Orientalism and Westernism (Occidentalism): Prejudices and Interreligious Dialogue

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ABSTRACT

Interfaith dialogue is considered one of the important topics between Islam and other religions from very ancient times. We find that there are many Qur'anic verses and prophetic hadiths that emphasize the principle of dialogue with others, taking into account religious constants and matters related to belief. Therefore, we see that what the Islamic clerics are doing is an attempt to dialogue with the followers of other religions regarding the common human value, while avoiding everything that brings about differences, especially in matters of religious belief. There are many obstacles present to religious dialogue, but we find that major religious institutions in the world, especially Al-Azhar in Egypt and the Vatican Church, have taken important steps to support the process of dialogue between religions. Dialogue with the other does not necessarily require convincing the other, but what is required is finding common ground between the two parties to support peaceful coexistence and communication between people of different religions. It cannot be said that religious dialogue is easy target, but it is a very complex dialogue that requires different treatment, understanding the other's culture, and not trying to impose a certain opinion or play a guardianship role. But what is required is a constructive dialogue based on equality, with the necessity of taking into account the religious and cultural identity of each party.

Keywords: *Orientalism, Occidentalism, Interreligious Dialogue, Vatican Church, European modernity.*

Orientalism and Westernism are interrelated concepts, since "East" and "West" have been historically produced as stable sets of interconnected texts, discourses, and ideas, representing fields of knowledge and sets of practices often supported by stereotypes of other cultures. They are also a product of and response to European modernity and its imperialist and colonial depictions. Orientalism, and Westernism are the result of ontological and epistemological classifications that support an inextricable racial and cultural distinction between "East" and "West". In this context, Orientals, Westerners and their cultures are presented as objects of

study, so that each side can define the other. Westernism is a rhetorical and material strategy mobilized and disseminated by non-Western mechanisms in order to rid themselves of the negative effects of Orientalism and Western cultural and political supremacy that made the East an object and a mirror in which to reflect imperialism. The use of the term "Westernism or Occidentalism" means that the East wants to make itself a strong base that enables it to confront the West with a kind of equality.[1] Although neutrality and objectivity are essential elements of science, neither Orientalism nor Westernism are neutral or objective. They are directed systems, expressing the inclinations and impulses of Oriental and Western scholars. However, each side tries to prove its distinction over the other in an arrogant way, using the tools of culture and religion, to achieve its goals.[2] The Christian West sees itself as a developed world, a first world, and that it is the creator of modern scientific discoveries, and that it is credited with preserving even the Orient and its civilizations. Therefore, it was natural for it to have control over it, and perhaps this was one of the reasons even for the Crusades. Where Europeans believed it was necessary to confront the dark-skinned Muslims who controlled the birthplace of Jesus Christ.[3] As for the Islamic East, it appears to the West as "cUluj علوج Unbeliever, Foreign to the Arabian race"[4] or as "Banu al-Asfar بنو الأصفر (yellow-haired – blond, Frenjah فرنجة and Roumروم)". We find that these characterizations and others have also penetrated the historical, cultural and religious heritage. This is also seen in the hadith of the Prophet Muhammad: "There will be a treaty between you and the Banu al-Asfar (blond Christians), but they will betray you and march against you with eighty banners, under each of which there will be twelve thousand soldiers".[5] The term in the hadith of the Prophet has a religious connotation, wanting to refer to Christians.

Westernism is not a product of the moment. On the contrary, its origins date back to the movement of cultural and scientific communication with the West, through translations carried out during the Abbasid era, where many philosophical and scientific works were translated. There were many translators who took on this role, such as Hunayn ibn Ishaqحنين بن إسحاق and others. Therefore, the study of Westernism must undoubtedly differ from that on which Orientalism was built. Muslims wanted to benefit from the West, and to use Greek (Western) philosophy in religious matters. Something that has greatly influenced the various firaq فرق, especially the Mu'taziliteالمعتزلة who used Greek philosophy to strengthen their views on very important and essential issues. The task of Westernism at that time was not to put the West in the position of the enemy of God, Islam and the Prophet.[6]

Therefore, we find that the term Westernism took a religious curve, at the beginning of Islam, where Westernism turned the West into a religious enemy and gave it a specific colour, through the expressions and terms used in its cultural heritage. Then, after the stability of the Islamic state and the great conquests of many parts of the Byzantine Empire and their interaction with other peoples, especially the Greeks of that period, then it began to change to become the Western teacher. While Orientalism from the beginning proceeded to transform the East into material that serves Western trends and the pursuits of the Papal Church in the Middle Ages, as well as the imperialist powers in the modern era. [7]

In this context, we must refer to the efforts that have been made to identify with the other and to learn the truth about him and to create a channel of dialogue with him. That is why we consider it useful to refer to the translations of the Quran that were made during the Byzantine period, which dates back to the ninth century AD. This translation was made in the capital of the Byzantine Empire, Constantinople, and this shows that Eastern Europe's interest in the Arabic language and the Islamic religion preceded Western Europe.[8]

This was natural, because Arab-Byzantine relations extend even before Islam, where there were trade relations between the Arabs and the Byzantines, in addition to the conquest of the Byzantine Empire in some Arab countries, especially Syria and others. In addition, the Orthodox Christian faith has also spread to these countries. We also mention the Arab-Byzantine and later Islamic-Byzantine conflicts, which are mentioned extensively in historical sources, and among these works are those that deal with the life of the Byzantine Christian knight Digenis Akritas, who had an Arab father and a Roman mother. The Quran refers to the Romans and their conflict with the Persians.[9]

John of Damascus was one of the greatest theologians, who also knew the Arabic language and wrote many books, including "Source of Knowledge". This great work is divided into three sections, the first section is dedicated to ancient Greek philosophy and its importance in supporting the Christian faith. As for the second section, it is dedicated to the various Christian heresies, and the curious thing is that he dealt with Islam as a Christian heresy in this work. The third part deals with the Orthodox Christian doctrine. So did Abouqurra and Theophanes the Confessor. [10]

Treating the Islamic religion as a Christian sect and that Muhammad was nothing more than a heretic who was influenced by the Christian religion and by the Arab Christians who were

scattered among the Arab tribes, as well as living in the monasteries located on the trade route between the Hijaz and the Levant (Syria). Therefore, they believed that he had transferred the Christian teachings, to establish a new religion, and that this religion was nothing more than a Christian sect and that he brought nothing new.

Nicetas the Byzantine has translated in his own way some verses of the Quran, also criticizing the Quran. [11]

But what is important in this matter is that the dialogue was taking place, as is clear, in the Caliph's palace and under his care. This indicates that the religious dialogue was taking place under the patronage of the ruler without any obstacles. It can be seen from the topics that were put forward for discussion in the works of Damaskinusيوحنا الدمشقي , Abu Qurrahابو قرة , and others that there were no barriers to the religious dialogue. Rather, topics related to the dimension of religious belief were also being discussed.

The Use of Terms

The use of different terms and characterizations, which reduce the different other, aims to place the other in a lower position, so that he does not become worthy of dialogue. Also, these terms, whether national or religious, lead to conflict with the other and widen the gap that already exists. These terms Saracen", [12] "Hagarene", "Ishmaelite", "Mohammedanian", or those that characterize others as "cilj (strong- clumsy- infidel)" and "crusader", are all terms that deepened the spirit of hostility with the other and reduced the possibilities of dialogue with him. While the term of the Quran is stable, "People of the Bible أهل الكتاب" or "Christians مسيحي– Nazarenes [13] نصراني or Rum رومي [14]", as they are religious terms that recognize the other, his religion and faith. This led to a step further, making him worthy of dialogue, based on good manners. [15]

We can say that the dialogue between Islam and Christianity, or Islam and Judaism, has begun very early. Mainly the Quranic verses that constantly call on Muslims to dialogue with the people of the Bible. [16] The Quranic verses present a comprehensive image of the other, who differs in doctrine, racial origin and colour. It is worth mentioning that the Quranic representation of the other, according to the religious perception, is based on human and religious unity on the one hand, and on the other hand on diverse diversity. Religious discourse

recognizes diversity in language, racial origin, colour and ideology. Religious discourse emphasizes this diversity that exists, but at the same time, it calls on people to get to know each other, and to stop this tendency to exclude the other. [17]

It is noteworthy that the Quran calls us to know each other, "O mankind! We created you from a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes that you may know one another. The most honourable of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. Allah is All-Knowing, All-Aware." [18]

Dialogue with others and communication with them is a phenomenon that has its roots very deep in history. [19] Therefore, as the culture of dialogue prevails and its base expands, new bridges of communication will be built, and a state of peace and security will prevail throughout the world. However, when man chooses to close himself off, then cultural narcissism and chauvinism will appear, and religious intolerance and extremism will prevail. Then hopes are lost and a tension prevails that certainly threatens world peace. Because the person turns against others and acts against them with a kind of violence and does not give importance to their opinions or even their thoughts and beliefs. [20] The era we live in is full of unrest, and it needs a greater contribution from people, religious leaders, scholars and politicians, and everyone is called to write in favour of tolerance and tolerance.

Religion should not be a point of discord between people, as long as one respects the religion and doctrine of the other, and does not offend either the other or their religious places.[21] However, this cannot be done in this context of constant tension, which only serves narrow goals, without taking into account that this leads, with mathematical precision, the world to inevitable conflict.[22]

Therefore, "cultural and interreligious dialogue is a multidimensional process, a path of continuous construction, which requires perseverance. An education must be cultivated that establishes the culture of peace, with the aim of enabling people to seek the best methods, and to act with prudence and balance, in crises and tensions, and in a way that absorbs violence and reduces tendencies towards extremism. This imposes a sense of critical thinking on the criteria by which we see the other, also on the mechanism of perception that constantly promotes the direction of always treating the other as the cause of evil. The tendency of prejudice, simplification and generalization, which seek to disarm the human character of cultures, groups

and entire peoples, must also be revised. Trying to hold them accountable for the bad deeds of some people belong to them" [23]

It is necessary to emphasize the common standards we have with others, and to make a serious effort to develop them, in order to protect humanity and maintain the spirit of communication. However, humanity cannot continue its course without reviving the common elements that exist among civilizations, such as justice, freedom, human pride and mercy, and relying on human conscience to support these elements.

Therefore, we must escape from the narrow circle of the ego, which leaves no opportunity or space for any dialogue with the other. Egocentrism holds man hostage in the world of the ego, and excludes him from others, and this is the core of extremism, with result to incite violence against those seen as not sharing his beliefs. [24]

The use of different terms that put the other in the place of the "others" or in a lower position, made the dialogue difficult.

Therefore, we find that hostility has increased and opportunities for dialogue with the other have decreased, in order to get to know him and his religious and cultural identity. It is worth noting that the use of the designation "Western", in the Eastern tradition, raises suspicion. In many cases it also causes hostility, due to the colonial legacy that the East suffered for many years.

The designation Western represents colonialism, which brings nothing but destruction to the East. It is hostile to Islam and does not accept the presence of Muslims in this world, buts dialogue in front of a lot of problems. Therefore, we find that public discourse in the Muslim East, even religious discourse, sees the West as an enemy. Therefore, both sides should renovate their discourse, to come to common ground. [25]

Therefore, there is a state of hostility against the West and against everything that has a Western origin, even against its customs or traditions. The belief of most Orientals is not to imitate the West in anything, because it is (haram حرام). Thus, hostility towards Westernism was based on Western identity, which is inseparable from religious identity. Despite the fact that there are also Western Muslims, this was not enough for many to revise their thoughts and generalized and biased judgments towards the West, and the Western man. It is noteworthy that some still judge Muslim Westerners according to their Western environment. This treatment has the

consequence that Western Muslims fail to be accepted neither by the majority of Muslims in the East, nor by their Western societies, which treat them, in many countries, not in the context of their national identity, but in the context of their religious faith. This in itself results in them also bringing the negative consequences that their co-religionists in the East bring. That is why in most Western societies, the East is limited to Muslims and brings to the imagination of the Western person "massacre", "destruction", "war", "terrorism", "Allahu Akbar", "Islam", "oppression", "hijab or niqab", "Sharia" and "Jihad". [26] The same applies to the mention of the West, where the Oriental will have in mind "imperialism", "westernization", "fighting Islam" etc. These thoughts show prejudice, which prevents any attempt to approach the other. Even the political systems of the East, more so in order to maintain their political regimes, reinforce this approach, accusing even their citizens who claim freedom or equality or even justice of being fed with Western thoughts in order to arouse the feelings of the majority against them.

This, however, does not exclude the fact that there are many writers, thinkers and academics who have treated the other positively, whether he is an orientalist, and by this we mean the eastern Muslim or the westerner. We can refer to many writers in the West such as Gustave Le Bon, [27] William Phipps, [28] William Muir, [29] Wolfgang von Goethe,[30] William Montgomery Watt, [31] Edward Gibbon, [32] George Sale,[33] Félix María Pareja,[34] Joseph Héliodore Garcin de Tassy, Alfred von Kremer, [35] Marcel André Boisard, [36] Leopold Weiss (Muhammad Asad), [37] Lady Evelyn, [38] Sigrid Hunke. [39]

Regarding the Greek case, we can refer to the university academic orientalist Grigoris Ziakas [40], who is considered one of the most important writers in the field of Islamic studies. He himself managed, in a precise scientific manner, characterized by impartiality, to offer a clear picture of Islam and Muslims. He has many books that present a clear picture of Islam to the Greek reader, help in understanding the other and his nature and open channels of dialogue with him on a scientific basis.

The Other in the Quran and the Sunnah of the Prophet

The verses of the Quran present a comprehensive image of the other, who differs in doctrine, ethnic origin and colour. It is worth mentioning that the Quranic representation of the other, according to the religious perception, is based on human and religious unity on the one hand, and on the other hand on diverse diversity. Religious discourse recognizes diversity in language, ethnic origin, colour and ideology. Quranic discourse emphasizes this diversity that

exists, but at the same time, it calls on people to know each other, and to stop this tendency to exclude the other. [41]

It is worth mentioning that the Quran calls on people to know each other, "O! You people! "We created you from a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes that you may know one another. The most honourable of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous. And Allah is Knowing and Aware." [42]

Thus, we observe that Islam establishes the principle of common coexistence between people. Therefore, official religious institutions must adopt a strategy that aims to support peaceful coexistence and interfaith dialogue among the people of the same state, despite their religious and ideological differences. This is because the nation, or more generally the planet, is greater than having one group or one specific ideology dominate within it.

The Holy Quran specifically states, "Allah does not forbid you from showing kindness to those who do not fight you because of your religion, nor drive you out of your homes. Allah loves the merciful." [43]
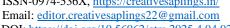
The East knows how the West sees it, over the centuries. The West has created stereotypes for Muslims. They are characterized by fundamentalism, extremism, terrorism, backwardness, lust, the burqa and other characteristics that define the Islamic world and place it in the position of the other, different from the West. [44]

The other in the Quran is the one who has a different religious doctrine, mainly the Christian and the Jew (Ahl Al-Kitab اهل الكتاب). A point of reference is that the Quran praises the Christians, because they are people who seek the truth and accept it. The Quran states, "And you will find those who say, 'We are Christians,' closest in friendship to the believers. That is because among them are monks and because they are not proud." [45]

The Quran's speech to the People of the Bible is very mild. It is a speech based on respect for diversity "Argue with the People of the Bible in a good way". This requires a proper understanding and knowledge of the culture of dialogue and not rushing to make definitive judgments based on prejudices.

The Quran urged mutual respect in dialogue with the other, since it also does not support arrogance and contempt for the other. The Quran emphasizes, "Say: "O People of the Bible! Come to a common agreement with us, that we worship none but God and that we associate no

partner with Him and that none will take others as lords besides God". If they turn their backs, then say to them: "Bear witness that we have submitted to God". The Prophet emphasized about the Ahl al-Dhammah (those enjoying Islamic protection (i.e. the People of the Bible living in Islamic countries), "if a dhammah (a follower of the Bible) is wronged, then the country becomes an enemy." [46]

Islam prohibits injustice and the violation of the rights of the people of the Bible, because such behaviour undoubtedly causes hatred and widens the gap between Muslims and the people of the Bible, their fellow citizens. According to Qur'an, Allah does not forbid Muslims to establish relations with countries that do not hold them in enmity and that do not fight us because of their religious faith. A point of reference is the commendable attitude shown by some non-Islamic countries towards Muslim immigrants and refugees. We can mention the Greek example, which Greece is making great efforts to welcome Syrians and other refugees who suffer from the suffering of the wars that exist in the Middle East. The Muslims migrated to Abyssinia at the request of the Prophet Muhammad in order to protect their lives from the harm they were exposed to in Mecca. The Messenger sent his companions to Abyssinia because he knew that these were people of the Book and that they would not harm his Muslim companions. [47]

Therefore, "cultural and interreligious dialogue is a multidimensional process, a path of continuous construction, which requires perseverance. An education must be cultivated that establishes the culture of peace, with the aim of enabling people to seek the best methods, and to act with prudence and balance, in crises and tensions, and in a way that absorbs violence and reduces tendencies towards extremism. This imposes a sense of critical thinking on the criteria by which we see the other, also on the mechanism of perception that constantly promotes the direction of always treating the other as the cause of evil. The tendency of prejudice, simplification and generalization, which seek to disarm the human character of cultures, groups and entire peoples, must also be revised. Trying to hold them accountable for the bad deeds of some people belong to them" [48]

It is necessary to emphasize the common criteria that exist with others, and to make a serious effort to develop them, in order to protect humanity and maintain the spirit of communication. However, humanity cannot continue its course without reviving the common elements that exist among civilizations, such as justice, freedom, human pride and mercy, and relying on human conscience to support these elements. In this point we to declare that the idea of interfaith dialogue dose not aim to change the ideas or the religious beliefs of the other, but to

focus on harmony between them and common problems. [49] Therefore, people should escape from the narrow circle of the ego, which leaves no opportunity or space for any dialogue with the other. Egocentrism holds man hostage in the world of the ego, and excludes him from others, and this is the core of extremism. So, what actually the people need is to meet one another as humans, based on their common conscience.

We believe that the chauvinistic ego, which is based on religious or racial superiority, must be removed and replaced with the universal and open we, which accepts the other as a partner in this world, as long as it recognizes their ideological, cultural and religious particularity.

The first basis for the interfaith dialogue is the religious freedom, As the Quran explains in many verses:

﴿وَلَوْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ لَجَعَلَكُمْ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً وَلَٰكِن يُضِلُّ مَن يَشَاءُ وَيَهْدِي مَن يَشَاءُ ۚ وَلَتُسْأَلُنَّ عَمَّا كُنتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ﴾ (النحل: 93)

And if Allah had willed, He could have made you [of] one religion, but He causes to stray whom He wills and guides whom He wills. And you will surely be questioned about what you used to do. (Qur'an, Al-Nahl, v. 93).

﴿وَلَوْ شَاءَ رَبُّكَ لَجَعَلَ النَّاسَ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً ۖ وَلَا يَزَالُونَ مُخْتَلِفِينَ﴾ (هود: 118)

And if your Lord had willed, He could have made mankind one community; but they will not cease to differ (Qur'an: Hud, v. 118).

The Prophet Muhammad also defined the relationship between Muslims and others, especially with the People of the Book اهل الكتاب , or Ahl Al-Dhemmah اهل الذمة. He mentioned this in more than one hadith.

وَعَنْ صَفْوَانَ بْنِ سُلَيْمٍ عَنْ عِدَّةٍ مِنْ أَبْنَاءِ أَصْحَابِ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ عَنْ آبَائِهِمْ عَنْ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ قَالَ: "أَلَا مَنْ ظَلَمَ مُعَاهِدًا أَوِ انْتَقَصَهُ أَوْ كَلَّفَهُ فَوْقَ طَاقَتِهِ أَوْ أَخَذَ مِنْهُ شَيْئًا بِغَيْرِ طِيبِ نَفْسٍ فَأَنَا حَجِيجُهُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ [51]

Safwan ibn Sulaim quoted the authority of a number of the sons of the Companions of God's Messenger who told on the authority of their fathers that God's Messenger said, "If anyone wrongs a man with whom a covenant has been made, or curtails any right of his, or imposes on him more than he can bear, or takes anything from him without his ready agreement, I shall be his adversary on the day of resurrection."

حَدَّثَنَا مُحَمَّدُ بْنُ عِيسَى، حَدَّثَنَا أَشْعَثُ بْنُ شُعْبَةَ، حَدَّثَنَا أَرْطَاةُ بْنُ الْمُنْذِرِ، قَالَ سَمِعْتُ حَكِيمَ بْنَ عُمَيْرٍ أَبَا الأَحْوَصِ، يُحَدِّثُ عَنِ الْعِرْبَاضِ بْنِ سَارِيَةَ السُّلَمِيّ، قَالَ نَزَلْنَا مَعَ النَّبِيِّ صلى الله عليه وسلم خَيْبَرَ وَمَعَهُ مَنْ مَعَهُ مِنْ أَصْحَابِهِ وَكَانَ صَاحِبُ خَيْبَرَ رَجُلاً مَارِدًا مُنْكَرًا فَأَقْبَلَ إِلَى النَّبِيِّ صلى الله عليه وسلم فَقَالَ يَا مُحَمَّدُ أَلَكُمْ أَنْ تَذْبَحُوا حُمُرَنَا وَتَأْكُلُوا ثَمَرَنَا وَتَضْرِبُوا نِسَاءَنَا فَغَضِبَ يَعْنِي النَّبِيَّ صلى الله عليه وسلم وَقَالَ " يَا ابْنَ عَوْفٍ ارْكَبْ فَرَسَكَ ثُمَّ نَادِ أَلاَ إِنَّ الْجَنَّةَ لاَ تَحِلُّ إِلاَّ لِمُؤْمِنٍ وَأَنِ اجْتَمِعُوا لِلصَّلاَةِ " . قَالَ فَاجْتَمَعُوا ثُمَّ صَلَّى بِهِمُ النَّبِيُّ صلى الله عليه وسلم ثُمَّ قَامَ فَقَالَ " أَيَحْسَبُ أَحَدُكُمْ مُتَّكِئًا عَلَى أَرِيكَتِهِ قَدْ يَظُنُّ أَنَّ اللَّهَ لَمْ يُحَرِّمْ شَيْئًا إِلاَّ مَا فِي هَذَا الْقُرْآنِ أَلاَ وَإِنِّي وَاللَّهِ قَدْ وَعَظْتُ وَأَمَرْتُ وَنَهَيْتُ عَنْ أَشْيَاءَ إِنَّهَا لَمِثْلُ الْقُرْآنِ أَوْ أَكْثَرُ وَأَنَّ اللَّهَ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ لَمْ يُحِلَّ لَكُمْ أَنْ تَدْخُلُوا بُيُوتَ أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ إِلاَّ بِإِذْنٍ وَلاَ ضَرْبَ نِسَائِهِمْ وَلاَ أَكْلَ ثِمَارِهِمْ إِذَا أَعْطَوْكُمُ الَّذِي عَلَيْهِمْ " . ⁵²

Narrated Al-Irbad ibn Sariyah as-Sulami:

We alighted with the Prophet (ﷺ) at Khaybar, and he had his companions with him. The chief of Khaybar was a defiant and abominable man.

He came to the Prophet (ﷺ) and said: Is it proper for you, Muhammad, that you slaughter our donkeys, eat our fruit, and beat our women?

The Prophet (ﷺ) became angry and said: Ibn Awf, ride your horse, and call loudly: Beware, Paradise is lawful only for a believer, and that they (the people) should gather for prayer.

They gathered and the Prophet (ﷺ) led them in prayer, stood up and said: Does any of you, while reclining on his couch, imagine that Allah has prohibited only that which is to be found in this Qur'an? By Allah, I have preached, commanded and prohibited various matters as numerous as that which is found in the Qur'an, or more numerous. Allah has not permitted you to enter the houses of the people of the Book without permission, or beat their women, or eat their fruits when they give you that which is imposed on them.
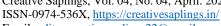
There is no doubt that dialogue and argument are inherent traits of mankind, [53] as God Almighty mentions in the Holy Quran: "And man is the most argumentative of all kinds. [54] وكان الانسان

اكثر شيء جدلا" God created man to face this life, with all its situations and events, with an open mind that does not settle on one state. We find that he searches for a thing and its opposite, to argue and engage in dialogue, but he is not certain. Man thinks and moves on a new journey towards doubt, and after doubt he begins his long journey towards certainty.

Interfaith Dialogue through Religious Institutions

The Islamic values that are seen in good morals, freedom, bravery, respect and dignity, are common elements that the Muslims have with others. Because these values are not, in any case,

exclusive to a specific people, but are common among people. The same is true for the opposite, such as extremism, malignancy, because there are terrorists and extremist who are also believe in other religions.
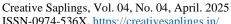
The emergence of religious terrorist organizations threatens world peace. We see the terrorist organizations, which spreads destruction, and commits terrible crimes against humanity every day.

It is necessary to create a climate of trust, and intensify the efforts to prepare the ground for constructive dialogue between peoples, cultures and religions. We consider it necessary to emphasize that, "religious and cultural coexistence, in essence, is based on mutual understanding, and on the creation of an alliance that will activate, in the interest of societies, their security and stability. Real coexistence, and not that based on lies, needs good will and deep knowledge, because the uneducated and the malicious do not dialogue." [55]

Most Western media outlets present a negative image of Islam. This in itself establishes Western hostility towards Islam and Muslims in the East and the West. By limiting Islam to the actions of terrorist organizations. They try to portray the violence and extremism of these organizations - which is due to a lack of understanding of religious texts or even misinterpretation of these texts - and attribute their actions unfairly to Islam. It is clearly notable that these organizations are being lured by false temptations, and are turning their weapons on their fellow citizens. The stereotype of radical and extremist Islam and Muslims is being prevalent in the western media and western society. [56]

Therefore, interreligious dialogue requires that there be a positive acceptance of the other, and not simply that this other exists on the sideline or that we are forced to accept him hesitantly. This other must be invited to act as an interlocutor and partner, without imposing any limits to their beliefs or their freedom. [57] We believe that some criteria must be established for people who undertake religious sermons. Because formal and external religiosity is not enough at all, but the preacher should know the reality, and be aware of the various issues in deferent levels. The preacher must also have a broad knowledge of the various cultures and histories, because theology alone is not enough to convey the correct information to the recipient.

The threat to world peace is a reality that we all observe, especially with the growing number of extremist organizations all over the world, and unfortunately they have a religious guise to hide their real goals. It is known that these organizations operate in the East, but in the West

there are also organizations and various mechanisms that are constantly trying to demonize Islam, with the result that various organizations appear, not only but also political parties, that commit violence against Muslims and their places of worship, and the examples are many and it is unnecessary for me to mention them to you, because obviously, you see and read about what is being done to them every day.
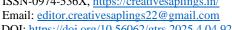
Some media are playing a negative role in this matter, serving some political interests, or are simply ignorant of what is really happening, and do not give the other the opportunity to clarify. Whether it is the first or the second, the result is the same, the presence of a distorted image of the other, which leads not only to the threat of their countries of worship, but also to the threat of their lives and physical integrity.

Interfaith dialogue refers to conversations about the meanings of beliefs, rituals, and morals. These conversations have undoubtedly taken place, formally or informally, since the beginning of history, and at least since people first disagreed about religious believes. [58] These are conversations that occur naturally between people of different faiths. This difference or even this discussion does not necessarily lead to conflict, but rather it is about exploring the other and knowing what beliefs or even cultures he believes in. This is in accordance with the words of God Almighty: {Mankind was one community, then God sent prophets as bearers of good tidings and warners, and sent down with them the Book in truth to judge between people concerning that over which they differed.} [59] However, the term interfaith dialogue did not appear until the last half of the twentieth century. [60]

The interfaith dialogue according to Islamic jurisprudence الفقه الاسلامي is a communal duty فرض كفاية. If it is carried out by those who are sufficient, the duty is dropped from the rest, and the call becomes a recommended Sunnah سنة مستحبة . [61] This is consistent with what the Holy Quran also indicates: {And let there be a community there who invite to good and forbid evil. Those will be the successful.} [62] However, if the sufficiency is not fully achieved, all Muslims are sinful from the perspective of Islamic law, and the duty becomes general, until sufficiency is achieved. Dialogue also means calling for points of convergence. It also works to clarify the common points between people and find a way to communicate. [63]

There are questions that are rightly raised by various people about who undertakes the religious Islamic discourse? If we take the European example, we will find that in many countries those who are responsible for the places of worship of Muslims do not belong to official religious

institutions. Most of these people either know nothing about Islam or the knowledge they have is very superficial. This leads to the misinterpretation of religious texts - especially those related to the people of the Bible, peaceful coexistence and interfaith dialogue.

Muslims establish a basic rule for dialogue, which is monotheism. This is clearly evident in the call to the People of the Book to dialogue on the basis of monotheism and not associating partners with God. [64] Say: "O People of the Book! come to common terms as between us and you: That we worship none but Allah; that we associate no partners with him; that we erect not, from among ourselves, Lords and patrons other than Allah." If then they turn back, say ye: "Bear witness that we (at least) are Muslims (bowing to Allah's Will). [65]

﴿ قُلْ يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ تَعَالَوْا إِلَىٰ كَلِمَةٍ سَوَاءٍ بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكُمْ أَلَّا نَعْبُدَ إِلَّا اللَّهَ وَلَا نُشْرِكَ بِهِ شَيْئًا وَلَا يَتَّخِذَ بَعْضُنَا بَعْضًا أَرْبَابًا مِّن دُونِ اللَّهِ ۚ فَإِن تَوَلَّوْا فَقُولُوا اشْهَدُوا بِأَنَّا مُسْلِمُونَ﴾ (آل عمران 64)

Through this Qur'anic verse, we find that the framework of religious dialogue is specific to Muslims and is based on a monotheistic religious framework, meaning that it calls people to a common word, and this word is the pure monotheism of God.

During the modern era, there have been several attempts by official religious institutions to support dialogue and coexistence between religions. It is worth noting what Al-Azhar Al-Sharif has done during the past years in cooperation with many Christian and non-Christian religious institutions. Al-Azhar Al-Sharif opened a channel for dialogue with the Vatican, and the two parties reached the signing of a document called Human Fraternity الاخوة الانسانية. This document has been translated into many languages, including English, French, Spanish, Italian, Japanese, Hebrew, German, as well as many African and Asian languages, including Chinese, Persian, Pashto, and other different languages. The two parties were keen to clarify the main objective of this document and to set specific provisions that support interfaith dialogue and also clarify the importance of peaceful coexistence between followers of different religions. The Sheikh of Al-Azhar has been interested in the issue of dialogue and has worked to support communication with the various churches, especially the Catholic Church. In the Imam's various speeches, we can see that he is interested in clarifying Al-Azhar's opinion on the issue of dialogue, and he is also working to clarify Islam's position on dialogue with others.

Through the speeches of the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar on various occasions, we realize that he is interested in the issue of dialogue between religions, for example, what he mentioned in one of his speeches at conference he held in the Emirates: "From here, brothers and sisters! The

dangerous role that falls on our shoulders - religious scholars and religious leaders - before others, emerges to address this crisis that the world is suffocating with today, and the way to do that is: the global brotherhood that haunted Al-Azhar's dreams in the thirties of the last century, and still haunts it until this moment, begins with brotherhood among religious leaders first, or as the great theologian/Hans Kung says: "There is no peace in the world without religious peace." Therefore, religious scholars - today - if they intend to play their role in preaching world peace, replacing conflict with understanding, and fulfilling people's hopes for an integrated and understanding world - they must achieve peace and understanding among themselves first, so that they can call people to it". [66]

The basic foundations of dialogue established by Al-Azhar Al-Sharif are based on the principle of equality and fairness in dealing with others. Therefore, we see from the speeches of the officials in Al-Azhar Al-Sharif, a state of dissatisfaction due to the use of terms such as terrorism, violence, and others, and describing Muslims with them, as well as describing Islam. These people believe that dialogue cannot take place with the existence of this treatment. Therefore, the Imam of Al-Azhar stressed that: "The Holy Qur'an has elaborated on the regulation of the relationship between Muslims and Judaism and Christianity, because they represented the two largest heavenly religions known to people in the Arabian Peninsula and the neighbouring Persian and Roman capitals. As for the rest of the other religions, such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, and others, they were unknown religions to the Arabs. However, the texts of the Holy Qur'an and the Prophetic Sunnah expanded upon them when these texts established a general rule that governs the relationship between Muslims and others and limited it to a relationship of righteousness and justice with the believers of any religion, sect, or philosophy, as long as they do not attack Muslims or expel them from their homes: "Allah does not forbid you from those who do not fight you because of religion and do not expel you from your homes - from being righteous toward them and acting justly toward them. Indeed, Allah loves those who act justly. Allah only forbids you from those who fight you because of religion and expel you from your homes and support each other in your expulsion - from making them allies. And whoever makes them allies - then it is those who are the wrongdoers." "The basis on which this comprehensive Qur'anic vision is based is that the Qur'an views all people equally, that they are the children of one father and one mother, and that the non-Muslim is either a brother to the Muslim in religion or his equal in humanity. Here is a human unity that recognizes one another, and there is no distinction between its individuals
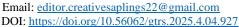
except through righteous deeds." [67] Therefore, the basis of differences in beliefs and cultures is based on the principle of diversity as Islam sees it, and it is a difference that Muslims see as a natural thing and that this is the law of the universe. The Qur'an has confirmed this principle and that God's will has made people differ in beliefs, color, and language. The Qur'an says "This difference is considered a type of miracle that the Qur'an described and in which Muslims also believe. And if your Lord had willed, He could have made mankind one community, but they will not cease to differ. Except whom your Lord has given mercy. And in this way, He created them". [68]

The Grand Imam of in one of his speeches emphasizes that "Al-Azhar hopes that the World Council of Churches in Geneva will adopt a "call" to confront the phenomenon of Islamophobia, continuing its commendable steps on the path of Christian-Islamic dialogue that this council began with the first official dialogue in 1982 between the Council of Churches and the World Islamic Conference in Colombo, the capital of Sri Lanka". [69] According to the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar "The logic of religions does not recognize the dominance of civilizations over each other, but rather emphasizes that if the relationship between different civilizations proceeds in this ominous direction, the result will never be the dominance of one civilization over another, or the supremacy of one culture at the expense of another, but rather the inevitable fate at that time is: either the collapse of arrogant civilizations, or the return of all humanity to a state of barbarism and chaos, perhaps the likes of which history has never known before. The logic of religions in the relationship between the sons of civilizations with each other; It is fundamentally in contradiction with the logic of the clash of civilizations and the logic of the end of history. A religious person is qualified to feel for his fellow human being and to feel the human brotherhood that is the basis of the spiritual values shared between religions. This fact is very clear in the Islam that I follow, which establishes that all people belong to one father and one mother. It does not stop there, but rather establishes the religious brotherhood between Islam and the divine messages that preceded it and connects it to them with an organic and inseparable bond; whether that is at the level of Islam as a religion, a holy book, or a prophet conveying this message." [70]

The Imam expresses his opinion on the issue of interfaith dialogue and confirms that Al-Azhar looks forward to establishing more cooperative relations between all religious, cultural and media institutions in the Arab world, to work together in the fields of guidance, religious and moral education, and upbringing for citizenship. This will have a positive impact on developing

relations and understanding with Arab and international religious institutions, to consolidate Islamic-Christian dialogue and dialogue of civilizations.[71] Although the Imam of Al-Azhar called for dialogue in many of his speeches at various conferences, we find that he also criticizes the West's methodology in dealing with the Islamic East. He believes that this methodology is based on dealing with a kind of arrogance and chauvinism. He also emphasizes that the poem of Rudyard Kipling Pallad to East and West," in which he pointed out that "Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet", that this statement become a principle and rule in Western policies in regulating the relationship between the West and the East. Indeed, for more than a century, it has expressed the most specific description of Western culture that rejects the Islamic East and opposes its civilization and heritage in the last century and before it as well. He said that the Muslims "used to think that this culture of "rejecting Islam" had become obsolete after the amazing progress achieved by the West, especially in the field of information, where Islam can now be read correctly, and its simplicity and humanity can be easily recognized with precision and clarity by Westerners, so that there is no longer any justification for the West to persist in its traditional hostile position towards Islam and its civilization. However, we were surprised by the modern policies of the West, which are weaving in the same old way, after changing the banners, and fabricating claims and lies. After the motive for colonialism in the past two centuries was the message of the white man towards the savage Easterners, and their refinement and civilization, the West presented us with a new excuse: "The clash of civilizations," "The inevitability of confronting Islam," "The end of history," "Creative chaos," and "Spreading democracy." All of these are fallacies and shameful scandals if viewed in the light of the noble quranic verse that establishes the acquaintance, integration, and brotherhood of civilizations, as God Almighty says: {O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you.} [Al-Hujurat: 13], also in the light of the prophetic light which in turn emphasized the principle of equality among people: "People are equal like the teeth of a comb," "People are the children of Adam, and Allah created Adam from dust." [72]

The Imam holds the Western regimes responsible for obstructing interfaith dialogue and peaceful coexistence, especially through the West's dealings with the issues of the Islamic East, and which the Imam believes are being dealt with in an unfair manner. Moreover, dialogue cannot take place in light of this ongoing distortion from the West towards the East, and he

emphasizes that "The theory of the clash of civilizations that governs the philosophy of Western regimes is a colonial theory par excellence, and it is carefully designed to justify the inevitable clash with Islam, which obsesses decision-makers in the West. This theory was formulated in a booklet published in the United States in 1996, and decision-makers there soon adopted this claim and other claims, and turned it into a miserable and bitter reality that Arabs and Muslims live in more than one of their countries and homelands." [73]

In any multi-religious and multi-sectarian society, the need for constructive dialogue based on equality becomes a pillar of its unity and stability. Dialogue can only be with the other, and the other can only be different, otherwise there is no need to dialogue with him. Therefore, the first pillar of dialogue is to recognize the inevitability of the existence of difference with the other, provided that this difference is interpreted in the sense of diversity in absolute human life, which results in the principle of recognizing the existence of the other and his right to exist. It is absurd to eliminate difference, and to try to impose a policy of absolute agreement and eliminate the religious and cultural identity of the other in order to accept him. It is also impossible to melt all beliefs and ideas in one crucible and transform them into absolute agreement. [74] Although Muslims call for dialogue, they reject dialogue about faith, but focus on dialogue regarding the moral values shared by humanity. It is worth noting what the Qur'an indicates in this matter, especially in the verse [of Al Imran- 19] "Indeed, the religion in the sight of Allah is Islam". إِنَّ الدِّينَ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ الْإِسْلَامُ And "I have وَرَضِيتُ لَكُمُ الْإِسْلَامَ دِينًا 3 – الْمَائِدَة and chosen Islam for you as your religion" and "And whoever seeks a religion other than Islam, it will never be accepted of him, whoever seeks other than what Allah has legislated, it will not be accepted from him. and in the Hereafter he will be one of the losers. (Al Imran- 85).

وَمَنْ يَبْتَغِ غَيْرَ الْإِسْلَامِ دِينًا فَلَنْ يُقْبَلَ مِنْهُ 85 - آلِ عِمْرَانَ

The religious dialogue that Muslims mean is the dialogue that is based on common humanity and moral values, far from discussing doctrinal matters. Muslims believe that discussing faith is something that cannot be allowed because it contradicts the religious texts of the Qur'an and Sunnah. Okay, for them, about a matter related to faith and disbelief. However, Rana, the difference in faith cannot hinder dialogue between people of deferent believes. Dialogue in Islam depends on persuasion and presenting evidence without forcing the other to convert to Islam, "And dispute ye not with the People of the Book, except with means better (than mere disputation), unless it be with those of them who inflict wrong (and injury): but say, "We

believe in the revelation which has come down to us and in that which came down to you; Our Allah and your Allah is one; and it is to Him we bow (in Islam).".

وَلَا تُجَادِلُوا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ إِلَّا بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ إِلَّا الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا مِنْهُمْ وَقُولُوا آمَنَّا بِالَّذِي أُنزِلَ إِلَيْنَا وَأُنزِلَ إِلَيْكُمْ وَإِلَهُنَا وَإِلَهُكُمْ وَاحِدٌ وَنَحْنُ لَهُ مُسْلِمُونَ

If this dialogue is urgent in non-religious matters, it is even more urgent in interfaith relations, because religion has an impact that cannot be ignored in the lives of people, individuals and groups, and because it has - above all - a great and effective impact in building self-awareness in human societies, ancient and modern. Religion, or what replaces religion (or what specialists in the field of theology and comparative religions have called "quasi-religion" or "semi-religion") of modern ideologies such as: humanism, secularism, nationalism, communism, Marxism, and so on,1 is in fact the basic component and foundation of human civilization and its identity. This is because it is the only one that provides it and supplies it with the values and ideals by which it achieves its existence, becoming, strength, legitimacy, and continuity in history, and without which all of that would be disrupted. [75]

However, it is noticeable that there are those who view interfaith dialogue with pessimism and consider it to be nothing but a Western trick to achieve their true aims, which are to eliminate the Islamic religion and religiousness among Muslims and to eliminate all religious differences that exist between traditional religions. These people, a large percentage of whom include religious charlatans, believe that most religious dialogues take place contrary to what is required and what dialogue should be. The goal sought by most Christian churchmen is evangelism and conversion, or secularism if conversion is not possible, while the proponents of "quasi-religions" have planned dialogue within a larger and broader strategy to achieve another goal, which is to erase the traditional religious identity of man or encourage "religious detachment" or "religious indifference." This goal ultimately leads to an inevitable and dire result, which is the elimination of all "traditional" religions (religions proper) and their replacement by "quasi-religions." These people view the entire interfaith dialogue as a large and organized conspiracy taking place on an international scale to eliminate "traditional religions" while hiding behind the mask of the shiny democratic values of equality, freedom, pluralism, tolerance, peaceful coexistence, mutual respect, and so on. These people believe that "this fact is so clear and obvious that only an ignorant or negligent person would overlook it. Anyone who has the slightest awareness of the development of this new strategy, its objectives, methods, means of implementation and activation on the ground will inevitably realize the

extent of the clarity of this conspiracy and its large size. There are clear indicators of this that can be deduced from their writings, statements and political decisions on more than one level." They even question "academic studies and writings on religions and religious dialogues, as the main trend or prevailing channel for them is to focus intensely on the common or similar aspects and elements between religions alone without addressing the basic differences between them. Rather, there has become a kind of semi-official consensus on the "prohibition" of addressing these subjective differences between religions and delving into them in these two fields, i.e. scientific studies of religions and religious dialogue, in particular." [76]

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