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ISLAM AND THE WEST

GLOBAL CHALLENGES, CONCERTED RESPONSES

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Content

Introduction

II. Ongoing debate on clash or dialogue of civilizations

III. Dialogue: options and prospects

IV. Cross-civilizational communication

V. Common heritage, shared values

VI. Unity of origin, unity of message

VII. Islam, western liberalism and democracy

VIII. The West and the Muslim world

IX. Global challenges, concerted responses

1. Xenophobia, islamophobia, anti-Americanism and anti-Western sentiments

2. ISIS, violent extremism, terrorism, responses by the West, and Muslim world

X. Christendom, and Islam, sources of togetherness for peace

XI. Conclusion

End Notes

Introduction

A bird's eye view, even with a fleeting glance at Will Durant's stupendous classic on the "story of civilizations" throughout its (11) volumes (1938) from the dawn of history to modern European history in the late 18th century (the French revolution) would immediately reveal how challenging and formidable is the task of encapsulating successive epochs, eras of civilization through the history of mankind within a such a time frame of some 14-16 weeks or sessions and courses dedicated to reviews, analyses on the Dialogue of civilization, Eat and West encounter.

An even more daunting attempt would also have been to abridge or distill in a few lectures, a "must read" textbook on "the study of history", in its (12) volumes collection by British historian "Arnold Toynbee" (1936-1961), reviewing, analyzing and discussing origins of the growth, rise and fall of civilizations in time and space, starting from ancient Egyptian civilizationand ending up with contemporary world politics, i.e. war, peace, conflicts, upheavals or stability within a new context of consensual relationship between East and West.

However, apart from delving so deeply into complexities of conflicts, theories about the "story of civilization", whether in the form of clashes, or coexistence, dialogues (Huntington's clash of civilization, 1992), (Fukuyama's End of History, 1991) as debunked and refuted by Edward Said and Noam Chomsky. However, a third perspective was presented arguing neither for Eastern nor Western civilization. This third perspective was termed as global "Central civilization".

According to its author, David Wilkinson wrote "It is one single global civilization, which is a lineal descendant of "an earlier" civilization, that emerged about 1500 B.C in the Near East when Egyptian and Mesopotamia civilizations collided and fused" [Wilkonson, D, 1987].

Wilkinson also argued that this "new fusion entity" has since expanded on the entire planet and absorbed all the previously independent civilizations. It is an "omni-directional civilization", a network located originally where Asia and Africa meet, spread over in all directions, encompassing civilized networks of Europe, West

Africa and the Americas by moving West and those of South and East Asia by moving East and thereby rendering itself historically central as well" [28, pp.31-34].

If anything, such holistic, cultural approach and interpretation of civilizational cycles and processes throughout history is an indicator and a most unambiguous implication that underlines the interconnectedness of all civilizations, ancient, medieval and modern, Near Eastern, Mediterranean, European, American or Asian.

This paper emphasis has always been laid, with this in mind, on cross cultural or civilizational communication processes between peoples, societies, with a view to promoting dialogue, coexistence, intermarriages, to preempt, avoid, and defuse tense situations, confrontations, sometimes bellicose predilections and warlike collisions among different cultural affiliations with religious, ethnic, sectarian or factional motivations.

Throughout this paper on the "Dialogue of civilization debates as revisited today, a cluster of some selected issues will be focused upon in light of the close relevance to today's world politics and international relationship; Islam and the West, cooperation or confrontation come foremost among those issues".

Significant roles played by major religious institutions in the Muslim world and Christendom will be duly fitting, in this ongoing debate on the high degrees of cooperation, coordination between Al-Azhar Mosque, the most prestigious institution in the Muslim world, together with the Vatican, Anglican Church, EU member states with significant Muslim-European migrants.

These are only some aspects of a multidimensional, interdisciplinary curriculum, focusing on arguments and counterarguments on clash of civilization. (Huntington, S. 1992, pp.1-28) or Fukuyama's End of History article, earlier 1992.

Through discussions, debates, criticisms and appraisals (class 2096-01) American Studies, spring 2016) a synthesis emerged reconciling arguments advanced either in defense or against Huntington's "Clash of Civilizations" and Fukuyama's End of history theories, which evoke till now, endless literature in the study of history, civilization, role of culture, religion or ideologies in issues of war, conflicts, rise and fall of Empires and states.

In this paper, I will attempt summing up a brief critique of only some selected topics that stimulated different reactions, responses through seminars, presentations and research papers prepared by an admirable alert, proactive, and highly motivated group of undergraduates (fall 2015-spring 2016).

Within this context, references will be made to main commonalities, similarities, shared and common values between Islam and Christianity as well, documented from readings into Islamic history and civilization.

Eventually, no less important topic could have been underestimated or overlooked, particularly as it is extremely related to recent developments in the Islamic world, U.S., Europe, Africa, and Asia as well. These are the challenges of violent extremism, ISIS, and responses by counterterrorist strategies implemented through international, Muslim and Arab coalitions against a background of an earlier phenomenon of Islamophobia, anti-Western sentiments within Muslim as well as immigrant communities in the West respectively.

With concluding this somehow overloaded paper on different burning issues, some illuminating lights will have been cast on the multidimensional, multidirectional debates on dialogue of civilization, East and West encounter, conflict or cooperation.

II. Dialogue: options and prospects

No doubt dialogue itself can help yield exchange of ideas, clarify contentious points of cultural, religious divergence. Earnest dialogue can also bridge both religions as well as political divides through establishing channels of dialogue that could unearth unrevealed truths. Also through dialogue processes, discrepancies could be further discerned and positively addressed to form clearer understanding of controversial issues, even through violence, extremism and terrorism might silence voices of truth. Ultimately, reason, discretion, wisdom will prevail and dominate [7].

Ongoing debates

Revisiting Huntington's classis article on "the Clash of civilization" on the next pattern of conflict in world politics, the submitted hypothesis that the fundamental source of conflict in this new world will not be primarily ideological or economic, and that the dominating source will be cultural" [Huntington, S., 1992]. In his new hypothesis a comprehensive review and analysis had been presented of conflicts between Islam and the West in Medieval (Crusades) and Modern times as well (Arab-Israeli Wars).

Again Huntington's new perspective was in fact a response to Fukuyama's article "End of history " commenting on fundamental changes in world relations and politics in the aftermath of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, 1991, and the ultimate victory of the West, that is the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of western liberal democracy as the final form of human government, yet this victory in Fukuyama's thesis, is yet incomplete in the "real material world" [Fukuyama, F.,199212].

Both theses submitted earlier by Fukuyama (1991) and later by Huntington (1992) attempting conceptual frameworks few historic changes and civilization reversals, rises and declines were abundantly debunked and harshly refuted with counter argumentation analyses by Edward Said in "The clash of ignorance" versus "The clash of civilizations" discussing Huntington's exemplification of September 11, 2001 as an adequate means, assessing that the terrorists involved cannot be used as acceptable representation of Islam. "Said" also endeavored to emphasize lack of evidences required to confirm clear-cut divide between Islam and the West [Said, E., 2001].

Noam Chomsky was no less harsh in refuting this conceptual and material framework of Huntington's thesis in his lectures on "militarism, democracy and people's right to information". Chomsky argues that the clash itself exists, but against a pretext to perpetuate western domination and justification for its atrocities in the East (Islamic threat after the demise of Soviet menace under the guise of combating international terrorism [6Chomsky, N., 2001].

John M. Hobson provided even some further counter-arguments criticizing Huntington's clash of civilizations as a "myth" submitted in dialogical-historical context [Hobson, J.14].

Referring to Huntington's premises that civilizations are autonomous self-continuing entities, free from interactions between each other, and that they meet in head on conflicts, whereas the meeting point of civilization is conflictual and bloody, Hobson ended up with a relevant inference that Huntington's premise is problematic not least because it obscures the various dialogues of civilizations.

Hobson ends up also with debunking Huntington's theory with a conclusion that the futures of both peace and civilization depend upon understanding, cooperation (not between East or West) but among the political, spiritual and intellectual leaders of the worlds of the world's major civilizations.

Hobson main criticism of Huntington's analysis of international relations underlines his "insistence that the West is self made free from any help from non-Western civilizations and to that extent that the civilization's interact, it is only through irredeemable conflicts between East and West" [Hobson, J.].

III. Cross-civilizational communication

Resorting to Medieval history in Islamic World under the Abbasid Caliphate, would provide undisputed evidences of Islamic civilization contributions to the scientific, cultural and intellectual advancement and renaissance in the West.

This very topic, contributions of Islamic civilization and interaction with the west is one more issue that aroused high degree of interactions and responsiveness against the background brought about by such achievements, interactions between Islam and the West and their interchange of cultural values and ethos.

Great centers of religious learning were also centers of knowledge, scientific progress. Such centers began during Abbasid period (750-1258), when thousands of mosques and schools were established. In the ninth century (A.D) Baghdad had some 300 schools.

Alexandria in the fourteen century had 12 thousand students, with the two most famous Bait Al Hikma (House of Wisdom in Baghdad (ca 820) and "Dar Al-

ilm" in Cairo (ca 995). Universities such as Al-Azhar (969 AD) were also established long before those in Europe. Throughout the first four centuries of Islam, it has been a conduit for Western civilization of cultural forms, which otherwise might have died out [Bassioni, C., 2012].

Islamic philosophy was influenced by the writings of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. Great Muslim philosophers such as Ibn-Khaldun (d. 1406) and Ibn-Sina (Avicena d.1037), IbnRushd (Averroes d.1198), "Al Farabi" and "Alghazali" translated the works of earliest Greek philosophers and added their own scientific contribution.

It was essentially through such works, intellectually faithful to the originals that western civilization was able to benefit from these earlier legacies. Those great philosophers produced a wealth of new ideas that enriched civilizations, particularly western civilization which depended so much on their works.

The influence of Islam ultimately made possible the European Renaissance which was generated by the ideas of the Greeks, filtered through Muslim philosophers. El Tabary of Baghdad (838-923) in the introduction to his multivolume work devoted an entire volume to the science of history and its implications.

The West fascination with Arab-Islamic culture can be seen in many ways. "The thousand and one nights" captured western cultural and popular fancy in the 1700, Dante's "Devine Comedy" contains references to prophet's ascension to the Heavens.

Arab-Islamic cultural knowledge, scholarship and science fed the Western world's development for five hundred years, between the tenth and fifteenth centuries.

No one in the Western world would attempt writing a book about the East, or Islam without acknowledging intellectual and scientific contribution of the Orient to the Western civilization. Orientalism (the science of the Middle East or knowledge of the Eastern World), its language, civilization and literature has had a significant impact on Western civilization and the Islamic world as well. It does have a considerable share in the formulation of western perception of Islam as well as affecting Western attitudes towards Islam over many centuries [Bassioni, C.,2012].

Muslim scholars also highly value the contribution of Orientalists, whose efforts saved Arabic manuscripts, which were brought to Europe. Others would think differently, rejecting the whole western civilization. Orientalists inspired by the humanist trends that emerged during European Renaissance started to study Eastern languages (Cambridge, 1636) [Dar Al-Ifta Al-Masriya, 2016a]

The end of 17th century witnessed important trends with a sympathetic outlook at Islam. Yet the image of Islam in Western minds remained as negative as the same since Middle Ages. The 18th, 19th centuries were known as the golden age for Orientalists Movement (Theodor Noldeke[1]-1836-1930)

Unsurprisingly, through regrettably, colonialist expansionist policies of the 19th century in the Islamic world played a tangible role in identifying the European perspective of the East and Islam, benefiting from orientalists heritage, with western grip over the Muslim world, empowering Western rule over Muslim countries. There are nevertheless positive aspects in the Orientalist Movement in studying rare Arab and Islamic manuscripts of Arab language and literature (Carl Brokleman book on the history of Arabic literature 1899-1902-1938,1942 edition), publishing heritage books, translating them into many European languages [Dar Al-Ifta Al-Masriya, 2016b].

IV. Common heritage, shared values

1. Tolerance

One of the common charges brought against Islam as a religion by some western writers is that it is an intolerant creed. Islamic history itself belies those charges.

Suffice to say that in Spain under the Ummayads (in Damascus (661-756) and in Baghdad under the Abbasid caliphates (750-1258) Christians and Jews, equally with Muslims, were admitted to the schools and universities, not only that, they were boarded and lodged in the hostels at the cost of the state. The Muslim Empire was a refuge for all those who fled from persecutors of the inquisition [Menocal, M.,2016].

[1]Theodor Noldeke, 1836-1930, a German orientalist, well-known for his book “The Quran an introduction”, 1859

2. Moderation

Moderation is also a commendable behavior, which safeguards from slipping into extremes that fall under the spell of either excessiveness or extremism. It also means avoiding extremism or dereliction.

The word "moderation" was mentioned five times in the Quran and all of them were avoiding dereliction or excessiveness. Moderation is the insignia of Islam, as a value it urges "balance" in responsibilities and rulings. It is a call for rejecting extremism and exaggeration when confronting others.

Characteristics of moderation in Islam:

a) Mitigating difficulty or hardship
b) Good manners
c) Warning against any extremism
d) Tolerance: full respect for others

3 – Coexistence

Common heritage Shared values, Islam and the West principles

Islam in essence, is based on (universality) as the message of Islam was sent to all mankind in totality regardless of their cultural affiliation or racial background. Freedom of belief and warship is guaranteed in Islam, and therefore it is one of its basic tenets, and there should be "no compulsion in religion".

Islam is an open system that transcends boundaries of time and confinement of space. It had established a set of maxims that laid down essential rules of conduct which are seen as guidelines for coexistence with orders.

Prophet Mohamed has left models of coexistence with others, whether they live in or out of the borders of the Islamic civilization.

a. First model is the model of Mecca, patience and coexistence were highlighted in this model as the rule of conduct (with non-Muslims)
b. The second model is the model of Abyssinia with loyalty and gratitude (where early Muslims were protected by Christians).

c. The third model is the model of Medina in its first stage which characterized openness and cooperation, paradigms of coexistence, a blueprint for Muslims living in non-Muslim countries (Jews, Muslims, Christians together).

These models feature the different environments and the varying circumstances in which the Muslims may live with no limitation to specific geographical location.

The Meccan model recognizes that Muslims may well find themselves in a non Muslim society, which might seek to marginalize them. Muslims were very few, called upon to endure difficult state of affairs (in response, many Muslims migrated to Abyssinia, which represents the second model, through a non-Muslim State, they enjoyed protection from Negus, a Christian king).

This represents a great model of religious communities living together in religious freedom, a true model of citizenship, coexistence with non-Muslims. This model stands in sharp contrast to distortions, practices by extremists in foreign territories and countries. They used a negative narrative that rejects faiths, expressing hate and bigotry towards non Muslims [Peters, F.E.].

V. Unity of origin, unity of message

Islam is one of the three monotheistic religions along with Judaism and Christianity, which are all based on the belief of Oneness of God, the Sanity of God's Prophets, belief in human's accountability and the last Day of Judgment, yet Islam is still the subject of controversial debate and misnomers.

The unfortunate reality is that many people are being fed with negative messages and illicit connotations when it comes to the Islamic faith.

*First principle is Oneness of humanity and the Universality of Islam regardless of race, cultural heritage, or creed. All people according to Islam possess basic human rights, including the right to freely chose one's religion without coercion, the space of the other is well preserved, respected and protected (it's not an exclusivist religion).

In terms of their canonical belief, Jews, Christians are closer to the Islamic creed, all of them recipients of divine scriptures. They share a common moral code.

*Second principle is intermarriages with the “people of the Book”

This divine brotherhood paved the way for closer human relationships, that has had its profound impact on creating commonalities with the sacred union of marriage of Muslims with Christian or Jewish women, indicating proximity and commonality which Islam shares with Judaism and Christianity [Dar Al-Ifta Al-Masriya, 2016a].

VI. Islam, western liberalism and democracy

Islam and pluralism

Since the very inception of the Islamic society in Medina, it was a pluralistic city-state. A treaty was concluded when Prophet Mohamed emigrated to Madinah between all tribes including the Jewish tribes who lived there, establishing religious freedom, equal rights and duties.

For Muslims, the legal dictum about the “People of the Book” is that they have their own rights and undertake their own duties. They are equally eligible for social security and other benefits the state provides. Muslims were warned against acts of bigotry or prejudice. Some unfounded propaganda propagates negative narratives against Islam, aiming at igniting animosity and inciting hatred among Abrahamic religions [Dar Al-Ifta Al-Masriya, 2016a].

Islamophobia

It is the collective responsibility of sensible adherents of the three monotheistic religions to rise up to their shared duty to fight the forces of division, bigotry with a voice of reason and wisdom [Dar Al-Ifta Al-Masriya, 2016a].

Islam and Western democratic and liberal values

Amongst other burning and worrying debatable issues also highly thought-provoking and controversial throughout discussions, critiques, questions and answers sessions, was the issue of Islam and Democracy within the context of Islam as a culture, value systems and Western traditional democratic and liberal values.

Dalia Mogahed, in an article on “understanding Islamic democracy” argues that anger toward the U.S. is interpreted as a part of much broader hatred of democracy, freedom and equality. Therefore, according to Mogahed, a question

arises whether widespread support amongst Muslims for Sharia (Islamic jurisdiction) means a general rejection of democratic values? Mogahed dismisses that claim stressing that the vast majority (of Muslims) supports freedom of speech, religion, essentially as well as woman's right to vote. So while Muslim support for Shariah is high, so is the support for democratic and egalitarian values [Mogahed, D.,2008].

VII. The West, the Muslim World.Global challenges and common responses

The fear and anxiety felt by the West in the aftermath of 9/11 had had devastating consequences for Muslims living in Western countries and who are thoroughly Western and Muslims at the same time.

Some of the ugliest consequences of the war on terror has been a type of regression back to the age of intolerance appropriately entitled "Islamophobia".

As the decolonization movement emerged and nations gained the right to self determination, national liberation, humanity in Post World War II seemed finally to be reuniting over some values, among them tolerance as a necessary moral and ethical value.

Dispossession of some Muslim, Arab peoples, foreign occupation, of their homelands evoked reminiscences of medieval crusades with all its connotations of ethnocentrism, religious and cultural intolerance, domination and persecution [Khaled, A., 2016].

That explains how Islamophobia of today is so distressing, it revives latent memories of a miserable past that divided Muslim and Christians through senseless was of hatred, bigotry and denial of the others. That is why the phenomenon of Islamophobia and Islam-hating is unsettling whether for Muslims living in non-Muslim communities in Western countries in Europe or the United States, or in the Muslim world as it sets on a chain of ugly anti-western sentiments and cultivates seeds for violent extremism and acts of terrorism under the false guise of reviving "true Islam" and Islamic culture and heritage (ISIS) [Mogahed, D., 2008].

A common issue is militancy, radicalization and potential violent extremism, i.e. terrorism in all its form, set in motion endless controversies, escalating tense polemics and sometimes armed clashes amongst Muslim communities and non

Muslims as well. Those debates, confrontational attitudes revolved around the issue of "political Islam" or "Islamism" as traditionally coined by the media. However, whenever tackling militant Islamism, it could be argued that there are different types of political Islam movement such as the Islamic State (ISIS), Boko Haram and Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula which seek to create a vision of a society through outright violence.

Political Islam, however, is a modern ideology that seeks political power as a mean of transforming society. Its goal is a revolutionary change compelled by a vision of a "tyrannical society" and governed by the law of God. State identity and citizenship are defined by religious affiliation and observance only.

Many of those radicalized in the West today are second, or perhaps third generation of migrants with Islamic heritage and others converted to Islam. They may face marginalization and racism, identity crisis or the urge to rebel against family and society.

However, the main driver of radicalization is the ideological message of societal and political Islamism. It provides new recruits with direction, structure, and identity. It empowers them with images of supremacy and domination. Violence is their last step of the radicalization process [Manea, E., 2015].

Tackling militant Islamism requires policies that confront its societal and political messages in schools, mosques and religious classes. In charting those policies, it makes sense to avoid alliances with societal and political Islamist movements, however seemingly (non violent) the message might be.

"Judging from the Islamic State's propaganda, it would appear the group is rapidly overtaking the Muslim world. The Islamic State has declared "Wilayats" (provinces) in ten countries spanning from Nigeria to the Caucasus region. It has executed high-profile attacks in several otherwise stable countries, including Tunisia, Turkey, Kuwait, France, and the United States. The group ISIS championed its victories and downplayed its defeats at every turn, portraying itself as a military behemoth destined to restore the "Caliphate" to its former glory" [Gartenstein, D., 2016].

In short, the Islamic State has encountered one serious obstacle after another as it has tried to expand its presence beyond Syria and Iraq. Several of its nascent affiliates met decisive defeat. In some places, the Islamic State has been its dire enemy, as personality clashes and disagreements over strategy created deep cleavages**.**

The successes of the Islamic State do not obscure that it has stumbled or even failed in almost every country where it needed to establish a new "Wilayet".

The group's failures cast doubt on its entire global caliphate project. At a time when the international community is floundering about for ways to undermine the Islamic State's propaganda machine, highlighting these defeats may be one of the most effective and impregnable counter-messaging strategies. Then, state and non-state actors involved in combating the Islamic State's online propaganda machine should draw attention to the group's recent defeats, juxtaposing them against the Islamic State's claims of omnipotence [Gartenstein, D., 2016].

VIII. Common challenges, common responses

The unprecedented wave of migrants to European shores from the Middle East and North Africa has led to populist backlash in many member states. The rise of far right parties and xenophobic rhetoric in these countries has added political urgency to the humanitarian crisis confronting Europe and to a lesser extent some Western countries like Australia and the United States [Ahram Online, 2016].

The number of Muslim converts in the West involved in violent extremism is an emerging issue. In recent times, Muslim converts in the West professing extremist beliefs, have come under more spotlight for terrorist related activities. The motivations behind these acts were personal and different. However, what is common is the embracing world view that legitimizes acts of extreme violence to achieve objectives that are premised on religious grounds. Was this the result of the converted interpretation and misunderstanding of religious texts, or was the convert influenced by individuals? or did violent extremism groups simply appeal to the psych of the convert? The behavioral and attitudinal trends could be stressful enough due to personal circumstances, environmental and situational factors, societal dynamics, i.e.

discrimination against Muslims may add potentially to the complexity of the conversion process.

Resenting of modernity, globalization and secular society, absence of formal education or training in Islamic doctrine and the interpretation of Islamic ideology as a form of protest, are all key push factors toward radicalization, which is usually the result of societal interaction [Cheong, D., 2014].

Integration or alienation dilemma
Islamophobia and anti-Western sentiments (U.S., E.U.)

Radical Islam is spreading across Europe among descendants of Muslim immigrants. Disenfranchised and disillusioned by the failure of integration, some European Muslims ended up jihadists against the West. They could be dangerous and committed and they can enter the U.S. without a visa.

The Pentagon is waging war in the Middle East to stop terrorist attacks in the United States, but the growing nightmare of officials is passport-carrying, visa-exempt “mujahedeen” coming from the U.S. Western European states

“Jihadist networks” span from Poland to Portugal thanks to the spread of radical Islam among the descendants of “guest workers” once recruited to shore up Europe’s postwar economic miracle. Immigrants or their descendants are volunteering for jihad against the West [Leiken, R., 2005]. Finally, a quarter of the Jihadists were Western European nationals eligible to travel visa-free to the United States.

In Europe, host-countries that never learned to integrate newcomers collide with immigrants exceptionally retentive of their way, producing a variant of what the French scholar Olivier Roy calls “globalised Islam”, i.e. “militant Islamic resentment” of Western dominance, anti-imperialism, exalted by “revivalism”.

As a consequence of demography, history, ideology and policy, Western Europe now plays host to often disconsolate Muslims offspring who are citizens in name but not culturally or socially.

To make matters worse, the very isolation of the diaspora communities obscures inner workings, allowing the (Mujahedeen) to fundraise, prepare and recruit for jihad.

According to senior counter-intelligence officials, classified intelligence briefings, wiretaps, Jihadists extended their European operations after the roundup that followed September 11, and then again with fresh energy after the invasion of Iraq (2003) [Leiken, R., 2005].

Common threats and Mutual interests

Europe's emerging "Mujahedeen" endangered the entire Western world. Collaboration in taming "Muslim rancour" or at least keeping European jihadists off the U.S. bound airplanes could help reconcile estranged aliens.

Common threats and mutual interests should engage media, policy-makers and the public on both sides of the Atlantic to concentrate their minds on common dangers, and solutions might come as a bittersweet relief for Europeans and Americans alike [Leiken, R., 2005].

IX. Christendom, and Islam, sources of togetherness for peace

Reading and analyzing statements, addresses, comments by Pope Francis in the Vatican, Sheikh, Dr. Ahmed Al Tayeb, Grand Imam of Al-Azhar in Egypt would demonstrate a shared determination, willingness and deep interest in bridging any gaps that exist or could have existed between the West, the Muslim World drawing from basics of both religions, unity of origin and unity of destiny, common challenges and concerted common responses.

In the words of Andrea Riccardi on the occasion of holding an international conference on Dialogue of civilizations between East and West in Paris, May 2016, he said that it is not easy to define their borders, yet they do exist in the perception of people and the life ofpeople". He continued to say "East or West exist, they are cultures, civilizations; worlds interact with each other, so much so that one speaks of an "inner East". Much could be said however about history, traditions, culture of this world.

According to Riccardo, however, we are today two different worlds, the European world and the Arab Islamic world. These were some interpretations of history embodied in a theory promoted earlier by Samuel Huntington, titled “clash of civilizations”. It was not just the invention of Huntington, it became a recurring option as awful and simplistic. It found vast responsive reaction in the West, and also in Muslim environment that have nurtured aggression and terrorist interpretation of Islam [Ricarrdi, Anna, 2016].

The soul of Europe is in fact greater than the present borders of the Union and is called upon to become a “model of new syntheses and of dialogue”.

The future of Europe is not in confrontation, but in the richness of its various cultures, and the beauty of its commitment to openness. Without this capacity for integration, if there is one word that we should not tire of repeating, it is this: dialogue. We are called upon to promote a “culture of Dialogue” by every possible means and thus to rebuild a fabric of society. The “culture of dialogue” enables to view (others) as valid “dialogue partners”, to respect the foreigner, the immigrant and people from different cultures as worthy of being listened to.We need to engage in building a culture which privileges dialogue as a form of encounter and in creating a means for building “consensus” and agreement. Peace will be lasting if we arm our children with the “weapons of dialogue”, to devise a culture of life, not death, of inclusion, not exclusion [Pope Francis address, 2016].

The impact of Western civilization upon the civilization of the East or the Islamic civilization is so remarkable and cannot be overlooked. The Islamic world doesn’t represent one geographic unit or monolith. National affinities are much deeper than religious affinities amongst Muslim countries (look at Iraq and Iran). A plea to establish an Islamic Ummah fell on deaf ears so much that some scholars deny the vision of an any such thing as an “Islamic Ummah” which represents an imminent threat against a far stronger West according to misconceived narratives.

Common, interconnected elements between the East and West which constitute an exchange of cultural, scientific and artistic elements in both civilizations could create common ground that contributes to promote a “cultural rapport” based

on integration, mutual benefits, consolidation of principles of democracy freedom, human rights in the East, and the West alike. Wealthy countries should cease exercise of policy of hegemony, oppression, dividing the world into haves and have-nots, into secure and insecure regions into advanced and backward, into developed and undeveloped societies.

Great efforts should be undertaken by Muslims, Christians alike in the East so as to amend the approach to the West and Westerners to dismiss apprehensions, concerns toward the West. Such sentiments could lead to hatred, revenge practice, with rudiments of an apocalyptic outcome, the decline of both civilizations Islamic and Western.

The West has to mitigate arrogant policies. Arrogance, condescending policies of the West towards the East should be discarded while mistrust, misgivings of the East toward the West have to be dissipated so that a viable encounter might be achieved to better understand each other and exchange experiments and interests. Muslims are ordained in Quranic verses to seek cooperation, amongst all peoples to avoid conflicts, exclusion, dictatorship, as this is the divine law of international relations for mankind.

Former Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Sheikh Al Maraghi (1936) in a London conference called for an "international partnership" to contain conflicts and disputes among peoples. Sheikh Arafa, too wrote in Al-Azhar Review (1946) an article arguing the "necessity of cooperation" between the West, Islam to remove causes behind hatred and animosities [Dr. Al-Tayeb, A.].

An immense threat is endangering all mankind; that is violent terrorism under the guise of religion through misinterpretation of the Holy Books.

Also during an address delivered before the German Bundestag, March 16, 2016 Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Dr. Ahmed Al Tayeb dealt with topics of interfaith dialogue and combating terrorism. Dr. Al Tayeb said that Christianity was first to provide sanctuary for Islam. Without Abyssinia (modern Ethiopia) and Christian King (Negus) who protected early Muslims, Islam, would have been destroyed in its cradle.

The Grand Imam also called for “unity to defeat terrorism and extremism”. He told the Bundestag that Islam never justified terrorist crimes, stressing that Muslims have suffered the largest losses in what he described as a “deadly epidemic” adding that real opening between religion and its believers is essential for the East, West to combat intercontinental terrorism. He urged the West to help Arab and Muslim countries to build their democracies, and this can take place through exchange of cultures, non tyrannical dialogue, education and trade, and technological exchange programs [Ahram Online, 2016].

X. Conclusion

Political Islam, militancy, radicalization of Muslim wide sectors of some Muslim societies, emerging threat of terrorism, challenges to global and regional security presented by groups such as ISIS, or ISIL in Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Egypt, North Africa, Sub Saharan Africa, all these burning issues turned out to be an international preoccupation not only for policymakers, statesman but for academics, and scholars as well.

Viewing these issues from a broader perspective and through cultural, civilizational prism, it has been timely and appropriate to revisit previously dealt with, though inconclusively, topics of clash of civilization, with their advocates pioneered by Huntington in the 1990’s as well as with their opponents and critics forerun by former American scholar Edward Said in his “Clash of ignorance”.

A trail of related issues today has to be reexamined, reflected upon in light of changing international world politics and global landscape.

This paper attempted through some extensive reappraisal of the basics of different approaches to sift a whole complex of attitudes either by scholars, religious leaders, institutions, primarily most prestigious seats of Islam and Christianity, Al-Azhar Al Sharif in Egypt and the Holy See in the Vatican.

Some major conclusions have been drawn even further, vindicating strongly the initiative proposed since the beginning of this millennium in the context of UN General Assembly vote to initiate a Dialogue of civilization process, which entailed a whole series of supportive similar initiatives by different international fora. In the

Muslim world and the West, history of mankind, the story of civilization, pre-history, ancient, medieval, Islamic, renaissance periods. Modern or contemporary history, reconfirms beyond doubt that a cross-civilizational communication process never stopped throughout different eras of history.

Clashes, armed conflicts, wars, either world wars or civil wars, naturally never stopped also through the history of mankind.

Today there is a ferocious fight raging in different regions, sub regions, in the Middle East, North Africa, Sub Saharan states, Asian states also. Under the guise of defense of religions, crimes against humanity, brutalities and atrocities are being committed against all norms of divine revelations, paradigms of human rights or respects for human dignity.

A critical review of those aspects, dimensions of clashes of political, cultural and ethnic, humanitarian issues have been relatively elaborated to cast some light, so that the predicaments so many Muslims and non Muslims are going through could be rightly assessed, diagnosed, remedied and resolved.

As long as this war is raging in the four corners of the world, this debate on clash or dialogue of civilization will be ongoing interminably for years to come.

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