



INTERFAITH DIALOGUE A MUSLIM LEGAL PERSPECTIVE ON ITS VALIDITY, CONCEPT AND PRACTICES

MOHAMMAD SAID MITWALLY IBRAHIM*

Assistant Professor, Islamic Studies in English, al-Azhar University, Cairo, Egypt.
<Msaid42@hotmail.com>

A B S T R A C T

The purpose and definitions of interfaith dialogue vary from person to person depending upon the areas from where they come and the nature of the encounter they are facing. Many Muslims participate in multi and inter faith dialogues for propagating Islam, providing clear understanding about its tenets and at times for the sake of securing their interests in the country they live in as a minority. It necessarily involves exchange of visits, holding common prayers or participation in coalitions and joint demonstrations. Such practices for some Muslims conflict with the basic tenets of Islam while for others, these endeavours provide a sizable opportunity to present Islam as a religion of tolerance that supports coexistence. This paper delves into the well-established rules of Islamic Jurisprudence, *uṣūl al-fiqh*, the Prophetic *Sunnah* and the recognised exegeses (*tafāsīr*) of the Glorious Qur'ān to evaluate the concept and practices of multi or inter faith dialogue from an Islamic *sharʿī* perspective. The present paper, however, does not discuss the political motives and dimensions of interfaith dialogue.

* Mohammad Said Mitwally Ibrahim is an Assistant Professor at the Department of Islamic Studies in English, al-Azhar University, Cairo, Egypt. He acquired PhD in the *Ḥadīth* Studies from al-Azhar University, Egypt. He has published 8 research papers in the academic journals around the world. He also has 3 books on his credit: *The Science of Ḥadīth Terminology and Classification*; *Ḥadīth Textual Criticism in Muslim and Modern Western Studies*; *Studies in Early Sources of the Prophet Muḥammad's Biography*, all published by International Islamic Publishing House, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.



Introduction

Many Muslims participate in multi and inter faith dialogues for purposes of propagating Islam, providing clear understanding about its tenets and sometimes for the sake of securing their interests in countries where they live in as minorities. Such participations necessitate exchange of visits, holding common prayers or even joint participation in demonstrations and forming coalitions. For some Muslims such practices conflict with the basic tenets of Islam¹ while for others such activities provide a sizable opportunity to present Islam as a religion of tolerance that supports coexistence and spreading peace around the world. We need to admit that those who participate in such activities are not as many as those Muslims who do not participate. So, we are faced with the jurisprudential adaptation of the concept, practices and mechanisms of multi-faith dialogue as being currently practiced in the West and other parts of the world. Therefore, the main question raised by this research paper is to evaluate the concept and the recurrent practices of multi or inter faith dialogue from an Islamic *sharʿī* perspective with reference to the well-established rules of Islamic Jurisprudence, *uṣūl al-fiqh*, the Prophetic *Sunnah* and recognised exegeses (*tafāsīr*) of the Glorious Qurʾān. The present research, however, does not deal with nor discuss the political motives and dimensions of the interfaith dialogue pursued by the hegemonic powers.

Multi-faith Dialogue: Concepts and Muslim Legal Perspective

The focus of this section will be to elaborate the most common concepts of multi-faith dialogue and based on that perception an

1. See, ‘Abd al-Raḥīm al-Sulamī, “al-Ḥiwār bayn al-Adyān,” *Shabakat al-Qalam*, available online at: <<http://www.almoslim.net/documents/hewar.pdf>>; Bakr b. ‘Abd Allāh b. Abū Zayd, *al-Ibtāl li Nazariyyah al-Khaṭṭ Bayn Dīn al-Islām wa Ghayriḥ min al-Adyān* (Riyadh: Dār al-‘Āṣimah, 1421 AH), p 11; Muḥammad b. Saʿīd b. Sālim al-Qaḥṭānī, *al-Walā’ wa ’l-Barā’ fi ’l-Islām* (Riyadh: Dār Ṭaybah, 1402 AH), pp. 346–351.

attempt will be made to elaborate the Muslim legal discussions on each concept.

Definitions of dialogue vary from person to person, depending upon the areas from where they come and the nature of the encounter they are facing. The *Chambers Dictionary* defines dialogue as a “conversation between two or more persons, especially of a formal or imaginary nature, an exchange of views in the hope of ultimately reaching agreement.”²

According to the Austrian-born Israeli philosopher best known for his philosophy of dialogue, Martin Buber (1878–1965), “true dialogue expresses an essential aspect of the human spirit, when we listen and respond to one another with an authenticity that forges a bond between us.”³ The most comprehensive definition, in our view, however, is the one adopted by Wikipedia. According to which interfaith dialogue refers to cooperative, constructive positive interaction between people of different religious traditions (i.e., “faiths”) and/or spiritual or humanistic beliefs, at both the individual and institutional levels.⁴

Multifaith Dialogue and *Da‘wah*

There is a fine line between this definition of multi-faith dialogue and the concept of *Da‘wah*. Rather it deems to be a pivotal goal of the multi-faith dialogue. *Da‘wah*, from an Islamic perspective, is defined by the Palestinian-American Muslim philosopher, widely recognised by his peers as an authority, Isma‘il Raji al-Faruqi (1339–1406/1921–1986), as “the effort by the Muslim to enable other men to share and benefit from the supreme vision, the religious truth, which he has appropriated. In this respect it is rationally necessary, for the Truth wants to be known. It exerts pressure on the knower

2. See, “dialogue” in A. M. Macdonald, ed., *Chambers Twentieth Century Dictionary*, revised edition (Edinburgh: W & R Chambers, 1978).

3. Cited by, Douglas Johnston, *Faith-Based Diplomacy: Trumping Realpolitik* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 56.

4. See, “Interfaith dialogue,” available online at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Multi-faith_service>.

to share his vision of it with his peers.”⁵ *Da‘wah* is further defined as “an invitation to think, to debate and argue.”⁶ It is, therefore “a critical process of intellection.”⁷

Multifatih dialogue as defined above is, to some extent, compatible with the goal and mechanism of *Da‘wah*. There are two basic subtypes of interfaith dialogue which are commonly in practice, namely, the academic interfaith dialogue and the interfaith activities in social spheres.

Academic Interfaith Dialogue

Academic interfaith dialogue is a dialogue of beliefs, theological doctrines, and philosophical ideas. This type tends to be restricted to the academy. It is often technical and abstract. For these and other reasons, it is often avoided. It is nonetheless vitally important, as it engages the minds and hearts of the people of faith of both traditions in their common search for the truth.

This type of dialogue has some precedents in the Prophetic *Sunnah*. The first Christian-Muslim debate occurred between the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be on him) and the Christians of Najrān, a Christian district in Yemen. This debate is alluded to in the Qur’ān in the famous *āyah* inviting the Christian delegation to *mubāhalah*, ‘the invocation of Allah’s curse.’⁸ The *mubāhalah* was an old Arab custom in which two parties making conflicting claims would pray with an oath that Allah’s curse be upon the liars of either party. In this case, the *mubāhalah* was concerning the issue of humanity or divinity of the Christ (peace be on him). The question as to whether this event of *mubāhalah*, actually did take place or not does not concern us here. It is sufficient to observe that the men of Najrān prudently opted for peace, albeit at a price, instead of accepting the challenge of getting into the *mubāhalah* with its religious, political

5. See, Ismail Faruqi, “On the Nature of Islamic *Da‘wah*,” available online at: <<http://www.ismaifaruqi.com/articles/on-the-nature-of-islamic-dawah/>>.

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid.

8. See, the Qur’ān 3: 61.

and military consequences. Of greater importance, for our purpose, is the fact that the *āyāt* relating to this debate conclude with the following conciliatory call to the people of the Book:

قُلْ يَتَاهِلَ الْكِتَابُ نَعَالُوا إِلَى كَلِمَةٍ سَوَاءٍ بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكُمْ أَلَّا نَعْبُدَ إِلَّا اللَّهَ وَلَا نُشْرِكَ بِهِ
شَيْئًا وَلَا يَتَّخِذَ بَعْضُنَا بَعْضًا أَرْبَابًا مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ فَإِنْ تَوَلَّوْا فَقُولُوا اشْهَدُوا بِأَنَّا
مُسْلِمُونَ

Proclaim [O Muḥammad], “O people of the Book, ‘come to a just word common between us and you: that we worship none other than Allah, that we associate nothing with Him, and that we do not take one another as lords instead of Allah.’ But if they turn their backs, say, ‘Bear witness then that we are Muslims.’”⁹

The point to note is that the *āyah* concludes: “But if they turn their backs, say, ‘Bear witness then that we are Muslims.’” The delegation of Najrān came to the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be on him), according to a tradition, with two aims in view: to share their faith in hope of winning Prophet Muḥammad (peace be on him) to Christianity and, failing this, to establish a peace covenant with the Muslim state that would insure for them religious freedom and social independence.¹⁰ The delegates who included religious and political leaders of Najrān were allowed to offer their prayers in the Prophet’s mosque in spite of the protestations from some of the Companions of the Prophet (peace be on him).¹¹

9. See, the Qur’ān 3: 64.

10. See, Abū ‘l-Fidā’ Ismā‘īl b. ‘Umar Ibn Kathīr al-Qurshī, *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘Aẓīm*, ed., Muḥammad Ḥusayn Shams al-Dīn (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1419 AH), vol. 2, p. 43. Here Ibn Kathīr quoted Muḥammad Ibn Ishāq on the occasion of revelation (*sabab al-nuzūl*) of *āyah* 61 of Sūrah Āl-i ‘Imrān, who maintained that Christians of Najrān argued with the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be on him) about Jesus (peace be on him) by claiming his divinity. This is the reason that the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be on him) called them for *mubāhalah*. Their argument is further explained as an attempt to convince the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be on him) about their belief about Jesus (peace be on him). See, *ibid.*, vol. 2, pp. 42–43. For further discussion of this event and the traditions concerning it, see, Mahmoud M. Ayoub, *The Qur’an and Its Interpreters* (Albany: State University of New York, 1992), vol. 2, “Introduction: Occasion of Revelation of Sūrah 3 (Āl-i ‘Imrān),” pp. 1–4 and the Commentaries on its *āyah* 61 inviting the delegation to *mubāhalah*, pp. 183–195.

11. See, ‘Abd al-Malik Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīrah al-Nabawīyyah*, eds., Muṣṭafā al-Saqā, Ibrāhīm al-Abyārī and ‘Abd al-Ḥafīz Shalabī (Cairo: Muṣṭafā al-Bābī, 1375/1955), vol. 1, pp. 574ff.

The Qur'ān clearly indicates that a sharp debate concerning the divinity or humanity of Christ (peace be on him) took place between the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be on him) and the delegates of Najrān but it does not report the actual disputation.¹² Though briefly, accounts of this debate as well as that of the accord which was reached at between the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be on him) and the delegation of Najrān thereafter are reported in the collections of *Ḥadīth* and the works of *Sīrah*.¹³ These accounts show an already developed legal system governing the social, religious, and political status of non-Muslims in a vast Islamic state. The two elements that are of interest to us here in this encounter are; first, the fact that the delegates of Najrān were allowed to worship in the Prophet's mosque and, second, that while the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be on him) and the Christians of Najrān did not agree theologically, they worked out a mutually acceptable relationship.¹⁴

Another precedent in the Prophet's time is the message he sent to Negus [al-Aṣḥam (d. 9/630)], King of Abyssinia. It is related by Abū Bakr Aḥmad b. al-Ḥusayn b. 'Alī b. Mūsā al-Bayhaqī (384–458/994–1066), on the authority of Muḥammad b. Ishāq b. Yasār, aka, Ibn Ishāq (85–151/704–768), and reads as follows:

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
هَذَا كِتَابُ مُحَمَّدٍ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ إِلَى النَّجَاشِيِّ الْأَصْحَمِ عَظِيمِ الْجَيْشِ سَلَامٌ عَلَى مَنْ اتَّبَعَ الْهَدْيَ،
وَأَمَّنَ بِاللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ، وَشَهِدَ أَنَّ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَحْدَهُ لَا شَرِيكَ لَهُ، لَمْ يَتَّخِذْ صَاحِبَةً وَلَا وَلَدًا، وَأَنَّ
مُحَمَّدًا عَبْدُهُ وَرَسُولُهُ، أَدْعُوكُمْ إِلَى اللَّهِ، فَإِنِّي أَنَا رَسُولُ اللَّهِ، فَأَسْلِمُ تَسْلِمًا قُلْ يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ
تَعَالَوْا إِلَى كَلِمَةٍ سَوَاءٍ بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكُمْ أَلَّا نَعْبُدَ إِلَّا اللَّهَ وَلَا نُشْرِكَ بِهِ شَيْئًا وَلَا يَتَّخِذَ بَعْضُنَا بَعْضًا أَرْبَابًا
مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ [آل عمران: 64] الْآيَةُ، فَإِنْ أَتَيْتَ فَعَلَيْكَ إِنْ أَمَّ النَّصَارَى.

12. See, the Qur'ān 3: 59–64.

13. See, Muḥammad b. Ismā'il al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Kitāb al-Maghāzī, Bāb Qiṣṣah Ahl Najrān; Abū Dāwūd Sulaymān b. Ash'ath al-Sijistānī, *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, Kitāb al-Khirāj wa 'l-Fay' wa 'l-Imār, Bāb Fī Akhdh al-Jizyah; 'Abd al-Malik Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīrah al-Nabawiyyah*, vol. 1, pp. 574ff; Abū Zayd 'Umar b. Shabah b. 'Ubaydah b. Rīṭah al-Numayrī al-Baṣarī, *Ta'rikh al-Madīnah li Ibn Shabah*, ed., Fahīm Muḥammad Shaltūt (Jeddah: al-Sayyid Ḥabīb Maḥmūd Aḥmad, 1399 AH), vol. 2, pp. 580–584; Abū 'l-Faṭḥ Muḥammad b. Muḥammad Ibn Sayyid al-Nās al-Ya'murī, *Uyūn al-Athar fī Funūn al-Maghāzī wa 'l-Shamā'il wa 'l-Siyar*, eds., Muḥammad al-'Id al-Khaṭarāwī wa Muḥyī 'l-Dīn Mastaw (Al-Madīnah al-Munawwarah: Maktabah Dār al-Turāth, 1413/1994), vol. 1, pp. 348–350.

14. See, *ibid*.

In the name of Allah, the most Gracious, the most Merciful. This is the letter from Muḥammad, the Messenger of Allah, to Negus al-Aṣḥam, the king of Abyssinia. Peace be on the one who followed true guidance and believed in Allah and His Messenger; and bore witness that there is no deity but Allah Alone with no associate, He has taken neither a wife nor a son, and verily Muḥammad is His slave and Messenger. I call you with the call of Allah, verily, I am the Messenger of Allah; So embrace Islam, you will be at peace and safe; “Proclaim [O Muḥammad], ‘O people of the Scripture (Jews and Christians), come to a word that is common between us and you, that we worship none but Allah, and that we associate no partners with Him, and that none of us shall take others as lords besides Allah.’ Then, if they turn away, say: ‘Bear witness that we are Muslims,’” [the Qur’ān 3: 64]. Should you reject this invitation, then you will be held responsible for the evil of all the Christians [who follow you].¹⁵

The type of dialogue which is based on discussion of basic realities and beliefs is further discussed in three main Qur’ānic passages, namely, the Qur’ān 5: 48; 29: 46 and 60: 8. The first passage admits the diversity as a norm and positions the Qur’ān as the main authentic reference:

وَأَنْزَلْنَا إِلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ بِالْحَقِّ مُصَدِّقًا لِمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ مِنَ الْكِتَابِ وَمُهَيْمِنًا عَلَيْهِ

15. See, Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Ḥakam al-Nisābūrī, *Mustadrak Ḥakam ‘alā al-Ṣaḥīḥayn*, ed., Muṣṭafā ‘Abd al-Qādir ‘Aṭā (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1411/1990), vol. 2, p. 679, Kitāb Dhikr Akhbār Sayyid al-Mursalīn wa Khātām al-Nabiyyīn Muḥammad b. ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib al-Muṣṭafā Ṣalawāt Allāh ‘alayh, Bāb Min Kitāb Hijrah al-‘Ulā ilā ‘l-Ḥabshah. The letter sent to Negus of Abyssinia is not a unique one. The Prophet Muḥammad (peace be on him) sent similar letters to Heraclius of Byzantine, Muqawqis of Egypt and a letter to the polytheist leader of Persia. See for details, Muḥammad b. Ismā‘il al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Kitāb al-Maghāzī, Bāb Kitāb al-Nabiy Ṣallā Allāh ‘alayh wa Sallam ilā Kisrā wa Qaysar; Kitāb al-Jihād, Bāb Da‘wah al-Yahūd wa ‘l-Naṣārā... wa mā Katab al-Nabiy Ṣallā Allāh ‘alayh wa Sallam ilā Kisrā wa Qaysar; Kitāb al-Jihād, Bāb Du‘ā’ al-Nabiy Ṣallā Allāh ‘alayh wa Sallam al-Nās ilā ‘l-Islām wa ‘l-Nubuwwah; Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj al-Nisābūrī, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Kitāb al-Jihād wa ‘l-Siyar, Bāb Kitāb al-Nabiy Ṣallā Allāh ‘alayh wa Sallam ilā Hiraqal Yad‘ūh ilā ‘l-Islām. We referred to the letter sent to Negus of Abyssinia because it was further intensified by a live dialogue with him when the Muslims migrated to Abyssinia. Other kings and rules did not engage in real discussions or dialogue with Muslims. For the discussions and dialogue between Muslim delegates and Negus, see, for example, Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *Musnad Aḥmad*, Kitāb Musnad Banī Ḥāshim, Bāb Ḥadīth Ja‘far b. Abī Ṭālib Raḍī Allāh ‘anh wa Huw Ḥadīth al-Hijrah.

فَأَحْكُم بَيْنَهُم بِمَا أَنزَلَ اللَّهُ وَلَا تَتَّبِعْ أَهْوَاءَهُمْ عَمَّا جَاءَكَ مِنَ الْحَقِّ لِكُلِّ جَعَلْنَا مِنْكُمْ شِرْعَةً وَمِنْهَاجًا وَلَوْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ لَجَعَلَكُمْ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً وَلَكِنْ لِيَبْلُوَكُمْ فِي مَا آتَيْنَاكُمْ فَاسْتَبِقُوا الْخَيْرَاتِ إِلَى اللَّهِ مَرْجِعُكُمْ جَمِيعًا فَيُنَبِّئُكُمْ بِمَا كُنْتُمْ فِيهِ تَخْتَلِفُونَ

And unto thee We have revealed the Scripture with the truth, confirming whatever is there from the Scripture before it, and a watcher over it. So judge between them by that which Allah hath revealed, and follow not their desires turning away from the Truth which hath come unto thee. For each We have appointed a divine law and a method. And if Allah had so willed, He could surely have made you all one single community: but [He willed it otherwise] that He may test you in what He has given you. So vie one another in good works. Unto Allah you will all return, and He will then inform you of that wherein you differ.¹⁶

The Qur'ān here described itself as the guardian over all previous scriptures. It also refers to focusing on common principles and competing in acts of virtue. Muḥammad al-Ṭāhir Ibn 'Āshūr (1296–1394/1879–1973) commented on the context of this *āyah*, “confirming a legislation through another legislation adds to its authenticity since it becomes an established ruling enacted by Allah where common interest is realised regardless of addressees and epochs.”¹⁷

The other Qur'ānic passage invites Muslims to conduct dialogue with the people of the book ‘in the excellent way:’

وَلَا تُجَادِلُوا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ إِلَّا بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ إِلَّا الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا مِنْهُمْ وَقُولُوا ءَامَنَّا بِالَّذِي أُنْزِلَ إِلَيْنَا وَأُنْزِلَ إِلَيْكُمْ وَإِلَهُنَا وَإِلَهُكُمْ وَاحِدٌ وَنَحْنُ لَهُ مُسْلِمُونَ

And do not argue with the People of the Book, except in the most kindly manner; unless it be with those of them who inflict

16. See, the Qur'ān 5: 48.

17. See, Samāḥah al-Ustādh al-Imām al-Shaykh Muḥammad al-Ṭāhir b. 'Āshūr, *Tafsīr al-Tahrīr wa 'l-Tanwīr* (Tunis: al-Dār al-Tūniyyah, 1971), vol. 6, p. 216.

wrong (and injury): and say, “We believe in that which has been sent down [from the High] to us, as well as that which was sent down to you: for our Deity and your Deity is One and the same, and it is unto Him that We [all] surrender (in Islam).”¹⁸

According to Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (224–310/838–923), “*billatī hiya aḥsan*” means “with the best manner or the most beautiful words, and that is inviting them to (submission to none but) Allah with His *āyāt* (signs in the universe as well the revealed passages of the Qur’ān) diverting their attention to the conclusive proofs set in them by Him.”¹⁹ Prohibition of dialogue in the above *āyah* is expressed for those “who inflict wrong (*alladhīn ḡalamū*).” Mujāhid b. Jabr (22–103/642–721), interpreted “*illā ‘lladhīn ḡalamū*,” to mean, “those who inflicted wrong by fighting against Muslims and refusing to pay *jizyah*.”²⁰ According to Sa‘īd b. al-Mussayyab (14–94/635–713), it means “those who inflicted wrong by violating their treaties and engaged with Muslims in wars.”²¹

Abū ‘l-Fidā’ Ismā‘īl b. ‘Umar Ibn Kathīr (702–774/1301–1373), states, “*illā ‘lladhīn ḡalamū*,” implies, “those who turn away from the truth, turning a blind eye to clear evidence, being stubborn and arrogant.”²² In this case, “you should progress from debate to combat, fighting them in such a way as to deter them from committing aggression against you.”²³ According to Ibn Kathīr, the *āyah* further commands the Prophet (peace be on him) to argue with the people of the book in the best manner so that it can be more effective. The best manner mentioned in this *āyah* is elucidated elsewhere in the Qur’ān by Allah, in the following words:

18. See, the Qur’ān 29: 46.

19. See, Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad b. Jarīr b. Yazīd b. Kathīr b. Ghālib al-Āmilī al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān fī Ta’wīl Āyy al-Qur’ān*, ed., Aḥmad Muḥammad Shākir, 24 vols. (Beirut: Mu’assasah al-Risālah, 1420/2000), vol. 20, p. 46.

20. Ibid.

21. Ibid, vol. 20, p. 47.

22. See, Ibn Kathīr al-Qurshī, *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘Azīm*, vol. 6, p. 256.

23. Ibid.

أَدْعُ إِلَى سَبِيلِ رَبِّكَ بِالْحُكْمَةِ وَالْمَوْعِظَةِ الْحَسَنَةِ وَجِدِلْهُمْ بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ
هُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِمَنْ ضَلَّ عَنْ سَبِيلِهِ ۖ وَهُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِالْمُهْتَدِينَ

Invite (all) to the way of your *Rabb* with wisdom and good counsel. And argue with them in the best of manners. Surely, your *Rabb* knows best the one who deviates from His path, and He knows best the ones who are on the right path.²⁴

Ibn Kathīr further added that Allah also advised Hārūn and Mūsā (peace be on both) while they were sent to Pharaoh [Fir‘awn] to speak to him gently so that he may take heed:

﴿أَذْهَبَا إِلَىٰ فِرْعَوْنَ إِنَّهُ طَغَىٰ ۖ فَقُولَا لَهُ قَوْلًا لَّيِّنًا لَّعَلَّهُ يَتَذَكَّرُ أَوْ يَخْشَىٰ﴾

Go, both of you, to Pharaoh, for he has indeed transgressed all bounds; But speak to him mildly; perchance he may take warning or [at least] be filled with apprehension.²⁵

Mujāhid, accordingly, opined that dialogue should not be harsh or aggressive.²⁶

A claim is raised at times that the content provided in the Qur’ān 16: 125 and 29: 46, mentioned above, as well as the guidance provided in the Qur’ān 60: 8, which is discussed below in this paper,²⁷ were abrogated by the following *āyah*, which is famous among the exegetes (*mufasssirūn*) and the jurists (*fuqahā’*) as the ‘*āyah* of the sword:’

فَإِذَا أَدْلَسَخَ الْأَشْهُرَ الْحُرُمَ فَاقْتُلُوا الْمُشْرِكِينَ حَيْثُ وَجَدْتُمُوهُمْ وَخُذُواهُمْ وَأَحْصُواهُمْ
وَأَقْعُدُوا لَهُمْ كُلَّ مَرْصِدٍ ۚ إِن تَابُوا وَأَقَامُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَآتَوُا الزَّكَاةَ فَخَلُّوا سَبِيلَهُمْ ۚ إِنَّ
اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَّحِيمٌ

24. See, the Qur’ān 16: 125. Also see, Ibn Kathīr al-Qurshī, *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘Azīm*, vol. 6, p. 256.

25. See, the Qur’ān 20: 43–44. Also see, Ibn Kathīr al-Qurshī, *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘Azīm*, vol. 6, p. 256.

26. See, Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. Abū Bakr l-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi’ li Ahkām al-Qur’ān*, ed., Hishām Samīr al-Bukhārī (Riyadh: Dār ‘Ālam al-Kutub, 1423/2003), vol. 13, p. 350.

27. See, notes 53–56, below.

Then, when the sacred months have passed, slay the idolaters wherever ye find them, and take them (captive), and besiege them, and prepare for them every ambush. But if they repent and establish the Prayer (*al-ṣalāh*) and pay the Poor-due (*al-Zakāh*), then leave their way free. Lo! Allah is Forgiving, Merciful.²⁸

As well as by the implications of the following *āyah* of the same Sūrah, that reads:

إِنَّ عِدَّةَ الشُّهُورِ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ اثْنَا عَشَرَ شَهْرًا فِي كِتَابِ اللَّهِ يَوْمَ خَلَقَ السَّمَوَاتِ
وَالْأَرْضَ مِنْهَا أَرْبَعَةٌ حُرُمٌ ذَلِكَ الدِّينُ الْقَيِّمُ فَلَا تَظْلِمُوا فِيهِنَّ أَنْفُسَكُمْ وَقَاتِلُوا
الْمُشْرِكِينَ كَأَفْكَ مَا يُقْتُلُونَكُمْ كَافَّةً وَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ مَعَ الْمُتَّقِينَ

The number of months with Allah is twelve (in a year), so ordained by Him the day He created the heavens and the earth; of them four are sacred: that is the straight way. So wrong not yourselves therein, and fight the Pagans all together as they fight you all together. But know that Allah is with those who being Allah Conscience restrain themselves.²⁹

Such a claim of abrogation, however, is debatable for a number of reasons: First, recourse to abrogation (*naskh*) is conducted on the proviso that reconciliation is impossible or unfeasible. Such a rule is consistently applied by the Qur'ān exegetes (*al-mufasssīrūn*).³⁰ Whereas in the case under consideration, Taqiy al-Dīn Abū 'l-'Abbās Aḥmad b. 'Abd al-Ḥalīm Ibn Taymiyyah al-Ḥarrānī (661–728/1263–1328) saw reconciliation between the '*āyah* of the sword' and the *āyāt* quoted above in support of dialogue, peaceful co-existence and mutual care and sympathy, to be perfectly feasible.³¹

28. See, the Qur'ān 9: 5.

29. See, the Qur'ān 9: 36.

30. See, Abū 'l-Baqā' Taqiy al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Abd al-'Azīz al-Fattūḥī, *Sharḥ al-Kawkab al-Munīr*, ed., Muḥammad al-Zuhaylī and Nazīh Ḥammād (Riyadh: al-'Ubaykān, 1418/1997), vol. 3, p. 529.

31. See, Taqiy al-Dīn Abū 'l-'Abbās Aḥmad b. 'Abd al-Ḥalīm Ibn Taymiyyah al-Ḥarrānī, *al-Jawāb al-Ṣaḥīḥ li man Baddal Dīn al-Masīḥ* (Riyadh: Dār al-'Āshimah, 1414 AH), vol. 1, p. 219.

Second, the ‘*āyah* of sword’ does not address the case of the people of the book (*ahl al-kitāb*) with whom dialogue must be conducted in the best way possible for the sake of propagation, and even in the case of polytheists (*mushrikūn*) grant of asylum to hear the Qur’ān is prescribed in the very next *āyah* following in sequence the ‘*āyah* of sword.’³² Third, ‘Abdul Ḥamīd A. Abū Sulaymān, a contemporary Islamic scholar of sound academic repute, argues that this classical concept of permanent abrogation, in this case, is oblivious of the space-time element woven in the context of the ‘*āyah* of sword’ which, if taken into account, would have restricted the application of abrogation (*naskh*) to the given circumstance alone.³³ Fourth, it is to be noted further that the position of the classical jurists which characterised war as the permanent pattern of relationship with non-Muslims was due to the given ground reality of continuous aggression on Muslims by most of the world powers of the time namely, the Arab pagans, the Jews, the Christian Roman Empire and the Persian Empire, and their vessels.³⁴ Otherwise (*jamhur*) most of the classical jurists of the generation of the Prophet’s Companions (*ṣaḥābah*) and their Successors (*tābi‘ūn*) held the opinion that according to the Islamic teachings the normative basis of Muslim non-Muslim relations is peace and war is caused as a result of aggression upon Muslims.³⁵

32. See, the Qur’ān 9: 6.

33. See, ‘Abdul Ḥamīd A. Abū Sulaymān, *Towards An Islamic Theory of International Relations: New Directions for Methodology And Thought*, Islamization of Knowledge Series; No 1 (Herndon: International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT), 1993), p. 73.

34. This issue has been ably treated by Muḥammad Abū Zahrah. See, al-Imām Muḥammad Abū Zahrah, *al-‘Alāqāt al-Dawliyyah fī ‘l-Islām* (np: Dār al-Fikr al-‘Arabī, nd), pp. 47–52.

35. In stark contrast to the other four powers of the time mentioned above, Ḥabashah was friendly towards Islam and Muslims. The Prophet (peace be on him), accordingly, bade the Muslims to leave them alone unless they initiate hostility, therefore, the *fuqahā’* considered it to be impermissible to initiate war against Ḥabashah. See, Abū ‘l-Walid Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Aḥmad Ibn Rushd al-Shahīr bi Ibn Rushd al-Ḥafīd, *Bidāyah al-Mujtahid wa Nihāyah al-Muqtaṣid*, 4 vols. (Cairo: Dār al-Ḥadīth 1425/2004), vol. 2, p. 144. Wahbah Muṣṭafā al-Zuhaylī (1351– /1932–), presented a rich discussion arguing that the position characterising war as the basis of Muslim non-Muslim relations, is not consistent with the balance of evidence of the Texts (*nuṣūṣ*) of the Qur’ān and *Sunnah*. See, Wahbah al-Zuhaylī, *Athār al-Ḥarb fī Fiqh al-Islāmī* (Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, 1962), pp. 113–120.

Moreover, the historical context must always be considered while developing an understanding of the Qur'ānic *āyāt*. Without knowing the circumstances behind the revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*), one cannot know the accurate application of an *āyah*. The particular case of the 'āyah of sword' is that it was revealed towards the end of the revelation period and relates to a limited context. Reading this *āyah* in its historical context reveals that by the revelation of this *āyah* hostilities were frozen for a four-month period during which the Pagan Arabs were given assurance of free and peaceful movement without threat of initiation of armed conflict from Muslims. The Prophet Muḥammad (peace be on him) was inspired to use this peace period to encourage the polytheist combatants to join the Muslim ranks or, if they chose, to leave the area that was under Muslims rule. However, if they were to resume hostilities, after this peace period then the Muslims would fight back until victory.

Similarly, the sequential context of the *āyāt* in which the 'āyah of sword' is placed as well as the sequential context of its constituent phrases also need to be taken into consideration for its proper understanding. The very 'āyah of sword' concludes by emphasising the divine attributes of mercy and forgiveness. To minimise hostilities the Qur'ān, in the *āyah* following in sequence the 'āyah of sword' ordered Muslims to grant asylum to anyone from the Pagan enemies, who sought refuge. And this asylum had to be granted according to the customs of chivalry; it was ordained that the person given asylum be explained the message of the Qur'ān but not coerced into accepting that message. Thereafter, he or she be escorted to his place of safety regardless of his or her religion: ³⁶

وَإِنْ أَحَدٌ مِّنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ اسْتَجَارَكَ فَأَجِرْهُ حَتَّى يَسْمَعَ كَلِمَ اللَّهِ ثُمَّ ابْتَغِهِ مَأْمَنَهُ
ذَلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمْ قَوْمٌ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ

If one amongst the Pagans ask thee for asylum, grant it to him, so that he may hear the word of Allah (Qur'ān); and then escort him to his place of safety. That is because they are men without

36. See, Maher Hathout, *Jihad vs. Terrorism*, ed., Samer Hathout (Pasadena, Ca: Dawn Books, 2002), pp. 52–53.

knowledge.³⁷

The context of the passage in which this ‘āyah of the sword’ is read further substantiates this explanation. The passage starts:

بَرَاءَةٌ مِّنَ اللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ إِلَى الَّذِينَ عَاهَدْتُمْ مِّنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ ۖ فَسِيحُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ أَرْبَعَةَ
أَشْهُرٍ وَعَلِمُوا أَنَّهُمْ غَيْرُ مُعْجِزِي اللَّهِ ۖ وَأَنَّ اللَّهَ مُخْزِي الْكَافِرِينَ

A disassociation (is proclaimed) by Allah and His Messenger from the pagans with whom you have contracted mutual alliances: Roam about on the earth for four months. But know that you cannot frustrate Allah and that Allah will cover with shame those who reject Him.³⁸

In these āyāt the pagans were granted a four month amnesty with an indication that when the four months were over, fighting would resume. However, the āyah falling in sequence just before the ‘āyah of sword’ exempts some of them from the resumption of hostilities. It reads:

إِلَّا الَّذِينَ عَاهَدْتُمْ مِّنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ ثُمَّ لَمْ يَنْقُصُوكُمْ شَيْئًا وَلَمْ يُظَاهِرُوا عَلَيْكُمْ أَحَدًا
فَاتِمُوا إِلَيْهِمْ عَهْدَهُمْ إِلَىٰ مُدَّتِهِمْ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ مُحِبُّ الْمُتَّقِينَ

Except for those pagans with whom you entered into a covenant and who then did not break their covenant at all nor aided anyone against you. So fulfil your covenants with them until the end of their term, for Allah loves the righteous.³⁹

So in the ‘āyah of the sword’ when Allah says:

فَإِذَا أَنْسَلَخَ الْأَشْهُرَ الْحُرُمَ فَاقْتُلُوا الْمُشْرِكِينَ حَيْثُ وَجَدْتُمُوهُمْ وَخُذُوهُمْ وَأَحْصُرُوهُمْ
وَأَقْعُدُوا لَهُمْ كُلَّ مَرْصِدٍ ۚ فَإِنْ تَابُوا وَأَقَامُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَآتَوُا الزَّكَاةَ فَخَلُّوا سَبِيلَهُمْ ۚ إِنَّ
اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَّحِيمٌ

Then, when the sacred months are passed, fight the pagans wherever you find them, and seize them and beleaguer them and

37. See, the Qur’ān 9: 6.

38. See, the Qur’ān 9: 1–2.

39. See, the Qur’ān 9: 4.

lie in wait for them in every stratagem (of war); but if they repent, and establish the Prayers (*al-Ṣalāh*) and pay the Poor-due (*al-Zakāh*), then leave their way free: for Allah is Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful.⁴⁰

The above discussion about the historical as well as sequential context of the ‘*āyah* of sword’ shows that it is not general, since the *āyah* falling in sequence just before the ‘*āyah* of sword’ has qualified it to refer to the Pagan Arabs who were actually at war with the Prophet (peace be on him) and those who conveniently broke their covenants of peace. This specification is further emphasised a few *āyāt* later where Allah says:

أَلَا تَقْتُلُونَ قَوْمًا نَكَتُوا أَيْمَانَهُمْ وَّهُمُؤَا بِإِخْرَاجِ الرَّسُولِ وَهُمْ بَدَءُوكُمْ أَوَّلَ مَرَّةٍ
أَتُخْشَوْنَهُمْ ؕ قَالَهُ أَحَقُّ أَنْ تَخْشَوْهُ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ مُؤْمِنِينَ ؕ

Will you not fight people who broke their covenants and plotted to expel the Messenger and attacked you first? Do you fear them? Nay, Allah is more worthy that you should more justly fear Him, if you are believers!⁴¹

Therefore, the historical context of the ‘*āyah* of the sword’ as well as its sequential context within the passage of the *Sūrah* in which it is placed make it clear that it referred to those pagan Arabs who were persistent in their hostilities and attacks against Muslims, and parts of it are applicable in the active battle only. So, it referred to those Pagans who would continue to fight after the period of peace. Its context clearly commanded the Muslims to protect those who sought peace and were non-combatants even among those Pagans. Thus it is a specific *āyah* with a specific ruling and can in no way be applied to general situations.

Historical application of the ‘*āyah* of the sword’ also proves that it cannot be regarded abrogating (*nāsikh* of) the *āyāt* prescribing peaceful co-existence, mutual care and sympathy, and inviting others to Islam peacefully. It has been beautifully summarised by Karen Armstrong:

40. See, the Qur’ān 9: 5.

41. See, the Qur’ān 9: 13.

After Muhammed's death, Jews and Christians were never required to convert to Islam but were allowed to practice their religion freely in the Islamic empire. Later, Zoroastrians, Hindus, Buddhists and Sikhs were also counted among the People of the Book. It has never been a problem for Muslims to co-exist with people of other religions. The Islamic Empire was able to play host to Christians and Jews for centuries; but Western Europe has found it almost impossible to tolerate Muslims and Jews in Christian territory.⁴²

When the Muslims entered Jerusalem hundreds of years ago, instead of tearing down the churches or synagogues, the Christian places of veneration and worship were respected.⁴³ 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb (40 BH–23 AH/584–644), the second Rightly Guided Caliph (13–23/634–644), forbade his fellow Muslims even to pray inside the Church of holy Sepulchre, and refused to pray inside it himself, for the fear that some later Muslims might insist to build a mosque in its place, thinking that his actions were a validation for such an act.⁴⁴

Therefore, the 'āyah of the sword' cannot be deemed as abrogating all āyāt calling upon Muslims to dialogue with the people of the book including Jews and Christians. There are some Muslim etiquettes that should be met, however, when holding such sessions of inter-faith dialogue which should meet the Qur'ānic instruction to be "in (a way) that is the best, except with such of them who do wrong."⁴⁵

The goal of this type of dialogue should be elucidated clearly as making the truth clear and obvious, to guide all of humanity and to eliminate misconceptions. The dialogue should not be contaminated by inflammatory speeches or with an air of superiority, whether in

42. Karen Armstrong, *Muhammed: A Biography of the Prophet* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991), p. 87.

43. See, Abū Ja'far Muḥammad b. Jarīr b. Yazīd b. Kathīr b. Ghālib al-Āmilī al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh al-Ṭabarī: Ta'rikh al-Rusul wa 'l-Mulūk*, 11 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Turāth, 1387 AH), vol. 2, p. 608.

44. See, al-Baṭrīrak Iftīsiyūs al-mukannā bi Sa'id Ibn Baṭrīq (Eutychius), *al-Ta'rikh al-Majmū' 'alā 'l-Taḥqīq wa 'l-Taṣdīq* (Beirut: Maṭba'ah al-Ābā' al-Yasū'iyyīn, 1909), vol. 2, pp. 17ff; Abū Zayd 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Muḥammad b. Muḥammad Ibn Khaldūn, *Dīwān al-Mubtada' wa 'l-Khabar fī Ta'rikh al-'Arab wa 'l-Barbar wa man 'Aṣarahum min Dhawī 'l-Sha'n al-Akbar*, ed., Khalīl Shihādah (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1408/1988), vol. 2, p. 268.

45. See, the Qur'ān 29: 46.

the content of the speech or its method of delivery. A debater should not narrow the broad practices of Islam. Adopting a certain juristic (*fiqhī*) view in terms of a juristic (*fiqhī*) issue should not necessarily require adopting the same view in terms of dialogue since the field of interfaith dialogue is wider than the field of juristic opinions. Kindness and justice are the basis for dealing with both Muslims and non-Muslims among which People of the Book have a special place. Examples of this can be found in *Sharī'ah*; that their slaughtered meat is permissible for Muslims and it is also permissible for Muslim men to marry their chaste women, two privileges followers of other religions do not share.⁴⁶

The kindness and justice which a Muslim is ordered to show in his dealings with non-Muslims, however, does not imply embracing their faiths, nor does it allow the Muslim to deny his belief that final version of Islamic *Sharī'ah* (practical injunctions) revealed through Allah's last and final Messenger and Prophet, Muḥammad (peace be on him) abrogated all the previous versions of the Islamic *Sharī'ah* (practical injunctions) revealed through Allah's earlier Messengers/Prophets starting from the very first human Adam to Jesus Christ (peace be on them all), let alone the religions that came about by distortions in the beliefs and practices propagated by those Prophets (peace be on them).⁴⁷ Consequently, for all times to come, whosoever does not accept Islam in its final version revealed through Allah's last and final Messenger and Prophet, Muḥammad (peace be on him), will not attain *the success* in here nor in the Hereafter.⁴⁸ This

46. See, the Qur'ān 5: 5.

47. See, for example, the Qur'ān 2: 213; 3: 19–22.

48. According to Islamic/Qur'ānic teachings all the true Prophets (*anbiyā'*) and Messengers (*rusul*) commissioned by the Almighty Creator Allah invited mankind towards one and the same *dīn* (way of life) namely Islam, Submission to none but the Creator in all affairs of individual as well as collective spheres of life. All the true Prophets and Messengers (peace be on them) and their followers called themselves Muslims. See, for example, the Qur'ān 2: 130–133; 3: 19, 52, 85; 5: 44; 10: 71–72, 83–86, 90; 12: 101; 27: 30–31; 42: 13; 51: 35–36. However, while the basic tenets and principles being the same, the details of the practical injunctions (*Sharā'i'*) revealed to each Messenger (peace be on him) had some variations. See, for example, the Qur'ān 5: 44–48; 22: 26–34. See for the need, nature and brief history of the Prophet-hood, Sayyid Abū 'l-A'la Mawdūdī, *Towards Understanding Islam*, tr. Kurshid Ahmad (Indianapolis: American Trust Publications, n.d.), pp. 29–73.

is briefly the Islamic stand regarding interfaith dialogue dealing with the discussions of basic concepts and beliefs.

Interfaith Dialogue–Social Spheres

The other type of dialogue which is based on a wider concept of international human cooperation is more tolerable and emphatically recommended. Examples of such a dialogue include international address of issues related to the supremacy of law, violation of human rights, atrocities of wars, genocides, fighting the epidemics, hunger and malnutrition, protection of environment and relief efforts.

One sub-type of this interfaith dialogue aims to increase sensitivity to others and their problems. This is commonly known as addressing global challenges in the sphere of interfaith dialogue. As the Parliament of the World Religions affirmed in Chicago in 1993, “The earth cannot be changed for the better unless the consciousness of the individual is changed first.”⁴⁹ This is the most concrete, widespread, and basic type of dialogue. It is known as the dialogue of life. It is the dialogue of concerned neighbours with their adjacent churches and mosques, who work together and live on the same street. This type of dialogue, as explained by Professor Mahmoud Ayyoub, is concerned with issues of social justice, pollution problems, and teenage children in mixed public schools with their problems of drug use, level of intimacy with the other gender and a host of other issues.⁵⁰ This is one of the great avenues for the propagation of Islam by actively participating in the community especially for Muslim minorities living in the West who suffer from segregation and stereotyping.

Islam stands clearly in favour of this type of dialogue. Before the Prophethood Muḥammad (peace be on him) participated in *Ḥilf al-Fuḍūl*, a 7th-century alliance created by various Makkans, including

49. David Chappell, “Interreligious Dialogue, Globalization, and Human Rights: Buddhist Reflections on Interdependence and the Declaration” in Joseph Runzo, Nancy Martin, and Arvinda Sharma, eds., *Human Rights and Responsibilities in the World Religions* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2003), p. 191.

50. See, Mahmoud Ayyoub, *A Muslim View of Christianity, Essays on Dialogue*, ed., Irfan A. Omar, Faith Meets Faith Series (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2007), p. 68.

young Muḥammad [peace be on him], to establish fair commercial dealings. The pact holds significance in Islamic ethics because Muḥammad (peace be on him), after the advent of his Prophethood, accepted the substance of this agreement made primarily by non-Muslims. He held it in such a high esteem that, long after receiving the message of Islam, he said, “In the house of ‘Abd Allāh b. Jud‘ān I was present at an alliance which was of such a merit that if I was invited to take part in it now in Islam, I would still do so.”⁵¹ Tariq Ramadan (1382– /1962–), a renowned contemporary scholar, draws three principles from this:

1. Islam embraces values derived from the human conscience though outside of the Islamic tradition. This is because Prophet Muḥammad (peace be on him) acknowledged a pact that was established before the beginning of Revelation to him, which pledges to defend justice imperatively and to oppose the oppression of those who were destitute and powerless.
2. Islam acknowledges the righteous acts of non-Muslims, by validating, in this case, a pact established by non-Muslims seeking justice and the common good of their society.
3. Islam does not establish a closed universe of reference but rather relies on a set of universal principles. The message of Islam by no means is a closed value system, or at variance or conflict with other value systems.⁵²

Islam encourages Muslims to extend social projects to include non-Muslims. The Qur’ān states:

لَا يَنْهَىكُمُ اللَّهُ عَنِ الَّذِينَ لَمْ يُقَاتِلُوكُمْ فِي الدِّينِ وَلَمْ يُخْرِجُوكُم مِّن دِيَارِكُمْ أَن تَبَرُّوهُمْ
وَتُقْسِطُوا إِلَيْهِمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الْمُقْسِطِينَ

Allah does not forbid you, with regard to those who do not fight
you for your Faith nor drive you out of your homes, from

51. See, Abū Bakr Aḥmad b. al-Ḥusayn b. ‘Alī b. ‘Abd Allāh b. Mūsā al-Bayhaqī, *Sunan al-Bayhaqī*, ed., Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Qādir ‘Aṭā’, 10 vols. (Makkah: Maktabah Dār al-Bāz, 1414/1994), vol. 6, pp. 366-367, Kitāb Qasm al-Fay’, Bāb I‘ṭā’ al-Fay’ ‘alā ‘l-Diḥwān wa Man Taqa’ bih al-Bidāyah.

52. See, Tariq Ramadan, *In the Footsteps of the Prophet: Lessons from the Life of Muhammad* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 20–22.

dealing kindly and justly with them: for Allah loves those who are just.⁵³

As a part of this faith to deal justly and kindly with non-Muslims some scholars permitted paying alms to them. According to Abū Ḥanīfah Nu‘mān b. Thābit (80–150/699–767), it is permissible for Muslims to distribute part of their *zakāt al-fiṭr* (the charity paid as giving thanks at the end of the fasting of the month of Ramaḍān) to fellow non-Muslims, especially to the Christian monks.⁵⁴ The famous *muḥaddith* Abū Maysarah ‘Amr b. Sharāḥbīl al-Hamdānī (d. 63/683) used to give out to monks from *ṣadaqah al-fiṭr*, according to reports related by Abū Bakr ‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm Ibn Abī Shaybah (159–235/776–235).⁵⁵ Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr b. Ayyūb Ibn Qaiyyim al-Jawziyyah (691–751/1292–1350), reported that ‘Umar b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz (62–101/682–720), the fifth Rightly Guided Caliph (99–101/717–720), instructed the Muslim administrator of Baṣrah ‘Adiy b. Arṭāt to, “look for the People of the Book (Jews and Christians) in your area who have grown old and weak, and are unable to earn money, and establish stipends for them from the treasury to provide for their needs.”⁵⁶

The Qur’ān commands Muslims to collaborate among themselves and with non-Muslims for just ends:

وَلَا تَجْرِمَنكُمْ شَتَائِنُ قَوْمٍ أَنْ صَدُّوكُمْ عَنِ الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ أَنْ تَعْتَدُوا وَتَعَاوَنُوا عَلَى
الْبِرِّ وَالتَّقْوَىٰ وَلَا تَعَاوَنُوا عَلَى الْإِثْمِ وَالْعُدْوَانِ ۚ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ شَدِيدُ الْعِقَابِ

53. See, the Qur’ān 60: 8.

54. See, Ibn Rushd al-Ḥafid, *Bidāyah al-Mujtahid wa Nihāyah al-Muqtaṣid*, vol. 2, p. 44.

55. See, Abū Bakr ‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm Ibn Abī Shaybah, *Muṣannaf fi ‘l-Aḥādīth wa ‘l-Āthār*, ed., Kamāl Yūsuf al-Ḥūt, 1st edn. (al-Riyād: Maktabah al-Rushd, 1409 AH), vol. 2, p. 401, Kitāb al-Zakāh, Bāb Mā Qālū fi ‘l-Ṣadaqah fi Ghayr Ahl al-Islām. It is further mentioned by Abū Muḥammad ‘Abd Allāh b. Aḥmad Ibn Qudāmāh al-Maqdasī that famous *muḥaddiths*, ‘Amr b. Maymūn (d. 75/694), Abū Maysarah ‘Amr b. Sharāḥbīl and Abū Ismā‘il Murrah b. Sharāḥbīl al-Hamdānī (d. 76/695) used to give out from *ṣadaqah al-fiṭr* to monks, see his, *al-Mughnī fi Fiqh al-Imām Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal al-Shaybānī*, 10 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1405 AH), vol. 3, p. 78.

56. See, Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr b. Ayyūb b. Sa‘d Ibn Qaiyyim al-Jawziyyah, *Aḥkām Ahl al-Dhimma*, ed., Yūsuf b. Aḥmad al-Bakrī and Shākīr b. Tawfiq al-‘Ārūrī, 3 vols. (Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 1418/1997), vol. 1, pp. 143–144.

And let not the hatred of some people in (once) shutting you out of the Sacred Mosque lead you to transgression (and hostility on your part); And collaborate in virtue and righteousness and do not collaborate in sin and transgression; And be conscious of your duty to Allah. Lo! Allah is severe in punishment.⁵⁷

The sequential context of the phrases of this *āyah* shows that the command to collaborate in virtue and righteousness is not restricted to collaboration among Muslims only. Abū 'l-'Abbās Aḥmad b. Idrīs al-Ṣanhājī al-Qarāfī (625–684/1228–1285), summed up Islamic Caliphate's responsibility towards the *dhimmīs* by maintaining, "It is the responsibility of Muslims to the People of *dhimmah* to take care of their weak, fulfil needs of their poor, feed their hungry, provide clothes to their needy, address them politely, and even tolerate their harm even if it was from a neighbour, even though the Muslim have an upper hand. The Muslims must also advise them sincerely in their affairs and protect them against anyone who tries to hurt them or their family, steals their wealth or violates their rights."⁵⁸

Interfaith cooperation for serving global issues is evidenced in the Prophet's statements and deeds as well. The Prophet Muḥammad (peace be on him) advocated reconciliation with others, as evidenced by his peace treaty with Jewish tribes in Madīnah.⁵⁹ He also believed in mutual trust between different faith communities, evidenced by the fact that in 8 BH/615 he sent Muslims fleeing persecution from the Makkans to find refuge with the Christian king of Abyssinia. The statement of the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be on him) is explicit in tolerance and mutual cooperation for peace and reconciliation, "you may go to Abyssinia where a king rules with no injustice; that is a

57. See, the Qur'ān 5: 2.

58. See, Abū 'l-'Abbās Aḥmad b. Idrīs al-Ṣanhājī al-Qarāfī, *Anwār al-Burūq fī Anwā' al-Furūq* aka *al-Furūq*, ed., Khalil al-Manṣūr, 4 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1418/1998), vol. 3, p. 31.

59. For details of the *Mithāq Madīnah*, see, 'Abd al-Malik Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīrah al-Nabawīyyah*, vol. 1, pp. 501–504; al-Duktūr Muḥammad Ḥamid Allāh al-Ḥayderābādī, *Majmū'ah al-Wathā'iq al-Siyāsiyyah li 'l-'Ahd al-Nabawī wa 'l-Khilāfah al-Rāshidah* (Cairo: Maṭba'ah Lajnah al-Ta'lif wa 'l-Tarjumah wa 'l-Nashr, 1376/1956), pp. 15–21. Dr Muhammad Hamidullah calls it, the first written constitution of a state, see, his, *The First Written Constitution in the World: An Important Document of the Time of the Holy Prophet* (Lahore: Shaikh Muhammad Ashraf, 1968).

land of truthfulness; until Allah leads us to a way out of our difficulty.”⁶⁰

According to the Constitution of Madinah (*Mithāq Madīnah*), all parties would engage in co-operation with one another, provide support for each other, and would remain under the protection of the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be on him). This contract was in force from 1/622 to 10/632.⁶¹ Through this document, the tribal structures which had formerly been based on blood and kinship were abolished and people of different geographical, cultural and ethnic backgrounds came together and formed a social unity. The Constitution of Madinah is an excellent example of peaceful coexistence of peoples adhering to different religious traditions.⁶²

Islam thus encourages cooperation for building bridges of co-existence to find out solutions for the world or even local problems shared by Muslims and non-Muslims through interfaith dialogue. Such a type of dialogue ensuring cooperation is even regarded an act of worship (*‘ibādah*) especially if it facilitates in securing valuable human lives and properties in a hostile environment.⁶³ But some participants of interfaith dialogue may go beyond the limits by attempts of transforming collaboration and co-existence into tendentious reshaping of principal beliefs resulting in patterns of syncretism aiming at so called unity of all faiths.

Syncretism

Syncretism, meaning ‘combining,’ is one of the patterns of interfaith dialogue. It is a call for unity of all faiths. It is the attempt to reconcile contrary beliefs melding practices of various faiths. It may involve attempts to merge and analogise several originally discrete traditions, especially in theology and mythology of religion and thus

60. See, ‘Abd al-Malik Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīrah al-Nabawīyyah*, vol. 1, p. 321.

61. These dates are provided by Harun Yahya, in his, *Islam Denounces Terrorism* (New York: Tehrike Tarsile Quran, Inc, 2002), pp. 94–95; available online at: <www.islamdenounceterrorism.com>.

62. See, *ibid*; also see, Ḥamid Allāh al-Ḥayderābādī, *Majmū‘ah al-Wathā’iq al-Siyāsiyyah*, pp. 15–21.

63. See, Proceedings of the fifth annual conference of AMJA (Assembly of Muslim Jurists in America) held in Manamah, Nov. 2007, available online at: <www.amjanoline.net>.

assert an underlying unity allowing for an inclusive approach to other faiths. Attempts have even been made by several religious thinkers to synthesise various religions in order to remove the conflict among them. It has been maintained by some: i) that all religions are basically the same, and there is a 'rock bottom unity' among all religions; ii) that all religions are true, and iii) that different religions are paths leading to the same goal, and so on.⁶⁴ This view, though well intentioned, is incorrect and a myth.

Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, Jainism, and Sikhism are the main living religions of the world. The myth of unity of all religions can easily be refuted by showing that these religions make conflicting truth-claims, which are incompatible with one another.⁶⁵ For instance, they have different views regarding the nature of this world or about the nature of the life after death, or about the ultimate destiny of human beings. They also advocate different moral codes, different methods of worship and different rituals. Since they are not similar, it is not possible for all of them to be true at the same time. It is also not possible to regard them as different paths leading to the same goal, because they do not believe in a common goal. Accordingly, the main stream Muslim, Jewish, Christian, and Hindu scholars do not approve of it.

Dr Ramendra Nath (1957–), Associate Professor of Philosophy at Patna University, India, calls it the *Myth of Unity of all Religions* and asserts that rationalism and humanism or rational humanism is what we really need for achieving fellowship among human beings, and not a confused and illogical approach towards religion.⁶⁶

Similarly, Pope Pius XI (1922–1939), in his, *Mortalium Animos* # 2, on Jan. 6, 1928 declared, "For which reason conventions, meetings

64. See, "Syncretism," *Wikipedia*, available online at: <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Syncretism>>.

65. See, John H. Hick, *Philosophy of Religion* (New Delhi: Prentice-Hall Private Limited, 1978), p. 118.

66. Dr Ramendra Nath, *The Myth of Unity of all Religions*, published originally as a booklet by the Buddhiwadi Foundation, India. It has been republished till now in: *Humanist Outlook* vol. 10, no. 5 (Autumn 2003); *Indian Skeptic*, vol.16, no. 8 (15-12-2003); *The Modern Rationalist*, vol. 28 no.12 (Jan 2004); *The Radical Humanist*, vol. 67 no.10 (Jan 2004) and *Understanding Sikhism* (Jan 2006). It is available online at: <<http://www.buddhiwadi.org/myth.htm>>.

and addresses are frequently arranged by these persons, at which a large number of listeners are present, and at which all without distinction are invited to join in the discussion, both infidels of every kind, and Christians... Certainly such attempts can nowise be approved by Catholics, founded as they are on that false opinion which considers all religions to be more or less good and praiseworthy... Not only are those who hold this opinion in error and deceived, but also in distorting the idea of true religion they reject it...”⁶⁷

Ibn Taymiyyah, the famous Muslim jurist, put up a compelling argument against the call of syncretism at his time.⁶⁸ The Members of the Permanent Committee for Academic Research and Issuance of Religious Verdicts in Saudi Arabia quoted innumerable *āyāt* and Prophetic traditions (*aḥādīth*) which concentrate on major doctrinal and fundamental distinctions of the Islamic belief which are impossible to unify with fundamental doctrines and creeds of Judaism, Christianity and most of existing world religions. They proclaimed that “the call for ‘Unity of religions’ aims at eliminating everything which distinguishes Islam from *Kufr*. Accordingly calling and supporting the concepts of the ‘Unity of Religion’ amounts to *riddah* (apostasy).”⁶⁹ Though most world religious found today show some similarities with Islam this does not prove their ‘essential unity.’ Because though some of them are ascribed to the anciently revealed Truth through Allah’s Prophets (peace be on them) who came before Muḥammad (peace be on him), the changes that were intentionally made or have unintentionally crept into the creed, basic tenets and practices of each of these religions are so extensive and fundamental that those changes have not only distinguished these

67. See, <<http://www.mostholylfamilymonastery.com/JP2apostasywithpagansidolatersandinfidels.php>>.

68. See, Taqiy al-Dīn Abū ‘l-‘Abbās Aḥmad b. ‘Abd al-Ḥalīm Ibn Taymiyyah al-Ḥarrānī, *Majmū‘ al-Fatāwā*, ed., ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Muḥammad b. Qāsim (al-Madīnah al-Munawwarah: Majma‘ al-Malik Fahd li Ṭibā‘ah al-Muṣṣhaf al-Sharīf, 1416/1995), vol. 28, pp. 522–524.

69. See, al-Lajnah al-Dā‘imah li ‘l-Buḥūth al-‘Ilmiyyah wa ‘l-Iftā’, *Fatāwā al-Lajnah al-Dā‘imah: al-Majmū‘ah al-‘Ulā*, ed., Aḥmad b. ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Duwaysh, 26 vols. (Riyadh: Ri’āṣah Idārah al-Buḥūth al-‘Ilmiyyah wa ‘l-Iftā’ – al-Idārah al-‘Āmah li ‘l-Ṭab’, n.d.), vol. 12, p. 274–284.

religions from one-another as well as from anciently revealed Islamic Truth but also have made them mutually different and contradictory.

Islamic Legal Ruling on Some Practices of Multi-Faith Dialogue

Now we turn to some of the practices of the multi-faith dialogue and take a look on them from an Islamic legal perspective.

Conducting Multi-faith Sessions at Places of Worship

At some occasions priests and rabbis are invited to mosques to participate in an interfaith dialogue. On other occasions sessions are conducted in Christian churches and Jewish synagogues. Therefore, we are confronted with a two fold issue, namely, the issue of a Muslim engaging in an activity held at the places tailored for non-Muslims' acts of worship and non-Muslims engaging with Muslims in their congregations. The main intent of inviting non-Muslims seems to be *da'wah* in a manner that acquaints them with the tenets and practices of Islam. The majority of Muslim scholars permitted those invitations while a minority of scholars restricted that with necessity or when a need arises.

There are a number of incidents substantiating the first view including instances from the conduct of the Prophet (peace be on him) during his life time; for instance, his permission to keep Banū Ḥanīfah's tribal chief Thumāmah b. Uthāl (d. 13/634), at his mosque for a few days.⁷⁰ This ruling does not differentiate between the polytheists and the people of the book, since Thumāmah was a pagan. The delegation of Banū Thaḳīf was similarly hosted in the Prophet's mosque. Upon some Companions' objection, the Prophet (peace be on him) explained that it does not entail impurity of the earth (of the mosque).⁷¹ Jubayr b. Muṭ'im b. 'Addiy (d. 57/677)

70. See, Muḥammad b. Ismā'il al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Kitāb al-Maghāzī, Bāb Waḍ' Banī Ḥanīyah wa Ḥadīth Thumāmah b. Uthāl; for more details see, 'Abd al-Malik Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīrah al-Nabawīyyah*, vol. 4, p. 228.

71. See, Ibn Abī Shaybah, *Muṣannaf*, vol. 2, p. 260, Kitāb al-Ṣalāh, Bāb Fī 'l-Kuffār Yadhkhulūn al-Masjid; also see, Abū Dāwūd Sulaymān b. al-Ash'ath al-Sajistānī, *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, Kitāb al-Kharāj wa 'l-Imārah wa 'l-Fay', Bāb Mā Jā' fī Khabar al-Ṭā'if.

while being a prisoner of Badr (2/623) entered the Prophet's mosque, without being disapproved by the Prophet (peace be on him), and heard him reciting Sūrah al-Ṭūr in the evening Prayer (*Ṣalāh al-Maghrib*). Jubayr stated that this (listening of recitation of Sūrah al-Ṭūr) was the first thing which made the way of faith (*īmān*) in his heart.⁷² According to Abū Bakr Aḥmad b. 'Alī al-Razī al-Jaṣṣāṣ (305–370/917–980) and Burhān al-Dīn Abū 'l-Ḥasan 'Alī b. Abī Bakr al-Marghīnānī (d. 593/1197), Ḥanafī scholars did not make distinction between the Sacred Mosque of Makkah and any other mosque in this regard. Accordingly, they see no harm in non-Muslims entering the Sacred Mosque except if they enter without covering *satar*, arrogantly or for anticipated corruption.⁷³ According to Muḥammad b. Idrīs al-Shāfi'ī (150–204/767–820),⁷⁴ and one view of the Ḥanbalī school of law a non Muslim can only be admitted to mosque with Muslim permission.⁷⁵ They relied on the report that 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (23 BH–40 AH/599–661) during his caliphate (36–40/656–661) saw a Magian entering the Mosque while he was on the pulpit and had him drove out of the Mosque because he entered without permission.⁷⁶ They further explained the Prophet's admittance of non-Muslims was with the Prophet's permission. This view is confronted by the instances when non-Muslims entered the

72. See, Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Kitāb al-Jihād, Bāb Fidā' al-Mushrikīn; Kitāb al-Maghāzī, Bāb ba'd Bāb Shuhūd al-Malā'ikah Badran.

73. See, Abū Bakr Aḥmad b. 'Alī al-Rāzī al-Jaṣṣāṣ al-Ḥanafī, *Aḥkām al-Qur'ān*, ed., Muḥammad Ṣādiq al-Qamḥawī (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 1405 AH), vol. 4, p. 279; Burhān al-Dīn Abū 'l-Ḥasan 'Alī b. Abī Bakr b. 'Abd al-Jalīl al-Farghānī al-Marghīnānī, *al-Hidāyah Sharḥ Bidāyah al-Mubtadī*, ed., Ṭalāl Yūsuf, 4 vols. (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, n.d.), vol. 4, pp. 379–380.

74. See, Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī b. Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. al-Ḥabīb al-Māwardī, *al-Ḥawī al-Kabīr fī Fiqh Madhhab al-Imām al-Shāfi'ī wa huw Sharḥ Mukhtaṣar al-Muznī*, eds., al-Shaykh 'Alī Muḥammad Mi'wāḍ wa al-Shaykh 'Ādil Aḥmad 'Abd al-Mawjūd, 19 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1419/1999), vol. 2, p. 267; Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Khaṭīb al-Shirbīnī al-Shāfi'ī, *Mughnī al-Muḥtāj ilā Ma'rifah Ma'ānī Alfāz al-Minhāj*, 6 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1415/1994), vol. 1, p. 216.

75. See, Ibn Qudāmah al-Maqdasī, *al-Mughnī*, vol. 10, pp. 607–608; Muṣṭafā al-Suyūṭī al-Raḥībānī, *Maṭālib Uli 'l-Nuhā fī Sharḥ Ghāyat al-Muntahā*, 6 vols. (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1961), vol. 2, p. 617.

76. See, Ibn Qudāmah al-Maqdasī, *al-Mughnī*, vol. 10, p. 608; al-Raḥībānī, *Maṭālib Uli 'l-Nuhā*, vol. 2, p. 617.

mosque without permission such as in the case of Abū Sufyān Ṣakhar b. Ḥarb (57 BH–32 AH/567–653), who entered the mosque seeking the resumption of al-Ḥudaybiyah treaty and ‘Umayr b. Wahb (d. 22/643) who entered to the mosque intending to kill the Prophet (peace be on him), however, he was blessed with the acceptance of Islam.⁷⁷

Therefore it is permissible to conduct sessions of interfaith dialogue at mosques with permission of the administrative boards of those mosques. The proof for this is that the Prophet (peace be on him) admitted in his mosque the delegations of Najrān and Ḍimām b. Tha‘labah to discuss their beliefs with him.⁷⁸ Such an admission, however, is regarded as to be with prior permission of the Prophet (peace be on him). Muslims, however, ought to prepare the place for meeting in such a way that mingling between male and female can be avoided during such engagements. As far as conducting sessions of interfaith dialogue in the synagogues and churches are concerned, the general rule of not entering houses without due permission is applicable.⁷⁹

Observing Common Congregations

Offering common congregations either at churches or at mosques is usually conducted in two manners. The first way is when Muslims and non-Muslims engage at one congregation either according to the Christian way of prayer or the Muslim way of prayer. This is commonly known as inter-religious prayers. Muslim as well as the Christian scholars do not consider it to be permissible or valid. For example many Catholics including several Archbishops and Cardinals denounced the actions of John Paul II (1920–2005), the Pope

77. See, al-Jaṣṣāṣ al-Ḥanafī, *Aḥkām al-Qur’ān*, vol. 4, p. 280; Ibn Qudāmāh al-Maqdasī, *Al-Mughnī*, vol. 10, p. 607.

78. See, Muḥammad b. Ismā‘īl al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Kitāb al-Īmān, Bāb Mā Jā’ fi ‘l-‘Ilm.

79. See, for this rule, the Qur’ān 24: 27–29. For more details, see, al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān fi Ta’wīl Āy al-Qur’ān*, vol. 19, pp. 145–155, Ibn ‘Āshūr, *Tafsīr al-Taḥrīr wa al-Tanwīr*, vol. 18, pp. 196 ff; Sayyid Abul A‘la Mawdūdī, *Towards Understanding the Qur’ān: English Version of Tafhīm al-Qur’ān*, tr. and ed., Zafar Ishaq Ansari and A.R. Kidwai (Leicester, UK: The Islamic Foundation, 1419 / 1988), vol. VI, pp. 217–222.

(1978–2005), when he, conforming with the United Nations’ call for dedication of the year 1986 as ‘international year of peace,’ invited the Catholics and the representatives of the other Christian denominations as well as the other world religions to join in an assembly for peace at Assisi, on October 27, 1986.⁸⁰ Though the Pope very wisely connected the ‘Assisi World Day of Prayer for Peace’ with a significant Christian tradition with reference to the ‘peace mission’ of Saint Francis of Assisi (1181–1226) who died in October, 1226, he was accused as being antipope and the assembly for peace at Assisi was called ‘his Apostasy at Assisi.’⁸¹ At this occasion more than 120 representatives of different Christian denominations and other world religions spent a day together with fasting and praying.⁸² It was argued that the main biblical currents do not seem to endorse such practices. And there is little in the tradition to support inter-religious prayer. William Johnston brings to light that “some cardinals and theologians of the Roman Curia were less than happy (about the Assisi affair). They could not reconcile Assisi with the teaching of the Catholic Church as set forth in the Catechism of the Council of Trent and the standard work on Christian Creeds by a leading German Catholic theologian Heinrich

80. See, for example, “Archbishop Lefebvre’s Letter to Eight Cardinals About Assisi 1986,” available online at: <http://www.sspxasia.com/Documents/SiSiNoNo/2002_February/What_Should_We_Make_of_Assisi_1986.htm>.

81. See, “Antipope John Paul II’s Apostasy in Assisi,” available online at: <<http://www.mostholyfamilymonastery.com/JP2apostasywithpagansidolatersandinfidels.php>>. According Christian tradition St. Francis of Assisi, who lived during the time of the Crusades, had come to distrust violence and war. In the year 1219 he sought a non-violent way to solve the conflict between Christians and Muslims. Francis journeyed to Damietta, Egypt, near the mouth of the Nile, determined to have a meeting with the Sultan of Egypt, even as Christian crusaders were engaged in bloody conflict with the Muslim forces nearby. Francis succeeded in getting an audience with Sultan Malek-el-Kamel [al-Malik al-Kāmil Muḥammad b. al-Malik al-‘Ādil Abū Bakr b. Ayyūb (r. 1218–1238)]. Though Francis tried to persuade the Sultan of the good news of Jesus’ saving love for all, the Sultan was not drawn away from his own faith and convictions. Yet, given to Francis’ enthusiasm and courage he listened to him courteously and gave Francis a safe passage back to the Christian camp. See, <<http://www.americancatholic.org/e-News/FriarJack/fj110801.asp>>; Paschal Robinson, “St. Francis of Assisi” in *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: Robert Appleton Co., 1909), available at: <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06221a.htm>>.

82. See, Andrea Riccardi, *La pace preventiva*, (Milan: San Paolo, 2004).

Denzinger (1819–1883).⁸³ Some argued, in light of the Catholic Faith, the prayer meeting of world religions at Assisi be considered tantamount to: 1) an insult to God; 2) a denial of the universal necessity of Redemption; 3) a lack of justice and charity towards the infidels; 4) a danger and a scandal to Catholics; and 5) a betrayal of the Church and Peter's mission.⁸⁴

The pressure of accusations and the problem of syncretism required an official mantra to justify inter-religious prayer.⁸⁵ Furthermore, Bishop Jorge Mejia, the Secretary of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace had to explain that the purpose of this meeting was not 'to pray together,' but 'to be together to pray.'⁸⁶ Accordingly, in the words of a Catholic critic of Pope John Paul, "at Assisi each religious group was given a separate room to pray as per their religious requirements. From these rooms all of the crucifixes were removed, and the crucifixes which could not be removed were covered. The Muslims needed a room facing Makkah and it was given to them. The Zoroastrians needed a room with a window so that the smoke from the wood chips that they would burn could exit and it was given to them. Similarly, the Jews wanted a room that had never been blessed in the name of Jesus Christ and it was given to

83. See, William Johnston, "Break the Chains and Pray Together," *Tablet* (16 March 2002). Heinrich Joseph Dominicus Denzinger (1819–1883) was a leading German Catholic theologian and author of the *Enchiridion Symbolorum et Definitionum* (Handbook of Creeds and Definitions) commonly referred to simply as 'Denzinger.'

84. It was argued by many Catholics that those whom Pope John Paul II called 'the representatives of the other religions' the Church always more appropriately called them infidels. Broadly speaking, to Catholics, all those who do not possess the true [Catholic] faith are considered infidels; in the strict sense infidels are the unbaptised. They are divided into monotheists (Jews and Muslims), polytheists (Hindus, Buddhists, etc.), and atheists. Similarly, what Pope John Paul II called the 'other' religions, the Church more properly called the false religions. A false religion is any non-Christian religion. Moreover, every non-Catholic Christian sect is false in so far as it neither accepts nor faithfully practices the entire content of Revelation. See, "What Should We Make of Assisi," available online at: <http://www.sspaxasia.com/Documents/SiSiNoNo/2002_February/What_Should_We_Make_of_Assisi_1986.htm>.

85. See, William Johnston, "Break the Chains and Pray Together," *Tablet* (16 March 2002).

86. See, Francesco Gioia, ed., *Interreligious Dialogue: The Official Teaching of the Catholic Church from the Second Vatican Council to John Paul II (1963-2005)* (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 2006), no. 535.

them.”⁸⁷ The whole morning was spent with each religious group praying on its own with its adherents. From the individual centers of prayer, the groups walked to the lower square of the Basilica of St. Francis, in the afternoon for the whole assembly to pray together. The prayers of each faith came out loud and clear, distinct and articulate. Practically each one made use of its own sacred writings to express the desire and longing for peace and the commitment to it.⁸⁸ Finally, the Pope John Paul II, addressed them all in which he took time to explain the scope of this assembly of prayer held in Assisi in connection with the World Day of Prayer for Peace, as follows:

The fact that we have come here does not imply any intention of seeking a religious consensus among ourselves or negotiating our faith convictions. Neither does it mean that religions can be reconciled at the level of a common commitment in an earthly project which would surpass them all. Nor is it a concession to relativism in religious beliefs, because every human being must sincerely follow his or her upright conscience with the intention of seeking and obeying the truth. Our meeting attests only – and this is its real significance for the people of our time – that in the great battle for peace, humanity, in its very diversity, must draw from its deepest and most vivifying sources where its conscience is formed and upon which is founded the moral action of all people.⁸⁹

Many Christian authorities including Pope Benedict XVI (2005–), then Cardinal Ratzinger, the Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith as well as Dean of the College of Cardinals,

87. See, for more details, “Antipope John Paul II’s Apostasy in Assisi,” available online at: <<http://www.mosthollyfamilymonastery.com/JP2apostasywithpagansidolatersandinfidels.php>>.

88. See, Antonio M. Rosales, “The Day Assisi Became the ‘Peace Capital’ of the World,” available online at: <<http://www.americancatholic.org/Features/Assisi/PeaceCapital.asp>>.

89. Francesco Gioia, ed., *Interreligious Dialogue: The Official Teaching of the Catholic Church from the Second Vatican Council to John Paul II (1963-2005)*, no. 535. For full text of the Pope’s address, see, “Address of John Paul II to the Representatives of the Christian Churches and Ecclesial Communities and of the World Religions,” available online at the official website of the Vatican State: <http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/speeches/1986/october/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19861027_prayer-peace-assisi-final_en.html>.

continued criticising Pope John Paul II for Assisi affair in spite of all his precautions⁹⁰ though some Christian authorities also supported him.⁹¹ Similarly, though according to the announced purpose of this meeting what actually happened in Assisi was not ‘praying together,’ but ‘being together to pray’ and, as described above, each religious leader offered his prayer at a separate place according to his own convictions using his own Sacred Text, some Muslim scholars consider it an example of inter-religious prayer involving syncretism in addition to violation of the basic Islamic injunctions and codes and thus a prohibited act.⁹² On the other hand, many Muslim scholars do not see it as an example of inter-religious prayer involving syncretism though there were such apprehensions prior to this meeting. They view it as an excellent *da‘wah* opportunity, though not adequately availed by the Muslim delegation.⁹³

There is, however another type of prayer, i.e. using the word for its literal connotation to mean supplication. In this case it is permissible for a Muslim to pray in the presence of non-Muslims while others say amen (*Āmīn*) after his invocations. According to Shafi‘ī scholars, non-Muslims must not be prevented if they wish to come out as a distinct group to join Muslims in the Prayers for rain (*Ṣalāh al-Istisqā’*). Muḥammad b. Muslim Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhri (51–124/671–741), ‘Abd Allāh Ibn al-Mubārak (118–181/736–797) and Abū Ḥanīfah also had the same ruling. Makḥūl (d. 113/731) said there is nothing objectionable in their coming out to attend this prayer.⁹⁴

90. See, “The Smearing of Assisi,” available online at: <<http://archive.feedblitz.com/11887/~4003501>>; Archbishop Lefebvre and Bishop de Castro Mayer, “1986 declaration against Assisi,” available online at: <http://www.sspx.org/archbishop_lefebvre/1986_declaration_against_assisi_archbishop_lefebvre-bishop_de_castro_mayer.htm>; also see, note 81-85 above, and the sources mentioned there.

91. See, Antonio M. Rosales, “The Day Assisi Became the ‘Peace Capital’ of the World,” available online at: <<http://www.americancatholic.org/Features/Assisi/PeaceCapital.asp>>.

92. See, Bakr b. ‘Abd Allāh b. Abū Zayd, *al-Ibtāl li nadhariyyat khaṭṭ dīn al-Islām wa ghayrihi min al-Adyān*, p. 24.

93. Their opinion is based on the line of arguments given below, see, note 94-95.

94. See, Abū Zakariyyā Yahyā b. Sharf al-Nawāwī, *al-Majmū‘ Sharḥ al-Muhadhdhab*, ed., Muḥammad Najib al-Muṭī‘ī (Jeddah: Maktabat al-Irshād, n.d.), vol. 5, p. 72.

Ibn Abī Shaybah wrote a chapter on the legal ruling about a Muslim saying amen after the invocation of a monk. Here he quoted a statement of Abū Bakr Ḥassān b. ‘Aṭīyah al-Muḥārabī (d. ca. 130/748), who saw no harm in a Muslim saying amen after the invocation of a monk, adding that their invocation may be accepted on our behalf whereas it may not be accepted on behalf of themselves.⁹⁵

Conclusion

Interfaith dialogue, or meetings with representatives of other religions, is an equivocal and ambivalent term, entails various concepts and definitions, some of which are legally accepted according to unanimous agreement of classical and modern Muslim scholars while others are deemed prohibited and conflicting with the basic principles of *Shari‘ah* and the tenets of Islamic belief.

If it is intended to invite people to the truth of Islam through an interfaith dialogue by establishing sound and explicit proofs of guidance and removing misconceptions about Islam, it is a highly recommended act of worship. If an interfaith dialogue is meant for merely announcing the truth about Islam in the context of gatherings and circles which deny it and reject its message and by removing desolation of their hearts and breaking barriers of aversion it facilitate them in reviewing their beliefs objectively and making an informed decision for themselves, it would be a praiseworthy endeavour and an acceptable good deed. If interfaith dialogue aims at achieving a peaceful co-existence amongst people of different faiths, sparing lives, calming unrest, enabling people thereby to move freely about the land in peace and security, empowering thereby the cause of truth so that the true message might spread leaving no excuse for those who want to spread atmosphere of tension, controversy and enmity, it is similarly of a legitimate and praiseworthy goal. Similarly if interfaith dialogue aims at achieving the worldly welfare common

95. See, Ibn Abī Shaybah, *Muṣannaf*, vol. 6, p. 105, Kitāb al-Du‘ā’, Bāb fī ‘l-Muslim Yu‘amman ‘alā Du‘ā’ al-Rāhib.

to followers of different faiths, especially for those who are linked by common bonds, by ensuring necessary cooperation, it is again a legitimate praiseworthy act.

The interfaith dialogue which aims at Syncretism needs to be avoided as it is not permissible. Syncretism is an attempt to blend all religions to create a common sphere of beliefs. It transforms the intrinsic characteristics of various faiths and religions. It is unanimously rejected by Muslim and traditional Christian and other non-Muslim scholars.

The basic principle in interfaith meetings is that they are scholarly endeavours for building bridges of understanding to facilitate the propagation of truth or at least ensuring a peaceful coexistence of peoples belonging to various faiths saving valuable human lives and providing an environment conducive for an objective truth search.

It is permissible to hold interfaith meetings at mosques and other places of worship as long as the sanctity of a mosque is respected and worshippers are not disturbed. This is based on the preferred view of Muslim scholars. When the time of Prayer is due, Muslims can offer Prayers in synagogues or churches provided that they do not face statues. Likewise, Muslims can allow non-Muslims to pray in their mosques as long as that does not become a regular practice. Whoever of the non-Muslims would like to join the Muslims in their Prayer should not be prevented from doing so; it seems that this would have the advantage of inclining their hearts.

It is permissible for a Muslim to make supplications and respond to supplications recited by followers of other faiths provided that they do not involve calling upon anything besides Allah or contain idolatrous phrasing. The participants in these discussions should agree on certain ground rules, including not infringing on participants' particular beliefs and convictions.

As far as common activities held by followers of different religions, those activities which fall within the category of rituals which Islamic *Shari'ah* requires to be performed in a prescribed format offering

those rituals in a way contrary or variant to prescribed forms is an act of innovation which is not acceptable in Islam. All other activities which do not fall in the above category or are intended for social services and public welfare are permissible since they are a part of beneficial cooperation recommended by the Qur'ān and the *Sunnah* of the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be on him).

X X X