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**Islamic Approaches for Developing Muslim-Christian Interfaith
Dialogue and Communications**

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In His Name

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لَتَجِدَنَّ أَقْرَبَهُمْ مَوَدَّةً لِلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا الَّذِينَ قَالُوا إِنَّا نَصَارَىٰ ذَٰلِكَ بِأَنَّ مِنْهُمْ قِسِيَّيْنَ وَرُهْبَانًا وَأَنَّهُمْ لَا يَسْتَكْبِرُونَ
“and surely you will find the nearest of them in affection to the faithful to be those who say" We are Christians." That is because there are priests and monks among them and because they are not arrogant”. (Holy Qur'an 5-28)

Abstract

Islam and Christianity are two of the most numerous and the most influential of the world religions today. They share many points in common as religions. Most important of all they trace their lineage to one common ancestor, Abraham, who is the Divine Patriarch of the religions, called after him as the Abrahamic religions. Knowing this, for any religious person among these two, it is a must to endeavor for approximation of them more and more, due to the world's today's situation filled with challenge and tension. Now, the main question is this: “what are the theoretical elements for developing Muslim Christian Interfaith Dialogue and Communication?” And the secondary questions: “Why it is so much talked about today and is so much important? What are the religious leaders' perspectives about this phenomenon “ the future of the world is bound to the future of Islam and Christianity's Dialogue” (2012)¹. Following the strong statements of the religious scholars and referring to some solid verses of the holy Qur'an and narrations from the holy Prophet of Islam(S) and His Ahlulbayt (PBUT) and the statements of other great thinkers, one will conclude that, Muslim Christian Dialogue, is inevitable.

Keywords: Islam, Christianity, shi'ism, dialogue, Ahadith, Qur'anic verses, Ayatullah Mesbah.

1- Introduction

- No peace among the nations without peace among the religions.
- No peace among the religions without dialogue between the religions.
- No dialogue between the religions without investigation of the foundations of the religions.

There are important reasons for Christian theology to deal with Islam. They have something to do with striving for insight and with the belief that Christianity and Islam have to say each other something. Relevant issues are the conception of God, the God-man relationship and the formation of religious identity. Dialogue, or peaceful negotiation, is the path prescribed by Islam. Islam is based on the principle of *dawah*, which is another name for peaceful negotiation manifests that violence is totally forbidden in Islam and there is only one exception to this ban and that is when it is engaged in self-defense. The Prophet of Islam started His mission which was to communicate his ideology to people by talking to them, listening to their objections and trying to convince them of his viewpoint by means of arguments. In the situation which Many people are under the impression that Muslims are close-minded and unwilling to engage in discussion with people of other faiths, dialogue and effective communications based on tolerance, respect and love, is very constructive; this is while, the holy Qur'an offers very clear guidelines and encouragement for Muslims to engage in interfaith dialogue.

2- The Aims or Goals of Interreligious Dialogue

There are a number of significant aims and goals interreligious dialogue. First said to be “mutual understanding.”² We want to understand each other, what our beliefs are, why we believe what we do, and so on. Over the years we have discussed a great many topics: Muslims are frequently asked to speak to churches and synagogues in my area; there is a widespread interest in Islam.

Another reason for dialogue is common activity: how can we work together to help the common good. providing Muslim speakers for schools, businesses, police organizations, journalists, and so on.

A more profound reason is the one I have mentioned above, we engage in dialogue because both of us, Muslims and Christians, are concerned about a deeper conversion to God. This is what the document “Dialogue and Proclamation gives as the ultimate reason for dialogue: the deeper conversion of all to God. This has been beautifully explained by the late Jesuit author, Jacques Dupuis, in a passage that is worth quoting in full:

The other main purposes of such Interfaith Dialogues can be:

- To provide opportunity for the national bodies of each faith to come together to build understanding and harmony,
- To pave the way for global justice and Advent of Imam Mahdi (Aj),
- Religious globalization,
- To establish the foundations of peaceful coexistence,
- To be a model of how different faiths can live harmoniously together,
- To build understanding, good will and a sense of community between people of different faiths,
- To explore and learn about each other and our faith traditions,
- To share our knowledge and insights with others,
- To work together to achieve common goals,
- To support each other in the times of difficulty,

Seen in this way, we, the partners in dialogue, are pilgrims on a common journey, the journey back to full conversion and submission to God. John Paul II said something similar, which is cited in the document “Dialogue and Proclamation”: “At the end of the day of prayer, fasting, and pilgrimage for peace in Assisi, Pope John Paul II said: ‘Let us see in it an anticipation of what God would like the developing history of humanity to be: a fraternal journey in which we accompany one another towards the transcendental goal which he sets for us.’”³.

If Muslim-Christian dialogue is to be at all meaningful, it must first be benefited then go beyond the letter of scriptures, creed, and tradition. Men and women of faith in both communities must learn to listen to the divine voice speaking through revelation and history, and together seek to understand what God, the Almighty, is saying to Muslims through Christianity and to Christians through Islam. In more practical terms, this means that Christians and Muslims must go beyond the history of a reified religion and try instead to share in the commonality of faith. Then it will, we hope, be realized that although Christians and Muslims have followed different roads toward the goal of human fulfillment in God, the goal is one and the road meets at many points.⁴

3- Initializing Guidelines

There are several important guidelines to be considered in the realm of interfaith dialogue which by considering them, one can have a more fruitful and influential round table of dialogue away from any kind of prejudice, dogmatism, unnecessary controversial debates and etc, like:

- 1- Dialogue is only possible when we respect each other’s individuality. Thus, knowledge of others in their cultural setting is essential. By recognizing and accepting social, cultural, and religious diversity, an exchange of mutual values and union in collaboration, humanity ultimately will be led to unity.

- 2- Everything is actively involved in a continuous growth process toward a better world in an ever-higher intellectual and spiritual environment. This awareness that all people belong to the same family, through their common origin and destination, should lead to a higher universal responsibility to practice this awareness in our lives.
- 3- The inspiring role of the leaders of world religions, traditions, and other convictions is of prime importance in our effort to create a better world order in peace and justice. In their cultural and philosophical traditions, their churches, organizations and institutes are the organizations par excellence to proclaim and sustain universally accepted moral principles.
- 4- The tenets of world religions and other faith traditions have their roots in their native culture, have developed on the basis of their culture's philosophical and moral concepts, and have approached and proclaimed the faith in transient expressions and culturally appropriate ceremonies. As pilgrims always on their way to new discoveries and subject to change, no faith community should claim exclusive representation of the Truth or superiority.
- 5- The world religions should move from their "approach of converting" to an "approach of testifying." The essential elements of one's own faith should be presented in a language understandable by the local faithful, so that dialogue between the world religions and faith traditions will lead to a better mutual knowledge and understanding, and to an exchange of mutual values. This will enrich one's faith and that of others.

- 6- In the passionate search for the truth and a more comprehensive approach to spirituality, meditation should be re-evaluated and practiced to engender a deeper awareness of the Divine presence. Meditation crosses all religious boundaries and is universally shared and accepted. Silent meditation should be part of all interreligious encounters.
- 7- People involved in interreligious and intercultural dialogue must remain aware of and concerned about our world's escalating ecological, social, economic, and financial problems.

Accepting these seven guidelines could become a major stepping stone to a union, in collaboration between the world religions and other faith traditions that transcends doctrinal differences. Such a dialogue in collaboration with the political world would be the most effective contribution toward more efficient solutions to the world problems. At the same time, it would be an important stepping stone to a new world order of more peace and justice for all.

4- Historical background

The dialogue between Islam and Christianity had started exactly from the time of the emergence of Islam. It is not something special for our today's situation. Based on the revealed verses to the holy Prophet of Islam, He never talked to the Christians harshly⁵. He would always talk to them softly and demonstrated on them logically and one cannot find in the history of Islam that He and the other Infallible Imams had challenged them in the name of religion. In the letters to the heads of Christians, the holy Prophet (s) always talked to them very respectfully.. Rooted as both traditions are in the monotheism of the patriarch Abraham, Muslims and Christians share a common heritage. For more than fourteen centuries these communities of faith have been linked by their theological understandings and by geographical proximity. The history of Muslim-Christian interaction includes periods of great tension, hostility,

and open war as well as times of uneasy toleration, peaceful coexistence, and cooperation⁶.

Islamic self-understanding incorporates an awareness of and direct link with the biblical tradition. Muḥammad (s), his companions, and subsequent generations of Muslims have been guided by the Qurʾān, which they have understood as a continuation and completion of God's revelations to humankind. The Qurʾān speaks of many prophets (*anbiyāʾ*, singular *nabī*) and messengers (*rusul*, sg. *rasūl*) who functioned as agents of God's revelation. Particular emphasis is laid on the revelations through Moses (the Torah) and Jesus (the Gospel) and their respective communities of faith or "People of the Book" (*ahl al-kitāb*).

The Qurʾān includes positive affirmations for the People of the Book, including the promise that Jews and Christians who have faith, trust in God and the Last Day, and do what is righteous "shall have their reward" (2:62 and 5:69). The different religious communities are explained as a part of God's plan; if God had so willed, the Qurʾān asserts, humankind would be one community. Diversity among the communities provides a test for people of faith: "Compete with one another in good works. To God you shall all return and He will tell you (the truth) about that which you have been disputing" (5:48).

The Qurʾān states that "*there shall be no compulsion in religious matters*" (2:256). Peaceful coexistence is affirmed (106:1–6). At the same time, the People of the Book are urged to "come to a common word" on the understanding of the unity of God (*Tawhīd*) and proper worship (e.g., 3:64, 4:171, 5:82, and 29:46). Christians, in particular, are chided for having distorted the revelation of God. Traditional Christian doctrines of the divinity of Jesus and the Trinity are depicted as compromising the unity and transcendence of God (e.g., 5:72–75, 5:117, and 112:3). There are also verses urging Muslims to fight, under certain circumstances, those who have been given a book but "practice not the religion of truth" (9:29).

4-1- Shi'ite- Christian interfaith dialogue

In Shiite perspective, dialogue, rationality and the logic of dialogue is very important. The pioneer in dialogue is the holy prophet of Islam (s), as the founder of the religion, and after Muhammad (s), Ahlulbayt (a) were the main role models in interreligious and intercultural polemics with Christians. Following them, many Shi'i scholars and religious authorities have recorded good background off dialogues among themselves. In the book of “ the Historical Background of Islam and Christianity, Emphasizing on Shi'a Catholic Perspective” by Dr. M.H. Taheri, (2008) has enumerated several historical evidences for dialogues and letters between the holy Prophet (s), Ahlulbayt (a) and Christians. He brings more than 18 evidences from the polemics and debates of Muhammad (s) including letter to the (Nestorian) Christians of Najaran and the letter to St. Catherine's Monastery, Sinai, Egypt ((which I will bring the content in detail)⁷, letter to Heraclius, the Kaiser of Rome, letter to Muqawqis, Vicegerent of Egypt⁸, letter to Heraclius, Emperor of Byzantines (Eastern Roman Empire), prophet Muhammad's encounter with Bahira⁹ and so on.

Dr. Taheri also brings more than 11 polemics from the *Ahlulbayt* (a.s.) amongst which the debate of Imam Ali (a) and Imam Ridha (a) are of some more importance. He also brings about 40 evidences of contemporary dialogues between the Shi'a and Christian scholars amongst which, the dealings of Imam Khomeini in France, Imam Musa Sadr's in Lebanon and the , meeting between Ayatollah Misbah Yazdi and Pope John Paul the second, are of highest significance.

Altogether, the history of the Shi'ite and Christian cultural relations is comparatively old. Of these relations may be mentioned inter-religious dialogue in the area of *Kalam* that took place in a spirit of complete mutual understanding. In the works of the Shi'ite this is discussed in detail. Among such dialogues one may refer to discussions between the spiritual leaders of the two creeds, particularly dialectic between the Muslims and Catholicos, preserved in the oldest Shi'i books. The commentators of *hadith* have explained Catholicos in the following manner:

"Catholicos, is the greatest spiritual leader of Christianity of every age." Most probably this word is the same as Catholic in the present sense, though for an author it is difficult to say which term is an alternative of the other.

Muhammad bin `Ali bin Babwayh al-Qummi, known as al-Shaykh al-Saduq (d. 280/901 A.D.), has recorded four polemical discussions between the highest spiritual leader of Christians and Shi`ah scholars of eminence and *Mutakallimun* in his works.

It is probable that dialogue of Cathilicos with Imam `Ali (`a) took place during 657 A.D.¹⁰ But the culminating point of these controversies has been during the early 10th century A.D.¹¹ i.e., in the 2nd century Hijrah, during the periods of Imam al-Sadiq (`a) and Imam al-Ridha (`a),¹² the 6th and 8th Imams of the Shi`a.

Another point that is indicative of the close cultural relations between the Shi'a and Christianity is recording of the sayings, character and biographical accounts of Christ in the books of the Shi'a, which surpasses all such accounts of Christ in the works of all other sects of Islam. It is noteworthy that the name of `Isa has occurred in the Qur'an 25 times and the name of Masih (`a) recurs 36 times in the Qur'an¹³. And the circumstances of his birth and his way of preaching and his ascension are repeatedly narrated in the Qur'an. But despite this emphasis the books of non-Shi'i authors do not contain detailed accounts of Christ's sayings and character.

For instance, in *Sihah al-Sittah*, i.e., six authentic compendia of *hadith* of Ahl al-Sunnah we do not come across even a single utterance of Christ. On the other hand in the books of the Shi'a, even some of the oldest, utterances of him are found in abundance.

Imam `Ali (`a), the first Imam of the Shi'a, has narrated the ascetic style of the life of Christ in one of his sermons, given under No. 160, in *Nahj al-Balaghah*. After him, in the 2nd century A.H., Imam al-Sadiq has quoted the preaching of Christ, as found exactly in the Bible of Mathew, while delivering his advice to `Abdullah bin Jandab in New Testament, book of Mathew, chapter 6, sentences 2,3,6,7,16 and 18.

During the period from the 2nd to the 4th century A.H., al-Jahiz, in *al-Bayan wa al-Tab'in*, nine short sayings and one detailed speech of Christ were recorded. During the middle of the 4th century an eminent Shi'i author, Abu Muhammad Hasan bin `Ali bin al-Husayn bin Shu`bah al-Harani (d. 38 A.H. = 1001 A.D.) in his book, *Tuhf al-Uqul `an Al al-Rasul*, had devoted about 16 pages to record the sayings of Christ. These utterances consist of two parts: the first, which is briefer, second, which is comparatively detailed, quote parts of Christ's sermons. According to the researches done in this regard, same words are accessible to us at present, in some of *anajil* (i.e., *Book of New Testaments*). For example one may refer to the following:

Book of Mathew, sentences 1-7, 14-17 and 44-45 in chapter 5, sentences 12-19, 24, 30 in chapter 6, sentence 16 in the chapter 7, and 29-36 in chapter 22; Book of Luke, sentences 17-49 in chapter 6; 44-45 in chapter 6, 4-17 in chapter 8 and 37-53 in chapter 11; Book of Mark, sentence 30 in chapter 12.

*Ibn Shu`bah* was a resident of *Harran* and since Harran was a center of learning for the Christians, he had access to a majority of the Christian primary source. Of course, most of the sentences that Ibn Shu`bah has quoted are specifically from the books of Mathew, Luke and Mark. It remains unknown why he has not quoted from all the books of New Testament.

However, it is a distinct feature of the Shi'i works that they have been forerunners in the matter of referring to and quoting profusely from the sayings and sermons of Christ as compared to all other Muslim sects.

In the books of the Shi'a special attempt has been made to deal with the life and character of Christ [*Masih* (a)]. In the sermon 159 in *Nahj al-Balaghah*, `Ali (a), while highlighting the piety of great prophets, writes about Christ:

"Hadrat Masih (a) laid his head on a stone, put on dress made of coarse material, took tough food. His main diet was hunger, at night the moon provided him only light; during winter he slept under the sun at times when it shone or set down; his fruit and vegetable was none other

than what the earth grows for animals. He neither had wife that could instigate him to do follies nor did have a child that could make him sorrowful with concern; nor had any property which might have taken away from him; nor had he any kind of greed (for worldly things) that could cause him humiliation. He had no means of moving except his own feet, his servants were his own hands."

On another occasion, addressing one of his companions, *Nuf Bukali*, Imam Ali (a), states: "Blessing be on those pious persons who have turned away from the worldly attachments like Christ."

4-2- Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and the Christians

Muslims and Christians together constitute over fifty percent of the world and if they lived in peace, we will be half way to world peace. One small step that we can take towards fostering Muslim-Christian harmony is to tell and retell positive stories and abstain from mutual demonization. In this article I propose to remind both Muslims and Christians about a promise that Prophet Muhammed (s) made to Christians. The knowledge of this promise can have enormous impact on Muslim conduct towards Christians. Muslims generally respect the precedent of their Prophet and try to practice it in their lives.

As I mentioned earlier, I would like to invite you consider two important letters, one to the Christians of Najrans in the month of Muharram 624 by holy Prophet (s) which had been written by Imam Ali (a) in the Masjid Annabi in Medina and the other to a delegation from St. Catherine's Monastery In 628 AD, who came to Prophet Muhammed (s) and requested his protection. These important and historical letters are also known as "**Prophet Muhammad's Promises to Christians**" and also, "**Letters from Muhammad (s) to All Christians**".

1- In Makatib al-Rasoul, by *Ahmadi Mianeji*, a letter is narrated from the holy prophet of Islam (s) the (Nestorian) Christians of Najaran. This letter which verbalized by prophet Muhammad (s) and is orthographed by Imam Ali (a) in the month of Muharram, in the year 624 (A.D. or the 3rd year A.H.) contains very important notios. The letter is as follow:

In the Name if God, the Compassionate the Merciful

This is a covenant from Muhammad bin Abdullah, the Messenger of God, to all Christians. I write this letter to be a proof after me indicating that Allah is Almighty and All-Wise. This is a covenant to all Christians in east and west, Arab and non-Arab, known and unknown. Do not break this covenant, or it would be the violation from the covenant of God and mockery to the allegiance of God. If you break it, will be cursed by Him; No difference that you are a governor, a believer or a Muslim. All the rights which belong to me, my people and my relatives, are alike for Christians. They are my citizens and "the people of the *dhimma*¹⁴".we prohibit any kind of bothering and annoying them... no bishop is enforced to discard his Episcopal position, no monk is needed to abandon his position. Those who are in Monastery can stay there and those who are in trip can come back. No church and no business place of the Christian must be destroyed and no property (confiscated) or use in building the mosques, if one violate it, had certainly broken God's covenant and stood against the holy Prophet (s); we do not want any ransom (*Jeziah*) or reparation¹⁵ from monks and bishops.

Wherever they are, are under my support. In desert or faraway land, in east or west, in north or south, they are under my covenant and promise and all devils is away from them. Anyone from them who are in mountains or holy places worshiping God are under my support. There is no tax or *Zakat*¹⁶ for their crops and harvests... do not dispute them but with good polemics.... Whoever violates this covenant and acts against it undoubtedly has violated the covenant of God and His prophet...till when this world is alive must not violate it till the end of the world.

The importance of the letter and the covenant is that much that the holy prophet three times has emphasized on the fact that this is the covenant of God, the Almighty. This is the order of God. God loves to see all mankind in peace and love. And this is exactly the commandment of God:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا ادْخُلُوا فِي السَّلَامِ كَافَّةً وَلَا تَتَّبِعُوا خُطَوَاتِ الشَّيْطَانِ إِنَّهُ لَكُمْ عَدُوٌّ مُبِينٌ

O you who believe! Enter into submission and all and do not follow the footsteps of Shaiatin surely he is your open enemy (2:208)

The other important point is in regard with the monks, bishops and Christian religious leaders. This is again due to the prescriptions of the word of God:

لَتَجِدَنَّ أَقْرَبَهُمْ مَوَدَّةً لِلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا الَّذِينَ قَالُوا إِنَّا نَصَارَى ذَلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمْ قِسِيّينَ وَرُهْبَانًا وَ أَنَّهُمْ لَا يَسْتَكْبِرُونَ

“and surely you will find the nearest of them in affection to the faithful to be those who say" We are Christians." That is because there are priests and monks among them and because they are not arrogant”. (*Holy Qur'an* 5-28)

The other important point is that, this covenant is eternal and for all Christians in different parts of the world. No one has the right to violate it until the day of

resurrection, because God the Almighty has put their position over the disbelievers till the day of resurrection:

إِذْ قَالَ اللَّهُ يَا عِيسَى ابْنِي مَرْيَمَ وَرَافِعُكَ إِلَىٰ وَمُطَهِّرُكَ مِنَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا وَجَاعِلُ الَّذِينَ اتَّبَعُوكَ فَوْقَ
الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا إِلَىٰ يَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ (آل عمران 55)

When Allah said, " O Jesus, I shall take you] r soul [, and I shall raise you up toward Myself, and I shall clear you of [the calumnies of] the faithless, and I shall set those who follow you above the faithless until the Day of Resurrection (3:55)

2- In 628 AD, a delegation from St. Catherine's Monastery came to Prophet Muhammad (s) and requested his protection. He responded by granting them a charter of rights, which I reproduce below in its entirety. St. Catherine's Monastery is located at the foot of Mt. Sinai and is the world's oldest monastery. It possesses a huge collection of Christian manuscripts, second only to the Vatican, and is a world heritage site. It also boasts the oldest collection of Christian icons. It is a treasure house of Christian history that has remained safe for 1400 years under Muslim protection.

The Promise to St. Catherine:

"This is a message from Muhammad ibn Abdullah, as a covenant to those who adopt Christianity, near and far, we are with them.

Verily I, the servants, the helpers, and my followers defend them, because Christians are my citizens; and by Allah! I hold out against anything that displeases them.

No compulsion is to be on them. Neither are their judges to be removed from their jobs nor their monks from their monasteries. No one is to destroy a house of their religion, to damage it, or to carry anything from it to the Muslims' houses. Should anyone take any of these, he would spoil God's covenant and disobey His

Prophet. Verily, they are my allies and have my secure charter against all that they hate.

No one is to force them to travel or to oblige them to fight. The Muslims are to fight for them. If a female Christian is married to a Muslim, it is not to take place without her approval. She is not to be prevented from visiting her church to pray. Their churches are to be respected. They are neither to be prevented from repairing them nor the sacredness of their covenants.

No one of the nation (Muslims) is to disobey the covenant till the Last Day (end of the world)."

The first and the final sentences of these two letters are critically important. They make the promise eternal and universal. Muhammad (s) asserts that Muslims are with Christians near and far straight away rejecting any future attempts to limit the promise to St. Catherine alone. By ordering Muslims to obey it until the Day of Judgment the charter again undermines any future attempts to revoke the privileges. These rights are inalienable. Muhammad (s) declared Christians, all of them, as his allies and he equated ill treatment of Christians with violating God's covenant.

A remarkable aspect of the charter is that it imposes no conditions on Christians for enjoying its privileges. It is enough that they are Christians. They are not required to alter their beliefs, they do not have to make any payments and they do not have any obligations. This is a charter of rights without any duties!

The document is not a modern human rights treaty but even though it was penned in 628 A.D. it clearly protects the right to property, freedom of religion, freedom of work, and security of the person.

I know most readers, must be thinking so what? Well the answer is simple. Those who seek to foster discord among Muslims and Christians focus on issues that divide and emphasize areas of conflict. But when resources such as Muhammad's promise to Christians are invoked and highlighted it builds bridges. It inspires Muslims to rise above communal intolerance and engenders good will in Christians who might be nursing fear of Islam or Muslims.

3- When I look at Islamic sources, I find in them unprecedented examples of religious tolerance and inclusiveness. They make me want to become a better person. I think the capacity to seek the good and do the good inheres in all of us. When we subdue this predisposition towards the good, we deny our fundamental humanity. In this holiday season, I hope all of us can find time to look for something positive and worthy of appreciation in the values, cultures and histories of other peoples. With these two concrete examples there remains no room for violating such a covenant which is prescribed to be eternal. The letter to Muqawqis, Vicegerent of Egypt, as named before, there are very noble notes worthy to be mentioned:

„O people of the Book! Leaving aside all matters of difference and dispute, agree on a matter which is equally consistent between you and us and it is that we should not worship anyone except God and that we should neither associate anyone with Him, nor make anyone else as our god.”¹⁷

The content of this letter is completely derived from the verse of Da’wah from Qur’an (3:64). This phrase of the letter is very very constructive in MCID while inviting all Christians to put aside the differences and hold on our commonalities. We both have one common enemy which is Atheism (*Ilhad*) or Anti-God movement; therefore there is no time to waste time on differences.

After this long introduction, it is about time to review and analyze, first, the general important verses about peace, unity, the principality of dialogue and communication, and then, elaborate on the verses on Christianity and Christians, in particular.

5- Qur'anic general proofs for dialogue, communication and peace

The very word 'Islam' (from the Arabic *Silm*) connotes peace. According to a tradition of Prophet Muhammad (s), 'Peace is Islam' (*Al-Bukhari*). This means that peace is one of the prerequisites of Islam. Similarly, a *Hadith* states: "A Muslim is one from whose tongue and hands people are safe"¹⁸. One of the attributes of God described in the Qura'n is '*As-Salam*', which means peace and security.' That is to say that God's Being itself is a manifestation of peace. Indeed, God is Peace and loves peace makers in Mathew there exist a nice verse similar to this concept; "*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God*"¹⁹. In the Quran divine guidance is likened to the paths of peace. (Qur'an, 5:16)

According to Islam, Paradise is the ideal human abode, and is thus called the 'Home of Peace.' It is also said that, the people of Paradise will wish peace to one another, indicating that the social culture of the people of Paradise will be based on peace. Qura'n avers that, 'reconciliation is best' (4:128), and judging by the consequences, the way of peace is far better than that of confrontation. By the law of Nature, God has decreed that success will be met with only on a reconciliatory path, and not on a confrontational or a violent course of action²⁰.

Considering the fact that peace is the policy of Islam, inevitably, coming to the subject matter of "peaceful dialogue" or "dialogue in the path of peace", needs more investigations in Qur'anic verses to reach to a solid and concrete consequences. Here, the most important verses of Qur'an are gathered this seems so illustrative for the main topic of interfaith dialogue.

1- يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا ادْخُلُوا فِي السَّلَامِ كَافَّةً وَلَا تَتَّبِعُوا خُطُوَاتِ الشَّيْطَانِ إِنَّهُ لَكُمْ عَدُوٌّ مُبِينٌ

O you who believe! Enter into peace and all and do not follow the footsteps of Satan surely he is your open enemy (2:208)

From this verse till the verse 214, seven complete verses are revealed for the sake of unity amongst all religious human beings²¹. Allameh states here that God

the Almighty, after dividing people into two groups in the former verses, from this verse starts to clarify that the unique and solitary way toward the happiness and felicity is entering the realm of peace and submission. The word *Kaffah* كَافَّةً in the verse is for emphasis and according to Allameh's view, does not refer to one group of believers or nation, rather, to all humanity and those who believe in God. He continues in interpreting the phrase of *خُطُواتِ الشَّيْطَانِ* in this manner that, all the things which cause humanity to go away from peace, is a satanic way and accordingly, entering the way of dispersing and disuniting, is following Satan²²

Ayatullah Makarem (h) in Tafsir-e Nemounah interpreting the verse states that: 'believing in God and submission to His orders and entering the realms of peace, all are the keys of unity of all human beings'.²³ So we can infer that one of the main commonalities on which all the people of the Book and religiosity assess themselves is the amount of their submission to God, the Almighty. For those who accept submission, an abode of peace is the outcome:

2- لَهُمْ دَارُ السَّلَامِ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ وَهُوَ وَلِيُّهُمْ بِمَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ

For them [who accept admonition] will be the Home of Peace near their
Creator and Nurturer; and Allah will Be their Guardian due to their
Righteous deeds (6:127)

According to Tafsir-e Nemounah, an abode of peace and settlement is a place where there exist no war, no bloodshedding, and no exploitation, rather, there exist absolute peace, security and guardianship²⁴; and Allah summons us up to such a place which is paradise. Imagine a world where there exists none of the mentioned crisis. The following verse is also denotes to such a place.

3- وَاللَّهُ يَدْعُوا إِلَى دَارِ السَّلَامِ وَيَهْدِي مَنْ يَشَاءُ إِلَى صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ

Allah invites to the abode of peace, and He guides
whomever He wishes to a straight path (10:25)

One of the main characteristics of the Heaven is that, there is no vain talk or annoying matters in it. All the good doers will reside in a place of absolute calmness with no insult, no humiliation, no mockery and etc²⁵. And with this verse, God the Almighty Calls us to build up such a place on the earth away from all kinds of vain. It also teaches us to be polite in our speech and talks with others. The following verse indicates the same issue:

-4 لَا يَسْمَعُونَ فِيهَا لَغْوًا إِلَّا سَلَامًا

Therein (Heaven) they will not hear vain talk, but only "Peace!" (19:62)

-5 وَلَقَدْ جَاءَتْ رُسُلُنَا إِبْرَاهِيمَ بِالْبُشْرَى قَالُوا سَلَامًا قَالَ سَلَامٌ

Certainly Our messengers came to Abraham with the good news, and said, " Peace!"

Peace!" He replied. (Hud- 11:69)

Salam or peace is also the greetings of the angels. i.e., as role models, they teach us to say peace when we see each other. In the abovementioned verse, when or the angels²⁶ brought the good news of a Son or offspring to Abraham, they started their good tidings with Salam. This is why, Salam in Islam is so important and Muslims all over the world use the Islamic form of greeting, "Assalamu alaikum", which means peace be to you.

Actually, the very wording helps generate a friendly and relaxed atmosphere. It is also common in its shorter and longer forms to all Muslim communities wherever they happen to be. Thus, when two Muslims meet who are total strangers to each other, the moment they use this greeting, they immediately feel that they have common grounds, even when they do not speak each other's languages.

The Islamic greeting has different versions, the shortest of which is the one we have already mentioned. The rule in Islam is that when we are offered a greeting, it is obligatory (*Wajib*) that we return it with a better one or with its equal at least. God

orders in the Qur'an: "When a greeting is offered you, answer it with an even better greeting, or (at least) with its like. God keeps count of all things."(4: 86).

-6
وَإِذَا حُيِّتُمْ بِتَحِيَّةٍ فَحَيُّوا بِأَحْسَنَ مِنْهَا أَوْ رُدُّوها إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ حَسِيباً

When you are greeted with a salute, greet with a better one than it, or return it;
indeed Allah takes account of all things (-4:86)

Salam is one of the main attributes of God, the Almighty, where we recite that: "He is Allah, than Whom there is no other God, the Sovereign Lord, the Holy One, Peace, the Keeper of Faith, the Guardian, the Majestic, the Compeller... (59:23). In another place God the Almighty notes that:" *With it (Qur'an) Allah guides those who follow [the course of] His pleasure to the ways of peace, and brings them out from darkness into light by His will, and guides them to a straight path (5:16).* Considering these verses we understand how much the concept of peace and peacemaking is crucial according to the teachings of Qur'an. One of the terms meaning peace and peacemaking in Arabic, *Sulh*, which is used in the Qura'n, is also the root of the word *Islah* denoting development and improvement. This term is used to refer to peacemaking. Peacemakers are agents of good and those who breach it are elements of corruption and sin. It is therefore observed that peace and peacemaking are seen in Islamic tradition as part and parcel of human development. In Islam peace and making peace are seen as *Godly acts worthy of praise and reward.*²⁷ In Islam peace is advocated as a divine quality to be pursued in order to achieve the state of felicity that we were in paradise, man's former dwelling. Up to here, we have discussed the general verses in regard with *Selm* and peace.

There are a couple of other verses which strongly indicates that principality is with peace and security not war or hostility. In the following verses we read that if your enemy inclines towards peace, it is forbidden to be hostile with them, rather, it is must to build peace in among:

7- لَا يَنْهَاكُمُ اللَّهُ عَنِ الَّذِينَ لَمْ يُقَاتِلُوكُمْ فِي الدِّينِ وَلَمْ يُخْرِجُوكُمْ مِنْ دِيَارِكُمْ أَنْ تَبَرُّوهُمْ وَتُقْسِطُوا إِلَيْهِمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الْمُقْسِطِينَ

God does not forbid you to deal kindly and justly with those who have not fought against you about the religion or expelled you from your homes. God does not love the unjust people (60:8)

8- وَإِنْ جَنَحُوا لِلسَّلَامِ فَاجْنَحْ لَهَا وَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَى اللَّهِ إِنَّهُ هُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْعَلِيمُ

And if they (the unbelievers or unbelievers) incline toward peace, then you [too] incline toward it, and put your trust in Allah. Indeed He is the All-hearing, the All-knowing (8:61)

9- فَإِنْ اعْتَرَفُوا بِكُمْ فَلَمْ يُقَاتِلُوكُمْ وَآلَقُوا إِلَيْكُمْ السَّلَامَ فَمَا جَعَلَ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ عَلَيْهِمْ سَبِيلًا

So if they keep out of your way and do not fight you, and offer you peace, then Allah does not allow you any course [of action] against them (4:90)

Ayatullah Makarem (h) in *Tafsir-e Nemouneh* in regard with the first verse of the three aforementioned verses elaborates that from the verse and its continuations we can deduce and demonstrate how deal with non-Muslims and this is not just related for today or tomorrow, it is forever. This is a solid rule that if the enemies of Islam and religiosity try to attack and offend, transgress and insult, self defense is a must, but if they, the disbelievers and even pagans and *Kafirs* do not offend and stay neutral and abstained or show desire toward Islam, Muslims can establish friendly cooperation with them.²⁸ Not only Muslims can have peaceful friendship, but also it is must according to this part of the verse “*تَبَرُّوهُمْ وَتُقْسِطُوا إِلَيْهِمْ*” to be just and fair with them. Imam Ali (a.s.): “if your enemy called you on peace treaty, if the pleasure of God is in it, do not leave it, for peace is the cause for the peace of your army and land, and is also the cause of the release of yourself from grief and problems...”²⁹

Principally, Peace is the best. Following the next verse, though it is mentioned to love and build peace in among the family members, one can generalize it to whole society:

-10 ...وَالصُّلْحُ خَيْرٌ...

...“Peace (and settlement) is better”... (4:12)

We must also pay attention that we have the responsibility to communicate. A world without communications is unimaginable and improbable. In the following verse, Allah has commanded all believers to be patient and establish good relations with one another:

-11 يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اصْبِرُوا وَصَابِرُوا وَرَابِطُوا وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ

O, Believers, have patience, help each other with patience, establish good relations with one another, and have fear of God so that you may have everlasting happiness (3:200)

Late Allameh Tabatabayi (r.a.) in interpreting this verse have had opened a vast discussion on *al-Murabitah*. *al-Murabitah* is derived from R B T or communication. Allameh states that man cannot live individually. *Insan*, the Arabic word for human beings, is derived from ONS which means “intimacy or living together” there has been no spot in the history that all human beings would have lived individually. Allameh indicates that after the First prophet man understood for the very first time which what is good and what is bad. According to this verse: “*Mankind were but a single religious [community; then they differed*” (10:19) and كَانَ النَّاسُ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً فَبَعَثَ اللَّهُ النَّبِيِّنَ مُبَشِّرِينَ وَ مُنْذِرِينَ وَ أَنْزَلَ مَعَهُمُ الْكِتَابَ بِالْحَقِّ لِيَحْكُمَ بَيْنَ النَّاسِ فِي مَا اخْتَلَفُوا فِيهِ “*Mankind were a single community; then Allah sent the prophets as bearers of good news and as warmers, and He sent down with them the Book with the truth, that it may judge between the people concerning that about which they differed*” (2:213).

Allameh demonstrates that the only way for the compromise and congruity among the mankind is bound to knowing the Books and prophets and gathering

around one religion. He continues with this verse that: *“He has prescribed for you the religion which He had enjoined upon Noah and which We have[also] revealed to you, and which We had enjoined upon Abraham, Moses and Jesus, declaring, “Maintain the religion, and do not be divided in it.” (42:13)*

So, the only way for the unity of mankind is gathering around RELIGION.³⁰ Therefore, Islam has special view on society and communication and application of religion as the connecting link among all members of the society. The following verse, too, although is mentioned for unity among all members of Muslim community, seems to be useful for our discussions which calls for unity.

-12 وَاعْتَصِمُوا بِحَبْلِ اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا وَلَا تَفَرَّقُوا وَاذْكُرُوا نِعْمَتَ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ إِذْ كُنْتُمْ أَعْدَاءً فَأَلَّفَ بَيْنَ قُلُوبِكُمْ فَأَصْبَحْتُمْ بِنِعْمَتِهِ إِخْوَانًا

And hold fast by the covenant of Allah all together and be not disunited"

And remember the favor of Allah on you when you were enemies, then

He united your hearts so by His favor you became brethren; (3:103)

This covenant which is the connection between man and the Lord, in Islamic perspective, is anything which can connect man to Him like Prophet Muhammad (s), Qur'an or Ahlulbayt (a.s.)³¹, however, Allameh has a more general perspective in its general use for interfaith dialogue indicating:” anything which connects earth to the heavens or man to the Lord”.³² Allameh Javadi Amoli has a delicate idea here that this “covenant of God or the Cord of God” is *Existence*; per se. it means that my being, your being and the being by itself is the connection between me and Him, because my being is not apart from His Being. After reviewing some useful and instrumental Qur'aic verses about the principality of peace and settlement and its priority to struggle and tention, now it is about time to get down to some illustrative verses about another principle which is al-Da'wa³³ or invitation to dialogue. The verses about Da'wah are numerous and by itself is a distinct subject matter which maybe hundreds of books are written, however, the important point here refers to this element in Islam. Islam never imposes a religion on somebody, on the contrary,

believes in religious freedom and freewill in choosing a faith (2:256). Let's consider some of these verses and then I will add some points:

13- فَلِذَلِكَ فَادْعُ وَاسْتَقِمْ كَمَا أُمِرْتَ وَلَا تَتَّبِعْ أَهْوَاءَهُمْ وَقُلْ آمَنْتُ بِمَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ مِنْ كِتَابٍ وَأُمِرْتُ لِأَعْدِلَ
بَيْنَكُمْ اللَّهُ رَبُّنَا وَرَبُّكُمْ لَنَا أَعْمَالُنَا وَلَكُمْ أَعْمَالُكُمْ لَا حُجَّةَ بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكُمْ اللَّهُ يَجْمَعُ بَيْنَنَا وَإِلَيْهِ الْمَصِيرُ

So summon to this [unity of religion], and be steadfast, just as you have been commanded, and do not follow their desires, and say, " I believe in whatever Book Allah has sent down. I have been commanded to do justice among you. Allah is our Lord and your Lord. Our deeds belong to us and your deeds belong to you. There is no argument between us and you. Allah will bring us together and toward Him is the destination.
(42:15)

14- قُلْ هَذِهِ سَبِيلِي أَدْعُوا إِلَى اللَّهِ عَلَى بَصِيرَةٍ...

Say, " This is my way. I summon to Allah with insight (12:108)

15- ادْعُ إِلَى سَبِيلِ رَبِّكَ بِالْحُكْمَةِ وَالْمَوْعِظَةِ الْحَسَنَةِ وَجَادِلْهُمْ بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ

Call to the way of your Lord with wisdom and goodly exhortation and have disputations with them in the best manner (16:125)

According to these three verses, the principality of calling; inviting; and supplicating, i.e. to call on God, is pinpointed. *Da'wah* was the basic mission of the prophets of God. They were raised up among their respective people to call them to the worship of Allah alone and to abandon the worship of the various false gods that they had invented like the idols, moon, stars, the sun and etc. therefore, *Da'wah* becomes obligatory. In the first verse (42:15), Prophet Muhammad (s) is ordered to summon and to call to the way of God ad believing in Him. Allameh Tabatabayi (r) interpreting the verse states that, this verse is the concluding verse for the former ones. The former verses are talking about differences and arguments among different religions, while, Allah has Sent just one *Shari'ah* to all

prophets and God is one. We do not have different gods and different divine laws³⁴. Allameh adds this point that from this verse, we can deduce good results in the unity of religions when in the continuation of the verse, Allah orders the Prophet (s) to testify the former religions and to judge justly. In this phrase *اللَّهُ رَبُّنَا وَ* clearly this points are scrutinized that, firstly, God is one among all, and secondly, there is no debate and hostility among the people of the book; and the best way to convey and transmit this message (unity of religions), must be told in its best possible dispute and argument (16:125). If in this way, the caller for dialogue responds in an inappropriate way and manner, he is not allowed to react similarly; rather, he must respond in peace and say peace. This method is exactly the Qur'anic and Islamic teaching: *"The servants of the All-beneficent are those who walk humbly on the earth, and when the ignorant address them, say, "Peace!"(25:63) or "Those who do not give false testimony, and when they come upon vain talk, pass by nobly. (25:72). This verse reminds me of the verse in the Bible, "turn the other cheek" (Matthew 5:39).*

The following verse is the result of fulfilling the task of *Da'wah*. i.e., when one calls on unity and interfaith dialogue, then, this is the will of God which seals the work. God Brings the hearts together and causes the unity of hearts:

16- *وَأَلَّفَ بَيْنَ قُلُوبِهِمْ لَوْ أَنْفَقْتَ مَا فِي الْأَرْضِ جَمِيعًا مَا أَلَّفْتَ بَيْنَ قُلُوبِهِمْ وَلَٰكِنَّ اللَّهَ أَلَّفَ بَيْنَهُمْ إِنَّهُ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ*

And Allah is the One Who caused Unity between the hearts of The believers [who suffered from discord And dispute before]; and had you [O Messenger] spent all that is on The earth you could not have caused That unity between their hearts, but Allah caused unity between them; verily, Allah is the Source-

Wisdom Supreme power (*al-Anfal*-8:63)

From these aforementioned verses, we drew this conclusion that, calling to unity, is the complementary part of the first principle which was peace and love.

One of the other important principles in calling for peace and understanding that Islam is not a religion which must be approached by force and compulsion is the following verse which refers to “freedom in choosing religion”. Allameh states that this verse is one of the strong evidences in response to those who want to accuse Islam to imposing religion on people.

-17 لَا إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ قَدْ تَبَيَّنَ الرُّشْدُ مِنَ الْغَيِّ

There is no compulsion in religion (Baqara- 2:256)

Allameh Tabatabayi (r), Ayatullah Makarem (h) and many other interpreters state that, in choosing religion, there is no compulsion. The abode of belief and faith is inside the heart of human being and nothing can be pushed to heart by force.³⁵ In fact, the Holy Quran is full of statements showing that belief in this or that religion is a person's own concern, and that he is given the choice of adopting one way or another. If he accepts the truth, it is for his own good, and that, if he sticks to error, it is to his own detriment.

Some quotations to this effect are given below:

“The Truth is from your Lord; so let him who please believe and let him who please disbelieve.” (18:29)

“We have truly shown him the way; he may be thankful or unthankful.” (76:3)

“Clear proofs have indeed come to you from your Lord: so whoever sees, it is for his own good; and whoever is blind, it is to his own harm. And I am not a keeper over you.” (6:104)

“If you do good, you do good for your own souls. And if you do evil, it is for them.” (17:7)

The duty of the Messenger of Allah, and, following him, the duty of every Muslim is only to deliver the message of truth and no more. It is not permissible to compel a disbeliever into professing Islam. If, for example, a non-Muslim citizen (*dhimmi*) or a person of protected status (*musta'man*) is forced to accept Islam, he is

not considered a Muslim unless it is established that his confession is a result of his own choosing. If the person concerned dies before his consent is known, he will be considered a disbeliever...The reason for the prohibition of duress here are the words of God Most High that there shall be 'no compulsion in religion.'³⁶

Islam has given to mankind freedom of thought, freedom of speech, and freedom of action but within a correct and reasonable framework, (i.e. whereby one does not harm others or oneself), so that certain foods and drinks, which are very harmful, are not permissible because of the harm they cause to oneself. Likewise slander and assault and the like are not permissible because of the harm they cause to others.

In a tradition quoted from Imam Ali Ibn Abi Talib (a.s.):

'Do not be a slave to another when Allah has made you free.'

In a well known line of poetry of Imam Hussein at Karbala:

'Oh that I may not be killed but as a free man, even though I see death as a thing repulsive.'

Imam Hussein also said to Hurr Ibn Yazid al-Riyahiyy:

'Your mother did not err when she named you Hurr (free) for you are free in this world and felicitous in the next.'

In regard with the freedom of religions in frequently related traditions we see that Islam adopts for every people of religion that which they themselves follow, thereby confirming their freedom in their religion. For example Imam Sadiq was asked about rulings' (concerning everyday issues) and he replied, *"What every people of religion permit is permissible"*. In another tradition Imam Ridha said: *'adopt for them what they themselves adopt.'* Related from Imam al-Sadiq (Peace be upon him) that he said: *'Whatever people profess as a matter of religion will become obligatory as a law upon them.'*³⁷

The following verses are some selected ones about the character and personality of the holy prophet (s). It is inevitable to talk about peace building and Islamic teaching without talking about Muhammad (s). In numerous verses God, the All-Beneficent, has introduced him as a role model in character and leniency of heart and manner. These verses are important because show that the carrier of the revelation is such a kind person.

18- وَإِنَّكَ لَعَلَىٰ خُلُقٍ عَظِيمٍ

And most surely you conform (yourself) to sublime morality (-68:4)

19- لَقَدْ جَاءَكُمْ رَسُولٌ مِّنْ أَنفُسِكُمْ عَزِيزٌ عَلَيْهِ مَا عَنِتُّمْ حَرِيصٌ عَلَيْكُم بِالْمُؤْمِنِينَ رَءُوفٌ رَّحِيمٌ

There has certainly come to you an apostle from among yourselves.

Grievous to him is your distress; he is full of concern for you, and most kind and merciful to the faithful (Taube- 9:128)

20- فَبِمَا رَحْمَةٍ مِّنَ اللَّهِ لِنْتَ لَهُمْ وَلَوْ كُنْتَ فَظًا غَلِيظَ الْقَلْبِ لَانفَضُّوا مِنْ حَوْلِكَ

فَاعْفُ عَنْهُمْ وَاسْتَغْفِرْ لَهُمْ وَشَاوِرْهُمْ فِي الْأَمْرِ...

It is by Allah's mercy that you are gentle to them; and had you been harsh and hardhearted, surely they would have scattered from around you. So excuse them, and plead for forgiveness for them, and consult them in the affairs (3:159)

In these three verses, being “most kind and merciful”, owning “sublime morality “ and being “gentle” to the people are the main attributes related to him. In the verse 3:159, one point is worthy to mention that if prophet would have been harsh to his people, they would have scattered from around him. Accordingly, being gentle, lenient, kind, forgiving and merciful are the main reasons to attract a person’s attention and pave the way to a constructive and peaceful dialogue. While he is a role model for us, as a prophet of God, we have the obligation to resort to him and do the same in encountering people of different faiths. One example of his kind behavior is with The Jewish man. Prophet Muhammad (s) had a Jewish neighbor who used to throw garbage and dead animals in his way every day when he came out of his house.

This man was absent for a while. Prophet Muhammad (s) decided to pass by his house and ask about him. He found him ill and accordingly paid him a visit and inquired about his health with kindness. Upon seeing this, the Jew embraced Islam and about the same manner is reported from *Imam Hasan al-Mujtaba* (A.S.) in regard with his Jew neighbor³⁸. The enmity of his worst enemy toward his most beloved was also met with awesome goodness. This includes tolerance for actions they may do that is not pleasing to one. Or as Jesus' (P) famous saying: "Love your neighbor like yourself." Prophet Muhammad (s) states that:

"By God, he is not a believer, by God, he is not a believer, by God, he is not a believer, with whom his neighbors are not secure." ³⁹

In one beautiful narration we encounter a Hadith from Imam Sadiq (A.S.) ⁴⁰:

هل الدين الا الحب؟

Is religion other than love?

6- Qur'anic attributes on the People of the Book, esp. Christians

In the previous chapter we elaborated on details on general verses about the peace, love, unity and respect. In this chapter the emphasis is mainly on the verses particularly aims at Christians and bringing some arguments for dialogue with them.

In Qur'an, as a Divine guideline toward human's life prosperity, numerous verses exist in regard with the dialogue with non-Muslims, specially, with Christians, which are worthy to be mentioned. In Qur'an, the first and foremost essential slogan is the following verse:

1- قُلْ يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ تَعَالَوْا إِلَى كَلِمَةٍ سَوَاءٍ بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكُمْ أَلَّا نَعْبُدَ إِلَّا اللَّهَ وَلَا نُشْرِكَ بِهِ شَيْئًا

Say, " O People of the Book! Come to a word common between us and you: that we will worship no one but Allah, and that we will not ascribe any partner to Him (3:64)

6-1- Knowledgeability, Humbleness and trustability of Christians

Founding the dialogue on the basis of talking about commonalities is the key point. In books of interpretations, especially in *Tafsir Nemooneh* by Ayatollah Makarem,⁴¹ it is mentioned that if you could not justify each other for your own beliefs, for the sake of *the holy Purpose*, put your differences aside and rely on your commonalities. Standing against atheism, denying God and paganism, is *the holy Purpose*; this verse is so important for grounding the entire basis of dialogue for and with the juxtaposition of this verse with the verse from the holy Bible, can be good parallels: "*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God*" (B* Matthew 5:9).

In another verse, Allah the Almighty, differentiates between different groups of the People of the Book and does not consider all of them as one group including the wrong-doers and the righteous ones:

2- لَيْسُوا سَوَاءً مِنْ أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ أُمَّةٌ قَانِمْهُمْ يَتْلُونَ آيَاتِ اللَّهِ أَنَاءَ اللَّيْلِ وَهُمْ يَسْجُدُونَ (113) يُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَيَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَيُسَارِعُونَ فِي الْخَيْرَاتِ وَأُولَئِكَ مِنَ الصَّالِحِينَ (114)

Yet they are not all alike. Among the People of the Book is an upright nation; they recite Allah's signs in the watches of the night and prostrate, They have faith in Allah and the Last Day, and bid what is right and forbid what is wrong, and are active in [performing] good deeds. They are among the righteous (3:113-114)

According to Ayatullah Makarem's interpretation, this verse and its following verse was revealed on praising a group of Jews lead by *Abdullah b. Salam* and 40 Christians from Najran, 32 Christians from Abyssinia and 8 people from Rome, who had the sense of Truth Seeking and accepted Islam, and Qur'an while condemning the wrong groups of the People of the Book, admires the righteous group and attributing them as these:

- They are Upstanding in their beliefs for God,
- They Recite Allah's signs in the watches of the night,
- They prostrate before God,
- They believe in God and the Last Day,
- They bid what is right and forbid what is wrong
- They are active in good deeds.⁴²

Or in another place we see differentiation among the People of the Book by admiring some of them to have faith in Allah and what He Has sent down to the prophets. Important of all, is their humbleness which in 5:82 we witness it, too.

3- وَإِنَّ مِنْ أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ لَمَنْ يُؤْمِنُ بِاللَّهِ وَمَا أُنْزِلَ إِلَيْكُمْ وَمَا أُنْزِلَ إِلَيْهِمْ خَاشِعِينَ لِلَّهِ لَا يَشْتَرُونَ بِآيَاتِ اللَّهِ ثَمَنًا قَلِيلًا أُولَئِكَ لَهُمْ أَجْرُهُمْ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ سَرِيعُ الْحِسَابِ

Indeed among the People of the Book there are surely some who have faith in Allah, and in what has been sent down to you, and in what has been sent down to them. Humble toward Allah, they do not sell the signs of Allah for a paltry gain. They shall have their reward near their Lord; indeed Allah is swift at reckoning (3:199)

These are not some ordinary attributes to be said to anyone, but for those who are beloved by God and those who are in the right path. In the following verse another attribute is followed the former ones.

4- وَإِذَا سَمِعُوا مَا أُنْزِلَ إِلَى الرَّسُولِ تَرَى أَعْيُنُهُمْ تَفِيضُ مِنَ الدَّمْعِ (مائده 83)

When they hear what has been revealed to the Apostle, you see their eyes fill with tears because of the truth that they recognize. They say, "Our Lord, we believe; so write us down among the witnesses (5:83)

5- أُولَئِكَ يُؤْتَوْنَ أَجْرَهُمْ مَرَّتَيْنِ بِمَا صَبَرُوا وَ يَذَرُونَ بِالْحَسَنَةِ السَّيِّئَةَ وَمِمَّا رَزَقْنَاهُمْ يُنفِقُونَ

(قصص/54)

Those will be given their reward two times for their patience. They
repel evil] conduct [with good, and spend out of what We have
provided them (28:54)

The Christians of the time of Prophet Muhammad (s) had some special characteristics compared to other eras; firstly, they believed in the Prophet and his mission and the wordings of Qur'an. Moreover, they were humble in their behavior and whenever they would hear the voice of revelation, they would cry over the content of the verses and would shout out calling on God, the Almighty, to put them amongst the companions of Muhammad (s).⁴³ There are some other attributes mentioned in Qur'an introducing the Christian people of Knowledge and the People who are more proximate and intimate to Muslims than others.

6- لَكِنِ الرَّاسِخُونَ فِي الْعِلْمِ مِنْهُمْ وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِمَا أُنْزِلَ إِلَيْكَ وَمَا أُنْزِلَ مِنْ قَبْلِكَ وَالْمُقِيمِينَ

الصَّلَاةَ وَالْمُؤْتُونَ الزَّكَاةَ وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ أُولَئِكَ سَنُؤْتِيهِمْ أَجْرًا عَظِيمًا

But as for those who are firmly grounded in knowledge
from among them, and the faithful, they believe in what has been
sent down to you, and what was sent down before you those who
maintain the prayer, give the *Zakat*, and believe in Allah and the
Last Day them We shall give a great reward. (4:162)

6-2- Affection of Christians to Muslims

7- لَتَجِدَنَّ أَقْرَبَهُمْ مَوَدَّةً لِلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا الَّذِينَ قَالُوا إِنَّا نَصَارَى ذَلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمْ قِسِيَّيْنَ وَرُهْبَانًا وَ
أَنَّهُمْ لَا يَسْتَكْبِرُونَ

“and surely you will find the nearest of them in affection to the faithful to be those who say" We are Christians." That is because there are priests and monks among them and because they are not arrogant”. (Holy Qur'an 5-82)

This verse, (5:82) is one of the best evidences for dialogue of Muslims and Christian. This fact is due to the humbleness of them and that they are not arrogant. According to the personal and others' experiences, talking to them is much easier even than some extremists even among the Muslims like Taliban, al-Qaida and other sects and that includes some Jews because they are mostly relying on racism and extremist approaches.

8- كَوْنَهُمْ أَقَامُوا التَّوْرَةَ وَالْإِنْجِيلَ وَمَا أَنزَلْنَا إِلَيْهِمْ مِنْ رَبِّهِمْ لَأَكْلُوا مِنْ فَوْقِهِمْ وَمِنْ تَحْتِ أَرْجُلِهِمْ
مِنْهُمْ أُمَّةٌ مُقْتَصِدَةٌ وَكَثِيرٌ مِنْهُمْ سَاءَ مَا يَعْمَلُونَ (مائده، 66)

Had they followed the Laws of the Old and New Testaments and what was revealed to them from their Lord, they would have received Our bounties from above and below in abundance. Some of them are modest people, but many of them commit the worst sins (5:66)

One of the constructive points mentioned in this verse is the fact that even, if the Jews and Christians hold fast to the real and original teachings of the Old and New Testament in addition to the teachings of the other prophets mentioned before them, as the Psalms (*Zabour*) of David⁴⁴, the blessings and bounties of God will descend to them. Ayatullah Makarem interpreting the verse points out to this fact that, following and acting in accordance with the real teachings of Old and New

Testaments (not the verses heresies entered into them), not only has benefits for the Hereafter, but also brings peace and security in among them. The wars, bloodsheds, struggles and assassinating the think tanks and scholars are the results of ignoring those messages and teachings of those Divine Books. Ayatullah Makarem continues his interpretation adding this point that, there are always some moderate and rituos people among the people of the Book who are against any kind of brutality, terror, animosity and struggles which Qur'an admires them as the continuation of the verse, "...some of them are modest people..." (5:66). Ayatullah Makarem intensifies this fact with the verses 159 and 181 of Chapter A'raf : " وَمِنْ قَوْمِ مُوسَىٰ أُمَّةٌ يَهْدُونَ بِالْحَقِّ وَبِهِ يَعْدِلُونَ *Of the people of Moses there is a section who guide and do justice in the light of truth*" (7:159) and " وَمِمَّنْ خَلَقْنَا أُمَّةٌ يَهْدُونَ بِالْحَقِّ وَبِهِ يَعْدِلُونَ *Among those We have created are a nation who guide by the truth and do justice thereby.*" (7:181). Ayatullah Makarem brings also the following verse including among the verses boosting the importance of discriminating and separating the modest people of the Book from the extremist groups.⁴⁵ Before considering the verse, one other point in the former verse is worthy to be mentioned that all the pronouns in the verse are referred to the people of the Book, themselves, and this is one of the points and teachings of Qur'an that one must not have prejudice on nationality over religiosity⁴⁶.

9- وَمِنْ أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ مَنْ إِنْ تَأْمَنَهُ بِقِنطَارٍ يُؤَدِّهِ إِلَيْكَ وَمِنْهُمْ مَنْ إِنْ تَأْمَنَهُ بِدِينَارٍ لَا يُؤَدِّهِ إِلَيْكَ إِلَّا مَا دُمْتَ عَلَيْهِ فَإِنَّهُمْ قَالُوا لَيْسَ عَلَيْنَا فِي الْأُمِّيْنِ سَبِيلٌ وَيَقُولُونَ عَلَى اللَّهِ الْكَذِبَ وَهُمْ يَعْلَمُونَ

And among the People of the Book is he who if you entrust him with a quintal will repay it to you, and among them is he who, if you entrust him with a dinar will not repay it to you unless you stand persistently over him. That is because they say, " We have no obligation to the non-Jews." But they attribute lies to Allah, and they know [it] (3:75)

In a couple of other verses, God admires the followers of Jesus the Christ:

10- إِذْ قَالَ اللَّهُ يَا عِيسَى ابْنَىٰ مَتَوَفَّيَكَ وَارْفَعُكَ إِلَىٰ وَطْهَرُكَ مِنَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا وَجَاعِلُ الَّذِينَ
اتَّبَعُوكَ فَوْقَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا إِلَىٰ يَوْمِ الْقِيَمَةِ (آل عمران 55)

When Allah said, " O Jesus, I shall take your soul, and I shall raise you up toward Myself, and I shall clear you of] the calumnies of [the faithless, and I shall set those who follow you above the faithless until the Day of Resurrection. Then to Me will be your return, whereat I will judge between you concerning that about which you used to differ (3:55)

Ayatullah Makarem mentions that this verse is one of the miraculous verses of Qur'an which shows the superiority of the Christians over the Jews.⁴⁷ Allameh Tabatabayi in his interpretation after several pages taking over this verse concludes that this part of the verse: " *I shall set those who follow you above the faithless until the Day of Resurrection* "refers to both Muslims and Christians who will conquer non-believers and the Jews who are doomed to be cursed till the day of resurrection.⁴⁸ One other important point is that *وَ رَافِعُكَ* (Raise you up) here means a spiritual ascension⁴⁹ because God does not have a body or place to mean this ascension is a physical one, although it needs more scrutinization on the meaning of ascension in other place.⁵⁰

6-3- Preservation of the worshipping places

11- وَ لَوْ لَا دَفَعُ اللَّهُ النَّاسَ بَعْضَهُمْ بِبَعْضٍ لَّهَدَمَتْ صَوَامِعُ وَبِيَعٌ وَصَلَوَاتُ وَ مَسَاجِدُ يُذْكَرُ فِيهَا اسْمُ اللَّهِ
كَثِيرًا وَ لَيَنْصُرَنَّ اللَّهُ مَنْ يَنْصُرُهُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَقَوِيٌّ عَزِيزٌ

Had not Allah repulsed the people from one another, ruin would have befallen the monasteries, churches, synagogues and mosques in which Allah's Name is mentioned greatly. Allah will surely help those who help Him. Indeed Allah is all-strong, all-mighty (22:40)

In this verse, God the Almighty, implicates the fact that He like all places of worship, no matter for Muslims, Christians and Jews be safeguarded by some groups. The importance of the verse is that in this phrase of the verse, يُذَكِّرُ فِيهَا اسْمُ اللَّهِ, *in which Allah's Name is mentioned greatly*, God, the Almighty, legitimizes mentioning the name of Allah in Monasteries, Churches, temples and other worshipping places. Although Christians do not use the name of *Allah* in their churches or monasteries, or the Jews in their synagogues, rather use *God* or *Jehovah*, all worship one source which is Allah (s.w.t.) and He Legitimizes them; and this was while that most of the Jews would deny all of them, considering themselves as the best race and people on the earth⁵¹.

6-4- The catering of the People of the Book

12- الْيَوْمَ أُحِلَّ لَكُمُ الطَّيِّبَاتُ وَطَعَامُ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ حِلٌّ لَكُمْ وَطَعَامُكُمْ حِلٌّ لَهُمْ

Today wholesome things are] made [lawful for you, and
so is the food of those who were given the Book lawful for you,
while your food is lawful for them. (Ma'idah-5:5)

This verse is one of the verses which help us in interfaith dialogue. In this verse, the food and caterings of the people of the Book is counted *Halal*⁵² and legal to both sides, Muslims and others of the people of the Book, and this brings more intimacy to both sides. Allameh Tabatabayi very nicely interprets it as a remedy and grief releasing order by God the Almighty⁵³ to make the communication and interactions. Of course, there is a jurisprudential discussion about the kinds of the food which are considered *Halal*, however, it does not harm our discussion since it shows that the people of the book are not intrinsically impure⁵⁴

6-5- All the religions are Islam

13- ان الدين عند الله الاسلام

Lo! Religion with Allah(is) the Surrender(to His Will and Guidance.(3:19)

Very interestingly, interpreting this verse, Ayatullah Makarem indicates that “the true faith before God is Submission and in reality, the spirit of religion in each time and space is nothing but submission to God, however, since the religion beought by the Prophet of Islam (s) was the sealing and the best religion, the word Islam or Submission is chosen for it, unless, overally, all religions are Islam.”⁵⁵ And this verse is very strongly supported by the following verse.

14- ما كان ابراهيم يهوديا ولا نصرانيا ولكن كان حنيفا مسلما

Abraham was neither a Jew nor a Christian. Rather he was a Hanif, (a pure) Muslim and he was not one of the polytheist (3:67)⁵⁶

6-6- The necessity of recognizing all the former religions

There are a couple of verses in the holy Qur'an which commands all Muslims to recognize the former religions, while recognizing them is recognizing Islam since they are fathers and forefathers of Islam and there is no benefit out of dyeing them. The followings are selected verses of those ones.

15- قُلْ ءَامَنَّا بِاللّٰهِ وَمَا اُنْزِلَ عَلَيْنَا وَمَا اُنْزِلَ عَلَىٰ اِبْرٰهِيْمَ وَاِسْمٰعِيْلَ وَاِسْحٰقَ وَيَعْقُوْبَ وَاَلَسَبَاطِ وَمَا اُوْتِيَ مُوسٰى وَعِيسٰى وَالنَّبِيُّوْنَ مِنْ رَبِّهِمْ لَا نُفَرِّقُ بَيْنَ اَحَدٍ مِّنْهُمْ وَنَحْنُ لَهُ مُسْلِمُوْنَ

Say, " We have faith in Allah, and in what has been sent down to us, and what was sent down to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob and the Tribes, and that which Moses and Jesus were given, and the prophets, from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and to Him do we submit.(3:84)

16- اَمَّنَ الرَّسُوْلُ بِمَا اُنْزِلَ اِلَيْهِ مِنْ رَبِّهِ وَالْمُؤْمِنُوْنَ كُلٌّ ءَامَنَ بِاللّٰهِ وَ مَلٰئِكَتِهِ وَ كُتُبِهِ وَ رُسُلِهِ لَا نُفَرِّقُ بَيْنَ اَحَدٍ مِّنْ رُّسُلِهِ وَ قَالُوْا سَمِعْنَا وَاَطَعْنَا غُفْرٰنَكَ رَبَّنَا وَاِلَيْكَ الْمَصِيْرُ

The Messenger believes in what has been sent down to him from his Lord, and [so do] believers; everyone believes in God and His angels, His books and His messengers. We do not differentiate between any of His messengers. They say: " we have heard and obey; [we beg] Your pardon, our Lord! Toward You lies the Goal!

17- شَرَعَ لَكُمْ مِنَ الدِّينِ مَا وَصَّى بِهِ نُوحًا وَالَّذِي أَوْحَيْنَا إِلَيْكَ وَمَا وَصَّيْنَا بِهِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَمُوسَى وَعِيسَى أَنْ أَقِيمُوا الدِّينَ وَلَا تَتَفَرَّقُوا فِيهِ... فَلِذَلِكَ فَادْعُ وَاسْتَقِمْ كَمَا أُمِرْتَ وَلَا تَتَّبِعْ أَهْوَاءَهُمْ....

He has prescribed for you the religion which He had enjoined upon Noah and which We have [also] revealed to you, and which We had enjoined upon Abraham, Moses and Jesus, declaring, " Maintain the religion, and do not be divided in it..... So summon to this [unity of religion], and be steadfast, just as you have been commanded, and do not follow their desires, and say, " I believe in whatever Book Allah has sent down. I have been commanded to do justice among you (42:13-15)

In this verse, the phrase of *أَنْ أَقِيمُوا الدِّينَ وَلَا تَتَفَرَّقُوا فِيهِ* is very strongly in favor of the unity of religions and respecting one another, especially the Arch religions revealed to Arch prophets, i.e., Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad (s). So, the main aftermath of recognizing other Divine religions is unity and congruity of them.

6-7- Methodology of dialogue

About the methodology of dialogue, Qur'an in several occasions has called for peaceful dialogue; In Qur'an great emphasis is put on the best polemics and way of addressing and dialogue with the People of the Book. Islam never prescribe debate, wild talk, rather, supports logical reasonings, arguments and demonstrations. Belief, as mentioned before, abodes I heart and nothing enters heart unless by peaceful talks and dialogue. It is very important for each Muslim

and believer to keep it in mine in the time of encountering one another and establishing the foundations of communication.

18- وَلَا تَجْدُلُوا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ إِلَّا بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ إِلَّا الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا مِنْهُمْ وَقُولُوا ءَامَنَّا بِالَّذِي أُنزِلَ إِلَيْنَا

وَأُنزِلَ إِلَيْكُمْ وَإِلَهُنَا وَإِلَهُكُمْ وَاحِدٌ وَنَحْنُ لَهُ مُسْلِمُونَ

Do not dispute with the People of the Book except in a manner which is best, barring such of them as are wrongdoers, and say, " We believe in that which has been sent down to us and has been sent down to you; our God and your God is one[and the same], and to Him do we submit. (29:46)

Principally, any kind of disdainful dispute based on bias or illogical prejudice is rejected and instead, good behavior and soft voice is substituted. In one narration from Imam Hasan (pbuH), the third infallible Imam of the Shi'ite, we witness this saying that: *"The best of the bests, is the best humor"*

In other verses we recite: "...Whenever you speak, speak justly, even if a near relative is concerned; and fulfill the covenant of God. Thus does He command you, that you may remember." (Qur'an 6:152) Do not feel discouraged if people seem unconvinced by your beliefs, and are unwilling to share your faith. The Qur'an describes that God Alone is the One to guide people's hearts.

Ayatullah Makarem mentions that, this verse by itself is based on good polemics when addresses the non-Muslims: , " We believe in that which has been sent down to us and has been sent down to you; our God and your God is one[and the same], and to Him do we submit", what a beautiful declaration,?! This is the rhythm of Unity and belief in all the things revealed from One God, omitting all prejudices, omitting differentiating between *I* and *Other* and submitting one to the Truth"⁵⁷ In the following verse, other good qualities of fair and peaceful dialogue are mentioned, like being just in dialogue, rejecting harmful arguments and so on.

19- فَلِذَلِكَ فَادْعُ وَاسْتَقِمْ كَمَا أُمِرْتَ وَلَا تَتَّبِعْ أَهْوَاءَهُمْ وَقُلْ آمَنْتُ بِمَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ مِنْ كِتَابٍ وَأُمِرْتُ لِأَعْدِلَ بَيْنَكُمُ اللَّهُ رَبُّنَا وَرَبُّكُمْ لَنَا أَعْمَالُنَا وَلَكُمْ أَعْمَالُكُمْ لَا حِجَّةَ بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكُمُ اللَّهُ يَجْمَعُ بَيْنَنَا وَإِلَيْهِ الْمَصِيرُ

So summon to this] unity of religion [, and be steadfast, just as you have been commanded, and do not follow their desires, and say," I believe in whatever Book Allah has sent down. I have been commanded to do justice among you. Allah is our Lord and your Lord. Our deeds belong to us and your deeds belong to you. There is no argument between us and you. Allah will bring us together and toward Him is the destination. (42:15)

These verses were just some of the verses available in Qur'an denoting to founding peaceful dialogue and communications which can be summarized in one verse that: *"O people! Behold, we have created you from a male and a female and have made you into nations and tribes so that you might come to know one another. Verily, the noblest of you in the sight of God is the one who is most deeply conscious of Him. Behold, God is all-knowing, all-aware."* [Qur'an 49:13]

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَى وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَاكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ (49:12)

O mankind! Indeed We created you from a male and a female, and made you nations and tribes that you may identify yourselves with one another. Indeed the noblest of you in the sight of Allah is the most God wary among you. Indeed Allah is all-knowing, all-aware

So the purpose behind the diversity in the creation of mankind is to dare to know one another

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَالَّذِينَ هَادُوا وَالنَّصَارَى وَالصَّابِئِينَ مَنْ آمَنَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَعَمِلَ صَالِحًا فَلَهُمْ أَجْرُهُمْ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ وَلَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ (2:62)

Indeed the faithful, the Jews, the Christians, and the Sabaeans those of them who have faith in Allah and the Last Day and act righteously they shall have their reward near their Lord, and they will have no fear, nor will they grieve

The golden triangle of believing in a Creator, Named Allah, God and Whatever, believing in the Hereafter and doing good deeds are the angles which lead one to be in hope rather in fear or sorrow in the Hereafter.

These were just a few verses about interfaith dialogue and for sure there are so many other related ones which in the case of bringing about, this article would succeed 100 pages to be a book.

7- Interfaith Dialogue from Christian perspective

Traditional Christian doctrine is Christocentric, meaning that Christ is held to be the sole full and true revelation of the will of God for humanity. In a Christocentric view, the elements of truth in other religions are understood in relation to the fullness of truth found in Christ. God is nevertheless understood to be free of human constructions. Therefore, God the Holy Spirit is understood as the power who guides non-Christians in their search for truth, which is held to be a search for the mind of Christ, even if "anonymously," in the phrase of Catholic theologian Karl Rahner. For those who support this view, anonymous Christians belong to Christ now and forever and lead a life fit for Jesus' commandment to love, even though they never explicitly understand the meaning of their life in Christian terms.

While the conciliar document *Nostra Aetate* has fostered widespread dialogue, the declaration *Dominus Iesus* nevertheless reaffirms the centrality of the person of Jesus Christ in the spiritual and cultural identity of Christians, rejecting various forms of syncretism.

Pope John Paul II was a major advocate of interfaith dialogue, promoting meetings in Assisi in the 1980s. Pope Benedict XVI has taken a more moderate and cautious approach, stressing the need for intercultural dialogue, but reasserting Christian theological identity in the revelation of Jesus of Nazareth in a book published with Marcello Pera in 2004.

For traditional Christian doctrine, the value of interreligious dialogue is confined to acts of love and understanding toward others either as anonymous Christians or as potential converts.

In mainline liberal Protestant traditions, however, as well as in the emerging church, these doctrinal constraints have largely been cast off. Many theologians, pastors, and lay people from these traditions do not hold to uniquely Christocentric understandings of how God was in Christ. They engage deeply in interfaith dialogue as learners, not converters, and desire to celebrate as fully as possible the many paths to God.

7-1- Biblical verses

In Christianity there is one rule which is called Golden Rule: *“Love the Lord thy God and Love thy neighbour as thyself”*. Leviticus 19:18 represents but one of several versions of the Golden Rule. The following verses are included in this rule which has founded the basis for interfaith dialogue in Christian perspective. The Golden Rule or ethic of reciprocity is a maxim, ethical code, or morality that essentially states either of the following:

- (Positive form of Golden Rule): One should treat others as one would like others to treat oneself.^[1]
- (Negative form of Golden Rule): One should not treat others in ways that one would not like to be treated.

Main article: Silver Rule

It is commonly referred to as "Do unto others"

This concept describes a "reciprocal", or "two-way", relationship between one's self and others that involves both sides equally, and in a mutual fashion.

This concept can be explained from the perspective of psychology, philosophy, sociology, and religion. Psychologically, it involves a person empathizing with others. Philosophically, it involves a person perceiving their neighbor as also "*an I*" or "*self*." Sociologically, this principle is applicable between individuals, between groups, and also between individuals and groups. (For example, a person living by this rule treats all people with consideration, not just members of his or her in-group). Religion is an integral part of the history of this concept.

7-1-1-Luke 10:25-28

King James Version (KJV)

²⁵ And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him,
saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?

²⁶ He said unto him, What is written in the law? How readest
thou?

²⁷ And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God
with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength,
and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself.

²⁸ And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do,
and thou shalt live.

7-1-2- Matthew 11:37-40

³⁷ Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the **Lord** thy God with
all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

³⁸ This is the first and great commandment.

³⁹ And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy **neighbor**
as thyself.

⁴⁰ On these two commandments hang all the law and the
prophets.

7-1-3- Mark 12:28-34

King James Version (KJV)

²⁸ And one of the scribes came, and having heard them
reasoning together, and perceiving that he had answered them well,
asked him, Which is the first commandment of all?

²⁹ And Jesus answered him, The first of all the
commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord:

³⁰ And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart,
and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy
strength: this is the first commandment.

³¹ And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy
neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater
than these.

³² And the scribe said unto him, Well, Master, thou hast said
the truth: for there is one God; and there is none other but he:

³³ And to love him with all the heart, and with all the
understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and
to love his neighbor as himself, is more than all whole burnt
offerings and sacrifices.

According to the Biblical verses, loving God, the Almighty, and loving the
neighbors are the signs of having faith; neighbors, according to Christian interpreters

is not necessarily the physical one, rather, it is generalized to the neighbor in faith, humanity and dignity. Accordingly, these verses from different versions of Gospel denotes to the fact of interfaith dialogue. The following verse is also one of the firm verses reverberating the fact of dialogue in the form of peace making:

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God

7-2- Attitudes of the Roman Catholic Church towards Islam and Muslims

Attitudes of the Roman Catholic Church towards Islam and Muslims can be summed up as follows⁵⁸:

A. Willingness for dialogue and cooperation with Muslims: There has been an openness in the Church in general and especially in the Roman Catholic Church after Vatican Council II towards non-Christian religions, especially Abrahamic religions. Many attempts have been made, especially in the last few decades, towards productive dialogue between Muslims and Christians in order to reach mutual understanding and in order to build bridges between the two parties for working together to meet the challenges that threaten the faith community and humanity as a whole.

On the significance of this dialogue, Pope John Paul II says:

The Catholic Church wishes to pursue a sincere and fruitful interreligious dialogue with the members of the Jewish faith and the followers of Islam. Such a dialogue is not an attempt to impose our views upon others. What it demands of all of us is that , holding to what we believe, we listen respectfully to one another, seek to discern all that is good and holy in each other's teachings, and cooperate in supporting everything that favours mutual understanding and peace. ⁵⁹

B. High regard for Muslims: Regarding the high regard and respect of the Church for Muslims, one may refer to the following documents:

the Church regards with esteem also the Moslems. They adore the one God, living and subsisting in Himself; merciful and all powerful, the Creator of heaven and earth, who has spoken to men; they take pains to submit wholeheartedly to even His inscrutable decrees, just as Abraham, with whom the faith of Islam takes pleasure in linking itself, submitted to God. Though they do not acknowledge Jesus as God, they revere Him as a prophet. They also honor Mary, His virgin Mother; at times they even call on her with devotion. In addition, they await the day of judgment when God will render their deserts to all those who have been raised up from the dead. Finally, they value the moral life and worship God especially through prayer, almsgiving and fasting.

Part three goes on to say that the Catholic Church regards the Muslims with esteem, and then continues by describing some of the things Islam has in common with Christianity and Catholicism: worship of One God, the Creator of Heaven and Earth, Merciful and Omnipotent, Who has spoken to men; the Muslims' respect for Abraham and Mary, and the great respect they have for Jesus, whom they consider to be a Prophet and not God. The synod urged all Catholics and Muslims to forget the hostilities and differences of the past and to work together for mutual understanding and benefit.(NOSTRA A ETA TE)⁶⁰

C. Recognizing salvation for Muslims: The Church believes that there is no monopoly over salvation:

The plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator, in the first place amongst whom are the Muslims; these profess to hold the

faith of Abraham, and together with us they adore the one, merciful God, mankind's judge on the last day.⁶¹

D. Recognizing Islam as a sister faith and Muslims as sisters and brothers in faith: Not only does the Church allow for the salvation of Muslims, but it also regards Islam as genuine expression of the faith of Abraham.” They have, like you, the faith of Abraham in the one, almighty, and merciful God.⁶²

These are the main approaches of Christian leaders who had facilitated the way of dialogue in between Islam and Christianity. The following is the list of commonalities between the two.

Professor Dr. Terry Nichols, the head of Muslim Christian Dialogue Center (MCDC) in St. Thomas Catholic University in Minnesota, in a conference⁶³ coordinated by him and me, on behalf of al-Mustafa International University and cooperating with Muslim Christian Interfaith Dialogue association (MCID)⁶⁴, in a lecture stated as very important points in regard with MCID as follow:

This is my own view also, yet I would go one step further. In a world besieged by atheism, materialism, secularism, nationalism, militarism, and a host of other idolatries, I would foresee a time when we, Christians and Muslims, Muslims and Christians, would witness together to the sovereignty of the one true God, the Creator of heaven and earth, the judge of human kind on the Last day, the Lord to whom we will all return. As the Qur'an puts it, in a beautiful verse, “If God had so willed, he could surely have made you all one community. But his purposes required that he test you by means of what he has given you. So vie with one another in doing good works. To Allah shall you all return, and he will inform you about that which you used to differ.” (Qur'an 5:48)

The greatest enemy of religion in our day, and the greatest cause of Godlessness, is the strife between religious believers, not only between religions, but within the religions themselves. One does not need to read far

in the works of the so-called 'new atheism', like Richard Dawkins' *The God Delusion*, to realize that while much of their atheism is rooted scientific materialism and naturalism, much of it also is a reaction to the violence and strife among religions people. I have often thought, and sometimes said, that if I were Satan, and wanted to destroy the worship of the true God on earth, I would set religious believers against one another. Divide and Conquer: it always seems to work. But this is not the will of God. God's will. Which will one day triumph, is that all true believers in God love each other and work together in common witness to God's lordship. This is the ultimate aim of interreligious dialogue, and in this we ought to be confident that we are indeed doing the will of the one God whom we worship in common.

8- Commonalities between Islam and Christianity

There are different ways to handle this increasingly important issue. In what follows, I would like to address the issue in an indirect way, which is by explaining what I frequently tell my Christian friends about how I, as a Muslim, am very comfortable and pleased with dialogue and solidarity between Muslims and Christians. The reason for such a statement lies in the following facts⁶⁵:

1. We both believe in and worship the same God who is the One, the Merciful, the Benevolent, the Omnipotent, the Omniscient and the Omnipresent. Muslims and Christians love God immensely and try to devote themselves to Him and gain proximity to Him. We read in the Psalms (42:2), "*My soul thirsts for God. The God of life; when shall I go to seek the face of God?*" and in the *Qur'an* (2:115), 'To God belong the East and the West; wheresoever you turn, there is the Face of God.' There is a very rich and significantly similar spirituality in both religions.

2. We both believe in human freewill and their responsibility and accountability before God and share the same understanding of key basic moral values.

3. We both believe in Resurrection and God's treatment of human beings with justice and mercy on the Day of Judgment.

4. We both have high esteem for the gift of reason and conscience and at the same time recognize our need for divine revelation on our path towards happiness in this world and hereafter.

5. We both believe that all human beings come from the same father and mother, that is, Adam and Eve. We have a great sense of fellowship and deny any sort of racism. We believe in the dignity of all human beings and reject any unjust treatment of mankind. We appreciate the value of human life as a great divine gift.

6. We both believe in Prophethood and share a long history of Prophecy, right from the very beginning of the history of mankind.

7. We both have great respect for Prophet Abraham and we take him as a role model and, indeed, as "the father of all who believe".

8. We both have great reverence and love for Mary and her son, Jesus, upon them be peace. We believe in his virgin birth and await his second coming.

9. We both share great concerns about the challenges of living a life of faith in today's world! caused by the contemporary culture of materialism and secularism.

10. I believe in a complete harmony between all divine revelations and prophecies. There has never been any rivalry or enmity between the Prophets or between their true followers. Indeed, Islam, which is in essence entire submission to God, is the religion of all Prophets. Prophet Muhammad confirmed all previous Prophets including Jesus and he himself was prophesied by them.

11. as, a Muslim I have no need to deny Jesus or his mission. Indeed, to be faithful to my own religion. I must believe in all Prophets and revelations. The Qur'an asks Muslims to declare their faith in previous Prophets and revelations:

Say: "We believe in God and in what has been revealed to us and what was revealed to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob and the Tribes and in (Books) given to Moses, Jesus and the Prophets from their Lord: we make no distinction between one and another among them and to Allah do we bow our will (in Islam)". (3:84)

12. To me, there is no need to deny or cover up the gifts of Jesus or the valuable qualities of Christianity; these are all signs of the greatness of the same God. These are all divine blessing that increase my sense of richness and for which I must be very thankful.

13. I have no need to, compromise my faith in order to enter into a genuine, sustainable and fruitful dialogue with Christians; Indeed, it is the Qur'an itself which calls for such dialogue with all adherents of Abrahamic faiths. Thus, for me, , entering into such a dialogue and building upon commonalities in rooted in the Qur'an and is not just a fashion or a formality.

14. The Qur'an shows great affection for Christians because of their humility, their search for truth and their sympathy with Muslims. For example, we read in the Qur'an:

... and you will find the nearest among men in love to the believers (to be) those who say: "We are Christians because there are among them priests and monks, and because they are not arrogant. When they listen to that which has been revealed unto the Messenger, you see their eyes overflow with tears because, of their recognition of the Truth. (5:82 & 83)

15. Through my close and intimate relationships with many Christians I have come to the conclusion that the Qur'anic description and praise of the Christians at the time of Prophet Muhammad can be witnessed in Christendom today. There are sincere, truth-seeking, humble and sympathetic Christians who have devoted their lives to God and I see no reason why I should not take these people as real

representatives of Christianity instead of those who call for separation, enmity and fighting between believers and who are far removed from the practice of the commandment to love. Unfortunately today it is very easy to be deceived. There are people who are called "Muslims" or "Jews" or "Christians", but by no means can one judge about their faiths by looking at their behaviour. And this becomes worse if there is a deliberate attempt to misrepresent the life of faith in general and certain religions in particular.

16. It helps one very much to see that our partners in dialogue reciprocate the love and respect that I have for them and their faith. Here I would like to refer briefly to the Christian understanding of Islam and illustrate the fact that these relationships of respect and love are already established. Since this work is specifically concerned with the dialogue between Shi'i Islam and Roman Catholicism, I will refer to Catholic sources below.

These commonalities are the linkage between these two great religions which can bridge the gap and remove all the historical misunderstandings. Believers of these two have great responsibilities to overcome the obstacles and come on love, respect, trust and tolerance, or better to say, patience.

9- Types of Dialogue

Islam and Christianity are two world religions whose adherents comprise over half of the world's population. While the Oikomene, or Christian realm, and *dar al-Islam (Ummah)*, Muslim realm, were limited historically to specific geographical areas of the world, both houses have geographically and politically long since disappeared. Now the sphere or abode of Islam is the homes and hearts of the people of the Ummah. Similarly, the house of the Christian faith is the church, the hearts and minds of its members. Millions of Muslims are now citizens of Western Christian countries and many Muslim countries have an equal number of Christian citizens. In the West in particular, Islam is no longer the religion of strangers, but the religion of

next-door neighbors. Muslims share with Christians the neighborhood, school, workplace, hospital ward and even burial ground. They share all the moral and social problems as well as the amenities of modern urban living. They also share the sacred space of their houses of worship — the churches and mosques, where meaningful and sustained dialogue is nurtured. The most concrete, widespread and basic type of dialogue is the dialogue of life. It is the dialogue of concerned neighbors with their adjacent churches and mosques, who work together and live on the same street. This type of dialogue is concerned with issues of social justice, pollution problems, and teenage children in mixed public schools with their problems of sex and drugs and a host of other issues. Here the common Abrahamic prophetic moral and spiritual heritage can help the children of all three families of Abraham to come together to face the problems of the modern world. Through their mosques, churches and synagogues they should strive together for the common good of society.

1. The dialogue of life is the active concern of citizens with the problems of life together in one free and democratic country. One of the most important changes in the Muslim Ummah is the rise of the nation-state. The modern state has both strengthened the bond of faith and also fragmented the Ummah. Thanks to the nation-state model, the Ummah can now, more than ever before, transcend all ethnic, cultural, geographical and national boundaries. Moreover, where Muslims live as minorities in developed Western countries, they are far freer to experiment with new ideas and actions than their confreres in their countries of origin. Thus, they can help the Ummah find its rightful place in the modern world.
2. A second type of dialogue is the dialogue of beliefs, theological doctrines and philosophical ideas. This type tends to be restricted to the academy. It is often technical and abstract. For these and other reasons, it is often avoided. It is nonetheless vitally important, as it engages the minds and hearts of the people of faith of both traditions in their common search for the truth. Another type of

dialogue may be euphemistically called the dialogue of witnessing to one's faith. It, however, often becomes an invitation to conversion through methods of *Da'wah* and mission. Here the name dialogue is used to cover up a non-dialogical agenda. However well-intentioned participants in such dialogue may be, their ultimate aim is not to understand and accept the other, but to absorb and assimilate them.

3. Another type of dialogue is the dialogue of action, in which Christians and others collaborate for the integral development and liberation of people.
4. The forth type is the dialogue of theological exchange, where specialists seek to deepen their understanding of their respective religious heritages, and to appreciate each other's spiritual values,⁶⁶
5. One of the efficient types of dialogue is the dialogue of religious experience, where persons, rooted in their own religious traditions, share their spiritual riches, for instance with regard to prayer and contemplation, faith, and ways of searching for God or the Absolute"⁶⁷
6. A final type is what I wish to call the dialogue of faith. It uses the ideas and methods of the second type, but on a deeper and more personal level. Its aim is to deepen the faith of Muslim and Christian women and men by sharing the personal faith of the other. The ultimate purpose of this dialogue is to create a fellowship of faith among the followers of Islam and Christianity. This goal may be achieved by sharing one's faith with the other through worship, spiritual exercises and the existential struggle in God⁶⁸. The Qur'an promises those who strive in God that He will guide them to His ways. His ways are the "ways of peace." (Q. 29:69 and Q. 5:16)

10- Modes of interfaith dialogue

While the nature of the encounter differs from place to place and over time, most organized efforts adhere to a particular type of dialogue. As the interfaith

dialogue movement emerged, organizers and participants developed several distinctive, yet interrelated modes.

1. “Parliamentary dialogue” is carried on by the large assemblies convened for interfaith discussion. The earliest example was the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago. Such gatherings became more frequent in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries under the auspices of multifaith organizations such as the World Conference on Religion and Peace and the World Congress of Faiths. These sessions tend to focus on better cooperation among religious groups and the challenges of peace for people of faith.

2. “Institutional dialogue” is the organized effort to initiate and facilitate various kinds of dialogue meetings. In addition to the immediate focus, this approach also seeks to establish and nurture communication between institutional representatives of religious organizations. Institutional dialogue encompasses much of the work carried out through the Vatican and the WCC⁶⁹, with numerous variations at the local level.

3. “Theological dialogue” includes structured meetings in which theological and philosophical issues are the primary focus. Muslims and Christians, for example, may concentrate on understandings of God, Jesus, revelation, human responsibility in society, and so forth. Theological dialogue also refers to discussion of the meaning of one's religious tradition in the context of religious pluralism. Here, as with most other types of dialogue involving several participants, the dialogue occurs both between Muslims and Christians and within those groups.

4. “Dialogue in community” and “the dialogue of life” are inclusive categories concentrating on practical issues of common concern—for example, the proper relationship between religion and the state, the rights of religious minorities, issues arising from interreligious marriage, appropriate approaches to mission and witness, and religious values and public education. This type of

dialogue is often designed to encourage common action. Another important function of dialogue in community is difficult to measure: organizers often express the hope that it will stimulate more intentional and informal daily interaction between Muslim and Christian neighbors.

5. “Spiritual dialogue” is concerned with developing, nourishing, and deepening spiritual life through interfaith encounter. Here too there is considerable latitude for exploration. The least threatening approach might include observing the worship of others or sharing perspectives on the meaning of fasting or prayer. A more ambitious initiative might include participation in joint worship experiences.

Having enough knowledge to these types and modes of interfaith dialogue is very fundamental when one wants to have an insightful and well organized dialogue. The difference between types of dialogue and modes of dialogue is like the difference between types of human beings which refer to different natures and nationalities, and the modes of human beings which mainly refer to some internal aspects and organic manners.

11- Obstacles of Interfaith dialogue

The organized dialogue movement represents a new chapter in the long history between Muslims and Christians. Intentional efforts to understand and cooperate are hopeful signs, particularly for religious communities with a history of mutual antipathy. Muslims and Christians who advocate and engage in dialogue still face many obstacles.

Many Muslims are wary of the entire enterprise because of the long history of enmity and the more recent experiences of colonialism. Contemporary political machinations involving the United States or other major Western powers also create problems for many would-be Muslim participants. Still other Muslims suspect that dialogue is a new guise for Christian missionary activity.

Although the primary impetus for organized dialogue originated largely with Muslims from its beginning 14 centuries ago and the Christians and church-related bodies, many conceptual and theological obstacles remain. Some Christians argue that dialogue weakens or undermines Christian mission and witness. For many, the perception of Islam as inherently threatening is deeply ingrained; they are unwilling or unable to move beyond stereotypes or to distinguish between sympathetic and hostile counterparts in the other community.

The horrific September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington marked a major turning point in Muslim-Christian relations. These and many subsequent developments in the U.S., Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, Lebanon, and Israel/Palestine created both obstacles and opportunities for Muslim-Christian dialogue. In the U.S., thousands of churches focused study programs on Islam; many initiated dialogue programs and constructive projects (e.g., churches, mosques and synagogues together building houses for low-income neighbors). Courses on Islam and interfaith relations increased dramatically in colleges and universities throughout North America. The concerted efforts to facilitate constructive dialogue during the previous half century provided an invaluable foundation for many.

At the same time, the voices of some highly audible Christian and Muslim leaders became more polemical. Those overtly rejecting the other religion as “false,” “demonic,” or “evil” found followings in their respective communities. The long history of misunderstanding, mistrust, and animosity continues to inform the attitudes of many people in both communities of faith.

Muslim-Christian dialogue represents a new and major effort to understand and cooperate with others in increasingly interdependent and religiously diverse countries. The newness of dialogue and the absence of conceptual clarity have required experimentation. Questions about planning, organization, representation, and topics need thoughtful consideration and careful collaboration. Through trial and error,

advocates of interfaith dialogue in Asia, Africa, Europe, and North America continue to refine the process. Many local, regional, and international dialogue groups have developed guidelines to address common concerns and avoid pitfalls. Many of these resources are readily available on the Internet.

12- Facilitating Summary for interfaith and intercultural Dialogue

The following notes and parts are the main body of my article extracted out of my researches and field experiences as well as finding very important phrases from great philosophers and theologians. These are very noteworthy to all Muslims and Christians to hold on commonalities in differences. Respect, trust and love are the main points in interfaith dialogue.

1- Real dialogue is possible only in the presence of mutual knowledge and acceptance of cultural and religious values. Racism can be described as intolerance and non-acceptance of other cultures, with ignorance as its main cause. All opponents of racism argue for tolerance. However, tolerance implies discrimination, because one tolerates something that one wishes were not there. Given this, it should be replaced by acceptance of others in respect of the values inherent in their cultures, religions, and customs. Accepting others must mean more than tolerance—it should mean accepting them as members of the community without necessarily any loss of their unique identity.

Such mutual acceptance should integrate both sides' values into a culturally richer community. Where there is respect, there will be willingness and even readiness to integrate some of those values to enrich one's own cultural and religious values. Such respect for others requires certain knowledge of the others' history, historical and cultural development, ways of life, and other factors. Thanks to developments in communication technology, such knowledge is now readily available.

2- The recent trend of re-evaluating religion, spirituality, meditation, silence, and so-called soft human virtues can be considered in full agreement with the optimistic life-view of the Shi'a moral conducts and orders leading toward admonition, reflection and contemplation as well as Christian scholars. The growth in common knowledge and an ever-higher intellectual heritage passing from one generation to the next has brought millions of people into contact with different cultures and religions. Our world is becoming multicultural, and languages are becoming more important in bringing people together to merge their identity with the phenomenon of collectivity or multiculturalism. The same is true about the religion and the country. For a country like Iran, the sense for religiosity has merged with its identity and collectivity.

3- In the individualistic West, there is a growing tendency to place the individual in the foreground as the decision maker in moral matters based on his or her individual conscience, while in the real thinking of a religious approach; this is God, the Almighty, Who can enact such real values.

The world religions should unite globally in a union of collaboration to increase the effectiveness of their moral and ethical guidance in personal and worldly matters. Such a dream would receive the enthusiastic support of young people searching for a new ethical basis for their lives.

The ethical basis for such a union is available in the global ethic declaration of the Catholic theologian Hans Küng and his colleague Karl-Josef Kuschel⁷⁰ of Germany. Its main ideas are summarized in following three catch phrases:

- No peace among the nations without peace among the religions.
- No peace among the religions without dialogue between the religions.
- No dialogue between the religions without investigation of the foundations of the religions.⁷¹

4- It is a very opportune trend that Qur'anic and Biblical exegesis, as practiced in Muslim Ummah and Christian communities, is now a part of most communities. All of this has resulted in a growing understanding of other religions and cultures, and a growing mutual respect and acceptance of the values of others. This even has resulted in an integration effort of others' cultural and religious values in one's own faith-life as a rethinking and a deepening of personal faith. Advances in communication, as well as global migrations and the resulting enculturation process, have made a global interfaith dialogue possible.

5- Many of us accept the existence of a spiritual power or spiritual being, whether a person with a sublimation of human characteristics (compassion and love) or as a difficult-to-define *Irfan*⁷² or Islamic mysticism, karma or buddhahood, to which the spiritual existence of everything belongs as its origin and final destination.

Most religious scholars now admit that each world religion has its origin in a particular culture, of which the eternal truth's wording and each religion's religious ceremonies are a part. Culture changes over time, due to increased general knowledge, science, and lifestyles, while it is not the case with religions' origin which is that Divine source; accordingly, there is a great harmony among all religions. Life, as it was experienced at the time of the founders of the world religions and other faith traditions, bears almost no resemblance to modern life and conceptions. Thanks to philology, archeology, and anthropology, we can better understand and interpret sacred texts and how they originated and developed in their contemporary contexts and surroundings.

Many fear that accepting other cultures or religions within their borders means losing their own values. In fact, each such encounter enriches one's culture and values. A unification and further homogeneity of the world population based on accepting and acknowledging the cultural values of others, enriches our own culture as well as the

world's culture. This can lead to a kind of Religious Globalization rather than political or economical globalization which leads to abuse.

This can be applied to religious perception. In the absence of claims to monopolization, there is no need to convert others. Interfaith dialogue seeks to reach a better mutual understanding and to engage in common activities. Its main attitude is reconciliation in order to create a better and more peaceful world, to share the world's resources more equally, and to help the underprivileged. Doctrinal, communal, or religious union should not be the real aim; rather, we should work for union in collaboration to do something together, to rise above discussions on doctrinal and ceremonial similarities and differences. Such union in collaboration is possible only in diversity and in conserving as much as possible our own identity in an increasingly homogeneous world. These are converging, not contradictory, developments. This is true for nations and countries where borders are becoming less important or even disappearing, and also for religions. It seems evident that such a union can be realized only by collaborating with each other in a common global range of activities.

6- The Divine lives and is present in everything, especially in each person's self. Meditation and contemplation do away with the "self" to discover the real "Self" by becoming free of thought and desire, by becoming empty of the "self" so that the "Self" can reign. This way still might be reserved for a few, but the numbers of such people continue to grow markedly. Daily prayer, meditation and contemplation on the text of Divine Books like Qur'an, can be practiced by anyone, for it is a matter of living in conscious awareness of others as members of the same family and of all the things around us. Just being aware helps us to concentrate on essentials, to eliminate stress, and especially to become aware of our brothers and sisters of the one Earth-family under the same Heaven.

7- The unity that interfaith dialogue should seek is possible only in collaboration. If the organizations active in interreligious/intercultural dialogue and in dialogue for

peace really believe what they say they believe, then the most direct and efficient way to realize a one-voice world forum for all faith communities, the object of the United Religions Initiative, would be for the main interfaith and peace organizations (e.g., the Parliament of the World's Religions, the World Conference of Religions for Peace, the World Congress of Faiths, the International Association for Religion and Peace, and many others, to transcend their self-interests and join forces with the United Religions Initiative in a kind of federal combination. Then they could work to create this kind of global organization, whose most appropriate name would be the United Religions Organization. Why religions must NOT gather together while politicians make some like United Nations, EU and so on so forth. This would be the expression, reverberating throughout the world, of a real human spirit of mutual love and compassion, and also of the Japanese and Eastern spirit of harmony in forgetting the "self" for the common welfare.

8- Dialogue by itself is a purpose. It is very important to understand that interfaith, interreligious and intercultural dialogue per se, is a target. Many ask that what is the benefit of such coordination while the neither the Muslim counterpart would be converted to Christianity nor vice versa! This misunderstanding can be solved by noting that neve Islam or Christians are forced to convert the others, لا إكراه في الدين, there should be no compulsion in religion (Qur'an 2:256). We have the obligation of enjoining for good and forbidding the evil or showing the beauties of religions, not using force. All religions have one common enemy which is *Ilhad* or atheism, and this is the cause of unity.

13- Conclusion:

Referring to the very time of the emergence of Islam, we see it vividly that the invitation toward the new religion by the Holy Prophet of Islam and His *Ma'soum* (Infallible) *Ahlulbayt* (Progeny-PBUT), had never been resorted to any kind of force, violence or any other type of uncivilized matters, rather, scientific discussions,

negotiations and agreements were the only prescribed way toward dealing with non-Muslims. Following this method, during the history, many Shi'a scholars had take the way of dialogue as the only constructive method for establishment of peace and justice and history shows as well that the most constructive and influential services to the religiosity had always done by the peace makers and the people of dialogue. Believers and religious communities, based on their faith in God, have a specific role to play in society, on an equal footing with other citizens; moreover, Believers are called to cooperate in the search for common good, on the basis of a sound relation between faith and reason; It is necessary for Christians and Muslims as well as all believers and persons of good will, to cooperate in answering modern challenges, promoting moral values, justice and peace and protecting the family, environment and natural resources. Faith, by its very nature, requires freedom⁷³ (لَا إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ). Therefore, religious freedom, as a right inherent to human dignity, must always be respected by individuals, social actors and the State. The cultural and historical background of each society which is not in contradiction with human dignity should be taken into consideration in applying this fundamental principle. Besides, Religion has an inherent social dimension that the State has the obligation to respect; therefore, also in the interest of society, it cannot be confined to private sphere;

Qur'an, as mentioned before, very strongly insist on the unity of the Divine religions, Books and the followers of them. Qur'an proclaims that the origin of the revealed Books and Holy scriptures is one before God, the Almighty and that Origin is called "*Ummol Kitab*" (Mother of the Books) or *Luhe Mahfudh*, namely, the Preserved Tablet which only God and His Messengers are aware of.

فَبَشِّرْ عِبَادَ-الَّذِينَ يَسْتَمِعُونَ الْقَوْلَ فَيَتَّبِعُونَ أَحْسَنَهُ أُولَئِكَ الَّذِينَ هَدَاهُمُ اللَّهُ وَأُولَئِكَ هُمْ أُوْلُوا
الْأَلْبَابِ

...Give good news to My servant (17) who listen to the word] of Allah
[and follow the best] sense [of it. They are the ones whom Allah has
guided, and it is they who possess intellect (Qur'an-39:17-18)

14- References:

¹ Stated in the MCID committee's meeting in International Institute for Islamic Studies, 20012

² Terence L. Nichols, MUSLIM- CHRISTIAN DIALOGUE: CHALLENGES and POSSIBILITIES, Univ. of St. Thomas, June 4, 2012

³ (Dialogue and Proclamation # 79)

⁴ Paraphrased statement of Mahmud Ayoub, "Muslim Views of Christianity," from *A Muslim View of Christianity: Essays on Dialogue by Mahmoud Ayoub*, ed. by Irfan Omar (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2007, p. 229).

⁵ Muhammad Hossein Taheri Akerdi, *Islam and Christianity in dialogue*, Imam Khomeini publications, Qom, Iran, 2008

⁶ <http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t236/e0567>

⁷ St. Catherine's Monastery, Sinai, Egypt

⁸ Ibn Ishaq (761) and other Muslim historians record that sometime between February 628 and 632, Muhammad sent out letters to Arabian and non-Arabian leaders, including to al-Muqawqis:

The apostle (Muhammad) had sent out some of his companions in different directions to the kings of the Arabs and the non-Arabs inviting them to Islam in the period between al-Hudaybiya and his death... [He] sent... Hatib ibn Abi Balta'ah to al-Muqawqis ruler of Alexandria. He handed over to him the apostle's letter and the Muqawqis gave to the apostle four slave girls, one of whom was Mary (Mariah) mother of Ibrahim the apostle's son...

„O people of the Book! Leaving aside all matters of difference and dispute, agree on a matter which is equally consistent between you and us and it is that we should not worship anyone except God and that we should neither associate anyone with Him, nor make anyone else as our god.”

⁹ Abel, A. "Baḥīrā". *Encyclopaedia of Islam*. Brill. Brill Online, 2007

¹⁰ Al-Shaykh al-Saduq, *Tawhid*, pp.182, 286, 361.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp.270, 417, 420.

¹² *Ibid.*, p.422.

¹³ According to different sources, the name of Jesus the Christ has been mentioned more than 90 times in Qur'an and the name of Lady Mary abbot 34 times. She is the only lady whose name is directly mentioned in Qur'an and a whole chapter is named after her. (Dr. M.A. Shomali, *Mary, Jesus and Christianity, an Islamic Perspective*, London, 2007)

¹⁴ Ahli Dhimma is a historical term referring to non-Muslim subjects of a Muslim state. Dhimma allows rights of residence in return for taxes. According to scholars, Dhimmis have the same social responsibilities and rights as Muslims. They are excused or excluded from specific duties assigned to Muslims, and otherwise equal under the laws of property, contract and obligation.

(H. Patrick Glenn, *Legal Traditions of the World*. Oxford University Press, 2007, pg. 219)

¹⁵ is the giving of a fixed portion of one's wealth to charity, generally to the poor and needy.

¹⁶ *History of the dialogue between Islam and Christianity*, by Dr. Taheri Akerdi, Muhammad (2009)

¹⁷ Ibn Ishaq (761) and other Muslim historians record that sometime between February 628 and 632, Muhammad sent out letters to Arabian and non-Arabian leaders, including to al-Muqawqis

¹⁸ *Al-Bukhari*, Dar al-Fikr, sv:1, p;28, Beirut, 1981

- ¹⁹ B* Matthew 5:9
- ²⁰ <http://www.cpsglobal.org/content/peace-quran>
- ²¹ Allameh Tabatabayi, *Tafsir Almizan (translation)*, v:2, p:151
- ²² *Ibid*, p:152-3
- ²³ *Tafsire Nemounah*, v:2, p:82
- ²⁴ *Tafsir-e Nemounah*, v:8,p:264-6
- ²⁵ *Tafsir-e Nemounah*, v:3,p:98 and *Tafsir-e Almizan* v:14, p:106
- ²⁶ *Tafsir-e Almizan* v:10, p:477
- ²⁷ Al-Naim, Abdullahi Ahmed, *Toward an Islamic Reformation: Civil Liberties, Human Rights, and International Law*, Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1990.
- ²⁸ *Tafsir-e Nemounah*, v:5, p:162
- ²⁹ *Nahjol Balagja*, letter 53
- ³⁰ *Almizan*, v:4, p:147: „پس تنها ضامن اجتماع صالح دین است“
- ³¹ *Tafsire Nemounah*, v:1, p:315
- ³² *Almizan*, v:3,p:572
- ³³ *Da 'wah* literally means "issuing a summons" or "making an invitation", being the active participle of a verb meaning variously "to summon" or "to invite" (whose triconsonantal root is د ع ی). A Muslim who practices *da'wah*, either as a religious worker or in a volunteer community effort, is called a *dā'ī*, plural *du'āt*. A *dā'ī* is thus a person who invites people to understand Islam through a dialogical process. (*Oxford Islamic Studies Online*". *Oxfordislamicstudies.com*. 2008-05-06. Retrieved 2012-09-19.)
- ³⁴ *Almizan*,v:4, p:333
- ³⁵ *Almizan*, v:2, p:524, *Tafsire Nemounah*, v:1, p:231
- ³⁶ *Ibn Qudamah, al-Mughni*, VIII, 144.
- ³⁷ Ayatullah M. Shirazi, *The New Order for the World of Faith, Freedom, Welfare and Peace*,
- ³⁸ Muhammad Husain Shahida'ee, *Tohfatul Va'ezin*, v.2, p.106
- ³⁹ (Al-Bukhari),
- ⁴⁰ Allame Majlesi, *Bihar al-Anwar*, v.69, p.237
- ⁴¹ *Tafsir-e Nemooneh*, V.2, p:594
- ⁴² *Ibid*, v:3, p:57
- ⁴³ *Ibid*, v:5, p: 56
- ⁴⁴ *Almizan*, v:6, p:56
- ⁴⁵ *Tafsir e Nemounah*, V:4, P:455
- ⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p:454
- ⁴⁷ *Ibid*, v:1,p:289
- ⁴⁸ “و هاهنا وجه آخر و هو أن يكون المراد بالذين اتبعوا هم النصارى و المسلمون قاطبة و تكون الآية مخبرة عن كون اليهود تحت إذلال من يدعون لزوم اتباع عيسى إلى يوم القيامة، و التقريب عين التقريب، و هذا أحسن الوجوه فى توجيه الآية عند التدبر (”الميزان فى تفسير القرآن، ج3، ص:321)

⁴⁹ Ibid, p:326

⁵⁰ Ibid

⁵¹ Ibid, v:5, p: 57

⁵² This is an Arabic term used for the eatable things which are Islamically OK.

⁵³ Ibid, v:5, p:330

⁵⁴ *Nijasat Zati*

⁵⁵ Tafsire Nemouneh, v:2, p:471

⁵⁶ According to the Farsi translation of Ayatullah Makarem

⁵⁷ Ibid, v:16, p:301

⁵⁸ M.A. Shomali, *Mary, Jesus and Christianity, an Islamic Perspective*, p:16, 2007

⁵⁹ (Pope John Paul II, To Christian Jewish and Muslim leaders, Jerusalem, 23 March 2000)

⁶⁰ *Nostra Aetate* (Latin: *In our Age*) is the Declaration on the Relation of the Church with Non-Christian Religions of the Second Vatican Council. Passed by a vote of 2,221 to 88 of the assembled bishops, this declaration was promulgated on October 28, 1965, by Pope Paul V

⁶¹ (Catechism of the Catholic Church, No. 841 from Lumen Gentium, No. 16)

⁶² Pope John .J Paul II, To the Catholic community in Ankara,)

⁶³ This conference was held in San Anselmo Abbey, Rome, Italy in 2012

⁶⁴ This association which I have the responsibility of its direction, was held in 2011 under the authority of Qom Seminary (*Hawze Elmiyye Qom*) under the supervision of International Institute for Islamic Studies (IIIS).

⁶⁵ M.A. Shomali, *Mary, Jesus and Christianity, an Islamic Perspective*, p:16, 2007

⁶⁶ Terence L. Nichols, *MUSLIM- CHRISTIAN DIALOGUE: CHALLENGES and POSSIBILITIES*, Univ. of St. Thomas, June 4, 2012

⁶⁷ (His Holiness John Paul II, Dialogue and Proclamation, # 42.)

⁶⁸ Mahmoud Ayoub, *Christian-Muslim Dialogue: Goals and Obstacles*, Temple University, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 2004

⁶⁹ World Council of Churches

⁷⁰ Global Ethic: The Declaration of the Parliament of the World's Religions, Karl-Josef Kuschel (Author), Hans Küng (Editor), December 1, 1993

About the Author

Hans Kung is Emeritus Professor of Ecumenical Theology at the University of Tübingen and President of the Global Ethic Foundation. He is the author of numerous best selling books including *On Being a Christian* (Harper Collins).

Karl-Josef Kuschel is also a Professor at the University of Tübingen. He is one of the leading liberal Catholic theologians in Germany and is a younger colleague and former pupil of Hans Küng.

⁷¹ Another version:

- No human life without a world ethic for nations.
- No peace among nations without peace among religions.
- No peace among religions without dialogue among religions.

⁷² Irfān (Arabic/Persian/Urdu: عرفان, also spelt *Irfaan/Erfaan*) literally means *knowing/awareness*. The term is often translated as mysticism or gnosis, however it also refers to Islamic mysticism. Those with the name are sometimes referred to as having an insight into the unseen. Irfan is also a Muslim given name, usually used for male persons.

The concept of Irfan overlaps considerably with Sufism in both meaning and content. A large number of the Twelve Imams appear in numerous Sufi orders. In Twelver Shiism on the other hand, the term refers specifically to gnosis that can be revealed strictly within the confines of Islam.(Mutahhari, Murtaza; Tabataba'i, Muhammad Husayn; Khomeini, Ruhollah (2000). *Light Within Me*. Ansariyan Publications.)

⁷³ There should be no compulsion in religion (Qur'an-2:256)

Appendix 1

Primary and secondary questions

1. Main Question:

- What are the main theoretical elements for developing Muslim-Christian Interfaith Dialogue (MCID)?

2. Secondary questions:

- Why Muslim-Christian Interfaith (MCID) is so much talked about today and is so much important, too?
- How we can reach to this purpose and a better understanding of MCID
- What are the religious leaders' perspectives and the ideas of others scholars about this phenomenon?

Hypothesis

It seems that according to the elements of both religions, like their holy Books, traditions, maxims, cultures and other commonalities, this interreligious dialogue and communication, is possible and very constructive.

Review of literature

According to my research in both Persian and English resources, in both sides there exist numerous scientific-research based articles, In Persian language I found about 28 research papers and In English over 40; However, in English language, specially from Christian side, this issue, i.e., Interreligious dialogue is more highlighted.

Method

My research paper is based on both field study and library study. I, myself, had some experiences in this regard with Christian abbots, monks, Benedictines, monasticism, Jesuits, who were mostly from Catholic denomination, and also, I have done some researches on the main references in both sides.

Theoretical Framework

I am mostly in favor of demonstrating the possibility of this issue based on Qur'anic verses, the interpretations of Allameh Tabatabaee, Al-mizan, and Ayatullah Makarem, Tafsire Nemouneh, and also *Hadiths* of the holy Prophet of Islam (s) and Ahlulbayt (a.s.) and the Biblical verses in addition to Papal statements and pontifical decrees and councils like the second Vatican council and *Nostra Aetate*, I will argue about not only the possibility of Muslim Christian Interfaith Dialogue

(MCID), but also about the necessity and positivity of it, over its negativities. I will also demonstrate on other aspects of the issue like the aims, guidelines, historical backgrounds, obstacles, types and modes, and some very important elucidating points on interfaith and intercultural dialogue and communications.

Appendix 2

Major branches within Christianity

