

ISLAM

AND

GLOBAL DIALOGUE

Religious Pluralism and the Pursuit of Peace



John Bowden

Diana L. Eck

Muhammad Legenhausen

Francis Robinson

William Dalrymple

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Frank Julian Gelli

Murad Wilfried Hofmann

Jeremy Hanzell-Thomas

Mahmoud M. Ayoub

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Edited by **ROGER BOASE**

Foreword by **HRH PRINCE HASSAN BIN TALAL**

ISLAM AND GLOBAL DIALOGUE

Today, the World's religions are challenged by factions that preach religious exclusivism and theologies of hate. As 9/11 tragically demonstrated, Islam has been hijacked and used by extremists and global terrorists. Islam and Global Dialogue is a major contribution toward the promotion of mutual understanding, religious pluralism, and tolerance and thus in the reassertion of religion's role in promoting global peace rather than conflict.

John L. Esposito, University Professor of Religion and
International Affairs, and Islamic Studies,
Georgetown University, USA

In a period of bloody confrontations and religious radicalisms that nourish the self-styled clash of civilisations, it is necessary to read these pluralistic reflections on the matter by a brilliant group of Jewish, Christian and Muslim intellectuals and scholars. The book is a meritorious effort to promote dialogue and peace.

Juan Goytisolo, Marrakesh

This essential book conclusively disposes of the vicious mythology that the religious faiths are doomed to fight each other.

Dan Plesch, Birkbeck College, and the United Services Institute, UK

At a time when the world is becoming increasingly interdependent, multi-cultural and multi-religious, the concept of religious pluralism is under assault as a result of hatred, prejudice and misunderstanding from both religious exclusivists and dogmatic secularists.

In this important and timely book, twenty internationally acclaimed scholars and leading religious thinkers respond to contemporary challenges in different ways. Some discuss the idea of a dialogue of civilisations: others explore the interfaith principles and ethical resources of their own spiritual traditions. All of them reject the notion that any single religion can claim a monopoly of wisdom; all are committed to the ideal of a just and peaceful society in which people of different religions and cultures can happily coexist. More space is given here to Islam than to Judaism and Christianity because, as a result of negative stereotypes, it is the most misunderstood of the major world religions. HRH Prince Hassan bin Talal of Jordan contributes the Foreword.

For Mansur and Muin

Islam and Global Dialogue

Religious Pluralism and the Pursuit of Peace

Edited by

ROGER BOASE

Queen Mary College, University of London, UK

Foreword by

HRH PRINCE HASSAN BIN TALAL

 **Routledge**
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2005 by Ashgate Publishing

Published 2016 by Routledge

2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017, USA

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

Islam and global dialogue: religious pluralism and the pursuit of peace

1. Religious pluralism – Islam
 2. Religious pluralism
 3. Culture conflict – Religious aspects – Islam
 4. Culture conflict – Religious aspects
 5. East and West
- I. Boase, Roger
297.2'08

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Islam and global dialogue : religious pluralism and the pursuit of peace / edited by Roger Boase ; with a foreword by HRH Prince Hassan bin Talal.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-7546-5307-3 (hbk) ISBN 978 1 4094 0344 9 (pbk) (hardcover : alk. paper)

1. Religious pluralism--Islam.
 2. Islam--Universality.
 3. Peace--Religious aspects--Islam.
- I. Boase, Roger.

BP190.5.R44I73 2005

297.2'8--dc22

2005003006

ISBN 978 0 7546 5307 3 (hbk)

ISBN 978 1 4094 0344 9 (pbk)

ISBN 978 1 3155 8990 9 (ebk)

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Bismillah ar-rahman ar-rahim
In the name of God, Most Merciful, Most Compassionate
(*Al-Fatihah* – The Opening)

Our Father in the heavens
Hallowed be Thy name
(The Lord's Prayer)

Exalted and hallowed be His great Name
in the world which He created according to His will
(Opening words of the *Kaddish*, the Jewish prayer for the dead)

There is no god but God
(*La ilaha illa'llah*)

Holy are You,
and awe-inspiring is Your Name;
and beside You there is no God.
You are praised, O Lord, the holy God
(*Amidah*, stanza 3, ancient Palestinian version)

When I call aloud the name of the Lord,
You shall respond, "Great is our God"
(Deuteronomy 32:3)

Allahu Akbar
God is Great
(*Takbir*)

Allah is my Lord and your Lord, so worship Him.
This is a straight path.
(Words of Jesus in the Qur'an, 3:51; 19:36)

May He who makes peace in His high heavens
make peace for us and for all Israel.
And say: Amen
(Last lines of the *Kaddish*, repeated twice)

As-salamu 'alaykum wa rahmatullah wa barakatuhu
Peace be upon you and God's mercy and blessings
(Muslim greeting and petition for peace,
repeated twice after every cycle of prayer)

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Foreword

HRH Prince Hassan bin Talal

Although this new century has begun so darkly for any proponent of peace, it has also seen a great increase in exchanges across cultural and spiritual borders. One result is that investigative views, as represented by the authors of the essays in this volume, have become prominent markers of ways forward to a more peaceful engagement with each other. They show that differences of opinion need not mean differences of approach, and that civilised dialogue within cultures and traditions is as necessary and as enlightening as dialogue between them.

Ironically, our greatest certainty now is that we face unpredictable times. The communications revolution has introduced ever more politicised roles for media and educational policy, while the density and movements of the world's population seem sure to shift according to ongoing changes in birth-rates and economic developments. New concepts in the developed world, such as Euro-Islam or government-defined citizenship exams, have provoked many to re-examine the relationships between national, regional, cultural, and religious identities, while, in developing countries, issues such as the "brain drain", suggested links between poverty and violence, and struggles for independence should alert us to be prepared for major and unexpected changes to come.

In this atmosphere, our most powerful tool for grasping and, ultimately, directing events is effective communication. By comprehending each other's insights, we can identify common ground on which to start building towards each other with the ideals and habits of peacefulness towards one universal civilisation. This does not mean that we have to agree on all points. Recognising and appreciating the culture of "the other" need not involve negating one's own culture. I believe in Professor Mircea Malitza's "one world of ten thousand cultures." However, we must be clear about the need to better human conditions, and it is not only acceptable but also preferable that our methods, so long as they consistently deliver improved conditions, should differ. By respecting cultural and religious diversity, while at the same time recognising the importance of universal human values and international humanitarian norms, as well as the concept of global sustainability, an alternative ought to be found to the feared hegemonic and homogenic globalisation process.

Scholarship and knowledge, reason and experience, are powerful tools for building bridges across the divisions between peoples' assumptions and educations. Still, once bridges are built, they serve no purpose unless people are persuaded that they can benefit from them. It is necessary to explain, as this

volume also sets out to do, the reasons why we must cross bridges, meet on them, widen and strengthen them, and even build homes upon them. This book of scholarship and knowledge maps many bridges open for use, along with places suitable for new construction. It remains to build creatively, attractively, and flexibly – and encourage people to walk across.

Preface

Before the atrocity now known by the abbreviation 9/11, Islam was already receiving a bad press as a result of bloody conflicts in many parts of the world – notably Palestine, Chechnya, and Kashmir, but after that date Islam has become, for many people, a synonym for fanaticism and terrorism. The chief aim of this book is to promote mutual understanding between Jews, Christians, and Muslims, and to demonstrate that there is no contradiction between Islam and the concept of religious pluralism. It is hoped that, by stimulating further thoughts and discussions, these essays will be useful to all those around the world who are engaged in the task of constructing a more just and humane world in which religious and cultural diversity will be respected.

It needs to be stressed that there is nothing inherently violent about Islam as a religion. Indeed quite the reverse. As anyone with any knowledge of Arabic will tell you, the word *islam*, which is generally defined as “submission to the will of God”, derives from the same root as *salam*, “peace”. War, in certain circumstances, is a duty, but it can never be “holy” and it is governed by a strict code of conduct that forbids, for example, the killing of women and children. The striving denoted by the verb *jahada* is primarily spiritual or moral, as in God’s admonition to the Prophet: “Strive hard against the deniers of the truth and the hypocrites” (9:73).¹ Other passages indicate that the Qur’an itself is the instrument with which believers must strive against those who disbelieve (25:52; 66:9). As Dr Seyyed Hossein Nasr says, concerning the concept of *jihad*, “its translation into ‘holy war’, combined with the erroneous notion of Islam prevalent in the West as the ‘religion of the sword’, has helped to eclipse its inner and spiritual significance” (1987: 28).² All external forms of struggle – and these include fighting ignorance and injustice – are worthless if they are not accompanied by the inner struggle, or greater *jihad*, against evil and the whims of the ego. The Prophet Muhammad is reported to have said: “If a man engaged in battle entertains in his heart a desire to obtain out of the war only a rope to tether his camel, his reward shall be forfeited.” A soldier is not a *mujahid* if he is motivated by hatred, or revenge, or personal ambition, or the pursuit of worldly gain, and there is a well-known story that the Prophet Muhammad’s son-in-law ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib felt obliged to refrain from killing a man who spat at him to avoid the sin of killing his enemy in anger.

Only self-defence, in the widest sense, including the defence of religious freedom, makes force permissible for Muslims. If people did not have such a right to fight, then “monasteries and churches and synagogues and mosques, in which God’s name is much remembered, would surely have been destroyed by now” (Qur’an, 22:40). However, it is also written: “whoever pardons [his foe] and makes peace, his reward rests with God” (42:40), and “if they incline

towards peace, incline thou also to it and place thy trust in God” (8:61). Those who have been unjustly driven from their homelands have a duty to fight (Nasr 1987: 27–33). However, when the opportunity for peace arises, Muslims are encouraged to be forgiving and to seek reconciliation, for mercy and compassion are God’s chief attributes, and it may be that “God will bring about affection between you and some of those whom you now face as enemies (60:7). According to one Prophetic tradition, to settle a dispute between people is more excellent than fasting, charity, and prayer. On the basis of the above definition of a just war, readers can easily figure out which recent and continuing conflicts may legitimately fall into the *jihad* category.

There is a widespread fallacy that without religion there would be no more wars. But, as the Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks so rightly says in his book *The Dignity of Difference*, “If religion is not part of a solution, it will certainly be part of the problem” (2002: 9). The present recourse to violence throughout the world is symptomatic of a general moral crisis, a spiritual bankruptcy, and increasing social injustice. The fact that religious extremism is rooted in genuine grievances does not make it any less an aberration contrary to the whole spirit of Islam. With the decline of traditional knowledge and the dissemination of Western secular values, the ecumenical and mystical aspects of Islam are not only unfamiliar to the majority of non-Muslims but they are not properly understood by the average Muslim, even though they are clearly expressed in the Qur’an. This is why the time has come for Muslims and non-Muslims to join together in an intellectual and ecumenical *jihad*. It is only by “the stockpiling of trust” through interreligious dialogue that we can lay the foundations of a more peaceful world.³

How can we live in peace and avoid the clashes of culture or civilisation that are being widely predicted unless we recover the unity of the pluralistic vision that is at the heart of all the great spiritual traditions? From every quarter, this vision is now under threat. Not only did people of many nations and faiths die in the suicidal attacks on New York and Washington, but since then, as a direct or indirect consequence of this event, thousands of other innocent people have died in Afghanistan, Palestine, Kashmir, Chechnya, and elsewhere, and the whole world has become a much more dangerous place: increasingly interdependent, multi-cultural, and multi-religious, but at the same time increasingly polarised. Furthermore, in the countries listed above and, more recently, in Iraq, military force has been used as a first resort instead of engaging in patient diplomacy or employing methods compatible with ethical principles and international law.

Never, in the history of the human race, has there been simultaneously such a capacity for mutual understanding and such a capacity for global destruction, such a wealth of information and yet such a dearth of wisdom and understanding. Despite the increasing interdependence of all nations, both economic and ecological, the astonishing new means of communication at our disposal, and the revolutionary growth of computer technology, enabling us to store an almost infinite quantity of data, there is as much fear, hatred, prejudice, insecurity, ignorance, and misunderstanding – as much lack of real communication – as ever before.

This book grew out of a paper, which I wrote in the summer of 2001, on Islam and religious pluralism.⁴ After 9/11 my determination to correct some of the negative stereotypes of Islam took on a new urgency.⁵ Islam itself was in the dock. At first I thought of inviting responses from scholars of many different religious persuasions, provided that their approach to religious diversity could be defined as open or broadly pluralistic. However, there was not space within a single volume to do justice to all the major religions. So it was decided that the book should be confined to the three Abrahamic faiths: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Since these are sibling religious traditions, competing with one another and sharing much of the same Scripture, this gives the book a sharper focus.

I would like to thank His Royal Highness Prince Hassan bin Talal of Jordan, one of the most eloquent and learned exponents of the need for mutual understanding between the People of the Book, for finding time to write the Foreword, and of course I wish to thank the distinguished scholars who have generously collaborated with me on this project.

Ayman Ahwal, Carol Bebawi, Hugh Boulter, Dr Robert Crane, Dr Murad Hofmann, the late Dr Michael Hooker, the Reverend Canon Dr Michael Igrave, Dr Leonard Lewisohn, the Reverend Dr David Marshall, Mehri Niknam, the Reverend Alan Race, Nancy Roberts, Daoud Rosser-Owen, Dr Ataullah Siddiqi, Dr Tony Sullivan and Dr Seif I. Tag el-Din all deserve special thanks for their advice or help at different stages in the genesis of the book.

I am grateful to Sarah Lloyd of Ashgate Publishing for agreeing to publish this work, the late Shaykh Abdullah SIRR-Dan al-Jamal (John Ross), who introduced me to the ecumenical aspect of Islam many years ago, the late Michael Scott of Tangier, who was a walking encyclopaedia of esoteric knowledge, the late Peter Talbot-Wilcox, whose World Faiths Study Group I attended for a time, Rabbi Dr Jonathan Magonet, Principal of Leo-Baeck College, who invited me to participate in a Jewish-Christian-Muslim dialogue group which has been meeting since 1992, and the Naqshbandi spiritual master, Shaykh Muhammad Nazim Adil al-Qibrisi.

Above all, I am indebted to my wife Aisha for her moral support and constant encouragement.

Roger Boase
Remembrance Day 2004

Notes

- 1 Qur'anic quotations, with Surah and Ayah numbers, are generally based on Muhammad Asad (1980).
- 2 Footnotes have been kept to a minimum by referring to books in the Bibliography by the author's name, followed by the date of publication and the page reference.
- 3 Diana L. Eck, *Minutes, Sixth Meeting of the Working Group of Dialogue with People of Living Faiths* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1985), p. 30; cited in Smock, 2002: 7.

- 4 For details, see below endnote 1, p. 262.
- 5 See my article, “The Need to Explain”, *MANNA: The Voice of Living Judaism*, no. 75 (Spring 2002), 6–7.

Introduction

The concept of religious pluralism, in particular the notion that no single religion can claim a monopoly of the truth, has gained wide currency during the last two decades as people have become increasingly aware of the need to break down barriers of mutual prejudice by engaging in interfaith and intercultural dialogue. Now, however, as a result of recent political events, this concept – and the interpretation of religion and culture that it presupposes – is increasingly under assault. The language of dialogue is being eroded by the self-fulfilling prophecy of a “clash of civilisations” and the nightmare of “total war”.¹ This is a book of essays by Jewish, Christian, and Muslim scholars who believe in the ecumenical imperative and who respond to the challenge of religious diversity by exploring the interfaith principles and ethical resources of their own spiritual traditions. What unites them is a commitment to the vision of a just, peaceful, and multi-religious society – a vision to which all human beings can respond, whether or not they believe in the existence of God. More space is here given to Islam than any other religion because the ecumenical message of the Qur’an is not well understood.

Part One begins with an essay by the Reverend John Bowden, explaining the importance of interfaith dialogue between Jews, Christians, and Muslims. He first outlines the context of any contemporary discussion of religious pluralism, a term which he deliberately avoids defining in any systematic way. He then examines the significance of religious pluralism for the Abrahamic faiths, considering in particular the problems raised by the modern and post-modern world-view influenced by the European Enlightenment (a convenient shorthand for a complex of scientific and ethical achievements, such as modern technology and the UN Declaration of Human Rights which have their roots in the eighteenth century).² After discussing questions of truth in belief, he moves to the sphere of ethical values, and ends by indicating the challenges to all three faiths.

The second essay is by Professor Diana Eck who runs the Pluralism Project at Harvard University. This essay on “Exclusivism, Inclusivism, and Pluralism” comes from her book *Encountering God* (1993). Although it is a chapter in that book, it really stands on its own as an independent essay. I have placed it in this opening section because it offers a strong defence of the pluralistic approach to religious diversity and defines the three key terms used by most of the contributors to this collection.

In the third essay, Muhammad Legenhausen, an American Muslim who lives in the holy city of Qom, distinguishes between seven different types of religious pluralism and offers a critique of the ideas of John Hick. This essay is important for two reasons: first, some of the criticism that he levels against

Christian or liberal pluralism is persuasive; and second, although he follows the Shi'ah tradition, he expresses views about the attitude of Islam to other religions that are based on authoritative sources and are probably shared by many Muslims, although they are not entirely consistent with the more open position of other Muslim contributors to this compilation.

At this stage, I shall briefly define the terms exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism. The Reverend Alan Race was the first to elaborate these three general approaches to religion in his book *Christians and Religious Pluralism* (1983), although he did so in a Christian context.³ The exclusivist rejects the truth claims of other religions in the belief that only his or her religion is true; for such a person no other religion may be a source of salvation or divine grace. The inclusivist is more broad-minded: he or she would concede that sparks of spiritual truth may be found in other religions, and would acknowledge the need for tolerance, mutual respect, and peaceful cooperation between people of different faiths; but such a person would consider other religious traditions to be in some way inferior, incomplete, or deficient. The pluralist believes that "no one creed has a monopoly of spiritual truth; no one civilization encompasses all the spiritual, ethical, and artistic expressions of mankind."⁴ Such a person seeks to understand each religion on its own terms as an expression of the Divine, or path to the Divine. Religious pluralism is therefore not a neutral or descriptive term for the phenomenon of religious diversity but an ideal to strive for and a positive evaluative response to this phenomenon. It is, moreover, a response that requires great humility: "Pluralism means coming to terms with the truth claims of the other and an adjustment of one's own claims to truth. Pluralism requires a degree of 'epistemological modesty', and is uncommon in the historical record of all religions and in the doctrines of virtually all faiths."⁵

Islam is generally regarded as a religion that is hardly compatible with a pluralistic theology or a pluralistic vision of society. Muslims themselves are obviously partly to blame for this because many of them have little knowledge of, or respect for, religions other than their own. Worse still, they tend to take pride in their ignorance, forgetting that, as the Prophet Muhammad said: "Knowledge is the lost property of the believer and he should reclaim it wherever he finds it." Many of them also respond to a growing sense of social alienation, associated with globalisation, poverty, political injustice, and other genuine grievances, by reducing Islam to a militant political ideology that closely conforms to the Islamophobic view of Islam so dear to the media pundits.

Muslims have failed to publicise the pluralistic vision that is at the heart of Islam because it is a vision that many of them have lost. There may also be some hesitation about using the word "pluralism",⁶ which seems to undermine the central Islamic principle of unity, or *tawhid*. Yet, as Dr Murad Hofmann says, "it is essential that the Western media and those who exert an influence on public opinion should be made aware of the true Islamic model of religious pluralism."⁷ Since, for Muslims, religious diversity is divinely ordained (Qur'an, 5:48), Muslims are not only bound to respect and understand other spiritual paths in the interests of peace, justice, love, and social harmony, but they are also bound to do so in pursuit of the truth.

In today's increasingly interdependent and multi-religious world, it is vitally important to recover a sense of the sacred, to refute those who regard religion itself as inevitably divisive, and to rediscover the ecumenical and ethical principles that have been taught by all great spiritual teachers. It is not simply a matter of respecting religious differences; we have to recover the practical spiritual wisdom that unites us and makes us human. The Prophet Muhammad taught that not only all human beings but also "All creatures of God form the family of God and he is the best loved of God who loves His family best" (*Mishkat*, I, p. 247). His son-in-law Imam 'Ali urged the Governor of Egypt to remember that his subjects are "brothers in humanity before they are your brothers in religion" and should be treated with mercy, love, and kindness. As Martin Luther King said, "our loyalties must become ecumenical rather than sectional. Every nation must now develop an overriding loyalty to mankind as a whole in order to preserve the best in their individual societies" (King 1967: 190).

Every great civilisation in the past has been based on a religious tradition.⁸ Modern Western civilisation has discarded, or attempted to discard, this solid basis, offering itself as a model for "backward societies" to emulate, even though many of the capitalist or neo-liberal values upon which it is based, such as individualism, relativism, materialism, sensationalism, the obsession with security, the expansion of appetites and desires into needs and rights, and the idea of productivity as an end in itself, are hollow and do not bring real happiness or satisfaction. It is certainly ironic that the modern West, which now threatens to swallow up all other cultural traditions and world-views, is deeply divided and insecure, despite its enormous wealth and power; fear, stimulated by the media and certain interest groups, is causing people to lose faith in the possibility of a free and peaceful multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, and multi-religious society. If we seek to bolt the doors and close all the windows, it is obvious that the knocking will only grow louder.⁹ Peace cannot be preserved by means of war because, as Wendell Berry writes, "One cannot reduce terror by holding over the world the threat of what one most fears" (2003: 10).

Among remedies that have been proposed for the spiritual, moral, political, and ecological crisis in which we find ourselves are the following: the concept of a dialogue of civilisations¹⁰ (advocated by Anwar Ibrahim at an international seminar on Islam and Confucianism in Kuala Lumpur in 1995 and by Muhammad Khatami, President of Iran, at the United Nations General Assembly in 1998); the possibility of reconciling economics with religion and morality so that globalisation may serve the good of the whole of humanity, instead of the interests of a small dominant minority,¹¹ and the project of establishing a global ethic, initiated by Hans Küng at the Parliament of the Worlds' Religions in 1993.

Religious scholars generally agree that people are capable of building their self-identities on the basis of what they hold in common with the "other" rather than, as Huntington (1996) would have it, on the basis of differences, fears, and tribal loyalties. They feel that the tendency to grade civilisations or cultures in a hierarchy according to Western criteria is obsolete. Instead of thinking of the world in terms of seven or eight civilisational groups defending

their selfish and partial interests, “it would be far better to establish the mental framework for a world organization serving the interests of the human species as a whole” (Marti 2001). This is what religious leaders from around the world sought to do in 1993 when they agreed that, to prevent global order from degenerating into either chaos or tyranny, it was imperative to formulate a global ethic, representing the core moral values of the religions of the world, or “the necessary minimum of shared ethical values, basic attitudes or standards, to which all regions, nations and interest groups can subscribe” (Küng 2003: 11).

The fundamental demand of this global ethic is that every human being, regardless of age, sex, race, physical or mental ability, religion, or nationality, possesses an inalienable dignity and must be treated humanely. This demand is based on the so-called Golden Rule. As the Chicago Declaration states:

There is a principle which is found and has persisted in many religious and ethical traditions of humankind for thousands of years: *What you do not wish done to yourself, do not do to others.* Or, in positive terms: *What you wish done to yourself, do to others!* This should be the irrevocable, unconditional norm for all areas of life, for families and communities, for races, nations, and religions. (Küng and Kuschel 1993: 23–4).

Four simple commandments derive from the practical application of the Golden Rule: “Have respect for life! Deal honestly and fairly! Speak and act truthfully! Respect and love one another!”¹² The goal of these directives is to transform consciousness: “Earth cannot be changed for the better unless we achieve a transformation in the consciousness of individuals and in public life” (Küng and Kuschel 1993: 34). Or, to cite the Qur’an, “God does not change the condition of people until they change that which is within their inner selves” (13:11).

In recent years various institutions have discussed the applicability of this global ethic.¹³ It is hoped that this ethic will find its practical implementation in concerted efforts to monitor and prevent the proliferation of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons, to introduce measures to halt global warming and to protect the environment from pollution and commercial exploitation, to support and expand the work of the International Criminal Court, to tackle the problems of poverty and world debt, and to redress the injustice that has been done to those who have been denied their political rights. In 1983 the global crisis seemed desperate: “The world is in agony ... Peace eludes us ... the planet is being destroyed ... neighbours live in fear ... children die!” (Küng and Kuschel 1993: 13). How much worse the situation now seems!

First of all, it is important to refute the immoral and illegal concept of unilaterally determined pre-emptive self-defence¹⁴ and the paradoxical notion that liberal and democratic values can, and should, be imposed by force. We must counter the arguments of those who prepared the groundwork for neo-imperialism in the post-9/11 period, and who have said that we should celebrate “the intellectual wreckage of the liberal conceit of safety through international law administered by international institutions”.¹⁵ If the predic-

tion of a “clash of civilisations” – or more accurately a “clash of barbarisms” – may prove to be wrong, or at any rate somewhat exaggerated, it will not be thanks to the military policies of the US administration, which have only assisted in the recruitment of suicide bombers in several dozen countries, but to the massive popular anti-war movement across the world, supported by leading world figures, such as the Pope, the Dalai Lama, and Nelson Mandela, and to those nations that have stressed the need to work within the framework of international regulations. Some credit should also be given to the many people around the world who have sought in different ways to promote civilisational or intercultural dialogue.

The essays in Part Two of this book are about Islam and the West and the idea of a dialogue of civilisations. To understand the roots of the present global crisis, it is necessary to know about the history of relations between the West and the Muslim peoples of the world. Professor Francis Robinson gives us a brilliant synopsis of this history, explaining how the changing balance of power, the memory of the Crusades, and the colonial experience produced resentment and a sense of loss, which led to the emergence of Islamic revivalist or reformist groups with a political agenda in many parts of the Muslim world.¹⁶ Since, however, Muslims and Christians have a common Semitic and Hellenic inheritance, Robinson reflects that there are grounds for concord as well as conflict.

William Dalrymple, travelling in space and time, takes us back much earlier, giving us a glimpse of the Middle East before the intervention of crusaders and colonisers. He evokes the daily life of Christian saints and ascetics in the Middle East and the Eastern Byzantine world in the sixth century after Christ, just before the spread of Islam, by using a contemporary travel account and his first-hand experiences as source material with which to illuminate the past. Following in the footsteps of the monk John Moschos, Dalrymple is surprised to discover how many aspects and practices of the early Christian church have been preserved in Islam. Although saddened by the decline of Christian monasticism, he finds several places in the Middle East and the Levant where Christians and Muslims are fellow pilgrims, and he bears personal witness to the essential kinship between Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

Professor Akbar Ahmed discusses the two competing ideas about relations between the “Western” and Islamic worlds, namely that of an inevitable clash and that of a dialogue, within the context of 9/11, and he does so with reference to the concept of globalisation and Ibn Khaldun’s analysis of the way civilisations decline due to a breakdown in social cohesion. He gives a good account of the reasons for mutual distrust between the West and the Muslim world and the re-emergence of religion as a factor shaping political events. He sees the clash of civilisations as a dangerous self-fulfilling prophecy if people do not engage seriously in the task of building bridges.

Professor Fred Halliday offers some healthy and subtle reflections on the dubious theory of a clash of civilisations in an essay based on a lecture that he gave in Tunis in 1997, soon after the publication of Huntington’s famous book. He discusses how difficult it is to define what is meant by a culture or a civilisation when traditions and historical narratives are being constantly

reinvented, and he points out that, as a result of globalisation and global interdependence, there is no such thing as a society or culture untouched by outside influences. He advocates the need for intelligent counter-arguments to Huntington's thesis, refuting his fatalism with regard to global dialogue and his belief that international institutions and universalist principles have become in some way irrelevant.

In a paper originally given in 2002 at the time of the publication of his book *The Dignity of Difference*, Rabbi Dr Jonathan Sacks offers some profound thoughts on why, with the decline of ideology, religion has become such a divisive force in many parts of the contemporary world, and why paradoxically religion, or rather a religious paradigm that values diversity and rejects both tribalism and universalism, is also the best and only true antidote to war, violence, and intolerance.

Dr Antony Sullivan argues that, for the good of humanity and in the interests of world peace, the aggressive ideological foreign policies of Christian fundamentalists and neo-conservatives must be replaced by traditional cultural conservatism. It is within such a framework, he suggests, that Jews, Christians, and Muslims can rediscover their communalities and face together the challenge of radical secularism. He finds strong support for his politically incorrect views in the writings of Peter Kreeft and Russell A. Kirk. He also proposes that Western civilisation should be designated as "Abrahamic" rather than "Judeo-Christian", and he fully endorses the condemnation by Muslim scholars of violence and terrorism using traditional Islamic criteria.

Dr Robert Crane is worried by the role that professional Islamophobes have played in demonising Islam and promoting the paradigm of a clash of civilisations. He argues that American Muslims – and, one might add, Muslims throughout the world – have been challenged by the terrorists of 9/11 to prove that they are not collectively guilty and that their religion is not a source of fanatical extremism. In his view, the real worldwide clash is not between civilisations or religions, but within each civilisation between extremists of all kinds. He maintains that the principles of America's Founding Fathers are entirely consistent with the universal principles of Islamic law, and he proposes that Muslims must join traditionalists of all faiths in formulating a common vision for America and for the whole world in order to bring about civilisational renewal.

Dr Khaled Abou El Fadl finds that there are methodological flaws in the paradigm of a clash of civilisations, and argues that the terrorist activities and extremist ideas of Usama bin Ladin and his followers reflect a sense of alienation from modernity, on the one hand, and from the Islamic heritage, on the other, neither of which they properly understand. In his view, the theory of a clash of civilisations only aggravates the siege mentality of such groups, whose puritanical self-righteousness reflects the influence of Wahhabi and Salafi schools of thought.

Part Three, "Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Responses to Religious Diversity", begins with a lecture delivered at the Sternberg Centre for Judaism on 3 May 2002 in memory of Sir Francis Younghusband, founder of the World Congress of Faiths. Rabbi Tony Bayfield cleverly employs a literary device in

order to give vent to his indignation, anguish, and despair: he assumes the part of the prosecuting angel before the court of heaven in order to indict the sibling traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam for being indirectly and jointly responsible for the atrocity of 9/11.

Rabbi Dr Norman Solomon suggests how Jews might create a “theological space” for dialogue with Christians and Muslims. After discussing traditional attitudes of Jews to non-Jews, he mentions how Christianity and Islam were later accommodated within Jewish theology as religions that were preparations for the coming of the expected Messiah. He then cites the rare example of the Jewish Yemeni neo-Platonist Netanel ibn Fayyumi (d. c. 1164), who recognised the authenticity of the Qur’anic revelation and the concept of the universality of revelation. It is only recently, he concludes, chiefly as a result of the impact of modernity, that Jews, Christians, and Muslims have begun to abandon their “absolutist claims” and are embarking on a journey of self-discovery and a discovery of “the other” in dialogue.

The Reverend Marcus Braybrooke, who has been a member, founder, or chairman of nearly every interfaith organisation in Britain, urges people of all faiths to recognise that “each faith has a precious gift to share with the world” because each conveys a message that is both unique and universal. He gives a useful summary of the Christian inheritance of exclusivism which still colours interfaith relations, and cites a few examples of Christians who have rejected this inheritance; he gives his own definition of the terms “exclusivism”, “inclusivism”, and “pluralism”, and explains how certain seemingly exclusivist biblical passages might be differently understood.

Father Frank Julian Gelli suggests that the concept of the Hidden God, active in the world in a variety of ways, is the best way to interpret the phenomenon of religious diversity. His general conclusion is that the difficulties associated with universalist and exclusivist truth-claims, genuine doctrinal differences, and irrational ancestral fears can only be resolved by the mystery of divine love.

Dr Murad Wilfried Hofmann gives a lucid analysis of religious pluralism and Islam. First, he discusses how perceptions of Islam have changed with the hardening of stereotypes since 9/11, and attempts to predict what may happen to Muslim minorities in the future if they reject social integration as the world becomes more polarised. Second, he summarises the Qur’anic model of religious pluralism. Third, he refutes those who would accuse him of empty theorising by comparing the history of Muslim-Christian-Jewish coexistence in Muslim Spain and elsewhere with the Christian record of intolerance, backed by an exclusivist theology. Then, after explaining the juridical status of Jews and Christians in an Islamic state, he ends with some thoughts about the ecumenical prospects of Islam.

My own contribution covers some of the same ground as the previous paper, but from a different angle. I interpret the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the manner in which the US government has subsequently responded to those attacks as assaults upon the very concept of religious pluralism. I explain why we would be wrong to imagine that Islam is inherently violent or intolerant and why we need to abandon the language of confrontation. I give an outline of the

interfaith principles that are found in the Qur'an and discuss some ecumenical and ecological aspects of Islam.

Dr Jeremy Henzell-Thomas, drawing on his knowledge of linguistics and semantics, challenges the pessimistic doctrine of a clash of civilisations by identifying certain quintessentially Anglo-Saxon values that are associated with the Islamic idea of “the middle way” – moderation, tolerance, the concept of fair play, and the balance between reason and faith.

Professor Mahmoud M. Ayoub gives a brief account of religious and cultural pluralism in the Qur'an, which he feels is now threatened by the process of globalisation. He explains the confusion that has arisen as a result of the different levels of meaning in the word *islam*, referring, on the one hand, to a universal attitude of submission to the will of the Divine, and, on the other hand, to an institutionalised religion, bound by a juridical code of law. He touches on the question of whether the concept of the People of the Book can be expanded to include Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, and other faiths.¹⁷

The final essay is by the American visionary, conservationist, poet, and novelist Wendell Berry. War, he rightly says, is always a failure and modern warfare is so devastating that there can be no winners and no losers. I would add that military superiority is, in any case, no guarantee of security when the enemy uses guerrilla or terrorist tactics. Berry condemns the hypocrisy of those leaders who claim the moral right to manufacture and sell weapons of mass destruction while, at the same time, denying the right of their enemies to possess such weapons. How, he asks, can “internationalised capitalism”, which destroys cultural diversity and squanders the earth's human and natural resources for the sake of short-term gain, serve the professed aim of national self-defence? How can peace be guaranteed by acts of violence? These are some of the disturbing questions that he raises. It is to be hoped that the essays in this book will, in some small measure, contribute to the cause of peace and make amends for the failure of war.

Notes

- 1 Richard Perle writes “If we just let our vision of the world go forth, and we embrace it entirely, and we don't try to piece together clever diplomacy, but just wage a total war . . . our children will sing great songs about us years from now” (*Green Left Weekly*, 12 December 2001, cited in Pilger 2002: 9–10).
- 2 Norman Solomon once called the modern critical approach inherited from the Enlightenment “the third dialogue partner” (Bayfield and Braybrooke 1992: 147). The heritage of the Enlightenment, or the civilisation of modernity, has now become an invisible fourth presence in any interfaith encounter between the People of the Book.
- 3 Alan Race also discusses this typology of responses to religious diversity in *Interfaith Encounter* (2001: 21–42).
- 4 Sacks 2002: 62. Unfortunately this is one of the passages that the Chief Rabbi has been persuaded to delete from later editions of his book.
- 5 David Gordis, “John Paul II and the Jews”, in Sherwin and Kasimow 1999: 131.

- 6 Non-Christians do not often use this word (Forward 2001: 44).
- 7 See below, pp. 237–8.
- 8 See Nasr 1989: 65–86, and Akram 2002. Traditional non-European languages do not have a word for “tradition” because in the pre-modern age people were so immersed in tradition that they had no need of the concept.
- 9 See *The Penguin Krishnamurti Reader*, ed. Mary Lutyens (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1970), p. 97.
- 10 The first to coin this phrase may have been the French Muslim Roger Garaudy in the title of his book *Pour un dialogue des civilisations* (1977).
- 11 See Mofid 2002, Braybrooke and Mofid 2005. Dr Mofid offers an alternative to the globalisation of inequality and the globalisation of religious extremism. He argues that the economic, moral, and spiritual crises that the world is experiencing are interlinked and can only be resolved by replacing neo-liberal economics by economic globalisation for the good of humanity. In his opinion, “economics as traditionally taught – as he was taught – is simply inadequate to the profound material and spiritual challenges of the age” (Comments made by Dr James Piscatori at the launch of Dr Mofid’s book *Globalisation For the Common Good*, Plater College, Oxford, 9 March 2002).
- 12 These are mentioned in the brochure of his exhibition, *World Religions, Universal Peace, Global Ethic*, opened at the German Embassy, London, on 17 May 2001, sponsored by the Weisfeld Foundation; see Küng and Kuschel 1993: 24–34. The Golden Rule is found in Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, Hinduism, Christianity, Islam, and the Baha’i faith.
- 13 See the InterAction Council’s *A Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities* (1997) (Swidler 1998: 52–66), the *Earth Charter* (2000), produced by The Earth Council, Costa Rica: <<http://www.earthcharter.org/draft/charter.htm>>, and the *Call to Our Guiding Institutions* (1999), issued by the Council for a Parliament of the World’s Religions (Barney 1999: 108).
- 14 See Robert Kagan, *The Coming Anarchy: Shattering the Dream of the Post Cold War* (New York: Random House, 2000).
- 15 Richard Perle, “Thank God for the Death of the UN”, *The Guardian*, 21 March 2003.
- 16 Throughout Muslim history there have been puritanical revivalist movements, such as the Kharijites who assassinated the fourth Caliph ‘Ali in 661 CE and questioned the legitimacy of the Umayyad dynasty. But the modern phenomenon of Islamic revivalism – the conviction that a literalist interpretation of the Qur’an, combined with a strict adherence to the Sunnah (the example of the Prophet Muhammad), or a return to basic principles (*usuliyyah*), will resolve all the woes of the Islamic world – began in the eighteenth century as a response to Western colonialism and the challenge of modernity. This movement became increasingly militant in the 1960s when many of their leaders were tortured or executed. Some would regard religious “fundamentalism” in general is an expression of resistance to globalisation: see Tony Bayfield, “Religious Diversity and Resistance to the Globalization of Western Values”, editorial, *MANNA* (October 2002). The expanding global hegemony of the USA may produce a backlash that will slow down the process of globalisation. John Gray suggests that a “partly deglobalized world would be a less tidy and more genuinely diverse world” and also “a safer world”; see “The End of Globalization”, *Resurgence*, no. 212 (May/June 2002), 19–20.
- 17 See Shah-Kazemi (2002). In this important paper on the unity of mysticism, omitted from this book for reasons of space, he discusses key passages in the

Qur'an that are a source of inspiration for interfaith dialogue, drawing upon traditional Sufi commentators, such as Ibn al-'Arabi, 'Abd al-Razzaq Kashani, al-Ghazzali, and Jalal al-Din Rumi.

PART ONE

DEFINING THE ISSUE

He who knows one religion ... knows none.

Max Müller

Beware of being bound up by a particular creed and rejecting others as unbelief! Try to make yourself a prime matter for all forms of religious belief. God is greater and wider than to be confined to one particular creed to the exclusion of others. For He says, "Wherever you turn, there is the Face of God" Qur'an, 2:115.

Ibn 'Arabi

We not only need to understand one another, we need one another to understand ourselves.

Jean Halperin

We are like little fish with their mouths open wanting to swallow the ocean.

Shaykh Nazim al-Qibrisi

Man is ... the only animal that has the True Religion – several of them. He is the only animal that loves his neighbour as himself and cuts his throat, if his theology isn't straight. He has made a graveyard of the globe in trying his honest best to smooth his brother's path to happiness and heaven.

Mark Twain

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Chapter 1

Religious Pluralism and the Heritage of the Enlightenment¹

John Bowden

What is Religious Pluralism?

For almost 1500 years the three great monotheistic faiths – Judaism, Christianity, and Islam – have lived together, for better or worse, in relationships ranging from mutual respect and toleration to persecution. Moreover, the world into which they came knew of yet other religions, even if the Abrahamic faiths often dismissed these in disparaging terms as idolatry or superstition, and more new religions have emerged, or have been discovered, during the course of their history. So there is a sense in which religious pluralism as a phenomenon has always been with us.

There has been religious pluralism in a second sense, too. Neither Judaism, nor Christianity, nor Islam is a monolithic block. Within each faith, as it has developed, differences of opinion and tradition, not to mention geographical and cultural factors, have led to variant and often rival forms of belief and practice, and to divisions of greater or lesser severity. So there is also religious pluralism within each of the monotheistic faiths.

However, the religious pluralism that has become such a major issue at the beginning of the twenty-first century differs quite substantially from these two other forms. What sets it apart is the rise of a tradition, rooted in the eighteenth-century European Enlightenment, which has shaped so many features of the present-day world. From that tradition developed what is often called “secularisation”, originally the withdrawal of areas of life from religious control, and the autonomy of the natural sciences. An autonomous scientific approach has had success in so many areas of theory and practice that it has been claimed that it possesses a method and an explanation which can be extended to all areas of life and knowledge, and this in turn has established widely a world-view which assumes that its standpoint is the one from which everything else must be looked at.

Those who adopt this standpoint emphasise in particular that it is essentially a relative one: there is relativity in all things, not only in science but also in history and in cultural values, including religion. They point out that in the cultural sphere the natural way of explaining things is in terms of how they came to be, that this process of coming into being is essentially historical, that values are created over the course of time rather than received from some absolute source, and that therefore there are no absolutes. In this context,