘가에 사는 사람들이 아니다. 오히려 그들은 세계 거의 모든 곳에 있고 그곳에서 살아가고 있다. 이렇듯 점점 다원화되고 다종교화 되어가는 사회 속에서 대화가 안정적인 관계를 시작하는 첫번째 주목할 만한 단계를 만들 수 있을까? 서로 다른 형태의 종교간 대화를 발전시키는 것이 무슬림과 더 나은 관계를 이끌 더 큰 상호 이해를 발전시키는 것을 증진시킬 수 있을까? 이

러한 대화에 급진적 경향의 종교인들이 참여할 수 있을까? 본고는 무슬림들과 대화를 통해 교감하는 것에 관한 이러한 질문들에 답하는 것을 목적으로 한다.

**주제어:** 종교간의 대화, 십자군 전쟁, 급진주의, 문명의 충돌