INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

A GUIDE FOR MUSLIMS

MUHAMMAD SHAFIQ & MOHAMMED ABU-NIMER

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FOREWORD

THE International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT) has great pleasure in presenting this important and timely second edition of Interfaith Dialogue by Muhammad Shafiq and Mohammed Abu-Nimer.

Muslim engagement with members of other faiths, particularly Christianity and Judaism, has, bolstered by the Qur'an, always been an important component of the Islamic encounter with the Other. Hence, although a relatively modern term, interfaith dialogue has in fact had a long and enduring history for Muslims, underscored by a spirit of genuine inquiry and respectful exchange.

The primary role of interfaith dialogue is to remove misunderstanding and accept difference, the aim being to generate a climate of peaceful coexistence and harmonious social relations. And this is perhaps more needed today than ever before, as mankind is increasingly called upon to exercise tolerance in a markedly volatile world, where living and working together in diversity is fast becoming the norm. Interfaith dialogue is by no means easy, defensive reaction, uncomfortable exchange and an overwhelming desire to avoid a perceived compromise of deeply held principles are some of the pitfalls that can easily cool commitment and the best of endeavors. It is here that this book makes an important contribution. For it has been designed as a guide for Muslims who are interested or involved in building relations with Christians and Jews with a view to understanding, appreciating and celebrating the respective faiths.

Where dates are cited according to the Islamic calendar (hijrah) they are labelled AH. Otherwise they follow the Gregorian calendar and labelled CE where necessary. Arabic words are italicized except for those which have entered common usage. Diacritical marks have been added only to those Arabic names not considered contemporary.

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PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

A group of Middle Eastern scholars visited the Islamic Center of Rochester, New York, in 2010. One of them gave a talk on interfaith dialogue. His talk met with resistance. The situation got out of control when a comment was made by a person in the audience that interfaith dialogue is *Kufr* (disbelief) and those who get involved in interfaith dialogue must check their commitment to Islam. The scholar was warned of hellfire for supporting interfaith dialogue. Voices were raised and the moderator did his best to get the situation in control.

Since 2007, after the publication of this book, many developments have taken place in the Muslim world in support of interfaith dialogue. The major boost came from Saudi Arabia when King Abdullah sponsored the Madrid Interfaith Conference in 2008. Today interfaith is taking place in Muslim countries both at state and public levels. Many Muslims living in the West, including US and Canada, are active participants in the interfaith dialogue, but interfaith dialogue has yet to develop widespread acceptance among Muslims. There are two major obstacles that Muslims participating in interfaith dialogue have to deal with:

One, interfaith is a religious activity. But many Muslims who attend the mosque for daily worship are opposed or have negative opinions of interfaith dialogue. In many mosques around America interfaith activity is surrounded by controversy. Islamic centers in America that are primarily run by professionals have a hard time announcing interfaith activities publicly. It is even more difficult to have interfaith activity in mosques in Muslim countries. We hoped that this book will encourage intra-Muslim dialogue in the mosques on the issue of interfaith dialogue that will educate worshippers on the meaning, scope, and the contemporary use of modern interfaith dialogue from Islamic

perspectives. There is a concern that mosques will get divided if worshippers are not properly educated in this area.

Second, imams' often have a reluctance to participate in interfaith dialogue. Some imams have the misconception that interfaith dialogue is aimed to create a civil religion. Other leaders acknowledge its significance but fear negative responses from daily mosque-goers avoiding openly participating in interfaith dialogue. Those imams who openly participate in the dialogue face accusations from some worshippers as "going to hell," "being raised with Jews and Christians on the day of judgment," and some practitioners hesitate to pray behind such imams. We think this book will encourage imams training in intra and interfaith dialogue in understanding such controversies and then educating the worshippers on interfaith dialogue. There is as much of a need for understanding and teaching intra and interfaith dialogue in mosques as there is a need for teaching Qur'an, Hadith, Fiqh, and other subjects in Islam.

We also hope that this book will be taught as a part of youth weekend school curriculum. Our youth are our future; how we train them and how we teach them will determine their future success and service to the Muslim community as well as the global world. Unfortunately, teaching world religions and understanding interfaith dialogue is rarely happening even in many mosques in America.

Whenever there is interfaith dialogue, non-Muslims inquire about the concepts of *dhimmi*, *jizyah*, *Dar al-Islam* as well as the applications of *kufr*, *wali* and whether Christians and Jews enter *Jannah* (Paradise). The last three were in the first edition; we have added the first three in to the second edition. Further, we have added the last four appendixes to the new edition. These indexes will help in organizing interfaith dialogue and its successful implementation. Also, we have edited and made appropriate changes in the entire text to upgrade and make the new edition more understandable. To make Muslims aware of the urgency of interfaith dialogue, we have added several graphs to the introduction to demonstrate how Muslims are viewed in our world today making it clear that there is no alternative but to become proactive and get involved in interfaith dialogue.

Preface to the Second Edition

I thank IIIT for their continuous efforts in promoting knowledge and interfaith dialogue and supporting Muslim educational needs in America and the rest of the world. Spending to increase human knowledge and human understanding of difficult issues leading to peaceful coexistence is the greatest charity in Islam that one can give to God's creation. Please read this book with an open heart and mind. Forgive us if there is any unintentional mistake, and God Almighty knows the best.

Muhammad Shafiq
Rajab 20, 1451, July 3, 2010

INTRODUCTION

Purpose

WHEN we consider Islam's history and teachings, we see that Muslims have a long legacy of living in multi-religious neighborhoods and societies. Islam recognizes a plurality of religions and asks Muslims to respect other religions. By and large, Muslims have responded positively to this call, which is evident in the rich historical resource of dialogue that reflects successful communication with all levels of society. This book is designed to guide Muslims who are interested and/or involved in building relations with Jews and Christians.[1] As this guide explains, the Qur'an commands Muslims to respect other religions and their followers. Prophet Muhammad (SAAS)[*] always attempted reconciliation with other religions. He grieved with the Christians when the Zoroastrian Persians defeated the Christian Byzantines (Qur'an 30:1-6).[2] When the Prophet and other Muslims migrated to Madinah, he signed a pact with its Jewish tribes to live together in peace. Muslims not only lived in peace and respected the Jews and Christians, but when Muslims entered the Indian subcontinent, they behaved in the same way toward the Hindus and Buddhists.

In his book *Islam*, Isma'il R. al-Faruqi points out that the Prophet's treaty with Madinah's Jewish tribes recognized them as an Ummah (a religious community), a term used in the Qur'an for the Muslims. The same designation was extended to Christians and, later on in the Subcontinent, to Hindus and Buddhists. As a result, Islam guaranteed that each religious community's basic rights and religious freedom would be protected.[3]

Like their predecessors, many contemporary Muslims are eager to promote interfaith dialogue. But in order to do so effectively, they need to understand the challenges facing them in relating to non-Muslims.

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[*] (SAAS) – *Salla Allahu 'alayhi wa sallam*. May the peace and blessings of God be upon him. Said whenever the name of Prophet Muhammad is mentioned.

Among these are mastering contemporary terminologies and applying them correctly, creating institutions and structures to facilitate such relationships, empowering professional Muslims with the necessary knowledge to reach out to their faith communities, addressing the political realities of violence and persecution effectively, and identifying constructive and effective methods of approaching Islam.

Some Muslims raise concerns about interfaith dialogue, such as the danger of mixing Islamic teachings with other religious teachings. They view interfaith dialogue as an effort to create one religion by amalgamating all religions' key principles or creating a civil religion with common worship, rituals, and prayers. This concern can be met only by a common understanding of each religion's greatness and uniqueness, as manifested through its followers' free and pure practice of their religion and respect for all other religions. The Qur'an emphasizes this truth by insisting that the world's beauty lies in its racial and religious pluralism; otherwise, God would not have created it so (10:99[4]; 5:48[5]).

Other Muslim participants confuse interfaith dialogue with conducting *da'wah* (calling to Islam). Interfaith dialogue should not be considered an opportunity to convert others, for using such programs this way makes participants defensive and tends to turn them away from dialogue altogether. Genuine interfaith dialogue rests upon the central principle that it not be used for religious conversion. In addition, some Muslims consider interfaith to be synonymous with ecumenism and thus an attempt by the Christian majority to convert others. What these people need to understand is that in today's lexicon, interfaith signifies a dialogue among different religions.

Another issue that prevents Muslim participation is the belief that such a dialogue is no more than a polemical debate among theologians of different religions, as began centuries ago between Christian and Muslim theologians and continued into the modern period, particularly under colonialism. However, aggressive and polemical attitudes have nothing to do with interfaith dialogue.

This guide is an educational initiative that seeks to clarify these and similar misconceptions and helps define and introduce interfaith dialogue in its contemporary usage. In this context, interfaith dialogue

fosters understanding and builds bridges for peaceful coexistence. Thus, *The Interfaith Guide for Muslims* provides:

- A guide to prepare both leaders and participants for a dialogical relationship with non-Muslims.
- A clarification of dialogue as a form of communication that differs from the typical logical or theological debates used both between Muslims and between Muslims and non-Muslims.
- A tool to educate and clarify terminology so that misconceptions concerning interfaith/interreligious groups can be avoided.
- A method to remind Muslims of the *adab* (etiquette) and the ethics of disagreement based on the Qur'an and Sunnah so that they may achieve the most effective form of communication.

There are local issues as well. Muslims living in the West are divided on the issue of participating in interfaith dialogue, even to the extent that some mosques refuse to conduct *shura* (mutual consultation) with those mosques involved in interfaith dialogue. In fact, some imams consider interfaith dialogue to be *bid'ah* (an un-Islamic innovation). Whether this view is correct or whether interfaith dialogue is actually required by Islam is an issue that Muslims need to address in their intrafaith conversations. It is our hope that by exploring interfaith dialogue on an intra-Islamic level first, the Muslim community, once it is clear about its own faith and beliefs, will continue to develop the confidence and skills needed to participate effectively in an interfaith dialogue.

In many recent conferences, Muslim scholars have discussed the need for a comprehensive guide like this one.[6] And yet despite this clear need, which has also been felt by scholars and practitioners of interfaith dialogue, all that exists are various articles written by Muslim scholars engaged in this undertaking. In these articles, they present their own opinions on what Islam says about Muslim–non-Muslim relations and religious tolerance (e.g., Jamal Badawi, Muzammil Siddiqi, Sayyid M. Sayeed, Louay Safi, Ghulam Haider Aasi, and Mohammed Abu-Nimer). Invaluable as these articles are, they do not address interfaith dialogue for Muslims in any complete and systematic way.

Clearly, such a comprehensive approach is needed today. Verbal attacks on Muslims and Islam by Western media have confused many Americans and Europeans about Islam's peaceful nature. Even so, such hostility against Muslims is not a recent trend. Historically, Islam assumed the stereotype of the 'enemy other,' a stereotype that grew during the Crusades and the Renaissance. During the nineteenth century, it was enforced through subtler shades of prejudice, such as the new academic discipline of Orientalism. Centuries of distorted ideas have caused Westerners to be suspicious and afraid of Islam and Muslims.

After World War II, the rise of national liberation movements and anti-colonial struggles in Muslim colonies, especially in Palestine and other Arab countries, resulted in an even more fearsome image. Soon, this image was attributed to all Muslims, whether they were Arab or not. Although such struggles were clearly aimed at gaining national independence, Westerners perceived them to be acts of aggression aimed directly at them. The Iranian revolution is a case in point.

Hollywood films provide a useful index on anti-Muslim stereotypes in the West. Many movies have used both the Middle East and Islam to create an exotic, violent atmosphere. Unfortunately, they were produced mostly in ignorance of the true nature of Islam's cultural and religious aspects. In Hollywood movies, Jesus and Moses use enlightened reason to save people's souls; Muhammad is portrayed with a sword, promoting forced conversion or death. Popular nineteenth-century Western writers presented Islam as a product of the Devil and the anti-Christ.

Popular culture is not the only source that misconstrues Islam. Currently, some members of the Christian clergy preach that Islam is a religion of the Devil and darkness. Their unfounded, inflammatory language has been criticized. As Laurie Goodstein, author of "Seeing Islam as 'Evil' Faith, Evangelicals Seek Converts," points out: "The sharp language from religious leaders like Franklin Graham, Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson and Jerry Vines, the former president of the Southern Baptist Convention, has drawn rebukes from Muslims and Christian groups alike."[7] Unfortunately, extremist religious thought in the United States has been growing in strength.

September 11, 2001, and its aftermath raised many questions about Islam's message of peace and strengthened pre-existing negative stereotypes of Islam and Muslims. Today, many Muslims in the West live in fear. In 2004, the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR)[8] processed 1,522 incident reports of civil rights violations against Muslims, as compared to 1,019 cases in 2003. This constitutes a 49 percent increase in the reported cases of harassment, violence, and discriminatory treatment and marks the highest number of such cases ever reported to CAIR in its eleven-year history. In addition, CAIR received 141 reports of actually and potentially violent anti–Muslim hate crimes, a 52 percent increase from the 93 reports received in 2003. Ten states accounted for almost 79 percent of all reported incidents to CAIR in 2004: California (20.17%), New York (10.11%), Arizona (9.26%), Virginia (7.16%), Texas (6.83%), Florida (6.77%), Ohio (5.32%), Maryland (5.26%), New Jersey (4.53%), and Illinois (2.96%).

Even nine years after the attacks perpetrated against the United States in 2001, the negative image of Muslims in America is increasing. The following CAIR graph is a warning about the increasing civil rights violations Muslims in the United States are reporting. Muslims must act swiftly by taking positive steps to counter the growing hatred against them.[9]

Graph 1. Total Number of Civil Rights Complaints by Year

	95/96	96/97	97/98	98/99	99/00	99/01	01/02**	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Complaints	80	240	284	285	322	366	525	602	1019	1522	1972	2467	2652
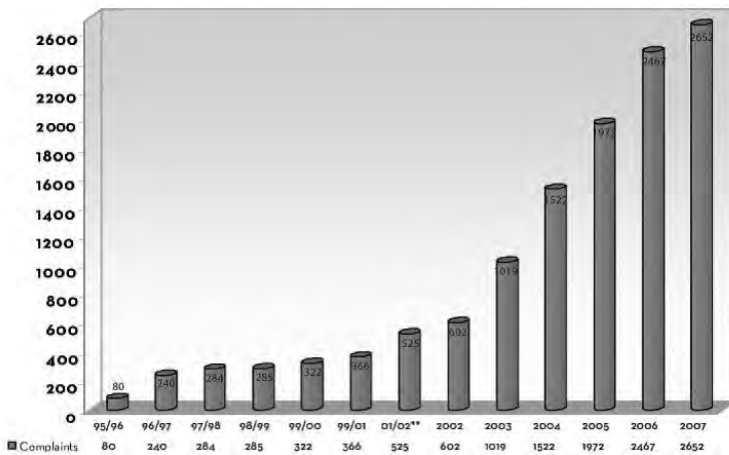
Americans, too, see Muslims as facing more discrimination inside the US than other major religious groups according to the PEW survey of 2009. Nearly six-in-ten adults (58%) say that Muslims are subject to a lot of discrimination, far more than say the same about Jews, evangelical Christians, atheists or Mormons. In fact, of all the groups asked about, only gays and lesbians are seen as facing more discrimination than Muslims, with nearly two-thirds (64%) of the public saying there is a lot of discrimination against homosexuals. The following PEW survey graph is important to understand how Muslims are perceived in America as compared to others:

Perceptions of Religious Differences

Compared with your religion, is…	Very/ Somewhat Similar %	Very/ Somewhat Different %	DK %
Protestantism	44	38	18
Catholicism	43	49	8
Judaism	35	47	18
Mormonism	21	59	20
Islam	17	65	19
Buddhism	15	60	25
Hinduism	12	57	32

Based on respondents who are not affiliated with the religion in question. Those without a religious affiliation asked whether each is similar to or different from their own beliefs rather than their own religion.

The results below to the question, "How concerned, if at all, are you about the possible rise of Islamic extremism in the US (United States)?" clearly demonstrates the sentiment amongst Americans about Muslims even in the United States.
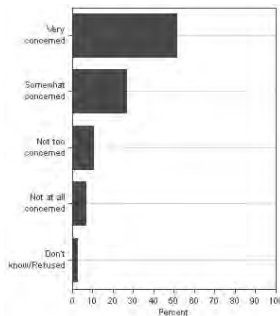
In comparison to the results to a similar question, "How concerned, if at all, are you about the rise of Islamic extremism around the world

these days?" the findings demonstrate that those who took the survey did not recognize a distinction between a possible increase of Islamic extremism in the United States and the rest of the world.[10]
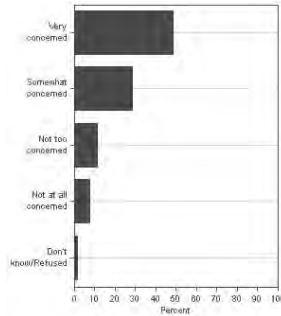
The Muslim image is more alarming in Europe as compared to the US. A survey that was conducted in by a Pew Global research center in 2008 revealed the following unfavorable views of Muslims in different European countries:
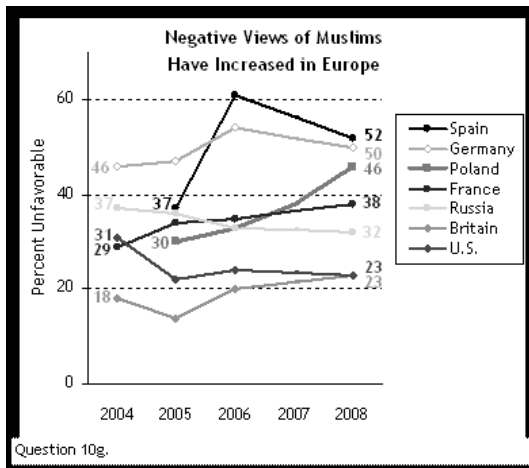
The media continues to focus on so-called "Muslim" extremist groups and not on positive, peaceful Islamic communities. This selective coverage includes using photographs of women wearing the hijab on the front covers of major magazines like *Newsweek* even though the article's map and statistics included statistics of ethnic or secular rooted

terrorist groups that were unrelated to Islam.[11] Even the daily life of Muslims has been affected.[12] Entering or working in security zones has become difficult, and Muslims are watched closely when shopping, driving, and walking.

How can Muslims overcome such prejudice? Muslims need not to fall into despair after viewing these graphs and images; even so, we need to take them seriously. In our view, civic engagement and interfaith dialogue are the two contemporary methods that, when utilized properly, can change people's negative perceptions, build relationships, and gain sympathies. Muslims must put their energies and resources into building bridges and dispelling misconceptions in order to garner a positive perception about Islam and Muslims.[13]

This guide enables Muslims to reach out to non–Muslims in order to strip away such misconceptions. It supports the Muslim community by utilizing peaceful Islamic approaches to interfaith dialogue and constructing the space and platform needed for successful exchange. It does this in the firm conviction that such an exchange, far from diluting our faith, actually strengthens it.

Chapter I explores why this guide is needed and answers two objections that some Muslims have to interfaith dialogue. First, it addresses their objection to ecumenism by defining this term clearly and explaining its history. It then addresses their anxiety about interfaith dialogue by clarifying the historical data that led to the rise of modern interfaith dialogue. Chapter II deals with this dialogue's limits and scope, as well as the atmosphere and tools needed for its success.

Chapters III and IV have three purposes. First, they deal with further questions raised by those Muslims who oppose interfaith work. Second, they remind Muslims how Islam began with pluralism, how Muslims flourished when they practiced pluralism, and how they created a new civilization based on the free interaction of Muslims and non–Muslims. They detail the circumstances that caused science and technology, as well as the arts and architecture, to thrive and that created a civilization marked by human dignity and a lack of concern with one's race and color. The third purpose is to remove the misconception that Islam is an exclusive religion. Therefore, chapter IV deals with some of the Qur'anic verses that seem to say the opposite.

Chapter V presents some examples of the pluralistic society that arose during the Islamic world's golden era, a society encouraged by Islam and one in which people of all faiths flourished. It also explains how interfaith dialogue should be conducted and how to educate the public about peaceful coexistence in a religiously pluralistic society. In addition, it deals with some model programs to assist our interfaith partners in designing successful interfaith dialogue initiatives. We have collected models of interfaith activities from several cities and put them together for the benefit of all.

We hope that such a comprehensive approach will make this guide truly useful for both Muslims and non-Muslims so that all sides can join together to build bridges of understanding.

CHAPTER I

INTRA-FAITH AND INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

Defining Interfaith Dialogue

THE word dialogue is derived from dia (across, through) and logos (conversation, word). Webster's Dictionary simply defines dialogue as a conversation between two or more people. In the Qur'an, the closest word for dialogue is *yuhawir* (18:34; 18:37; 58:1), which denotes a conversation between two individuals or groups of people. For instance: "And his friend answered him in the course of their argument (*yuhawiru* [argument, conversation]): "Wilt thou blaspheme against Him who has created thee out of dust…" (18:37).[1] More generally in the Islamic tradition, conversation between individuals, groups, and religions is seen as key to better living. The Prophet did not hesitate to listen to others, be they idolaters, People of the Book (Jews and Christians), or fellow Muslims. Later, we will analyze his dialogues with his uncle Abu Talib, 'Utbah ibn Rabi'ah (a Qurayshi tribal leader who sought reconciliation), and a Christian delegation from Najran.

In its interfaith understanding, dialogue reflects this Islamic under-standing of a conversation between individuals and/or groups. The goal of dialogue is not to eliminate differences of opinion and convic-tion, but to gain an understanding and acceptance of those differences. Dialogue is not about seeking to defeat or silence others, but about learning, understanding, and increasing one's knowledge of them. The Prophet said, "Souls are like recruited troops. Those who get to know one another will develop mutual understanding, and those who

are strangers to each other are more likely to dispute."[2] This hadith makes intra-faith and interfaith dialogue a necessity for acquiring a better understanding and building bridges between different communities. Many hadiths found in al-Bukhari's "Book of Reconciliation" point this out as well.

The purposes of dialogue are to struggle against negative conditioning and fanaticism and to open the door for listening, communicating, and respecting.[3] As Jaco Cilliers, a practitioner of interfaith dialogue, stresses, "Engaging in interfaith dialogue does not in any way mean undermining one's own faith or religious tradition. Indeed, interfaith dialogue is constructive only when people become firmly grounded in their own religious traditions and through that process gain a willingness to listen and respect the beliefs of other religions."[4]

Interfaith dialogue means to hold on to one's faith while simultaneously trying to understand another person's faith. It demands honesty and respect from its participants so that both individuals may present their religion sincerely. Uniformity and agreement are not the goals; rather, collaboration and combining our different strengths for the welfare of humanity are.

Beyond the rejection of hateful language, interfaith dialogue means using respectful methods to increase mutual understanding among religious people. Consider the following: What would it be like if people of different religions treated each other with contempt rather than with respect and understanding? No community can prosper with such a mentality, and no country can prosper and remain peaceful if it harbors religious hatred and bigotry. The Qur'an orders Muslims to respect other religions and be polite to their followers: "There shall be no coercion in matters of faith…" (2:256).[5]

In his *Dialogue from the Islamic Point of View*, Abbas al-Jirari explains the Islamic concept behind dialogue:

> Dialogue, conducted on this Islamic basis, is the ideal way for attaining truth. However, when we reflect – in the light of what it affords – on the present state of life and of humanity, we are led to conclude that it is necessary to establish understanding, strength, cooperation, and narrow the gap (stemming from differences) between people.[6]

As discussed above, interfaith dialogue does not seek to create a new religion or to abandon Islam's fundamentals; rather, it strives to create a peaceful atmosphere for coexistence. Imams could be teachers – guides on this path of dialogue – for both intra-Muslim and interfaith dialogue. Our participation in interfaith dialogue will provide the framework for us to:

• Relearn the art of listening to each other
• Understand our similarities and differences through theological and philosophical discussion on an intellectual level
• Value other people's spirituality by learning about different religions through sacred writings, stories and narratives
• Work together on joint projects at multiple levels to bring greater justice, humanitarian aid, and peace to society, and
• Operate in a peaceful atmosphere so that charitable and human service programs can be provided to everyone, regardless of religion.

A Brief History of Modern Interfaith Dialogue in the West

It is important to understand the historical context and emergence of modern interfaith dialogue. Expanding from spontaneous or casual interaction, dialogue now includes the formalized discussions with which we are familiar today. Up to the end of the nineteenth century, neither Christians nor Muslims had developed a formal framework for interfaith dialogue. Although Qur'an 29:46 mentions interfaith theological discussions and intra-Islamic debates (*jadal*), it did not embody the true definition of dialogue. As we will show in chapter III, *jadal* actually refers to a debate designed to persuade the other to accept one's own truth through logical and theological conversation. In addition, *jadal* sought to expose the other's mistaken (in its opinion) path or interpretations. Modern interfaith dialogue avoids such an aggressive objective and focuses on developing a genuine understanding of one's own religion by comparing it with another.

Interfaith dialogue, as a contemporary movement, can be traced back to the decision of some churches to extend cooperation and build relations with non-Christians. This initiative came from the Christian

missionaries' need to adapt to conditions of work overseas. Since the third world national independence movements made it difficult for them to carry out their traditional activities, they sought to keep themselves relevant by joining the society's mainstream through working with leaders of other religions and demonstrating that Christianity was not foreign. The first world missionary conference, held in Edinburgh in 1910, attempted to determine how Christians could work with non-Christians without violating their faith. This event was followed by two later international missionary conferences Jerusalem (1928) and Tambaram, India (1938). After all was said and done, Christians remained divided over their approach to other religions.

The state of Christian missionary work worsened after the Second World War. In 1948, churches interested in reversing this deteriorating situation formed the World Council of Churches (WCC) in Amsterdam. Both the International Missionary Council (IMC) and the WCC discussed how Christians could work with non-Christians to benefit humanity. The WCC held conferences in New Delhi (1961) and Kandy, Sri Lanka (1967) to adopt a more effective strategy.[7] At the same time, Pope John XXIII convened the Second Vatican Council (1962). Popularly known as "Vatican II," the council moved the Roman Catholic Church forward in terms of interfaith dialogue.[8] A key document, Nostra Aetate, defined its relation to non-Christian religions. This breakthrough in interfaith dialogue soon engendered major initiatives in favor of ecumenism (intra-Christian unity) and interfaith relations. The Roman Catholic Church acknowledged that the Holy Spirit is active in all Christian churches, even if they were Protestant or Eastern Orthodox. Vatican II pressed for Christian unity on the ground that this would not prevent each denomination from preserving its own tradition intact. Thus began the modern history of Christian involvement in interfaith dialogue.

A key step taken by Nostra Aetate was the expansion of the concept of revelation, of the action of God's Word, Truth, and Will to all of creation:

> The Fathers of the Church rightly saw in the various religions as it were so many reflections of the one truth, "Seeds of the Word,"[9] attesting that, though the routes taken may be different, there is but a single goal to which is

directed the deepest aspiration of the human spirit as expressed in its quest for God and also in its quest, through its tending towards God, for the full dimension of its humanity, or in other words for the full meaning of human life.[10]

Although this concept was known in early Christian writings, this public declaration fostered increased hope for dialogue with Jews, with whom Christians were now said to share "spiritual patrimony." Furthermore, it encouraged dialogue with Muslims, upon whom the Roman Catholic Church "looks with esteem," for Muslims adore One God; honor Abraham, Mary, and Jesus, and all prophets. Appreciative mention was also made of other world religions as a way of approaching the same One whom Christians call "God." Hinduism was described as a religion "through which men [and women] contemplate the divine mystery," and Buddhism as a religion "which acknowledges the radical insufficiency of this shifting world."[11] This was a major step forward for the Roman Catholic Church and Christianity in general.

Based on this wider vision of God's revelation, Nostra Aetate urged Catholics to enter discussions and collaborations with non-Catholics with prudence and charity. It urged Christians, while witnessing to their own faith and way of life, to acknowledge, preserve, and encourage the spiritual and moral truths found among non-Christians within their social life and culture. Emboldened by these generous words, many Catholic churches entered into interfaith dialogue, especially with Islam. Also, many churches sought to create a harmonious environment for their missionaries working abroad by adjusting their tasks to the changing environment and encouraging better communication, more respect of other religions, and peacebuilding. In other words, they sought to work toward shared interests while adhering to their own religion.

Muslims could do the same by relearning the dialogical process embedded in Islamic history all the way back to Adam. Dialogue is no stranger to Islam, for the Qur'an is a Book of Dialogue between Allah (SWT)* (God) and his creation, starting with the angels after Adam's creation and then with the prophets:

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*(SWT) – *Subhanahu wa Ta'ala*: May He be praised and may His transcendence be affirmed. Said when referring to God.

And Lo! Thy Sustainer said unto the angels: "Behold, I am about to establish upon earth one who shall inherit it." They said: "Wilt Thou place on it such as will spread corruption thereon and shed blood -whereas it is we who extol Thy limitless glory, and praise Thee, and hallow Thy name?" [God] answered: "Verily, I know that which you do not know." (2:30)

And He imparted unto Adam the names of all things; then He brought them within the ken of the angels and said: "Declare unto Me the names of these [things], if what you say is true." (2:31)

Said He: "O Adam, convey unto them the names of these [things]" And as soon as [Adam] had conveyed unto them their names, [God] said: "Did I not say unto you, 'Verily, I alone know the hidden reality of the heavens and the earth, and know all that you bring into the open and all that you would conceal?'" (2:33)

And, lo, Abraham said: "O my Sustainer! Show me how Thou givest life unto the dead!" Said He: "Hast thou, then, no faith?" (Abraham) answered: "Yea, but [let me see it] so that my heart may be set fully at rest." Said He: "Take, then, four birds and teach them to obey thee; then place them separately on every hill [around thee]; then summon them: they will come flying to thee. And know that God is Almighty, Wise." (2:260)

Although many publications by Muslim scholars have addressed the status of the "other" in Islam, Muslim religious institutions would be wise to recapture this dialogic form of communication so that they can effectively analyze the present widening gap between Muslims themselves and Muslims and other faiths in the light of Shari'ah. Many Muslim institutions (viz., Al-Azhar, the Organization of the Islamic Council [OIC], various fatwa councils in Saudi Arabia, and so on) could lead such initiatives and widen the path for interfaith and intra-faith dialogue among Muslims. Dialogue cannot be left to scholars alone.

This need for skill in dialogue has become more urgent since 9/11, for Muslims in the West have faced a terrible test. Many Muslims, especially Arabs, have been arrested, imprisoned, interrogated, and humiliated. In direct response, Christian and Jewish groups already active in interfaith dialogue reached out to their Muslim brothers and sisters. Muslims from around the world expressed their condolences to

Americans with heartfelt words that recalled the Prophet's method of teaching through *adab* and compassion. In turn, many Muslims reaffirmed their faith in Islam. As a result of 9/11, many Muslims realized the need to dialogue with Western individuals and institutions in order to express and share in the ensuing sorrow while feeling secure in their own religion.

Prior to 9/11, few Muslim groups in the United States were active interfaith participants. The Muslim community of Rochester, New York, was one of these few. Drawing strength from its good relations with its Christian and Jewish neighbors, this Muslim community successfully protected the area's Muslims from discrimination.[12] At first, some Muslims in the area were suspicious. Yet not long after 9/11, every Muslim applauded the work of Rochester's Muslims in building bridges and protecting the Muslim community. Thus encouraged, imams from western New York met to discuss the significance of interfaith dialogue. In fact, many of them acknowledged that those Islamic centers and mosques that had been active members of this dialogue prior to 9/11 were paid back afterwards with the support of non–Muslims.[13]

The imams reacted this way because like Muslim scholars, they are responsible for guiding Muslims. This guide seeks to serve Islam and Muslims by raising the value of interfaith dialogue in the West and grounding it in the Qur'an and the Sunnah. Therefore, it focuses on providing resources for reeducation based on *adab*, the ethics of disagreement, and the art of listening. Community leaders who use this guide can also advise Muslims of the rights and duties that come with living in the West. This guide will certainly support and contribute to developing an Islamic jurisprudence for Muslims living as minority communities in the West.

Why Some Muslims Object to Interfaith Dialogue

Interfaith dialogue is a method of communication among people, an undertaking that respects the differences of the 'other.' It allows for true listening in a safe environment and provides possibilities for each participant's self-awareness to grow.[14] Yet even though it is a key

element of the Islamic faith and tradition, some Muslims in the West and elsewhere continue to oppose it.

Consider the following incident. Once a Muslim man in a mosque was heard shouting that interfaith dialogue is *kufr* (disbelief) and that those Muslims who participated in it were acting like *kuffar* (disbelievers). His voice was full of hatred and disapproval. Everyone passed by him quietly, seeing that the atmosphere was not conducive to conversation. But one day, the imam asked him why he was so harshly opposed to this activity. In the ensuing discussion, the following misconceptions were revealed:

• Interfaith dialogue is part of ecumenism and ecumenism is Christian.
• The underlying purpose is to create one religion for everyone.
• Saying: "Your faith is mine and there is no difference" is forbidden.
• Interfaith dialogue is committed to creating new, blended, and diluted worship services common to all, and that Muslim participants were already involved in these worship services.

Opponents also use certain Qur'anic verses to substantiate their argument. However, they take the meanings out of context. Lacking an advanced and sound Islamic education, as well as a comprehensive Islamic understanding, some Muslims may support an absolutist attitude toward the text and the 'other.' In contrast, the Qur'an and the hadiths support dialogue between the different groups, both within the Muslim community and between Muslim and non-Muslim communities.

Muslims who oppose interfaith dialogue commonly quote the following verse:

> For, never will the Jews be pleased with thee, nor yet the Christians, unless thou follow their own creeds Say: "Behold, God's guidance is the only true guidance." And, indeed, if thou shouldst follow their errant views after all the knowledge that has come unto thee, thou wouldst have none to protect thee from God, and none to bring thee succor. (2:120)

While some Muslims understand this verse as condemning any dialogue with Jews or Christians, a scientific, historical approach

reveals that it actually refers to the controversy that erupted after Allah told the Prophet to change the *qiblah* (prayer direction) from Jerusalem to the Ka'bah. The Jews were unhappy with this decision. The Prophet did his best to explain his position on this new development and maintain good relations with them. It is within this context that Allah told him that the Jews and Christians of that time would not be pleased with him until he followed their teaching with respect to Jerusalem's centrality. The verse did not ask him to break his relation with the Jews and Christians, but only informed him that total satisfaction was impossible.[15]

Note that certain Muslims give to this verse an alternative, absolutist interpretation, contending that Muslims should not be satisfied with non-Muslims – whether Jews, Christians, or other – until they convert to Islam. According to this line of thought, were a Christian in New York for instance, to learn the Qur'an, and speak well about Islam, presenting it fairly, this would be neither here or there, for such Muslims would only declare satisfaction were he to convert; possibly even choosing to stop talking to him after a while.

Some Muslims use other verses of the Qur'an to support the condemnation of interfaith dialogue. They claim that the following verse also condemns interfaith dialogue: "He it is who has sent forth His Apostle with [the task of] spreading guidance and the religion of truth, to the end that He make it prevail over all [false] religion, however hateful this may be to those who ascribe divinity to aught but God" (61:9).

Analyzing this verse within a wider Islamic context, we realize that, first, Islam is the message of truth and that Muslims have to do their best to spread it. Second, some people always resist the truth when it is brought to their community. And third, Muslims must be ready to face the ensuing consequences and find positive ways to deal with them. As we know, truth cannot be spread amidst hostility, but only with proper behavior and patience. One has to do one's best to create a peaceful environment of trust. The Prophet provided us with such a model when he signed the Treaty of Hudaybiyyah with his Makkan opponents, the very ones who had expelled him and his followers from Makkah. He could see that this treaty would lead to peace and that by

signing it, the Muslims would be able to move freely in a peaceful atmosphere and spread Islam. This verse demands that Muslims build good relations with others. Other verses susceptible to misinterpretation are:

> You are indeed the best community that has ever been brought forth for [the good of] mankind: you enjoin the doing of what is right and forbid the doing of what is wrong, and you believe in God. Now if the followers of earlier revelation had attained to [this kind of] faith, it would have been for their own good; [but only few] among them are believers, while most of them are iniquitous. (3:110)

> Behold, the only [true] religion in the sight of God is [man's] self-surrender unto Him; and those who were vouchsafed revelation aforetime took, out of mutual jealousy, to divergent views [on this point] only after knowledge [thereof] had come unto them. But as for him who denies the truth of God's messages – behold, God is swift in reckoning! (3:19)

The Qur'an calls upon Muslims, both as individuals and as a community, to become the best community through applying and practicing Islam and to join organized and direct efforts to spread Islam. For Muslims, Islam is Allah's true religion; any doubt of this fact is a sign of a weak *iman* (faith). Accordingly, many Muslims use this verse to claim that interfaith dialogue undermines the possibility of becoming the 'best Ummah.' Yet they fail to remember that the Prophet himself engaged with non-Muslims by bringing them to dialogue and, in some cases, to Islam. Consider the following verses:

> And, indeed, He has enjoined upon you in this divine writ that whenever you hear people deny the truth of God's messages and mock at them, you shall avoid their company until they begin to talk of other things – or else, verily, you will become like them. Behold, together with those who deny the truth God will gather in hell the hypocrites. (4:140)

This admonition is repeated in Qur'an 6:68. Rather than keeping such company or attending such meetings, Muslims should pass them by. But attending interfaith dialogue is different, for those engaged in this particular activity respect each person and his or her religion. It is against the spirit of interfaith dialogue to look down on or pass negative

judgments on any other religions or their followers. Even so, the Qur'an expressly states that only Islam will be acceptable to Allah.

"For, if one goes in search of a religion other than self-surrender unto God, it will never be accepted from him, and in the life to come he shall be among the lost." (3:85)

But this and the other verse above do not forbid Muslims to build good relations with others. In fact, Allah commands them to build good relations, as will be explained later. Even so, the following hadith is often cited to discourage developing relationships with non-Muslims: "On the Day of Judgment, everyone will be with those whom he loves."[16]

Once there was a Jewish-Muslim dialogue. The day after this event, a Muslim who opposed it began quoting the above hadith and saying: "Those who favor dialogue with the Jews will be with them on the Day of Judgment, because dialoguing with them is to love them." Yet interfaith dialogue is not about loving the 'other' in the sense of becoming 'one' with that person; rather, it is about respecting the 'other's' views and thereby paving the way for a peaceful society. But many opponents take this hadith and others out of context and use them to frighten Muslim participants by accusing them of having committed a sin. The dialogical process itself forces Muslims to examine and reconfirm their own religious identity, to strengthen their own belief while respecting that of the 'other' with patience, tolerance, and good behavior. In fact, this particular hadith does not pertain to dialogue or bridge-building at all; it actually calls upon Muslims to love Allah and His Messenger, stand firmly behind Muslim causes, and maintain their belief in its authentic form by not mixing it with non-Islamic beliefs and practices.

Basing views on such misunderstandings, there are Muslims who claim that such interaction is actually designed to expand the West's political, military, economic, and cultural influence; Westernize Muslims and Muslim countries; make Muslims lose political, economic, and cultural independence; eradicate Islam and the Islamic way of life; and convert all people to Christianity. We acknowledge these fears; however, progressive postcolonial societies have developed the capacity to address such concerns and issues openly, with equality and

respect. Fear of interfaith dialogue actually reveals a lack of faith, confidence, and spiritual endurance. These deficiencies lead to the loss of the opportunity to introduce Islam to non-Muslims.

Yet an even more positive result of interfaith dialogue is possible than just introducing Islam to non-Muslims; interaction with the West and its pluralistic societies through dialogue can expand non-Muslims' knowledge and understanding of Islam. Fear can be replaced with confidence in Muslims and used to create a positive understanding of Islam through networking and involvement with others on common projects. Muslims engaging in such interaction have a golden opportunity to represent Islam as the truthful and peaceful religion portrayed in the Qur'an. Many people who have not met Muslims or had any personal contact with Islam would welcome such an opportunity. By making this possible in a sincere manner, instead of remaining behind closed doors in fear, Muslims make their dialogue partners more comfortable with them and may even cause others to seek a similar interaction.

Rochester's interfaith experience clearly demonstrates that Muslim participation can bring many blessings for all of the participants. This interaction has brought respect for the Muslim community and improved its image. As a result, the city's Muslims occupy a healthier position in the community than they would have if they had kept fearfully to themselves. They are respected in the workplace and trusted as moral human beings. Muslim participation in the city's interfaith dialogue has scored many positive points in public and private lives of the city's inhabitants. Even those Muslims living in Rochester who oppose interfaith dialogue have admitted this positive trend.

The opponents' concerns will be analyzed in more detail later on, as will the Qur'anic verses and hadiths quoted above. It is unfortunate that Muslims are divided on this issue. Such divisions have caused some Muslims to avoid mosques that participate in interfaith dialogue. Yet instead of reacting to fears based on misconceptions, they should confidently rely on their Islamic faith. Building such confidence is what this guide is all about. However, reliance must grow out of accurate theological and historical knowledge. Not only must the theological basis for dialogue in Islam be understood, but the nature

and importance of interfaith exchanges both in Islamic and Western history must be contextualized.

Taking Western history first, many significant questions can be posed. How and why did ecumenism (intra-Christian dialogue) begin in Europe? How and why has it developed in recent years? Muslims must look into these developments and learn how they relate to intra-Islamic dialogue. Through this study, they can communicate and interact with non-Muslims.

Defining Ecumenism and Analyzing Its Historical Significance

Muslims who oppose interfaith dialogue often say that ecumenism is forbidden. But what is ecumenism? Ecumenism originally comes from the Greek word oikos (house, household).[17] It implies the concept of unity, of coming together as a family. In addition, ecumenism can be used in its original form, referring to an intra–religious phenomenon that addresses and connects internal divisions within any religious, ethnic, or other group; it does not necessarily pertain only to Christian contexts. As we will see, this originally secular term was later applied to the Christian movement for the purpose of uniting the various Protestant denominations.

A group of Muslims in Rochester discussed ecumenism and read about it in its Christian context, as presented in Michael Molloy's *Experiencing the World's Religions*.[18] But without reading the complete chapter, those who opposed ecumenism said, "See. We told you ecumenism is Christian." Other people interjected: "Let's do the whole reading and then begin discussing ecumenism with an open mind." The following paragraph summarizes Molloy's discussion on ecumenism:

> After the Reformation and the Renaissance,[19] the Christian world was bitterly divided. The various denominations referred to one another as infidels (*kafirs*). The Vatican rejected the Protestant churches as "rebellious" and therefore as infidels. The Protestant churches hurled the same accusation at the Catholics. Additionally, the Protestant denominations were equally hostile to each other. Intra-Christian relations were at their lowest point in history. Then over time, mainstream Protestant denominations decided to

dialogue with each other to find common ground in order to ease tension and build relations among themselves. This movement came to be known as the Christian Ecumenical (family unity) Movement.

This movement, which sees all mainstream Christian groups as part of a single 'household,' encourages dialogue for understanding and building relations. The best known Christian ecumenical organization is the WCC, which emerged from the Church of England. Although the Eastern Orthodox churches and the Roman Catholic churches were not partners in the organization at first, ecumenism, uniting as a family community during a difficult time, proved to be one of God's gifts to Christianity: it helped them to understand, respect, and build relations with each other. Recognizing the benefits of this dialogue, today almost all-mainstream churches, including the Orthodox and the Roman Catholic, participate in the WCC to some degree.

After reading from Molloy's book, those Muslims who favored intra-faith and interfaith dialogue started their discussion by saying, "Look at our Muslim world; how bitterly it is divided by religious schisms. The relations between different schools of Muslim thought and especially between the Sunnis and Shi'as are at a very poor stage. Can't we learn something from Christian ecumenism for the benefit of the Islamic Ummah? Why can't we restart intra-Muslim dialogue to build respect and restore Muslim unity? The Qur'an and the Sunnah teach Muslims how to live together with respectful tolerance as brothers and sisters – but look how bitterly we are divided today."

In other words, Muslims who favored intra-faith and interfaith dialogue understood at once that ecumenism really has a broader meaning beyond its more restrictive Christian sense, one that can benefit Muslims and other large groups experiencing painful divisions. This understanding came painfully and far slower for its initial opponents. It is important to remember that many opponents are, in fact, sincere Muslims. Their resistance does not come from a lack of intelligence, but from the damaging effect that fear can have on anyone.

For example, while discussing the great need for Muslim intra-faith dialogue, some opponents actually cried and even the hardest hearts were softened. Yet misunderstandings persisted. With tears in his eyes, one opponent said, "But we are opposed to Muslims participating in

ecumenical dialogue." He was answered, "But we Muslims are not participating in ecumenical dialogue with Christians and within the Christian understanding of the term. We are participating with Christians and others in interfaith (interreligious) dialogue." Still confused, he asked, "But isn't that the same thing?" He was told that it was not, if one kept in mind that ecumenism usually deals with intra-Christian dialogue while interfaith is commonly used for a dialogue between religions. The discussion stopped at that point, when everybody agreed to meet again to discuss the issue of interfaith dialogue. (It must be noted that interfaith is often used today instead of the correct term interreligious, thus adding to the already existing confusion and misunderstanding).[20]

Is Interfaith Dialogue Creating One Religion?

Muslims have other fears, one of them being that non-Muslim participants are actually missionaries looking for additional information and insight to improve their evangelization efforts and convert Muslims. While this motive may characterize some missionaries, it can backfire. For example, one missionary who had gained an in-depth knowledge of Islam before venturing forth to convert Muslims, soon found that he was the one converted – to Islam!

Still another fear is that a new, diluted "Abrahamic" religion will emerge from these efforts, something resembling Akbar's *Dini-Ilahi* (Divine Faith). Akbar (1542-1605), the third Mughal emperor of India,[21] sought to create unity and reach out to many religions by creating a new religion – *Dini-Ilahi* – through combining Islam, Brahmanism, Christianity, and Zoroastrianism. Although he had strong relationships with scholars of all faiths, this new religion failed to establish itself among the people. Some Muslims, especially those from South Asia, sincerely oppose interfaith dialogue because of this incident. They support building good and friendly relations with non-Muslims, but not personal involvement in any interfaith dialogue.

When Muslims get together to talk about interfaith dialogue, they often find themselves locked in controversy. At a Muslim community meeting held in a New York mosque to evaluate the

Muslim community's intra-Muslim and interfaith programs, one man claimed that the interfaith program gave Christians an opportunity to learn about Islam and use that knowledge to convert Muslims. Some said such programs should only be held in churches. Yet many others said it was important to have such meetings at a Muslim venue in order to educate non-Muslims about Islam or at least to remove their misunderstandings.

The controversy took a specific form when a Christian missionary school in New York sent its students to visit the Islamic class held at the mosque. Some very vocal opponents argued that these students were coming to improve their missionary skills. Yet others believed that they were coming to receive accurate information about Islam. No one ever knows, they justified, whose heart will be changed.

The division of opinion breaks down as follows: Supporters of interfaith dialogue say that the Qur'an commands it; opponents call it an act of *kufr* (disbelief). And opposition can be intimidating. Once when an interfaith program was announced in a Chicago mosque, some men cried out: "*Kufr, kufr*!" Reactions like these keep many imams silent and unwilling to participate in these dialogues. Such instances create an imbalance at dialogic gatherings. Their imams being absent, lay Muslims are left to dialogue with highly educated rabbis, ministers, and priests. Without the imams' participation, the resulting dialogue cannot command trust from either side. Other religious leaders actually welcome the imams' participation. In fact, in those cities where the imams are part of the dialogue, interfaith work is more effective and honored.

A final reason used to oppose interfaith dialogue is that it supposedly encourages the blurring or blending of worship practices. Yet this fear can be easily dealt with by stating clearly at the outset that the participants are to observe, not participate in, the other people's acts of worship. Just as everyone is welcome to watch Muslims pray, Muslims should be welcomed to observe (but not participate in) Christian and Jewish prayer services. When Muslims raised this concern in Rochester, their dialogue partners readily agreed to the principle of separate prayers. As a result, the imams were able to participate with a clear conscience, thus assuring that the dialogue's diverse

peacebuilding activities would be more productive and beneficial to Muslims' interests.

The key point here is that interfaith dialogue does not aim to unify religions. Muslim participants need to be aware of this. When the Makkans asked the Prophet to let them worship their deities for a year and then worship Allah the next year, Allah revealed: "Unto you, your moral law, and unto me, mine" (109:6). The Qur'an stands for freedom of religion and religious worship.

From all that has been said, it is obvious that imams should not hesitate to participate in interfaith dialogue. On the contrary, their participation will help their congregations overcome their fears and think about the ensuing advantages. Interfaith dialogue is about freedom and respect for every religion, as well as building bridges to ease tension and hatred between followers of different religions. Religions are God's gift to bring peace, not hatred, to humanity. Religions can live together in peace only through organized efforts toward understanding, mutual appreciation, and building good relations.

Challenges: The Emergence of Radical Evangelicalism

Prior to meeting with various Christian groups in interfaith encounters, some Muslim participants expressed their concern that all Christians are engaged in aggressive evangelization and have no respect for Islam as a religion. The following section seeks to dispel this misconception by providing more details about those Christian evangelical groups that have expressed antagonistic views as well as those Christian groups and denominations that strenuously oppose such strategies.

Christian Evangelicalism is a complex movement within Protestantism. Some elements within it are actually very progressive. However, Evangelicalism's aggressive, fundamentalist wing has experienced a growth spurt since the 1970s. Since the start of the war in Iraq, it has grown even stronger and has been influencing other Christian sects.[22] Extreme radical and fundamental Evangelicalism, as seen in Indonesia, Africa, and now in the United States, has been fomenting strife between itself and other Christian denominations as well as other religions. Its tactics are underhanded. Strategically placed undercover

missionaries target other Christian denominations and Muslim communities as well. Ridiculing other religions is a common strategy. Hateful words once used in Christian churches against one another are used today against other religions, especially Islam. This behavior is manifested by many extremely conservative Evangelical churches, which do not even tolerate other Christian denominations that are less radical than they are. It is no surprise that these churches vilify Islam.

A recent example of such bigotry is the sign, visible from the highway, posted in front of a North Carolina Baptist Church: "The Koran Needs to be Flushed." According to Josh Humphries in *The Daily Courier* of Rutherford, North Carolina on May 24, 2005:

> The minister not only refused to apologize, but made statements insisting on the appropriateness of the display. "I believe that it is a statement supporting the word of God and that it (the Bible) is above all and that any other religious book that does not teach Christ as savior and lord as the 66 books of the Bible teaches it, is wrong," said the minister. "I knew that whenever we decided to put that sign up that there would be people who wouldn't agree with it, and there would be some that would, and so we just have to stand up for what's right. Our creed as a Christian, or a Protestant, or a Baptist church – of course we don't have a creed but the Bible – but we do have the Baptist faith and message that says that we should cling to the 66 books of the Holy Bible and any other book outside of that claiming to know the way of God or claiming to be God's word is automatically written off and is trying to defeat people from the way of true righteousness inside of our viewpoint in how we view the word of God."
>
> When the minister was asked whether he had considered before putting up the sign that there might be negative consequences or that some people might be offended, he said he had been hoping for such a result. "Well, I thought about it and I said there may be people who are offended by it but the way I look at it, Jesus told his followers that if the world hates you, don't feel bad because they hated me first," said the minister. "If we stand for what is right and for God's word and for Christianity then the world is going to condemn us and so right away when I got a complaint I said, 'well somebody's mad, somebody's offended, so we must be doing something right.'"

One sign of radical Evangelicalism's growing power is its expanding use of the Internet since 9/11. The past four years have witnessed an

'Internet war' involving both secularists and radical fundamental Evangelists against Muslims in organized and informal forums (e.g., the Yahoo Islam chatrooms). For example, one self-proclaimed Evangelical presents himself as being very well educated in Islam, Urdu, and Arabic. He manages a Christian radio network in Southeast Asia, and continually harasses and denigrates Islam and the Prophet while pushing fundamentalist Evangelical beliefs. Similarly, some Muslim and Jewish organizations engage in mutual bigotry. However, in many other internet platforms, dialogue does take place and there is evidence of transformative and respectful communication.

In general, the radical Evangelical movement currently enjoys widespread visibility throughout the United States and abroad through print and electronic media, a circumstance that enhances its agenda of converting both Christians and non-Christian to its beliefs. Its members have invested enormous resources in the media and in training and encouraging charismatic speakers to support its agenda. However, not all Evangelicals are radicals. In fact, many of them are deeply and sincerely involved in interfaith dialogue. Yet they and the mainstream members of the Abrahamic religions must be bolder and more outspoken in order to make people aware of the dangerous consequences of any kind of religious radicalism. This responsibility cannot be avoided, for the Old and New Testaments, as well as the Qur'an, relate that God told Abraham to work for peace with devotion and sincerity. Such work is a duty for everyone.

Bold action for peace will eventually release Muslims from their beleaguered situation. Due to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the constant threats directed toward Iran, and the 2004 and 2005 attacks in Madrid and London respectively, many Muslims in the West are living in fear. They know that certain government agencies and ultra-conservative Christian groups are hostile to them. Strengthening interfaith work and becoming involved in local political processes are two effective ways for Muslims to escape their fears, fight against prejudice and Islamophobia, and live in peace with others.

The post-Second World War history of Jews in the West provides us with a model for such a reversal of fortune. These Jews, having endured many of the same tests as Muslims are currently experiencing,

became active participants in ecumenical dialogue before interfaith dialogue even came into vogue. Rabbis were actively involved in interfaith relations, and the Jewish community donated money to encourage dialogue. Today, Jewish individuals and foundations provide many interfaith dialogue grants, and a rabbi or a prominent member of the Jewish community is always present at any interfaith meeting. In most meetings, a Jewish participant will volunteer to take minutes and do the secretarial work. Jews participate in the political process and have representatives in the House of Representatives and the Senate. They work hard to network with diverse groups and to bring about positive changes that protect their interests.[23] In sum, they have adopted interfaith dialogue and successfully integrated themselves into mainstream society while gaining respect and without compromising their religious beliefs.

Support for Interfaith Dialogue

Support for interfaith dialogue is growing worldwide. The Saudi Arabian sponsored international interfaith conference at Madrid, Spain in July 2008 and interfaith conferences in Qatar, Cairo, Islamabad, Istanbul, Jakarta and other Muslim cities are creating support and positive images of Muslims. In January 2002, the Alexandria Interreligious Conference was held and developed the First Alexandria Declaration. This milestone resulted from a joint consultation of at least eighteen Jewish, Christian, and Muslim scholars and religious leaders from the Holy Land. The conference took place in Alexandria, Egypt, and was co-hosted by the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar University. (The declaration full text is given in Appendix I).

A similar growth of support for interfaith dialogue has been seen in American and European institutions of higher learning. Several American and foreign universities have expanded their curriculum to include Islamic studies in relation to other religions and interfaith studies. American University's School of International Service, Georgetown University's Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding, and the University of Notre Dame's Kroc Institute, to name a few, are leaders in Islamic approaches to peacebuilding, justice, and

dialogue within the interfaith context. Other leaders are Hartford Seminary's Macdonald Center for the Study of Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations and, most recently, Rochester's Nazareth College, which established the Center for Interfaith Studies and Dialogue (CISD). Nazareth College, CISD organized a national interfaith understanding conference in April 11-13, 2010. The conference gave a positive image of Muslims along with other outcomes. The support of the College from the Rochester business community led by Brian and Jean Hickey and the International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT) at Herndon, Virginia has made the CISD a nationally recognized and internationally respected interfaith dialogue center. The center's stated goals are to develop skills that will clarify and improve individual and community-wide communications on matters of religion, faith, and spirituality; understand individual and communal faiths; establish a methodology proper to achieving such goals; and develop the capacity for living in a pluralistic world. CISD seeks to develop research tools, knowledge, and skills to benefit everyone; envisions an environment conducive to understanding different religions; and seeks to communicate the skills needed for people to live with each other in peace and justice.

In response to these positive growths in higher education, the Muslim community, relatively new but growing in the West, should be ready to face specific challenges and tests to secure a safe place for itself. Four practices are essential for the survival of this religious minority: staying united while building good relations with other religions, being pro-active in dealing with challenges, participating in the political process, and fostering strong educational programs in Islamic studies within the context of a pluralistic society (both within civil society and institutions of higher education).

Some Key Points of the Chapter

• Interfaith dialogue involves building bridges among different religious groups to promote respect, tolerance, and peaceful living.
• Interfaith dialogue is not ecumenism; rather, it is a dialogue among different religions.

- Ecumenism teaches Muslims to strengthen intra-Muslim dialogue in order to deal with inter-Muslim differences respectfully.
- Interfaith dialogue is not designed to create a civil religion, but to create an atmosphere of respect for each religion.
- Interfaith dialogue is essential to prevent the spread of religious radicalism.
- Interfaith dialogue protects the rights of religious minorities.
- Imams' participation is essential for proper guidance, education, and the prevention of misconceptions.

Discussion Questions

1. Are you aware of any intra-Muslim dialogue? If so, indicate where the dialogue is happening and explain its impact on relations between the different Muslim groups involved.
2. Do you know any Qur'anic verse or hadith, other than those discussed above, used by those who oppose interfaith dialogue? If so, explain how it has been misinterpreted.
3. Akbar's efforts to establish a unified civil religion is well known in South Asia. Do you know any other Muslim leader or a thinker who has attempted such an undertaking?
4. Would you join an interfaith dialogue group if you were asked to? Why or why not?

GUIDELINES FOR INTRA-FAITH AND INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

DIFFERENCES between people of the same or different religions are natural. And yet those differences are often denied. For example, an imam in New York was asked to create a council of imams in his city to address Muslim differences on issues that impacted their communities. He refused to do so on the grounds that "it is not needed." As a result, differences continued to divide the Muslim community. Even when intra-Muslim differences are acknowledged, there is a reluctance to address them. Once when he was presenting a paper on interfaith dialogue at an ISNA educational conference in Chicago in 2006, Muhammad Shafiq was asked about intra-faith dialogue. He stated that intra-faith dialogue was even more difficult than interfaith dialogue.

Such anecdotal evidence suggests that Muslim leaders find intra-faith dialogue harder than interfaith dialogue. In general, most imams and Muslim leaders have not been trained in the rules and etiquette of intra-faith dialogue, whereas many leaders of other faiths have had a long-standing engagement with this type of dialogue and thus are far more open to listening and learning. They have grown in confidence through practicing their dialogic techniques in their internal and external conversations.

Developing the basic skills needed for successful dialogue and communication can have positive influences on Muslim communities, especially in the West. The lack of such skills is a significant reason for the instability and poor management of many mosques. Many mosque

leaders may be good workers, but they have little experience in man-agement, dialogue, and conflict resolution. Many leaders still believe and practice the strategy of 'silencing by authority.' As a result, many mosques and other Muslim institutions controlled by a single entity are perceived as being more stable than those run by the community.[1]

However, when living within the Western communal context, interfaith dialogue becomes a necessity, and intra-Muslim dialogue becomes even more essential to building a better understanding between Muslims. Intra-faith dialogue can be an effective vehicle for building Muslim solidarity and unity, especially on issues that require the sacrifice of one's time and resources. A weak community cannot deliver, and thus stands on the receiving end. As the Prophet said, the giving hand is always better than the receiving one.[2] Although a community may be small, better organization will make its outreach efforts more effective. A better-organized Muslim community will always gain more respect and have a greater impact on interfaith dialogue than a disorganized one.

There should not be any argument about the value of such dialogue and the practices necessary to strengthen it. After all, the Qur'an stands for respecting the diversity of opinions between members of the same community and between people following different religions. Religious freedom, as regards practices and beliefs, is guaranteed in Islam. The Qur'an asks people to respect each other's beliefs and to live in peace. Before Islam, the Jews and Christians were living in hostility in Arabia and the Roman Empire. They could hardly tolerate one another, and persecution in the name of religion continued. When Allah chose Muhammad to be His Prophet in 610 CE and began to reveal the Qur'an to him, the guidelines for peaceful coexistence and dialogue were outlined. Every dialogue, whether between individuals, communities, or religions, should reveal the beautiful way of the Prophet and the ethics of disagreement as put forth in the Qur'an and the Sunnah. These models represent the very foundation and essence of dialogue, from which may be derived a guidance that holds true today.

Guiding Principles:[3]

The following principles are part of a training technique to bring awareness and create a mindset in the community of how to behave, build relations, and discuss issues of commonality and difference in a cordial atmosphere. The following principles would help in fostering peaceful understanding and living together:

Control Over Nafs (desires, inner-self): Controlling the *nafs* is the most important requirement in intra and interfaith dialogue. *Nafs* prompt a person to look for self-interest and prestige, comfort and money, and higher status at the cost of Islamic principles. Following the dictates of *nafs* is *hawa* (desires, lust). The Qur'an has condemned in strong words the following of *hawa* (2:120). By following *hawa*, an individual is following Satan and Satan is people's worst enemy (Qur'an, 17:53; 7:22; 12:05). It is the work of Satan to present things before man in an attractive and beautiful manner.

Large Heartedness and Forbearance: The Prophet was *awsa'al-nas sadran* (the most large hearted among people). When leading a Muslim community or preaching the words of God, it is common to hear verbal abuse, harsh words, and false accusations, and even to be persecuted. Patience is extremely important on such occasions. Our Prophet stayed calm, polite, and dignified on such occasions. Muhammad never showed any resentment or anger, but bore all the hardships with patience and perseverance.

Universal in Character: A Muslim Intra and Interfaith leader must refrain from tribalistic and nationalistic tendencies. Tribalism and nationalism are the enemies of Islam and Muslims. Prophet Muhammad stood above tribalism and ethnocentricity, and that brought tremendous success to his mission of Islam. Islam does not deny the reality that people are born into their families, divided into tribes and nations. Islam never tried to eliminate tribes and nations. The presence of Turks, Persians, Indians, Malays, and many African tribes outside of the Arabs are the proof of Islam's accepting attitude toward them.

Their culture and language were protected. Their historical documents were saved and literary research in their culture was encouraged.

Raising Voice: The Qur'an prohibits raising voices in meetings and dialogue. Abu Bakr and 'Umar once raised their voices in a meeting in presence of the Prophet, the Qur'an admonished them and others:

> O you who have attained to faith! Do not raise your voices above the voice of the Prophet, and neither speak loudly to him, as you would speak loudly to one another, lest all your [good] deeds come to nought without your perceiving it. Behold, they who lower their voices in the presence of God's Apostle – it is they whose hearts God has tested [and opened] to consciousness of Himself; [and] theirs shall be forgiveness and a reward supreme. (49:2-3)

Speak Softly: When Allah asked Moses and Aaron to invite Pharaoh to Islam, He told them to use a soft and gentle form of speech: "But speak unto him in a mild manner, so that he might bethink himself or [at least] be filled with apprehension" (20:44).

Be Polite and Gentle and Avoid Harshness[4]: Prophet Muhammad was known for his politeness: "And you (stand) on an exalted standard of character" (68:4). Allah praised his politeness and gentleness: "And it was by God's grace that thou [O Prophet] didst deal gently with thy followers: for if thou hadst been harsh and hard of heart, they would indeed have broken away from thee. Pardon them, then, and pray that they be forgiven. And take counsel with them in all matters of public concern; then, when thou hast decided upon a course of action, place thy trust in God: for, verily, God loves those who place their trust in Him" (3:159).

Suppress Anger and Be Forgiving: The use of offensive words during a dialogue often results in tension. The Qur'an advises Muslims to overlook and forgive for the sake of the common human good: "Those who spend [in His way] in time of plenty and in time of hardship, and hold in check their anger, and pardon their fellow-men because God loves the doers of good" (3:134).

Do Not Speak Ill of Others or Their Religion: The Qur'an says: "But do not revile those [beings] whom they invoke instead of God, lest they revile God out of spite, and in ignorance: for, goodly indeed have We made their own doings appear unto every community. In time, [however,] unto their Sustainer they must return: and then He will make them [truly] understand all that they were doing" (6:108). Speak only about your own religion, thereby avoiding direct criticism of other people or their religions: This is essential for avoiding conflict. Dialogue cannot happen if the participants start criticizing each other, for such an approach always causes angry, defensive emotions to arise and leads to conflict.

Respect For The Holy Scriptures: The Qur'an is very respectful when it talks about the Torah and the Gospel: "Verily, it is We who bestowed from on high the Torah, wherein there was guidance and light…" (5:44). Another verse says: "And We caused Jesus, the son of Mary, to follow in the footsteps of those [earlier prophets], confirming the truth of whatever there still remained of the Torah; and We vouchsafed unto him the Gospel, wherein there was guidance and light, confirming the truth of whatever there still remained of the Torah, and as a guidance and admonition unto the God-conscious" (5:46).

Respect For All Prophets and Founders of Faith: The Qur'an asks the believers to be respectful to all prophets. When a name of a prophet is mentioned, a Muslim is required to say "peace be upon him." About Moses, the Qur'an says: "O Moses! Behold, I have raised thee above all people by virtue of the messages which I have entrusted to thee, and by virtue of My speaking [unto thee]: hold fast, therefore, unto what I have vouchsafed thee, and be among the grateful!" (7:144).

Respect For Places of Worship: The Qur'an stands for respect and preservation of places of worship. The Qur'an says: "…For, if God had not enabled people to defend themselves against one another, [all] monasteries and churches and synagogues and mosques – in [all of] which Gods name is abundantly extolled – would surely have been destroyed [ere now]. And God will most certainly succour him who succours

His cause: for, verily, God is most Powerful, Almighty" (22:40).

Patience: Patience is a great virtue for "Allah is with those who patiently persevere" is found many times in the Qur'an. Interfaith dialogue is not easy. With such a diversity of people who hold many different opinions, individuals are sure to come across those views that they dislike. Patience is very useful on such occasions.

Equal and Humane Treatment: The Qur'an stands for the equality of races and is colorblind for all people are equal in Allah's eyes. Muslims participating in interfaith dialogue should treat all people with equal respect and dignity. In other words, treat others as you would like to be treated. The prophet said that a believer should prefer for another brother/sister what he/she would prefer for himself/herself. Practicing the prophetic tradition would result in a better atmosphere.

Smile and Laugh Gently: The Prophet would smile gently and avoid laughing loudly.[5] During a dialogue, avoid a bored or indifferent expression; instead, maintain a cheerful countenance. The Prophet said: "Smiling at your brother is an act of charity"[6] and "To bring a smile to another's face is a charity."[7]

Pay Full Attention to The Person Speaking: Listening deeply, paying attention, and being alert are crucial to dialogue and good *adab*, as the following hadith illustrates: A man came to the Prophet and started talking directly to him just when he was about to lead the prayer. The Prophet listened attentively, as if he were saying something very important, until the man finished.[8]

It is also important to understand the cultural manifestations of how people pay attention to each other. For example, Muslims are taught to keep their gaze down (Qur'an 24:30) when talking to members of the opposite sex, a practice that is considered offensive in the West. For example, once a non-Muslim woman complained to an imam that Muslims would never look at her when she was talking to them. She thought they were racist because when other people talked to them they either turned their faces away or looked down. She thanked the

imam after he explained why they did this. In the West, looking directly and yet modestly at members of the opposite sex is advisable for creating better working relations. This issue could be interpreted under the category of '*urf* (cultural values), which is a component of the Shari'ah.

Be Alert in Public: Muslims participating in interfaith dialogue should not only look alert but also avoid hypocrisy by actually being alert – a difficult but necessary spiritual practice. It is hypocrisy to pretend to be listening when, in fact, your mind is wandering. Of course, outward behavior is important, but it should reflect sincerity. For instance, the Prophet disliked public yawning and so suppressed his own need to yawn and asked others to do the same, or at least to cover their mouths while yawning and suppress any sighs or other yawning noises.[9]

Give Others The Chance to Speak: Speak to the point, be brief, and seek permission to speak, for this is what the Prophet did.[10] Do not interrupt those who are talking, as doing so is disrespectful and violates the rules of polite engagement.

Be Ready to Help and Volunteer For Community Work: Volunteering to help the needy, the poor, the sick, or the old, and humanity in general are all core elements of Islam's teaching. Networking and involvement in civil society benefits Islam and allows further interaction for dialogue. "And worship God [alone], and do not ascribe divinity, in any way, to aught beside Him. And do good unto your parents, and near of kin, and unto orphans, and the needy, and the neighbor from among your own people, and the neighbor who is a stranger, and the friend by your side, and the wayfarer…"(Qur'an 4:36). This includes every sort of volunteer work, contributing time and money, and helping all segments of humanity.

Be Punctual: Punctuality is part of Islam, for all *'ibadat* (acts of worship) must be done at certain times: "And when you have finished your prayer, remember God – standing and sitting and lying down; and when you are once again secure, observe your prayers [fully]. Verily,

for all believers prayer is indeed a sacred duty linked to particular times [of day]" (4:103).

Dress Clean and Properly: The Prophet said that cleanliness and purity is half of a Muslim's faith.[11] Allah commanded the Prophet to keep his clothes clean: "O thou [in thy solitude] enfolded! Arise and warn! And thy Sustainer's greatness glorify! And thine inner self purify!" (74:1-4)

The Prophet kept himself clean and pure and asked others to do so. Once he said: "Let those who have hair take care of it."[12] He also said that cleanliness was half of faith.[13] In another hadith, he informed Muslims that the following ten behaviors are essential acts of *fitrah* (human nature): clipping the mustache, growing the beard, using the *miswak* (toothbrush), cleansing the nostrils with water, trimming the nails, washing the joints of one's hands and feet, removing hair under the armpits, and cleansing the private parts with water. According to the narrator, the tenth may be rinsing the mouth.[14]

Critical to all of the above is remembering that others may perceive each Muslim to be a representative of Islam and the Prophet's teachings. Good appearance, a positive attentive attitude, and graciousness reflect Islamic principles and attributes.

Proper etiquette and good manners are essential foundations for interfaith dialogue. Leonard Swidler (Temple University, Department of Religion) has written extensively on the principles of interfaith dialogue, which he calls "commandments." They are summarized below.[15] Note that these "commandments" do not conflict with Islamic teachings, but rather reinforce the statements found in the Qur'an and Sunnah:

1. The purpose of dialogue is to learn and increase one's understanding.
2. Participants should be engaged in dialogue within each religious community and with other religious communities. These should take place simultaneously.
3. Participants should be honest, sincere, and desire to learn and grow together with respect.

4. Do not compare our ideals with our partner's practice, but rather our ideals with the other's ideals and our practice with the other's practice.
5. Each dialogue partner has the right to define his or her own religion and beliefs. The rest can only describe what it looks like to them from the outside.
6. Participants should abandon all of their preconceptions in order to listen to others with sincerity and openness.
7. Dialogue can take place only between equals. Therefore, do not try to dominate or treat others as inferior.
8. Dialogue must take place in an atmosphere of mutual trust.
9. Participants entering into dialogue must be willing to reflect upon themselves and their own religious tradition.
10. Participants in dialogue should attempt to experience how others' traditions affect them holistically.

From a Muslim perspective, Isma'il R. al–Faruqi[16] emphasized that dialogue must protect itself from degeneration into propaganda, brainwashing, or missionary activity. Interfaith dialogue, and especially theological dialogue, must adhere to the following rules to succeed:

- No religious pronouncement is beyond criticism: Like Swidler, al–Faruqi emphasized that no person should speak with silencing authority. Divine revelation is authoritative, but not authoritarian. Humanity's understanding of revelation must be based on rational argument and logical understanding. It must not be incomprehensible, irrational, esoteric, or secret.
- Internal coherence must exist: All discourse should be intelligible, not paradoxical. Paradox is legitimate when it is not offered as a final truth. Otherwise, such a discourse would be unintelligible.
- The proper historical perspective must be maintained: Dialogue must take into consideration one's religious history and context. Past history must not be viewed as redundant, for its genuine understanding leads to a successful dialogue.
- Correspondence with reality must exist: Dialogue will be better if it takes into consideration the participants' physical, ethical, and

religious sensitivities, as well as their reality. Each person should be able to articulate his or her particular reality.

• Freedom from absolutized scriptural interpretations: All religions manifest a diversity of opinions on how to approach religious texts. The ensuing disputes and contentions have existed for centuries. A considerable degree of freedom is necessary when addressing these multiple interpretations. This freedom can ensure the greatest possible tolerance for voicing current contextual issues.

Dialogue should be carried out in areas where there is a greater possibility of success, such as ethical duties: Participants can emphasize that mutual understanding can be achieved in the areas of ethics, morality, family, and issues of social justice in the service of humanity, despite the theological differences that have emerged within and between Islam and Christianity.[17] Richard Landau lists several other points:[18]

• Use our creative imaginations and our sensitivity for persons,
• All participating religious groups are to be involved in the initial planning,
• The most difficult differences should not be tackled first; rather, deal with the commonalities first in order to build trust and mutual respect,
• When comparing ideals, learn not to win, for wanting to win defeats the purpose of dialogue, and
• Maintain the dialogue as a two-way street of communication by letting no individual or group dominate. We could add that participating in interfaith dialogue is the best way to get to know people from other religions and their traditions. However, given that interfaith dialogue is not easy, one should know a great deal about other religions before engaging in this activity. Some additional guiding norms and principles of dialogue should be kept in mind, such as:
• Practice fairness: When speaking for or about another faith, speak in a way that people of that religion can affirm as accurate.
• Express empathy: Make an honest effort to appreciate the appeal of the other religion to those who are attracted to it and to understand

its meaning and functions for them and how it makes sense to them.

- Avoid misusing scripture: No one shall attempt to use one's own religion to dismiss another religion as invalid.
- Stay open to being changed and challenged: Each participant shall stay open to all suggestions and be ready to accept a collective opinion that contradicts any participant's belief.
- Steer clear of denunciations or debates: Dialogue is not a debate, and no dialogue can occur when one sides seeks to denounce the other.
- Show reciprocity: Each side should apply the same standard to itself that it applies to others.
- Avoid preconditions: Insisting on preconditions usually defeats the purpose of dialogue.
- Be cautious of making sweeping generalizations: Broad generalizations obscure the ambiguities within religions and the differences among them.
- Face areas of disagreement with frankness: Having a thick skin and not getting too easily insulted are important disciplines in dealing with disagreement.
- Avoid the selective use of scripture, tradition, and history: A common error is to extract verses about violence from a religious text without taking the whole picture into account.
- Avoid assuming consensus: Participants should not assume that every issue can be agreed upon through consensus. Each religion has its own priorities.
- Emphasize that wisdom does not belong to any particular believer: Each religion is blessed with many wise and respected adherents; no religion has a monopoly on such people.[19]

Levels of Interfaith Dialogue

When we talk about interfaith dialogue, we generally mean dialogue among religious communities in order to understand each other's religion and build bridges toward a pluralistic and peaceful society. However, there are different levels and forms of interfaith dialogue. A clarification of terms is essential at the start: bi-lateral dialogue is a

dialogue between two religions, whereas multilateral dialogue involves three or more religions.

The level of interfaith dialogue varies according to the venue in which it occurs: on a university campus as various student activities, within a formal institution between scholars or religious leaders, or in a multi-generational cultural exchange involving a meal as a social dialogical form of interfaith peacebuilding. Examples of different levels of dialogue are theological discussion, social exchange (interfaith picnic or food event), social action, educational exchange, partnership exchanges, campus exchanges, and cultural exchanges.

It is important to determine the particular level of dialogue one is pursuing when selecting the participants and topics. By increasing the participants' awareness and sensitivity to the type of dialogue envisioned, tailoring their expectations to their level of understanding, and clarifying the reason for entering into dialogue, the dialogue planners can avoid needless confusion and disappointment and encourage a more successful result.

Who are the potential participants in such events? One has to consider this question carefully, particularly when it comes to group diversity. An engineer who is not an Islamic scholar may feel uncomfortable in a formal setting discussing theology and philosophy with Islamic, Christian, or Jewish scholars, especially if the dialogue goes beyond his or her educational background and experience. Yet one cannot be rigid when it comes to social categorizations. For example, when setting up dialogue for male and female participants, one should not assume that only men can deal with theological exchanges or that women are best suited for partnership or social activism. There may or may not be any crossover between and among the otherwise diverse members, depending on the level of dialogical activity and the participants' particular gifts.

The participant pool can be large: men only, women only, both men and women, as well as various combinations of young people, students, religious leaders, scholars, and religious people of all faiths. A positive outcome depends on their ability to function in a manner appropriate to the dialogue's level. Yet regardless of the level, one focus characterizes them all: interfaith dialogue is for mutual

understanding and peacebuilding, not for any kind of political, social, or theological debate. (Debate is another style of communication altogether).

A dialogue of religions: When people think of interfaith dialogue, they usually envision dialogues between or among lay followers of different religions. Such dialogues typically focus on organizing and promoting various interfaith activities: multi-generational religio-cultural exchanges, political demonstrations or actions centering on peace and nonviolence, discussions of global ethics, or planning meetings to organize humanitarian aid.

Or, they may take part in what might, at first sight, seem to be 'simpler' efforts, such as religio-social activities (e.g., interfaith gatherings over a meal or a "living room" dialogue including visits to each other's place of worship to get a better understanding each other's religion). The power of such activities should not be underestimated. Strangers become friends through such partnership programs. CAIR, ISNA, ICNA, MAS, the Muslim Mission, and many other Muslim organizations take such activities seriously. They sponsor and attend open houses, picnics, and other activities where sharing is seen as the necessary first step to acquiring a better understanding of other religions.

In Rochester, these gatherings, especially among members of the Abrahamic faiths, are called "spiritual journeys." The Islamic Center of Rochester (ICR) typically hosts such a journey by providing food and refreshments when non-Muslim participants come to visit and learn about Islam. On such occasions, the center makes sure the imam or a community leader with an adequate knowledge of Islam and a clear understanding of interfaith dialogue leads the discussion.

Care must be taken to help certain Muslims understand what is going on during these occasions. For example, a Muslim once shouted at an imam, asking him in a challenging manner how many visitors he had converted. The imam had to explain patiently that the goal was not conversion, but building better relations. He had to clarify that interfaith dialogue dispels the common stereotypes of Muslims and offers non-Muslims a space to reflect on Islam's goodness. This does not mean that conversion is impossible; rather, it means that

conversion is not part of the dialogue itself. If a visitor wants to learn more about Islam, providing suitable guidance would be appropriate.

Interfaith dialogue among religious leaders: Dialogue among religious leaders is growing rapidly worldwide as they look for new solutions to the increasing divisions among people as a whole and specifically between and among adherents of all religions. Depending on the leader's personal commitment, his or her participation and guidance may encourage more interfaith dialogue. The topics of the dialogue will vary, but the leaders usually focus on religious under-standing and social exchange.

Interfaith dialogue between leaders and scholars can occur formally, casually, or spontaneously depending upon the format employed. The formats may include, but are not limited to, conferences, workshops or small groups (both led by a facilitator), symposiums (a meeting of experts to discuss different opinions about a specific subject), seminars (a lecture followed by an interactive dialogue that allows participants to share experiences), and forums (a gathering to discuss common issues and concerns).

The Interfaith Forum of Rochester provides one model of interfaith dialogue among peers. Religious leaders representing their respective religions are active members. (Laypeople are not usually included in these forums). Approximately twenty-two religious groups participate. The ongoing interfaith dialogue has also created commissions, such as the Commission on Christian-Muslim Relations (CCMR) and the Commission on Jewish-Muslim Understanding (CJMU). A related group, the Muslim-Catholic Alliance (MCA), is the product of a historic agreement between the city's mosques and the Roman Catholic Diocese of Rochester.

While more details of this type of dialogue will be provided later, we should point out here how challenging it is for the Muslim community. Christian and Jewish religious officials who participate in this type of dialogue are highly educated. In the absence of qualified imams, Muslims cannot have a serious impact on such dialogue. Even if a fully qualified imam can be found to participate, there still might be a language barrier. If this is the case, then the imam's most knowledge-able (about Islam) deputy should represent the community. But above

all, this type of dialogue requires extensive preparation for a deeper exploration of interfaith understanding. Participants must be able to discuss social issues and action intelligently, be well versed in current events, and appreciate the importance of continuous networking and building relationships with the larger community. Imams, as the community's representatives, perform a great service to the Ummah by being included as equals in such non-dialogical events as press conferences, presentations, and conferences, especially those concerned with community planning, responses to current events, and crisis management.

On a far larger scale, and involving a greater diversity of participants, the National Cathedral (Washington, DC) has, over the years, hosted many interfaith activities in which Muslim religious leaders, scholars, and lay people have participated. The organizers of such events have been quite successful in integrating these participants with different platforms, thereby allowing space for both formal and casual dialogue.[20]

ISNA has made interfaith dialogue part of its mission statement and has created a leadership forum that, among other things, trains imams in interfaith work. Similarly, the Salam Institute, in collaboration with ISNA, has undertaken to organize a conference on Muslim Peace Building, Justice, and Interfaith Dialogue (see more details about the Network for Muslim Peace, Justice, and Interfaith Dialogue on the Salam Institute website).

Other Valuable Dialogues Among Religious Leaders Are Listed Below:[21]

- In the Middle East, the Clergy for Peace brings together rabbis, priests, pastors, and imams in Israel and the West Bank for common action and witness to peace and justice in the region.
- The Royal Institute for Interfaith Studies (Amman, Jordan) holds dialogues and seminars to promote better relations between the clergy and the people of the Abrahamic faiths.
- In southern India, the Council of Grace brings together Hindus,

Christians, Muslims, Sikhs, and Jains in an attempt to address situations of community conflict.

• In the Pacific region, Interfaith Search brings together representatives of the many religions in Fiji in order to find a way to overcome prejudice and to promote mutual respect and appreciation.

Interfaith Dialogue on Theology: This type of dialogue occurs among faculty members. For example, Dr. Isma'il R. al-Faruqi, a leading pioneer of interfaith dialogue, participated in such efforts during the late 1970s and early 1980s.[22] This activity has produced valuable literature on interfaith matters. Increasing interest in and commitment by numerous colleges and institutes to interfaith studies as an academic subject of study has revived dialogue in academic circles. For example, Rochester's Nazareth College recently inaugurated its Center for Interfaith Studies and Dialogue (CISD). The Salam Institute for Peace and Justice and Fuller Seminary are working together to build suitable structures. The University of Notre Dame, the Kroc Institute, and Georgetown University's Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding are all developing centers for interfaith theological dialogue.

Spiritual Dialogue: Spiritual dialogue, also called "the dialogue of religious experience," often includes a variety of participants. This more philosophical dialogue is carried out through narratives and experiences that allow people who are secure in their own religious beliefs and traditions to share their spiritual experiences (e.g., their experience of prayer or their private dialogue or experience with God). Over time, this form of dialogue is probably the most transforming for all participants, regardless of the number of people involved. Groups focused on this kind of dialogue often visit places of worship to enhance their spiritual experience. Spiritual dialogue is common all over the United States.

Other Levels of Interfaith Dialogue and Participants

Any form of dialogue should concentrate, first and foremost, on people-to-people contact and interaction characterized by deep listening and

understanding. The first step in such an undertaking is to suspend one's previous thoughts and opinions concerning the "other." In his *What the World Needs to Know about Interfaith Dialogue*, Richard Landau concentrates on this topic and urges all participants to "See others as 'people,' not just symbols or even types."[23]

To sum up: if the question of who can participate arises, the answer is, obviously, anyone who wants to. The key to successful interfaith dialogue is matching one's level of understanding with the dialogue's expectations (for example, does the participant want to be involved with community-based partnership or theological forms of dialogue). Appropriate matching of individuals and types of dialogues provides the symmetry and balance needed for successful dialogue. Additionally, since sustainable dialogue occurs over a long period of time, it is important to determine the participants' level of commitment and tailor the nature of the dialogue accordingly.

The Interfaith Alliance: An interfaith alliance is a group of religious communities that form an alliance for a common social, political, economic, or educational cause. These alliances use various forms of dialogue for different themes or issues in their effort to bring fundamental change to a particular public policy. The Interfaith Alliance, a national organization with branches all over the United States, is dedicated to such efforts.[24] The Interfaith Alliance of Rochester (TIAR) and Muslims are actively involved in its activities.

Habitat for Humanity: Muslims throughout this country are involved with non-Muslims in building homes for Habitat for Humanity. Members work together to raise funds and renovate or build new homes for the less fortunate. Rochester's Muslim community is actively involved in this program, as are Muslim organizations in Illinois, Michigan, California, and other states.

The Hospitality Network: This interfaith network provides temporary hospitality, usually for a week, to homeless families. Churches, mosques, and synagogues volunteer to host such families.

Student Communities: Student-focused dialogues are rapidly growing on American university and colleges campuses. These dialogues bring different student groups together and facilitate common activities. Muslim communities should appoint trained imams to guide Muslim students in religious affairs, counseling, and interfaith dialogue. Many Muslim student associations need such services. When interfaith dialogue takes place, it is noticed that students who are more knowledgeable about Islam and have some background in comparative religions tend to be more sensitive to other religions. Here, we find such associations are the Children of Abraham Institute (CHAI) at the University of Virginia,[25] the Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding at Georgetown University,[26] the Student Interfaith Council at the University of Utah (SIFC-U),[27] the Bunting Meyerhoff Interfaith and Community Service Center of John Hopkins University,[28] and the Interfaith Communities United for Justice and Peace (ICUJP) at the University of Southern California.[29]

Women's Interfaith Dialogue: Women's groups are very popular. In many cities, and on campuses nationwide, Muslim women form groups to engage in both theological and social dialogues. As with similar groups, all Muslim participants should have a sound knowledge of Islam and other faiths as well as a mentor or imam who can support and guide them. A good model can be found at the National Cathedral whose group also supports a gender-based initiative for women of different faiths known as the "Sacred Circle." Another initiative is Boston University's Women's Interfaith Action Group.[30]

Youth Groups: Efforts are taking place, especially among young Jews, Christians, and Muslims, to form such groups. The CISD has a yearly summer program to train young people, regardless of their religion, interested in interfaith work.[31] The NCCJ in Detroit sponsors a good program known as Abraham's Children. Based on a return to traditional family values, Abraham's Children exposes young people to interfaith dialogue.[32] Another example is the Interfaith Youth Alliance of Idaho, which describes itself as follows: Interfaith Youth Alliance is a statewide interfaith project to bring diverse young people of faith

together to: 1) connect more deeply with the parts of their own faith tradition which inspires social action; 2) learn to understand, appreciate, and respect other faith traditions; and 3) make a difference in our communities, state, and world through interfaith social action. The IYA is led by youth aged 15–25 and adult allies representing the diverse faith communities of Idaho.[33] Dialogue is not limited to the above participants. All Muslims should participate in interfaith dialogue to provide a more diversified representation of Islam to the community. This broad commitment will help remove stereotyping and misper–ceptions and build a strong, productive civil society.

Suggested Themes

As stated above, dialogue has different forms and involves a diversity of people. Naturally, its themes and topics reflect this diversity. Dialogue is about communication between and among people with all of the complexity that such an undertaking entails. Although dialogue may develop from a discussion or a debate, it nevertheless remains a unique communication that has its own definitions, guidelines, opportunities, and outcomes.

Interfaith dialogue may have different themes depending on its form as well as the participants' level of interest, understanding, and knowledge. For example, social action is a productive common theme and may include topics related to the criminal justice system, economic justice, education, environmental justice, gender equity, health and cultural issues, global peace, peace and security, race and ethnicity, and political participation.[34] Below are some suggested themes.

Faith-based Issues: Most interfaith dialogues focus on presenting the realities of one religion to people who belong to other religions. Leaders with a background in comparative religion should facilitate the presentation. Some groups use a movie or a book to inform the group about a particular religion before engaging in any discussion, and then follow that with a question and answer session, and, finally, dialogue. Such an approach has proven to be effective.

Community-based Common Concerns or Issues: These concerns could range from nuclear, environmental, or economic issues on an international or local scale to issues concerning education, governmental services, or transportation.

Social Justice and Civil Rights: Protecting and enhancing civil rights is another human and religious cause. Muslims should take an active part in all activities related to education, activism, lobbying, reforming the criminal justice system, and stopping the use of torture, racial profiling, and other forms of discrimination. CAIR is a leader in these areas.

Religion and Race: Racial equality can be a theme to which Muslims can make a particularly strong contribution by emphasizing that Islam stands for the equality of all races and forbids racism. It is important that Muslims work with both minority and majority groups to prevent discrimination in education, the workplace, and social life.

Gender Equality: This is an important theme for many non-Muslims in the West, not to mention the rest of the world, believe that Islam, as a religion, oppresses women and deprives them of their rights. This misconception must be confronted within the interfaith dialogue process. Muslim participants can emphasize that Islam stands for protecting the rights of both men and women. The Qur'an and the Sunnah presents the case for these rights in detail, emphasizing Islam's understanding of men's and women's complimentary – but equal – roles. It is also important to explain the difference between cultural customs and authentic Islamic teachings. For example, people in the West often believe that honor killing is a fundamental Islamic belief, whereas it is actually a localized cultural practice. Asserting gender equality may fall on deaf ears, however, if Muslim women are not adequately represented. Dialogue is an equal-opportunity activity and must be perceived that way by all participants.

Humanitarian Aid: Many interfaith meetings focus on providing humanitarian aid to disaster victims. Aid to the poor, the elderly, and refugees is an oft-repeated Qur'anic theme. The Qur'an instructs

Muslims to take an active part in interfaith programs that focus on providing such aid. Muslim who help out at soup kitchens, shelters, training centers, halfway houses, and health clinics fulfill the command to give charity, one of Islam's five pillars.[35] Thus, the Muslim Students Association at Middle Tennessee State University cites the following Qur'anic verses and hadiths to undergird its commitment to charitable actions: The Prophet said, "Even meeting your brother with a cheerful face is an act of charity." The Prophet also said: "Charity is a necessity for every Muslim." He was asked: "What if a person has nothing?" The Prophet replied: "He should work with his own hands for his benefit and then give something out of such earnings in charity." The Companions then asked: "What if he is not able to work?" The Prophet said: "He should help the poor and needy." The Companions further asked: "What if he cannot do even that?" The Prophet said: "He should urge others to do good." The Companions said: "What if he lacks that also?" The Prophet said: "He should check himself from doing evil. That is also an act of charity."[36]

Animal Rights and Protecting the Environment: Many dialogue groups are interested in animal rights. Unfortunately, many participants, includ-ing Muslims, assume that Islamic teachings do not support protecting animal rights and consider this subject 'light' or 'not so serious.' On the contrary, the Prophet stressed the protection and stewardship of the Earth's creatures, and the Shari'ah states that animals must be killed humanely (not wastefully) and only for food (not for sport). This prohibition does not enforce vegetarianism or the non-slaughtering of animals; rather, it simply asserts that animals, when butchered, must be treated humanely and with respect.

The Prophet made it clear that humane treatment must be extended to animals that some cultures consider unclean: The Prophet related to his Companions the story of a man who found a dog panting from thirst. The man went down into a well, filled his shoe with water, and offered it to the dog to quench its thirst. The Prophet said: "Then Allah was grateful to him and forgave him his sins." The Companions asked: "O Messenger of Allah, is there a reward for us with relation to animals?" He replied: "There is a reward with (relation to) every living

creature."[37] Many Qur'anic versus and hadiths support the idea that Islam calls for protecting the environment and preserving natural resources. Muslims are told repeatedly to conserve and protect their environment – never to abuse it. Even during war, Islam prohibits the destruction of property, natural resources, and people's livelihoods.

Schools and Education: An equal opportunity to education is the right of all people. Due to the immigration status of first-generation immigrant communities, many Muslims face major challenges when negotiating the educational systems into which they enroll their children. Thus, education becomes a pressing theme for discussion in an interfaith setting. By participating more actively in such discussions, Muslims can play a more direct role in improving the schools' conditions and their curriculum and in addressing issues that are important to young people.

Celebrating Religious Rituals and Holidays: Given that Muslims are a minority community in the West, their religious rituals can be under-represented or marginalized. As a result, interfaith dialogue becomes important as a forum for addressing how public institutions (e.g., schools) should celebrate holidays. For example, members of Rochester's interfaith dialogue group managed to get the local school districts to increase the amount of time devoted to teaching about the holidays of all religions and to minimize the display of the Christian majority's religious symbols.

Crime, Gambling, and Other Issues: Interfaith dialogue groups can be organized around these and similar themes since they are of concern to everyone regardless of religion. Muslims should be in the forefront of advocacy against drinking, gambling, and other vices.

Family and Traditions: Islam has appealing and unique family traditions. Thus, Muslims should not hesitate to have a joint seminar on family life and shared values. Due to its educational nature and relatively uncon-troversial nature, such discussion should attract many non-Muslim participants.

Extremism and fundamentalism: Found in all faiths and societies, these existing realities are good interfaith topics. It is important that people learn to distinguish between authentic teachings and those false 'Islamic' teachings used by 'Muslims' to justify acts of terrorism. The importance of this topic derives from the current level and nature of the violence sweeping Muslim countries and from the Western response to it. Interfaith groups should address these issues in ways that are relevant to current concerns. It should be made clear that terrorism troubles Muslims just as much as it does anyone else.

Forgiveness and Mercy: Discussing these concepts from an Islamic view-point may be one of the best ways for an interfaith seminar to overcome Islam's negative image. Many people in the West believe that Islam is a religion of revenge because they do not know that its core teachings are forgiveness and mercy.

The list of potential interfaith dialogue themes and issues presented here is certainly not exhaustive. Since Muslim participants should always be prepared to provide the Qur'anic or Islamic perspective, they should come to each meeting fully prepared. Participants may need to consult their imam or a religious authority on certain issues. Seeking such advice is far better than providing incorrect information which may contribute to Islam's already negative image.

Planning Interfaith Programs

To conduct successful interfaith seminars and other programs, the following elements must be taken into consideration:

Subcommittees: Once the participants have met and agreed upon certain guidelines, they will be faced with many other tasks. First, they will have to decide on what subcommittees they should form to realize the goals of their mission statement. There could be subcommittees for media outreach, education, social justice activities, helping victims of natural disasters, and protecting civil rights. These committees should

meet periodically and present their recommendations to the joint commission/interfaith dialogue group.

Planning Committees: Since an effective interfaith encounter requires a great deal of preparation, a planning committee must be formed. Its members probably will have to meet several times to determine the program's date, time, and venue. Among its tasks are the following: preparing a flyer, publicizing the event, reaching out to potentially interested groups, selecting a coordinator, preparing an evaluation form, ensuring security, and organizing the reception and other necessary items relevant to the attendees' safety and comfort.

When setting the meeting's norms and ground rules, the leadership must agree on the following principles:

1. *Avoid proselytizing*: Make sure that speakers and others follow "listen to others as you would like them to listen to you."
2. *Distribute responsibilities*: Share the responsibilities equally. Do not seek to dominate, but consult with each other.
3. *Respect each organizer's voice*: Regardless of its size, each faith community's participation should be respected as equal to any other community's. Similarly, the greater involvement of one individual should not translate into more weight being given to his or her opinion.
4. *Manage program time consistently and fairly*: Programs should begin on time. In any seminar or forum involving a presentation, each group should be given equal time. The provision of adequate time for a Q&A session is essential. Generally, one-third of the time should be reserved for this session.
5. *Recognize tension or criticism*: Complaints or criticisms from any source should be listened to and evaluated without defensiveness. Evaluations collected after the program should be critically analyzed, and worthwhile suggestions should be implemented before the next event.
6. *Conduct programs in different places*: Interfaith programs and meetings should rotate among the participants' worship sites in order to create a sense of ownership and strengthen the bond of partnership.

7. *Avoid all forms of domination*: No group should be allowed to chair the interfaith group, subcommittees, or planning committees consecutively. The rules should ensure the rotation of leadership.[38]
8. *Learn to pray together*: Meetings should begin and end with short prayers suitable for the religious groups represented. Any member could be asked to recite those prayers. If a brief prayer of blessing in the name of God is read on such occasions, Muslims should have no objections. Interfaith prayers may be given when interfaith leaders meet at a time of calamity, war, or crime. A member of each group might be asked to read prayers of peace. Muslims usually read the opening chapter of the Qur'an or Qur'an 2:63-64 on the occasion of a calamity, Qur'an 49:11-13 in the case of a civil rights violation, or simply the salaam (the prayers for peace) recited at the end of the five daily prayers.

In conclusion, any dialogue group must ensure that all parties have an equal share, equal responsibilities, and equal respect. In addition, its members must make sure that the subcommittees are working together and that the leaders are aware of what is going on at every level so that they can prevent problems before they occur. Before a dialogue group initiates any program, it should provide all members a copy of the necessary guidelines as well as sensitivity training.

Key Points of the Chapter

- Intra-faith dialogue is essential for Muslim unity and understanding, and interfaith dialogue is necessary for respectful and peaceful coexistence.
- The Qur'an and the Sunnah ask Muslims not to shout, speak harshly or ill about others, or criticize others directly. Rather, they must be polite and gentle, let others speak, listen attentively, and behave properly.
- Dr. Swidler's ten points and Dr. al-Faruqi's five points could be taken as additional guiding principles for a successful dialogue based on the guidelines of the Qur'an and the Sunnah.
- Intra-faith dialogue between Muslims is almost non-existent, or at

least certainly infrequent. Interfaith dialogue is now taking place at many levels and continues to be very successful in many areas of serving others.

• Imams in each city should create intra-faith dialogue and join local existing interfaith dialogue groups in order to serve the Muslim community better.

Discussion Questions

1. Many non–Muslims have written guidelines for interfaith dialogue. Among Muslims, Dr. al-Faruqi has written on the subject. Do you know any other Muslims who have written on interfaith guidelines and/or their scope and limitations?
2. Could you suggest Qur'anic verses or hadiths as guidelines for interfaith dialogue in addition to those given above?
3. If you think that Muslims should actively participate in interfaith dialogue, do you agree with the guidelines offered above? Can you offer additional suggestions to improve dialogue? Explain.
4. If you were to participate in a dialogue, how would you prepare for it?

THE QUR'ANIC PERSPECTIVES OF INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

SINCE its inception, Islam (through the Prophet) has interacted with non–Muslims. During the Madinan and Makkan periods, Islamic teachings guided the first Muslims in the proper ways of addressing and dealing with non–Muslims. The following pages explore some Qur'anic verses and hadiths that provide examples of such interaction. Many imams and Muslim scholars cite such verses, especially in the context of calling for peace and reconciliation among Muslims in conflict situations.[1]

Although interfaith dialogue was developed within a non–Muslim context, Islam has many similar concepts and terms, including the language for the dialogue process itself. These concepts have been drawn on since the Prophet's time for both intra–Muslim and interfaith dialogue. Research on the Qur'an reveals that it contains a deeply rooted dialogical process. By examining the list of principles mentioned in the previous chapter, we can understand the need and appreciate the method for building human and interfaith relationships.

Some Qur'anic Terms

Ta'arafu: *Ta'arafu* is defined as knowing, understanding, and building relations. An interfaith meeting could be called a *majlis li Ta'arafu* (a meeting for building understanding):

> O men! Behold, We have created you all out of a male and a female, and have

made you into nations and tribes, so that you might come to know one another. Verily, the noblest of you in the sight of God is the one who is most deeply conscious of Him. Behold, God is All-Knowing, All-Aware. (49:13)

The primary assumption of interfaith dialogue is that religious diversity and the multiplicity of spiritual paths to truth is of divine origin. The Qur'an supports this belief, declaring explicitly in the above verse that Allah, in His wisdom and with full intent, created different nations and tribes, each with its own spiritual path. But the Qur'an also asserts that Allah intended people to seek each other's acquaintance and learn from each other's differences (*li Ta'arafu*).

Ta'arafu is illustrated in the following story. Once a Muslim traveler who entered a mosque did not know how to pray. A local Muslim accused him so harshly of being ignorant in Islam that the two were on the verge of fighting. However, the offended traveler quickly found himself at home when others approached him and politely introduced themselves to him. When the offending Muslim had cooled down, he asked the newcomer for forgiveness.

Ta'arafu also helps with interreligious relations. For example, when a young non-Muslim woman married a Muslim, her parents objected because they had a very bad image of Islam. They told her she was marrying a "terrorist." *Ta'arafu* changed the whole family's mind-set. The young woman later accepted Islam, and her parents accepted her marriage.

Interfaith educational activities (e.g., seminars and lectures in world religions, social gatherings of Muslims with non-Muslims), interfaith meals, collaborative efforts on social justice programs (e.g., Habitat for Humanity), and all similar activities that lead to helping and building relations with people are displays of *Ta'arafu*. The mandate to get to know others and appreciate their uniqueness as the expression of Allah's will is dialogue's core function. It is not a concept foreign to Islam; rather, it is integral to it.

Islah: Another Qur'anic term, *islah* (bridge-building, reconciliation, restoring relations, and resolving conflicts) appears in many forms throughout the Qur'an. For example, the Qur'an often calls bridge-builders *muslihin* (a word derived from *islah*). Clearly, this term is

linked to the meaning of interfaith dialogue's quest for peaceful coexistence and good relations. Other derivatives are *sulh* (peacebuilding and conflict resolution) and *salaha* (wishing the best, bridge-building, and searching for goodness). The examples below highlight the Qur'anic emphasis on helping others toward goodness and reconciliation:

> No good comes, as a rule, out of secret confabulations – saving such as are devoted to enjoining charity, or equitable dealings, or setting things to rights between people: and unto him who does this out of a longing for God's goodly acceptance We shall in time grant a mighty reward. (4:114)

He answered:

> O my people! What do you think? If [it be true that] I am taking my stand on a clear evidence from my Sustainer, who has vouchsafed me goodly sustenance [as a gift] from Himself [how could I speak to you otherwise than I do]? And yet, I have no desire to do, out of opposition to you, what I am asking you not to do: I desire no more than to set things to rights in so far as it lies within my power; but the achievement of my aim depends on God alone. In Him have I placed my trust, and unto Him do I always turn! (11:88)

Further, the Qur'an asks people to do justice at all times:

> And unto [the people of] Madyan [We sent] their brother Shu'ayb. He said: "O my people! Worship God alone: you have no deity other than Him. Clear evidence of the truth has now come unto you from your Sustainer. Give, therefore, full measure and weight [in all your dealings], and do not deprive people of what is rightfully theirs; and do not spread corruption on earth after it has been so well ordered: [all] this is for your own good, if you would but believe." (7:85)

Interfaith dialogue is nothing more than working to bring *islah* (reconciliation and building relations). *Islah* between Muslims brings unity and prosperity; in interfaith relations, it fosters good relations and peaceful coexistence. The imam's role is to facilitate reconciliation and guidance both within Muslim communities and in their relations with other communities. For example, imams must resolve family disputes. Sometimes, even non-Muslim couples seek their intervention. *Islah* is a prophetic way and carries a serious responsibility. Difficult as it is, the

work of improving familial and communal relationships can best be performed through *islah*. Much interfaith work is actually *islah* work, whether it involves participation in habitat for humanity, mediating racial and ethnic disputes, or, most importantly, healing the rifts within the global Muslim community.

Mujadalah: This Qur'anic term describes an early historical period in interfaith relations when followers of different religions sought to convert each other. Special interfaith circles dedicated initially to logical debate escalated into hostile arguments in which two or more sides competed to prove which one was more capable of answering theological questions. Thus, *mujadalah* refers to any attempt to convert others. It was practiced, before Islam, between Christians, Jews, and others. The Qur'an reformed this practice by asking Muslims to display respect for others when engaging in such activities: "And do not argue with the followers of earlier revelation otherwise than in a most kindly manner…" (29:46). Whenever interfaith dialogue happened between Christians and Muslims or Jews and Muslims, the early Muslims showed their respect for others and, when they differed, did so with dignity and avoided harsh language.

Influenced by this historical precedent, contemporary Muslims have often used *mujadalah* interchangeably with theological debates. It should be clear from what was said above, however, that *mujadalah* is not a synonym for dialogue, for both activities have different objectives and structures. The only thing they have in common is a commitment to avoid harshness and physical force.

Ihsan: *Ihsan* comes from the root *hasan* (to do better, beautify, look one's best). The Qur'an asks Muslims who engage in interfaith dialogue to speak and act in a civilized manner, even if their partners do not: "But [since] good and evil cannot be equal, repel thou [evil] with something that is better and lo! he between whom and thyself was enmity [may then become] as though he had [always] been close [unto thee], a true friend!" (41:34)

Here is an example of how *Ihsan* may be used: Once an imam in New York answered a phone call from a man who said to him: "Leave

this country and go home, you lunatic." The imam politely asked the man to come for a cup of tea so that they could meet and talk. The man started to cool down and later apologized. *Ihsan* repairs damage and remove sickness from people's hearts. All prophets were *muhsinin* (doers of goodness). *Ihsan* is a prophetic way since those who practice it win the hearts of people.

Al-Hikmah wa al-Maw'izah al-Hasanah: The meaning of this phrase is "wisdom and goodly exhortation." "Call thou [all mankind] unto thy Sustainer's path with wisdom and goodly exhortation, and argue with them in the most kindly manner – for, behold, thy Sustainer knows best as to who strays from His path, and best knows He as to who are the right–guided" (Qur'an 16:125). In the last years of the Prophet's life at Makkah, when he and his followers were facing the severest degree of persecution, this verse was revealed. In contrast to the Bedouin way of requiting like for like, the Qur'an told the Muslims to requite the Makkans' persecution with the honey of a honeybee – in other words, by exercising wisdom and giving good advice. This approach also has a powerful effect on intra–Muslim relations, for it brings unity and prosperity to the entire community.

Ta'awun: This word indicates the Qur'anic mandate to work together for the good of God's creation. It is meant to apply to people who might otherwise be seen as enemies, as the Makkans were seen in the Prophet's time. If it is sincerely implemented, the well-being of all people is assured. *Ta'awun* is the principle underlying the current understanding of dialogue and conflict resolution. People get together in interfaith dialogue to understand one another and work together for the betterment of the community:

> O you who have attained to faith! Offend not against the symbols set up by God, nor against the sacred month [of pilgrimage], nor against the garlanded offerings, nor against those who flock to the Inviolable Temple, seeking favor with their Sustainer and His goodly acceptance; and [only] after your pilgrimage is over are you free to hunt. And never let your hatred of people who would bar you from the Inviolable House of Worship lead you into the sin of aggression: but rather help one another in furthering virtue and God-

consciousness, and do not help one another in furthering evil and enmity; and remain conscious of God: for, behold, God is severe in retribution! (5:2)

The opposite of *ta'awun*, namely, those who want to tear down the human community, is prohibited. The Prophet said: "Help your brother both when he is persecuting and when he is persecuted." The Companions, puzzled by his statement, asked him for clarification. He replied that they should help such people by preventing them from engaging in such activities.[2] Muslims who help Katrina victims with food and shelter and who work with non-Muslims in this and other service activities are acting in accord with *ta'awun*. The benefits of such behavior come from unexpected sources. For example, Houston's Muslim community and nearby areas fed and housed Katrina victims, a charitable action that was appreciated nationwide. Proof of that came when a non-Muslim sent a donation to a mosque for the earthquake victims in Pakistan and enclosed the following message: "You helped in Katrina and deserve to be helped today in your disaster."

Istabiq al-Khayrat: Literally defined as "to excel or compete in good deeds," this refers to outperforming non-Muslims when it comes to doing good works. Addressing the issue of religious diversity, Allah tells Muslims:

> And unto thee [O Prophet] have We vouchsafed this divine writ, setting forth the truth, confirming the truth of whatever there still remains of earlier revelations and determining what is true therein. Judge, then, between the followers of earlier revelation in accordance with what God has bestowed from on high, and do not follow their errant views, forsaking the truth that has come unto thee. Unto every one of you have We appointed a [different] law and way of life. And if God had so willed, He could surely have made you all one single community: but [He willed it otherwise] in order to test you by means of what He has vouchsafed unto, you. Vie, then, with one another in doing good works! Unto God you all must return; and then He will make you truly understand all that on which you were wont to differ. (5:48)

Interfaith dialogue embodies the call to *Istabiqu al-Khayrat*, and for Muslims comes the additional mandate that they should outshine non-Muslims in serving people. In other words, if non-Muslims

extend their hands in cooperation, peacebuilding, or any kind of con-structive good for the community at large, Muslims should extend their hands even farther. In fact, they should stand at the front of the line and be the leaders. The Sunnah, as always, sets the standard. When Muhammad was thirty-five years old and not yet a prophet, the Makkans were about to fight among themselves over the honor of placing the Black Stone back into its proper place in the newly rebuilt Ka'bah. To avoid a tribal war, they decided that the first person to pass through the al-Safa gate would be their mediator. Muhammad, the first to do so, very wisely helped them avert a war and achieve a peace-ful solution.[3]

This peaceful and creative arbitration illustrates how Muslims can adopt a nonviolent approach to problem solving when addressing internal and external problems.

Qur'anic Examples of Religious Reconciliation and Peaceful Coexistence

Islam recognizes the other religions that were established before the Qur'an's revelation. Before and after Islam, world religions have been at war with each other; Jews and Christians rejected each other violently. Their mutual persecution is documented in many books on Judeo-Christian history. Islam's unique contribution to civilization is its recognition of the presence of other religions and its acceptance of the need to live in peace with those religions. Al-Faruqi, confirming this fact, says:

> The respect with which Islam regards Judaism and Christianity, their founders and scriptures, is not a courtesy, but an acknowledgement of religious truth. Islam sees them in the world not as 'other views' which it has to tolerate, but as standing de jure, as truly revealed religions from God. Moreover their legitimate status is neither socio-political, not cultural, nor civilizational, but religious.[4]

The assertion of one transcendent God: Such a God, beyond gender, color, and personification, enables the establishment of a truly universal

community. The Qur'an stresses that all people are the children of Adam and Eve. All people are vicegerents of God on Earth and stand as equals with each other before Him. Islam's very ideals, based as they are on the worship of One God and the injunction to seek unity based on their common creation by that One God, move people away from the concept of a 'chosen race' and of 'gentile.' It helps them see themselves as equally respected creations of God:

> O men! Behold, We have created you all out of a male and a female, and have made you into nations and tribes, so that you might come to know one another. Verily, the noblest of you in the sight of God is the one who is most deeply conscious of Him. Behold, God is All-Knowing, All-Aware. (49:13)

Humanity's first covenant with God: Our fundamental unity was revealed at our creation. After creating Adam and Eve, God drew forth from their loins all of their children, from the first human being to the last, and called upon them to testify:

> And whenever thy Sustainer brings forth their offspring from the loins of the children of Adam, He [thus] calls upon them to bear witness about themselves: "Am I not your Sustainer?" to which they answer: "Yea, indeed, we do bear witness thereto!" [Of this We remind you,] lest you say on the Day of Resurrection, "Verily, we were unaware of this." (7:172)

This covenant obligates people to know God, know each other as one people, and build the friendly relations essential for peaceful co-existence.

Din al-Fitrah: What al-Faruqi called Ur-religion or religeo-naturalis is the process by which people recognize God as transcendent and holy and, hence, worthy of adoration. Humanity possesses this concept of *din al-fitrah*:

> And so, set thy face steadfastly towards the [one ever-true] faith, turning away from all that is false, in accordance with the natural disposition which God has instilled into man: [for,] not to allow any change to corrupt what God has thus created this is the [purpose of the one] ever-true faith; but most people know it not. (30:30)

The Prophet said about this verse: "Every child is born with this inherent nature. It is one's parents that make one a Christian, a Jew, or a Zoroastrian."[5]

Din al-Fitrah and al-Din al-Hanif: The concept of *din al-hanif* focuses the concept of *din al-fitrah*. Hanif applies to all people who adhere to and worship the one true transcendent God. The Qur'an states that Abraham and all Biblical prophets, including Muhammad, were *hanifs* whom Muhammad called his brothers. The Qur'an enjoins on humanity the ideal of the *hanifs* by asking:

> And who could be of better faith than he who surrenders his whole being unto God and is a doer of good withal, and follows the creed of Abraham, who turned away from all that is false seeing that God exalted Abraham with His love? (4:125)

> Abraham was neither a "Jew" nor a "Christian" but was one who turned away from all that is false, having surrendered himself unto God; and he was not of those who ascribe divinity to aught beside Him. (3:67)

Islam as a continuation of the Abrahamic faiths: The Qur'an says: "And lastly, We have inspired thee, [O Muhammad, with this message:] 'Follow the creed of Abraham, who turned away from all that is false, and was not of those who ascribe divinity to aught beside God.'" (16:123).

Affirming that Islam is a continuation of the Biblical message, the Qur'an says:

> In matters of faith, He has ordained for you that which He had enjoined upon Noah – and into which We gave thee [O Muhammad] insight through revelation as well as that which We had enjoined upon Abraham, and Moses, and Jesus: Steadfastly uphold the [true] faith, and do not break up your unity therein. [And even though] that [unity of faith] to which thou callest them appears oppressive to those who are wont to ascribe to other beings or forces a share in His divinity, God draws unto Himself everyone who is willing, and guides unto Himself everyone who turns unto Him. (42:13)

Ummah: The concept of Ummah (religious community) is very supportive of interfaith interaction. First, it presents humanity as a

single religious family of brothers and sisters, as the children of Adam and Eve. "And [know that] all mankind were once but one single community, and only later did they begin to hold divergent views. And had it not been for a decree – that had already gone forth from thy Sustainer, all their differences would indeed have been settled [from the outset]" (10:19).

Second, the Qur'an calls every religious community an Ummah. God sent prophets to remind humanity of its primordial pledge to obey God and live together in peace. These prophets, although coming from different parts of the world, brought people the same message. Some believed in them and others rejected them:

> And indeed, within every community have We raised up an apostle [entrusted with this message]: "Worship God, and shun the powers of evil!" And among those [past generations] were people whom God graced with His guidance, just as there was among them [many a one] who inevitably fell prey to grievous error: go, then, about the earth and behold what happened in the end to those who gave the lie to the truth! (16:36)

Ahl al-Kitab: This concept reveals and encourages the further development of special and intimate relations among Muslims, Jews, and Christians. The Qur'an uses *Ahl al-Kitab* (People of the Book) specifically for Jews and Christians. The objective is to remind not only Jews and Christians, but also Muslims, that their religious heritage is shared and that their religious roots are similar. The Qur'an addresses Prophet Muhammad:

> Say: "O followers of earlier revelation! Come unto that tenet which we and you hold in common: that we shall worship none but God, and that we shall not ascribe divinity to aught beside Him, and that we shall not take human beings for our lords beside God." And if they turn away, then say: "Bear witness that it is we who have surrendered ourselves unto Him." (3:64)

The shared heritage here is the concept of One transcendent God and the obligation to obey certain rules established by Him.

To reconcile and build good relations with Christians and Jews, the Qur'an permitted Muslims to eat their food and encouraged the Jews and Christians to eat the Muslims' food (5:5). Today, many Muslims

still eat kosher food. The hope here is that such sharing will result in friendly relations, peaceful exchanges of ideas, and mutual understanding. This hope also rests on the historical Middle Eastern tradition of respecting those who eat your food and protecting them if requested.

The Qur'an told Muslim men not to marry women who worship idols and encouraged them to marry pious *Ahl al-Kitab* women (5:5). Marriage in Arabia was a sign of bonding, alliance building, and cooperation. Prophet Muhammad married women from different tribes, as well as Jewish and Christian women, to build a network of support and protection.

Al-Ummah al-Wasatah: This phrase, defined as a "distinguished community of the middle path," posits Islam as a purified religion and the Muslim community as the model for pure monotheistic worship. Such a community honors other faiths without compromising Islam's uniqueness and authenticity.

Implicit in this "middle path" is a distinction between those religions whose differences are God-given and therefore to be respected, and those religions whose differences reflect departures from pure monotheism and are therefore subject to criticism. We recall that the Qur'an first stressed the concepts of God's unity and that all people were equal before Him. Second, it states that all prophets taught God's Oneness and, third, explains how the religious communities before Muhammad falsified the true teaching of pure monotheism (*tahrif*). For a while, the Qur'an accepted the Torah and the Gospels as true revelations while simultaneously accusing the Jewish and Christian communities of, at some point in the past, obstructing or corrupting God's revelation. It is in this context that the Qur'an becomes the purified text that restores the prophetic concept of pure monotheism. In this sense, Islam becomes the true or purified way and the Muslim community becomes the model Ummah of believing in a pure monotheism.

Using the Qur'an to Address Challenging Issues

It cannot be repeated too often that interfaith dialogue is not about compromising the participants' religious beliefs, but about understanding and respecting each other's beliefs through education. Therefore, it does not seek to create a unified belief system, but rather to accept different beliefs and create a friendly atmosphere of peaceful coexistence. Such an atmosphere cannot always be assumed, however. Sometimes Muslim participants must work hard in the early stages of dialogue to clarify Qur'anic language about which non-Muslims often have serious misunderstandings. Following are some of these misunderstood terms and some clarifications.

Kufr

The Qur'an uses this word, usually translated as disbelief, to mean different things. Its basic meaning is being ungrateful, hiding or covering the truth, rejecting the truth, and not believing in God. Other meanings can also be derived. The first meaning is clear in the following verse:

> Answered he who was illumined by revelation: "[Nay,] as for me - I shall bring it to thee ere the twinkling of thy eye ceases!" And when he saw it truly before him, he exclaimed: "This is [an outcome] of my Sustainer's bounty, to test me as to whether I am grateful or ungrateful! However, he who is grateful [to God] is but grateful for his own good; and he who is ungrateful [should know that], verily, my Sustainer is self-sufficient, most generous in giving!" (27:40)

Here *kufr* is used as the opposite of *shukr* (grateful). The meaning of *kufr* depends on the historical context of its use. Note, for example, that in the following verse it is used to describe a specific situation, when Allah asks the Jews to believe in the Qur'an:

> Believe in that which I have [now] bestowed from on high, confirming the truth already in your possession, and be not foremost among those who deny its truth; and do not barter away My messages for a trifling gain; and of Me, of Me be conscious. (2:41)

Here, *kafir* (a derivative of *kufr*) is used to warn certain Jews. It does not mean that Jews in general are not believers in God, but only those specific Jews who were rejecting Muhammad and the Qur'an at that point in time. This is also true for other verses in which *kufr* is used in reference to the Jews and Christians (e.g., 2:41 and in those verses that contain another derivative: *kafara*). This interpretation does not mean that Jews and Christians do not believe in God. The Qur'an makes it clear that the God of the Jews, Christians, and Muslims is One and same God (29:46). Elsewhere, the Qur'an says: "Whereas those who have attained to faith and do righteous deeds, and have come to believe in what has been bestowed from on high on Muhammad – for it is the truth from their Sustainer – [shall attain to God's grace:] He will efface their [past] bad deeds, and will set their hearts at rest" (47:2).

Jews and Christians are not infidels. However, the Qur'an asks them to believe in Muhammad and the Qur'an, with their belief in the Biblical prophets and the scriptures that were revealed to them. Furthermore, the Qur'an asks Christians to abandon their concept of the Trinity and adopt the true concept of God's Oneness. The Qur'an uses *kafara* (covering up, hiding the truth, or committing an act of disbelief) for calling Jesus the Son of God or for saying that Allah is one of three. The Qur'an asks Christians to reject these false concepts (5:72-73).[6]

When al-Faruqi was asked if Jews and Christians should be called infidels, he replied that this word is applied only to those who do not recognize God at all. Therefore, he said, anyone who believes in God but is not a Muslim cannot be considered an infidel. Al-Faruqi further said that no Jew or Christian may be called an infidel a priori. However, if he or she denies God, or His unity and transcendence, he or she may be called an infidel.[7]

Discussions of such questions can – and should – be peaceable. For instance, in a recent dialogue entitled "Christians and Muslims on the Trinity in Christianity and the Transcendence and Unity of God in Islam," two speakers honestly explained their beliefs to an audience of 150 Muslims and Christians, including priests and imams. Afterwards, many questions were asked in a thoughtful, searching spirit. At the end, the audience expressed its appreciation for the speakers' honesty and clarity.

Muhammad Asad's *The Message of the Qur'an* has a good discussion on *kufr* and its derivatives in reference to verses 2:6 and 74:10. He translates *kafir* as generally meaning "denying the truth," with the exception of 57:20, where the word is used for farmers covering the seeds. He feels that the common translation of *kuffar* as disbelievers and particularly infidels is generally inappropriate.

The word *kafir* (and related words, such as the abstract noun *kufr* "disbelief") as mentioned in the Qur'an can be put together in 14 different categories:

1. *Kufr al-Tawhid*: to reject the belief in the Oneness of God. The Qur'an says: "Behold, as for those who are bent on denying the truth – it is all one to them whether thou warnest them or dost not warn them: they will not believe." (2:6)

2. *Kufr al-Ni'mah*: to lack gratefulness to God or to people. The Qur'an says: "So remember Me, and I shall remember you; and be grateful unto Me, and deny Me not (*la takfurun*)." (2:152)
   [Pharaoh said to Moses]: "And yet thou didst commit that [heinous] deed of thine, and [hast thus shown that] thou art one of the ingrate! (*kafirin*)" (26:19)

3. *Kufr al-Tabarri*: to disown/clear oneself from. The Qur'an says: "Indeed, you have had a good example in Abraham and those who followed him, when they said unto their [idolatrous] people: 'Verily, we are quit of you (*kafarna bikum*) and of all that you worship instead of God'…" (60:4)

4. *Kufr al-Taghtiyah*: to hide/bury something, like planting a seed in the ground. The Qur'an says: "Its parable is that of [life-giving] rain: the herbage which it causes to grow delights the tillers of the soil (*kuffar*)." (57:20)

5. *Kufr al-'Inad*: Disbelief out of stubbornness. This applies to someone who knows the truth and admits to knowing the truth but refuses to accept it and refrains from making a declaration. The Qur'an states: [Whereupon God will command:] "Cast, cast into hell every [such] stubborn enemy of the truth." (50:24)

6. *Kufr al-Inkar*: Disbelief out of denial. This applies to someone who denies with both heart and tongue. The Qur'an states: "They

[who turn away from it] are fully aware of God's blessings, but none the less they refuse to acknowledge them [as such], since most of them are given to denying the truth." (16:83)

7. *Kufr al-Kibr*: Disbelief out of arrogance and pride. The disbelief by the devil (*iblis*) is an example of this type of *kufr*.

8. *Kufr al-Juhud*: Disbelief out of rejection. This applies to someone who acknowledges the truth in his heart, but rejects it with his tongue. This type of *kufr* is applicable to those who calls themselves Muslims but who reject any necessary and accepted norms of Islam such as salah and zakah. The Qur'an states: "[And] in their wickedness and self-exaltation they rejected them, although their minds were convinced of their truth: and behold what happened in the end to those spreaders of corruption!" (27:14)

9. *Kufr al-Nifaq*: Disbelief out of hypocrisy. This applies to someone who pretends to be a believer but conceals his disbelief. Such a person is called a *munafiq* (hypocrite). The Qur'an states: "Verily, the hypocrites shall be in the lowest depth of the fire, and thou wilt find none who could succour them." (4:145)

10. *Kufr al-Istihlal*: Disbelief out of trying to make *haram* into *halal*. This applies to someone who accepts as lawful (*halal*) that which Allah has made unlawful (*haram*) like alcohol or adultery. Only Allah has the prerogative to make things *halal* and haram and those who seek to interfere with His right are like rivals to Him and therefore fall outside the boundaries of faith.

11. *Kufr al-Kurh*: Disbelief out of detesting any of Allah's commands. The Qur'an states: "[But] as for those who are bent on denying the truth, ill fortune awaits them, since He will let all their [good] deeds go to waste: this, because they hate [the very thought of] what God has bestowed from on high and thus He causes all their deeds to come to nought!" (47:8-9)

12. *Kufr al-Istihza'*: Disbelief due to mockery and derision. The Qur'an states: "Yet, indeed, if thou wert to question them, they would surely answer, 'We were only indulging in idle talk, and were playing [with words].' Say: 'Were you, then, mocking at God and His messages and His Apostle?' Do not offer [empty] excuses! You have indeed denied the truth after [having professed]

your belief [in it] – Though We may efface the sin of some of you, We shall chastise others – seeing that they were lost in sin." (9:65-66)

13. *Kufr al-I'rad*: Disbelief due to avoidance. This applies to those who turn away and avoid the truth. The Qur'an states: "And who could be more wicked than he to whom his Sustainer's messages are conveyed and who thereupon turns away from them, forgetting all [the evil] that his hands may have wrought? Behold, over their hearts have We laid veils which prevent them from grasping the truth, and into their ears, deafness; and though thou call them onto the right path, they will never allow themselves to be guided." (18:57)

14. *Kufr al-Istibdal*: Disbelief because of trying to substitute Allah's Laws. This could take the form of: (a) rejection of Allah's law (Shari'ah) without denying it, (b) denial of Allah's law and therefore rejecting it, or (c) substituting Allah's laws with 'artificial' (i.e. non-Muslim) laws. The Qur'an states: "Now had God so willed, He could surely have made them all one single community: nonetheless, He admits unto His grace him that wills [to be admitted] whereas the evildoers shall have none to protect them and none to succour them [on Judgment Day]." (42:8) The Qur'an also says: "For, verily, God is with those who are conscious of Him and are doers of good withal!" (16:128)

The word *kufr* can also be applied to a Muslim when he is doing something wrong, but not necessarily something that would place him or her outside the state of belief in Islam. For example, a Muslim who is able to perform the Hajj but does not go, without denying the need to go, would be committing an act of *kufr* in a sense of ungratefulness to God:

> Behold, the first Temple ever set up for mankind was indeed the one at Bakkah: rich in blessing, and a [source of] guidance unto all the worlds, full of clear messages. [It is] the place whereon Abraham once stood; and whoever enters it finds inner peace. Hence, pilgrimage unto the Temple is a duty owed to God by all people who are able to undertake it. And as for those who deny the truth – verily, God does not stand in need of anything in all the worlds. (3:96-97)[8]

In reality, the Qur'an carefully distinguishes among people's allegiances to God and we can divide humanity into five religious categories, as follows:

1. *Al-Muslimun*: those who believe in One God, in all Biblical prophets, Muhammad as the seal of the prophets, all revelations, the Qur'an as God's final revelation to humanity, and the Day of Judgment (2:2–5).
2. *Al-Mulhidun*: The disbelievers in God, those who do not accept His existence. The Qur'an uses the word *Mulhid* for such people who reject His name. For example, the Qur'an says: "And God's [alone] are the attributes of perfection; invoke Him, then, by these, and stand aloof from all who distort the meaning (*Yulhidun*) of His attributes: they shall be requited for all that they were wont to do!" (7:180)
3. *Al-Munafiqun*: The hypocrites, "And there are people who say, 'We do believe in God and the Last Day,' the while they do not [really] believe…"(2:8–18). When Muhammad and his followers migrated to Madinah, such people only pretended to be Muslims. The Qur'an addresses them in almost all of the surahs (chapters) revealed in Madinah.
4. *Al-Mushrikun*: The ones who associate other people and things with God, those who worship idols. In reference to their idol worship, the Qur'an says: "Verily, God does not forgive the ascribing of divinity to aught beside Him, although He forgives any lesser sin unto whomever He wills: for he who ascribes divinity to aught beside God has indeed contrived an awesome sin" (4:48, 116).
5. *Ahl al-Kitab*: People of the Book, namely, Jews and Christians, those who believe in God but not Muhammad and the Qur'an (2:105; 3:64). This phrase is very common in the Qur'an. The word *Kufr* can be applied in one meaning or another to all people including Muslims in the light of the categories.

Wali
Non-Muslims often ask Muslims why the Qur'an seems hostile toward them. "Why," they ask, "does it warn Muslims not to take

Jews and Christians as their friends?" This supposed warning, however, is based on a misconception: it is derived from some translations where *wali* is rendered as "friend," without any explanation of its actual complexity. When people who are not familiar with Arabic read the translation, they understand 'friend' to be the only meaning and, from that mistaken assumption, claim that the Qur'an forbids Muslims to associate with Christians and Jews.

Actually, *wali* means guardian, protector, and provider. God is the believers' *wali* (guardian); for those who obey Satan, Satan is their guardian. This usage frequently occurs in the Qur'an: "Allah is the protector of those who have faith. From the depths of the darkness He will lead them forth into light. Of those who reject faith, their patrons are the evil ones (*taghut*). From light they will lead them forth into the depths of darkness" (2:257).

Even in the context of human relationships, *wali* refers to a relationship of guardianship or protection, especially in situations where it is vital to distinguish between one's true and false supporters. Consider the following verse: "O you who have attained to faith! Do not take your fathers and your brothers for allies if a denial of the truth is dearer to them than faith: for those of you who ally themselves with them — it is they, they who are evildoers!" (9:23)

This verse refers to the battle of Badr, when the Makkans attacked the Muslims on the outskirts of Madinah. Brother stood against brother, and father against son. It is in this context that the Qur'an asked for Muslim solidarity, so that they would not betray their fellow Muslims when faced with fighting against their own blood relations. According to today's political thinking, such a betrayal would be considered treason and could be punished with death or imprisonment for life. Modern states demand loyalty to the state above all personal loyalties. Yet in situations that do not conflict with loyalty to other believers, the Qur'an commands respect for personal loyalties, especially those owed to parents:

> And [God says:] "We have enjoined upon man goodness towards his parents: his mother bore him by bearing strain upon strain, and his utter dependence on her lasted two years: [hence, O man,] be grateful towards Me and towards thy parents, [and remember that] with Me is all journeys' end. [Revere thy

parents;] yet should they endeavor to make thee ascribe divinity, side by side with Me, to something which thy mind cannot accept [as divine], obey them not; but [even then] bear them company in this world's life with kindness, and follow the path of those who turn towards Me. In the end, unto Me you all must return; and thereupon I shall make you [truly] understand all that you were doing [in life]." (31:14–15)

Now we come to the verse that seems to say that Muslims must not make friends with Jews or Christians. "O you who have attained to faith! Do not take the Jews and the Christians for your allies…" (5:51). This translation is typical in its use of 'friends' for *awliya'*, the plural form of *wali*. Yet we know that *awliya'* means protectors and masters. So what is this verse actually saying? One must understand the "occasion of revelation" or the historical context in order to understand the use of *awliya'* here. This verse refers to a special situation: one of Madinah's Jewish tribes betrayed the Muslim community, which was fighting for its life against the Makkan pagans. Known as the Battle of the Ditch as well as the Alliance of the Makkan Tribes, it consisted of the following event. The tribe of Banu Qurayzah had pledged, in both a treaty and the constitution of Madinah, to help the Muslim community fight its enemies. Instead, it teamed up secretly with the Makkans during the fight. After the battle was over, the Prophet called a *shura* (a parliament meeting in the modern sense) to decide what to do about this act of disloyalty. But disloyalty breeds disloyalty, for the hypocrites backed the Banu Qurayzah. In the midst of this series of betrayals, the controversial verse cited above was revealed.[9]

Such verses do not prohibit political, economic, and social dealings with non-Muslims. In this, as in all things, the Prophet himself provides the best example. He trusted 'Abd Allah ibn al-'Urayqit, a non-Muslim, as a guide during his migration (Hijrah) from Makkah to Madinah, even though the Makkans had offered a big reward for his capture.[10] On another occasion, the Prophet selected Ibn Abi Hadrad, a non-Muslim, to spy on the Thaqafi army – a highly sensitive mission in a critical situation.[11]

Other examples of his acceptance of protection offered by non-Muslims abound. Perhaps the most famous one is his living under Abu Talib's (his non-Muslim uncle) protection until the latter's death.

During Muhammad's mission to Ta'if, he was injured and returned to Makkah with the help of the non-Muslim Mat'am ibn 'Adi and his sons. The Prophet was so grateful that he said, after Badr, that if Mat'am were alive and had asked him to release the prisoners, he would have done so.[12] In addition, he signed an agreement of cooperation with Madinah's Jewish tribes soon after his migration, concluded the treaty of Hudaybiyyah with the pagan Makkans, and accepted an alliance with the non-Muslim Banu Khuza'ah tribe. In fact, this tribe participated in the conquest of Makkah.[13]

But good relations with non-Muslims were not formed simply for the sake of expedience; rather, doing so with all people, especially with Jews and Christians, is strongly encouraged by Islam as a universal practice. Yusuf al-Qaradawi cites examples from the *sirah* of the Prophet and his Companions of how to treat non-Muslim neighbors and people in general. Some examples are:[14]

- The Prophet sent gifts to be distributed among poor Makkans despite their hostility, sent gifts to kings and accepted gifts from them, and assigned an annual charity to a Jewish family in Madinah.
- When a Christian woman named Umm al-Harith ibn Rabi'ah, died, some of the Companions attended her funeral.
- When a sheep was slaughtered in a Companion's home, he sent some of the meat to his Jewish neighbor.
- Following the Prophet's way, 'Umar ibn al-Khattab sent his non-Muslim brother a piece of garment as a gift.
- The Prophet borrowed money from non-Muslims.[15]
- He honored non-Muslims, whether alive or dead. Once, when a funeral procession was passing by, he stood up in respect. His Companions told him that it was the funeral of a Jew. The Prophet asked: "Isn't it a human soul?"[16]

The point of these examples is that the Qur'an, the hadiths, and the Sunnah stress Islam's respect for people's rights and their humanity. Everyone, from one's companion to a wayfarer, has the right to be respected, treated fairly, and protected from harm and indignity (4:36).

Will the Christians and the Jews Enter Heaven in Islam?

Another sensitive topic is whether Muslims believe that Jews and Christians will inevitably end up in hell. For example, in a recent public dialogue between Christians and Muslims, the first question was how Christians could possibly dialogue with Muslims since Muslims believe that Christians are damned. In return, the Muslim speaker asked the Christian questioner what he believed about Muslims' chances of escaping hell and asked: "Don't Christians believe that the way to heaven is through Jesus alone? We are not here to send people to heaven or hell, but to find ways of building good relations with each other and to serve the cause of suffering humanity."

Yet this question is a crucial issue in interfaith dialogue. Every religion believes that their God will place them in heaven ahead of others. Jews and Christians also believe this. No religion is ready to share the same place in heaven with another one. During an interfaith session at Rochester's Islamic Center, a Muslim and a Catholic speaker defined their religions' respective understandings of hell and heaven. In the Q&A session, someone asked the Catholic speaker if he believed that non-Catholics would go to heaven. In reply, the speaker narrated a humorous story from his own tradition saying that the Catholics had already filled the empty spaces in heaven before the others, including the Muslims and non-Catholic Christians, had even arrived at its gate! Meaning that Catholicism had had a head start in time over the others. The speaker's joke helped create a relaxed atmosphere because it suggested that none of us should be fighting over a question about which "only God knows best."

Yet at the same time, each religion's sense of exclusiveness as regards its understanding of heaven and hell gives believers the energy and the motivation to do the best they can within their own belief system. This results in what the Qur'an calls God's decision "put you to a test [and thus show] which of you is best in conduct" (67:2). This belief resembles the concept of nationalism, but without its violence, for just as each nation-state proclaims itself superior to all others, each religion seeks to outdo the others in converts and to become domi-nant, not only on Earth but in heaven. Yet the Qur'anic concept of

Istabiqu al-Khayrat (excel and compete in doing well) reveals that this competition should be in the area of doing works of peace, not of war. So while nothing is wrong with this competitive spirit, the most important thing is finding ways to live in peace with others. It is not who wins or loses, but how the game is played. Islam instructs its believers to adopt *adab*, compassion, and respect toward all those whose religions have likewise told them to strive to do good.

Interfaith dialogue does not seek to send all people to heaven; rather, its concern lies in encouraging them to avoid violence and hatred and to cultivate peace and solidarity among themselves. Interfaith dialogue says that each religion's self-asserted positive claims should be made forthrightly and without reliance on invidious comparisons. Consider the difference between the following two approaches. On the one hand, one imam mentioned during his Friday sermon that Jews and Christians are bound for hell if they do not accept Islam. On the other hand, another imam said that Islam is Allah's chosen path and that those who believe in Him, the angels, the Biblical prophets, Prophet Muhammad as seal of the prophets, all holy scriptures including the Qur'an, the Hereafter, the Resurrection, and in the Day of Judgment – He, in His mercy, will bless such people in heaven. The difference in the approach between these two imams should be clear. Which of these imams more truly represents the spirit of interfaith dialogue?

Muslims would certainly oppose and reject those who say that Muslims are bound for hell or that Islam is an evil religion; conversely, Muslims should avoid saying that Jews, Christians, Hindus, Buddhists, or others will end up in hell. Allah has gifted people with intellect; they understand what is meant by saying that God will reward Muslims. Direct criticism of other religious practices and beliefs is unhealthy in any setting, especially in a dialogical context, and may easily escalate into further animosity and even hatred. Consider what happened in a recent dialogue when an imam presented the Muslim position on the afterlife clearly, as prescribed above. At the end, a Muslim raised his voice to say that while the imam had spoken correctly, he had neglected to tell the non-Muslims present they were all bound for hell unless they accepted Islam immediately. This type of language and approach creates a hostile atmosphere and must be avoided.

Yet, Muslims are divided on the criteria for judging whether a person will go to heaven or to hell. Some assert that the criteria for entering heaven are fairly inclusive, for they consist of believing in one God and the Day of Judgment, doing good deeds, and believing in the prophets and the scriptures that were sent to guide people toward that goal. Authoritative works upholding this broad view include Abul Kalam Azad's *Tafsir Tarjuman al-Qur'an*, Rashid Rida's *Al-Manar*, Muhammad Hassan al-Tabataba'i's *Al-Mizan fi al-Tafsir al-Qur'an*, as well as certain writings influenced by Sufi writers. In his *Major Themes of the Qur'an*, Fazlur Rahman expounds upon this understanding of the criteria for entering heaven in Appendix II.[17] In his book *Qur'an: Liberation and Pluralism*,[18] Farid Esack develops Rahman's thesis, basing his conclusions on an elaborate study of the Qur'an's approach to other faiths.

But the majority of *tafasir* (exegesis of the Qur'an) in both the classical and modern periods argue for more exclusive criteria. While listing belief in God, the Day of Judgment, good deeds, all the prophets, and all the scriptures as essential, they also include belief in Muhammad as the seal of the prophets and the Qur'an as God's final and preserved message to humanity. The majority of Muslims endorse this interpretation.

The same Qur'anic verse can sometimes support both sides of the debate. Those Muslim scholars who use the inclusive position to support religious pluralism and the universality of Islamic values buttress their belief that some Jews and Christians will go to heaven on such verses as the following:

> Verily, those who have attained to faith [in this divine writ], as well as those who follow the Jewish faith, and the Christians, and the Sabians – all who believe in God and the Last Day and do righteous deeds – shall have their reward with their Sustainer; and no fear need they have, and neither shall they grieve. (2:62)

Opponents argue that such verses refer only to those Jews and Christians who were alive during the time of their respective prophets and before the appointment of Muhammad as God's final prophet. They point out that when he was asked about the fate of those who

died before his prophethood, Muhammad replied that they would be treated according to the standards of their own faith.[19] Regarding the requisite set of beliefs, the opponents argue that many other verses confirm that belief in Muhammad and the Qur'an is essential for people to enter heaven.[20]

However, in reference to interfaith dialogue, too much consideration of these questions is unproductive. After all, many Muslims do not ponder the criteria of who will enter heaven or hell too much. They say that such a judgment belongs only to Allah. As explained above, the real issue of interfaith dialogue is how one expresses oneself and builds peaceful relationships while participating in dialogue. Islam is an Earthbound religion and thus very concerned about peace on Earth. While belief in the hereafter is a very significant part of Islam, it must not be disfigured by harsh, provocative language. Rather, it should be explained gently and modestly, for the truth is that only Allah knows who will enter heaven. It is best to say that "I do not know what my fate will be in the hereafter. Allah knows best who will end up in heaven and hell." The Qur'an, describing the Day of Judgment vividly, makes clear that only Allah can make this determination:

> And [on that Day,] the trumpet [of judgment] will be sounded, and all [creatures] that are in the heavens and all that are on earth will fall down senseless, unless they be such as God wills [to exempt]. And then it will sound again – and lo! standing [before the Seat of Judgment], they will begin to see [the truth]! And the earth will shine bright with her Sustainer's light. And the record [of everyone's deeds] will be laid bare, and all the prophets will be brought forward, and all [other] witnesses; and judgment will be passed on them all in justice. And they will not be wronged, for every human being will be repaid in full for whatever [good or evil] he has done: and He is fully aware of all that they do. (39: 68-70)

Yet while it is sometimes important to adopt a more inclusive stance toward other religions, it would be a serious error to adopt this stance on all occasions. It is misleading for Muslim scholars in a dialogic context to claim that a universal set of beliefs is valid for all religions or to claim that Islam includes all religions. Such an assumption of inclusiveness denies Islam its unique message as well as the specific historical and religious traditions that distinguish Islam and make it appealing.

Of course, Muslims who believe that interfaith dialogue is forbidden assert loudly that all non–Muslims are damned. Muslim participation in interfaith dialogue calls for those on the extremes to adopt a middle way in order to avoid sharp divisions among Muslims and thereby preserve the Ummah's unity. This is particularly important for Muslim communities in the West, for they are currently experiencing difficult times. Imams and the Muslim scholars of Islam should make joint efforts to guide the community toward moderation. By easing the pressure on Muslims, this outreach will enable individuals to follow the Prophet's ways more faithfully.

Dar al-Islam

The word literally means the abode or house of Islam used as an antonym to the word *Dar al-Harb* (the abode of war). There is confusion in use of these words. To some *Dar al-Islam* refers to those countries or communities where Muslims are free to practice their religion. For others, it means a state that is administered by Muslims according to Shari'ah no matter if Muslims are in the majority or minority.

The word *Dar al-Islam* and *Dar al-Harb* are not used in the Qur'an. However, the word *Dar al–Salam* is used in the Qur'an: "Theirs shall be an abode of peace (*Dar al–Salam*) with their Sustainer; and He shall be near unto them in result of what they have been doing" (6:127). In another place the Qur'an says: "And [know that] God invites [man] unto the abode of peace, and guides him that wills [to be guided] onto a straightway" (10:25). Even so, these verses refer to the life in the here–after according to the commentators.

There are some other references in both the Qur'an and Hadith that later in history supported the theology of the terms *Dar al-Islam* and *Dar al-Harb*. For example, the Qur'an says: "Behold, those whom the angels gather in death while they are still sinning against them-selves, [the angels] will ask, "What was wrong with you?" They will answer: "We were too weak on earth." [The angels] will say: "Was, then, God's earth not wide enough for you to forsake the domain of evil?" For such, then, the goal is hell – and how evil a journey's end!" (4:97). Or this verse: "Behold, as for those who have attained to faith,

and who have forsaken the domain of evil and are striving hard, with their possessions and their lives, in God's cause, as well as those who shelter and succour [them] – these are [truly] the friends and protectors of one another. But as for those who have come to believe without having migrated [to your country] – you are in no wise responsible for their protection until such a time as they migrate [to you]. Yet, if they ask you for succour against religious persecution, it is your duty to give [them] this succour–except against a people between whom and your-selves there is a covenant: for God sees all that you do'' (8:72). Imam Shaybani of the Hanafi School of Thought refers to this verse that its application to migrate from Makkah to Madinah was abrogated in the life of the Prophet as Muslims were allowed to stay in Makkah.[21]

A close look at these terms reveals that they were coined during the political hegemony of the Khulafa' (Caliphate) period of Umayyad and Abbasid. The Muslim jurists believed that Islam had come to rule the world and had no doubt that a universal caliphate could be a reality. Seeing it as God's command, they believed that the whole world should live under Islam (*Dar al-Islam*) for peace and security. Therefore, those who resisted living under the caliphate were called as *Dar al-Harb* and were to be occupied. The people of the book were to pay *jizyah* as the Qur'an referred to it in 9:29, and the polytheist were to be converted. The Jews and Christians, however, are stated as people of the Book (*Ahl al-Kitab*) in the Qur'an, and as such, later when India was occupied by Muslims, they were not converted but were granted the status of the people of the Book.

The in–depth study of the word *Dar al-Islam* refers clearly to the political domination of Islam, ignoring those early jurists who had voiced differently. In confirmation of this claim, the case of British India is significant to study. When Muslims lost power to the British, the first reaction was emotional both politically and religiously. Shah Abdul Aziz declared India as *Dar al-Harb* in 1803. At this time, Sayyid Ahmad started a Jihad movement from the North West Frontier Province calling upon the Pushtun tribes to liberate India. Since Muslims are obligated to migrate to *Dar al-Islam* and wage Jihad against *Dar al-Harb*, some Muslims migrated from India, though most stayed including Shah Abdul Aziz. Later accepting the reality of the situation,

Muslim jurists of India debated whether India under the British was *Dar al-Harb* or *Dar al-Islam*. Looking back at the Hanafi Fiqh (jurisprudence), many came to the conclusion, including some in Deoband Seminary, that as long as there is religious freedom for Muslims, a country could be considered as *Dar al-Islam*.[22]

To understand this issue in its contemporary application, *Muslims' Place in the American Public Square* is a good book to read. In chapter one of this book, "Toward a Fiqh for Minorities: Some Reflections," Taha Jabir Al-Alwani comes to the conclusion that *Dar al-Islam* is any place where a Muslim can be in peace and security even if he/she lives in a non-Muslim majority. Al-Alwani explains that *Dar al-Harb* or *Dar al-Kufr* is where a Muslim lives under threat. Even if the majority there adheres to Islam and Islamic culture, a Muslim is obligated to migrate to a land of freedom. He quotes Al-Marwardi's view saying if a Muslim is able to practice his religion openly in a non-Muslim land, that land becomes *Dar al-Islam* by virtue of his settling there. Settling in such a country is preferable as other people would likely convert to Islam. Al-Alwani also quotes Imam al-Razi's citing of al-Shashi's opinion that according to him it would be better to call *Dar al-Harb* or *Dar al-Kufr* as *Dar al-Da'wah* and *Dar al-Islam* as *Dar al-Ijabah*. He calls non-Muslims as *Ummah al-Da'wah* and Muslims as *Ummah al-Ijabah*.[23]

Most recently, the *Dar al-'Ulum* Deoband called India under the Hindu rule as *Dar Al-Aman* (place of protection and peace). The Vice Rector of the Seminary, Mawlana Abdul Khaleque was quoted in *Hindustan Times* on February 22, 2009 saying that Muslims in India are free to practice their religion with freedom so it is *Dar Al-Aman* for all Muslims.

The political, economic and social conditions of the modern world have changed drastically. We are living, supposedly and to an extant, in a democratic world (at least this is promoted as the ideal, whether practiced everywhere is another matter) where all citizens pledge allegiance to the constitution of the country, a constitution underscored by freedom of thought, religion and property. We all live together, both Muslims and non-Muslims, in *Dar al-'Ahad* (in a covenanted world), pledging to the constitution and in return receiving security and freedom.

Dhimmi

The term *dhimmi*, from *Dhimma*, means a pledge (*al-'Ahd*), a guarantee (*Al-Daman*) and safety (*Al-Aman*). The word *dhimmi* means the pledge of protection from Allah, His Messenger and the believers for all non–Muslims living under Muslim rule. The term has nothing to do with citizenship. All people, Muslims and non–Muslims are equal citizens in Islamic State (*Al-Jinsiyyah al Islamiyyah*).[24]

Why was the term *dhimmi* adopted for non-Muslims? All through history, the group in power, usually representative of one nationality or social grouping, has violated the rights of others living in that country. In the old days big tribes would subjugate the small tribes living in the neighborhood. The practice of persecuting and humiliating subjugated groups in order for the powerful elite to dominate is not uncommon as it is a method of prolonging power and the control of economic resources. To save the non-Muslims from such fear of domination and persecution, the term *dhimmi* was adopted giving them political, religious, social and economic protection. If the rights of a *dhimmi* were violated, Muslims were fearful of the consequential wrath of God.

The term *dhimmi* was strongly rooted in Arab tradition. The Arabs practiced the custom of *Jiwar* (protection) or *dhimmah* in their political system. Once the terms were agreed upon, the stronger tribe would protect the smaller one from any aggression or persecution. This protection was a matter of honor for the stronger tribe which ensured that the *dhimmah* was effective. When the Arabs accepted Islam, then the same concept of *dhimmah* was applied to non-Muslims to assure them full protection and security. Watt says, the Christians were probably better off as *dhimmi*s under Muslim Arabs rulers then they had been under the Byzantine Greeks. The same is reiterated by Thomas Arnold in his *Preaching of Islam*.[25]

The term *dhimmi* was used to encourage respectful tolerance and freedom towards non-Muslims at a time when there was little or no tolerance. There are many Hadith encouraging this protection. There is nothing negative in this term. However, the political landscape of the world, including the Muslim world, has changed a lot. Even if an Islamic State is being established in the modern world, the word

dhimmi would be considered an inappropriate application in the modern context.[26]

Jizyah

Jizyah, the root meaning compensation, was a poll tax on *dhimmi*s living in a Muslim state. It is actually a counterpart of zakah. Like zakah on Muslims, those non-Muslims who can afford it were required to pay *jizyah* to the state. Further, unlike zakah, the amount of *jizyah* was fixed and minimal. Initially only those who could join the army were required to pay the *jizyah*. Doi explains that *jizyah* absolved the non-Muslims from paying zakah, even though they were given zakah if they were poor.[27]

The justification of *jizyah* comes from the Qur'an: "[And] fight against those who – despite having been vouchsafed revelation [aforetime] –do not [truly] believe either in God or the Last Day, and do not consider forbidden that which God and His Apostle have forbidden, and do not follow the religion of truth [which God has enjoined upon them] till they [agree to] pay the exemption tax with a willing hand, after having been humbled [in war]"(9:29). The Surah was revealed in the 9th year of Hijrah, the Prophet's migration to Madinah. Islam spread throughout Arabia and some Jews and Christians came under the Muslim rule. It was during that time that the Prophet himself implemented the concept of *jizyah* on the People of the Book and it continued during the Caliphate in Muslim history. The majority of the commentators of the Qur'an agree that it was obligatory only on those Jewish and Christian men who could serve in the armed forces, but were exempted and instead asked to pay a certain amount in return. Those who could not afford it, they were exempted. The *jizyah* was symbolic and exemptions were many.[28] Muhammad Asad translates the word *jizyah* as exemption tax. He says that non-Muslims who were allowed to join the Muslim military in later history were exempted from *jizyah*.[29]

Mufti Muhammad Shafi in his explanation to the verse says that initially it was applied to the People of the Book and then *Majus* (Fire worshippers) were also included in the Prophet's time. However, the *Mushrikun* of Makkah were not included. They were asked to accept

Islam or leave the area. According to Abu Hanifah all non-Muslims including Hindus, Buddhists and others were asked to pay *jizyah* who could afford to pay.[30]

Zakah is a pillar of Islam and cannot be absolved by any one. *Jizyah* is different. It is narrated that the Prophet said during the death of his son Ibrahim that he would have exempted all Copts from Paying *jizyah* if Ibrahim had lived as a mark of esteem for him. Ibrahim's mother was a Copt.[31] It is also reported that Banu Taghlib a non-Muslim tribe approached 'Umar, the Caliph to exempt them from *jizyah* as they felt humiliated and that they would pay zakah in return. It is said that 'Umar allowed them.[32]

As said before about *dhimmi*s, the same is true about *jizyah*. The political and economic, including taxation system, realities in the modern world have changed a lot. The changing circumstances demand a new look at the Qur'an and Sunnah in its application to Muslim relations with non-Muslims.

Peaceful Coexistence and Religious and Human Rights

Islam bases its name on its commitment to peace (*salam*), and one of God's names is *al-Salam* (the peaceful). In this way, peaceful living and coexistence are at the very center of what Islam enjoins on all Muslims. Given this reality, the Qur'an is very concerned with ending tribal, ethnic, and religious feuds and promoting peaceful coexistence. So true is this that some Muslims believe that the United Nations' Declaration of Human Rights and the United States' Bill of Rights were influenced by the Qur'an.[33] Below are some specific Qur'anic concepts that call for preserving human dignity, exercising respect, and achieving peaceful coexistence in this world.

The Right to Life: The Qur'an upholds the sanctity and absolute value of human life:

> Because of this did We ordain unto the children of Israel that if anyone slays a human being-unless it be [in punishment] for murder or for spreading corruption on earth – it shall be as though he had slain all mankind; whereas, if anyone saves a life, it shall be as though he had saved the lives of all mankind.

And, indeed, there came unto them Our apostles with all evidence of the truth: yet, behold, notwithstanding all this, many of them go on committing all manner of excesses on earth. (5:32)

Say: "Come, let me convey unto you what God has [really] forbidden to you: Do not ascribe divinity, in any way, to aught beside Him; and [do not offend against but, rather,] do good unto your parents; and do not kill your children for fear of poverty – [for] it is We who shall provide sustenance for you as well as for them; and do not commit any shameful deeds, be they open or secret; and do not take any human being's life – [the life] which God has declared to be sacred – otherwise than in [the pursuit of] justice": this has He enjoined upon you so that you might use your reason. (6:151)

The same message is found in other parts of the Qur'an.

Religious Freedom: The Qur'an upholds religious pluralism as something worthy of respect:

And [thus it is:] had thy Sustainer so willed, all those who live on earth would surely have attained to faith, all of them: dost thou, then, think that thou couldst compel people to believe? (10:99)

And unto thee [O Prophet] have We vouchsafed this divine writ, setting forth the truth, confirming the truth of whatever there still remains of earlier revelations and determining what is true therein. Judge, then, between the followers of earlier revelation in accordance with what God has bestowed from on high, and do not follow their errant views, forsaking the truth that has come unto thee. Unto every one of you have We appointed a [different] law and way of life. And if God had so willed, He could surely have made you all one single community: but [He willed it otherwise] in order to test you by means of what He has vouchsafed unto, you. Vie, then, with one another in doing good works! Unto God you all must return; and then He will make you truly understand all that on which you were wont to differ. (5:48)

And say: "The truth [has now come] from your Sustainer: let, then, him who wills, believe in it, and let him who wills, reject it." Verily, for all who sin against themselves [by rejecting Our truth] We have readied a fire whose billowing folds will encompass them from all sides; and if they beg for water, they will be given water [hot] like molten lead, which will scald their faces: how dreadful a drink, and how evil a place to rest! (18:29)

No Compulsion in Religion: The Qur'an prohibits forced conversion and any hindrance to religious freedom: "There shall be no coercion in matters of faith…" (2:256). Allah told Muhammad, who was very concerned that the Makkans accept Islam: "Yet if God had so willed, they would not have ascribed divinity to aught beside Him; hence, We have not made thee their keeper, and neither art thou responsible for their conduct" (6:107).

Respect for Other Religions and Religious Communities: The Qur'an prohibits Muslims from using abusive language about other religions: "But do not revile those [beings] whom they invoke instead of God, lest they revile God out of spite, and in ignorance: for, goodly indeed have We made their own doings appear unto every community. In time, [however,] unto their Sustainer they must return: and then He will make them [truly] understand all that they were doing" (6:108). In this verse, Ummah (religious community) and *zayyana* (alluring and attractive) are used together to show that Allah made the religious injunctions – the Shari'ah (the sacred law) and *minhaj* (the cultural values) of each community attractive and appealing to its followers. Therefore, the Qur'an asks Muslims to show respect toward other *shara'i'* and *manahij* and avoid insulting them. This type of command, which is found throughout the Qur'an, seeks to make sure that religious pluralism is respected and that each religious community's actions and beliefs are protected and appreciated.

Respect For Fair Speech About Prophets and The Founders and The Figures of Other Religions:

> Peace be upon Abraham. Thus do We reward the doers of good for he was truly one of our believing servants. (37:109-11)

> For, indeed, We vouchsafed unto Moses the divine writ and caused apostle after apostle to follow him; [70] and We vouchsafed unto Jesus, the son of Mary, all evidence of the truth, and strengthened him with holy inspiration. (2:87)

> …God sends thee the glad tiding of [the birth of] John, who shall confirm the

truth of a word from God, and [shall be] outstanding among men, and utterly chaste, and a prophet from among the righteous. (3:39)

And lo! The angels said: "O Mary! Behold, God has elected thee and made thee pure, and raised thee above all the women of the world. O Mary! Remain thou truly devout unto thy Sustainer, and prostrate thyself in worship, and bow down with those who bow down [before Him]." (3:42-43)

Lo! The angels said: "O Mary! Behold, God sends thee the glad tiding, through a word from Him, [of a son] who shall become known as the Christ Jesus, son of Mary, of great honor in this world and in the life to come, and [shall be] of those who are drawn near unto God." (3:45)

Protection and Respect For All Places of Worship:

…For, if God had not enabled people to defend themselves against one another, all] monasteries and churches and synagogues and mosques – in [all of] which Gods name is abundantly extolled – would surely have been destroyed [ere now]. And God will most certainly succour him who succours His cause: for, verily, God is most Powerful, Almighty. (22:40)

Respect for People, Irrespective of Their Religion:

Verily, as for those who have attained to faith [in this divine writ], and those who follow the Jewish faith, and the Sabians, and the Christians, and the Magians, [on the one hand,] and those who are bent on ascribing divinity to aught but God, [on the other,] verily, God will decide between them on Resurrection Day: for, behold, God is witness unto everything. (22:17)

O men! Behold, We have created you all out of a male and a female, and have made you into nations and tribes, so that you might come to know one another. Verily, the noblest of you in the sight of God is the one who is most deeply conscious of Him. Behold, God is All-Knowing, All-Aware. (49:13)

In a well-known hadith, Prophet Muhammad said: "O people, your Lord is One and your father [Adam] is one. There is no superiority for an Arab over a non-Arab or vice versa, or for a white over a black or vice versa, but only in issues of righteousness."[34]

Freedom of Speech and Association: The Qur'an uses *shura* (consultation) to discourage authoritarianism and absolutism and to encourage people to voice their dissent in a civil manner. In fact, chapter 42 is called *surah* al-*Shura* in order to highlight the significance of honoring differences of opinion, freedom of speech, and freedom of association. The Qur'an speaks very approvingly of those who worship God and are conscious of Him: "…and whose rule [in all matters of common concern] is consultation among themselves…" (42:38).

The Qur'an tells Muhammad to respect his opponents' honest opinion and to consult with them:

> And it was by God's grace that thou [O Prophet] didst deal gently with thy followers: for if thou hadst been harsh and hard of heart, they would indeed have broken away from thee. Pardon them, then, and pray that they be forgiven. And take counsel with them in all matters of public concern; then, when thou hast decided upon a course of action, place thy trust in God: for, verily, God loves those who place their trust in Him. (3:159)

This verse was revealed at the time when the hypocrites betrayed Muhammad and the Muslims just before the battle of Uhud. Muhammad, having called a *shura*, found that some of the people favored defending Madinah from within its gates. But the majority wanted to fight the attackers on open ground. Muhammad followed the majority opinion. When the 1,000 soldiers went out to face the enemy, 300 of them departed, saying that their opinion had not been respected. This betrayal came at a moment of crisis. Although the loyal Muslims suffered heavy losses during the ensuing battle, they were able to survive. Muhammad was injured, and his uncle Hamza was martyred. Even after this event, Muhammad did not banish those traitors from his *shura* meetings.[35]

Dialogue and Communication Must Take Place in a Respectful Atmosphere: The Qur'an tells people to speak civilly to each other on all occasions, especially during moments of tension or disagreement: "And do not argue with the followers of earlier revelation otherwise than in a most kindly manner" (29:46). The same message is repeated often. In general, Allah commands courtesy, even to the point of outdoing one's

neighbor in this regard: "But when you are greeted with a greeting [of peace], answer with an even better greeting, or [at least] with the like thereof. Verily, God keeps count indeed of all things" (4:86). The Prophet was "neither one who abuses others, speaks bad words, or curses others. If he wanted to admonish one of us, he would say: 'What is wrong with him? Let his forehead be dusted.'"[36] The word *turab* is used here. When a Muslim prostrates, his or her forehead picks up some dust. Perhaps when the Prophet was displeased with someone, he would say these words, which could also mean "May you submit to God."

Key Points of the Chapter

- The Qur'an uses *Ta'arafu*, *islah*, *ihsan*, *mujadalah*, *al-hikmah wa al-maw'izah al-hasanah*, *Ta'awun*, and *Istabiqu al-Khayrat*, and similar terms to promote interfaith understanding and peaceful coexistence.
- The Qur'an recognizes the existence of other religions that arose before Islam and stresses peaceful coexistence with them through such concepts as *din al-fitrah*, *al-din al-hanif*, and *Ahl al-Kitab*.
- While stressing bridge building and respectful tolerance, the Qur'an emphasizes Islam's unique position among all other religions and the Muslim community's uniqueness.
- The word *kafir* has many usages. The *Ahl al-Kitab* are believers in the sense of believing in one God. When *kafir* is applied to them, it means they deny the Qur'an and Muhammad's prophethood.
- The word *wali* means a guardian or protector; it does not simply translate into "friend." Muslims should have friendships with non–Muslims, exchange gifts with them, visit them when they are sick, and respect their non–Muslim neighbors.
- The Qur'an's concept of human rights and obligations is similar to that found in the United States' Bill of Rights and the United Nations' Charter of Human Rights.

Discussion Questions

1. Find your own Qur'anic verse that supports interfaith dialogue, as you understand it.
2. Can you think of verses that do not support interfaith dialogue?
3. What would be the most appropriate way to convey Islam's message to non–Muslims?
4. Based on your experience, what other challenges might confront Muslims who are interested in interfaith dialogue?

TREATING NON-MUSLIMS IN THE LIGHT OF THE PROPHET'S *SĪRAH* AND MUSLIM HISTORY

THE Qur'an, the hadiths, Islamic tradition, and history itself provide us with many examples of peaceful interfaith relations. Whether they were the minority or the majority community, Muslims have always reached out to other religious groups. This section explores a selected number of cases to illustrate the richness and depth of Islam's call for interfaith dialogue and peaceful relations. The Prophet's life is full of examples of tolerance and nonviolent ways of politely communicating Allah's word to the non-believers, even when Islam was in its early stages. Obviously, a brief section can only provide a few of these many examples.

First of all, it is important to emphasize the power of the Prophet's own example as a person who always favored dialogue. This power derived from his unexampled authority. The following account testifies to that authority. 'A'ishah, one of his wives, was once asked about her husband's spiritual and moral standing. She asked: "Do you not read the Qur'an?" They replied: "Yes." She then said: "The Prophet is the living Qur'an."[1] In other words, he is a perfect embodiment of the Qur'an's teachings.

The Qur'an extols the Prophet as a messenger of mercy and blessing to all in the worlds (21:107) and a lamp that spreads light (33:46). It asks people to use his way of life as their model (33:21). When 'A'ishah was asked about his moral conduct, she replied: "He was not a lecherous person nor uproarious in the market. He would not return evil for evil; rather, he would respectfully tolerate and forgive."[2] Many of his other qualities are narrated in the same hadith.

The Makkans, indifferent to or perhaps frightened by his exemplary personal qualities, persecuted him and his followers and eventually imposed a total socioeconomic boycott upon them, thereby forcing them to live in seclusion and poverty. But later, when a severe famine afflicted the Makkans and many were dying of hunger, his staunch enemy Abu Sufyan approached him, saying, "Muhammad, pray for the Makkans. They are dying." Muhammad raised his hands in prayer, and Allah sent a heavy rain, through His mercy, to end the famine.[3] From the very beginning of his mission, the Prophet did his best to maintain a peaceful coexistence with his enemies and respect their religions and beliefs. He promoted freedom of thought and free expression in preaching.[4] Thus, his life is a great model for Muslims, imams, and everyone else to follow in their efforts to develop mutual good relations among themselves and with non-Muslims. By modeling themselves upon Muhammad, Muslims become a people of forbearance, wisdom, caring, and justice. Muslims stand with suffering humanity, for justice and for the welfare of everyone, regardless of race, gender, color, and religion. This is real *da'wah* and the way of the Prophet and of all prophets. It should be the way of all Muslims as well.

Prophet Muhammad's Interactions with the Makkans

Persecution and Muhammad's response: The Makkans' persecution of the Muslims increased to the extent that the Muslims faced a total socioeconomic boycott in the form of an unjust pact designed to isolate them from all aid and comfort. The Muslims and their supporters were forced to take shelter with Abu Talib for security reasons. The pact remained in effect for three years, during which they were forced to eat leaves from trees and the skins of dead animals. The cries of starving children could be heard even from a distance. Many Muslim women and children died of hunger. In spite of such barbaric treatment, however, Muhammad never prayed for the Makkans' destruction.[5]

On another occasion during this period, Muhammad went to Ta'if, a prosperous town near Makkah, and invited its people to Islam. But contrary to his hopes and expectations, he encountered great hostility. He managed to meet with some of his relatives and their friends and

present Islam to them, but even after a few days the people's initial hostility had not decreased. So he decided to leave. As if to hasten his departure, the people of Ta'if hooted him through the alleyways, pelted him with stones, and pursued him for two or three miles. Bloody from wounds to his head, the Prophet became very weak and took shelter against the wall of a vineyard. He prayed to his Lord, telling Him what had happened and asked for His mercy upon him. In response, Allah sent angel Gabriel along with the angel of the mountains. They asked the Prophet's permission to destroy both Ta'if and Makkah. He pleaded with them not to do so, saying, "I would rather have someone from their loins who will worship Allah, the Almighty, who has no associate."[6]

After Islam had established its foothold in Madinah, 'Abd Ya'lil, the leader of Ta'if who had instigated the children to throw stones at him, came there to worship. Seeing him enter the Prophet's Mosque, the Prophet stood up to welcome him and asked him to sit at his side so that he might honor him. The Prophet said nothing about the bad treatment he had received at Ta'if. Yet when 'A'ishah later on asked the Prophet which incident had most affected him, he referred to Ta'if. This high level of forgiveness and generosity toward a former enemy and many others who made him suffer is hard to find today, even among very religious Muslims.[7]

Muhammad Prays for the Byzantines' Victory over the Persians

In the political conflict between the Byzantine and Persian empires, the young Muslim community was sympathetic to the Christian Byzantines while the pagan Makkans prayed for the Zoroastrian Persians' victory. After the Persians defeated the Byzantines, who lost Syria and Palestine, which represented most of their Middle Eastern territories, the Makkans ridiculed Muhammad and his followers: "We should get rid of you, like the Persians got rid of the Byzantines." Undeterred and undiscouraged, Muhammad prayed for the Byzantines' victory. Allah then revealed the following verses: "Defeated have been the Byzantines in the lands close-by; yet it is they who, notwithstanding this their defeat, shall be victorious within a few years: [for] with

God rests all power of decision, first and last. And on that day will the believers [too, have cause to] rejoice" (30:2-4). The revelation proved true a few years later, when the Byzantines regained control of their lost territories.

This incident shows how the Prophet always did his best to identify those faiths that were closer to Islam and then initiate better relations with them. While it is essential to build good relations with everyone, it is, of course, easier to build them with some rather than others. Muslims living in the West can take full advantage of the Prophet's methodology of building interfaith relations.

The Christian King of Ethiopia Welcomes the Muslim Refugees

This is another example of Prophet Muhammad's initiatives to build bridges with Christians. Responding to the worsening conditions in Makkah, he sought ways to lessen his followers' suffering. When the Prophet learned the negus (king) of Ethiopia was a righteous Christian, he permitted his followers to seek asylum there hoping that he would protect them.

A group of sixteen Muslims left Makkah during the night. When the pagans learned of their departure, they were very upset, for they did not want the Muslims to find a safe haven. So, they dispatched a group of young men to intercept the Muslims before they could reach Ethiopia. However, the Muslims arrived safely. Then, the Makkans sent a delegation to the negus bearing precious gifts and requested that he send these "rebels" to Makkah. They told him that these "rebels," puffed with pride in their Islam, had insulted not only the Makkans' own ancestral beliefs, but the beliefs of Christians as well.

The negus, a just man, called the Muslims to his palace and asked them to explain themselves. Ja'far ibn Abu Talib stood up to testify to his new faith. When asked to recite from the Qur'an, he recited from *surah Maryam*. The Ethiopian ruler, listening to the recitation, wept so profusely that his beard became wet. Recovering himself, he told the Makkans that this revelation, and that given to Jesus, came from the same source. Thus, he refused to hand over the Muslims and returned the Makkans' gifts. As a last resort, the Makkans told him that these

Muslims considered Jesus to be only a servant of God, not his Son, and that Muslims rejected the Trinity. When asked about this, Ja'far recited: "He (Jesus) is God's servant and Messenger; a spirit and a word from God that He bestowed on the Virgin Mary." [He said this in reference to Qur'an19:16–36]. Hearing this, the Negus said, "Even so do we believe! Blessed be you and your Master." He asked the delegation to leave and told the Muslims to live in his country with security as long as they liked.[8]

These examples show how strong interfaith relations enabled Christians and Muslims to help each other in times of need. The early Muslims grieved with the Christians for their loss to the Zoroastrians and prayed for their victory. Then, when the early Muslims needed a refuge, the Christian ruler of Ethiopia provided them with one. In general, healthy interfaith relations not only facilitate understanding, but also nurture community connections and support during crises. Many Muslims living in the West after 9/11 were glad to discover they enjoyed such support. It was no accident that they did so, for their prior commitment to interfaith dialogue had built strong bridges that served them well during their time of need.

Muhammad at Madinah

When Muhammad and his Companions migrated to Madinah, he did his best to make Madinah a model city of peaceful coexistence. This was not an easy thing to do, for he had to reconcile three distinctive and often mutually hostile groups:

- The Muslims: The Qur'an calls these Muslim migrants the *Muhajirun* (Immigrants), and those who had accepted Islam and received them, the Ansar (Supporters). Yet the Ansar tribes were each other's enemies. The Prophet had to find a way to make peace between them while settling the *Muhajirun* among them.
- The Polytheistic Tribes: The 'Aws and Khazraj were among the many idol-worshipping tribes living in and around Madinah. Some were friendly; others were very hostile to these immigrants. Muhammad had to build relations with them to bring peace to Madinah.

- The Jewish Tribes: Several Jewish tribes had migrated to Madinah, mostly from Syria following the Byzantine persecution campaigns. They had adopted Arab dress, spoke Arabic as their native language, and adopted other local customs. However, they had maintained their distinctive character by remaining true to their Jewish heritage. These tribes were rich and had a strong economic influence in Madinah. Well aware that the situation of the Muslims in Madinah was dangerously unsecure, Muhammad first established unity among them. Then, meeting with leaders of the various Jewish and polytheist tribes, he persuaded them to sign a treaty of mutual support and defense. Some of the provisions of the pact with the Jews stated:
- All Jews are one Ummah with the Muslims. The Jews shall profess their religion, and the Muslims shall profess theirs.
- The Jews shall be responsible for their expenditures, and the Muslims shall be responsible for theirs.
- If attacked by a third party, each shall come to the other's assistance.
- Each party shall consult with the other, mutual relations shall be founded on righteousness, and any wrong doing is totally excluded.
- Neither shall do any wrong doing to the prejudice of the other.
- The wronged party shall be helped.
- The Jews shall contribute to the cost of war so long as they are fighting alongside the Muslims.
- Madinah shall remain secure and inviolable for all those who sign this treaty.
- Should any disagreement arise between the signatories, Allah, the All High, and His Messenger shall settle it.
- The signatories shall boycott the Quraysh commercially and not help the tribe in any way.
- Each party shall contribute to Madinah's defense, in case of foreign aggression, in its respective area.
- This treaty shall not hinder either party from seeking lawful revenge.[9]

Abd al-Rahman Azzam, the Arab League's first secretary general and called by the New York Times as "one of the great statesmen of contemporary Islam," wrote that:

> The pact [between the Muslims and the Jews] mounted to an agreement for peaceful coexistence, a defensive alliance for cooperation against aggression that sought to protect a group of small states, each enjoying under the provisions of the pact control over its own people and freedom to preach its own religion. The signatories guaranteed to aid one another and to protect each other's beliefs against anyone who wished to bring harm upon their lands and peoples. Thus, they guaranteed freedom of belief as well as freedom of preaching to members of the Pact, despite the diversity of their beliefs.[10]

Prophet Muhammad preferred building relations with Jews because of the religious teachings that bind the two religions together. This is why the Qur'an calls Jews, as well as Christians, the "People of the Book." Among the many things the three religions have in common is their belief in the One God. While Muslims should do their best to build interfaith relations with all religious groups, interfaith relations with Jews and Christians should be given priority.

The Christian Delegation from Najran

The people of Najran, lying to the south of Makkah on the way to Yemen, were mostly Christians. One day, a delegation of sixty Najrani political and religious leaders came to Madinah to meet with Prophet Muhammad. He and his companions welcomed them and let them stay in the Prophet's Mosque. Treated as special guests, some accounts state that they were allowed to worship in the mosque. They spoke with the Prophet about Jesus being the Son of God. In return, he recited Qur'an 3:36-64. The friendly dialogue continued for a second day, as both parties presented their arguments.

Since both parties stuck to their original positions, they decided to ask God to send a curse (*mubahilah*) upon the party who was mistaken. This was a common practice between religious groups or figures in that period; in reality, it was a way for God to "decide" an argument. So, both parties decided that the leaders of both groups would come forth with their families the following morning and invoke a curse upon the other group. The Prophet came out with his daughter Fatimah, his son-in-law 'Ali, and his two grandsons al-Hasan and al-Husayn. The Najrani delegation did not appear, but rather withdrew

from this event and signed a peace treaty instead.[11] A pillar in the Prophet's Mosque where the groups gathered and talked has been known ever since as *ustana al-wafud* (the pillar of delegates). While many such memorials have been erased from the mosque, this sign still remains.

The Treaty of Hudaybiyyah

After the Battle of the Ditch, Madinah's political life finally became stable. The Arab tribes, afraid of Makkah's threats, made treaties of mutual support and cooperation with the Muslims. The following year, Muhammad wanted to perform *'umrah* (the lesser pilgrimage) in complete peace. Soon he announced his intention and asked people to join him. He told them that since there would be no fighting, every-one should keep his sword sheathed. Dressed in *ihram* (the pilgrim's garb), some 1,400 Muslims started moving toward Makkah. But when they reached Hudaybiyyah, they were told that the Makkans would not allow them to enter the city. The Prophet exhorted his people to use diplomacy to resolve the issue peacefully.

The two parties stood at extremes. The Makkans wanted to fight; Muhammad wanted to make peace. The Makkans tried to force a battle by making many hard proposals. Muhammad was ready to accept them, as long as he could see a sign of hope. The Muslims were furious when he signed a treaty they regarded as humiliating.[12] Yet this treaty is proof of Islam and the Prophet's desire for peaceful coexistence with people irrespective of their religion or cultural association. Suhayl ibn 'Amru signed it on the Makkans' behalf, and the Prophet signed it on the Muslims' behalf. Its articles are as follows:

1. There shall be no war between the parties for ten years.
2. During this period, every person belonging to the two parties shall be safe and secure, and none of them shall raise swords against the other.
3. If any Qurayshi goes to Madinah, he or she shall be returned; if any Muslim goes to Makkah, he or she shall not be sent back.
4. The tribes of Arabia shall be free to make a treaty with either party.

5. The Muslims shall return to Madinah without performing *'umrah*. Next year, they can perform 'umrah and stay in Makkah for three days.
6. They shall not come with arms, swords shall remain in their scabbards, and the scabbards shall be kept in bags.[13]

This treaty shows that the Prophet preferred peace even at the cost of annoying some of his close followers. He knew that peaceful living would allow Muslims to dialogue with non-Muslims, move about freely, and build relations with other tribes. This treaty is an excellent example of going the extra mile with others to achieve peace.

The Abbasid Period and the Promotion of Interfaith Dialogue

Although awash with blood today, Baghdad was once the seat of a great civilization. During most of the Abbasid period (750-1258), its population was ethnically and religiously diverse and freedom of thought and expression were common. In his introduction to his *Christians at the Heart of Islamic Rule*, David Thomas writes:

> Baghdad became a center of a civil society where members of different faiths mixed with confidence and freedom, intellectual and religious influences extended in all directions, and relations between scholars, professionals and many of the common populace flourished in ways that prohibit any over-simple account in which Muslims looked upon their client Zoroastrians, Jews and Christians.[14]

Thomas' account suggests that during this period, Christians felt free to debate and associate with their Muslim counterparts in public. Proof of this can be found in the following account in which a Christian leader named Bariha, along with other priests, came to see the Muslim theologian Hisham ibn al-Hakim. Hisham reports this event in one of his letters:

> While I was seated in my shop at the Karakh gate with people around me reciting the Qur'an for me, suddenly there appeared a crowd of Christians, both priests and others, about a hundred men all in black with hooded cloaks. Among them was the chief Patriarch Bariha. They stopped at my shop, and

my chair was offered to Bariha. He sat on it, and the bishop and the monks stood around leaning on their staffs, with their hooded cloaks over their heads.[15]

This incident is important, because it shows the respect that Muslims and Christians had for each other. Christians were free to move around and even to engage in polemics without fear. Even some caliphs became interested in these theological debates, for these events took place openly and equitably, without hypocrisy or arrogance, and sought only the truth. "The Christians were allowed full freedom to present their arguments and to say whatever they wanted, which they did without wishing to vex anyone in any way, as do the common people, the ignorant, and the insolent of our own religion in their discussions."[16] The authorities would name a day and invite theologians from different religions to debate certain theological issues freely. The spirit of these undertakings provides a rich field of information about how Jews, Christians, and Muslims influenced each other during the early development of theology.

When Baghdad came under Muslim rule, Muslim and Christian leaders quickly joined forces and, as a result, benefited from each other's skills and accomplishments. Christian bishops as well as leaders of others religions enjoyed the caliphs' respect. Nestorian Patriarch Timothy declared: "I enjoyed direct access to the caliph's presence."[17]

The Muslims' appreciation of Christians during the Abbasid period is seen in the prominence of such Christian scholars as Hunayn ibn Ishaq, his son Ishaq, and their colleague Qusta ibn Luqa, all of whom were known for translating ancient texts into Arabic for the benefit of the caliph and the nobles. They and countless other less famous Christian translators were given proper respect and fair remuneration for their work. Similarly, Muslim philosophers were often the pupils of Christian scholars, as in the case of al-Farabi, Yuhanna ibn Haylan, and Abu Bishr Matti ibn Yunus. Even Muslim theologians were known to consult Christians occasionally, as in the case of 'Abdullah ibn Sa'id ibn Kullab and a certain Pethion, who met in a church cloister in Baghdad's *Dar al-Rum* quarter.[18]

The first generation of Arabic-speaking Christians, like Theodore Abu Qurrah, 'Ammar al-Basri, and Habib ibn Khidmah Abu Ra'ita,

were deeply involved in the then-current circles of Islamic theology. In fact, they borrowed techniques and concepts to help them articulate their understanding of the Trinity and the Incarnation. These theologians were known for their innovative arguments, the fruit of their training with their Muslim counterparts. On the other side, many Muslim theologians studied Christianity and the Bible. In some places, however, such study resulted in mistrust and controversy, and "dialogue" assumed the form of "diatribe." Even though relations between theologians on both sides occasionally took this polemical cast, the overall interaction between them was peaceful.[19]

Throughout most of the Abbasid era, Christians enjoyed security and freedom. There were Christian physicians, financiers, and personal secretaries in the palaces of caliphs and governors. They wore the same clothes, played the same games, and enjoyed many of the same comforts that the Muslims did. Just as Muslims living in the West are increasingly becoming Western in lifestyle, even naming their children in the Western style, Christians living at the time of the Abbasids were influenced by the dominant Muslim culture. The influence extended to artistic culture. In her study of Abbasid artistry, Lucy-Anne Hunt shows how Islamic arts may have influenced the way Christians decorated their churches. There was always, as is to be expected, a minority of people who complained about the Christian influence over the caliphate; however, such complaints did not change government policy.[20]

This interaction between Christian and Muslim theologians and nobles was not limited to matters of religion. They socialized together, dined together, and exchanged gifts. It was common in Baghdad for Muslim theologians and nobles to visit Christian monasteries on Christian holy days, participate in Christian celebrations, and sit at table together. Their Christian counterparts would make similar visits to mosques on Muslim holy days. Some caliphs would even visit monasteries and socialize with the monks. Caliphs Ma'mun and al-Mutawakkil spent much time in monasteries, and Ma'mun became an admirer of the Christian liturgies performed there.[21]

David Thomas, in his *Early Muslim Polemic against Christianity* explains the exchange between the Christians and Muslims:

Christians participated in Islamic society as far as this benefited them, and they took advantage where they could get away with it. They enriched society with the intellectual heritage and talents that they brought, and ideas they could borrow and ways of thinking in which they saw advantage enriched them. There was a great deal of discussion and disputation over matters of faith, and there flourished a polemical literature in which the respective positions became set and developed in detail and sophistication.[22]

Andalusia and Interfaith Dialogue

Muslims and Jews call Andalusia (Islamic Spain) their "golden era" of mutual understanding and interfaith cooperation. Spain became part of the Muslim world at the beginning of the eighth century. Muslims soon turned it into a center of interreligious and intercultural civilization. The result was the birth of Europe's first true cosmopolitan culture. Jewish, Christian, and Muslim students studied together and became friends. The graduates of schools in Cordoba and other cities translated classical Greek and Roman works into Arabic and Spanish. For example, they translated Aristotle's work on physics and natural history into Arabic from Greek.

Andalusia developed three different literary traditions during Europe's Middle Ages. Muslim philosophers and scientists developed knowledge in medicine, optics, algebra, chemistry, and other sciences. Jewish scholars gave shape to the Talmudic tradition, and Christian Europe sent its theologians to study philosophy and sciences under Muslim and Jewish scholars in Andalusia. The eleventh century saw Ibn Rushd (Averroes) and Maimonides as towering philosophical figures searching for a solution to the seeming contradiction between religious and scientific truth.

Akbar S. Ahmed, in his *Islam Today*, quotes Washington Irving, an American diplomat and revered writer of the nineteenth century, on Andalusia:

As a consequence, their heroism was only equaled by their moderation, and in birth, for a time, they excelled the nations with whom they contended. Severed from their native homes, they loved the land given them as they supposed by Allah and strove to embellish it with everything that could

administer to the happiness of man. Laying the foundation of their power in a system of wise and equitable laws, diligently cultivating the arts and sciences, and promoting agriculture, manufactures and commerce, they gradually formed an empire unrivalled for its prosperity by any of the empires of Christendom…The cities of Arabian Spain became the resort of Christian artisans, to instruct themselves in the useful arts. The Universities of Toledo, Cordova, Seville, and Granada, were sought after by the pale student from other lands to acquaint himself with the sciences of the Arabs and the treasure lore of antiquity.[23]

Many European scholars have confirmed Andalusia's rich literature and its wider influence. People living in Africa called it the "Lost Garden of Eden," as Roger Boase observes. "This is hardly surprising," Boase says, because in Muslim Spain Arab civilization reached a level of artistic and intellectual refinement unattained elsewhere. This refinement was best expressed in poetry that since pre-Islamic times had been the art in which Arabs had always excelled. The style of this poetry could be described as Baroque and elliptical, at times even precious, because it relies on the use of striking similes, metaphors and conceits within a contemporary strict metrical system and a traditional framework of themes. The poet was a jeweler with words, seeking the means of verbal images to fix and thereby eternalize a fleeting experience of joy or sadness or aesthetic delight, seeking also to pay homage to a patron, to lampoon an enemy or to make a humorous observation.[24]

In conclusion, modern Western societies need to redefine themselves as communities of civil society. Previous periods of civility contrast strongly with the violence and scapegoating seen in modern times. Today, Western societies are faced with numerous problems, many of their own making. In their fight against external terrorism and its threat, they raise few challenges to the ways in which they themselves are undermining the very foundation of their own civil society. For example, do these societies look carefully enough at how well they are protecting the rights and freedom of their ethnic and religious minorities, especially their Muslims? Are they fulfilling their responsibility to uphold the freedom of worship and respect for religious pluralism? What will be the future of immigrants who, looking for a better life,

come to the West? Many of them now live in anxiety and fear. Can Europe's notion of humanism be sustained in the face of populations that are neither European nor white?

Akbar S. Ahmed has raised these and other questions in order to turn Western scholars' attention to the example of Andalusia so that they might redefine the concept of civil society. Around a millennia ago, Andalusia stood for a civilized society that encouraged and supported religious and ethnic pluralism and free debate. Libraries and colleges were open to all, free education was linked with incentives for excellence, public baths and parks were plentiful, poetry and architecture flourished, and above all there existed a respect for humanity and human endeavor.[25]

How did this civilization end? When King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella conquered Andalusia in early 1492, they immediately ordered the Jews to convert or leave the country. These orders were carried out by August of the same year, and thus Andalusia's Jewish culture ended. The same rule was applied to Muslims as well, with similar results. A quotation from Thomas Arnold regarding the contrasting status of Christian Arabs under Muslim rule captures, from an Islamic perspective, the message of interfaith dialogue and its necessity:

> Had attempts been made to convert the Christians by force when they first came under Mohammedan rule, it would not have been possible for Christians to have survived among them up to the times of the Abbasid caliphs. From … the toleration extended toward the Christian Arabs by the victorious Muslims of the first century of Hijrah and continued by succeeding generations, we may surely infer that those Christian tribes that embraced Islam did so of their own choice and free will. The Christian Arabs of the present day, dwelling in the midst of a Mohammedan population, are a living testimony of this toleration. The native Christians certainly preferred the rule of the Mohammedans to that of the crusaders, and when Jerusalem fell finally into the hands of the Muslims, the Christian population of Palestine seems to have welcomed their new masters and to have submitted quietly and contentedly to their rule.[26]

The Crusades and Sultan Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi (Saladin)

The Crusades, which lasted from 1095 to 1291, sought to free the Holy Land of Jerusalem from Muslims. The brutal and bloody Crusades did indeed "free" the Holy Land, but in the process they stained the streets of its cities with the blood of its Muslim, Jewish, and Christian inhabitants. This horrific oppression drove Sultan Salah al–Din al–Ayyubi to liberate Jerusalem. After he defeated the Crusaders, however, he made sure to treat them with kindness. One story tells how he postponed attack on a castle so that a planned wedding could first take place within its walls before it fell into Muslim hands. In return for this respectful consideration, the bride's mother sent food and flowers to the Muslim army surrounding the castle as its share in the wedding celebration.[27]

Although the Crusades were violent and bloody and Muslim-Christian relations worsened as a result, Muslims and Christians, having committed themselves to peaceful coexistence, did not give up their efforts. Even during these hard times, Sultan al–Nasir (1062-88), a Muslim ruler in North Africa, sent a priest from his realm to be ordained as a bishop so that the needs of the Christians in his domain would be met. Pope Gregory VII (1020-85) was greatly impressed by this act of generosity and wrote an amazed letter of thanks and appreciation.[28]

The Ottoman Period

Following the Mamluk period, the Ottoman Empire controlled large parts of the Middle East, Eastern Europe and parts of central Asia and extended its authority over many ethnic, religious, and cultural communities. The sultans' administration designed a complex system to manage and govern these different (and often conflicting) religious groups. The Ottomans continued the tradition of respectful tolerance and religious autonomy called as the Millet system in continuation to the concept of *ahl al-Dhimmah* in the Muslim tradition during the reign of Muhammad the Conqueror (1451–81) and after. The three leading non–Muslim religious communities – the Jews, the Greek Orthodox

Church, and the Armenian Church – were established as recognized *dhimmi* communities (millets).

Millet is an Ottoman term for a religious minority living in the Ottoman Empire. Originally, it comes from the Arabic word *millah* (religious community). Each millet was led by its own religious dignitary: a chief rabbi for the Jews, and a patriarch for the Greek Orthodox and Armenian communities. Each community was responsible for collecting and allocating its own taxes, making educational arrangements, and handling such internal personal status legal matters as marriage, divorce, and inheritance. In the pre-modern Middle East, identity was based largely on religion. This system functioned until the European concepts of nationalism and ethnicity filtered into the Ottoman Empire during the second half of the nineteenth century. At that time, due to the Tanzimat reforms, the term started to refer to a legally protected ethnic and religious minority group other than the ruling Sunni community. Such autonomy did not exist in the West at that time.

The Contemporary Period

In our own time, interfaith dialogue has grown and contacts between different religions have increased. The world is rapidly changing. Globalization has made it impossible for the believers of one religion to be indifferent to the believers of another. The so-called "New World Order" makes cross-religious and cross-cultural contacts practically unavoidable, for television, radio, film, books and the Internet continue to narrow the gulfs that once separated religions and cultures. It is becoming harder for any religious, ethnic, or racial group to remain unaware of the teachings and practices of other religions and cultures.

Despite the ongoing conflicts and violence, many Muslims communities and individuals live in peace and cooperation with non–Muslims. The media tend to ignore these stories and experiences and focus, instead, on violent clashes and events. Yet this indifference must not deter those who are committed to interfaith dialogue. Interfaith dialogues are perfect settings not only for nurturing positive and constructive Muslim and non-Muslim relations, but also for spreading

them abroad and allowing such relationships to be the guiding model for interaction.[29]

One such model is based on an event in the life of St. Francis of Assisi. When St. Francis arrived in Damietta (Egypt) during the Fifth Crusade, he was agonized to see the destruction caused by the Crusaders. When he met later on with Sultan al-Kamil, a local Muslim ruler, he was amazed that the sultan received him courteously and treated him well. Ricoldo de Monte Croce from the Assisi Order spent some twenty years traveling through the Middle East and wrote a very impressive account of his good relations and friendly encounters with Muslims.[30]

Soon after gaining their independence from their colonial masters, many Muslim countries sought better relations with the Christians living among them. Representatives of each country's religions met in conferences dedicated to interfaith dialogue. One such Christian-Muslim conference was held in Tripoli (Libya) on February 1-5, 1976. This event was organized in cooperation with the Libyan government and was co-sponsored by the Vatican. Christian and Muslim delegates from around the world participated and, at the end, issued a twenty-four point joint declaration. As a sign of good will, Benghazi's Catholic Church was reopened on December 8, 1977. Muslim and Christian scholars from Africa, the Middle East, and other areas were invited to the ceremony. This conference marked a great breakthrough in Muslim–Christian relations. Ministers of foreign affairs from the Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC) endorsed the declaration in their meeting in Istanbul on May 12-15, 1976.[31]

Following is a partial list of the Muslim scholars who played key roles in promoting interfaith dialogue during the twentieth century: Isma'il R. al-Faruqi, Jamal Barzinji, Iqbal J. Unus, Muhammad Abdul Raouf, Naim Akbar (the United States); Sheikh Ahmad M. Zabara (Yemen); Ali Arslan Edin and Youssef Diaa (Turkey); Mahmoud Albaji (Tunisia); Sheikh Hasan Khattab (Syria); Soulainman Aboubakr (South Africa); Othman Shahin and Husein Muhammad Karibulla (Sudan); Ali Ahmad Hasan (Somalia); Ibrahim Kazem (Qatar); Khurshid Ahmad and Zafar Ishaq Ansari (Pakistan); Ahmad Shahati (Libya), Wahid Iddin Khan and Izziddin Ibrahim (the United Arab

Emirates); Muhammad Ahmad Khalafalla and Mustafa Mahmoud (Egypt); Sibgatallah al-Mujaddidi (Afghanistan); Naquib al-Attas (Malaysia); and Jamal Badawi (Canada).

Muslim organizations and scholars throughout history have almost always supported interfaith dialogue. All major Muslim organization in the West do so as well, such as the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA), the Islamic Circle of North America (ICNA), the Muslim Mission of America (MMA), the Muslim American Society (MAS), and the Council of American and Muslim Relations (CAIR).

The twenty-first century poses new and difficult challenges for Muslims. On the one hand, many forces within the Western media are committed to labeling Muslims as terrorists and using their technical expertise to foment prejudice. On the other hand, the Muslim population is growing. Accordingly, Islam is emerging as a force in a society that has little exposure to religious diversity. The West is emerging as a region of many religions in which different ethnic and racial groups are trying to live together in peace. In response to this growing diversity, of which they themselves are a significant part, Muslims should become more proactive in urging interfaith dialogue. They should become its torchbearers, winning the hearts and minds of people as peacemakers. Imams, religious leaders, and scholars, all of them holding fast to Islamic principles of dialogue, should become leaders in building world peace. We hope that this guide will help them perceive how Islam is re-emerging on the world scene as a framework for peace, justice, and dialogue.

In the next chapter, we will present a case study of such peacebuilding from Rochester, New York, and will examine some of the efforts initiated by Muslims living in the United States to promote peaceful living and mutual understanding through interfaith dialogue.

Key Points of the Chapter

- Prophet Muhammad did all that he could to help and nurture his new community, reconcile differences among its members, and keep its trust despite the Makkans' opposition, torture, and abuse. Whenever Makkan leaders came to talk to him, he listened

attentively and respectfully and then made his point clear to them in a polite way.

- In Madinah, Prophet Muhammad functioned as the head of state. In this capacity, he built an interfaith confederation that included Jews, Christians, Muslims, and pagans. His goal was to find a way for everyone to live together in peace. He spared no effort to make agreements with neighboring tribes, even with those of Makkah, when a suitable opportunity arose.

- Muhammad always used the Islamic principles of forgiveness and mercy to reconcile differences between individuals, within families, and even between his own community and hostile tribes.

- Many Muslim rulers and imams played key roles in expanding interfaith dialogue from its origin among members of the Abrahamic faiths to the Hindus, Buddhists, and others who eventually came under Muslim rule.

- Many Muslims played key roles in promoting interfaith dialogue even during the Crusades and Western colonialism, the worst days in Muslim history. While always opposing political occupation, these Muslims never ceased to dialogue with people of other religions.

- Continuing these truly Islamic traditions, mainstream Muslim organizations in the West, as well as many Islamic organizations and political parties in the Muslim world, support interfaith and inter-religious dialogue.

Discussion Questions

1. Are you aware of any significant example of dialogue from the Prophet's life that has not been mentioned in this guide? If so, add it to your list.

2. Have you come across any significant writing during Islam's classical era on interfaith dialogue or any stories of such encounters that you think we should add as a reference?

3. In our very partial list of the many Muslim scholars who took part in interfaith dialogue during the twentieth century, did we miss any significant individuals?

4. Are you familiar with the Bible's accounts of Jews and Christians that illustrate their beliefs about pluralism?

THE ABRAHAMIC FAITHS: A CASE STUDY OF ROCHESTER'S EXPERIENCE

The Need for Dialogue

FROM the historical perspective, Muslims have influenced Western culture and civilization for over a millennia. In contrast, for many centuries, Western culture had no particular influence on the Muslim world. Rather, it benefited tremendously from the "Islamic enlightenment" in all cultural and scientific fields. Dr. Hans Koechler, in his paper entitled "Muslim-Christian Ties in Europe: Past, Present and Future," compares in detail Europe's Christian civilization to Islamic civilization during those centuries. According to him, Islamic civilization was far more refined and enlightened. The Muslims that Christians encountered during the Crusades and afterwards awakened Europe from its "dogmatic sleep" and helped Europeans take a step toward creating an enlightened, rational, and non-dogmatic worldview. Whether it came through the "Great Library of Europe" in Toledo (Andalusia) or similar institutions, Islam had a great impact on the West. In 1130, Toledo's school of translation attracted students and researchers from all over Europe. This school bore the stamp of Muslim influence.

Christian-Muslim relations worsened during the early modern period, for the Ottoman Empire and the Western powers were locked in mutual distrust. Not content with downplaying Islamic civilization's positive influence upon and contribution to European civilization, Western Europe attempted to demonize the very character of Islam.

With the advent of colonialism, Western Europe's relations with Muslims tended even further towards political domination and "cultural tutelage." The negative characterization of Islam continued with the academic discipline of "Orientalism" which has its roots in this apologetic Christian approach that made Christian doctrine superior to the supposed Islamic "heresy." Hollywood movies, as well as electronic and print media, played an increasing role in strengthening such distortions.

Today, Muslim communities in the West are frequently portrayed as a threat to the West's sociocultural cohesion. The existence of sizable Muslim communities in the region has led to increasingly hostile reactions on the part of Westerners. First, the electronic and print media have made these people aware that the number of Muslims is growing. "The churches are empty and the mosques are filled" is a catchy phrase that has often been used to sow fear and distrust. Then the tragic incident of 9/11 happened, followed by bombings in Madrid and London. All of these disasters strengthened the customary stereotyping of Islam and Muslims in popular cultural mind of the West. Furthermore, Muslim communities are suspected of being potential allies of the new "militant Islam," which is perceived as threatening the West's cultural identity.[1]

As religious and cultural minorities, Muslims in the West are experiencing hard times because of this continuous stereotyping and humiliation. Yet, in the face of these assaults, they have not been passive. Rather, they have made strong efforts and invested many of their resources into countering this demonization. Obviously, far more efforts and even greater investments are needed. This is where interfaith dialogue comes in, for this activity can play a powerful role by initiating community programs that benefit the common welfare and promote social justice and civil rights.

Thankfully, many churches oppose such anti-Muslim stereotyping. Instead, they seek to build good relations with Muslims. In their adult education classes, Christians read about Islam and other religions. Many church groups visit mosques as key parts of their study. They are fascinated and impressed when they see Muslims pray and often speak about how the Muslims' devotion to God stimulates them to be more

faithful in their own worship. Many churches include teaching about Islam and site visits to mosques within their curriculum for youth confirmation as well. Teenagers and young people display a real interest in interfaith understanding and seek to join with their Muslim counterparts in various social justice projects. At the highest organizational levels – that of church councils, Catholic and Episcopalian dioceses, and other church organizations – there is genuine interest in building bridges through dialogue with Muslims.

Yet despite these worthy efforts, opposition is also rising among some Christians. The Evangelical conservative right wing is very opposed to interfaith dialogue, especially with Muslims. According to some Evangelicals, Christians who engage in interfaith dialogue with "infidel" Muslims become "infidels" themselves. However, such fearful, judgmental tendencies occur in every faith group.

Regardless of current threats, participation in any interfaith dialogue that leads to understanding and respect for humanity is commanded by Allah. Thus once they settle down in a Christian country, Muslims have always approached their new neighbors amicably and with the intentions of living in peace and building strong interfaith relations with them. In such situations, Muslims must be ready to admit past wrongs done to Christians. They can do so, knowing that their Christian counterparts will often reciprocate.

Despite its difficulties and challenges, the period through which we are now living can be seen as an opportunity for building peaceful relationships. But we Muslims need to be careful to avail ourselves of the opportunity instead of trying to turn it into a competition. An example of misusing this opportunity occurred recently when, during a Muslim-Christian interfaith dialogue, a Muslim told the imam: "I want to convert all of them to Islam. Allow me to speak." However, as indicated above, interfaith dialogue does not consist of preaching, debating, or converting, but of building relations for peaceful coexistence.

Meeting Muslims and including them in the family of races and religions with equal rights and obligations for all is a new experience for many members of the West's white Christian majority. As a result of such insecurity, and combined with the fear generated by 9/11,

bigotry and xenophobia have increased. Despite this negative reaction, such religious groups as the Catholic Church and many Protestant denominations courageously demonstrate their readiness for dialogue and peaceful coexistence. They persist even at the cost of losing many members to right-wing Christian congregations.

Regardless of the difficulties, interfaith dialogue, as discussed in chapter II must be handled fairly, justly, and with respect for all. Thus, when Muslim representatives persuade their Christian counterparts to have joint public seminars and programs on understanding Islam, they must be careful not to give even the appearance of attempting to preach to their audiences. Such an impression will destroy the dialogue. These seminars should address both Christian and Muslims beliefs and provide a comparative view of each, without attempting to judge between the two. Two speakers well versed in dialogue, one from each faith, should be chosen. If possible, they should meet beforehand so they can get to know each other and decide on a coherent approach. If the Christian partner suggests a seminar on Islam only, then perhaps only the Muslim speaker will be needed. If Muslims attempt to initiate a seminar on Islam, some resistance might occur. In some cases, Christian partners have complained about what they see as the Muslims' overly assertive attitude. Some have even left the dialogue under that impression.

Jewish-Muslim Dialogue

Muslims and Jews enjoyed a remarkable cultural renaissance in Andalusia from the tenth to the twelfth centuries. Hasdai ibn Shaprut served in the court of Caliph 'Abd al-Rahman III of Cordova. With Hasdai's encouragement, Jewish poets and scholars flocked to Andalusia from all over the world and launched a new era that was to become known in Jewish history as the "Golden Age of Andalusia."

Jews under the Ottomans lived in peace and prosperity. For the past seven hundred years, since the conquest of Bursa in 1326 and warm welcome to the Sephardic Jews when they were expelled from Spain till today in modern Turkey, the Jewish community has lived along with Muslims in peace and security. When Istanbul came under the

rule of the Ottomans in 1453, Sultan Mehmet II appointed Moshe Kapsali as the chief Rabbi of Istanbul so the Jewish community could live in peace practicing their faith with dignity. During World War II, Turkey remained and served as a safe passage for Jews fleeing from the horrors of Nazism. In the Jewish Museum of Istanbul, there are documents and evidence of how the two communities have lived in peace since the Ottoman period.[2]

Yet today, there is a great gap of misunderstanding between Muslim and Jewish communities. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has created distrust and hard feelings, and dialogue has suffered as a result. However, many Reform and even Conservative rabbis are willing to dialogue with Muslims. Muslims must encourage this open-mindedness, especially in the wake of 9/11 for several reasons. First, by seeking to dialogue with the Jewish community, Muslims send a strong message that they do not hesitate to build relations even with those with whom they sharply differ. Second, building coalitions with Jewish community leaders may result in certain political benefits. However, this reason should not be perceived as opportunistic because, given existing realities in the West, it is both pragmatic and realistic. Third, since Jews are members of the Abrahamic religious community, Muslims have a religious duty to reach out to them. Fourth, the rich historical tradition of strong and fruitful Jewish-Muslim relations must not be forgotten. Both groups' closeness in beliefs about God and in many religious practices provides additional grounds for dialogue. Fifth, Muslims recognize the Biblical prophets as prophets of Islam. Understanding the similarities and differences between their portrayal in the Old Testament and the Qur'an could be a good topic for a successful dialogue, one that could well lead to a deeper understanding of Judaism and Islam. Sixth, Muslims and Jews share the experience of living as minorities in the West. Not so long ago, the Jews experienced catastrophic persecution at the hands of Europe's Christian majority. They have experienced fewer such evils in the United States, yet they still face discrimination. In the wake of 9/11, Muslims are going through increasing discrimination. The two communities could use dialogue to talk with each other about dealing with discrimination successfully.

But beyond what they can gain even from such dialogues, Muslims and Jews have a role to play together in building a more peaceful world. A successful dialogue between the two communities and better relations could eventually contribute to the peaceful resolution of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. Such a vision is not as impossible as it might seem. Consider the late Rabbi Judea Miller of Rochester's Temple B'rith Kodesh. An active member of the city's Interfaith Forum, Rabbi Miller was very interested in building bridges and better relations between both communities. Accordingly, the Reform Jewish Community of Temple B'rith Kodesh and the Islamic Center joined hands to promote many activities, especially during the Bosnia crisis. One of these activities stands out: a joint fundraising dinner for Bosnian victims of war held at the synagogue in 1993. Many people attended, including state and federal government representatives. For the first time in a Rochester synagogue, the *adhan* (call for worship) was made and the Muslims prayed in congregation. This was indeed a historic occasion.

Rabbi Miller, a recognized leader of the Reform Jewish commun-ity, expended a great deal of time and effort to build good relations. He was also a humble, spontaneous man. Sometimes he would come to the Islamic Center without calling ahead if he had a new idea to share. On one occasion, he called Imam Shafiq's home from the airport to express sadness over the incident in which an American-born Jewish man had opened fire on Muslims during the congregational prayer in a Hebron mosque. He asked the imam to call a joint press conference for the next morning to condemn the incident. The center was packed with media personnel as well as community leaders on both sides of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. During the press conference, Rabbi Miller called the attacker an impostor, a betrayer of the Jewish faith. He asked Tel Aviv and the Jewish people to make amends for the betrayal.

Current Challenges Among Muslim Interfaith Participants

Interfaith dialogue is a new experience for many Muslims. Some Muslims are knowledgeable about Islam but very rigid in their approach; others are very interested in dialogue but have little

knowledge of Islam. Thus, Muslim participants need extensive training before they can play an effective role in a dialogue designed to improve their overall image and increase the non-Muslim participants' understanding of Islam.

In general, any Muslim dialogue with Christians and Jews has several major challenges. The first challenge is one of numbers. The Muslim representatives are always fewer in number than the non-Muslims. There are several explanations for this: the organizers often find it difficult to get the Muslim Community involved, Muslims come from cultures in which such dialogue is unknown or discouraged, or in which opportunities for public participation in such events are limited. Indeed, many Muslims in the West are struggling for basic economic survival, and religious leaders in the community tend to prefer intra-community activities.

The second challenge relates to dialogue itself. Muslim participants often have an incomplete understanding of the relevant principles and guidelines. This might be explained by the fact that few, if any, formal Islamic educational systems offer a curriculum that includes the Islamic approach to interfaith dialogue. In part, socioeconomic necessity and a scarcity of resources account for this gap. In addition, most Islamic educational institutions emphasize the apologetic (defensive or offensive) approach in dealing with other religions. In both cases, the goal is to win the argument and prove Islam's superiority. The unfortunate result is that many Muslims know very little, if anything, about Islam's rich sources and history of interfaith dialogue. It should be noted, however, that this situation is not exclusive to Muslims and their educational systems. Christian and Jewish systems suffer from the same apologetic approach to knowing the "other." As a result, their followers also arrive at a dialogue ready not to learn, share, and build better relations, but to prove the superiority of their own religion.

The third challenge results from the unwillingness of the community's religious leadership to lead the way in dialogue. Imams and experts in Islam rarely participate in interfaith meetings. One of the first steps in encouraging them to do so is to overcome some of their internal challenges through intra-Muslim dialogue, better training for imams, and community outreach. As mentioned earlier, the participation of these people would better serve the cause of Islam.

The fourth challenge arises from asymmetry. Most interfaith groups are initiated, designed, and funded by non-Muslim leaders and institutions. As a result, Muslim participation tends to become symbolic and the Muslim contingent finds itself unable to make any substantive contribution. In fact, in many cases Muslim representation is added after the entire program has been fully developed. Such token participation damages the potential effect that interfaith dialogue can have on the well-being of all the communities involved. A symmetric contribution and ownership of the dialogue process is required for a successful and effective program.

The fifth challenge stems from the fact that Muslim communities often lack professional trainers and facilitators for interfaith dialogue. Thus, the program leader or facilitator is often a non-Muslim who is not rooted in the Islamic tradition. This weakness reduces the program's coherence and appeal to Muslims. When a capable Muslim facilitator is available, the community will view the interfaith dialogue groups with more credibility.

The overemphasis on concrete results constitutes a sixth challenge. The lack of such results can discourage Muslim participation. Due to the difficult economic and political situations of many Muslims, they tend to be interested in concrete behavioral and structural changes in the system. Thus, some of them view an interfaith dialogue that focuses only on exploring beliefs as a waste of time. Accordingly, those who participate in such events should always emphasize specific agendas and concrete outcomes in order to overcome such suspicion and hesitation. In addition, they should always ask how their community would benefit from the proposed dialogue process.

The Abrahamic Faiths: Contemporary Examples of Interfaith Dialogue

Once educated in the basic principles of interfaith dialogue, imams and other Muslim community leaders need to ensure successful interfaith meetings and intra-Muslim dialogue events by creating a dialogue group with a clear mission statement, establishing planning committees, and selecting and implementing appropriate program models.

Documents and mission statements: Many churches are eager to participate in interfaith dialogue. There could be two levels of dialogue: formal and institutional dialogue (namely, with such groups as the local Catholic or Episcopal diocese, the local council of churches, or similar organizations) and community dialogue with local churches. Muslims can begin the process by inviting the target group to lunch or dinner or perhaps visiting the target group at its place of worship or another setting of its own choosing. At the start of a formal dialogue, a statement of purpose and by-laws will need to be drawn up. This kind of dialogue must be conducted carefully and with due consideration for procedures, details, and goals.

Setting goals is very important. Rochester's successful interfaith efforts are due, in part, to its careful selection of goals. Most of its programs are limited to enhancing leadership. Accordingly, the Interfaith Forum rarely arranges public educational programs. On the other hand, the Islamic Center of Rochester seeks to establish educational programs so that Muslims and Christians can meet and learn from each other and exchange views. Responding to that need, Rev. Gordon Webster of the Presbyterian church, an active member of the Interfaith Forum, and some Muslim members decided in 1993 to create a Commission on Christian-Muslim Relations (CCMR). Since its inception, this commission has done a marvelous job of devising and hosting outreach programs for the entire Rochester community. Its seminars and other activities are attended by up to 250 people. (See Appendix II for the commission's mission statement and by-laws).

Creating a formal dialogue group with a mission statement requires a lot of work as well as dedicated partners willing to devote their time and energy. This group should have a mission statement that clearly explains the rules of engagement in order to attract new members. Attracting new volunteers is essential, for it is not realistic to expect volunteers to stay engaged for a long period. In addition, religious leaders' assignments change from time to time. And there may be other impediments. For example, for Muslims in America, many mosques do not have imams, and those that do may have imams who are not fluent in English or who are hesitant to participate. Formal dialogue derives its strength from institutions and builds on public support, thus

both of these are essential if the dialogue is to reach its goals. Yet many in Muslim communities are reluctant to give institutional support to interfaith dialogue. Because this activity – in its present form – is still a relatively new concept, its value is often subject to doubt.

Resistance to the very idea of interfaith dialogue can arise even while drafting and preparing the mission statement. For example, at a Muslim-Christian interfaith dialogue in New York, a Catholic participant asserted that it was wrong to dialogue with Muslims since, according to him, Muslims believe that all non-Muslims will go to hell. While such misperceptions can be countered through ongoing meetings, they can chill any gathering upon first hearing.

Despite the fact that Christians and Muslims share a lot of common religious beliefs and history, they still encounter many obstacles when trying to create a successful dialogue. This is also true of Jews and Muslims. Today, Muslims and Jews are locked in misunderstandings and conflicts of interest. As mentioned earlier, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has created distrust and hard feelings, both of which make dialogue difficult. Fortunately, some Reform and Conservative rabbis as well as some imams are willing to dialogue; many Jews and Muslims realize the significance of dialogue between the two communities and understand its relevance to modern society. Muslims and Jews need one another in order to build better relations between their communities and help bring about peace in the Middle East and in the world at large. Nevertheless, it is still difficult for them to discuss the issue of Israel and Palestine openly.

Despite this reality, Rochester's Jews and Muslims have formed a commission to create a formal dialogue with institutional support. (See Appendix III for its mission statement and by-laws). For many years, the participants concentrated on Muslim-Jewish relations in the United States and avoided talking about Israel and Palestine. Recently, they have begun to address this sensitive topic in their leadership circle; however, they have been unable to hold a public seminar and open dialogue on it. Obviously, Jewish-Muslim dialogue becomes harder when there is renewed conflict in the Middle East. Many Muslims would hesitate to enter a synagogue, just as Jews would hesitate to enter a mosque, during such crises. In many cases, the members of the

city's dialogue group have overcome that hesitation. In a joint Jewish–Muslim event at the Islamic Center, so many people showed up that the main worship area was opened to provide enough space. It was a historic moment when the imam and the rabbi stood together in the minbar (the place from which the imam gives the Friday sermon) to speak on Jewish–Muslim dialogue.

Despite all such difficulties, the CCMR and the Commission on Jewish–Muslim Understanding (CJMU) have had a tremendous impact on community building and harmony in Rochester. Encouraged by the success of these efforts, the Catholic members of the CCMR sought to participate more directly by establishing close cooperation between the Catholic and Muslim communities. This relationship was already friendly, but after 9/11 it grew even warmer. Muslims were invited to give presentations on the basics of Islam ("Islam 101") at many Catholic churches. A booklet on "Islam 101" was printed jointly and distributed throughout the diocese. Finally, the Roman Catholic Bishop of Rochester, responding openly and pastorally to a desire on both sides for a formalized bond of solidarity, joined with the imam of the Islamic Center of Rochester and various Muslim community leaders to sign a historic agreement during May 2003. (See Appendix IV for the text of this agreement).

The seeds sown in Rochester have begun to spring up elsewhere. Recently, the Muslim community of the Washington, DC, area approached the Catholic Diocese of Arlington, Virginia, through the efforts of Rochester's Center for Interfaith Studies and Dialogue (CISD). Initially, there was hesitation to enter into formal dialogue, but soon the two communities overcame their hesitations. The dialogue group is known as the Catholic-Muslim Dialogue (CMD) of Northern Virginia. (See Appendix V for its mission statement and by-laws).

Planning an interfaith program: In its initial phase, interfaith dialogue faces many challenges, among them; fears of mistreatment, disrespectful language, and intimidation. Even in the Rochester dialogue groups, fears still loom despite the many success stories. The interfaith leadership must face these challenges together. If the leadership becomes divided or uses disrespectful language, the dialogue

collapses. In anticipation of these challenges, Rochester's interfaith leadership came up with a pledge to be signed by all of the participating religious leaders.

The pledge acknowledges that Rochester is a remarkable community for interfaith cooperation and that its people of faith were fervently praying for peace in the world and in their community during this time of increasing crisis. While some may feel helpless when it comes to changing the course of global events, they do not believe they are spiritually or politically powerless. Both of the religious traditions call its members to value each human life and stand up for human rights against injustice. They believe that each of them has an important role to play in peacemaking in their community, and that by doing so they will cause ripples that will extend far beyond Rochester. (For more details of the pledge's text, see Appendix VI).

Advice for Forming Interfaith Programs

Forming an interfaith group and agreeing on a mission statement, even signing an agreement, may be difficult. But it is also an exciting and gratifying undertaking. The most difficult steps include not only planning and executing a program, but also ensuring that the all participants are behind the effort. To conduct a successful interfaith seminar, workshop, or other program, subcommittees and planning committees must be established to provide oversight. These subcommittees and planning committees should meet several times to organize the details of the event: the planning committee should determine the event's date, time, and place; the planning committee should prepare a flyer, handle publicity, and conduct an outreach campaign; and the planning committee has to decide on the coordinator, prepare an evaluation paper, and take care of security, hospitality, and all other essential items.

Both committees must make sure that none of the presenters engages in proselytization. Moreover, the responsibilities should be spread equally so that one participating group cannot dominate the others. In other words, each participant must be accorded full respect. The planning committee should manage the available time fairly and

make sure that everyone has enough time to ask and answer questions. No complaint or criticism should be brushed aside, and the evaluations collected after the program should be critically analyzed and, if appropriate, implemented in the next program. Finally, the committee's chairship must be rotated so that each group is treated equally and fairly. (For more details, see chapter II).

The Commission on Christian-Muslim Relations (CCMR), the Muslim-Catholic Alliance (MCA), and the Commission on Jewish-Muslim Understanding (CJMU) have sponsored many educational programs, seminars, and picnics to acquire a better understanding of each other's religion and for building bridges among the participating religious communities based on warm, human relationships.

Educating the public about Islam: Islam is the most misunderstood religion in the United States. When many Americans hear "Islam," they automatically think of terrorism, Arab Bedouins, or a religion of dark-skinned, uncivilized people. Some think that Allah is actually Satan. The media carry frightening stories and pictures reinforcing the Americans' fear on an almost daily basis. To counter such negative images and fears, the CCMR has offered many "Islam 101" programs: "Islam: The Message and the Messenger," "Muslim Life around the Clock," "Muslim Faith and Worship," "Women in Islam," "Jihad: Personal and Public," and others. These seminars have been received very favorably and have drawn more than 200 people each time. (For more details, see Appendix VII).

Yet misunderstandings have arisen. For example, at one point the Christian leadership received complaints that the Muslim leadership was preaching Islam and (unknowingly) criticizing Christianity. Although these complaints were found to be baseless, the misconception constituted a serious risk to continued dialogue. Some of the leaders were afraid that the misconception would damage the good relationship created between the two communities. Similar misconceptions hamper Muslims' understanding of Christianity and of Christians who speak about Christianity. Many Muslims look at Christianity from a Qur'anic worldview and explain it accordingly. They are usually familiar with the Biblical account of creation, Original Sin, Mary and Jesus, heaven and hell, and many other

Christian concepts. Yet each Christian denomination has its own explanations or interpretations of these beliefs. So when Muslims say that "such and such is what Christians believe and this is what Islam says," the Christian audience is in many cases surprised to hear some Muslim perceptions, which they never heard before, described as Christian beliefs. Muslims have a great deal to learn about the different ways that Christians "hear" stories that both religions have in common.

Rochester's interfaith dialogue did two things to overcome this confusion: it asked Muslim speakers to limit themselves to Islam and began to train Muslim speakers in Christian sensitivity. In one evening, about twenty-five Muslim leaders got together and invited some Christian leaders to dinner in order to train Muslims in Christian sensitivity. The speakers, among them Catholics, Baptists, Presbyterians, and Episcopalians, addressed the following topics: creation, Original Sin, the Trinity, Jesus Christ (Who is He), and what unites Christians. (For more details, see Appendix VIII).

In addition, MCA offered a series of seminars on the comparative practices of Islam and Catholicism pertaining to the cycles of life, beliefs (including heaven and hell), and the worship that shapes those practices. These seminars helped both communities understand each other's religion better and also reduced the level of misunderstanding between them. As a result, they found it easier to become friends. In the Jewish-Muslim series, the topic of "Our Journey to America: Obstacles and Challenges" was especially appreciated as a learning experience for both groups. Muslims learned how Jews, in the past, had lived in fear in the United States in a way that closely resembles how Muslims live here today. Muslims took courage from learning how Jews overcame prejudice and found respect in the country.

Most of the MCA and CJMU seminars were comparative in nature consisting of one speaker from each religious community, who talked only about his or her own religion. Although they were told to follow this rule, some people in the audience felt that the speakers tended to undermine each other. To deal with this difficulty, the Rochester interfaith leadership asked the speakers to meet and find common ground before appearing in public. Also most of these programs were properly evaluated and the evaluation was discussed in the regular

meeting and the suggestions were incorporated into future programs. (See Appendix IX for a sample of evaluation of a program).

Thus, many of these programs were conducted in Muslim community centers. The Rochester Islamic Center and the ADAMS Center are examples of Muslim community centers that have managed to hold their own in such interfaith encounters. Many other centers ought to be recognized and highlighted, too, for providing venues on a par with those offered by their non-Muslim dialogue partners.

Key Points of the Chapter

- Interfaith dialogue between the followers of Abrahamic faiths in the United States has received top priority since 9/11. Imams and Islamic scholars must get more involved in order to provide proper direction and achieve better results.
- Muslim dialogue with mainline Christians is moving ahead smoothly. However, imams need to reach out to Evangelical Christians in order to build mutual understanding and respect.
- While Muslim dialogue with Jews is taking place in many cities, it is moving at a slow pace. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the main obstacle. It is advisable to focus exclusively on Jewish–Muslim relations in the United States, as the two communities have much to share and to experience since they are living together here.
- Muslim participants should not insist on "Islam 101" for public education unless other dialogue partners suggest it. Programs should deal equably with each dialogue partner's concerns.
- Since Muslim leaders and imams tend to approach Judaism and Christianity from a Qur'anic perspective, they need sensitivity training so that they can acquire an accurate understanding of how Jews and Christians understand their religion. This will prevent many unintended offensive words and incidents.
- An important aspect of interfaith encounter is to work as an equal partner with the participating non–Muslim institutions or groups.
- The appendices at the end of this guide can be used to create an interfaith program.

Discussion Questions

1. Are you aware of any other mission statement of an interfaith group in which Muslims are actively involved? Who are the Muslim participants? From your perspective, what are their successes and failures?
2. If interfaith dialogue takes place in your area, what forms does it assume? What programs are offered? Can you judge whether each group's participation is equitable? Is literature about these programs available to you?
3. If you participate in interfaith dialogue, what mission statement guides you? What programs have you initiated? If you would like to participate, what would your ideal mission statement be? What programs would you like to initiate?
4. If you already participate in Jewish–Muslim dialogue or belong to a Muslim group participating in Jewish–Muslim dialogue, what are the areas of success and failure of such dialogue? What are its future prospects? How could it be improved?
5. Do you have a mission statement of a Jewish–Muslim dialogue or know of any group that has one?
6. If you were to participate in Jewish–Muslim dialogue, what type of mission statement would you propose? What type of programs would you initiate for a successful dialogue?

CONCLUSION

TODAY, no religion can live in isolation from the world. All religions must open their doors to all others, thereby allowing them to be studied, observed critically, appreciated, or rejected. Religions with a universal message, such as Islam, must accommodate their teachings to demanding contemporary environments by exercising ijtihad (applying reasoned judgment to the teachings of the Qur'an and Sunnah). In this way, ecclesiastical bodies can make their religious beliefs and practices understandable and applicable to the modern world. This natural process has happened in the history of all major religions; those that resisted change, for the most part, lost members and decayed.

Members of all religions must respect the beliefs and practices of other religions in order to live peacefully and attract more members. Once again, religions are emerging as great forces in the modern world. If their adherents do not work for peaceful coexistence with each other, they will face a violent reaction from all societies. Religions that enter into calm and creative dialogues, provide spiritual services, and meet people's needs will be the dominant religions of the future. Interfaith dialogue does not mean creating a civil religion or sacrificing the fundamentals of one's faith; rather, it is an effort to convey respect to humanity, live together in peace, and provide the opportunity of freedom of worship to all.

All of the programs presented in this guide seek to engender further understanding between people of different religions. The programs' emphasis on Islam is due to the fact that Islam is badly misunderstood in the West, and Muslims who live here feel under attack. This is why Islam needs to be explained to the public and even to Muslims themselves. Another objective is to show the public that the overwhelming majority of Muslims disapprove of violence and terrorism.

Sadly, and perhaps surprisingly, intra-faith dialogue often turns out

to involve more difficulties than interfaith dialogue. Members of the same religion exchange accusations, blaming and labeling each other as less or more "authentic" or "loyal" to their religion's true teachings. But intra-faith dialogue is even more essential, for no religion can claim a respectable position in the world community unless its members respect their fellow co-religionists. Muslim participants will benefit more from interfaith dialogue if they have already achieved intra-faith understanding and spent time exploring their own perceptions and beliefs about interfaith work together. Similarly, both Christians and Jews who have reached an ecumenical understanding find that their interfaith dialogue has been strengthened as a result.

Despite the many attractions of interfaith dialogue, however, some people in each community not only refuse to participate, but actually claim to be the true believers while the dialoguers are disloyal. These rejectionists often attract more followers than dialoguers. For example, Evangelical Christian churches seem to be attracting more and more converts from traditional churches. There are Evangelical churches that call those mainstream Christians who participate in interfaith dialogue "infidels." Similarly, many Salafi Muslims call themselves "the righteous ones" and look down upon Muslims who participate in interfaith dialogue. In addition, certain Muslim groups refuse to meet with non-Muslims, despite the fact that they live together with non-Muslims.[1]

There can be no peaceful coexistence without both intra-faith and interfaith dialogue, for the former provides institutional support to the latter. By working together, people involved in both groups can initiate educational programs to help their congregations understand the significance of this dialogue. When people understand that participating in interfaith dialogue does not make them somehow less religious or spiritual, or cause them to abandon the fundamentals of their religion, the rejectionists or extremists will have fewer opportunities to mislead them. As everyone knows, education dispels misunderstanding. Perhaps some congregations will actually take the lead by urging their otherwise reluctant leaders to participate in intra-faith dialogue, respect others, and appreciate the efforts of those who work for intra-community and inter-community harmony and peace.

Peaceful co-existence with others is an important motivation for many Muslims participants in interfaith dialogue. Yet there is still an even more fundamental objective: to deepen one's own understanding of one's own religion as well as that of the other person. Out of this understanding, a new relationship can emerge, one that is not based on apologetic or defensive positions or motivations, but on a genuine and authentic human desire to really know each other.

For interfaith dialogue to be effective and beneficial for Muslim communities, imams and Islamic scholars need to take it, as well as intra-Muslim dialogue, seriously. Many are content to observe, thereby abdicating their responsibility and leaving this undertaking to those who either have no genuine knowledge of Islam or no longer practice it. Those imams who take their responsibilities seriously should fulfill three key duties: First, they should join an interfaith dialogue group in order to give proper direction to it in the light of Islamic injunctions. Such participation is essential, especially when the interfaith dialogue focuses on theological and faith matters; Second, imams need to participate in intra-Muslim dialogue to remove the usual misunderstandings associated with this effort; Third, Muslim intra-faith and interfaith groups should reach out and engage imams and community members who condemn such undertakings, for, in the end, both sides will benefit.

Contemporary initiatives for intra-faith and interfaith dialogue are stimulating a renewed spirit of communal unity. Just as the American civil rights movement of the 1960s paved the way for more racial, ethnic and cultural harmony, this current movement of interfaith and intra-faith dialogue will awaken the world to interfaith and intra-religious respect for and among people of all religions, thereby enabling people to live together in peace. Any religion that becomes the torchbearer of this new initiative will enjoy a promising future, for it will be respected and understood.

This guide is our first step toward emphasizing the need for intra-faith and interfaith dialogue. It should encourage imams to get involved, thus making strides toward winning the Muslims' hearts and gaining their moral and financial support. More books and articles in this field are imminent. It is our hope that this publication will provide

essential guidance for building strong intra-faith and interfaith rela-tions free of confusion, mismanagement, and misunderstanding. If this goal is realized, the groups involved can engage with each other on a clear and equitable basis. Proof of that engagement will be their capacity to design and execute attractive programs in the framework of a formal dialogue. Such dialogues are being demanded by genuine religious movements working for peace in the world. A successful step taken in this direction would be a blessing from God.

APPENDICES

THE FIRST ALEXANDRIA DECLARATION
JANUARY 21, 2002

IN the name of God who is Almighty, Merciful and Compassionate, we, who have gathered as religious leaders from the Muslim, Christian and Jewish communities, pray for true peace in Jerusalem and the Holy Land, and declare our commitment to ending the violence and bloodshed that denies the right of life and dignity.

According to our faith traditions, killing innocents in the name of God is a desecration of His Holy Name, and defames religion in the world. The violence in the Holy Land is an evil which must be opposed by all people of good faith. We seek to live together as neighbors respecting the integrity of each other's historical and religious inheritance. We call upon all to oppose incitement, hatred and misrepresentation of the other.

1. The Holy Land is holy to all three of our faiths. Therefore, followers of the divine religions must respect its sanctity, and bloodshed must not be allowed to pollute it. The sanctity and integrity of the holy places must be preserved, and freedom of religious worship must be ensured for all.

2. Palestinians and Israelis must respect the divinely ordained purposes of the Creator by whose grace they live in the same land that is called holy.

3. We call on the political leaders of both peoples to work for a just,

secure, and durable solution in the spirit of the words of the Almighty and the Prophets.

4. As a first step now, we call for a religiously sanctioned cease-fire, respected and observed on all sides, and for the implementation of the Mitchell and Tenet recommendations, including the lifting of restrictions and return to negotiations.

5. We seek to help create an atmosphere where present and future generations will co-exist with mutual respect and trust in the other. We call on all to refrain from incitement and demonization, and to educate our future generations accordingly.

6. As religious leaders, we pledge ourselves to continue a joint quest for a just peace that leads to reconciliation in Jerusalem and the Holy Land, for the common good of all our peoples.

7. We announce the establishment of a permanent joint committee to carry out the recommendations of this declaration, and to engage with our respective political leadership accordingly.

Delegates:

- His Grace the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. George Carey
- His Eminence Sheikh Mohamed Sayed Tantawi, Cairo, Egypt
- Sephardi Chief Rabbi Bakshi-Doron
- Deputy Foreign Minister of Israel, Rabbi Michael Melchior
- Rabbi of Tekoa, Rabbi Menachem Froman
- International Director of Interreligious Affairs, American Jewish Committee, Rabbi David Rosen
- Rabbi of Savyon, Rabbi David Brodman
- Rabbi of Maalot Dafna, Rabbi Yitzak Ralbag
- Chief Justice of the Sharia Courts, Sheikh Taisir Tamimi
- Minister of State for the PA, Sheikh Tal El Sider
- Mufti of the Armed Forces, Sheikh Abdelsalam Abu Schkedem
- Mufti of Bethlehem, Sheikh Mohammed Taweel

Appendix I

- Representative of the Greek Patriarch, Archbishop Aristichos
- Latin Patriarch, His Beatitude Michel Sabbah
- Melkite Archbishop, Archbishop Boutrous Mu'alem
- Representative of the Armenian Patriarch, Archbishop Chinchinian
- Bishop of Jerusalem, The Rt. Rev. Riah Abu El Assal

COMMISSION ON CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM RELATIONS BY-LAWS EFFECTIVE SEPTEMBER 1ST 2004

THE following are the by-laws of the Commission. These by-laws were revised and amended in 2003 and were passed unanimously on September 1st 2004.*

Statement of Purpose

The Commission on Christian Muslim Relations of the Muslim Community of the Greater Rochester Area, through the Council of Masajid (GRCM) and the Greater Rochester Community of Churches (GRCC) has the purpose of deepening mutual understanding and appreciation between the Christian and Muslim communities. Our objective is to broaden mutual respect and to enhance active participation within the Greater Rochester Area. We understand one another as peoples who are grounded in Abrahamic faith traditions. Together we will address ethical, social, and moral issues. The above stated purposes will be accomplished through:

1. Education
2. Social interaction
3. Monitoring and responding to media
4. Advocacy

Our mission is to increase understanding, improve dialogue, and dispel fear. The commission shall foster interaction, defend civil and

human rights, and challenge perceived public notions of our respective faith communities.

1. Membership
Each community will have a minimum of six and a maximum of nine members. The Commission encourages the sponsoring bodies to strive for diversity and gender representation.

2. Officers
The Commission will elect a Chair and Vice-chair alternating between Muslims and Christians. The Commission will elect a Recording Secretary/Treasurer to Record and distribute minutes and to receive, record, and distribute funds as directed. Officers will serve two year terms beginning January 1st. Officers' terms may or may not be renewable as executive and Commission members choose.

3. Accountability
The Commission will submit an annual report to GRCM and GRCC every December.

4. Finance
GRCM and GRCC, the sponsoring organizations, will provide a minimal budget. Extra funding for special events is the responsibility of the Commission.

5. Amendments
Amendments to these by-laws may be made by a majority vote of the Commission members following consideration at two successive meetings. At least four members of each community must be in favor of the amendment under consideration.

6. Honorary Life Membership
The Commission may grant, in recognition of long time exemplary service to the cause of Christian/Muslim relations, a non-voting Honorary Life Membership.

* These amended by-laws were suggested by the Commission and discussed at two separate meetings before being unanimously adopted on September 1st 2004.

The Commission meets monthly. Review minutes, discuss any significant event occurred during the month and plan for future activities. Below I list some of the joint seminars the Commission has organized for public education and building peaceful relations.

COMMISSION FOR JEWISH MUSLIM UNDERSTANDING (CJMU)

WHEN the Imam of Rochester, who had left for Pakistan in 1994, returned in the summer of 1997, Rabbi Miller had died, and Jewish–Muslim relations were at a poor stage. Thanks to Rabbi Alan Katz of Temple Sanai and Isobel Goldman of the Jewish Community Federation (JCC), a Jewish–Muslim contact group was soon established. The Group started to meet at homes and places of worship. It also held some public programs on different topics of mutual interest. The Contact Group became a Commission in 2002. The following are the by-laws of the Commission.

Statement of Purpose

The Commission on Jewish–Muslim Understanding of the Greater Rochester Area has the purpose of creating mutual understanding and appreciation between the Jewish and Muslim communities with a view toward broadening mutual respect and enhancing active cooperation within the Greater Rochester area.

Through educational and social opportunities and social justice activities, the Commission encourages increased understanding and dialogue among its members, its synagogues, and its Masajid, and within the community at large. One of the main purposes of the Jewish–Muslim Commission is to address the educational, social, religious, and moral issues of the community at large. The Commission commits itself to specific steps toward implementing its purpose by:

- Fostering interaction between Jewish and Muslim communities.
- Defending the civil and human rights of members of both communities through advocacy, education, dialogue and public relations.
- Addressing the media regarding its role in presenting accurate and fair reporting on issues of concern to Jews and Muslims and its role in fostering each other's understanding.
- Creating educational programs of common interest.
- Maintaining links with other interfaith and community groups in the area.

Signed by Jewish Members and Muslim Members

AN AGREEMENT OF UNDERSTANDING AND COOPERATION

THE following is a solemn document of agreement between the Roman Catholic Diocese of Rochester, NY and the Council of Masajid of Rochester, NY. Affirming our faith in only one God, and recognizing our common history and shared Abrahamic traditions, we pray to the merciful God to inspire in us respect, mutual understanding, and love and to guide us to pursue our common values for the benefit of all in our society and beyond.

Article I
In adherence to the spirit and laws of our respective religious traditions, to the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human rights, and to the Bill of Rights embodied in our American Constitution, we affirm our commitment to uphold the right of every human being to freedom of speech, thought, religion, and conscience.

Article II
We jointly declare our dedication to challenge continuously all forms of religious [intolerance], ethnic intolerance, and bigotry through active promotion of mutual understanding and respect for human life and dignity.

a. By responding openly to acts of religious, racial, ethnic or any other kind of intolerance.

b. By investing time, labor and talents to sensitizing our own communities to the evils of such intolerance.

c. By informing and educating each other on matters of public concern.

Article III

We dedicate and commit ourselves to foster the maturing relationship of mutual respect and cooperation between our two communities, by promoting a deeper knowledge of and respect for each other's history, traditions, and sensitivities.

For us to accomplish this, our communities are seriously encouraged to discover even better ways to foster and promote:

a. A comprehensive dialogue that leads to goodwill and mutual understanding.

b. The development and dissemination of appropriate information involving each other's religious traditions for both children and adults. Combined learning experiences are especially encouraged.

c. The necessity to deepen awareness and sensitivity to issues of special contemporary concern to either community.

Article IV

In regard to community outreach, whenever possible, we are strongly encouraged to collaborate in developing mutually beneficial services while respecting the integrity and independence of each other's service organizations.

a. By supporting, whenever feasible, efforts in each other's community as well as in the general public to provide for the basic needs of all.

b. By being whenever possible cognizant of, comprehending, and being sensitive to, the global needs of each tradition.

Article V
A joint committee will be formed by the Diocese and the Council to
see to it that this agreement is fully and faithfully implemented.

Signed today: _____May 5,

2003_____

Signed by Representatives

CATHOLIC-MUSLIM DIALOGUE (CMD) NORTHERN VIRGINIA

Mission Statement

WHEREAS Catholics and Muslims are two of the major faiths of the world religions living as neighbors in all parts of the global world;

Whereas Catholics and Muslims believe in God Almighty in the Scriptures;

Whereas Catholics and Muslims recognize Abraham as common patriarch of their faiths;

Whereas Catholics and Muslims believe in Scriptures that addresses [sic] the welfare of the needy and the poor, those in suffering and those affected by calamities;

Whereas Catholics and Muslims believe in family values and hold that their Scriptures stand for human dignity, generosity, compassion, mercy, and forgiveness; whereas Catholic Church Teachings and Muslim Traditions ask Catholics and Muslims respectively to reach out and build better relations between the two communities; whereas the global community cries out for cooperation, deepening relations, and respect for one another's faith in the service of humanity,-therefore we Catholics and Muslims living in Northern Virginia commit ourselves to dialogue:

1. To understand and build better relations;
2. To appreciate and celebrate our respective faiths as good neighbors in mutual respect for one another;

3. To address together religious, ethical, social, and moral issues facing humanity.

Our mission is to increase understanding, improve dialogue, dispel fear, and promote hope. The Dialogue shall foster interaction, defend religious, civil and human rights, and challenge perceived public notions of our respective faith communities.

This mission will be accomplished through:

1. Educational seminars and conferences
2. Social interaction programs
3. Monitoring, analyzing and responding to media to promote public understanding
4. Advocacy…

By Laws

1. Membership

In order to achieve our goal we decide to form this Dialogue group where each community will have 5 to 7 members. We encourage the sponsoring bodies to strive for diversity and gender representation. The Catholics will be represented through the Diocese of Arlington County and the Muslims will be represented through the Coordinating Council of Muslim Organization in Washington Area (CCMO).

2. Officers

The Catholic Muslim Dialogue (CMD) will elect a Chair and Vice-chair alternating between Muslims and Catholics. It will elect a Recording Secretary/Treasurer to Record and distribute minutes and to receive, record, and distribute funds as directed. Officers will serve two year terms beginning September 1st. Officers' terms are renewable.

3. Accountability

CMD shall submit an annual report to participating communities every year in September to gain support and renew membership/participation from the respective communities.

4. Finance

The Catholic Diocese of the Arlington County and the CCMO together will provide a budget for programs.

5. Amendments

Amendments to these by-laws may be made by a majority vote of the members following consideration at two successive meetings. At least four members of each community must be in favor of the amendment under consideration.

6. Meetings

CMD shall meet monthly to review minutes and to discuss significant events which may have occurred during the period and plan for future activities. CMD may appoint sub-committees to organize public meetings, seminars, special events, picnics, and visits to churches and mosques, to bridge the gap and build respectful understanding between the two faiths in Northern Virginia and beyond.

This Document was witnessed and signed on August 30, 2006

Signatures
Archbishop Paul S. Loverde
Dr. Jamal Barzinji, VP IIIT
Father Don Rooney
Imam Johari Abdul Malik
Father John J. Dolan, OSFS
Imam Mohammed Magid
Father Bob Menard, OFM
Imam Abolfazl Nahidian
David Natella
Imam Faizul Khan
Claireen E. Enciso
Dr. Hisham Al Talib
Mrs. Elizabeth Troiani
Dr. Iqbal Unus

Appendix V

Witnessed By
Rev. Canon Francis Tiso, USCCB
Dr. Muhammad Shafiq, Executive Director, CISD and Imam Islamic
Center of Rochester, NY

A PLEDGE OF REMEMBRANCE AND A COMMITMENT TO PEACE

THE Rochester Interfaith Forum adopted this Pledge of peace and commitment on April 21, 2002, in order to respect one another and stay in peace. The Pledge says:

- We are people of faith fervently praying for peace in our world and in our community in this time of increasing crisis. While some may feel helpless about being able to change the course of global events, we do not believe we are spiritually or politically powerless. All of our traditions call us to value each human life and to stand up for injustice and human rights. We believe there is an important role each of us can play in peace-making in this community – our community – with potential ripples in the world beyond Rochester.

- We are a remarkable community that has been a model for inter-faith cooperation. We draw strength from the experiences we have lived together. We believe we can continue to do God's will by reaching out to each other across our differences and refusing to be pitted against each other.

- *We Pledge to Remember* we cannot expect unanimity on issues as complex and filled with pain as those currently confronting us – not across groups, nor within our groups, nor even within our own anguished hearts and minds.

- *We Pledge to Remember* the promises of relationships that can endure through turmoil and grief. We remember when we have stood with one another in times of distress, and we pledge to remain committed to being friends when the world would separate us from one another.

- *We Pledge to Remember* that each act has the power to heal and bring us closer together or to sting and further divide us. When we speak or act publicly, regardless of our feelings of rage or terror or shame, we will remember that we can choose our responses, and be sensitive to not using words that are perceived as hurtful.

- *We Pledge to Remember* that we may not be able to change others' opinions, but we can encourage a climate of openness in which we can explore, with sensitivity and with understanding, the history, points of view and fears of others.

- *We Pledge to Remember* to pray for the healing of our wounds. All of our hearts are breaking, and we remember that God's heart is broken too.

- *We Pledge to Remember* that we are all children of God. As such we pledge to offer each other hope and a vision of a just world.

- *We pledge to Remember* that hope requires action to be fulfilled. We pledge to be bold about reaching out and about doing one thing each day to open communication, to bridge differences, to offer compassion, and to bring about healing.

SOME MODEL PROGRAMS OF INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

Interfaith Examples of Exposure Programs

SPONSORED by the Commission on Christian Muslim Relations (CCMR)
The Commission on Christian Muslim Relations of Rochester, New York, has sponsored many education programs to enhance the community's understanding Islam and to build bridges for Christian–Muslim relations. Some of the programs are presented as models for others to follow.

ISLAM 101:
The Commission on Christian Muslim Relations and the Muslim Catholic Alliance present a class on Islam in four Sessions.

1. *The Message and the Messenger*: In this session you will learn about the message of Al-Qur'an and about Prophet Muhammad as a messenger and living model of the Qur'an.

2. *Muslim Life around the Clock*: This session will answer the question, How do observant Muslims actually spend their day? How their beliefs affect the way they live their lives from moment to moment. There will be a video spotlighting Muslim youth.

3. *Jihad: Personal and Public*: The news media have turned Jihad into a scary word, practically synonymous with terrorism. Actually the

concept of Jihad, which means 'striving,' has deeply spiritual as well as political dimensions not only in Islam but also in Christianity. The session explores these dimensions, working comparatively from one religion to other.

4. *Women in the Qur'an*: Many Muslim women scholars have gone back to the words of the Qur'an to discover a clear assertion of the equality of men and women. This session will focus on the equality of women in Islam in religious, social, and family life.

An additional session: V*iolence and Terrorism: Christianity and Islam.* The practice of violence and terrorism as a means of settling issues is increasing alarmingly in the world. What is the perspective of the two religions on violence and terrorism?

More advanced Session on Islam:

Session I:
A. Qur'an: The Written and the Living

Prelude: A variety of recitation styles of the Quran from the CD accompanying Michael Sells' *Approaching the Qur'an, The Early Revelations*. (10 minutes)
The Written Qur'an (20 minutes)
Language: miracle, selection of words makes the Qur'anic language unique in its style (unlike the Arabic of the Hadith).
Composition: how it was revealed, the writing, how it was put together into book form and its preservation.
Structure: Surahs (chapter topics), the Makkah surahs (more spiritual and belief orientated) and the Medina surahs (focused on daily life).

Session I:
B. Hadith and Sunnah: The Living Qur'an (20 minutes)

Hadith: commentary on the Quran, by the Prophet Muhammad, written down as a deeper explanation of the meaning of the Quran.

Sunnah: unwritten form of the life of the Prophet, what he said, did, and approved.
Question and Answer (30 minutes).
Open Discussion (30 minutes).

Session II:
Shari'ah (Islamic Law): It's Application in Modern Times

A. Introduction (10 minutes)
B. Shari'ah the Divine Law (20 minutes)
1. The Roots of Shari'ah in the Quran and Sunnah.
2. Shari'ah and Capital Punishment.
3. Shari'ah and Human Rights.
C. Fatwa: Its Application and significance in Shari'ah. (20 minutes)
D. Question and Answer (30 minutes)
E. Open Discussion (30 minutes)

Session III:
Seminar On Science and Religion (Creation)
Other Seminar Sessions:

Title: Islam in America: Many Faces
Content: The media often present Islam as if it were a monolith, identical in every country and at every time. Our program tonight will try to dissipate this myth by describing two of the "many faces" of Islam here in the United States: the face of the Muslim immigrant community and the face of our home-grown African American Muslim community. What are the hopes and fears of these communities? How are their hopes and fears like and unlike the hopes and fears of the many other faces of Islam in other parts of the world?

Title: Extremism and Fundamentalism in Islam and Christianity
Content: How is it that Islam and Christianity, religions dedicated to peace and human flourishing, have in many instances become distorted by fundamentalism and extremism – and have even been manipulated

to justify violence? Tonight's session is dedicated to addressing this controversial question in a calm, informed, and respectful way.

Title: Meeting Islam as a Christian: A Personal Journey
Content: What happens when a Christian, following Jesus' commandment to "love thy neighbor," tries to see the world – and his own Christian faith – as Muslims do, through the perspective of the Qur'an and Sunnah? What are the dangers of such a journey? What are the great rewards? The speaker will present some landmarks on his own journey. (Note: After the talk there will be an opportunity to buy a signed copy of the speaker's just-published book on this same topic, *Meeting Islam: A Guide For Christians*).

Seminars Sponsored by the Muslim Catholic Alliance
Some Examples:
***Passages of Life*:** This was a very successful series hosted by the Catholic and Muslim communities and was well attended.

"Beginnings and Endings as Seen through Muslim and Catholic Eyes"
A. ***Conception and Childhood:*** Attitudes of Islam and Catholic Christianity towards life in the womb, towards abortion, towards children and child rearing; role of informed conscience. B. ***Youth and Growing Up:*** Attitudes of Islam and Catholic Christianity towards education of the young; balancing discipline with permissiveness; rites of passage; handling emerging sexuality and gender issues; handling conflicts with surrounding culture; handling religious education and conscience formation. C. ***Marriage:*** Attitudes of Islam and Christianity towards the purpose and meaning of marriage; connection between marriage and the larger community; marriage rites and their meaning; divorce. D**. *Aging, Dying, and Death:*** Attitudes of Islam and Catholic Christianity towards the aging process; illness; loss; incapacity; end of life issues; funeral rites; mourning. E. ***Afterlife***: Beliefs of Islam and Catholic Christianity about the life to come; how those beliefs affect the present.

Seminars Sponsored by the Commission on Jewish Muslim Understanding (CJMU)

Selected Program Series:

Judaism and Islam 101 Four Series:
Prayers: Jews pray three times a day and Muslims five. What are these prayers and what are our expectations of them? What do our faiths say about the role and impact of prayers? The session begins with a tour of the Islamic Center and opportunity to observe daily prayers. Reception to follow. (This particular program was attended by hundreds un-expectedly. The program was shifted to the Masjid worship area and was jam-packed with Jews and Muslims).

Food and Fasting: Muslims fast during Ramadan and Jews on Yom Kippur and a few other fast days. Why do we do this and how does it affect us? Both faiths are also concerned about what we eat and how the food is prepared – whether it is Kosher or Halal. What does this tell us about our attitudes toward food and the meaning of eating? Beginning with a tour of the Synagogue and followed by a "tasting" of Jewish and Muslim foods

Prophets, Prophecy and Prophethood: Jewish Community Federation Both of our faiths recognize the existence of prophets and revere them in our respective ways. What makes a prophet and why should we care? Why haven't we seen any around lately? Jews live Fridays with expectancy as they prepare for the on-coming Sabbath at sundown. Muslims also treat Fridays differently with extended prayers, though they do not share the concept of Sabbath. But we both thank God it's Friday, Find out why.
Reception to follow.

Three Sessions on Muslims-Jewish Relations:
Journey to America: A historical perspective of a secular history of our cultures. How we established our communities in America.

Overcoming Challenges and Obstacles, Islamic Center: This session will cover the prejudice, racism, and discrimination and other related issues Muslims and Jews have been or are being through. Multiple Faces of American Jews and American Muslims.

Other Themes Can Be on Conceptions and Misconceptions of Women in Judaism and Islam: The seminar took place at Temple Sinai and many members of the Muslim and Jewish communities participated. It was quite successful. In addition, there have been several Jewish Muslim Picnic events, and a Jewish Muslim Youth Meeting: Watching "Promises" documentary.

MUSLIM LEADERSHIP TRAINING: SENSITIVITY TO CHRISTIAN BELIEFS

SURAH 49:13 "O humankind, we created you from a single pair of male and female, and made you into different nations and tribes, so that you might get to know each other."

Date: Sunday, June 6th 6:30 – 8:30 pm
6:30 – 7:00Dinner
7:00 – 8:00 Panel Presentations and Topical Discussions
8:00–8:20 Open Forum: Wrap-up/Feed-back: possibility of future sessions, topics

Introduction: George Dardess (6 – 7 mins).

Panelists: Rev. Denise Yarbrough, Ecumenical and Interfaith Officer, Episcopal Diocese of Rochester; Rev. Peter Carman, Pastor, Lake Avenue Baptist Church; and Fr. Joe Marcoux, Roman Catholic Diocese of Rochester

TOPICS
1. Creation
2. Original sin
3. The Trinity
4. Jesus Christ – Who is He?
5. What Unites Christians?

PLEASE NOTE The Panel Presentations and Topical Discussions will be conducted according to the following format: Each panelist will get 2 minutes for topic #1, then we will have 6 minutes of discussion on topic #1. Then we will move on to topic #2 and so on through the 5 topics.

EVALUATING YOUR INTER-FAITH EXPERIENCE/PROGRAM

DESPITE the enormous studies and forms of evaluation that have been developed in academic and applied areas, nevertheless, there are very few models of evaluation that have been developed specifically for interfaith dialogue. Also due to the fact that most of the programs outlined in this manual are community based and have a standard design or format, it is hard to suggest any generic form or survey for evaluating the program or activity of interfaith.

Thus we have opted for a list of possible open ended questions which the organizers can utilize in designing their own written or oral evaluation. The following are some of these questions that you can use in different contexts:

Impact on Individual Attitudes and Behaviors:

- What are the most important things that you learned about race and ethnic relations in the dialogue groups?
- How did your participation in the interfaith activities affect your views of the other faith group?
- Did you develop any positive perceptions about the other faith group as a result of your participation in this interfaith program? Describe them.
- What did you discover about yourself as a result of your participation in this program?
- Did you change any of your behavioral habits as a result of your participation in this program?

- Have you established any ongoing relationship with members of the other faith or your own group as a result of this activity or program?
- How did the program affect your behavior? Share a story/example.
- How does the program affect your own community?

Programs Structure/Process:

- How can the organizer improve the program?
- What aspects (activities) of the program did you like? Why?
- How did the group leaders or facilitators carryout their role?
- Is there a balance between the different religious organizers? Yes/No.
- Any Suggestions?

STATEMENTS SUPPORTING INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

A conflict of cultures, or worse still, religions, could divide people even more than they are already divided; Interreligious dialogue aims at a better understanding of the faith of others and at making one's own faith better known, as well as reinforcing mutual bonds of personal respect… It does not aim to make those who participate in it less faithful to their own profound religious convictions, but to open minds and hearts ever more to the will of God.

Archbishop Lajolo of Indonesia
21 April 06

The respect with which Islam regards Judaism and Christianity, their founders and scriptures, is not a courtesy, but acknowledgement of religious truth. Islam sees them in the world not as 'other views' which it has to tolerate, but as standing de jure, as truly revealed religions from God. Moreover, their legitimate status is neither socio-political, nor cultural, but religious.

Dr. Isma'il R. al-Faruqi
Islam and Other Faiths

NOTES

Introduction

1. This guide focuses on interfaith dialogue among Jews, Christians, and Muslims because they belong to Abrahamic tradition. This focus should not be construed as avoiding or neglecting the need to develop similar guiding documents with Hindus, Buddhists, and other non-Abrahamic religions. On the contrary, since over 80 percent of all Muslims live in the Subcontinent and Asia, Muslims have far more contacts with them on a daily basis than they do with Jews and Christians. Our guide responds to the growing field of interfaith relations between Jews, Christians, and Muslims in response to current geopolitical dynamics.

2. *Alif. Lam. Mim.* Defeated have been the Byzantines in the lands close-by; yet it is they who, notwithstanding this their defeat, shall be victorious within a few years: [for] with God rests all power of decision, first and last. And on that day will the believers [too, have cause to] rejoice in God's succour: [for] He gives succour to whomever He wills, since He alone is Almighty, a Dispenser of grace. [This is] God's promise. Never does God fail to fulfill His promise - but most people know [it] not. (30:1-6).

3. Isma'il R. Al-Faruqi, *Islam* (Boston: Argus Communications, 1984), pp.61-67.

4. "And [thus it is:] had thy Sustainer so willed, all those who live on earth would surely have attained to faith, all of them: dost thou, then, think that thou couldst compel people to believe" (10:99).

5. And unto thee [O Prophet] have We vouchsafed this divine writ, setting forth the truth, confirming the truth of whatever there still remains of earlier revelations and determining what is true therein. Judge, then, between the followers of earlier revelation in accordance with what God has bestowed from on high, and do not follow their errant views, forsaking the truth that has come unto thee. Unto every one of you have We appointed a [different] law and way of life. And if God had so willed, He could surely have made you all one single community: but [He willed it otherwise] in order to test you by means of what He has vouchsafed unto, you. Vie, then, with one another in doing good works! Unto God you all must return; and then He will make you truly understand all that on which you were wont to differ (5:48).

6. The Islamic Society of North America, "Mission Statement," Goal #5: Interfaith and Coalition Building. Available online at www.isna.net/ISNAHQ/pages/ Mission—Vision.aspx. The International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT), "International Seminar Program." Available online at www.iiit.org/Partner/ Seminars%20 and%20Research/peaceseminar.asp.; The Salam Institute for Peace and Justice, "Mission Statement." Available online at http://www.salaminstitute. org/mission.htm.

7. Laurie Goodstein, "Seeing Islam as 'Evil' Faith, Evangelicals Seek Converts," *The New York Times* (New York, May 27, 2003).

8. www.cair.com.

9. For details, see CAIR report on violation of Muslim civil rights in America at its website: http://www.cair.com/Portals/0/pdf/civilrights2008.pdf.

10. For more detail on the Pew survey, please visit: http://www.pewforum.org and go to Pew Research Forum on Religion & Public Life Survey (November, 2009).

11. Christopher Dickey, "Women of Al Qaeda," *Newsweek* (December 12, 2005).

12. "Hate Hurts America Campaign," http://www.cairchicago.org/inthenews.php ?file=lm02272008.

13. Muslim communities can learn from the experience of Jewish minorities in the West as they reached out to the wider communities.

Chapter I

1. Unless otherwise noted, all following Qur'anic references will be taken from Muhammad Asad, *The Message of the Qur'an* (England: The Book Foundation, 2003).

2. *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Kitab al-Anbiya', Bab al-Arwah Junudun Mujannadah.

3. Mike Leterfield, "The Necessity of Dialogue," *The Fountain* (November 27, 1999), p.21.

4. Jaco Cilliers, "Building Bridges for Interfaith Dialogue," *Interfaith Dialogue and Peacebuilding*, ed. David R. Smock (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2002), p.49.

5. The Qur'an uses the phrase *la ikraha* to signify standing for freedom and respect, as well as for individual belief and freedom of choice.

6. Abbas al-Jirari, *Dialogue from Islamic Point of View* (Rabat: ISESCO, 2000). Available online at http://www.isesco.org.ma/english/publications/islamtoday/18/P2.php.

7. Sonia P. Omulepu, ed., *Interfaith Education Initiative: A Manual on Interfaith Dialogue* (New York: Office of Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations, The Episcopal Church USA, 2004).

Notes

8.   The Second Vatican Ecumenical Council (Vatican II). 1962-1965. Available online at www.christusrex.org/www1/CDHN/v1.html and also www. vatican.va.

9.   Edward Idris Cardinal Cassidy, *Rediscovering Vatican II, Ecumenism and Inter-Religious Dialogue*, p.148. Available at www.paulistpress.com.

10   Cf. "Vatican Council II: Declaration on the Church's Relations with Non-Christian Religions Nostra Aetate," 3-4, AAS 58 (1966), pp.741-43.

11. Mary Pat Fisher, *Living Religions*, 6th ed., (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2005). For a detailed study of "Nostra Aetate," see www.vatican.va/archives/histcouncils/II.

12. Muhammad Shafiq's "From Ecumenism to Interfaith Dialogue: A Historical Perspective," was presented to a gathering of church leaders in Pennsylvania. In it, he explained ecumenism had helped the Christian community build bridges. Ecumenism was like a gift from God to the Christians. While speaking on this subject, some Christian clergy were heard to say: "Hallelujah." The rest of the paper dealt with the significance of interfaith work. It was also presented to a Muslim gathering, augmented by the Qur'anic perspective. Opponents of interfaith work also attended. The paper generated a lively discussion and a step forward in the understanding of interfaith work.

13. The 2003 Upstate Council of Masjid meeting was attended by the imams and presidents of each mosque/Islamic center. The council appreciated the Muslim involvement in interfaith work prior to 9/11 and helped Muslims during the difficult time following 9/11.

14. Miriam Sabirah Ashki, "Islamic Approaches and Principles of Dialogue," (Fellowship Papers, Salam Institute, 2006). Online at www.salaminstitute.org/ashki.pdf.

15. For a detailed commentary on this verse, see Mawlana Mufti Muhammad Shafi, *Tafsir Ma'arif al-Qur'an* (Karachi: Idarah Ma'rif, 1989).

16. *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Kitab al-Adab, Bab 'Alamat al-Hub fi-Allah.

17. See www.carthage.edu/augustine/index.php?page_id=6/ and www.sofn.org.uk/Conferences/lg96conf.html economic oikonomia = household management.

18. Michael Molloy, *Experiencing the World's Religions* (Europe: McGraw-Hill, 2006).

19. The Reformation and the Renaissance were parallel movements in Western Europe. The Reformation supported the Protestant movement, and the Renaissance paved the way for the separation of church and state.

20. Ian R. K. Paisley, *A Concise Guide to Bible Christianity and Romanism* (Belfast: European Institute of Protestant Studies, 2000). Available online at www.ianpaisley.org/article.asp?bible17.htm#229.

21. "As the son of Emperor Humayun, he was born in Umarkot, Sind (now in Pakistan), and succeeded to the throne at the age of 13. He first ruled under a regent, Bairam

Khan, who recaptured for the young emperor much of the territory usurped at the death of his father. In 1560, however, Akbar took the government into his own hands. Realizing that Hindu acceptance and cooperation were essential to the successful rule of any Indian empire worthy of that name, he won the allegiance of the Rajputs, the most belligerent Hindus, by a shrewd blend of tolerance, generosity, and force; he himself married two Rajput princesses. Having thus secured the Hindus, he further enlarged his realm by conquest until it extended from Afghanistan to the Bay of Bengal and from the Himalayas to the Godavari River. Akbar's supreme achievement, however, was the establishment of an efficient administrative system that held the empire together and stimulated trade and economic development." David Nicolle, *Mughul India 1504-176* (Essex, UK, Osprey Publishing, 1993).

22. "Evangelical denominations emerged in 1920. With an emphasis on the Bible, and a conservative morality agenda, their number has been increasing gradually. The current radical fundamental Evangelical movement has its roots in the fundamental-modernist controversy of the early 20th century. Fundamentalists were reacting against the liberal or modern movement in Christianity that sought to reconcile science and religion and to use historical and archaeological data to understand the Bible. In response to that the Evangelicals asserted: the inspiration and authority of scripture (and sometimes its inerrancy); an emphasis on the virgin birth of Jesus and other miracles; the deity of Christ and the bodily resurrection as a literal historical event; Christ's atoning and substitutionary death; and an emphasis on the literal and imminent Second Coming of Christ." Mary Pat Fisher, *Living Religions*, 6th ed. (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2005), p.349. It must be stressed that not all Evangelicals are radical fundamentalists and that many moderates are deeply involved in interfaith dialogue. The Evangelicals we are discussing here are the far-right radical fundamentalists who have hijacked Christianity, just as some Muslims have hijacked Islam.

23. Some Jewish leaders have made direct positive overtures to the American Muslim community as well. The Commission on Jewish Muslim Understanding sponsored a public seminar on Jewish–Muslim migration in the USA. The Jewish speaker gave an eye-opening lecture on what the Jews faced when they arrived here and how hard they worked to find a place in an initially prejudiced context.

Chapter II

1. Muhammad Shafiq surveyed a few mosques and institutions established by various individuals as well as institutions and mosques run by community organizations. His survey revealed that institutions run by an established authority had fewer problems than those run in another way. In one community-run mosque, someone who had questioned the mosque's authority was simply told to leave if he was not satisfied. A

brief survey of imams indicated that many are not happy working in community-run mosques; rather, they prefer to have their own.

2. *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Kitab al-Zakah, Bab La Sadaqah 'Illa 'an zahr ghina.

3. A study of *surah al-Hujurat, surah Luqman, surah al-Furqan*, and al-Tirmidhi's *Al-Shama'il al-Muhamadiyyah* on the Prophet's Sunnah would help greatly in developing a comprehensive list of appropriate etiquette and manners. In his *Nonviolence and Peacebuilding in Islam* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003), Abu-Nimr has identified other core Islamic values that support dialogue and peace, among them patience, equality, symmetry, balance (as a mode of learning leading to action), good deeds, service to the community (including volunteer service), empathy, fairness and justice, the pursuit of learning, peacemaking, solidarity, the sanctity of human life, and universality.

4. Maintaining attitudes of politeness and gentleness is very challenging within materialistic and individualistic societies. In one 2006 conference, a community leader told us that in his mosque, some people would leave when certain people entered. "You always find them looking very angry. There is never a smile on their faces. Many Muslims do not come to the masjid because of them." In response, he was advised to ask the imam to give continuous sermons on manners (*adab*), and the Islamic virtues of politeness and smiling kindly.

5. *Sunan al-Tirmidhi*, "Chapter on the Cheerfulness of the Prophet," Book of Virtues, hadith no. 3642.

6. *Sunan al-Tirmidhi*, "Chapter on the Ways of Making Righteous Deeds," Book of Righteousness and Relationships, hadith no. 1956.

7. Muhammad ibn 'Isa al-Tirmidhi, "Chapter on Prophet's Manners of Talking," *Al-Shama'il al-Muhamadiyyah*,

8. Muhammad ibn 'Abdullah al-Khatib al-Tabrizi, "Chapter on Adab al-Mufrad," *Mishkat al-Masabih*

9. *Sahih al-Bukhari*, "Chapter on Sneezing and Yawning," Book of Manners, hadith no. 5869.

10. *Sahih al-Bukhari*, "Chapter on the Character of the Prophet," Book of Exploits, hadith no. 3375.

11. *Sahih Muslim*, "Chapter on the Virtues of Ablution," Book of Corporeal Purification.

12. *Sunan Abu Dawud*, "Chapter on Fixing One's Hair," Book of Combing One's Hair.

13. Al-Tabrizi, *Mishkat al-Masabih*, Kitab al-Taharah, vol. 1, hadith no. 281.

14. Ibid., "Chapter on *Miswak* (tooth brush)," Kitab al-Taharah, hadith no. 378.

15. Professor Leonard Swidler of Temple University underlined ten principles in his "What is Dialogue?" Available online at www.theamericanmuslim.org.

16. Isma'il R. al-Faruqi and Leonard Swidler were colleagues at Temple University's Department of Religion and actively involved in interfaith dialogue. Mohamad

Shafiq was privileged to be a student of al-Faruqi and has published *The Growth of Islamic Thought in North America: Focus on Isma'il R. Faruqi* (Beltsville, MD: Amana Publication, 1994) as a tribute to his life and achievements.

17. The above list is an edited version from al-Faruqi's, *Islam and Other Faiths*, ed. Ataullah Siddiqui (UK: The Islamic Foundation, published in association with the International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1998), pp.250-58.

18. Richard Landau, "What the world needs to know about interfaith dialogue," *Beliefnet*, 2001, www.beliefnet.com/90/story.

19. Ibid.

20. Washington National Cathedral, Massachusetts and Wisconsin Avenues, NW, Washington, DC 20016-5098. www.cathedral.org.

21. The World Council of Churches (WCC). Interreligious Relations and Dialogue. World Council of Churches, 150 Route de Ferney, P.O. Box 2100, 1211 Geneva 2, Switzerland. www.oikoumene.org/en/home.html and http://www.oikoumene.org/en/programmes/interreligiousdialogue.html.

22. Isma'il Raji al-Faruqi (1921-86) was born in Jaffa, Palestine. During his career, he became a prominent Palestinian-American philosopher and academic, as well as a highly respected scholar on Islam and comparative religion. He studied at Al-Azhar University (Cairo) and taught at McGill University (Montreal), the Central Institute of Islamic Research (Karachi), Temple University (Philadelphia), and several North American universities. Author of more than one hundred articles and twenty-five books, he co-founded the International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT) with Taha Jabir al-Alwani, Dr. AbdulHamid AbuSulayman, Anwar Ibrahim, and others in 1981.

23. Richard M. Landau, *What the World Needs to Know* (E-Book, 2001) http://www.how-to-succeed-at-interfaith-dialogue.com/.

24. The Interfaith Alliance, 1331 H Street, NW Washington, DC 20005 (11th Floor) www.interfaithalliance.org/site/pp.asp?c=8dJIIWMCE&b=120694.

25. Children of Abraham Institute, c/o Prof Peter Ochs, Dept. of Religious Studies, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA 22904-1026. http://etext.virginia.edu/journals/abraham/about.html.

26. Georgetown's Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding, Georgetown University, ICC 260, Washington, DC 20057. http://cmcu.georgetown.edu.

27. Student InterFaith Council at the University of Utah (SIFC-U), 124 Lincoln Street, Salt Lake City, UT 84102. http://utefaith.blogspot.com/.

28. Bunting Meyerhoff Interfaith and Community Service Center. John Hopkins University. 3400 North Charles Street, Baltimore, MD 21218. http://web1.johnshopkins.edu/chaplain/index.php/interfaith-center.html.

29. Interfaith Communities United for Justice and Peace (ICUJP), University of Southern California, P.O. Box 483 Pasadena, CA 91102-0483. www.icujp.org.

30. Boston University Women's Interfaith Action Group, 735 Commonwealth Ave., Boston, MA 02215.

31. For more information on the program, see www.naz.edu/dept/cisd.

32. NCCJ Interfaith Partners and Pathways to Peace Foundation, in association with Mosaic Youth Theatre and the University of Michigan, The Arts of Citizenship Program "The Children of Abraham Project."

33. The Interfaith Alliance of Idaho, www.idahodesigns.net/tiaidaho/currentpro-grams.htm.

34. Fellowship of Reconciliation. List of Social Action Issues. 521 N. Broadway, Nyack, New York 10960. www.forusa.org/programs/rej/socialagenda.html.

35. There are many Islamic relief and aid organizations. For example, Islamic Relief, one of the largest, is active in more than forty different countries.

36. *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Kitab al-Zakah, Bab 'la Kulli Muslim Sadaqah.

37. *Sahih Muslim*, Kitab al-Salam, Bab Fadl Saqi al-baha'im.

38. Sonia P. Omulepu (compiler and editor), *Interfaith Education Initiatives: A Manual on Interfaith Dialogue* (New York: Office of Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations, The Episcopal Church USA, 2005), pp.49-55.

Chapter III

1. Complete interpretations can be found in Isma'il ibn 'Umar ibn Kathir, *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-A'zim*; Abu 'Abd Allah al-Qurtubi, *Tafsir al-Qurtubi* (*Al-Jami' li Ahkam al-Qur'an*); Mahmud ibn 'Umar al-Zamakhshari, *Tafsir al-Kashshaf*; Muhammad Rashid Rida, *Tafsir al-Manar*; Sayyid Qutb, *Fi Zilal al-Qur'an* (in Arabic); Abul Ala Maududi, *Tafhim al-Qur'an*; Muhammad Asad, *Muqaddimah Tarjuman al-Qur'an*; and Muhammad Shafi'i, *Ma'arif al-Qur'an* (in Urdu).

2. *Sahih al-Bukhari*, "Chapter on Supporting your Brother when he Persecutes or is being Persecuted," Book of Grievances and Compulsion, hadith no. 2312.

3. Muhammad Husayn Haykal, *The Life of Muhamad*, tr. Isma'il al-Faruqi (USA: North American Trust Publications, 1976), pp.65-66.

4. Al-Faruqi, *Islam and Other Faiths*, p.74.

5. *Sahih al-Bukhari*, "Chapter on the Matter with the Children of the Idolaters," Book of Burials, hadith no. 1319. For further elaboration, see al-Faruqi, *Islam and Other Faiths*, pp.138-39.

6. For more details, see Jamal Badawi, "Muslim and Non-Muslim Relations: Reflections on Some Qur'anic Texts," *Islamic Awareness* (2005), http://www.islam-awareness.net/MusChristRelations/reflections.html.

7.   Al-Faruqi, *Islam and Other Faiths*, p.93.

8.   "*Kufr*," *The Free Encyclopedia of Wikipedia*, www.wikipedia.org.

9.   See Mufti Muhammad Shafi, *Tafsir Ma'arif al-Qur'an*, vol. 4 (Karachi: Idaratul-Ma'arif, 1999).

10.   Haykal, Mohammad, *The Life of Muhammad*, chapter 10.

11.   Saeed Ismaeel, *Muslim and Non-Muslim Relations* (Toronto: Al-Attique International Islamic Publications, 2003), p.24.

12.   *Sahih al-Bukhari*, "Chapter 16: On the Free Emancipation of Captives by the Prophet without taking the Khums," Kitab Fard al-Khums, hadith no. 3139.

13.   Ismaeel, *Muslim and Non-Muslim Relations*; Haykal, *The Life of Muhamad*, pp.395–413.

14.   Ismaeel, *Muslim and Non-Muslim Relations*, p.17; Yusuf al-Qaradawi, *Halal and Haram*, "Chapter 5," (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 1995).

15.   *Sahih al-Bukhari*, "Chapter on the Prophet Buying in Deferred Payment," Book of Selling, hadith no. 1963.

16.   *Sahih al-Bukhari*, "Chapter on Standing for the Funeral of a Jew," Book of Burials, hadith no. 1250. Also narrated in *Sahih Muslim*, "Chapter on Standing for Funerals," Book of Burials, hadith no. 961.

17.   Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an* (Chicago: Biblioteca Islamica, 1980).

18.   Farid Esack, *Qur'an: Liberation and Pluralism* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1998).

19.   See *Tafsir al-Zamakhsharii*, *Tafsir al-Tabari*, and *Tafsir Ibn Kathir* in reference to Qur'an 2:62.

20.   See Qur'an 3:19, 3:84, 85, 5:3, and 33:40. These and many other verses are cited by those who state that belief in Muhammad and the Qur'an is essential for one's salvation.

21.   Omar Khalidi, "Living as Muslim in a Pluralistic Society and State: Theory and Practice," *Muslims' Place in the American Public Square*, edited by Zahid H. Bukhari et al. (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2009), pp.43-46. See the whole discussion on Jurists debates on construction of the House of Peace and the House of War in the Medieval Area,

22.   For details on this subject, see Peter Hardy, *The Muslims of British India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972).

23.   Taha Jabir al Alwani, "Toward the Fiqh of Minority: Reflections," *Muslims' Place in the American Public Square*, p.28.

24.   A. Rahman I. Doi, *Non-Muslims Under Shari'ah* (Brentwood, MD: International Graphics, 1979), p.22. Also see Yusuf al-Qaradawi, *Ghayr al-Muslimun fi al-Mujtama' al-Islami* (Al Qahirah, Egypt: Maktabah Wahbah, 1977), p.7.

25. W. Montgomery Watt, *Islamic Political Thought* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 1968), p.51. Also see: Thomas Arnold, *The Preaching of Islam: History of Propagation of the Muslim Faith* (New York: AWS Press, reprint of 1913 edition).

26. The discussion that took place in Pakistan Constituent Assembly over the word *dhimmi* after its establishment in 1947–56 is interesting to study. For a detailed study on this, see Muhammad Shafiq, *Islamic Concept of a Modern State: A Case Study of Pakistan* (Lahore: Islamic Book Foundation, 1987).

27. Doi, *Non-Muslims*, p.55.

28. See the commentary on 9:29 in Yusuf Ali, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an* (Beltsville, MD: Amana Publications, 2003).

29. Muhammad Asad, *The Message of the Qur'an* (England: The Book Foundation, 2003).

30. Mawlana Mufti Muhammad Shafi, *Ma'arif al-Qur'an*, in Urdu, (Karachi: Idara Ma'arif, 1989). See his explanation to the verse 9:29.

31. Muhammad Hamidullah, *Introduction to Islam* (Paris: Center Cultural Islamique, 1969), p.149.

32. Thomas Arnold, *The Preaching of Islam*, pp.49–50. See also Majid Khudduri, *War and Peace in the Laws of Islam* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1955), pp.198–99.

33. Azizah al-Hibri, "Islamic Constitutionalism and the Concept of Democracy," *Journal of International Law*, no 24 (Winter 1992): p.127.

34. Ahmad ibn Hanbal in the section of "al-Ansar," hadith no. 22978.

35. For details, see Shafi, *Tafsir al-Ma'arif al-Qur'an*, vol. 2.

36. *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Kitab al-Adab, hadith no. 6031.

Chapter IV

1. Abu Dawud, "Chapter on Night Prayer," Book of Prayer, hadith no. 1342; Ibn Hanbal in the section of "al-Ansar," hadith no. 23748.

2. Al-Tirmidhi, "Chapter on the Characters of the Prophet," Book of Righteousness and Relationship, hadith no. 2016; Ibn Hanbal in the section of "al-Ansar," hadith no. 24889.

3. Al-Bukhari, "Chapter: Commentary on 'Our Lord! Remove the penalty from us, for we do really believe,'" Book of the Interpretation of the Qur'an, hadith no. 4547.

4. About the Prophet's attributes and manners, see Safi-ur-Rahman al-Mubarakpuri, *Al-Rahiq al-Makhtum* (USA: Maktabah Dar-us-Salam, 1996), pp.492–503.

5. Ibid., pp.117–20.

6. Ibid., p.138.

7. Ibid., pp.136–37. For the incident in Ta'if, see Majid Ali Khan, *Muhammad: The Final Messenger* (Delhi: Idara-i *Adab*iyat, 1980), pp.91–94.

8. Al-Mubarakpuri, *Al-Rahiq al-Makhtum*, pp.99–104.

9. Ibid., pp.197–98; Haykal, *The Life of Muhammad*, pp.179–83; Khan, *Muhammad: The Final Messenger*, pp.116–20. The treaty contains fifty-one articles. For the full text, see Sultan Ahmed Qureshi, *Letters of the Holy Prophet* (Karachi: International Islamic Publishers, n.d.), pp.31–37; Ibn Hisham, *Al-Sirah al-Nabawiyyah*, vol. 1, pp.178–79. Also consult Muhammad Hamidullah, *The First Written Constitution in the World: An Important Document of the Time of the Holy Prophet* (Sh. Muhammad Ashrail, 1975). (The treaty was signed by the Muslims and some Jewish and pagan tribes of Madinah. This shows Prophet Muhammad's commitment to peaceful living and the freedom of religious belief and opinion.

10. Abd al-Rahman Azzam, *The Eternal Message of Muhammad* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1993), p.128.

11. Al-Mubarakpuri, *Al-Rahiq al-Makhtum*, pp.450–51. For the treaty see Qureshi, *Letters of the Holy Prophet*, p.41. For their praying in the mosque, see *Tafsir ibn Kathir* (3:61). 'Abd al-Malik ibn Hisham, in his *Al-Sirah al-Nabawiyyah*, refers to how the Najrani delegation was treated.

12. For details, see Haykal, *The Life of Muhammad* and al-Mubarakpuri, *Al-Rahiq al-Makhtum*.

13. Qureshi, *Letters of the Holy Prophet*, pp.40–41.

14. David Thomas, *Christians at the Heart of Islamic Rule* (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2003), p.vii.

15. David Thomas, trans., *Early Muslim Polemic against Christianity: Abu Isa al-Warraq's "Against the Incarnation"* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p.4.

16. Ibid., p.5.

17. Thomas, *Christians at the Heart of Islamic Rule*, p.vii.

18. Ibid., p.viii.

19. Ibid., pp.viii and ix.

20. Ibid., pp.x–xi.

21. Thomas, *Early Muslim Polemic against Christianity*, p.6.

22. Ibid., p.20.

23. Akbar S. Ahmed, *Islam Today: A Short Introduction to the Muslim World* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1999), p.63.

24. Ibid., p.64.

25. Ibid., p.62.

26. Thomas Arnold, *The Preaching of Islam*, 2nd ed. (London: Constable, 1913), pp.50–52 and 96.

27. The recent movie *The Kingdom of Heaven* directed by Ridley Scott (Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation, 2005) presented a better image of Salahuddin's treatment of his enemies.

28. Rev. Elias D. Mallon, *Islam: What Catholics Need to Know* (Arlington, VA: National Catholic Educational Association, 2006), p.55.

29. See Peter Makari, *Conflict and Cooperation Among Christian and Muslims in Egypt: Communal Relations, Toleration, and Civil Society* (New York: New York University, 2003).

30. Ibid., pp.55–56.

31. *Documents and Researches of the Seminar on the Islamic-Christian Dialogue, Tripoli* (1-5 February 1976) (Libya: Popular Office of Foreign Relations, 1981). For the joint declaration of the final statement, see pp.138–45; for the reopening of the Catholic Church, see pp.125.

Chapter V

1. For more details, see Dr. Hans Koechier, "Muslim Christian Ties in Europe: Past, Present and Future." Available online at www.IslamOnline.net.

2. Muhammad Shafiq visited the Jewish Museum in Istanbul in June 2010. Also see: *The Quincentennial Foundation Museum of Turkish Jews* (Gozlem Dazetecilik Basin ve Yayin, 2004).

Conclusion

1. For more arguments against interfaith dialogue, see http://muttaqun.com/unity-ofreligions.html. Recently, a Salafi and an imam of the community met to deal with the former's charge that interfaith dialogue is *wahdat al-adyan* (creating a unified religion) and therefore *kufr*. In a friendly manner, the Salafi was made to understand the true goals of modern interfaith dialogue.

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Islam recognizes a plurality of religions and asks Muslims to respect other religions. The primary role of interfaith dialogue is to remove misunderstanding and accept difference, the aim being to generate a climate of peaceful coexistence and harmonious social relations. And this is perhaps more needed today than ever before, as mankind is increasingly called upon to exercise tolerance in a markedly volatile world, where living and working together in diversity is fast becoming the norm. Interfaith dialogue is by no means easy, defensive reaction, uncomfortable exchange and an overwhelming desire to avoid a perceived compromise of deeply held principles are some of the pitfalls that can easily cool commitment and the best of endeavors. It is here that this Guide makes an important contribution. The book is designed to guide Muslims who are interested and/or involved in building relations with those of the Jewish and Christian faiths.

Interfaith Dialogue: A Guide for Muslims provides:

- A guide to prepare both leaders and participants for a dialogical relationship with non-Muslims.
- A clarification of dialogue as a form of communication that differs from the typical logical or theological debates used both between Muslims and between Muslims and non-Muslims.
- A tool to educate and clarify terminology so that misconceptions concerning interfaith/interreligious groups can be avoided.
- A method to remind Muslims of the *adab* (etiquette), and the ethics, of disagreement based on the Qur'an and Sunnah so that they may achieve the most effective form of communication.