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# BEDER JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES

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ISSUE:3 VOLUME: 1 SPRING 2014







# HËNA E PLOTË BEDËR UNIVERSITY

## About the Journal

Beder Journal of Humanities (BJH) is a peer-reviewed journal published by Hëna e Plote Beder University Faculty of Humanities.

The main objective of BJH is to provide international scholars an intellectual platform for the exchange of contemporary research.

The journal publishes research papers in the fields of Humanities such as Anthropology, Communications, Education, Economics, Environmental Sciences, History, Health Sciences, International Relations, Law, Literature, Philosophy, political Science, Psychology, Religious Studies, and Sociology.

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### Journal Details:

#### Publisher:

Hëna e Plotë Bedër University, Faculty of Humanities

#### Publication Frequency: Biannual

ISSN: 2306-6083

Email: [bjh@beder.edu.al](mailto:bjh@beder.edu.al)

Phone: +35542419200

Address: Rr.Jordan Misja, Tirana, Albania





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## Editorial

**Prof.Dr. Ayhan Tekines**

Journals are nurseries for ideas to sprout. Sometimes, new ideas flourish and grow up first time in journals. Critiques and commentaries of society encourage authors to revise and develop their ideas and opinions.

With the recent developments in vocal and visual media, it is very easy to reach speeches of various intellectuals. Although these speeches have some unique features, writing always preserve its advantages like protection of knowledge and text critique. As keeps and protects information and ideas, writing reproduces itself with additions. It can also be deconstructed. With these characteristics, it is impossible to put aside writxxxxxing.

Since we believe the importance of journal publishing in writing culture, we present third edition of our journal. In this edition, articles on peace have a wide coverage. We hope that these articles, selected from the conference of “Peacebuilding”, will make significant contribution to our intellectual world.

Peace has always worthy place in human life. However, dissemination of “peace culture” is much more important to protect peace to prevent conflicts.

Globalization caused that everything have opportunity to reach almost every corner of the world indifferent to whether it is good or evil. Since today goodness has great opportunities to expanse like evil, we spread on effort to support every initiative on behalf of peace.

In this edition of our journal, there are articles treating east-west synthesis regarding peace. First article is “Can ethnocratic media afford the expression of cultural diversity?” written by Artan Fuga, notable intellectual of Albania.

Moreover, you have opportunity to reach President of Ipek University Ali Fuat Bilkan’s article on the relation of peace and language. In his article, Mr. Bilkan examines the importance of spoken language’s decontamination from vulgar and impolite wordings by presenting examples.

In the article “Promoting a culture of Peace and Tolerance through Education”, İbrahim Özdemir, prominent with his researches on education, approaches to peace from the aspect of globalization and education.

We attach great importance to the contributions of different countries’ intellectuals. There are articles of Gapur Oziev and Fatmir Shehu from Malaysia. Gapur Oziev made significant contribution with his article on the influence of socio-culture and religion on peacebuilding Ingushetia, from Caucasus which shows resemblance to Balkans with some aspects.

Our journal increases its quality with every edition. We hope to meet you with richer content in next edition.

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Fatmir Shehu\*

## Inter-Religious Dialogue and Contemporary Peace-Building: From Hostility to Mutual Respect and Better Understanding

### Abstract

*The misunderstanding and misinterpretation of religion and its teachings by its followers and others have given the impression that religion is the sole source of all past and current conflicts faced by humanity. This assumption is perhaps encouraged due to the limited knowledge of other religions and the wrong impression spread because of peoples' ignorance of their own religion. The media presents religion with stories focused exclusively on hatred, war-making, and devastation. However, the value of peace has been considered as the core principle in the teachings of major world religions. The ongoing inter-religious activities initiated by both, religious individuals and institutions have shown very clearly that religion stands for peace and not war. This research sees inter-religious dialogue as the most important element on which the notion of peacebuilding stands. This study attempts to show that inter-religious activities are a great resource for building and sustaining peace between people of different socio-cultural and religious backgrounds in the long term. The paradigm of inter-religious dialogue is to provide people with a better understanding of religion and its teachings and should shift their views from hostility and enmity to mutual respect and better understanding. Descriptive and analytical methods will be employed by the researcher with the intention of providing findings that will serve as solid solutions for the contemporary conflicts witnessed by our contemporary societies.*

**Key Terms:** *Inter-religious dialogue, peacebuilding, change, paradigm, mutual respect, better understanding*

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## Introduction

The world of 21<sup>st</sup> century is witnessing many unpredicted changes that have taken place in economic-political-cultural-regional-religious aspects. Such changes have created in the mind of many people, i.e., religious or irreligious, a dilemma about the continuity of peace and harmony in the years to come. The futuristic world peace between fellow men of different socio-economic-cultural-religious backgrounds depends on their genuine willingness to read, know and understand of one another's traditions, cultures, and religions.

The call for a sincere dialogue, conversation, or interaction between religious and irreligious people in general and Muslims and Christians in particular (since these two communities are making the majority involved in inter-religious dialogue activities), is hence, considered by this study as the most crucial means to build peace and harmony. In this sense, inter-religious dialogue is seen by many contemporary scholars and clergies of different religions namely Hans Küng, Leonard Swidler, John Hick, 'Ismā'il Rājī al-Fārūqī, Fazlu Rahman, Wilfred Cantwell Smith, etc., as the most important means to bring humanity out from the contemporary intellectual and economic crises, social ills, intra-religious and inter-religious conflicts.

Hans Küng (Catholic Christian) states that —there is no world peace without peace among religions, no peace among religions without dialogue between the religions, and no dialogue between the religions without accurate knowledge of one another.||<sup>1</sup> In this sense, inter-religious dialogue is of the greatest importance not just for politicians concerned with conflicts in the Near East, but for all human beings involved in the ordinary business life. Leonard Swidler maintains that dialogue between the adherents of different religions is the only way to move forward or to change the mode of religious communication from isolation to openness.<sup>2</sup> For 'Ismā'il Rājī al-Fārūqī the aim of the inter-religious dialogue is —conversion; not conversion to my, your or his religion, culture, mores or political regime, but to *the* truth,<sup>3</sup> which provides absolute harmony between the inner and the outer, religious and secular, sacred and profane aspects of people's life.

David Little and Scott Appleby believe that religion plays a vital role in peacebuilding process which includes “not only conflict management and resolution efforts on the ground, but also the efforts of people working at a distance from actual sites of deadly conflict,... legal advocates of religious human rights, scholars conducting research relevant to cross-

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<sup>1</sup> Hans Küng, “Christianity and world religions: Dialogue with Islam,” in *Muslims in dialogue: The evolution of a dialogue*, ed. Leonard Swidler (U.S.A.: The Edwin Mellen Press, vol. 3, 1992), 251. (pp. 249-272.)

<sup>2</sup> Leonard Swidler, “From the age of monologue to the age of global dialogue,” in *Religions in dialogue: from theocracy to democracy*, ed. Alan Race and Ingrid Shafer (England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2002), 7-16.

<sup>3</sup> Ataulloh Siddiqui, ed., *Islam and other faiths* (U.K.: The Islamic Foundation, 1998), 249.

cultural and interreligious dialogue, and theologians and ethicists within the religious communities who are probing and strengthening their traditions of nonviolence.<sup>4</sup>

According to Tom Keating, peacebuilding —calls for a radical transformation of society away from structures of coercion and violence to an embedded culture of peace.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, peacebuilding as a concept and paradigm has been initiated and promoted by many governmental and nongovernmental bodies as a means by which an inside or outside body can assist the people who are involved in a social or religious conflict as well as to construct a culture of peace for post conflict societies.<sup>6</sup> In this sense, interreligious dialogue for peacebuilding is an “important approach that places the practice of dialogue at the heart of peacebuilding. It fosters the (re)building of trust relations and enhances social cohesion. It increases awareness about how to improve human interactions, both locally and globally, by recognizing the importance of integrating religious identities into intergroup dialogue.”<sup>7</sup>

Looking at the importance of religion and inter-religious dialogue as such, religious bodies and institutions have initiated as well as promoted through intra-religious and inter-religious dialogues friendly communication and peaceful coexistence between the adherents of the same religion and the adherents of different religions. Although people of different religious, cultural and ideological backgrounds have involved themselves in dialogue a long time since their existence, yet the modern understanding of the concept of inter-religious dialogue is primarily a phenomenon of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which has demanded the mobilization of the resources of great religions for dialogue and peace.<sup>8</sup>

This study attempted to reveal the role of inter-religious dialogue in peacebuilding. The hostility created as a result of one’s ignorance towards his/her own religion and other’s religions or tradition can be replaced with mutual respect and better understanding promoted by genuine inter-religious dialogue. The nature, scope and the peacebuilding paradigm of inter-religious dialogue as initiated by both religious individuals and institutions whose concern is to build peace and harmony between people of different

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<sup>4</sup> David Little and Scott Appleby, “A Moment of Opportunity? The Promise of Religious Peacebuilding in an Era of Religious and Ethnic Conflict,” in *Religion and Peacebuilding*, ed. Harold Coward and Gordon S. Smith (U.S.A.: State University of New York Press, 2004), 5. (pp. 1-26)

<sup>5</sup> Tom Keating and W. Andy Knight, “Introduction: Recent Developments in Post Conflict Studies – Peacebuilding and Governance,” in *Building Sustainable Peace*, ed. Tom Keating and W. Andy Knight (Canada: the University of Alberta Press, 2004) xxxiv. pp. xxxi-lxii)

<sup>6</sup> See Keating and Knight, “Introduction:...,” xxxi.

<sup>7</sup> Ina Merdjanove and Patrice Brodeur, *Religion as a Conversation Starter: Inter-Religious Dialogue for Peacebuilding in the Balkans* (U.S.A – New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2009), 10.

<sup>8</sup> See Jørgen N. Nielson, “the contribution of inter-faith dialogue towards a culture of peace,” *Current Dialogue* 36 (2000), accessed April 28, 2014. <http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/interreligious/cd36-06.html>

socio-political-cultural-religious backgrounds. This kind of interaction is required today more than ever.

## I. The Nature of Inter-Religious Dialogue

The nature of inter-religious dialogue is very genuine. It promotes mutual respect and better understanding between people of deferent religious and cultural backgrounds whose concern is to promote peaceful coexistence among themselves and humanity at large. Inter-religious dialogue is very inclusive in nature as it makes people transcend the conflicts that have resulted from their religious divergence. In this sense, the main objective of inter-religious dialogue is peace.

In all inter-religious dialogue activities peace can be promoted and sustained by the rejection of exclusivism and the promotion of inclusivism. The former, if practised by the dialogue participants will lead to hostility, violence, hatred, and the latter, if practiced by the dialogue participants will create a climate of friendly relationship where mutual respect and better understanding shall prevail.

### - *One's exclusivism promotes hostility, violence, and hatred:*

One's exclusivism if it is not managed properly can create real chaos and disaster prevailed by hostility, violence, and hatred. There are at least three related meanings for exclusivism.<sup>9</sup> *First*, exclusivism deals with logical claims based on the law of non-contradiction made by two religions which are incompatible in nature. For instance, the monotheism of Islam, Judaism and Christianity, and the polytheism of Shintoism and Hinduism, cannot be true at the same time. Thus, one of them has to be considered as a true claim. *Second*, exclusivism refers to a religion's claim that it is the only true way to God, or the only way of salvation. *Finally*, all religions, even Hinduism, which acknowledges the existence of many ways to God as valid, are exclusivist in a manner claiming to present us with a worldview that is universally true and accurate.<sup>10</sup>

Furthermore, exclusivism<sup>11</sup> with respect to the "Truth" is the view that true religious claims are found only among the doctrines and teachings of the home religion or within the one religion. Thus, those who belong to and are keen to the home religion and follow its teachings

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<sup>9</sup> See Daniel B. Clendenin, *Many Gods, many Lords: Christianity encounters world religions* (Michigan, U.S.A.: Baker Books, 1995), 29. See also Kate Zebiri, *Muslims and Christians face to face* (Oxford: Oneworld Publication, 2000), 34.

<sup>10</sup> See John B. Cobb, "Beyond pluralism," in *Christian uniqueness reconsidered: The myth of a pluralistic theology of religions*, ed. Gavin D'Costa (New York: Orbis Books, 1990), 88-89.

<sup>11</sup> For more information look at Fatmir Shehu, *Nostra Aetate and the Islamic Perspective of Inter-religious Dialogue* (Malaysia-K.L.-IIUM: IIUM Press, 1<sup>st</sup> ed., 2008).

are eligible to attain salvation.<sup>12</sup> Religions are exclusive in the sense that they adopt as uniquely true a particular worldview that is, if not logically incompatible with, certainly very different from other worldviews.<sup>13</sup>

Inter-religious dialogue does not reject the exclusivism that deals with the fundamental principles of one's own religion. Rather, it rejects the exclusivism manifested by the dialogue participants in their inter-religious engagement promoting hostility, violence, and hatred. It is a fact that both, Muslims and Christians engaging in dialogue, feel an obligation: (1) to safeguard the particular revelation (which they believe to have come from God); and (2) to be loyal to their own religious community. Indeed, Muslims, like many Christians, have a fear of risking their faith if they enter into dialogue with others.

The exclusive approach often taken by some religious and irreligious people, through their religions/traditions/cultures to build walls of disconnection and isolation between themselves and others, has been a major barrier for peacebuilding in many countries. Such exclusive approach has been the main cause of the past and ongoing conflicts and problems in Palestine, Bosnia Herzegovina, Chechnya, Kosovo, Afghanistan, Iraq, Lebanon, Philippines, Syria and elsewhere.

The nature of inter-religious dialogue rejects exclusivism through its entire activities, and the dialogue participants have to avoid any form of activity that promotes exclusivism. Also, any kind of exclusivism promoted by one's ego-centric worldview on which his/her judgment of others stand, is completely rejected by the very nature of inter-religious dialogue, mutual respect and better understanding, which is very essential to peacebuilding.

- ***One's inclusivism promotes peace and harmony:***

In order to build peace between people, inter-religious dialogue rejects **exclusivism or isolation** to one's own worldview and **promotes inclusiveness or openness**<sup>14</sup> not in the sense that a participant of inter-religious dialogue has to embrace other's religion, tradition or culture. Rather, he/she has to maintain and enhance his/her own identity, while engaging with others. Such openness raised by inter-religious dialogue might be opposed by those who do not have sufficient knowledge of their own and others' religion/tradition/culture.

The inclusiveness or openness promoted by interreligious dialogue will not affect the belief system of the dialogue participants. Rather, it will open rooms for improvement, enhancement of one's own religious teachings and having the right knowledge of others' religions teachings. In an inter-religious engagement, the dialogue participants have to dialogue with one another freely in that sense that each one of them can give accurate

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<sup>12</sup> Paul J. Griffiths, *Problems of religious diversity* (U.S.A.: Blackwell Publishers, Inc., 2001), xiv-xv.

<sup>13</sup> See Clendenin, *Many Gods, many Lords*, 29.

<sup>14</sup> For more information please refer to Fatmir Shehu, *Nostra Aetate*.

information about his/her own tradition/culture/religion and at the same time acquiring the right knowledge of others' traditions/cultures/religions.

Therefore, inter-religious dialogue must begin with sufficient openness (where others are accepted as they are and not as we want them to be) in order to value the distinctiveness of the other person and a willingness to listen to what they have to share, without rejecting the faithfulness (being exclusive) to one's own tradition.<sup>15</sup>

Such inter-religious engagement involves high cooperation with good esteem and mutual respect leading to the understanding of the others' beliefs between the participants. Also, it involves a genuine reciprocal process, in which two parties stand on an equal footing of readiness to listen, as well as to be heard,<sup>16</sup> and therefore, implement the two-sided project of interaction.

In this two-sided project, each participant have to enter into a dialogue not only with his partner across the faith line - the Christian with the Muslim - but also with his co-religionists, with his fellow Muslims, or Christians, in order to share with them the fruits of such inter-religious dialogue. This way will enable the dialogue participants to: (1) learn and change their attitudes; (2) understand each other's systems of belief; and (3) open rooms for mutual respect and better religious understanding.<sup>17</sup> All this has to be done with the true sense of inclusiveness or openness to one another's worldview without polemics or refutations, which is against the true nature of inter-religious dialogue.

Peacebuilding can be a reality when dialogue is applied to different aspects of people's life. Thus, the dialogue denotes a conversation or interaction between two or more persons or groups who enter into this process though, by means of, their worldview (religion) and convictions in order to arrive at an agreement based on mutual respect and better understanding.

## II. Scope of Inter-Religious Dialogue

The scope of interreligious dialogue is various or comprehensive. Inter-religious dialogue comprehends topics and issues of various natures. But, the most important thing about the scope of such dialogue is that it forbids the dialogue participants to engage themselves in promoting violence and hostility, instead it commands them to find proper ways that lead to peace, harmony and coexistence.

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<sup>15</sup> Redmond Fitzmaurice, "The Roman Catholic Church and inter-religious dialogue; Implications for Christian-Muslim relations," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, vol. 3:1 (1992): 83-84 passim, 97, 107.

<sup>16</sup> See Maurice Wiles, *Christian theology and inter-religious dialogue* (London: SCM Press, 1992), 4-5.

<sup>17</sup> See Leonard Swidler, "Religious pluralism and ecumenism from a Christian perspective," in *Religious issues and inter-religious dialogues: An analysis and sourcebook of developments since 1945*, ed. Charles Wei-hsun Fu and Gerhard E. Spiegler (USA: Green Wood Press, 1989), 338.

Dialogue in general does not comprehend the verbal communication only between the adherents of World Traditions. Rather, it comprehends: (1) **People's dialogue of life** - peaceful and respectful co-existence, including active participation in one another's lives, between people of different races, cultures, and religions; (2) **People's social dialogue** - cooperation between people of different races and cultures in socio-economic enterprises; (3) **People's spiritual dialogue** - exchange of religious experiences and practices by people of different cultures and religions; and (4) **People's inter-religious engagement** where conversation and explanation by experts and students of different religions about the teachings and practices of their faiths, shall take place.<sup>18</sup>

It is of a great significance to emphasize that the scope of inter-religious dialogue does not cover the theological issues related to world religions. Rather, it comprehends all aspects of people's life. To have a better understanding about the scope of inter-religious dialogue, it is necessary to look at religious resources that are presented through the "four main elements of which religions consist: religious ideas (content of belief); religious practices (ritual behaviour), social organisation (religious community), and religious – or spiritual – experiences (psychic attitudes)."<sup>19</sup> All these various dimensions of religion if presented properly by its adherents can be used in peacebuilding process.

To discuss themes of comparative or critical nature in inter-religious engagements, will completely divert the nature of this dialogue. It will lead people to a climate prevailed by hostility and hatred instead of peace, respect, care of, and harmony. The main objective of themes discussed in inter-religious forums is to solve problems and not converting to the faith of the other party or to make others doubt about their own faith. Also, it is to "help all concerned to find a way to become better in themselves and to improve their relations with one another, so as to make the world as a whole a better place in which to live."<sup>20</sup>

Thus, the scope of inter-religious dialogue includes multiplicity of themes that the dialogue participants and the representatives of both, religion and politics see it of a great importance to be discussed. Also, the most important theme to be discussed in such dialogue should be on the "very down-to-earth level, the existential level on which man comes face to face with the real problems of life and is actively engaged in trying to solve them."<sup>21</sup>

The themes discussed by the dialogue participants in inter-religious dialogue activities should be of a diverse nature as such dialogue involves diversity of people. Thus, the scope of inter-religious dialogue depends on the form and the dialogue participants' level of

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<sup>18</sup> Mathieu Geijbels, "Mission and dialogue," *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue*, vol. 10:1 (2000): 34-35.

<sup>19</sup> Gerrie ter Haar, "Religion: Source of Conflict or Resource for Peace?" in *Bridge or Barrier: Religion, Violence, and Visions for Peace*, ed. Gerrie ter Haar and James J. Busuttill (The Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2005), 22 (pp. 3-34).

<sup>20</sup> *Guidelines for a Dialogue between Muslims and Christians* (Edizioni Ancora – Roma, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1969), 9.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.



interests, understanding, and knowledge.<sup>22</sup> For instance, if a Muslim enters into dialogue with his Christian neighbour or any follower of other religions, the theme of discussion will be related to their day-to-day life. Perhaps, they will talk about their careers, families, social ills, and so on. Thus, the focus will not be directly related to their religious issues. Unless, the Muslim would like to know about the religious approach of his Christian neighbour towards the contemporary conflicts between Muslims and Christians or others, and so on.

The topic of their dialogue depends on their level of interest, understanding and the knowledge they would like to share or acquire from one another. The topic can be decided on the bases that at the end of the day both neighbours can achieve peace, security and tranquillity. I would like to suggest here, that inter-religious studies provided for both, the Muslim and his Christian neighbour should provide for them the basis of peacebuilding between one another and make them aware of sensitive points that lead to hostility.

It can be concluded that the scope of inter-religious dialogue should cover issues that will not create conflicts between the dialogue participants as well as the members of contemporary world society. The focus of discussion in such inter-religious engagement should be on the issues, which nature has to –increase mutual knowledge and decrease tensions between religious groups, and to create a shared platform to present the represented beliefs in a positive or constructive way towards society at large.<sup>23</sup> For the sake of peacebuilding between people of different religious backgrounds, the scope of inter-religious seminar or forum should be decided by the organizing committee as well as those who hold religious and political authority.

### III. Peacebuilding Paradigm of Inter-Religious Dialogue

The contemporary material development presented through the advancement of industry, infrastructure and information technology is considered as the major resource for peace-building and harmony between the members of modern society characterised by diversity. In fact, the contemporary scientific development has eased people's lives and created many good opportunities and benefits for them, their families, societies, and countries on the one hand. It has created many challenges for the people, their traditions, customs, cultures, religions, and their very human nature, on the other one.

In a society characterised by diversity of tradition, culture, and religion, people do interact with one another as well as influence one another on the bases of their traditions,

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<sup>22</sup> For more information about the themes of inter-religious or inter-faith dialogue refer Muhammad Shafiq and Mohammed Abu-Nimer, *Interfaith Dialogue: A Guide for Muslims* (U.S.A.-Herndon: The International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2007), 34.

<sup>23</sup> Anne Hege Grung, "Inter-religious or Trans-religious: Exploring the Term 'Inter-Religious' in a Feminist Postcolonial Perspective," *the Journal of Inter-Religious Studies* 3 (2014), 12. (pp. 11-14)



cultures and religions. In order to promote peace among the members of our contemporary diverse society, it is required from both, officials representative and followers of the major world religions in general and the Christians and Muslims (who constitute the majority of religious population in both, west and east) as well as political officials, to be open to each other by the way of amicable inter-religious dialogue. Therefore, it is very important to mention here that only through implementing the inter-religious dialogue between Muslims and Christians can one hope for peace, justice, freedom, trust, mutual respect and better spiritual understanding.

Peacebuilding paradigm of inter-religious initiated by both, Christians and Muslims, has been achieved in line with the inspiration from their very religious sources – the Bible and Qur'an introduced to them by God through the chosen ones among the people, who are called Prophets. Religious scholars, clergies and institutions have paved the way for the construction of inter-religious dialogue and its peacebuilding paradigm that aims to construct a friendly relationship between world traditions' adherents in general and Muslims and Christians in particular prevailed by mutual respect and better understanding.

- ***Qur'an and Bible as Inspiring Sources for nurturing Inter-religious Dialogue:***

Muslims and Christians have been inspired from the text of the very revelations sent to them by God through Qur'an and Bible. As far as the very human nature is concerned, both scriptures look at it from a very monotheistic perspective regarding the relationship between people regardless of their differences. Based on the monotheistic perspective, people all come from God alone, regardless of race, nationality and religious beliefs, and they are descended from one **pair of parents**: *Ādam* (Adam) and *Ḥawā'* (Eve).

The Holy Qur'an states: "*O mankind! We [God] created you from a single (pair) of male and female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other (not that you may despise each other). Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) the most righteous of you.*"<sup>24</sup> "*And when I have perfected man's creation, I breathed into him of My spirit.*" [al-Qur'an, al-Ḥijr: 29]; "*We have honoured the sons of Adam; ... given them for sustenance things good and pure; and conferred on them special favours, above a great part of Our creation.*" [al-Qur'an, al-Isrā': 70]; "*We have indeed created man in the best of moulds*|| [al-Qur'an, al-Tīn: 4]; —*Then We said to the Angels bow down to Adam*" [al-Qur'an, al-A'rāf: 11]; and "*Behold, thy Lord said to the angels: I will create a vicegerent on earth*" [al-Qur'an, al-Baqarah: 30]; and "*whom I have created with My hands?*" [al-Qur'an, Ṣād: 75].<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> A. Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur'an: Text, translation and commentary* (Maryland: Amana Corporation, 1989), *Sūrah al-Ḥujurāt*: 13.

<sup>25</sup> This does not mean that man is equal with God; rather, man is a subservient of God and His deputy on earth, who has to worship God alone and serve other fellow man according to the transcendental code of ethics prescribed in the revelation.

The Holy Bible conveys the same message: “*God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness....*” [Genesis 1:26]; and “*So God created man in His own image, in the image of God created he him; **male and female** created he them.*” [Genesis 1:27]; and “*God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it:...*” [Genesis 1:28]<sup>26</sup> In this sense, the very origin of human beings, created by God in pairs – male and female, as a sound being, different from other creatures created by God, in order to multiply themselves into nations, with the aim to be God’s very representatives and establish His rule on earth. All this, I strongly believe, will serve as the very essential meeting points that will inspire both Muslims and Christians (and Jews) to initiate and sustain the peacebuilding paradigm of inter-religious dialogue with the motto of promoting mutual respect and better spiritual understanding.

### ***Religious Scholars, Clergies and Institutions promoting inter-religious dialogue:***

After the Second World War, the religions of the world and human societies witnessed many economical and socio-cultural crises as well as inter-religious conflicts. In order to overcome those inter-religious conflicts, and the obstacles of the modern world of that time, religious scholars and clergies of different religions were searching for a better way of communication. Therefore, the emergence of many religious movements, reformations or revivals, conferences, etc., was taking place and was embraced by many people.

In the midst of these movements, the concept of inter-religious dialogue was introduced, shaped, and applied by many religious scholars, clergies, and institutions of world religions in general and Islam and Christianity in particular. Looking back at those figures that formulated, promoted and sustained the concept of inter-religious dialogue, the researcher has found that most of them belong to the two major religious communities of Christianity and Islam. Both, Christian and Muslim communities through their religious scholars, clergies and institutions, have produced vast literature, have established religious institutions and centers, and have organized many congresses, conferences, seminars, workshops, in the field of inter-religious dialogue. This can be understood through the discussion of the following issues:

#### ***1. Formulation of the concept of Inter-Religious Dialogue:***

Inter-religious dialogue as far as its application goes back to the very beginning of human existence on earth. From a monotheistic perspective, God sent to humanity the chosen ones among them, who are called Prophets, Messengers, or Apostles, in order to guide people to what is right and refrain them from what is wrong, when they had deviated from the Divine Commandments of God. The chosen ones of God engaged in a friendly dialogue with their people reminding them about their responsibilities towards the Creator

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<sup>26</sup> *Holy Bible*, King James Version, Cambridge Edition, Genesis: “the Story of Creation,” accessed April 30, 2014. <http://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/Genesis-Chapter-1/>

and other fellow man.<sup>27</sup> However, in a specific sense, the concept of inter-religious in the modern understanding is a new phenomenon in world history as well as in the history of world religions. Even though in the Islamic history during the Abbasid time there have been many inter-religious dialogues (the Caliph himself has involved in dialogues), yet the concept of inter-religious dialogue only came into existence after the Second Vatican Council, which took place in Rome from 1962 to 1965.

The Catholic Church is considered as a pioneering institution taking the lead to open up not with the Christian fellows of other Churches (Orthodox and Protestant), but with the followers of world religions in order to build a peaceful environment among the adherents of all religions based on mutual respect and better understanding. This view has been expressed obviously in the Second Vatican Council's Declaration, *Nostra Aetate*,<sup>28</sup> which accredits the concept of inter-religious dialogue challenging the traditional exclusivist stand that had a very narrow scope of understanding towards the Christian religious thought in general, and Catholic Church in particular.

The unity of humankind was the starting point of this declaration stating that the whole race of men is created by God (Acts 17:26) and men's final goal is the same, since God wants to save them all. Thus, God stands out both as Creator and Saviour.<sup>29</sup> The main purpose of the starting point of this declaration is to focus on humankind as the unity that God intended it to be,<sup>30</sup> and to formulate or promote inter-religious dialogue, mainly by according grants to people of other faiths who wish to study Christianity. A special attention is also paid to the relationship between Christians and the followers of Abrahamic Faith, namely Jews and Muslims. Both, Muslims and Jews in paragraph 3 and 4 of *Nostra Aetate* are considered as strictly Monotheistic,<sup>31</sup> who worship the same God as Christians

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<sup>27</sup> For more information about this, please refer to the respective Holy Scriptures of the three revealed religions, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, which are: The Hebrew Bible, The Christian Bible, and the Holy Qur'an.

<sup>28</sup> The Declaration on the Relation of the Church to non-Christian religions (*De Ecclesiae habitudine ad religiones non-christianas*) promulgated on October 28, 1965, recognizes non-Christian religions as entities, which the Church should respect and with which Christians should enter into dialogue. See Declaration *Nostra Aetate* Proclaimed by his Holiness Pope Paul VI on October 28, 1965, accessed May 1, 2014. [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decl\\_19651028\\_nostra-aetate\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html)

<sup>29</sup> See Ibid., *Nostra Aetate*, Paragraph 1.

<sup>30</sup> See Tord Fornberg, *The problem of Christianity in multi-religious societies of today: The Bible in a world of many faiths* (Lewinston/ Queenston / Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, vol. 17, 1995), 18-21.

<sup>31</sup> See Walter M. Abbott ed., *The Documents of Vatican II* (New York: American Press, 1966), 663. See also Miikka Ruokanen, *The Catholic Doctrine of Non-Christian Religions According to the Second Vatican Council* (Leiden / New York / Cologne: E.J. Brill, vol. 7, 1992), 76 passim, 88; and David S. Noss and John B. Noss, *A History of World's Religions* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1990), 520.

do, and therefore, they should be respected and invited to an inter-religious dialogue, which will lead them to a close understanding of Christianity.

It is very clear that there will be no peace, if there is no genuine and effective cooperation between the adherents of World religions, and especially Christians and Muslims. Therefore, the formulation of inter-religious dialogue aiming at peace building through mutual respect and better understanding between people regardless of their background is very challenging. In fact, the truth that each one is searching for cannot be isolated because isolation is neither possible nor desirable. For instance, if Muslims and Christians follow the sense of isolation within the boundaries of their religious and theological decrees, without taking into consideration the feelings and emotions of each other towards the existence and worship of the Divine Reality, and not searching for the establishment of a common platform, there would never be mutual respect and better understanding as well as peace among them.

## 2. *Religious Scholars and Clergies on Inter-Religious Dialogue:*

Before and after the formulation of the concept of inter-religious dialogue, there have been many religious scholars and clergies of world religions, who have dedicated themselves entirely in search for ways and means that can help people of different customs, cultures, and religions to solve their ongoing conflicts as well as their post-conflicts. Although there were many religious scholars and clergies who contributed to inter-religious dialogue, yet this study will examine the contribution of few of them only. It is of a great importance to mention here the great contribution made by *Pope Saint John XXIII*,<sup>32</sup> who served as a pope for five years only, 1958–1963 C.A.. With the initiation of Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), even though he died at 1963, he introduced a new era in the history of the Roman Catholic Church by his openness to change. Such inclusive stance initiated by this pope has been the prior legacy the other popes who succeeded him. Indeed *Pope Paul VI*, who succeeded him, issued his first encyclical (*Ecclesiam suam*, 1964), specifically on inter-religious dialogue: "Dialogue is demanded nowadays ... It is demanded by the dynamic course of action, which is changing the face of modern society. It is demanded by the pluralism of society and the maturity man has reached in this day and age. Be he religious or not, his secular education has enabled him to think and speak and conduct a dialogue with dignity."<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> His original name is Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli, who was born on November 25, 1881, Sotto il Monte, Italy. He died on June 3, 1963, Rome. He was beatified September 3, 2000, and canonized April 27, 2014; feast day October 11. "Saint John XXIII," *Encyclopaedia Britannica, Encyclopaedia Britannica Online Academic Edition*. Encyclopædia Britannica Inc., 2014, accessed May 2, 2014. <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/304923/John-XXIII>.

<sup>33</sup> *Ecclesiam Suam*, (1964), cited by Leonard Swidler in his article "The age of global dialogue," 639.

*Saint Pope John II*,<sup>34</sup> followed the footsteps of the previous popes who initiated inter-religious dialogue with the followers of other religions, and especially with Jews and Muslims.

Leonard Swidler<sup>35</sup> views dialogue between the adherents of different religions as a change of the mode of religious communication from isolation to openness. In such dialogue the process of learning and thinking as well as the strengthening, affirming and transforming of one's fundamental beliefs and practices takes place, while experiencing the meeting with people of different fundamental convictions. The commonalities between the Abrahamic faiths have established the foundations of the inter-religious dialogue.<sup>36</sup> Hans Küng<sup>37</sup> is convinced that inter-religious dialogue is of the greatest importance not just for politicians concerned with conflicts in the Near East, but for all human beings involved in the ordinary business life. Every six persons in the world, one is Muslim and two are Christian, leads to the encounter between both Christianity and Islam as a model for inter-religious dialogue. Therefore, he urges Christians to make an attempt to understand Islam from the inside, as Islam strives to be an all-embracing view, an all-encompassing perspective on life, an all-determining way of life, and so in the midst of this life a way to eternal life. Islam is referred to as paradise, salvation, liberation, redemption, but it is not just a way in this life, with the focus on only the here and now.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> His Latin name is Johannes Paulus, original name Karol Józef Wojtyła, who was born on May 18, 1920, Wadowice, Poland, and died on April 2, 2005, Vatican City. He was beatified on May 1, 2011, and canonized on April 27, 2014; feast day October 22. "Saint John Paul II," *Encyclopaedia Britannica, Encyclopaedia Britannica Online Academic Edition*, Encyclopædia Britannica Inc., 2014, accessed May 2, 2014. <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/305139/Blessed-John-Paul-II>.

<sup>35</sup> Leonard Swidler (a Catholic Christian), has been the Editor of the *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* since 1964, and a Professor of Catholic Thought and Inter-religious Dialogue at Temple University since 1966. He has published over 175 articles and 60 books, where inter-religious dialogue between Christian and Muslims has been the major issue discussed by him.

<sup>36</sup> Leonard Swidler, "From the age of monologue to the age of global dialogue," in *Religions in dialogue: from theocracy to democracy*, ed. Alan Race & Ingrid Shafer (England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2002), 7-16. See also, Leonard Swidler, "Religious pluralism and ecumenism from a Christian perspective," in *Religious issues and inter-religious dialogues: An analysis and sourcebook of developments since 1945*, ed. Charles Wei-hsun Fu and Gerhard E. Spiegler (New York: Greenwood Press, 1989), 327-348.

<sup>37</sup> Professor of Dogmatics on Catholic Theology and of Ecumenical Theology since 1964, has given his contribution for the development of religious studies and especially for the cooperation between Christians and non-Christians by entering an into inter-religious dialogue.

<sup>38</sup> Hans Küng, "Christianity and world religions: Dialogue with Islam," in *Muslims in dialogue: The evolution of a dialogue*, ed. Leonard Swidler (U.S.A.: The Edwin Mellen Press, vol. 3, 1992), 249-272. See also Hans Küng et al., *Christianity and world religions: Paths of dialogue with Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism* (New York: Orbis Books, 1996), xiv-xx passim, 19-36.

It is obvious that Küng encourages Christians to enter into an inter-religious dialogue with Muslims in order to achieve peace and mutual respect among themselves.

'Ismā'īl Rājī al-Fārūqī<sup>39</sup> was one of the few Muslim scholars well-versed in Christian history and theology, who involved in inter-religious discussion with Christian peers. For him the aim of the inter-religious dialogue is the conversion to the truth and not conversion of his or her religion. In addition, according to him, the attempt of the Catholic Church to establish the foundations of inter-religious dialogue between Christians and non-Christians in the Second Vatican Council's Declaration, *Nostra Aetate*, left much to be desired that is of far greater importance.<sup>40</sup> Fethullah Gülen,<sup>41</sup> not only has initiated the concept of inter-religious dialogue, but he believes in it. This has been seen clearly in his numerous writings, activities and achievements. Since the beginning of his activities towards the initiation of inter-religious dialogue, he has presented for the Muslims a great awareness that Islam promotes and commands them to enter into a dialogue with others in general, and the People of the Book, i.e., Jews and Christians in particular. For Gülen, there is a need for the construction of a sincere dialogue, which will increase mutual respect and better understanding, and this will take place when people have proper education awareness.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> 'Ismā'īl Rājī al-Fārūqī (1921-1986), an authority on Islam and comparative religion, has been an active Muslim participant in the field of inter-religious dialogue with others, especially Muslim-Christian dialogue. His view on inter-religious dialogue is reflected in the content of his following best known writings: *Christian ethics* (1976), *The great Asian religions* (1969), *Historical atlas of the religions of the world* (1974), *The life of Muhammad* (1976), *Tawhīd: Its implication for thought and life* (1982), and *The cultural atlas of Islam* (1986). *Meta-religion: Towards a critical world theology* (1986); *Islam and Christianity: Diatribe or dialogue* (1992), etc.

<sup>40</sup> Ataulloh Siddiqui, ed. *Islam and other faiths* (U.K.: The Islamic Foundation, 1998), 241 passim, 269-274. See also 'Ismā'īl Rājī al-Fārūqī, *The Christian ethics: A history and systematic analysis of its dominant ideas* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1967), 32-35. See 'Ismā'īl Rājī al-Fārūqī, "Islam and Christianity: Diatribe or dialogue," in *Muslims in dialogue: The evolution of dialogue*, ed. Leonard Swidler (U.S.A.: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1992), 32-33. Also, 'Ismā'īl Rājī al-Fārūqī, "Meta-religion: Towards a critical world theology," *The American Journal of Islamic Sciences*, 3:1 (1986): 40-43, passim 56-57.

<sup>41</sup> Is a Muslim scholar, thinker and clergy as well as a prolific writer and poet. Born in Erzurum eastern Turkey, in 1941, which is socio-culturally very conservative. See Mehmet Enes Ergene, *Tradition Witnessing the Modern Age: An Analysis of the Gülen Movement* (New Jersey: Tughra Books, 2009), 6.

<sup>42</sup> M. Fethullah Gülen, *Toward A Global Civilization of Love and Tolerance* (New Jersey: The Light, 2006) 198-199. See also *Fethullah Gülen: Essays, Perspectives, Opinions* (New Jersey: Tughra Books, 2010), 86-87.

## IV. Conclusion

This study concludes that inter-religious dialogue is a very important means of communication through which contemporary peacebuilding process among people with different socio-cultural-political-economic-religious backgrounds, who are facing both, the ongoing and post-conflicts can become a reality. The inclusive nature of this dialogue can make people realize how significant is to be humane in the sense that security, justice, and peace should be granted to one's life, his family, his system of beliefs, customs, cultures, and humanity at large. Such inter-religious engagement should be on the issues that increase mutual respect and better understanding and decrease tensions between religious groups. The positive initiative of Catholic Church expressed in the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) towards the formulation of inter-religious dialogue, has to be admired. Since then, many religious scholars and clergies especially among the Christians and Muslims have engaged themselves in numerous inter-religious activities. This study, thus, urges both the Christian and Muslim scholars and clergies to take the application of inter-religious dialogue seriously. The contemporary peacebuilding paradigm of inter-religious dialogue can be achieved with the sincere cooperation between religious leaders and government representatives.



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