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# **DIALOGUE FROM THE ISLAMIC POINT OF VIEW**

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## FOREWORD

As part of its endeavor to spread the Islamic culture far and wide, develop the contents of this culture, raise a sound awareness about its purport and objectives, promote the Islamic thought and strengthen its role in the shaping of modern life, the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO) included in its Three-Year Action Plan for 1998-2000 a **Project on fostering awareness about the Islamic heritage and addressing issues of modern times**. Focusing on the Islamic heritage, the project aims to broach this lore from a contemporary perspective so as to shed ample light on its riches and expound issues and concepts not within reach for the present-day researcher and reader. Modern cultural and social issues are thus examined, and their cultural, economic and political implications investigated against the Islamic principles and fundamentals in such a way as to bring answers to the questions and problems raised by these issues.

One of the components of this Project consists in the preparation of a series of fifteen studies featuring the Islamic outlook on subjects and problems of interest to the contemporary society. Translated and published in Arabic, English and French booklets, the studies will be subsequently released through ISESCO's Islamic database aimed to publicize the religion, culture and civilization of Islam through Internet.

The Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization is pleased, therefore, to present ***“Dialogue from the Islamic Point of View”*** to the reader. The book highlights the tolerance of Islam and its promotion of dialogue with non-Muslims as well as its advocacy of stronger, respectful relations among humans and its support of the ethics of sound discourse, interaction and discussion of the thought of others.

Our thanks are due to the author, Dr. Abbas Al Jirari, for his excellent presentation of the Islamic viewpoint on the subject.

Our thanks also go to Dr. Jilali Saïb, author of the English translation.

It is hoped that this publication will rise to the expectations pinned by readers on their Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

We beseech Almighty Allah to crown our efforts with success, guide us to the right path and enhance the benefits of this book.

**Dr. Abdulaziz Othman Altwaijri**

Director General of  
the Islamic Educational, Scientific  
and Cultural Organization  
-ISESCO-

## **In the Name Of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate**

### **Introduction**

#### **THE POSSIBILITY OF A CONTEMPORARY DIALOGUE**

It has become well-known amongst people nowadays, and has been a matter of quasi conviction for them, that dialogue has turned out to be a necessity from which no one can escape; If this dialogue means talking to the other - irrespective of what he is - it does not mean looking for an alternative to thrusting oneself between his outstretched arms. By this I mean an alternative to the self, since this latter is deeply rooted in an individual. It does not mean either to recoil within one's individual entity in a fanatical closure to the outside world, as this recoiling yields in both cases nothing but dispute and conflict with oneself and then with the other.

Given this, it becomes incumbent upon anyone who seeks dialogue to rid it, from the beginning, of all the elements of inner or outward challenge, with the aim to clear up the atmosphere and bring out opportunities for meeting with the others. If these latter exist in such an abundance that the meeting parties can each get therefrom a provision susceptible to fructification and to the opening up of future perspectives, the clearing up of the atmosphere requires the banning of all the distorting actions and hostile stands inherited through history. It also requires the banning of direct and indirect accusations which, oftentimes, are made in an indiscriminate and projective way, without forgetting - in-so-doing - the necessity to rid oneself of the desire to intervene and orient. It

is through intervention and orientation that the strongest side seeks to show the extent of its superiority and controlling capability, hence seeks to impose its hegemony in the way that it deems appropriate. Yet, this is wrong, since it (i.e. the strongest side) wants the other side (i.e the weak one) to resign itself to shedding its own identity and the specificities of this latter. In this approach, we find that there is a disregard for one of the most important premises and bases for dialogue : the acceptance of each of the parties engaged in it as it is, with the aim to find meeting points within the reality of difference.

This conception of dialogue does not conflict with the spirit of the epoch, its requirements, evolution and the preference that these latter have produced toward what is called globalization. This will hold true only if this globalization is nothing but a contemporary cultural and civilizational phenomenon the advent of which must not coincide with the abandonment of what is dissimilar to it. Rather, this phenomenon (i.e. globalization) must, if it seeks globalism, open up on other phenomena and disclose the way for being cognizant of it, relate to it and enrich one's knowledge with it. This will enable it to acquire the human hallmark, which is the linking connection between all the civilizations and cultures that man has known throughout the long stretch of history, in a spontaneity appearing to resemble that of preordained universal norms. One of the first characteristics of these norms has to do with the fact that these civilizations and cultures must be susceptible to accepting coexistence, cohabitation and be qualified to engage in dialogue and communication, no matter how strong and superior or oppressed and helpless they may be, and irrespective of the religious faiths that they may stem from or adjust to.

From the foregoing, becomes clear the importance of dialogue governed by the Islamic point of view, as it can be

considered a model in the light of which it would be possible to convince people that a sound contemporary dialogue can take place. This is what the present study seeks to bring out and make crystal clear through its division into two parts :

Part one : It discusses the importance of dialogue and the basic facts for its success, starting from the presence of historical conditions and gives lying behind its advent and ending with showing the extent to which there is need for dialogue and how this latter must be.

Part two : It treats the concept of dialogue as it is mentioned in the Holy Quran, through a discussion of the terms and vocabulary items which refer to it as well as the methodology associated with it and some models of dialogue.

After these two parts comes the conclusion. It sums up the Islamic point of view concerning the subject matter, since Islam is, certainly, the religion of dialogue.

Our success depends upon Allah.

**Abbas AL-JIRARI**



## **Part One**

### **THE IMPORTANCE OF DIALOGUE AND THE BASIC FACTORS FOR ITS SUCCESS**

If the importance with which dialogue is characterized is well-known to everybody, it cannot be achieved so long as a number of factors - which underlie the conditions for its success - are not present. Thus, in spite of the many attempts in which dialogue has been tried, it appears that those who seek to engage in it must realize how necessary it is and how important is the style in which it must take place. It is these aspects that this part will clarify, through the examination of the following points :

1. Conditions that must be present in any dialogue,
2. Facts about its history,
3. The great need for it and how it must be.

Conditions that must be present in any dialogue

We would like to state, from the outset, that for a dialogue - any dialogue - to succeed some conditions must be present. These can be summed up as follows:

1. A dialogue requires that there be two or more parties so that it may not be simply a dialogue with oneself.
2. Its point of departure is the acceptance by each of the parties on one another. Each party must begin by getting psychologically prepared for opening up oneself to the other, with tolerance; that is, by accepting him as he is.
3. This acceptance must go hand in hand with the holding of a balanced view about the other and a shared desire to

engage in fruitful dialogue. It must also be coupled with mutual respect, the desire for exchanging views and readiness for being influenced by the other and exercising influence on him.

4. The necessity to open oneself and to come out of the silence and isolation wherein one may be and to abandon all that can lead to the development of selfishness and a bad impression about the other. The consequence of not taking this course of action is to allow for ignorance, hangups and complexes to overrule one's behavior; one must also avoid any orientation aiming to ensure victory, hegemony and domination.
5. Reaching agreement, at the outset, concerning a minimum number of concepts and values to be used as reference.
6. Ensuring access to correct knowledge, having the capability to share it with calm and poise, and seeking to convince the other parties without belittling them or their reaction and their point of view, or intending to reject their distinguishing specificities.
7. Seeking to have the dialogue take place within a framework based on givens and perspectives that do not provoke the mind and the feelings, represent a shock for the values of any of the parties, and conflict with the identity of the individual as concerns its material and spiritual dimensions.
8. The desire to get rid of disputes, erase the differences, disregard the factors of contradiction, to bridge the gap that separates between parties and to strengthen common bonds.
9. Making all the parties feel equal; that is, no party is to feel that it is in an inferior position and hence lacking the capability to adjust to, and keep pace with, the proceedings

of the dialogue. This starts from the ability to follow it and ends with that of give and take, if not the capability of measuring up with the other and entering into competition with him.

10. The requirement to define the goal sought by the dialogue and the desire to reach it, sincerely, with confidence, moderation and equity, through planning for it and laying down its condition and goals and determining who is to engage in it.

These conditions, although general, can be applied to any of the kinds of dialogue and at any of its levels, as is illustrated by what is taking place during the contemporary period, for example :

1. The Arab - European dialogue.
2. The dialogue between North and South.
3. The dialogue between countries located on the banks of the Mediterranean sea.
4. The dialogue between East and West
5. The dialogue between religions.
6. The dialogue between Islam and Christianity
7. The dialogue for narrowing the gap between the Islamic doctrines.
8. The political, social and cultural dialogue within one country.

Some of these types of dialogue that are going on now - in particular between North and South - take as points of departure the legacy of the colonial period and the situation whereby the other side seeks to impose its hegemony. This side may be so self-confident to the point that it will ignore the minimal conditions necessary for dialogue to take place and disregard whatever the side that is considered weak can put forward, if not in the economical and technical domains then in others, particularly the

cultural one. Other fields, where the weak side may make a contribution, have to do with whatever has an effect on man's life (be it at the individual or the societal level), with the fashioning of links between people and narrowing the gap between them.

The placing of this kind of dialogue in its true framework requires that it be taken out of the traditional conception, which amounted to discussing ways for the strong side to lend a helping hand, with all that this entails in terms of feelings of superiority, of distending the self and taking it as the model and the exemplar. There also results from this traditional conception the holding of a view that belittles and demeans the assisted side.

There is no doubt that a stand such as this incites the subordinate side to be suspicious of the sincerity and the usefulness of dialogue. Therefore, it accepts it only because it has to and does so only with great caution. This is so because it feels that, in its present situation, it cannot succeed in coming out of underdevelopment, in order to be integrated in the advanced world and participate in it through fruitful cooperation, and hence in bridging the gap - let alone fill it - between the two worlds.

The continued existence of this gap, with its depth and width, calls for all the parties in the dialogue - in particular the strong ones - to reflect on it and on the doctrinal and intellectual questions which it raises. These questions concern the respect of religious and moral values, the forgetting of which has become a factor for the disengagement from faith, for throwing oneself into the bosom of permissiveness, and for the spread of drug addiction, anger and violence.

In this regard, the importance of a dialogue between the heavenly revealed religions becomes clear. It requires reflecting on it and looking into it through the facts of its history - especially as concerns the dialogue between the Moslems and Christians - and on the basis of how necessary it is today and how it must be.

## **Facts about the history of dialogue**

Dialogue between Moslems and Christians is permanent and continuous. It has not stopped since the early Islamic period up till now, even though it has not gone on in a positive manner during all the epochs. The reasons for this have to do with occasional confrontations lying outside the realm of the two religions.

Dialogue has been manifest in environments where Moslems have lived together with other people belonging to heavenly revealed religions. Andalusia, under Islamic rule, topped all the countries where the atmosphere of coexistence and tolerance was prevalent. So were some of the parts of the Middle East, especially Jerusalem (which was a fertile land for such coexistence and tolerance). The same holds true for Morocco, which gained fame because of the good treatment it reserved for the Jews who were permitted to be free citizens (Ahlu Dimmah), since it is a well-known fact that it has never known any spread of Christianity even in limited numbers.

Dialogue was also represented in religious discussions that took place in intellectual councils - even in mosques - and in some writings. Some examples of these are what the Jewish scholar, Saâd Ibn Mansur Ibn Kamunah, wrote (in the 7th century of Hegira) concerning "*the Reexamination of the Researches conducted on the Three Faiths : the Jewish, the Christian and the Islamic*" in a published book where, it should be remarked, he attacked Islam. We should add what the Moslems have known during the days when scholastic theology flourished, and what they have written on religious faiths and creeds.

As for the recent historical period, Christianity was linked in the Moslems' minds with colonial expansion, which used to encourage evangelization and fight Islam in many a colonized country.

In the contemporary phase, many quarters have taken dialogue initiatives. At their top, we find the Vatican, whose calls for dialogue have always been met with approval on the part of Moslems. However, this acceptance was accompanied with some caution in view of suspicion aroused by the weak stand taken by the Vatican concerning some questions that are of interest to Moslems, especially the usurpation (by Israel) of the Arab and Moslem rights in Jerusalem and Palestine and the war of extermination waged in Bosnia Herzegovina.

Amongst the most important reference points of dialogue, we would like to mention the following :

1. The Vatican's declaration, made in 15 October 1995, concerning "The Church's Relationship with Non-Christian Religions". It was followed by a number of Islamic-Christian colloquia, the most outstanding of which are the first (held in Cordoba in September 1974), and the second (held in the same city, in March 1977), as well as the meeting that the Pope had, in 1986, with the representatives of various religions and faiths and during which prayers were recited and invocations of God were made based on the beliefs that were represented therein.

What should retain our attention, concerning the activities of the Vatican, is that the papal office has created a council for dialogue between religions (**Pontificum concilium pro dialogo inter religiones**), which published a bulletin (entitled *Bulletin*) and a journal called *Dirâsât Islâmiyya - Masîhiyya : Islamo - Christiano* ("Islamic-Christian Studies : Islamo Christiano). Writings in Arabic, French and English are published in them.

In 1964, Pope Paul VI created a Secretariat for non-christians (**Secretariatus pro non-christianis-vaticano**) with a special department with the name *Islam*. This Secretariat has

endeavored, during the sixties (67-69), to publish four books each of which is to be considered a guide for the manner in which can take place a meeting with non-Christians (the Buddhists, the Hindus, the Moslems, and the adherents to African religions). It also published, in 1984, a study on “*The Church’s stand toward the believers in other religions.*” Furthermore, it appears that this Secretariat had a large domain of work in North Africa, and in Africa in general, which must have undoubtedly been geared to favor the missionary movement. In this regard, precaution is necessary so as not to let the field free for the Non-Moslems and let it be exploited in anything that is not good for the Moslems, in their own country.

2. The kind of activity engaged into by the *Royal Academy for Islamic Civilization Studies (Al-Bayt Institution)*, in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, along with various parties amongst which are : *the Independent Commission for the Islamic-Christian Relations in Windsor* (Great Britain); *The Center for Orthodoxy in Champisi* (Switzerland); *The papal Council for Dialogue between Religions* (The Vatican).

Meetings have taken place, under the patronage - and guidance - of his Highness Prince Hassan, of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, in Amman and the Vatican, some of which I was invited to attend. Amongst these meetings, mention should be made of the following :

- A conference on “Religious education in contemporary society” : held in the Vatican from 10 to 12 Jumâda I/1410 Heg (6-8 December 1989).

- A conference on “Religion and the utilization of Earth’s resources”: organized also in the Vatican from 29 Dhi Al Qi‘dah to 2 Dhi Al-Hijjah (1416 Heg. (17-20 April 1996))

3. Some universities - in the East and the West - organize conferences in order to treat one of the religious aspects related to contemporary issues, like the one hosted by the *Law Institute for Peace and Development*, which is part of the French university of Nice (“Institut du droit de la paix et du développement - Université de Nice - Sophia Autiopolis). It organized, jointly with UNESCO, in December 1990, a conference on “Religions et guerre” (“Religions and War”), in which I participated and delivered a paper entitled “L’Islam: Religion de paix et jihad” (Islam: religion for peace and jihad”)

It should be pointed out that Alcalá University in Madrid (Spain) organized, in the last part of November 1994, a meeting for the three religions to which I was invited. Its motto was: “The Meeting of the people of the Book : A commitment for peace”. It aimed at fostering joint reflection, the exchange of views, and the discussion of experiences that might reinforce peace initiatives in the world, in particular in the Middle East.

4- Efforts made by UNESCO : mention should be made of a meeting held in Barcelona in January 1994, from which the “Barcelona Declaration” resulted, and other meetings on “Dialogue between cultures” organized within the framework of the project “Ways of faith” - in which I was able to participate. They were successively organized in Rabat (19-23 June 1995 ; 18-22 June 1997)<sup>(1)</sup>

Within the framework of this project, a “Day of Reflection on Dialogue Between the three Monotheist Religions” was organized

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(1) See “The cultural strategy for the Islamic world”; ISESCO Publications, 1418 Heg. = 1997, See in particular pages 9-50-56-63-64-65

in Rabat, in 18 Shoual 1418 Heg (= 16 February 1998 A.D.), under the High Patronage of His Majesty the late King Hassan II, may Allah bless him. It ended with the issuance of a document calling for the establishment of a gathering place in Morocco, for reflection and action, to which will be convened representatives of the three monotheist religions who will seek to define activities targeting various factions and endeavor to encourage mutual understanding and movement toward the establishment of a culture of peace.”

5. The role played by the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO) in this domain, which is manifested in the numerous aspects of the strategy it devised and the programs issuing from it. This strategy starts by taking as a premise that (a) the Islamic culture has characteristics amongst which are globalism and universality, and (b) it has a credibility and a power stemming from its divine origin and its taking as bases - for its starting points, goals and values - human nature and principles pertaining to rights, justice and human dignity. This readily accepted by people with sound minds and no human will question its validity.

From this juncture, the Organization (ISESCO) sees in the possibility to have Islam and Christianity engage in a dialogue on opportunity to attain the goal of building a reciprocal confidence, laying out bridges for intellectual coexistence and to establish natural relations between the followers of the two religions. However, this goal must be tied in to the high interests of the Islamic Umma (Community), as it endeavors to focus on human values and to coordinate between the various Islamic parties that are concerned with dialogue.

In this regard, we must point to the participation of the director of the Islamic Organization (ISESCO), Dr. Abdulaziz Othman Altwaijri, in meetings organized for this purpose. An example is the colloquium organized by the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs in Egypt (13-16 July 1997) to study the following topic : “Islam and

the West : past, present, future”. He presented a study on “The future perspective of dialogue between Moslems and the West”.<sup>(2)</sup>

No matter how many of these attempts<sup>(3)</sup> are made, which seek to firmly establish dialogue between Islam and Christianity - in fact, as can be observed in the case of some of these attempts, a complete tripartite dialogue englobing the three heavenly revealed religions - attention must be called to the fact that the Jews try, using various means, to solve their problems with the Christians even if this is done at the expense of these latter.

This is what they have done lately as concerns getting recognition for their claimed innocence from the spilling of Christ’s blood (Peace be Upon Him). Their purpose is to attain the same result with the Moslems concerning Jerusalem, so that they may establish leadership and hegemony over it and attain the influence that they covet, using as a point of departure the sacred capital. We must also call attention to the fact that the Moslems do not exclude the Jews from the dialogue. The proof for this is found in the many tripartite meetings that were held. However, the Moslems do not think that dialogue between the three religions is possible, let alone useful, as long as the legitimate right of the Arabs to Jerusalem and to Palestine is not recognized.

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(2) The study was published separately and translated into French and English; see ISESCO’s publications (1418 Heg. = 1997)

(3) In addition to what has been said, we should point to the meetings for dialogue between Islam and Christianity that took place in France, Switzerland, Italy, Austria, Yougoslavia, Colombo (Sri Lanka), Tunis (Tunisia), Libya, Jerusalem and Beirut. We should also mention meetings where the Jewish side was included : e.g. 3 November 1977, in Lisbon (Portugal), on the topic: “The changing world: a challenge for our religions”; November 1997, in Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia), on the topic: “Religious dialogue and what it raises as problems”

See, concerning this dialogue, the book entitled Islam and Christianity, written by Alex Jouar Fiske and translated by Dr Khalaf Muhammad Al-Jarâd. Published within the Series “The world of knowledge”, No 215, Jumâdah II 1417 (November/Tishrin II, 1996)

## **The need for dialogue and how it must be**

Dialogue is considered, in the current phase, to be a necessity and a means, perhaps a purpose. It requires forgetting religious differences, ignoring the erroneous practices and hostile stands. Yet, Moslems have suffered -and are still suffering- from these practices and stands at the same time that they are moving forward, in big steps, in the path leading to the establishment of a close relationship with the others. In so-doing, they ignore the distancing gap between them and the others and show complete readiness to close down the records of harsh treatment and enmity and to open up new leaves in which they take into consideration the future that is hoped for humanity. If this is done, this latter will face it by establishing a perfect and judicious equilibrium between the mechanical innovations of the epoch and its technical discoveries and religious values which are likely to curb their excesses or at least limit them.

Through these positive steps, taken for the purpose of allowing for a meeting with the others, Moslems have incessantly directed their call to focus on all that is common between the heavenly revealed religions and all that can be considered in them as intended vital means for the preservation of man's existence, the protection of this dignity, and for helping him fulfill the mission that was assigned to him concerning the vicereignty in the Earth granted him by Allah.

In taking this stand, the Moslems are not pretending or putting on studied airs; by taking it, they are being coherent with the spirit of Islam and with all that its all-englobing message - which incorporated all the faiths that preceded it- has called for.

So that dialogue reaches its objective, despite the negative aspects of the contemporary phase and the risks that surround man's life during it, it must begin by taking a decisive initiative through which will be attained the following:

**First:** To spread the religious conception of man, the universe and life. This is owing to the fact that man is honored before Allah, Who created him in the best of shapes, blown some of his spirit into him, graced him with some boons, made the universe -with all that it contains- be of service to him, favored him over many of His creatures by granting him the bounty of the mind and knowledge, charged him with the responsibility of being His viceroy in the Earth, with all the rights and duties that relate to this function.

Concerning these rights and duties, man must watch over them and protect them from any abuse, so that life will continue in the way that Allah (the Exalted) wanted it to. In fact, this is a domain for testing the extent to which man does well in his job in order to attain goodness for him and for others. It is also the domain to test man's care for the universe, which he must preserve and safeguard.

**Second:** To strengthen faith through the afore-mentioned religious conception, with all that this faith requires in terms of a doctrine based upon the unity of Allah, the acknowledgement of His greatness and His limitless capabilities and the power of His will. Another requirement concerns the canonical law that Allah (Praised be Him) has commanded that human beings follow. This is done so that the affairs of individuals and communities be organized in accordance with the commandments and the prescriptions through which Allah's will and justice are realized.

So that the positiveness of the faith, with the doctrinal and canonical sides, crystallizes, a third aspect can not be

avoided: it is represented by behavioral applications that must not be infringed upon or violated, in addition to their being neglected or disregarded. Faith revolves around the nobility of manners and commendable natural dispositions in many domains. The most outstanding of these manners and dispositions are: the lowering of the wing (in kindness), the liking of the other, treating him in a brotherly manner and cooperating with him, fighting all kinds of fanaticism and racial discrimination, and deepening the feelings of tolerance.

An initiative for instituting dialogue, such as this first and essential one, is likely to make it (i.e dialogue) capable of attaining more in terms of understanding, coexistence and movement within the path of peace. It is understood that this peace must be preceded by the respect for the other and his recognition as he is. It must also be preceded by tolerance (which is necessary for self-fulfillment), be paralleled with a concession in the area of some features thought to be as particular as privately-owned possessions, and by an endeavor towards a close relationship through focusing on shared values.

So that dialogue attains its objective, it must be made to go beyond the exchange of discourses and views, which can be achieved from a distance, and be made to take shape in meetings in which direct contact is ensured, the presentation of different points of view -no matter how contradictory they are- is clearly provided for, so that common principles and values will be the outcome.

After this requirement is fulfilled, dialogue can proceed through phases and at a number of levels, as is indicated below:

1. Between the overseers of the believers' interests in the heavenly revealed religions, this phase has started, in effect, with the repeated meetings between His Holiness

the Pope and a number of leaders of the Islamic states, as the meeting that took place in 19 August 1985, during the papal visit to Morocco, between His Holiness and His Majesty Hassan II. The Pope gave a speech to a huge audience in a sports stadium in Casablanca.

2. Between religious scholars belonging to these religions for the purpose of determining areas of agreement and linkage which are many and basic.
3. Between the educated youth, for the purpose of imparting the unified divine teachings, and in so-doing not to show any prejudice against any faith. Regarding this question, Islam's stand is sound and clear.
4. Between the believers in general, that is at the level of public opinion. This can be achieved through the means of the media. The purpose is to spread the spirit of tolerance and to urge people to coexist with each other in security and peace.

It is a well-known fact that the heavenly-revealed books and the heritage that springs from them are rich in terms of subjects that are suitable for serving as the starting point for a reflection and exchange of views on them; that is, the starting point for dialogue.

These subjects increase in richness within the framework of dialogue when they are put on the carpet of the reality of life, which is full of troubles, contradictions, struggles and problems. This reality may be related to the individuals' daily life or big problems from which suffers humanity in many parts of the Earth.

The adherents to the heavenly-revealed religions - as believers - are capable, through their commitment to their faith and its values, of confronting the problems of the contemporary world and finding appropriate solutions for them. They are also capable of meeting all the challenges. As such, they are entrusted with a common human

message which they must carry and convey, in a world dominated by a disorder resulting from the weakness of religion in people, the spread of heretic laic orientations and careless transgressing trends. The point of departure for this message is for its carriers to transmit the divine values to the young generations to reach, through these values, an awareness of the significance of their existence, the essence of their selves, their role in the universe, of what their relationship with Allah should be and the duties springing from it.

As for the basis for dialogue, it is manifested in the following equations :

1. Whatever you want the other to know about you, you should know it about him.
2. Whatever you want the other<sup>(\*)</sup> to do for you, you should do it for him.

The point of departure, in the dialogue between the believers belonging to various religions, consists in understanding the magnanimity which characterizes all these religions. It leads to a tolerance that must urge people to disregard errors that were committed - and are still being committed - for accidental reasons that, for the most part, lie outside religion or that result from a bad interpretation of its scriptures. This has led to the suspicion that there exist problems and dangers.

There is no doubt that, through this suspicion, it is possible to explain many struggles that have taken a religious coloration and different external forms, starting from sanguinary wars to civilizational and cultural conflicts.

Whoever reflects on these conflicts will be surprised to find many shocking books about which the least one can say -

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(\*) (N.B. : What is meant by the other is somebody who has a faith that is different from yours)

concerning what is published in them about Islam - is that it comes from an erroneous understanding. This incorrect understanding has as its ends the distortion of its image and the attainment of, largely, political, military and economic goals. A third end is to prepare for smashing it as it is considered to be a mortal enemy and the only enemy.

In an endeavor to convince people of the well-foundedness of this plan of action and of the necessity to implement it, most of these writings focus upon phenomena whose features are arbitrarily stuck to Islam. The most outstanding of these phenomena are : extremism and terrorism. We disregard here whatever reasons that may lie behind the occurrence of these phenomena, some of which may - very likely - have to do with a random reaction geared to confront the inimical practices to which Moslems - and even others - are subjected. One proof of this can be found in the many violent incidents for which are responsible oppressed minorities or (political) movements, in some European countries, for example.

As was mentioned above, it is possible for dialogue to start in the domain of belief in Allah, living in accordance with His law, applying the behavioral values derived from it to understand the true nature of religion. Disagreement is not permissible concerning what can be considered truth (or great truths), even if the ways to express it differ.

The ability to engage in dialogue, deepen it, and derive some usefulness from it correlates with the strength with which one can hold on to the belief in Allah, His law, and religious morals. This usefulness is manifested in the ability to grasp what the other party to the dialogue has. Of course this grasp requires abandoning withdrawing within oneself or selfish and individualistic reasons. In case this holding on to the belief in Allah is weak or inexistent, obstacles arise and impede the engagement in dialogue. This leads

to the spread of ignorance, fanaticism, the absence of awareness of truths. As a result, grave mistakes, of which the consequences are very serious, are committed.

Dialogue, in its best situations, must lead to engaging in give and take; that is, learning from the other after accepting that there might be disagreement with him. If these conditions are not present, the other must be left alone. One must not interfere in his affairs, engage in skirmishing with him or provoke him, let alone struggle against him or fight him.

The nature of dialogue that some Eastern countries, whose population is made up of Moslems and Christians (even when these latter are a minority), seek to engage in differs from that of a dialogue which can take place in a country like Morocco. With the exception of the Jewish minority, this country's population is all Moslem; Christians are not part of the national population. In the first case (i.e that of the Eastern countries), dialogue aims at finding ways of coexistence within the context of a multiplicity of religions which governs one community and controls its institutions and organisms, ranging from school education to the system of government and its machinery. In the second case (i.e that of Morocco), dialogue is required to afford opportunities likely to lead to more contact with the other, a contact which aims to span the bridges of understanding and to strengthen the commitments for mutual knowledge.



## Part Two

### DIALOGUE IN THE HOLY QURAN

It can be said, at the outset, that the Holy Quran is a book of open dialogue with unlimited dimensions and perspectives. This dialogue took place between categories of Allah's creatures : believers, polytheists, hypocrites, the people of the Book, and others. It started with the angels and the prophets (Peace Be Upon Them) and went on to Iblis (Satan). The Holy Quran also has shown the methodological elements of dialogue and how it should proceed. It is this that this part endeavors to clarify through three study points :

1. Terminological items referring to dialogue.
2. Its nature, its instruments and style.
3. Models of dialogue between Allah and His creatures.

#### **Terms and vocabulary items referring to dialogue**

In this section, I would like to point to the most important of them.

1. *Al-tahâwur* (dialogue : it means examining and responding in a discourse and engaging in give and take in it. The root of the word *hâra*, *yahûru*, *hawran* means to return. It is mentioned in this statement by the Most High (Allah): “*He verily deemed that he*

would never return unto Allah” (Sûrah Al-Inshiqâq (The Sundering) ; v.1) (4)

Dialogue requires mutual response between two parties who are engaged in exchanging utterances: an interlocutor and an addressee, or speaker and a receiver (of the speech). The purpose is to arrive at forming an opinion or to derive one from the conversation, which is based on introductory elements and common principles that are considered indisputable by both parties in a dialogue. Furthermore, it is not possible for a dialogue to proceed save if one of the parties is in agreement with the other, reaches the same conclusion and follows his reasoning in a gradual manner.

When the situation between them becomes characterized with non-acceptance or with contradiction, dialogue changes into controversy. In the Holy Quran, Allah (The Sublime) says :

- "...And he said unto his comrade, when he spoke with him: *I am more than thee in wealth, and stronger in respect of men.*" (Sûrah al-Kahf (The Cave); v.3).

- "*And his comrade, while he disputed with him, exclaimed: Disbelieve thou in Him Who created thee of dust, then of a drop, and then fashioned thee a man.*" (Same Sûrah; v. 37)

- "*God has indeed Heard (and accepted) the statement of the woman who pleads with thee concerning her husband and carries her complaint (in prayer) to God : and God (always) hears the*

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(4) Translator's Note (Hereinafter T.N.):

The Translator has elected, for ease of reference, to place the references to the Quranic verses and Hadith in the text, not in footnotes (as is done in the Arabic version of this work.)

The translation of the Holy Quran used is that of Muhammad M. Pickthall, *The Glorious Qur'an*, (undated), published by the Islamic Call Society, The Socialist people's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya.

*arguments between both sides among you... " " (Sûrah al-Mujâdila (The Woman who Pleads); v.1)\**

2. *Al-jadal, al-jidâl, al mujâdala* (dialectics): All these terms refer to discussion , a discussion that relies on the ability to argue, aims to convince through the presentation of evidence in order to make the unable understand, and confront a proof with a counter proof for the purpose of silencing with arguments and introducing correction.

*Al-jadal* can be associated with argument (or dispute) or quarrel because it involves compelling the opponent. The origin of *al-jadal*, in general, is dialogue, since *al-jadali* (the disputant) - for Plato -"is somebody who does best in asking and answering questions". This is a splendid definition for dialogue.

*Al-jidâl* (Eristics) is similar to it, even though it is closer to *al-mirâ'* (dispute, quarrel), which we will discuss below. The same holds for *al-mujâdala*, which means the exchange of *jidâl* (argument). In the Holy Quran, a Surat has *Al-mujâdila* as a title.

The three terms are derived from the verb *jadala*, which means to engage in a dispute. The term *al-jadal* appeared in two Quranic verses, with the meaning of *al-mukhâlafa* (disagreement) and *al-munâza'a* (dispute, controversy) concerning an opinion, including what can reach the level of an intense dispute. The first verse contains Allah's statement: "...but man is more than anything contentious." (Sûrah Al-Kahf (The Cave); v. 54. The second verse contains Allah's statement: "And say: Are our gods better, or is he? They raise not the objection save for argument. Nay ! but they are a contentious folk." (Sûrah Al-zukhruf (Ornaments of Gold); v. 58).

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(\*) The translation of this Quranic Verse comes from Abdullah Yusuf Ali's version, published by the Presidency of the Islamic Courts and Affairs, the State of Qatar.

As for *Al-Jidâl* and *Al-mujâdala*, they appeared with the same meaning, which may be to argue for truth or to attempt to impose falsehood. When *al-jidâl* (dispute) aims to establish falsehood, it becomes negative since its outcome can be only a quarrel. This evokes what the unbelievers did as they tried to belittle truth when they asked, in mockery and scorn, for the occurrence of preternatural phenomena (or miracles) and the quick descent of punishment. This appears in this statement by the Exalted (Allah): "...And they take Our revelations and that wherewith they are translated as a jest." (Sûrah al-Kahf (The cave); v. 56).

The Holy Quran does not mention the term *al-jidâl*, in this form, save in two verses, which are:

-First: "*Pilgrimage is in the well-known months, and whoever is minded to perform the pilgrimage therein (let him remember that) there is no lewdness nor abuse nor angry conversation on the pilgrimage.*" (Sûrah Al-Baqara (The Cow); v. 197)

- Second: "*They said: O Noah! Thou hast disputed with us and multiplied disputation with us; now bring upon us that wherewith thou threatenest us, if thou art of the truthful.*" (Sûrah Hûd (Hud); v. 32.)

At the same time, the verb *jâdala* appeared in the Holy Quran, in its perfect, imperfect and imperative forms, in 25 verses. Of these, we refer to the afore-mentioned verse (cf. Sûrah Hûd), in which Noah is the addressee, and where the verb *jâdala* is in the perfect. We refer also to the introduction of Sûrah Al-Mujâdila (cf. above), where the focal verb is in the imperfect. We would like to add to these two verses the following statement by Allah (The Glorious and Majestuous):

"*Call unto the way of thy Lord with wisdom and fair exhortation, and reason with them in the better way. Lo! thy Lord is best aware of him who strayeth from His way, and He is Best Aware of those who go aright.*" (Sûrah Al-Nahl (The Bee); v. 125)

3- *Al-Mirâ'* (dispute, quarrel) and its derivatives: its meaning is to contest (dispute) what the other claims. Its etymological origin is *mary al-nâqah*, meaning to stroke the she-camel's udder so that it will release milk. It is used as a metaphor to describe the actions of the parties in a dispute: each disputant tries to extract what the opponent has, in the same way a milker extracts milk from the udder.

This term occurred in the Holy Quran in two forms:

**First:** It occurred as a noun and a verb (in the imperfect and imperative), with the meaning referring to the intensity of a dispute and triumph in a debate, in four verses, e.g.: "... *So contend not concerning them except with outward contending, and ask not any of them to pronounce concerning them*" (Sûrah Al-Kahf (The Cave); v. 22). Perhaps that Allah's ordering the prophet (PBUH) to extract information from his interlocutors, from the people of the Book, is nothing but asking him to imitate their action. For in the the action of *mirâ'* (dispute, contention), there is a condemnable dimension in contention.

**Second :** the noun *al-mumtarîn* and its verb appeared in the Holy Quran with all the forms of this latter in 11 verses. They all refer to hesitation, suspicion and even denial. An example is this statement by The Exalted: "*And lo! verily there is knowledge of the Hour. So doubt ye not concerning it...*" (Sûrah al-Zukhruf (Ornaments of Gold); v. 61). Another example is: "*It is the Truth from thy Lord (O Muhammad), so be not thou of those who waver.*" (Sûrah Al-Baqara (The Cow); v. 147).

To the above form should be added that of *mira'*, which occurred in 5 verses, e.g.: "...*So be not thou in doubt concerning it. Lo! it is the Truth from thy Lord; but most of mankind believe not*" (Sûrah Hûd (Hud); v. 17).

In the light of these facts from the Holy Quran, Moslem scholars have discussed all the levels of conversation, conversation having as its goal *al-munâdhara* (debate, discussion ) on which they have written a great deal. They have even written on the rules of good conduct during debates, preferring *al-hiwâr* (dialogue) and rejecting *al-mirâ'* (contention), expressing reservations concerning *al-jidâl* (argument, dispute) save in few instances:

(a) when it is geared to “*cause the Truth to triumph and bring vanity to naught*” (T.N: a take off from Sûrah Al-Anfâl (Spoils of war); v. 8);

b) it is not engaged into for some other purpose like using it to test one’s obstinacy, to show one’s wonders, haughtiness, fame, and so on.

In so-doing, these scholars were following the prophet’s guidance (PBUH), who said:

-“When an erstwhile guided people go astray, they are given contentiousness.” (Related by Ibn Hanbal, Al-Tirmidhi and Ibn Mâjja, on the authority of Abî Umâma)

- “Whoever sought knowledge for the purpose of using it to compete with the learned or showing ability to be contentious with stupid people, or to draw people’s attention to him, Allah will put him in hell.” (Authenticated by Al-Tarmidhî, on the relation of Ka‘b Ibn Mâlik)

It is worth mentioning that, in the context of imparting knowledge and using convincing pieces of evidence, there appeared in the Holy Quran forms of the verb *sa’ala* (ask) many times. In the Surat of the Cow, the asking is about new moons and the forbidden month, wine, orphans, menstruation, and twice about what should be spent. It should suffice for us to cite one example:

*“they ask thee (O Muhammad), of the new moons. Say: They are fixed periods of time for mankind and for pilgrimage... (v. 189).*

In other surat, the asking is about the spoils of war, the soul, Dhu al -Qarnayn, and the mountains, as well as the Destined Hour (in many verses). An instance of asking for the Destined Hour is in this statement by The Exalted:

*“They ask thee of the (destined) Hour, when will it come to port. Say: Knowledge thereof is with my Lord only. He alone will manifest it at its proper time. It is heavy in the heavens and the earth. It cometh not to you save unawares. They question thee as if thou couldst be well informed thereof. Say: Knowledge thereof is with Allah only, but most of mankind know not.” - (Sûrah al-A‘râf (The Heights); v. 187)*

It is worth mentioning that the asking of questions in the Holy Quran has been associated with a number of parties. We limit our mention to questions having to do with the believers, the people of the Book or of the Scripture, the polytheists:

1. As concerns the believers, they were urged not to ask many questions of the prophet (PBUH), before the revelation descends upon him. This is clear in the following Quranic verse:

*“O ye who believe! Ask not of things which, if they were made known unto you, would trouble you; but if ye ask of them when the Qur’an is being revealed, they will be made unto you. Allah pardoneth this, for Allah is Forgiving, Clement.” (Sûrah Al-Mâ’ida (The Table spread); v. 101)*

2. For the People of the Scripture, we would like to mention the following statement by Allah (The Mighty and Sublime):

*‘The people of the Scripture ask of thee that thou shouldst cause an (actual) Book to descend upon them from heaven. They asked a greater thing of Moses aforetime, for they said: Show us*

*Allah plainly; The storm of lightning seized them for their wickedness.*” - (Sûrah Al-Nisâ' (Women); v. 153)

3. For the polytheists, we would like to mention the following statements by Allah (Praised be He):

- *“If thou wert to ask them: Who created the heavens and the earth, and constrained the sun and the moon (for their appointed work)? they would say: Allah, how then are they turned away?”*- (Sûrah Al-'Ankabût (The Spider) ; v. 61)

- *“If thou wert to ask them: who causeth water to come down from the sky, and therewith reviveth the earth after its death? they verily would say :Allah. Say: Praise be to Allah! But most of them have no sense.”* (Same Sûrah; v. 63)

- *“And verily, if thou shouldst ask them: Who created the heavens and the earth? they will say: Allah...”*- (Sûrah Al -Zumar (the Troops); v. 38)

- *“And if thou ask them who created them, they will surely say: Allah. How then are they turned away?”* - (Sûrah Al-Zukhruf (Ornaments of Gold); v. 87)

## The Methodology of Dialogue

This methodology can be summed up in the following three points:

**First**, The starting point when one engages in any dialogue with the other is to recognize and respect him, which requires that he be accepted as he is, that is accepting the existence of a difference with him. Difference, from the point of view of Islam, is considered amongst the signs of Allah which afford evidence for His will, omnipotence and wisdom. In this regard, Allah said:

*-"And of His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the difference of your language and colors. Lo! herein indeed are potents for men of knowledge."* - (Sûrah Al-Rûm (Romans); v. 22)

- *"...For each, among you, we have appointed a divine law and a traced-out way. Had Allah willed He could have made you one community. But that He may test you by that which He hath given you (He hath made you as ye are)."* (Sûrah al-Mâ'ida (The Table Spread); v. 48)

Difference is a characteristic which can apply to religion , as the following Allah's statement clearly shows :*"Unto you your religion, and unto me my religion"* (Sûrah Al-Kâfirûn (The Disbelievers); v. 6). However, this difference must not make the differing people forget that they are created *"from a single soul"*, as is mentioned in the opening to the Quranic chapter on women and others. Likewise, it must not make them forget that Allah has honoured men as such, as He (Exaltation be to Him) said: *"Verily We have honored the children of Adam"* (Sûrah Al-'Isrâ' (The Children of Israel); v. 70). Moreover, it must not make them forget what they are required to do as concerns knowing one another and cooperating with each other for performing good deeds. In this regard, Allah (Mighty and Sublime be He) says:

- "...*Help not one another unto sin and transgression...*" (Sûrah al-Mâ'ida (The Table Spread); v. 2)

-"*O mankind; Lo! We have created you male and female, and have made you nations and tribes that ye may know one another, Lo! the noblest of you, in the sight of Allah, is the best in conduct...*" (Sûrah Al-Hujurât (The Private Apartments); v. 23)

So that this cooperation and knowledge occur, the Holy Quran insisted on the recognition and respect of the other. This is indicated in this statement by the Mighty and Sublime: "*And lo! of the People of the Scripture there are some who believe in Allah and that which is revealed unto you and that which is revealed unto them, humbling themselves before Allah. They purchase not a trifling gain at the price of the revelations of Allah. Verily their reward is with their Lord...*" (Sûrah Al-‘Imrân (The Family of Imran); v. 199).

The Mighty and Sublime says, concerning the people of the Scripture:

*"but those of them who are firm in knowledge and of the believers in that which is revealed unto thee, and that which was revealed before thee, especially the diligent in prayer and those who pay the poor-due, the believers in Allah and the Last day. Upon these We shall bestow immense reward."*- (Sûrah al-Nisâ' (Women); v. 162)

He also says, in verses 82 and 83 of Sûrah al-Mâ'ida (The Table spread):

- "*Thou wilt find the most vehement of mankind in hostility to those who believe (to be) the Jews, and the idolaters. And thou wilt find the nearest of them in affection to those who believe those who say: Lo! We are Christians. That is because there are among them priests and monks, and because they are not proud.*" (verse 82)

- *“When they listen to that which hath been revealed unto the messenger, thou seest their eyes overflow with tear because of their recognition of the Truth. They say: Our Lord, we believe. Inscribe us as among the witnesses.”* (Verse 83)

Respect for the other side in the dialogue means also refraining from ridiculing him, making fun of him or discrediting him. In this regard, The Most High says:

- *“O ye who believe! Let not a folk deride a folk who may be better than they (are), nor let women (deride) women who are better than they are; neither defame one another, nor insult one another by nicknames.”*- (Sûrah Al-Hujurât (The Private Apartments); v. 11)

- *“Allah loveth not the utterance of harsh speech save by one who hath been wronged...”* - (Sûrah al-Nisâ’ (Women); v. 148)

This is a stand that must be taken with one who transgresses the precepts of religion. This is in keeping with this statement by the Mighty and sublime:

*“Revile not those unto whom they pray beside Allah lest they wrongfully revile Allah through ignorance...”* - (Sûrah al-An’âm (the Cattle); v. 108)

Needless to say that this behavior, which affords esteem and respect for the other party engaged in dialogue, requires reciprocity. It also requires that there be agreement on something basic from which dialogue can start, something that represents the basic minimum for attaining its goal. In this regard, Allah (The Truth) says:

*“Say: O people of the Scripture! Come to an agreement between us and you: that we shall worship none but Allah, and that we shall ascribe no partner unto Him, and that none of us shall take others for Lords beside Allah...”* - (Sûrah Al ‘Imrân (The Family of Imran); v. 64)

**Second:** the first and basic device of dialogue is correct and constant knowledge whose possessor is convinced of, wishes it to reach others and convince them with it. The Holy Quran had discussed it when it mentioned knowledge, wisdom and discernment, as indicated in the following:

*- "Say: This is my Way: I call on Allah with sure knowledge, I and whosoever followeth me -Glory be to Allah; -and I am not of the idolaters." - (Sûrah Yûsuf (Joseph); v. 108).*

*-"(O man), follow not that whereof thou hast no knowledge. Lo! the hearing and sight and the heart- of each of these will be asked." - (Sûrah al-'Isrâ' (The Children of Israel); v. 36)*

*- "When Jesus came with clear proofs (of Allah's sovereignty), he said: I have come unto you with wisdom, and to make plain some of that" - (Sûrah Al-Zukhruf (Ornaments of Gold); v. 63)*

The Holy Quran has condemned whomever engages in a dialogue or a contention without possessing this correct and convincing knowledge, since Allah (The exalted) says:

*"...Yet of mankind is he who disputeth concerning Allah, without knowledge or guidance or a scripture giving light." - (Sûrah Luqmân (Luqman); v. 20)*

The Mighty and Sublime says the following, when He commanded His prophet to confront the unthinking people, who have neither an argument nor a proof, with a call to be in Allah's refuge:

*"Lo! those who wrangle concerning the revelations of Allah without a warrant having come unto them, there is naught else in their breasts save pride which they will never attain. So take thou refuge in Allah. Lo! He, is the Hearer, the Seer." - (Sûrah Ghâfir/al-Mu'min (The Believer); v. 56)*

While the Plain Quran urges people to use the power of knowledge during dialogue, it also indicates how one is to rely on it; one must follow proof and present it gradually - as a concrete and perceptible proof- for the purpose of convincing the other. This can be seen in these verses (57-74; Sûrah Al-Wâqî'ah (The Event)), which addresses those who will be on the left side during the Day of Judgement:

- 57: "We created you. Will ye then admit the truth?
- 58: Have ye seen that which we emit?
- 59: Do ye create it or are We the Creator?
- 60: We mete out death among you, and we are not to be outrun
- 61: that We may transfigure you and make you what ye know not
- 62: And verily ye know the first creation. Why, then, do ye not reflect?
- 63: Have ye seen that which ye cultivate?
- 64: Is it ye who foster it, or are We the Fosterer.
- 65: If We willed, We verily could make it chaff, then would ye cease not to exclaim:
- 66: Lo! we are laden with debt;
- 67: Nay, but we are deprived!
- 68: Have ye observed the water which ye drink?
- 69: Is it ye who shed it from the raincloud, or are We the shedder?
- 70: If We willed, We verily could make it bitter. Why, then, give ye not thanks?
- 71: Have ye observed the fire which ye strike out;
- 72: Was it ye who made the tree thereof to grow, or were We the grower?

-73: We, even We, appointed it a memorial and a comfort for the dwellers in the wilderness.

-74: Therefore (O Muhammad), praise the name of thy Lord, the Tremendous.”

If we examine how the Holy Quran proceeded in the above verses, we find that it started with a protest against taking creation as a vain act. It supported the protest by pointing to the power that Allah has to transfigure people and make them what they know not. It is a re-creation in which they (i.e the people on the left side) do not believe; yet it is like the first creation, which they believe in. The Quran also calls our attention, through using the rhetorical device of questioning, to the fact that the two acts of creation resemble one another and that Allah is capable of performing them while they (i.e the people on the left side) are not. Allah (the Exalted) is also capable of giving life and of causing death; nothing impedes nor overwhelms him in so-doing. For if He wills it He can come up with the same creation a second time or with a different one.

The Quran proceeds gradually with the people on the left side, reminding them of the first creation so that they will compare the second one to it. It then brings forward another element in support -through proofs- of Allah’s capability. Indeed, after discussing the creation of progeny, it moves on to :

- (a) the growing of cereals, reminding of the possibility of their destruction so that they do not draw any benefit from them ;
- (b) questioning them about water - which is vital for any living thing - and about who controls its downpour from the sky and its use, reminding them that, if Allah wills it, it will make it unsuitable for drinking. It concludes by questioning about fire, from which they draw a great many benefits in addition to being a reminder of what hellfire is; it is the Exalted Who is its creator.

The verses mentioned above have gone over a number of boons via which are illustrated the greatness of Allah and His capability. Perhaps that we need not establish that these ways of arguing are all based on *al-burhân* (demonstration). For this latter is the measure which guarantees the emergence of certainty and the clear and convincing proof to the opponent. This proof may be rational, stemming from rational initial principles and premises; it may be empirical and based on concrete and perceptible reality. This is what happened with Abraham (P.B.U.H) when he asked Allah to show him how to resurrect the dead. This is how Quran relates the story:

*“And when Abraham said (unto his Lord) : My Lord! Show me how Thou givest life to the dead, He said: Dost thou not believe! Abraham said: Yea, but (I ask) in order that my heart may be at ease. (His Lord) said: Take four of the birds and cause them to incline unto thee then slaughter them, cut them into pieces, then place a part of them on each hill, then call them, they will come to thee in haste. And know that Allah is Mighty, Wise.” - (Sûrah Al-Baqara (The Cow) ; v. 260)*

I will come back to this holy verse when I discuss some models of dialogue.

The Holy Quran has addressed mankind in all kinds of discourse and used, as means, various types of proof and demonstration. Some of them are clearly congruous with the nature of the Arabic mind in its premises and results; some are built on the features that have come to be known, later on, about the interlocutors: such as reliance on an argumentation based on precise and intricate proofs. In the latter case, the reliance is on a mental agility in which thought surpasses itself in order to interact with that which opposes or contradicts it.

The term *al-hujja* (proof, evidence), and related vocabulary items, occurred about twenty times in the Holy Quran. As examples of this, consider the following two verses from the Surat of the Counsel:

v. 15: *“Unto this, then, summon (o Muhammad). And be thou upright as thou art commanded, and follow not their lust, but say: I believe in whatever Scripture Allah hath sent down, and I am commanded to be just among you. Allah is our Lord and your Lord. Unto us our works and unto you your works; no argument between us and you. Allah will bring us together, and unto Him is the final return - (Sûrah Al-Shûra)*

v.16: *“And those who argue concerning Allah after He hath been acknowledged, their argument hath no weight with their Lord, and wrath is upon them and theirs will be an awful doom.” (Same Sûrah).*

As for the term *al-burhân* (proof), it occurred in eight verses, as in these statements by the Exalted, for example:

*-“O mankind! Now hath a proof from your Lord come unto, and We have sent down unto you a clear Light; “-(Sûrah al-Nisâ’) (Women) ; v. 174)*

*-“And they say: None entereth Paradise unless he be a Jew or a Christian; These are their own desires. Say: Bring your proof (of what ye state) if ye are truthful.” - (Sûrah al-Baqara (the Cow); v. 111)*

It is worth mentioning that this incapacitation call (*hâtû burhânakum*) was repeated in three other verses: v. 24 of Al-'Anbiyâ' (the Prophets); v. 64 of Al-Naml (The Ants); v. 75 of Al-Qasas (Narration).

In its insistence on the necessity to rely on correct statements supported by evidence, the Holy Quran teaches the believers how

to handle themselves when they are engaged in a dispute. It says in this regard:

*“O ye who believe! Obey Allah, and obey the messenger and those of you who are in authority; and if ye have a dispute concerning any matter, refer it to Allah and the messenger if ye are (in truth) believers in Allah and the Last Day.” - (Sûrah al-Nisâ’ (Women); v. 59)*

Indeed, it invites the Non-Moslems to use their Scriptures as arbiter, as our Lord Muhammad (PBUH) did with the children of Israel (i.e the Jews) when he asked them to go back to the Torah in order to ascertain that Allah has forbidden to eat certain kinds of food only because of their infringement on His law. They were all permitted before, save those that Jacob forbade for himself (e.g. the meat and the milk of the camel). This is clear from the following Quranic verse:

*“All food was lawful unto the children of Israel, save that which Israel forbade himself, (in days) before the Torah was revealed. Say: Produce the Torah and read it (unto us) if ye are truthful.” (Sûrah Al ‘Imrân (The Family of Imran); v. 93)*

When they were silenced with this proof and censured, they dared not go back to the Torah and felt condemnation and shame. They were also considered liars and evil-doers, as the following verse indicates:

*“And whoever shall invent falsehood after that concerning Allah, such will be wrong-doers.” (Same Sûrah; v. 9)*

This is what happened with Abraham when Nimrod argued with him about the existence of Allah. Nimrod claimed that, like Allah, he gives life and causes death. However, when Abraham asked him to cause the sun to rise from the west as Allah does from

the east, he was unable to respond. In this regard, Allah (The Mighty and Sublime) says: “...*Thus was the disbeliever abashed...*” (Sûrah al-Baqara (The Cow); v. 258).

**Third:** the most effective style for dialogue is that which is flexible and associated with commendable conduct. This latter is manifested in a number of good qualities like: patience, wisdom, friendliness, sincerity, care, good and purposeful extravagance, stubbornness, violence, fanaticism, rigidity, obstinacy, presumptuousness and haughtiness. Among some examples of this commendable conduct that are mentioned in the Holy Quran- and they are many- is that represented by the dialogue which took place between Abraham and his father, when the former tried to convince the latter of the unicity of Allah, saying (Sûrah Maryam (Mary) ; verses 41 - 48)

- v. 41 : “*and make mention (O Muhammad) in the Scripture of Abraham. Lo! he was a saint, a prophet.*”
- v. 42 : “*When he said unto his father: O my father! why worshippest thou that which heareth not nor seeth, nor can in aught avail thee?*”
- v. 43 : “*O my father! Lo ! there hath come unto me of knowledge that which came not unto thee. So follow me, and I will lead thee on the right path.*”
- v. 44 : “*O my father! Serve not the devil. Lo ! the devil is a rebel unto the Beneficent*”
- v. 45 : “*O my father! Lo! I fear lest a punishment from the Beneficent overtake thee so that thou become a comrade of the devil.*”
- v. 46 : “*He said : Rejectest thou my god, O Abraham? If thou cease not, I shall surely stone thee. Depart from me a long while!*”

v. 47 : “*He said: Peace be unto thee! I shall ask forgiveness of my Lord for thee. Lo! He was ever gracious unto me.*”

v. 48 : “*I shall withdraw from you and that unto which ye pray beside Allah, and I shall pray unto my Lord. It may be that, in prayer unto my Lord, I shall not be unblest.*”

Abraham has used the form *abati* when addressing his father, a form lacking the (-y) of the speaker (first person singular) (cf. *abî* from /abiy) which was replaced by the tâ' ({-t}). This form is used only when addressing the father or the mother . It occurs with the vowel /i/ or /a/ after the /t/ and can be augmented when with the /a/ vowel. It denotes endearment and care, something which is more than called for in this kind of situation. This denotation is increased by the prolixity that characterized the verses because of Abraham’s repeated use (four times) of this form of address. In addition, there are :

- (a) Abraham’s patience with which he met his father’s violence, as this latter threatened him with dilapidation and abandonment,
- (b) Abraham’s meeting this threat by taking leave of his father, a leave associated with his promise to ask Allah’s forgiveness for his father.

This behavior, from Abraham, should not be surprising as he was seeking to convince his father and entice him to turn away from his error. This is especially true in view of the friendliness of Abraham’s personality which has always been characterized - throughout the various stages of his life - by wisdom, calm, the entreaty of Allah and return to Him. In fact, this is what has transpired from his relationship with everybody, starting with his

father -in the manner that was described above - moving on to the rest of the people whose stand has forced Abraham to leave them and what they worshipped. For this reason, the truthful (Praise be to Him) has described Abraham in these Holy words: *“Lo ! Abraham was soft of heart, long-suffering”* (Sûrah al-Tawba (Repentance) ; v. 11) ; *“Lo ! Abraham was mild, imploring, penitent”* (Sûrah Hûd) ; v. 75;

In order to demonstrate that the adoption, in a dialogue, of a style characterized by flexibility and calm, and a great distance from grossness and violence is the most important feature that must be present in it, the Holy Quran has insisted on it (i.e. this feature) in many instances. Among these, we can cite the one having to do with Allah’s commanding Moses (PBUH) to go, along with his brother, to discuss matters with Pharaoh. Allah asked them to use the afore-mentioned style as they were fearful of the attack and tyranny of this latter. In this regard, the Exalted says (Sûrah Tâ Hâ (Ta Ha) ; verses 42 - 48) :

42 : *“Go, thou and thy brother, with My tokens, and be not faint in remembrance of Me.”*

43 : *Go, both of you, unto Pharaoh. Lo ! he hath transgressed (the bounds)”*

44 : *“And speak unto him a gentle word, that peradventure he may heed or fear.”*

45 : *“They said : Our Lord ! Lo ! we fear that he may be beforehand with us or that he may play the tyrant.”*

46 : *“He said: Fear not. Lo ! I am with you twain, Hearing and Seeing.”*

47 : *“So go ye unto him and say: Lo ! We are two messengers of thy Lord. So let the Children of Israel go with us,*

*and torment them not. We bring thee a token from thy Lord. And peace will be for him who followed right guidance.”*

48 : *“Lo ! it hath been revealed unto us that the doom will be for him who denied and turneth away.”*

The dialogue goes on, after this, to discuss matters related to the Lord (Allah), the past centuries and so on until it reaches the testing of the sorcerers, as the following verses in the same Sourat explained.

This is how the messengers and prophets used to address their peoples in a style showing a brotherly integration with them and affording trust, peace and readiness to listen and to be convinced. In this regard, Allah (The Exalted) says concerning (a) *Hûd*: “And unto (the tribe of) “*Aâd* (We sent) their brother, *Hûd*...” (Sûrah Al-'A'râf (The Heights) ; v. 65 & 59) ; (b) *Sâlih* : “*And to (The tribe of) Thamûd* (We sent) their brother *Sâlih*...” (Sûrah al-'A'râf (The Heights) ; v. 73 and *Hûd* (v.61) and Al-Naml (v. 45)); (c) *Shu'eyb* : “And unto Midian (We sent) their brother, *Shu'eyb*... (Sûrah al-'A'râf (The Heights) ; v. 85; *Hûd* (v. 48); Al-'Ankabût (v. 36))

This brotherliness is equated with sincerity, as can be seen in what Noah said to his people : “*My Counsel will not profit you if I were minded to advise you...*” (Sûrah *Hûd* (Hud); v. 34)

Allah (Mighty and Sublime be He) has praised our Lord Muhammad (PBUH) for his adoption of a flexible style, a forgiving attitude and for distancing himself from any rudeness and grossness. This praise was also motivated by the effect that this way of behaving had on people since it lead them together around him. In this regard, Allah said:

*“It was by the mercy of Allah that thou wast lenient with them (O Muhammad), for if thou hadst been stern and fierce of heart they*

would have dispersed from round about thee. So pardon them and ask forgiveness for them and consult with them upon the conduct of affairs..." (Sûrah al 'Imrân (the Family of Imran); v. 159)

Because of the importance of adhering to these and other good manners in a dialogue and the kinds of interaction with people that ensue from it, the Holy Quran insisted, in many verses, on the necessity of this adherence. Among these verses, we can mention the following :

(a) v. 83 of Sûrah al-Baqara (The Cow): "...and speak kindly to mankind...";

(b) v. 152 of Sûrah Al-'Ana'âm (The Cattle): "...And if ye give your word, do justice thereunto...";

(c) v. 199 of sûrah Al-A'araf: "Keep to forgiveness (O Muhammad), and enjoin kindness, and turn away from the ignorant.";

(d) verses 34 - 35 of Sûrah Fusilat (Ha Mim) : "The good deed and the evil deed are not alike. Repel the evil deed with one which is better, then lo! he, between whom and thee there was enmity, (will become) as though he was a bosom friend."(v. 34);

"But none is granted it save those who are steadfast, and none is granted it save the owner of great happiness." (V. 35);

(e) v. 24 of Sûrah Al-Sajda (The Prostration): "And when they became steadfast believing firmly on Our revelations, We appointed from among them leaders who guided by Our command."(Verse, 24) ; Surah Al-Sajda (Prostration)

The Noble Hadith have, likewise, insisted on these virtues. among them are the following examples of the Prophet's practice (PBUH), which were related by Hadith compilers and authenticators:

-*"When the Prophet uttered a word, he repeated it three times so that it would be understood. When he came by some people, he greeted them three times."* (related by Al-Bukhâri, on the authority of Anas)

-Lady Aisha (May Allah be pleased with her) said:

“The Prophet’s speech was clear; everybody understood it.”

It is also reported, based on her relation, that the Prophet said:

“Allah is kind and likes kindness. He rewards for kindness that which He does not give for violence or its likes.”

He also said to her:

“O Aisha! Be kind. Kindness can not be in a thing without embellishing it and cannot be removed of a thing without disfiguring it.” (Related by Muslim and Abû Dâwûd)

- The Prophet also said:

“Whoever renounced lies that are falsehoods, his reward is a building in the outskirts of Paradise. Whoever renounced contention even though he was right, his reward is a building in its middle. Whoever is good-natured, his reward is a building in its loftiest part.” (Related by Al-Tarmîdhî, Abû Dâwûd, on the authority of Ibn ‘Abbâs)

He also said:

-“You will shun evil if you do not measure your abilities with those of a disputant.” (Authenticated by Al-Tarmîdhî, on the authority of Anas)

-“Are more likable to me and closest to my meeting place in Paradise those of you who are very good-natured. Are more detestable to me and more distant from my meeting place, the prattlers, good talkers and the “*mutafayhiqûn*”. “They said: “O Messenger of Allah! We know of prattlers and the good talkers; what are the “*mutafayhiqûn*”? He said: the haughty” (Related by Al-Tarmîdhî, on the authority of Jâbir)

It is commonly known that :

(a) *al-tharthâr* is one who talks a great deal, and

(b) *al-mutashaddiq* is one who talks presumptuously. The Prophet (PBUH) also said: “The believer is not one who defames, discredits, or curses; nor is he one who is indecent or bawdy.” (Authenticated by Al-Tarmîdhî, on the authority of Abdullah Ibn ‘Abbâs).

## **Models of dialogue in the Quran**

They are models for dialogue between Allah and categories of His creatures, which range from the Angels to the Prophets and finally to Iblîs (Satan).

### **First: Dialogue with the Angels:**

Allah (The Exalted) says in the Sûrah Al-Baqara (The Cow); verses 30 to 33):

**v. 30:** *“And when thy Lord said unto the angles: Lo! I am about to place a viceroy in the earth, they said: Wilt thou place therein one who will do harm therein and will shed blood, while we, we glorify Thy praise and sanctify Thee? He said: Surely I know that which ye know not.”*

**v . 31:** *“And He taught Adam all the names, then showed them to the angels, saying: Inform me of the names of these if ye are truthful”*

**v. 33:** He said: *“O Adam! Inform them of their names, and when he had informed them of their names, He said: Did I not tell you that I know the secret of the heavens and the earth? And I know that which ye disclose and which ye hide.”*

These holy verses show that, when Allah (The Exalted) created Adam and blown into him of his spirit, He willed it that there will be a viceroy in the earth. He then addressed, in the words contained in the above verses, the angles informing them of this will in a style that also meant consulting them about this very great matter. The angels' response contained elements of surprise and inquiry. They considered it unlikely that Allah will grant viceroyalty to one who has it in his nature to spoil things and shed blood. This runs contrary to what He wanted for earth in terms of population, restoration, discipline and organization.

Even though the angels left the matter in the hands of Allah, they thought that they were worthier of such a viceroyalty, because they ceaselessly praise the greatness of Allah and place Him above any anthropomorphism. However, the Exalted and Mighty informed them that He knows what they do not; that is, at the time that he decided to make Adam a viceroy, He knew that this latter had the qualifications necessary for this mission. These qualifications were based on the knowledge that Allah (the Exalted) made explicit in teaching Adam all the names that can be pronounced in order to refer to the existing things and beings. Thus, when Allah uncovered the ignorance of the angels of this knowledge, which they did not possess, and showed them this - through Adam's utterance- the worthiness of Adam for such a mission became clear.

## **Second: Dialogue with the Prophets:**

Concerning this, we would like to point to two examples:

1. The dialogue with Abraham (PBUH): *“When Abraham asked Allah to show him how he resurrects the dead”* (cf. Sûrah al-Baqara (The Cow) ; v. 260)

*“And when Abraham said (unto his Lord) : My Lord! Show me how Thou givest life to the dead, He said: Dost thou not*

*believe? Abraham said: Yea, but (I ask) in order that my heart may be at ease. (His Lord) said: Take four of the birds and cause them to incline unto thee, then slaughter them, then place a part of them on each hill, then call them, they will come to thee in haste. And Know that Allah is Mighty, Wise.”*

Abraham addressed his Lord and asked Him, politely, propitiatorily, and with a desire to gain certain knowledge based on a clear vision of things. He did so in order to be informed on the way Allah resurrects the dead. Allah answered him with an interrogation, the intention behind it is to insist on the establishment of negation (about the belief). It was as though the interrogation was addressed, not to Abraham (who is Allah’s prophet and friend), but to others than him who may ask questions or complain. It may be that the motivation behind Abraham’s request has to do with his longing to hear from Allah (the Exalted) that he has believed; hence his asking the question leading to this. Abraham (PBUH) answered with what changed the negation into a positive confirmation, mentioning that he only wanted to have peace of mind and tranquility concerning the matter or to be more certain of Allah’s power. He wanted to achieve this through something concrete and perceptible, alongside evidence based on a naturally firm faith.

For this reason, Allah (The Truthful) ordered him to hold in his hand parts of four (slaughtered birds cut and torn from them and then call upon them (i.e the parts) to come to him. They came to him gathered as they were (initially) in a live bird. This is in accordance with one interpretation of the operation. The other possibility for Abraham is to put the birds’ parts in four different places and then call upon them to come to him. They answered his call by coming to him obediently and bowing down. This is in accordance with another interpretation. This means that, when

Allah (Mighty and Sublime be He) wants to resurrect the dead, He commands that they rise and they respond to him immediately, willingly and in total submission to His will.

2. The dialogue with Moses (PBUH) : It is the dialogue in the Holy Quran which is closest to the one that took place with the “friend of Allah” (i.e Abraham). Allah (Mighty and Sublime be Him) says (cf Sûrah Al-'A'râf) (The heights); verse 143 and 144)

v. 143: *“And when Moses came to Our appointed tryst and his Lord had spoken unto him, he said: My Lord! Show me (Thy self), that I may gaze upon Thee. He said: Thou wilt not see Me, but gaze upon the mountain! If it stand still in its place, then thou wilt See Me. And when his Lord revealed (His) glory to the mountain He sent it crashing down. And Moses fell down senseless, And when he woke he said: Glory unto Thee! I turn unto Thee repentant, and I am the firts of (true) believers.”*

v. 144: *“He said: O Moses! I have preferred thee above mankind by messages and by My speaking (unto thee). So hold that which I have given thee, and be among the thankful.”*

Moses came to his meeting at the appointed time and Allah talked to him in a speech that he heard. It is well-known -through the Holy Quran- that Allah (The Exalted) talks to humans - indeed He did so with His prophets- via these means, as He Himself said (cf. Sûrah Al-Shûra (The Counsel);

*“And it was not (vouchsafed) to any mortal that Allah should speak to him unless (it be) by revelation of from behind a veil, or (that) He sendeth a messenger to reveal what He will by His leave. Lo! He is Exalted, Wise.”*

Moses hoped, after Allah (Praise be to Him) had talked to him, to lay eyes on Him, enjoy His Majesty for quite awhile, and to witness His nature. However, Moses' request was met with refusal. Yet, an emendation occurred; it contained the reason for the refusal. For Allah commanded Moses to look at the mountain which was going to be flattened simply by a touch of some of His Majesty (Exalted be He). This has made Moses to be like thunderstruck and lose his consciousness. One wonders what would have happened if Allah had appeared to Moses and allowed him to see Him in the manner that he requested!

### **Third: Dialogue with Iblīs (Satan):**

Allah (Mighty and Sublime be He) says the following (cf. Sûrah Al-'Arâf (The Heights); verses 11-17):

- v. 11: *“And we created you, then fashioned you, then told the angels: Fall ye prostrate before Adam! And they fell prostrate, all save Iblīs, who was not of those who make prostration.”*
- v. 12: *“He said: What hindered thee that thou didst not fall prostrate when I bade thee? (Iblīs) said: I am better than him. Thou created me of fire while him Thou didst create of mud.”*
- v. 13: *“He said: Then go down hence! It is not for thee to show pride here, so go forth! Lo! thou art of those degraded.”*
- v. 14: *“He said: Reprieve me till the day when they are raised (from the dead).”*
- v. 15: *“He said: Lo ! thou art of those reprieved.”*
- v.16: *“He said: Now, because Thou hast sent me astray, verily I shall lurk in ambush for them on Thy Right Path.”*

v.17: *“Then I shall come upon them from before them and from behind them and from their right hands and from their left hands, and Thou wilt not find most of them beholden (unto Thee)”*.

It is a dialogue unveiling Allah’s stand (Praise and Exaltation be to Him) concerning Iblîs’ refusal to prostrate himself before Adam and in so-doing disobeying His command. Allah asked him for the reason and Iblîs gave it to Him: he is better than Adam because of the element from which he was made. What happened is that the Truthful (Praise be to Him) commanded Iblîs to descend from his place and position because of his haughtiness, which can not be forgiven. This descent is confirmed by the banishment, which affirms Iblîs’ belittlement and ignominy.

The dialogue continues with a request from Iblîs; who asks that Allah allow him to remain until the Day of Resurrection. Allah informs him that he is among those who will remain, as it was destined in Allah’s previous foreordainment. Iblîs commented that, because Allah willed it to send him astray, he will lay in ambush in the path of Adam and his progeny, will assail them from all sides until they go astray, disobey Allah and show ingratitude to Him. The dialogue ends with Allah’s ruling that Iblîs be banished from Paradise, censured and contemptible, promising him and whomever follows him hellfire.

Among the elements of the dialogue between Allah and Iblîs that are related in the Holy Quran - and they are many- we can cite the ones in the following verses (from Sûrah Al-’Isrâ’ (The Children of Israel); verses 61-65):

v.61: *“And when we said unto the angels: Fall down prostrate before Adam and they fell prostrate all save Iblîs, he said: Shall I fall prostrate before that which Thou hast created of clay?”*

- v.62: *“He said Seest Thou this (creature) whom Thou hast honored above me, if Thou give me grace until the Day of Resurrection I verily will seize his seed, save but a few.”*
- v. 63: *“He said: Go, and whosever of them followeth thee - Lo ! hell will be your payment, ample payment.”*
- v.64: *“And excite any of them whom thou canst with thy voice, and urge thy horse and infantry against them, and be a partner in their wealth and children, and promise them. Satan promiseth them only to deceive.”*
- v. 65: *“Lo! My (faithful) bondsmen - over them thou hast no power, and thy Lord sufficeth as (their) guardian.”*

The above dialogue starts, as did its antecedents, with the command to prostrate before Adam. But Iblîs, because of his propensity for disobedience, refuses protesting that the clay matter from which Adam was created, is a lowly natural element; yet, Adam is preferred over him and enjoys more favor from Allah than he (Iblîs) does. He shows his insolence and dares swear that, if Allah allows him to remain (alive) until the day of Resurrection, he will tempt Adam’s progeny and will make them go astray, save some faithful servants of Allah. The divine response, which contains a contempt and challenge to Iblîs, is given to him. He is to do whatever is in his power, using all sorts of means, to dominate, tempt and entice Adam’s progeny. However, he will not be able to take hold of Allah’s faithful worshipers, who are under His protection (Mighty and Sublime be He).

It should be pointed out that, in a dialogue such as this, Iblîs addressed the Creator (Mighty and Sublime be He) with these statements:

- v.36: *“He said: My Lord! Reprieve me till the Day when they are raised.”*

- v. 39: *“He said: My Lord! Because Thou has sent me astray, I verily shall adorn the path of error for them in the earth, and shall mislead them every one, [T.N: the statement ends in the following verse”*

Notice that he (Iblîs) used the expression “*rabbî*” (my Lord), in spite of the disobedient stand that he took. He did so because he had to show politeness in a dialogue with Allah, recognize His divinity and draw His mercy unto him so that He may answer him favorably. We find the same discourse, with additional swearing by the Might of Allah, in the dialogue mentioned in Sûrah Sâd (verses 79, 82, 83):

- v. 79: *“He said: My Lord! Reprieve me till the day when they are raised.”*
- v. 82: *“He said: Then, by Thy might, I surely will beguile them every one,”*
- v. 83: *“Save Thy single-minded slaves among them.”*



## Conclusion

### ISLAM IS THE RELIGION OF DIALOGUE

In the light of this Quranic point of view, it is patently clear that Islam is the religion of dialogue :

1. It shows deference to man in himself and respects him as such and as he is. It considers him to be favored by Allah, as He wanted it to be. In this regard, Allah says (cf. Sûrah Al-'Isrâ' (The Children of Israel); v. 70): *“Verily We have honoured the children of Adam.”*

2. It reaffirms that the difference between men, preordained by the Creator, is a distinguishing feature and one of the norms of the universe. In this regard, Allah (Praise be to Him) says (cf. Sûrah Hûd (hud); v. 118 and v. 119):

v. 118: *“And if thy Lord had willed, He verily would have made mankind one nation, yet they cease not differing”*

v. 119: *“Save him on whom thy Lord hath mercy; and for that He did create them...”*

This difference goes as far as faith. In this respect, Allah (Praise be to Him) says (cf. Sûrah Yûnus (Jonah); v.99)

*“And if thy Lord willed, all who are in the earth would have believed together. Wouldst thou (Muhammad) compel men until they are believers?”*

3. It leaves the matter of this difference in faith to the discretion of the Creator (the Exalted), His appreciation and

judgement. Allah says (cf. Sûrah Al-Nahl (The Bee); v. 124 and v. 125):

v. 124: *"...and lo! they Lord will judge between them on the Day of Resurrection concerning that wherein they used to differ."*

v. 125: *"...Lo! thy Lord is best aware of him who strayeth from His way, and He is Best Aware of those who go aright."*

4. In spite of this, Islam draws a parallel between believing in Allah and in His Noble Prophet and believing in His other heavenly Scriptures and in previous prophets. In this regard, Allah (the Exalted) says (cf. Sûrah Al-Baqara (The Cow); v. 285):

*"The messenger believeth in that which hath been revealed unto him from his Lord and (so do) the believers. Each one believeth in Allah and His Angels and His scriptures and His messengers- We make no distinction between any of His messengers..."*

5. In so-doing, it condemns intolerance whatever it may be, urges co-existence and cohabitation, calls for the exchange of services and benefits. The latter actions are to be accomplished within the framework of a global conception that can be summed up in the following mutual knowledge (i.e knowing one another). The truthful (Praise be to Him) made mutual knowledge to be a value capable of incorporating all kinds of difference. In this regard, Allah says (cf. Sûrah Al-Hujurât (The Private Apartments); v. 13) :

*"O mankind! Lo ! We have created you male and female, and have made you nations and tribes that ye may know one another..."*

6. The first aspect of the afore-mentioned knowledge consists in spreading friendliness and mutual caring among people in the context of love and mutual affection. The Exalted says, in this regard, the following:

*"And the believers, men and women, are protecting friends one another; [...]"* - (Sûrah Al-Tawba (Repentance); v.71)

*"The believers are naught else than brothers..."* Sûrah Al-Hujurât (the Private Apartments); v.10)

This brotherliness reaches the point of considering the believers as one body, in the way described by the Prophet (PBUH) in the following Hadith

“Believers, in their being friendly, merciful and caring to one another, are like one body. If one member complains, the whole body is summoned to watchfulness and protection” (Related by Al-Bukhârî, Muslim, on the authority of Al-Nu‘man Ibn Bashîr)

7. The result of all this is that the (Islamic) community is characterized by solidarity, which requires that some members be in the care of others. This ensures for everybody the required minimum of basic necessities and the obligatory right upon which is built a respectable and honorable life. It also affords the ability to ward off the obstacles that may prevent leading such a life, within the scope of the dignity that every member of the community seeks to attain for himself. Because of its importance, this solidarity reaches a high degree upon which rests faith, since the Prophet (PBUH) said:

“None of you is a [true] believer until he wishes for his fellow man whatever he wishes for himself” - (Authenticated by Al-Bukhârî, Muslim, Al-Dâramî and Ibn Hanbal, on the authority of Anas)

8. This kind of solidarity between the members of the community does not exempt anybody from feeling responsibility and shouldering it, everybody according to the range of his capability and sphere of his speciality. This is in keeping with the following Prophet's saying:

“Everyone of you is a shepherd, responsible for his flock: The Emir is a shepherd, the man (head of a household) is a shepherd over his family; the woman (of the house) is shepherdess over her husband's house and children. Therefore, everyone of you is a shepherd and everyone of you is responsible for his flock.” (Related by Al-Bukhârî, Muslim, Al-tirmidhî, Abû Dâwûd and Ibn Hanbal, on the authority of Ibn ‘Omar)

9. Within the context of charging people with this responsibility, Islam affords them all the rights and reaffirms them, beginning with the right to freedom, which it links to the spontaneity and instinct. This is what the following statement means, in which ‘Omar (May Allah be pleased with him) clearly disapproved the denial of freedom to a person and stripping him/her of it: "When was it that you were allowed to enslave people to whom their mothers have given birth as free people.”

In this regard, it will suffice to point to freedom of speech, which the Holy Quran made a bounty ranked immediately after that of creation. Allah (Praise be to Him) says, concerning this (Cf. Sûrah Al-Rahmân (The Beneficent); verses 1-4)

v.1: *“The Beneficent.”*

v.2: *“Hath made known the Qur’ân.”*

v.3: *“He hath created men.”*

v.4 *“He hath taught him utterance.”*

In fact, freedom of speech reaches religion, as Allah (the Exalted) said (cf. Sûrah Al-Baqara (The Cow); v. 256): *“There is no compulsion in religion...”*

10. Within the framework of this freedom, Islam calls for a calm dialogue and a good debate with non-Moslems. In fact, it proscribes any other style of holding a dialogue or a debate. In this regard, Allah says (Praised be the Sayer): *“Call unto the way of thy Lord with wisdom and fair exhortation, and reason with them in the better way...”* (Sûrah Al-Nahl (The Bee); v. 125). He also says (cf. Sûrah Al-‘Ankabût (The Spider); v.46): *“And argue not with the people of the Scripture unless it be in (a way) that is better...”* Perhaps, this is the best methodological guidance for a dialogue.

11. In so-doing, Islam calls for the avoidance of the causes of civil strife and controversy, which benefit noone. In this regard, the Mighty and Sublime says (cf. Sûrah Al- ‘Anfâl (Spoils of war); v.25):

*“And guard yourselves against a chastisement which cannot fall exclusively on those of you who are wrong-doers...”*

12. Islam, however, makes a difference concerning non-Moslems: it makes a distinction between those who fight Moslems and those who seek peace with them. In this respect, Allah (the Exalted) says (cf. Sûrah Al- Mumtahanah (She That Is To Be Examined); verses 8-9):

v. 8: *“Allah forbideth you not those who warred against you on account of religion and drove you not out from your homes, That ye should show them kindness and deal justly with them. Lo! Allah loveth the just dealers.”*

v. 9: *“Allah forbideth you only those who warred against you on account of your religion and have driven you out from your homes and helped to drive you out, that ye make friends of them. Whosoever maketh friends of them -(All) such are wrong-doers.”*

This tolerant treatment goes as far as inter-marrying with the people of the Scripture and eating their food, as Allah says (Sûrah Al-Mâ’ida (the Table Spread); v.5 See Also “The Conception of Coexistence in Islam”, ISESCO Publications, 1417 Heg./1996 A.D.)

*“This day are (all) good things made lawful for you. The food of those who have received the Scripture is lawful for you, and your food is lawful for them. And so are the virtuous women of the believers and the virtuous women of those who received the Scripture before you (lawful for you)....”*

### Postscript

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 lead to conclude that it is necessary to establish understanding, strength, cooperation, and narrow the gap (stemming from differences) between people. This is especially necessary now that the distance between countries and between societies have vanished -or just about- and the means of communication have become both strong and varied and have invaded every place. It is through these actions that mutual knowledge, for which Islam has called, can be achieved. It is through this mutual knowledge that real peace can set in.

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