Framework of Inter Faith Dialogue in Al-Sharî'a Al-Islâmiyyah

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Abstract

The paper proceeds with the short introduction of interfaith dialogue. Terminologies such as al jadl, al mufawadhat, al hîwar al mûhajah, and al hâdith etc. that are being used by the Muslims for the notion of dialogue have also been elaborated. The thoughts of contemporary Muslims scholars involved in interfaith dialogue reveal that dialogue as conversation between the representatives of religions with the aim of developing understanding and harmony is in accordance with Islamic teachings. The Da'wah, which involves knowing, learning and persuading each other, is also kind of dialogue. Disagreements of nations are diversities from which need for dialogue emerges. Such type of prospects and benefits of interfaith dialogue particularly in Muslims' perspective have been traced then. Islamic concept of religious diversity, which is based on recognition of almost all pre Islamic Religions, has been elaborated in third part of this paper. No compulsion in choice of faith is core of Islamic belief. Muslim Jurists are agreed that freedom of choice of faith is basic ingredient of conversion. Conversion by force and coercion is null and void. This has been discussed in forth part of this study. The fifth part of the study deals with interfaith tolerance and respect. The last part of the study consists upon miscellaneous rules that regulate the conduct of interfaith dialogue. In conclusion of this paper importance of inter religious dependence and possible role of framework of interfaith dialogue in the light of al-Sharî'a al-Islâmiyyah have been identified so that Muslims can actively and positively contribute for peace among religions through dialogue.

Islam, being a unique and youngest in world religions has related itself to the most of the pre-Islamic religions. Islam's recognition of other religions as legitimate religions is essence of Islamic beliefs, which is reflected in the rulings of al-Sharî'a al-Islamîya. Its relations with other religions are indicating the world view of Islam. Al-Sharî'a' s view of God, the reality of man and his place in the universal, importance of religious diversity, legislation regarding non-Muslims are providing sufficient theological and legal grounds on which Muslims are regulating their relations with the followers of other religions. Islam's relations with Judaism, Christianity and Sabaeanism

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were crystallized first by God through direct revelation in al-Qur'ân. The actions of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), on the bases of divine guidance, further enhanced Muslims' capacity to work with them. During his life time Holy Prophet entered into agreements with Christians and Jews and at a time went to include them into Muslim Ummah. The Prophet's companions extended this status of official recognition to the Zoroastrians at the time of conquest of Persia. This recognition was extended to Hinduism and Buddhism by the Muslim Jurists following the conquest of the lower region of the Indus valley.

This recognition of almost all pre-Islamic divine religions is inbuilt in the commandments of al-Sharî'a al-Islamîya. Its rulings are regulating the relations of Muslims with others from the early period of Islam till today. In each period of Islamic history during peace and war, Muslims were very successfully able to create interfaith tolerance and co-existence. The Muslim's communication with non-Muslims was also conducted on the bases of these rulings. In spite of political clashes and wars between Muslims and others, these rulings of al-Sharî'a remain in changeable and sustainable because it based on basic sources of Islam i.e. al-Qur'ân and Sûnnah.

In contemporary world due to the spread of idea of clash of civilizations and increasing conflicts between followers of different religious traditions it became inevitable to search way forward for interfaith understanding. The only way to create interfaith understanding and co-existence is dialogue. Contemporary movement of interfaith dialogue was initially started by the Roman Catholic Christians. Later on adherents of other religions including Islam started contributing in it. Presently Muslims have taken this challenge very seriously and many contemporary scholars such as Ismâ'îl Râ'jî al Fârûquî, Syed Hussein Nasr, Prof. Khurshid Ahmed, Muhammad al-Tâlbî , Muhammad Fateullah Gülen and Ataullah Sidiqui are trying to revive original Islamic teachings regarding inter faith relations. The contribution of these scholars is unique and addressing almost all important issues of interfaith relations including dialogue. In the light of rulings of al-Sharî'a al-Islamîya, contemporary Muslim scholars are trying to suggest frame work for interfaith dialogue so that Muslims can effectively contribute in it while considering it as a tool of peace among world religions. The aim of this paper is to identify the main ingredients of Islamic framework of interfaith dialogue while analyzing the contemporary thoughts on the bases of mainstream Islamic teachings.

I-Introduction to the concept of Interfaith Dialogue

Definition of dialogue

The term dialogue has been explained by various ways. Its literal, religious, philosophical and anthropological dimensions have received attention of the researchers. As a noun it has been derived from the Greek verb dialegomai' which in philosophical term refers to an action through which we can reach the 'Logos' or the idea. In Socrates 'dialegomai' takes the form of question and answer, which is to carry a conversation direct toward reaching a decision or settlement. [1] The English verb ' to confer' is very close to this meaning in its basic use such as 'to give', 'to meet,' 'to

exchange views' or 'to negotiate'. In the thoughts of Plato and Aristotle the meaning remains generally the same, with the emphasis on 'treating' something, or conferring'. In *philo,* dialogue means nothing more than 'conversation' or 'speech' and only once does it meant 'disputation.' [2]

If applied in a religious context, the term Logos could also refer to the 'divine mind' or 'word.' In its New Testament usage 'dialegomai' was the act of exercising one's power of argument with a view of reaching the meaning of the world of God: the logos revealed in scripture through revelation. If revelations were defined in terms of 'comprehensive declaration of the divine will, which sets all life in the divine truth,'[3] then the word 'dialogue' would have a different connotation in religion than in philosophy. Instead of reasoning with a view of reaching the true meaning that would suggest the philosophical usage of 'dialogue,' its religious use would imply the idea of reasoning upon the reality given divine truth. It is in this sense of the word 'reasoning' that the verb is used in Acts 17:2 where Paul is said to reason with the Jews from the Scriptures for three Sabbaths. The same meaning of dialegomai,'is implied in acts 17:17; 18:4,19; 24; 12. The following text of Acts better characterizes this usage:' Therefore he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and with the Gentile worshipers and in the market place daily with those who happened to be there.'[4]

Vjekoslav Bajsic draws attention to the anthropological dimension of this term. He says that dialogue has the power of forming togetherness. By attributing importance to the partner from the beginning, I change my problems and his problems into our problems. Certain interests reveal themselves as 'our' interests while community is being created through common action. Therefore, one may define dialogue as a conversation of man with man about the essential matters of man for sake of man. He also stresses on the need of establishing positive meaning of dialogue because problems of dialogue are at the same time problems of humanization in the broadest sense of the world. Any objection to dialogue on grounds of a principle, before undertaking the dialogue, represents an inadequate anthropology and rests on ideological foundations.[5] Scholars, involved in interfaith dialogue, distinguish it from debate in which representatives of each religious tradition try to prove that the position of their communication is right and others wrong'.[6] Swidler analyses these definitions and concludes it as 'a conversation between two or more persons with differing views, the primary purpose of which is for each participant to learn from the other so that he or she can change and grow'.[7]

Muslims' Definitions of Dialogue

Muslims used different terminologies such as *al jadl, al mufawadhat, al hîwar* al *mûhajah,* and *al hâdith* for the notion of dialogue. The base of these terminologies is its use in al-Qur'ân and Sûnnah of Prophet Muhammad. The terminology '*Al Jadl'* is used on several occasions in al-Qur'ân in the meaning of argumentation,[8] which held between different previous prophets and their nations.[9] Muslim jurists usually use the term *al mufawadhat* for describing negotiation in trade matters. One kind of business,

approved by al-Sharî'a, is also named *shirkat al mufawadhat,* in which each party enters as a result of successful trade negotiation.[10] This terminology is described as 'exchange of views of negotiators, on the bases of particular rules, for reaching on an agreements'.[11]This terminology is preferably used in the meanings of political negotiation.[12]The term *al hîwar[13]* is closer to the contemporary meanings of dialogue. Ibn Manzoor (d.1311),a famous scholar of Arabic language, has defined it as 'conversation between people in which they exchange their views with each other.[14] This Arabic terminology is equivalent to the western terminology dialogue[15]in which conversation is aimed on better understandings between the representatives of different traditions or cultures.

Contemporary Muslim scholars, involved in dialogue between people of different traditions, also try to define dialogue in Islamic context. Tunisian scholar Mohammed Tâlbî (1921-) defines dialogue as a state of mind, an atmosphere, an opening, an attitude of friendship or of comprehension'.[16]He feels that Muslims much more urgently need this comprehension.' Islam, he elaborates, has long lived with in 'safe boundaries', but in today's new circumstances, it can no longer afford to remain isolated. 'Thus dialogue for Islam', he argues, 'is first and for most a necessary and vital re-establishment of contact with world at large'.[17] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, an Iranian scholar settled in U.S.A, calls dialogue 'a very honourable term', especially 'in the west and the philosophical traditions'. The meaning of the term, he points out, in 'Platonic and Socratic' discourse is understood 'as a means of discovering the truth'. But 'as used since the Second world War', in the religious sphere, 'it has come to mean discussing various aspects of religion among followers of each religion with the aim of a better understanding of the two sides,'[18]

The above views of Muslim scholars approve that the contemporary use of terminology dialogue as 'conversation between the representatives of different communications with the aim of developing greater understanding and finding a basis for greater cooperation,[19] is in accordance with Islamic thought.

Dialogue and *Da'wah*
The relationship of *Da'wah* with dialogue is an other point needs to be elaborated. Contemporary *Muslim* scholars consider *Da'wah* as evidence of favourable Islamic trend towards dialogue. Prof. Khurshid Ahmed sees it as a part of dialogue, which involves 'knowing, learning, reaching, talking, discussing, and persuading each other'.[20] Nasr defines *Da'wah* as an opportunity 'to present the message of Islam and the message of *tawhid* where ever possible'. The condition, in his opinion, is to present Islam 'without coercion'. In relation to *Da'wah* /mission and dialogue Nasr finds 'some clash between the two. In order to have dialogue ', he suggest, one must transcends the trying to convert everyone to your religion'. Rather he prefers to use the term 'witness', and through witness of one's religion 'someone may receive the call of God and embrace Islam. This, he suggests, is a far stronger position for Muslims than any other thing. In Nasr's view, dialogue in wider sense is a part of *Da'wah* .He suggests

that Muslims 'have to reach a level of understanding …of the doctrine of *Tawhid* and the role of Islam in world as a whole'. This he argues,' will provide a wider vision where they will be happy if they have good Christians amidst them who understand them with out becoming Muslims. He believes that today many Muslims have lost the universality of their religion. If Muslims today 'went back to the best of their 'own traditions' then Da'wah would not be understood in the sense of 'bitter enmity against Christianity, Judaism and other religions;' much of that is political'.[21]

II-Importance of Inter faith Dialogue

There is much agreement today that what all faiths share is more important than their differences. At present there are two extremes in the Western historical narratives. The first implies that, after the end of the cold war, the West will see its values expending all over the world. Francis Fukuyma told this story in '*The End of the History and the Last Man.*'[22] Samuel Huntington derived from this story his vision of 'Clash of Civilizations.'[23] The both stories are of modernist origin, the first is optimistic about the final worldwide victory of western civilization, and the second is pessimistic about the gradual decline of the West. None of these two points of view have generally been accepted.In the view of Yuri Pochta, 'we must give ourselves a chance to restore modern world history and to avoid any fatalistic comparison of it.'[24] Human differences could be considered reason of clashes or it could be treated as a unique characteristic of human life in the context of cultural and religious diversity in which we have to live.

Disagreements and differences of the nations are symbols of diversity and need of conversation emerges from it. Conversation can take place only when there is some disagreement, either of negative kind in which someone knows something and the other does not, or of a positive kind in which there is a difference in thinking and assertion. If there is complete identity of thinking there can be no real conversation but only a confirmation of agreement, reciprocal recitation, and mutual silence or boredom.[25] Dialogical conversation provides opportunity of free exchange of ideas, which can be beneficial to all. Tâlbî points out that the primary objective of dialogue is 'to remove barriers and to increase the amount of good in the world by a free exchange of ideas'. He finds inspiration for this in declaration of *Nostra Aetate.*[26] He feels confident that the list suggested by the second Vatican Council, e.g. 'what is man? What is the meaning and purpose of life? What is goodness and what is sin? What gives us sorrows and to what extend?' Each of these questions should be developed into a theme for dialogue inviting representatives from all religions whether they have their scripture or not'. But, he stresses, the question should be a question for under standing and learning and not for interrogation.[27]

Muhammad Tâlbî also identifies prospects that are particularly important for Muslims. He thinks that Muslims' participation in dialogue with non-Muslim may yet generates another dialogue within Muslim communities at various levels. He argues 'the dialogue could play the role of shaking Muslims out of their false sense of security and could make their hearts and ears more attentive to the message of God'. He is

against those who dissociate themselves from their past heritage, what he calls the 'wealth and positive advances made by the *Ummah*, yet he is not in favour of clinging to the past. The precise purpose of dialogue, whatever the circumstances, is to reanimate constantly our faith, to save it from tepidity, and to maintain us in a permanent state of Ijtihâd that is a state of reflection and research.'[28]

There are three other prospects of dialogue, in Nasr 's view. Dialogue 'plays an important role in buttressing our own faith'. In dialogue a person encounters an other person from an other religion 'in whom he sees the mark of authentic faith and piety and wisdom and even on the highest-level sanctity. To reject that as being untrue or unreal cause a danger for the person to lose his or her faith. Secondly, Nasr argues, there are many Christians in the West, whose 'faith has been attacked by nineteenth-century secularist philosophies or the age of enlightenment before that', but when they discover the living condition 'outside of Christianity in which faith is very strong and wisdom and divine knowledge have not been lost', in such encounters they discover their 'own religious universe'. Thirdly, Nasr stresses that all religions are in a deeper sense interrelated and therefore instead of fighting against each other, for them to [discover] …. Their transcendent and divine grounds or principle or origin of all religions is the best answer to those who make us of the diversity of religions in order to destroy religion which has been done by so many people like Feuerbach and Marx and a lot of grandfathers of anti religious philosophy in the last century. [29]

Wilfred Smith identifies 'understanding of the faith of other people, without weakening our own.' as important prospects of dialogue. [30] Swidler adds another element, that of learning. For him the primary purpose of dialogue is that each participant learns from the other so that both can change and grow."[31]Milko Youroukov thinks that 'understanding' and 'learning' however are not possible without tolerance.[32] Monika Konrad Hellwig observes that the point of the dialogue is not proselytizing but the clarification of one's perception of the position of the others, in order thereby to clarify one's perception of one's own position and engage in more realistic and authentic relationships.[33]

In spite of importance of all these prospects of dialogue, the human beings are still not able to benefit from it because the world is not fully prepared for dialogue. The present movement of dialogue is still not matured and there are many problems that are threatening its worldwide success. Therefore it is dire need of time that followers of each religion should strive hard for searching theological bases of dialogue in their own religion.

III-Recognition of Religious Diversity

Islam believes that the core of the massages of all the prophets and messengers was the submission to God in the light of guidance communicated by the prophets. All prophets were Muslims (submitters to the God), and Islam is not merely the religion preached by Muhammad but was also the religion of all the true prophets of God such as Noah, Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, and Jesus and their followers.[34] Muslim's

recognition of legitimate religions is not limited to Christianity and Judaism only but it extends to almost al major pre-Islamic religions including Hinduism and Buddhism.[35] This recognition is based on Islamic belief that there has been no nation, which had not been visited by a warner[36]so that, the different religious traditions of the world presumably had an authentic starting point.

Religious pluralism in Islam is based on the acknowledgement of the non-believer on three distinct levels: The first is that of humanism. Islamic concept of *dîn al-fitrah* express that all human being are endowed at birth by God with a true, genuine and valid for all time religion. Insofar as they are humans, this claim would be true of them that they have a *sensus communis* by the free exercise of which they can arrive at the essence of all religious truth. There is no exception in the universalism of this aspect of Islam. Islamic doctrine of natural religion is the base for universal humanism.[37] All men are ontologically the creatures of God, and all of them are equal in their natural ability to recognize God and His law. Every human being is equipped at his birth with the knowledge that required to know God. Islamic concept of *dîn al-fitrah* differentiates between natural religion and the religion of the history. The latter are either derivations from this most basic endowment; or they come from other sources such as revelation or human passion, illusion and prejudice. If this kind of religion divides mankind, natural religion unites them all, and puts all their adherents on one level. As the Prophet (peace be upon him) said: All men are born Muslims (in the sense of being endowed with *religio naturalis*). It is their parents (tradition, history, culture, natural as opposed to nature) that turn them into Christianity and Jews'.[38] On the level of nature, Islam holds the believers and non-believers equal partakers of religion of God.

The second level of religious pluralism in Islam is 'universalism of revelation'. Islam holds that 'There are no people but God has sent them a prophet or Warner'.[39] And that no prophet was sent but to convey the same divine message, namely, to teach that God is one and that man ought to serve him.'[40] As if man has been given by nature is not enough, Islam now adds the contribution of history. In history, every nation has been sent a messenger, 'To teach them in their own language;'[41] and none has been sent in vain.[42] Every messenger conveyed and made understood identically one and the same message from God whose essence is recognition of Him as God, i.e., as Creator, Lord, Master and Judge, and the service of Him through adoration and obedience. All followers of religious traditions, therefore are recognized as possessors of divine revelations, each fitting its context of history and language, but all identical in their essential religious content. Muslims and non-Muslims are equal in their experience of divine communication.[43] Islam considered adherence to different religious traditions legitimate. Islamic concept of universal revelation made possible a distinction between the revealed essence of a religion, which it shares with all other religions and the figurizations of that religion in history. A critique of the historical by the essential, and of the understanding of both by the natural, has become possible for the first time with this breakthrough of Islam.[44]

The third level of religious pluralism in Islam is its identification with historical

revelation of Judaism and Christianity. It acknowledged the prophets of the two religions as genuine prophets of God, and accepted them as Islam's own. Muslims are being taught to honour their names and memories. With acceptance of the Jewish prophets and Jesus Christ, Islam reduced every difference between itself and these religions to a domestic variation, which may be due to human understanding and interpretation, rather than to God or the religion of God. By making difference between the Muslims and Jews and Christians internally it thus narrowed the gab between the adherents of these religions. This is why the Muslims declare: [Worthier of affiliation with Ibrâhîm (and by extension, all Hebrew prophets and Jesus Christ) are, rather those who follow his religion, this Prophet and the believers'.][45]

On the bases of unity in essence and diversity in expressions in these religions God commanded His prophet (Muhammad peace be upon him) to address them in these words: [O People of Books, let us rally together, around a noble principle common to both of us, namely, that we shall serve none but God; that we shall associate naught with Him, and shall not take one an other as Lords beside God'.][46]

Islam initiated the culture of appreciation to others on their good deeds while saying: [Those who believe (The Muslims) and those who are Jews, Christians and Sabaeans-all those who believe in God and in the day of Judgement and work righteousness, shall have their reward with God. They shall have no cause for fear nor grief.][47]

The privilege of Ahlal Al-Kitâb, granted by God in the Qur'ân to the Jews, Christians and Sabaeans, was extended by the Muslims to the Zoroastrians, Hindus, Buddhists and adherents of other religions as they came into contact with them.[48] Therefore, Islam grants today all three religious privileges to adherents of all the religions of the world.[49]

Turkish scholar Muhammad Feteullah Gülen also highlights such ecumenical aspects of Islam in his thoughts. He has very successfully traced theological foundations of these ecumenical aspects of Islam in al-Qur'an and Sunnah of the Prophet (Peace be upon him). He is not only interested in communication with West on the bases of these foundations but also wants to convince the contemporary Muslims about the importance of inter faith dependence. He is saying that 'the attitude of the believers is determined according to the degree of faith. I believe that if the message is put across properly, then an environment conducive to dialogue will be able to emerge in our country and throughout the world.'[50] Thus, as in every matter, we should approach this issue as indicated in the Qur'an and Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him). His point of view is that the religion of Islam, beyond accepting the formal origin of other religions and their prophets, requires Muslims to respect them as fundamental Islamic principles. A Muslim is a follower of Muhammad at the same time that he or she is follower of Abraham, Moses, David, Jesus and other biblical prophets. From his perspective not to believe in the biblical prophets mentioned in the Qur'ân is enough of a reason to place someone outside the circles of Islam.[51]

Islamic concept of religious diversity provides sufficient integration which is required for the purpose of healthy dialogue among the followers of different religions. Islamic recognition of other religions as legitimate encourages the Muslims to interact with the followers of all religions. If some one asked for conversation while declaring him right in his selection of religion, he will definitely accept such invitation. The framework of interfaith dialogue devolved on Islamic concept of religious diversity will provide a point from which every one would like to start conversation.

iv- Freedom of Choice of a Faith

A Muslim is obliged by his faith to present Islam to the non-Believer. But this obligation is to be performed with the condition of 'no compulsion in choice of faith.' No compulsion is the guarantee of the freedom to convince as well as to be convinced, of the truth. It implies that the converter non-Muslim is to make up his own mind regarding the merit or demerit of what is presented to him. The Qur'ân forbids in unequivocal terms any tempering whatever with the process. Repeatedly, God warned His Prophet not to press the matter once he had made his presentation, absolving him of all responsibility for the decision for or against, or indecision, of his audience. Above all:[There shall be no coercion in religion. The truth is now manifesting; and so is falsehood. Whoever rejects evil and believes in God has attached him to the most solid bonds.][52]

Allah asked the Prophet:[Call them unto the path of your lord through wise arguments and fair preaching; and argue them(the non-believers)with arguments yet more fair, yet more becoming.][53]In an other verse this has been further clarified as: [We have revealed to you the Qur'ân that you may convey it to the people. It is the truth. Whoever accepts it does so to his own credit. Whoever rejects it does so to his discredit. You are not responsible for their decisions …(in case people reject the revelation). Say, I am only a Warner to warn you.][54]

Like the presentation of any theory, the presentation of Islam to the non-believers can be with all evidences but it can do no more than lay it down. To the over Zealous enthusiast who takes men's rejection too much to heart, or who is tempted to go beyond presentation of the truth, the Qur'ân warned:[Had your Lord willed it, all the people of the earth would be believers(But He did not).Would you then compel the people to believe. O Men, the truth has come to you from your Lord. Whoever wills may be guided by it; whoever does not will, may not.][55]

The freedom of choice in Islam is basic ingredient of conversion because conversion by force, coercion and interference is null and void to the subject, and a prosecutable crime for the da'iyah,[56] Muhammad Asad explains the terminology dîn and clarified : "The term dîn denotes both the contents of and compliance with a morally binding law; consequently, it signifies 'religions in the widest sense of this term, extending over all that pertains to its doctrinal contents and their practical implications as well as to man's attitude towards the object of his worship, thus comprising also the concept of faith "religious law' or moral law .. depends on the

context in which this term is used. On the strength of above categorical prohibition of coercion (*ikrâh)* in any thing that pertains to faith or religion, all Islamic Jurists (fuqaha) without any exception, hold that forcible conversion is under all circumstances null and void, and that any attempt at coercing a non-believer to accept the faith of Islam is grievous sin: a verdict which disposes of the widespread fallacy that Islam places before the unbelievers the alternative of "conversion or sword" .'[57]

The earlier commentators of the Qur'ân provide the perceived historical circumstances in which the verse 'no compulsion'[58] was revealed. They relate the verse to a custom said to have been common among Arab women of Madina in the pre-Islamic period. Women whose children tended to die in infancy, or who bore only one child (*miqlât)*[59] used to vow that if a child is born to them and survives, they would make him a Jew and let him live among the Jews in order to ensure his long life. When Islam came into being, consequently, some of these children lived with the Jews. During the expulsion of Jews form Medina, the Ansâr attempted to prevent the expulsion of their off springs. They argued that in the Jâhiliyya they had caused their children to adopt Judaism because they thought that this religion was better than their heirs: now that Allah has honoured them with Islam, they wanted to force their sons to embrace the new faith, so that they be permitted to stay in Medina with their biological parents. When they communicated their intentions to the Prophet Muhammad, he did not respond at first: then the verse in question was revealed, giving a clear, and negative, response to the request. Therefore, when the Banû Nadîr were expelled from Medina by the Prophet, their sons were given the choice to embrace Islam and stay, or to retain their adopted Jewish faith and leave the city with other Jews. No compulsion was practiced against those who chose the latter alternative. A similar tradition is related about Ansârî children who were suckled by the women of Banû Qurayza.[60]

According to an other tradition, the verse was revealed in connection with a certain Ansârî called Hasayn (or Abû al- Hasayn) whose two sons were converted to Christianity by Byzantine merchants who came to sell their goods in Medina.[61] Their father asked the Prophet to pursue them and bring them back to Islam. On this occasion these verses revealed. It is also reported that the verses revealed when an Ansârî man became frustrated after the failure of his attempt to force his black slave to embrace Islam.[62] Umer b. Khattâb is reported to have interpreted and implemented in a similar manner. He offered to his mamlûk (or mawlâ) Wasaq al-Rûmî to become his assistant in the administration after embracing Islam. He refused to embrace Islam and Umer left him alone, invoking these verses of Qur'ân. Similar was his reaction when an old Christian woman refused to convert to Islam at his behest.[63] Tunisian scholar, Ibn ˡshûr maintains that Jihâd with the purpose of conversion was enjoined only in the earliest period of Islam. In contradiction to the traditional commentaries, which consider that Qur'anic verse no.2:256 is abrogated, he maintains that this Qur'anic verse revealed late. It was revealed in his view, after the conquest of Mecca. Consequently, it is not abrogated. On the contrary it is itself abrogating Qur'anic verses and Prophetic traditions according to which Jîhad was designed to bring about conversion. Since this revelation

has changed the purpose of Jihad, its aim is now to expend the rule of Islam and induce the infidels to accept its dominion by the contracts of *dhimma*. He feels that the new situation is reflected in verse no. 9:29, where the unbelievers are required to submit and pay Jizya, but not to embrace Islam. Ibn ˡshûr also maintains, again in contradiction to the majority of the opinions, that verse no 9:29 abrogated verse no. 9:73 which does not mention the payment of jizya and could be understood as enjoining jîhad for the purpose of conversion.[64]A similar view is expressed by al-Qâsmî who reaches the conclusion the 'sword of jihad', which is legitimate in Islam, is not used to force people to embrace the (Islam) religion, but to protect the Da'wah and to ensure obedience to the just rule and government of Islam.[65] In explanation of this verse, Hasan al-Basrî says, 'The people of the Book are not to be coerced in to Islam.'[66]In the light of this verse it can be concluded that the dhimmîs are not to be forced to embrace Islam if they agree to pay the Jizya or the Kharâj. If they choose to ignore the truth of Islam after it made clear to them, God will take care of their punishment in the hereafter, but no religious coercion is practiced against them on earth.[67]Muslim jurists have rejected the validity of forcible conversion to Islam. According to Abû Hanîfa, al-Shâfî and Ibn Qudâmah, if some one acts against this principle and illegitimately forces a dhimmî or a musta'min to embrace Islam, the latter's conversion is not valid unless he remains a Muslim voluntarily after the coercive force ceased. This opinion has practical significance: if a person was forcibly converted to Islam and later reverted to his former religion, he is not considered an apostate and may not be killed. Imam Muhammad bin al-Hassan Al-Shaybâni, on the other hand, maintains that such a person is "outwardly" (fi al-zâhir) considered a Muslim and ought to be killed if he leaves Islam.[68] However, Ibn al-Arabî derives that the verse only forbids forcing people to believe in falsehood; to force them to believe in the truth is a legitimate part of religion.[69]

Above discussion show that 'no compulsion in faith' is an established Islamic rule that was practiced by the Muslims during their period of rise and power. Islamic tradition of no coercion in faith is essence of interfaith dialogue. Any attempt of conversion through dialogue will lead it to disaster. Participants of dialogue must show their commitment that their participation in it is not for the purpose of conversion or proselytization. Any success of dialogue will totally depend on its adherence with the principle of liberty of choice in faith.

V- Tolerance and Respect

Islam as a terminology is derived from the root words sîlm and salâmah. It means surrendering, guiding to peace and contentment, and establishing security and accord.[70]Islam is a religion of security, safety, and peace. These principles permeate the lives of Muslims. When Muslims stand to pray, they cut their connection with this world, turning to Lord in faith and obedience, and standing at attention in His presence. Completing the prayer, as if they were returning back to life, they greet those on their right and left by wishing peace: "Remain safe and in peace". With a wish for safety and security, peace and contentment, they return to ordinary world once again. Greeting and wishing safety and security for others is considered one of the most beneficial acts

in Islam. When asked which act in Islam is the most Beneficial, the Prophet (Peace be upon him) replied. (Feeding others and greeting those you know and those you do not know.)[71]

In the most period of Islamic history, Muslims wielded political power and were in the position to accord (or deny) tolerance to others. In an interesting episode, it is however significant to point out that the earliest manner in which religious intolerance manifested itself in Islamic history was the religious persecution faced by Muslims in Mecca before the *hijra*. In a certain sense, the twelve years between 610 and 622 in Islam can be compared to the first three centuries of the Christian history. Though the suffering of these early Muslims for their faith lasted only for a short period of time and gained only limited importance in the Islamic ethos, an analysis of the question of religious tolerance in Islam cannot be completed without some reference to this nascent period of Islamic history.[72] It is however observed that the non-Muslim communities living under Islamic rule experience for less expulsion and persecution than Jews, or deviant Christians, living under medieval Christendom.[73]After the establishment of strong state, Muslims were used to accept and protect Jewish subject, allowing them to worship freely in their synagogues and to judge themselves by their own laws. When the Jews of Europe suffered Christian persecution, it was often to Muslim countries that they fled for safety.[74]

Muslims are a faith based community: believing and belonging to the community (ummah) go hand in hand. Its earthly objective is to establish a cohesive, human and just social order. It aims to create a society where the individual and the society are under an obligation to enjoin good and forbid evil.[75] Differences of belief are seen in Islamic belief as part of God's plan. The abolition of such differences is not the purpose of the Islam nor is the Prophet Muhammad was sent for that purpose. Al-Qur'ân also emphasizes that such differences do not suggest that their origin is different, rather it emphasises that human beings have a common spirituality and morality.[76] The differences on the bases of religions are infect diversities of human choice because God has given them the freedom of choice: [If it had been your Lord's will, they would all have believed –all who are on earth Will you then compel people against their wills to believe.][77]

Muslims have enough theological resources to redefine their position in the contemporary world. A society based on inter religious dependence, tolerance and respect can be built so that those involved, Muslims or otherwise, can feel to engage and participate fully in the society that they are living in.[78]

On the bases of recognition of religious diversity in Islam, Muslim scholars suggest tolerance and dialogue as alternatives of clash and conflicts. Tolerance in the opinion of Muhammad Fethullah Gülen is a term that is some times used synonymous to mercy, generosity or forbearance. This is most essential element of moral system; it is a very important source of spiritual discipline and a celestial virtue of perfect people.[79]The Prophet (upon him be peace and blessings), defined a true Muslim as one who harms no one with his/ her words and actions, and who is the most trustworthy representative

of universal peace**.**[80] Al-Qur'ân always accepts forgiveness and tolerance as basic principle, so much so that the servants of 'All-Merciful' are introduced in the following manner:[And the servants of (God) the All-Merciful are those who move on the earth humility and when the ignorant address them they say Peace.][81] [When they meet hollow words or unseemly behaviour, they pass them by with dignity'.][82] [And when they hear vain talk, they turn away there from and say: "To us our deeds and to you yours'.][83]

The general gist of these verses is that when those who have been favoured with true servant-hood to God encounter meaningless and ugly words or behaviour they say nothing unbecoming, but rather pass by in a dignified manner. In short: 'Everyone acts according to his own disposition'[84] and thus displays his or her own character. The character of heroes of tolerance is gentleness consideration. Holy Prophet (the pride of the humanity, peace and blessing be upon him) is example for Muslims in dealing with issues related to interfaith tolerance and respect. This ideal personality lives in an orbit of forgiveness and forbearance. He even behaved such a manner towards Abû Sufyan, who left no stone untouched in enmity of the Muslims throughout his lifetime. During the conquest of Makka, even though Abû Sufyan still was not sure about his conversion to Islam, The Messenger said: (Those who take refuge in Abû Sufyan's house are safe, just as those who take refuge in the Kaaba are safe). Thus, in respect of providing refuge and safety, Abu Sufyan's house was mentioned alongside Ka'ba. [85]After narrating this event Gülen observes 'In my humble opinion, such tolerance was more valuable than if tons of gold have been given to Abû Sufyan, a man in his seventies, in whom egoism and chieftainship had become ingrained.'[86]

Forgiveness and tolerance have been given great importance in the messages of all the prophets particularly in the message of Prophet Muhammad. In addition to being commanded to take tolerance and to use dialogue as his bases while performing his duties, the prophet was directed to those aspects in which he had things in common with the People of the Book (Jews and Christians)

[Say: "O people of the Book! Come to common terms as between us and you: that We worship none but God; that we speculate no partner with him; that we take not some from among ourselves for Lords other than God'.][87]

Tolerance and genuine interfaith dialogue are not simply pleasant ideals that will be fulfilled in some future paradise, but is some thing at the core of what it is to be done by the Muslim in the here and now.[88] Turkish Scholar Muhammad Fethullah Gülen evaluates reasons of awkwardness and says:' In countries rife with corruption, intolerance and mercilessness such things as freedom of thought, polite criticism, and the exchange of ideas according to norms of equity and fair debate is absent; It would be meaningless to talk of the results of logic and inspiration.'[89] He asked the Muslims to look into the message of Al-Qur'ân and Sûnnah where tolerance and mercy are inbuilt human values. Allah Almighty commanded to the hearts filled with belief and love to behave forgiveness and tolerance, even to those who do not believe in the after

life:[Tell those who believe to forgive those who do not look forward to the days of God: It is for Him to recompense each people according to what they have earned.][90]

Those who consider themselves addressed by these verses, all devotees of love who dream of becoming true servants of God merely because they are human beings, those who have declared their faith and thereby become Muslims and performed the mandated religious duties, must behave with tolerance and forbearance and expect nothing from other people.[91]Gülen feels that dialogue, tolerance and openness are demonstrated in the all embracing nature or universality of Islam. He mentions verse which states [peace is good].[92] The verse does not necessitate its being particular to certain event, meaning and framework. The rule is general. He questions? Does not the root of noun "Islam" express soundness, surrender, peace, safety, and trust? Then it is not possible for us to be true Muslims without fully representing and establishing these characteristics. In addition to this underlying the meaning of this sacred name is an essence that incorporates embracing all and approaching everything with love.

Milko Youroukov proposes tolerance as solution to the problem of extreme fundamentalism. For the adherence of interfaith dialogue, in his words, tolerance should become a basic criterion to judge attitudes toward one an other and toward others respective religions.[93]

On the other hand, Muhammad Tâlbî feels that the problem of fundamentalism could be over come by willingness to listen to others and certain amount of openness, respect, and humility. He associates tolerance with the medieval mentality; at that time it represents a certain degree of progress. He quotes that Roberts's dictionary defines it as the fact of not forbidding or requiring, although it would be possible to do so. Therefore, he thinks, tolerance is not a right .It is an act of pure indulgence by some one in a dominating position. It implies inferiorities and condemnation. We tolerate error, although we are entitled to prohibit it on the name of truth. What is tolerated is perceived as evil that cannot be extirpated except at the price of greater evil. To tolerate this evil is to put up with it temporarily and unwillingly, as an act pass charity with a certain condescension dictated by a benevolent superiority. Respect, instead, is a right and presupposes the complete and absolute equality of the partners. He concludes that only respect can guarantee the dignity of all. In respect there is neither inferior nor superior. In tolerance there is the one who tolerated, at a higher level, and the one who is tolerated, at a lower level, while this disparity is eliminated in respect.[94]

Importance of tolerance or respect, as suggested by Muhammad al-Tâlbî, as an alternative of conflict and clash is essential element for conduct of interfaith dialogue. Those who hate each other can never entered in meaningful dialogue. Respect of those who are not agreeing with us is from ethics which guides the conduct of participants of interfaith activities. Tolerance in the meaning of respect for others can teach us how to disagree in an agreeable manner. Muslims were tolerant throughout the history and they were successful in convening the message of Islam in peaceful manners to the world. This was reason of spread of Islam. Cotemporary Muslims should also learn this

from their history so that they can provide a chance to the contemporary human beings to understand what Islam is al about.

VI- Rules to Regulate the Conduct of Interfaith Dialogue

Legitimacy of religious diversity in Islam, freedom of choice of faith, mutual respect and tolerance for the others provide foundations on which interfaith dialogue can be conducted. These are crucial as well as essential elements without which no interfaith dialogue can proceed. Any frame work of interfaith dialogue must have these essential elements which have been clearly inbuilt in the rulings of al-Sharî'a al-Islâmiyyah. These are theological foundations of interfaith relations in Islam and other participants of interfaith dialogue can also take benefit from these. Along with these fundamentals of frame work of interfaith dialogue some other important principles of conduct of interfaith dialogue are also very important to facilitate the participants of interfaith dialogue. These principles are not extensively derived from al-Sharî'a but at the same time are not contradictory to it. Some of these principles are as under:

Sincere Preparedness and Freedom of Expression

Tâlbî states clearly that dialogue should not be looked upon as 'art of compromise'. He demands in it sincerity and freedom of expression, with out hostility. He fears that the lack of equal partners in dialogue and unequal preparedness could be dangerous for success of dialogue. He suggests that our hopes should not anchor themselves on convergence of our faith and the colloquia that we organize, but rather we should have faith in the creator.[95]He feels that the problem of historical risks can be approached through our respective historical traditions. He argues: 'today we live in a situation where *Dhimmi* no longer exists. It should become imperative and absolutely in dispensable to shelve this notion in the cupboard of history.' This, he contends, is possible from an Islamic point of view.[96]?Monika Konrad Hellwig suggests that any genuine dialogue depends on the willingness of some scholars and religious representatives to achieve a psychological distance from historical and practical stumbling blocks, by willingness to consider not the achievements of the other parties but the aims and desires intrinsic in the religious position of each. She observes, habitually each group evaluates its own position by its ideals and the position of the others by their performance. From this nothing but further prejudice and failure of understanding can arise.[97] Internal dialogue before participation in interfaith dialogue could provide sound opportunity of preparedness. This kind of internal dialogue can be used for making appropriate strategy and the participants can enrich their arguments. She feels that only those who can critically undergo an internal dialogue are seriously ready for dialogue with others.[98]

Ascending   from Temptation of Proselytization

Whoever believes in a truth also has the tendency to communicate it. Something, which is quite normal but Tâlbî, warns that it should not be a 'mission' conceived of as one- way traffic. He detects the same tendency amongst Muslims too. This, he argues,

creates difficulties where one partner in dialogue accuses the other of using less than honourable means'. He suggests that holding 'some colloquia with the purpose of defining the deontology respectful of the freedom of the other respectful of God and respectful of human rights' is essential.[99] The core of dialogue, Nasr suggests, 'is that if you want to talk to an other person and get meaningful result, you must see what he is, right now, in himself, not what you would like him to be in order for you to talk to him'.[100]

Loyalty with Faith

The participants of dialogue are representatives of their community. Their participation can be fruitful only if they represent mainstream ideas of their religion. In case of doubt in their loyalty with their religious traditions, their contribution will be fake and fruitless. Jewish scholar?Zalman M. Schachter observes that there is a myth, begotten by the market place and parliament, that the individuals involved in the dialogue will have power given to them to change the thinking of the faithful of their own community. He stresses that his community has given him no such power. He acknowledges 'If I go too far out, I will be repudiated by my own community.' Therefore he warns those dialoguers who cross the limits prescribed by their communities.[101] ?

Search of Points of Agreement

The dialogue can be started on firm grounds, which should be agreed upon by the participants. This basic common ground is what both sides take for granted: the myth, or what we might call the rule of the game.[102] Scholars are trying to find common grounds on which dialogue could be initiated. For example the life of Jesus is controversial issue between Muslims and Christians but both are agreed that he was the son of virgin Marry. The matter of crucified is point of disagreement. Hossein Nasr suggested that this kind of issues could be settled down with the use of traditional epistemology. In his view, this may provide a solution. 'One could say' he remarks, 'that such a major cosmic event as the end of the earthly life of Christ could in fact be 'seen' and 'known' in more than one way, and that it is God's will that Christianity should be given to 'see' that in one way and Islam in an other.'[103]

Universal truth could be an other point of agreement. Nasr argues that truth comes before peace and peace follows from the truth. [104]Refering to the saying of Hans Küng 'There will be no peace among the people of this world without peace among the world religions'.[105] Nasr appreciates that Küng has 'taken a step toward the understanding of Islam,' a step further than various Christian theologians, both Catholics and Protestants, before him. Yet he finds that theological problems remain the same. Dialogue has not yet crossed the boundaries in more than goodwill or good gesture. The theological issues-the Prophet, revelation, God and his mercy, history, Christology –remain under the constraint of 'polite diplomacy'. He contends that even today, 'with all the platitude, diplomatic declarations, and even humanitarian gestures towards Islam, and even in the Vatican declarations of 1962, the Prophet of Islam is always left aside'.[106]He emphasizes that the relation of the Prophet to Qur'ân is central. Describing

the various views within Islam, he finds that 'the Qur'ân as the word of God be regarded at the same time as the word of the human Prophet.' Nasr describes, one cannot overlook the beliefs of a billion Muslims concerning the nature of the Qur'ân and its relation to the Prophet'. Furthermore,' non-Islamic western analysis based on the separation between the Qur'ân and its traditional commentaries over the centuries is not going to help dialogue with Muslims, simply because the development of various aspects of the traditions throughout the centuries is based upon the Qur'ân.[107]

All major religious traditions have a concept of God. They may differ in His characteristics but they are agreed on His existing. All religious scriptures has witnessed on his presence. This agreement on the existence of God can be a base of dialogue between the followers of different religious traditions. All followers of the religions are believers of God too. They share with each other in spirituality and could ready to cooperate with each other in this regard. These feelings can be qualified into a tool for creating more religious tolerance and respect for the followers of other traditions. Therefore, as Alexander Andonov proposed, it is need of time that we should look for ontological common ground on the bases of which we could understand each other and transfer meanings among Christians, Muslims and unbelievers. He further says that I believe this common ground is the ontological subject ness[108] of all living creatures.[109]

Other ground for dialogue, identified by Jay Newman, is trans –cultural values. He advances the hypothesis that 'there are some abstracts, basic trans-cultural values' and that 'almost all known societies are built upon a foundation of a limited number' of such values. He argues that those basic trans-cultural values 'are essentially ends and people in diferent religious or political or ethnic groups disagree as to what the appropriate means to these ends are.'[110] Newman further reasons that if there were no trans-culture values, then we would be left with radical ethical relativism and an empty concept of civilization. But if there are universal ethical termini, no matter how abstract… then intercultural dialogue on ethical question is possible, and we can learn from people in other societies about ways of more rapidly realizing common ideals.[111] From an ontological perspective, people-just like all living creatures-are, to a certain extent, a self –creating reality in the sense that they are responsible for their own lives. They build their own lives since this is a process *sui generis and* no one can replace them, no matter how skilful s/he is or how much s/he wants to. People, just like all living creatures, must do their own breathing, eating, growing, etc. Needless to say, people are different from animals. They are producers. They have a particular way of life and can invent a new one. This is an ontological fact. Trans-cultural values are arguably easier to identify from the perspective of this philosophical idea. The problem is to what extent a particular religion respects this basic ontological reality of humankind.[112]

Monika Konrad Hellwig (Roman Catholic) suggests that salvation can be another common point of agreement for dialogue. However she thinks that dialogue concerning the meanings of salvation cannot and does not take place in a vacuum. It assumes the meaning of some common terms and understandings and the need to explain some

unique terms.[113]In her opinion, Justice on a grand social scale is also a starting point of dialogue. This common base seems to offer very clear grounds for dialogue among religious traditions on matter of social justice and the relief of large-scale human suffering and deprivation. At least in theory, it offers a basis for meaningful dialogue in matters as thorny and urgent as colonial oppression, racial oppression, and remnants of slave trading, the state of Israel, the plight of the Palestinians, various liberation struggles, societal role restrictions on women, deprivation of civil rights of certain groups, and so forth. [114]

Hellwig Monika feels that the notion of holiness in religious scared books particularly revealed books like Qur'an and Bible are not too far away from each other. There are few conversations in the universe as deeply satisfying to the heart as the dialogue of the devout. She realises that such dialogue took place mostly among the people of each religion separately. If this profound sharing were to take place between zaddik, saint, and dervish, monk, murid, and Hasid, we would have a model of what one of the highest form of conversation could be. She argues that one's own tradition may lack a certain way, approach, attitude, or advice that another tradition has deeply fostered. She suggests that in the literature, in retreats and workshops, and by attendance at worship with other, Christian and Jews can learn about *Zikr*; Muslims and Jews can learn from the stately rising and abating rhythm of the Mass; both Christian and Muslims can learn much from Sabbat for their own holy resting and praying.[115]

Conclusion

Interfaith Dialogue is a tool of discovering the truth through the conversation between the representatives of different religions with the aim of developing greater understanding and finding a base for greater cooperation. It removes barriers and increases the opportunity of free exchange of ideas, which can be beneficial to all human beings. Frame work of interfaith dialogue in al-Sharî'a al-Islamîya is based on recognition of religious diversity, freedom of choice in faith and tolerance and mutual respect among the world religions. Religious diversity in al-Sharî'a al-Islamîya is founded on the belief that the core of the massages of all the prophets and messengers was the submission to God in the light of guidance communicated by the prophets. Islam accepts world religions on three levels i.e. humanism, universalism of revelation and its identification with historical revelation of Judaism and Christianity. Concept of religious diversity in al-Sharî'a al-Islamîya proves that religions are sharing with each other in essence but its figurizations and expressions are different. Integration of origin of all religions is a reality which has been witnessed by humanity throughout the history it is therefore appropriate for human beings, instead of fighting against each other, to discover their transcendent and divine roots in world religions. It can help us to understand the faith of other people, without weakening our won.

The establishment of the principle 'no compulsion in faith' in al-Sharî'a al-Islamîya is a result of recognition of religious diversity. The freedom of choice is basic ingredient

of conviction in al-Sharî'a al-Islamîya because Muslim jurists are agreed that conversion by force, coercion and interference is null and void. Non Muslims can be invited to understand Islam through persuasions with all evidences but any attempt at coercing them to accept the faith of Islam is categorically prohibited because many Muslim jurists have rejected the validity of forcible conversion to Islam. Islamic tradition of no coercion in faith is essence of framework of interfaith dialogue.

Freedom of choice is nothing without tolerance and mutual respect between the adherents of world religions. Tolerance is some times used synonymous to mercy, generosity or forbearance. This is most essential element of moral system; it is a very important source of spiritual discipline and a celestial virtue of perfect people. Tolerance and openness are demonstrated in the all embracing nature or universality of Islam because it denotes soundness, surrender, peace, safety, and trust.

The framework of interfaith dialogue developed on religious diversity, no compulsion in choice of faith and tolerance requires that if you want to talk to an other person and get meaningful result, you must see what he is, right now, in him, not what you would like him to be in order for you to talk to him. It also needs sincerity and freedom of expression, with out hostility. Lack of equal partners in dialogue and unequal preparedness could be dangerous for success of dialogue. Therefore all participants have to prepare themselves properly for it. Intra Muslim dialogue, before participation in interfaith dialogue, could provide sound opportunity of preparedness to them. This kind of internal dialogue can also be useful for them to make appropriate strategy. No interfaith dialogue can exist without adherence to a faith therefore participants of dialogue must be loyal to their faiths. In case of doubt in their loyalty with their religious tradition, their contribution will be fake and fruitless.

Present movement of interfaith Dialogue has not yet crossed the boundaries in more than goodwill or good gesture. Muslims are still not participating in it actively. The political clashes between Muslims and Islam phobia in West and USA are reasons of mistrust of Muslims on dialogue. The theological issues such as Prophet, revelation, God and his mercy, history, Christology –remain under the constraint of 'polite diplomacy'. It is therefore appropriate that like Hans Küng West should go forward to wards recognition of Islam, its prophet and Qur'an as Muslims already confirmed divine nature of Christianity and Judaism.

The frame work proposed in this study obviously is not point at which dialogue might be expected to begin, but neither it may be categorically ruled out as possible area of dialogue. The self interest and mutual distrust of power groups may pose almost insurmountable obstacles, but the conduct of dialogue on the bases of common issue such as divine demand for social justice can be a substitute of 'Clash of Civilizations'. Dialogue is the hope for saving the world from conflicts therefore it is duty of the followers of the world religions particularly Muslims to use it as tool of healing and reconciliation among the human beings.

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