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Contents

DIALOGUE OF CIVILIZATIONS:
ISLAMIC AND WESTERN PERCEPTIONS*

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Introduction

The initiative for dialogue of civilizations came into sight with the appearance and dominance of the clash of civilizations thesis in international politics. Among many institutions and organizations, *Rabita al-'Alam al-Islami* or the Muslim World League undertook a program for dialogue of civilizations as part of its dawah activities. The popular perception of *da'wah* among non-Muslims, however, is understood as converting non-Muslims to Islam. For Muslims the *Qur'an* is a book of guidance for establishing peace on earth and the Muslim community is expected to work to achieve this goal. Is it necessary for the whole world to convert and become Muslim in order to achieve this goal? Or should Muslims work with non-Muslims in order to achieve the *Qur'anic* objective? If Muslims decide to work along with non-Muslims to achieve the *Qur'anic* goal, how should they do this? Should this be through interfaith/ inter-civilizational dialogues? Or should one organize inter-faith debates in order to find out who are the true followers of God? Is *da'wah* a form of education and communication, or is it a form of preaching of one's doctrines? What sort of wisdom does *da'wah* require? This paper proposes to discuss and investigate these questions. We shall examine these questions on the basis of *da'wah* activities conducted by *Rabita al-'Alam al-Islami*, concentrating mainly on activities conducted on the platform of dialogue of civilizations.

Rabita al-'Alam al-Islami, popularly known as Rabita, was founded in 1962 following a conference held in Makkah. However, ideas leading to its foundation may be traced to years following the abolition of the *Khilafah* (caliphate) in 1923. In 1926 the newly chosen king of Hijaz, Abdul Aziz ibn Saud (1876-1953), convened

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a conference of Muslim leaders from all over the world to discuss mainly two issues: the administration of hajj and 'umrah, and the existing political situation in the Muslim world. The conference, however, was not able to discuss political situation in the Muslim world because of pressure from various colonial administrations (most of the Muslim world was under colonial rules) and secular Muslim governments such as Turkey. However, Ibn Saud received consent from most Muslim leaders on the administration of hajj which had improved significantly ever since he had taken control of the holy cities of Makkah and Madina. The conference also established *Mu'tamar al-'Alam al-Islami* or the Muslim World Congress with the aim of reminding Muslims of ideas of *ummah*-unity in a world divided in nation-states and continuing discussions about the situation in the Muslim world during the annual hajj.

The *Mu'tamar*, however, did not meet during hajj every year; it met only occasionally. In 1931 it held a major conference in Jerusalem, mainly to discuss the threatening situation of the local population in Jerusalem and Palestine under the British Mandate. The conference failed to create awareness about the impending Zionist threat to Palestine. Attempts were again made to revitalize the organization after the creation of Pakistan in 1947. Yet the *Mu'tamar* failed to secure governmental participation in its efforts to achieve Muslim unity. The next experiment involving Muslim unity was relatively more successful than that of the *Mu'tamar*. In the late 1950s the threat from Arab nationalism and socialism became imminent. Following the military coup in Egypt, many Arab and Muslim countries witnessed military takeover. Faced with the challenge of Arab nationalism and socialism represented particularly by Egyptian President Jamal Abdul Nasir (1918-1970), the Saudi Crown Prince Faisal bin Abdul Aziz (1904-1975) came forward with the idea of Muslim unity based on the concept of *ummah*. One historian states that this development was, "to combat Nasser's radicalism and revolutionary socialism. [As for] Faisal ... [he] invoked Islam as a counter-ideology."[1] The

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1 Abdullah M. Sindi, "King Faisal and Pan-Islamism," in King Faisal and the Modernization of Saudi Arabia. Ed. William A. Beling. (London: Croom

government of Saudi Arabia sponsored an international conference in May 1962 in Makkah to discuss ways to fight secularism in the Arab and Muslim world. Both governmental and non-governmental representatives attended the conference. Although the conference did not enjoy official support from all Muslim majority countries, more government representatives participated in this conference than had participated in the *Mu'tamar* conferences earlier. It is here in this conference that Rabita was officially launched with *da'wah* activities as the primary objective of the organization. Several years later *Munazzamah al-Mu'tamar al-Islami* or Organization of the Islamic Cooperation (OIC) was founded in order to achieve its political goal, while *Rabita* remained a *da'wah*-based organization. Explaining the need for such activities the crown prince, who became king of Saudi Arabia in 1964, said:

> It is in these moments when Islam is facing many undercurrents that are pulling Muslims left and right, east and west, that we need time for more cooperation and closer ties to enable us to face all the problems and difficulties that obstruct our way as an Islamic nation, believing in God, His Prophet and His laws.[2]

It took some time for the organization to develop a program for civilizational dialogue. Through sponsoring a major conference in Madrid, Spain in July 2008, Rabita initiated a program for dialogue of civilizations. However before we analyze this program we shall describe the background of the development of this idea. This will enable us to scrutinize and explore a proper strategy for this purpose.

Origin of the Idea of Dialogue of Civilizations

The idea of dialogue of civilizations came in 1998 from the then Iranian president, Khatami, who had advanced this idea in the context of the clash of civilizations thesis. However, the clash of civilizations thesis too has its own background and it is necessary

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Helm, 1980), 186.
2   Ibid. 188.

to comprehend it properly in order to understand its present context. The term was first coined by British orientalist, Bernard Lewis, and was later espoused and popularized by Harvard professor, Samuel Huntington, in an attempt to provide a theoretical foundation for US policy makers at the end of the Cold War.

Some background information about Lewis might be useful to comprehend a better understanding of the issue. Lewis, who had served in the Intelligence Corps of the British Army during World War II, wrote *The Origin of Ismai'lism* as his Ph. D. dissertation. Following this he wrote *The Emergence of Modern Turkey (1961)* and a number of other books on nationalism and other developments in Muslim countries. In one of his works he predicted the defeat of Islam to nationalism in the modern world. Referring to the mission of the Prophet in 7th century Arabia he said, "Another such struggle is being fought in our own time - not against Al-Lat and Al-'Uzza (pre-Islamic objects of worship) – but a new set of idols called states, races, nations; this time it is the idols that seem to be victorious."[3] However, after witnessing the October (1973) war which was followed by a successful oil embargo against patrons of Israel, he revised his opinion in an article entitled "The Return of Islam" in 1976.[4] In 1990 Lewis again transformed his "return of Islam" thesis into a new thesis called the clash of civilizations which appears to have been conceived to create divisions between Islam and the West. In an article entitled "The Roots of Muslim Rage" he formulated his argument as follows:

> It should by now be clear that we are facing a mood and a movement far transcending the level of issues and policies and the governments that pursue them. This is no less than a clash of civilizations — the perhaps irrational but *surely historic reaction of an ancient rival against our Judeo-Christian heritage,* our secular present, and the worldwide expansion of

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3 Bernard Lewis, *The Middle East and the West,* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1967), 70.

4 Bernard Lewis, "The Return of Islam," in *Commentary.* (January 1976), 39-49.

both. It is crucially important that we on our side should not be provoked into an equally historic but also equally irrational reaction against that rival.[5]

Lewis clearly defines the relationship between the Islamic and Western civilizations as 'we' and 'they,' and in order to justify his thesis, he imposes this division on Muslims, and manipulates history of both civilizations. Arguing that Muslims believe in dividing the humanity into "themselves and others," he says: "These definitions not only define the outsider but also, and perhaps more particularly, help to define and illustrate our perception of ourselves."[6] In defining the Muslim understanding of the "other," his main aim appears to have been to develop a new interpretation of what constitutes Western identity. In fact throughout the article Lewis' interest seems to be to identify himself, a Jew born in Great Britain, with Western civilization and the US (according to Lewis, a daughter of Europe) as flag-bearers of Western civilization in the world today. One wonders why Lewis is so keen to identify himself with Western civilization. Could it be because Arnold Toynbee, an outstanding historian of Western civilization, had condemned Judaism and the state of Israel for causing a "disastrous wrong turn" for Christianity and Western civilization? According to one author:

> Toynbee called Judaism the "fossil relic of a dead civilization" that had taken Christianity and the West on a disastrous wrong turn, inspiring the West's crass materialism and "consummate virtuocity in commerce and finance," and its insistence on a morality of law and stern taboos rather than the working of the free spirit. Above all, the Jewish claim to being the chosen people had encouraged a Western attitude of arrogance toward other cultures, which Toynbee saw as the real origin of the Holocaust.[7]

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5 See, Bernard Lewis, "The Roots of Muslim Rage," The Atlantic Monthly, vol. 266, no. 3 (September 1990), 47–60. Emphasis added.

6 Ibid.

7 Arthur Herman, "Welcoming Defeat: Arnold Toynbee" in his The Idea of Decline in Western History (New York: The Free Press, 1997), 286

On his part, however, Lewis seems to have been interested in diverting Western anger towards Muslims, presumably in order to justify an ever expanding Israel in international politics and in securing US/Western support for that purpose. A *daw'ah* activist must understand this. The expression, *Judeo-Christian tradition*, which Lewis seems to cherish, is also misleading. For, there hardly exists any cogent reference to Judeo-Christian heritage in the context of Western civilization before late 19th century. At the end of the 19th century, Friedrich Nietzsche (d. 1900) used the phrase with a negative nuance to criticize lack of spiritual values in that tradition. However, the use of the phrase was deliberately cultivated in order to neutralize Hitler's aggression against the Jews in Europe in the middle of the 20th century.[8] It is also interesting to note that Lewis counsels his Western audience not to be provoked by the "irrational reaction against that rival."[9] Lewis seems to be exploiting the perceived superiority complex of some Western policy-makers.

The clash of civilizations thesis also relates to the question of the origin of western civilization and its relationship with the United States. Scholars have generally traced the intellectual roots of Western civilization not to Judeo-Christian heritage but rather to the Renaissance and the Enlightenment tradition. The founding fathers of the United States in particular never envisioned the US as an avowedly Christian state. In fact in one of the earliest formal international documents, the US declared that:

> As the Government of the United States of America is not, in any sense, founded on the Christian religion; as it has in itself no character of enmity against the laws, religion, or tranquillity, of Mussulmen; and, as the said States never entered into any war, or act of hostility against any Mahometan nation, it is declared by the parties, that no pretext arising from religious

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8 Information Clearing House, "The Myth of a Judaeo-Christian Tradition," *New Dawn Magazine* (February-March 1994.)

9 Bernard Lewis, "The Roots of Muslim Rage," *The Atlantic Monthly*, vol. 266, no. 3 (September 1990), 47–60.

opinions, shall ever produce an interruption of the harmony existing between the two countries.[10]

Our purpose in pointing this out here is not to stress that the Muslim-American relations in the early period of its history were cordial; rather, our purpose is to highlight that the US was not founded on the so-called Judeo-Christian tradition of Europe. Furthermore, one should note that John Tyler, the mid-19th century American President (1841–1845) whom Bernard Lewis quotes in his "The Roots of Muslim Rage" article of 1990 to demonstrate American tolerance, identified Jews along with Muslims and East Indians as strangers to America. Tyler wanted to grant all immigrants an "abode among us." Yet in the same article Lewis would later insist that he himself and the state of Israel were a part of Western civilization.

It is noteworthy that in the wake of Lewis' article a significant number of noted academicians, journalists and film makers came forth to support the clash of civilizations thesis. In this process Islam and the Muslim world moved to the centre stage of international politics. According to Lewis Muslims are enraged at Westerners and their "hatred is directed against us."[11] He elaborates his thesis by stressing that since most Muslims want to revive the teachings of the *Qur'an* and the Prophet they must have been directed by "a desire to reassert Muslim values and restore Muslim greatness" in the world today. Such "Muslim desire," according to Lewis, would pose a serious threat to the existing international order.[12]

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10 Article 11 in the Treaty of Tripoli "authored by American diplomat Joel Barlow in 1796, the following treaty was sent to the floor of the Senate, June 7, 1797, where it was read aloud in its entirety and unanimously approved. John Adams (US President 1797–1801), having seen the treaty, signed it and proudly proclaimed it to the Nation." See <http://www.stephenjaygould.org/ctr/treaty_tripoli.html>.

11 Bernard Lewis, "The Roots of Muslim Rage: Why so many Muslims resent the West. And why their bitterness will not easily be mollified," The Atlantic Monthly. Digital Edition. (September 1990). Hosted at: <mhtml:file//C:\Documents and Settings\student.C_06 Desktop\The Roots of Muslim Rage ...> (accessed on 30/6/2010).

12 Ibid.

This was a shrewd move on the part of Bernard Lewis. Obviously, he tried to promote his cause without making any reference to the conflict in Palestine which caused the 1973 war and the oil embargo that followed, and the unqualified US support for the Shah of Iran which was a major factor that led to a revolution in that country. In this context, the common Americans tended to find fault with the Muslims who are, according to Lewis, "convinced of the superiority of their culture," but are also "obsessed with the inferiority of their power."[13] The late Edward Said (d. 2003), a former professor of literature at Columbia University, rightly pointed out that Israel's identification with Western civilization was done "in the hope that more Americans and Europeans will see Israel as a victim of Islamic violence."[14] This scheme has been successful in so far as many others around the globe joined to highlight the danger of the "Islamic threat." Newspaper columnists, reporters, movie makers and even some novelists joined the academicians in a mission to demonstrate that "The Red Menace is Gone. But Here's Islam."[15] Islam became a theme of discussion among the policy-makers and the media circle. Again, a daw'ah activist in our contemporary world must be aware of these writings on Islam by orientalist scholars.

Huntington Espouses the Clash of Civilizations Thesis
The Harvard professor, Samuel P. Huntington, joined this debate with justification for his *Weltanschauung* by quoting a novelist! Like Bernard Lewis, Huntington too argued for the need of an enemy in order to define self-identity. On his part, the novelist Michael Dibdin, as quoted by Huntington, refers to a "Venetian nationalist demagogue" saying:

There can be no true friends without true enemies. Unless we hate what we are not, we cannot love what we are. These are

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13 Ibid.

14 Edward Said, *Covering Islam*, 2nd edn. (New York: Vintage, 1996), xxi

15 See, Sunday New York Times "Week in Review" which came up with this headline in January 21, 1996. Although this specific issue was published in 1996, the real campaign had begun much earlier.

the old truths we are painfully rediscovering ... Those who deny them deny their family, their heritage, their culture, their birthright, their very selves! They will not lightly be forgiven.[16]

Huntington goes on to express his conviction that "the unfortunate truth in these old truths cannot be ignored by statesmen and scholars."[17] Although the argument might appear naïve by scholarly standards, Huntington wants to inculcate the idea that "enemies are essential" for "people seeking identity." He echoes Bernard Lewis in identifying the potential enemies of Western civilization. In the post-Soviet era Huntington identifies mainly Islamic and occasionally Chinese civilizations as the enemies of Western civilization. The events of September 11, 2001 were perceived by many to corroborate Huntington's thesis.

Both Lewis and Huntington carried the clash of civilizations thesis further, churning out a spate of writings. Lewis wrote a series of books such as *What Went Wrong?: The Clash Between Islam and Modernity in the Middle East (2002), The Crisis of Islam: Holy War and Unholy Terror (2003)*,[18] and several articles, one of the latest of them bearing the title "Muslims about to take over Europe"[19] in the Jerusalem Post (January 29, 2007). As for Huntington, he reiterated his thesis in an article entitled "The Age of Muslim Wars" saying that "throughout the Muslim world, ... there exists a great sense of grievance, resentment, envy and hostility toward the West and its wealth, power and culture."[20] With the support of the Bush administration and its neo-conservative allies the thesis seemed to have become a reality in the early years of the 21st century. In

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16 Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, 20.

17 Ibid.

18 Bernard Lewis, *What Went Wrong? Western Impact and Middle Eastern Response* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); *The Crisis of Islam: Holy War and Unholy Terror* (New York: The Modern Library, 2003).

19 Bernard Lewis, "Muslims about to take over Europe," *Jerusalem Post* (January 29, 2007).

20 Samuel P. Huntington, "The Age of Muslim Wars," Special Davos Edition, *Newsweek* (December 2001–February 2002), 9.

order to understand the Muslims' "sense of grievance ... toward the West and its wealth,"[21] it would be necessary to highlight some of Huntington's observations about the Muslim world. A daw'ah activist should be aware of these points mainly because the mainstream media constantly spread these prejudiced views.

Huntington's Observations about the Muslim World

Huntington believes that a war in our contemporary times involving the core states of the world's major civilizations is "highly improbable but not impossible."[22] As he searches for enemies, Huntington provokes his readers to imagine a possible scenario of a "global civilizational war" in which "the United States, Europe, Russia and India ...become engaged in a truly global struggle against China, Japan, and most of Islam" in the year 2010. Such a conflict may spark and escalate "if aspiring Muslim core states compete to provide assistance to their coreligionists."[23] It should be noted, however, that even though Huntington puts China and Japan on the side of "most of Islam," the major part of his work discusses the potential for conflict between Muslims and the United States.

Why should "most of Islam" turn against "the United States, Europe, Russia and India" in the "global civilizational war?" Huntington believes that the reason for this would be that with the passage of time the Muslim world would become more Islamic and thus increase their potential threat to Western civilization in international politics:

> Beginning in the 1970s, Islamic symbols, beliefs, practices, institutions, policies, and organizations won increasing commitment and support throughout the world of 1 billion Muslims stretching from Morocco to Indonesia and from Nigeria to Kazakhstan. ... In 1995 every country with predominantly Muslim population, ... was more Islamic and

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21 See p. 23 below.
22 Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, 312.
23 Ibid., 312–318.

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Islamist culturally, socially and politically than it was fifteen years ago.[24]

In response to these developments Muslim "political leaders rushed to identify their regimes and themselves with Islam," observes Huntington:

> King Hussein of Jordan, convinced that secular governments had little future in the Arab world, spoke of the need to create "Islamic democracy" and a "modernizing Islam." King Hassan of Morocco emphasized his descent from the Prophet and his role as "Commander of the faithful." The Sultan of Brunei, not previously noted for Islamic practices, became "increasingly devout" and defined his regime as a "Malay Muslim monarchy." Ben Ali of Tunisia began regularly to invoke Allah in his speeches and "wrapped himself in the mantle of Islam" to check the growing appeal of Islamic groups. In the early 1990s Suharto explicitly adopted a policy of becoming "more Muslim." In Bangladesh the principle of "secularism" was dropped from the constitution in the mid 1970s, and by early 1990s the secular, Kemalist identity of Turkey was, for the first time, coming under serious challenge. To underline their Islamic commitment, governmental leaders — Ozal, Suharto, Karimov — hastened to their *hajh*.[25]

In order to convince his readers of the violent nature of the relationship between Islamic and Western civilizations, Huntington quotes Bernard Lewis, "a leading Western scholar of Islam," and argues that there exists "no less than a clash of civilizations." He provides empirical data from history, claiming that "50 percent of wars involving pairs of states of different religions between 1820 and 1929 were wars between Muslims and Christians."[26] Although a

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24 Ibid., 111.

25 Ibid., 115.

26 Ibid., 210. It is interesting that Huntington finds 50 percent of wars involving Muslims and Christians during this period. However, he forgets that during this

number of Muslims viewed European colonialism as a continuation of medieval crusades, in academic terms, Bernard Lewis' argument is quite trivial. This is because during the colonial period, when most of Africa and Asia were under the occupation of European powers, it was only incidental that most of Europe supposedly followed Christianity ('supposedly' because most Europeans were deists and followed no organized religion during the second half of the 19th century) and most of Africa and Asia were populated by Muslims. History books have recorded these conflicts as anti-colonial or nationalist struggles to achieve self-determination. History has also recorded that one of the major contributions of the United States to world civilization is that it introduced the idea of self-determination in modern times. The US not only fought a war of independence against European colonization, but it also pressured the world bodies such as the Paris Peace Conference of 1919, and later the United Nations, to undertake the diplomacy of decolonization.[27] Huntington now seems to want the United States to abandon its historical role to promote Enlightenment values such as freedom of conscience and respect for human dignity and to assume the historical burden of Europe's Christendom.

In support of his thesis, Huntington argues:

[i]t is hard to find statements by any Muslims, whether politicians, officials, academics, businesspersons, or journalists, praising Western values and institutions. They instead stress the differences between their civilization and Western civilization, the superiority of their culture, and the need to maintain the integrity of that culture against Western

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most volatile century in the fourteen centuries of Christian-Muslim relations the two communities taken together constituted at least 70 to 75 percent of the world population. It is also noteworthy that most members of the UN are either Christian or Muslim majority: out of the current 192 member states at least 169 have clear Christian or Muslim majority or a combination of both.

27 Although the US never officially joined the world body, President Woodrow Wilson's idea of national self-determination laid the foundation of the League of Nations.

onslaught. Muslims fear and resent Western power and the threat which this poses to their society and beliefs. They see Western culture as materialistic, corrupt, decadent, and immoral.[28]

Huntington believes that since the "1979 Iranian Revolution, an intercivilizational quasi war developed between Islam and the West,"[29] and in the near future "conceivably even more intensely anti-Western nationalisms could emerge, blaming the West for the failures of Islam."[30] Therefore, there is strong likelihood of a perpetual conflict between the two civilizations. Since the essential "problem for the West is not Islamic fundamentalism. It is Islam, a different civilization whose people are convinced of the superiority of their culture and are obsessed with the inferiority of their power."[31] A further examination of Huntington's thesis would clarify the nature of the relationship between the two civilizations.

Is there really a Clash between Islamic and Western Civilizations?
We raise questions about the validity of Huntington's thesis because his ideas are based on questionable premises. In order to demonstrate his thesis, Huntington manipulates history of both civilizations. Introducing the discussion on "Islam and the West" during the Clinton administration, Huntington suggests that:

> Some Westerners, including President Bill Clinton, have argued that the West does not have problems with Islam but only with violent Islamist extremists. Fourteen hundred years of history demonstrate otherwise. The relations between Islam and Christianity, both Orthodox and Western, have often been stormy. Each has been the other's Other.[32]

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28 Huntington, The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order, 213.
29 Ibid., 216.
30 Ibid., 121.
31 Ibid., 217.
32 Ibid, 209.

Huntington's knowledge of history of both Islamic and Western civilization seems to be naive. A thorough analysis of the relationship between Islam and Christianity is not within the scope of this paper. However, Huntington's claims demand some reflection on history. It is a known fact that the *Qur'an* does not single out Christians as enemies of Muslims. In fact the *Qur'an* encourages friendly relations with Christians not only because Christians believe in the existence of God, but also they share many prophets in their respective tradition. In fact when persecuted by their fellow tribesmen early Muslims sought refuge with the Christian king of Ethiopia. The *Qur'an* also favored the Byzantine Christians in their clash against the Persians. In this context one may refer to an academically more sound work by Columbia professor, Richard Bulliet, entitled *The Case for Islamo-Christian Civilization*, which argues a closer relation between Islam and Christianity in history than Bernard Lewis' "Judeo-Christian heritage;"[33] seems to suggest. In fact, one needs to examine Huntington's proposition that Christians and Muslims constitute "the other's Other." Let us first discuss the proposed thesis more closely.

The *Qur'an* does not identify any religious, linguistic or ethnic group as enemy; rather it strongly condemns those who hide the truth of the existence of One Lord and those who attempt to become lord over others. The *Qur'an* claims that these people spread corruption on earth in order to establish their lordship mainly over the poor and weak. It is well-known that the earliest enemies of Islam were the Prophet's own ethnic and linguistic fellow tribesmen – the Quraish. The message of Islam attracted followers not only from the Quraish, but from various groups of people, including Africans and Persians living in Arabia. In other words, Islam's message was universal and therefore, both its early followers and opponents belonged to the same cultural group. This is not to suggest that no Muslim ruler in history considered Christians as enemies; rather this is to show that there has not been any specific "Other" for Islam.

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33 Richard W. Bulliet, *The Case for Islamo-Christian Civilization* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

Furthermore, it is not true that Muslims always constituted the "Other" for Christians. Christianity was born as a reform movement within the Jewish tradition and the two communities became other's other during the early days of Christianity. Huntington romanticizes Christian history by suggesting that the "twentieth-century conflict between liberal democracy and Marxist-Leninism is only a fleeting and superficial historical phenomenon compared to the continuing and deeply conflictual relation between Islam and Christianity."[34] Perhaps the Cold war was too contemporary to be erased from the memory of his readers. Therefore, Huntington justifies the conflict inside the Western civilization. However, should one obliterate the memories of the Crusades against Orthodox Christians? Who fought the Hundred Years War (1337-1453), and the Thirty Year's War (1618-1648)? Who were the main participating forces in the two devastating world wars in the 20th century?

It is most alarming that Huntington ignores the motivating factors behind the American war of independence. There has been an explosion of references to the Judeo-Christian heritage of the American republic in the past decade or so. However, like many Enlightenment philosophers, the founding fathers of America were religious, but vehemently anti-clerical. Of course the founding fathers might have learned about the principles of human rights and human dignity from Judaism and Christianity, which in reality, constituted the fundamental forces of their motivation. These ideas are not only common to classical Greek tradition of Socrates and Plato, which Renaissance attempted to revive, but to Islam as well. How can a student of history fail to notice these essentials! However, this is not to suggest that there has not been any conflict between Muslims and Christians during the last fourteen hundred years of history; rather, this is to argue that Muslims and Christians have not been each other's "Other" throughout history as has been suggested by Huntington.

What was the general pattern of the conflict between

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34 Huntington, *Clash*, 209.

Islam and European Christendom in history? Again an in-depth analysis does not fall within the scope of this paper, but for the sake of our argument we shall formulate some observations on the issue. In fourteen hundred years of history one can definitely find fault with both parties. Invasions and incursions into one another's territories have occurred. Unfortunate events such as the atrocities committed by the Crusaders during the occupation of Jerusalem in 1096 have taken place, but now the Catholic Church has accepted the responsibility for past mistakes. As for the relationship during the European colonial penetration into the Muslim world, most European historians now acknowledge the inhuman and savage penetration pattern of the European colonizers into Asia and Africa. Huntington's claim that Muslims possess a "sense of grievance, resentment, envy and hostility toward the West and its wealth" is sickening. Huntington does not provide any evidence to support this accusation. If any Muslim resentment against European colonizers exists, it must be viewed in the proper historical context. In fact one will find some resentment among all Muslim and non-Muslim victims of European colonization because of the plunder of their territories by the colonizers. Describing the British plunder of wealth after the occupation of Muslim Bengal in 1757, one British historian noted that, "men made fortunes, returned to England, lost them and returned to India for more."[35] This was on top of millions of pounds worth of valuables and goods transferred by the East India Company, the official colonizer of the territory. Hence one needs to highlight the point here that the conflict between European colonizers and Muslims of Asia and Africa originated during the latter's struggle for freedom and self-determination, and not because of the "wealth, power, and culture" of the former. In fact pre-colonial Africa and Asia were wealthier than post-colonial Africa and Asia.

Now returning to the question – whether or not a clash of civilizations exists in international politics today – at the outset most observers of events during the early years of the 21st century

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35 Percival Spear, The Oxford History of India 4th ed. (Delhi, London: Oxford University Press, 1958), 474.

will answer in the affirmative. This is mainly because of the Bush Administration's policy toward the Muslim world. The "neo-conservatives" in the Bush Administration seem to have accepted Lewis and Huntington's twisted history to suit their desire to impose hegemony in various parts of the world. The events of September 11, 2001 seem to have come to support their design. The introduction of the Homeland Security Act of 2002, the rise of terrorist activities in various parts of the world, the stringent policies of the Bush Administration and a number of European countries toward Palestine, Iraq, Afghanistan and Somalia, and also because of policy toward Muslim charity organizations and travel restrictions on certain Muslim individuals, particularly those with relationship to institutions and organizations such as *Rabita*, have convinced many observers to conclude that this is happening because of a clash of civilizations in the world today. Yet if one examines some other developments and ponders upon the situation deeply, one finds many moderate voices around the world. For example, millions of Americans and Europeans came out on the streets opposing the invasion of Iraq in 2003. The opposition to continuous occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan is increasing not only in the Muslim world, but in Europe and America. It is highly unlikely that they would have done this had they believed in the idea of the clash of civilizations. Also the American voters had expressed their opposition to Bush Administration's Iraq policy in the mid-term election in 2006 and the general elections, particularly the election of Barack Obama, in 2008. Clearly these voters chose to express their displeasure with the administration's foreign policy and out of their motivation and commitments to fundamental values of the US constitution.

One could notice the fallacy of the thesis during the height of the Bush administration. On the occasion of the arrest of six Muslim imams at Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport in November 2006, Congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee, a senior member of the House Homeland Security Committee, said in an official statement that, "The Muslim American Community has grown in size and prominence, and is an integral part of the fabric of this nation. Muslim Americans share the same values and ideals that make this nation

great: Ideals such as discipline, generosity, peace and moderation."
She also said that, "Securing our homeland and protecting our
national security is a paramount national concern. But the tragedy
of 9/11 cannot be permitted to be used to justify racial profiling,
harassment, and discrimination of Muslim and Arab Americans.
Such conduct is not only deplorable, but also undermines our civil
liberties and impedes our success in the global war on terror."
Therefore Huntington's argument that "the clash of civilizations
is tribal conflict on a global scale" is not a valid argument. Yet in
international politics Huntington's suggestion that a "war between
groups from different civilizations, most likely involving Muslims on
one side and non-Muslims on the other"[36] seem to dominate the mind
of many academicians, journalists and policy makers. However, we
would like to believe that human beings have become more civilized
with the passage of time, and like Sheila Jackson Lee, they will not
subscribe to tribalism, but rather to common civilizational values to
save humanity.[37]

How to Turn the Clash into Dialogue and Co-existence of Civilizations

Common civilizational values must become foundation for
civilizational dialogue which would ultimately lead to co-existence
of civilizations. Peace on the basis of human dignity and co-existence
of civilizations is the demand of Islamic civilization. Therefore those
who are interested in *da'wah* activities should look for common
values, particularly in the present context, between Islamic and
Western civilizations. Every activist interested in interfaith or inter-
civilizational dialogue must keep what has been called "the golden
rule" – "like for your brother or neighbor what you like for yourself"
– in mind. This rule is found in almost all religions. Every point of
disagreement must be settled on the basis of human dignity and respect

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36 Huntington, *Clash*, 312.
37 In this context Collin Powel's question "what was wrong for a Muslim to the
   president of the United States" in response to another question whether or not
   Barack Obama was a Muslim is noteworthy. See Los Angeles Times. October
   19, 2008.

for each other. The conflicts must be encountered intellectually on the basis of common human, civilizational and *Qur'anic* values such as *amānah* (trust), *'adālah* (justice), *shūra* (consultation). Interestingly all these values are common in all civilizations and originated with divine guidance. These discussions must be open and transparent so that common people all over the world know whether these discussions are violating fundamental values of their civilizations. At this stage of our discussion one should compare and highlight how some of these values are also enshrined in the words of the American Declaration of Independence.

American constitutional jurisprudence expressly rests on doctrines of public powers held in trust to accomplish justice which is defined as solicitude for the lives, liberties and happiness of the people. The Federalist Papers[38] put it this way: "The aim of every political constitution is, or ought to be, first to obtain for rulers men who possess most wisdom to discern, and most virtue to pursue, the common good of the society; and in the next place to take the most effectual precautions for keeping them virtuous whilst they continue to hold their public trust" (Federalist No. 57).

The American Constitution refers to offices held under its authority as "offices of trust and profit." In the Federalist Papers, written to explain and defend the proposed federal constitution it is said, for example, that "the federal and state governments are in fact but different agents and trustees of the people, constituted with different powers and designed for different purposes" (Federalist No 46). Ultimate power resides in the people alone; they are sovereign. Subordinate power is delegated to government offices. The Tenth Amendment to the Constitution provides that "The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the states, are reserved to the states respectively or to the people." The Federalist Papers make it clear that "every act of a

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38 Federalist Papers are articles published in 1787-1788 for discussions on the US constitution which became the primary source for interpretation of the constitution.

delegated authority, contrary to the tenor of the commission under which it is exercised, is void. No legislative act, therefore, contrary to the Constitution can be valid. To deny this, would be to affirm that the deputy is greater than his principal; that the servant is above his master..." (Federalist No 78).

James Madison (4th president) wrote that "It will not be denied that power is of an encroaching nature, and that it ought to be effectually restrained from passing the limits assigned to it" (Federalist No 48). Thus constitutionalism requires more than written formulas; it requires constant vigilance against the wiles of ambition and corruption. "A mere demarcation on parchments of the constitutional limits of the several departments is not a sufficient guard against those encroachments which lead to a tyrannical concentration of all the powers of government in the same hands."

The remedy for having real safeguards against real tyranny was put in the hands of different offices of government, each able to check other but each also needing support from the other. "Ambition must be made to counteract ambition." The private interest of individuals – a great and ceaseless natural power - is to be enlisted as a sentinel watching out for public right.

"If men were angels, no government would be necessary." The Federalist Papers in their presentation of American constitutionalism recognized that prevention of tyranny is applied to social conditions as well. Just as power of government should not be overly concentrated, so too should the power of any one part of society be prevented from exercising a tyrannical might over others in society. That balance of powers for the benefit of all without invidious discrimination was defined as justice, the fitting end of government (Federalist No 51). "The passions therefore not the judgment of the public would sit in judgment. But it is the reason, alone, of the public, which ought to control and regulate the government." For legislators, they need upright intentions, sound judgment, and a certain degree of knowledge. The US constitution recognizes that the use of wise judgment is necessary for good government. And the Constitution

requires for the consent of the legislature to the proposals of the executive to mandate a form of *shūra* or consultation in the use of power for public purposes. Reliance on a process of deliberation was justified in the Federalist Papers by the observation that "As there is a certain degree of depravity in mankind which requires a certain degree of circumspection and distrust, so there are other qualities in human nature which justify a certain portion of esteem and confidence" (Federalist No 55).[39]

In this respect the Madrid Declaration made at the World Conference on Dialogue organized by *Rabita* in July 2008, which was attended by the kings of Saudi Arabia and Spain, is relevant. After referring to UN declarations in 1995 as being the "Year of Tolerance," and 2001 the "Year of Dialogue of Civilizations,"[40] the conference adopted the following recommendations:

- To reject theories that call for the clash of civilizations and cultures and to warn of the danger of campaigns seeking to deepen conflicts and destabilize peace and security.
- To enhance common human values, to cooperate in their dissemination within societies and to solve the problems that hinder their achievement.
- To disseminate the culture of tolerance and understanding through dialogue so as to have a framework for international relations through holding conferences and symposia, as well as developing relevant cultural, educational and media programs.
- To agree on international guidelines for dialogue among the followers of religions and cultures through which moral values and ethical principles, which are common denominators among such followers, so as to strengthen stability and achieve prosperity for all humans.

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39 For a comprehensive discussion on similarities between Islamic, Western and Scientific tradition on good governance, see Abdullah al-Ahsan and Stephen B Young, Guidance for Good Governance: Explorations in Qur'anic, Scientific and Cross-Cultural Approaches. (Kuala Lumpur: IIUM Press, 2008). These excerpts have been taken from the second chapter written by Stephen B Young.
40 See www.un-documents.net/dpt.hml. Accessed on July 5, 2010.

- To work on urging governmental and non-governmental organizations to issue a document that stipulates respect for religions and their symbols, the prohibition of their denigration and the repudiation of those who commit such acts.[41]

These are excellent recommendations, but participants in civilizational dialogue must also be acquainted with the beliefs and history of all civilizations. It is not too difficult to identify the divine origin of all civilizations in history. A successful inter-civilizational dialogue will be possible only when a clear understanding of all beliefs is reached. One Christian theologian made an interesting observation in this regard. He refutes the general perception about interfaith or inter-civilizational dialogue that in order to be engaged in such activities one needs to give up the faith in his or her own tradition. To the contrary, he argues, that participants of interfaith dialogue must be well-versed with their own religious tradition. Holding Turkish scholar, Badiuzzaman Said Nursi (1878-1960), as a model for interfaith dialogue; he argues that, "every religious tradition needs a Said Nursi. The future of the world depends on all of us discovering in our rootedness a commitment to dialogue and living together."[42]

Conclusion
The current international situation clearly suggests that holding of civilizational dialogue is imperative for everybody who is interested in peaceful co-existence. Since the clash of civilizations thesis has brought followers of Islamic and Western civilizations into a collision course, it is the responsibility of both – members of the Muslim community and the Western world – to undertake initiatives for dialogues and exchanges of ideas on common issues. *Rabita*'s call for civilizational dialogue is just one project: many more are needed. Defenders of these initiatives, however, need to comprehend history

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41 See www.saudi-usrelations.org/articles/2008/ioi/080719-madrid-declarations. html. Accessed on July 5, 2010.

42 Ian S. Markham, Engaging with Bediuzzaman Said Nursi: A Model of Interfaith Dialogue. (London: Ashgate, 2009), 145.

of both civilizations before they undertake such programs. They need to understand both positive and negative forces in international politics. Only a profound understanding of these forces would enable them to conduct successful dialogues.