In The Name of God

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Foreword

Asia is the birthplace of different religions, cultures and philosophical schools of thought all of which play a major role in constituting social bonds among many societies and nations. Most scholars and thinkers are of the opinion that the existing diverse cultures of this region can pave the path for closer cooperation and harmony among Asian nations. The shared values of Asia's rich diverse ethnic, religious and cultural communities such as mutual respect, non-violence and love for peace and justice, call on scholars and thinkers to make greater effort towards the enhancement of integration and harmony among Asian cultures and civilizations.

Protecting and Respecting Cultural Diversity is essential for maintaining peace, justice and a civilized way of life on our planet. The common heritage of diversified cultures of Asia necessitates dialogue between cultures and religions; which in turn will strengthen the values shared by the peoples of Asia and enhance cooperation, peace and friendship while diminishing the risk of discrimination, violence and war.

To achieve this objective, the Center for Interreligious Dialogue (CID) of the Islamic Culture and Relations Organization proposed to the Sub-Committee on Protecting and Respecting Cultural Diversity held in Phnom Penh on 5 July 2010, to host an International Conference on "Dialogue among Religions and Cultures in Asia" jointly with the Islamic
Parliament of Iran. The Conference will be participated by members of parliaments, religious scholars and thinkers from Asian countries who share their views and thoughts for promoting understanding and harmony. The proposal was endorsed in article 16 of the resolution on Protecting and Respecting Cultural Diversity in Asia which states:

“We welcome the proposal contained in secretary-general’s report about the decision of the Islamic parliament of Iran and the Iranian Center for Inter-religious Dialogue (CID) to jointly host an “international conference on dialogue among religions and cultures in Asia” in 2011 and request the hosts to provide timely and detailed information on substantive and organizational arrangements for the conference to member parliaments through the secretary-general so as to ensure wide participation from across Asia.”

The Resolution was eventually adopted in the APA Plenary in Damascus in November 2010 and in order to implement the decision taken by the APA, the CID in consultation with the APA Secretariat decided that the first round of this conference be held in Tehran on 11-12 Sep. 2011.
Editorial

Dialogue for Protection of Faith

It is now ten years that the Dialogue has been being published. Despite the fact that some ups and downs at times have caused interruption in its publication, it has not interrupted the communication and connection between the Center for Inter-religious Dialogue and other religious institutions, associations and religious figures across the world. The primary objective of the establishment of the Center for Inter-religious Dialogue was to establish cordial relations with the leaders and followers of divine religions, religious denominations and sects, to be able to cooperate and play a part in the global developments. The prerequisite to such cooperation was primary mutual knowledge, understanding and exchange of views on the common religious and other issues, whose main objective is felicity, welfare and happiness of the followers of religions as well as achievement of a kind of peaceful coexistence among the leaders and followers of religions, religious sects and civilizations. We should reach a mutual understanding on the fact that divine religious teachings and doctrines, although stemming from the same root and coming from the same source, have grown in the context of different cultures and traditions and hence despite their unity, different readings are offered based on these sources. At the same time it should be borne in mind that the understandings and
perceptions in different periods have led to negative judgments and perceptions.

Dialogue as a method was emphasized upon from the early days of Islamic period. In fact there is clear reference to dialogue in early Islamic texts. Today, dialogue is a longstanding time-tested tradition for mutual understanding among nations. This tradition has been tested and experienced throughout history via positive constructive talks, leaving invaluable results for the people across the world. Those who entered the Islam-Christian dialogue in the early days of the past two decades were not much clear about its content and were speaking of some gaps in common understanding of the issues. The ambiguities about common understanding turned more serious when it came to divinities and theology. But the trend of dialogues and the experiences of the two sides as well as mutual understanding proved that dialogue is not confined to theology and divinities, philosophy and theosophy, polemics and trial and convincing or domination of the “other”, rather the main objective of dialogue is mutual understanding, exchange of views and cooperation in the social fields as well as protection of collective faith. In the course of dialogue attempts should be made to deepen the faith in God Who is the Creator of all creatures and human beings and is the Source of all good and values. In fact this approach can help the participants in the dialogue to expand and promote sublime ethic and spirituality among the youth and youngsters. In fact these social groups are exposed to convictional threats and creedal menaces. They are exposed to certain cults that have no respect for God-oriented values and traditions, which are the manifestation of all perfect, beautiful and glorious attributes of God. On the other hand these cults are the manifestation of all
bad and nastiness, i.e., Satan, who was repelled and has been misguiding human beings since the early days of creation, but unfortunately is being worshiped as god. It is terrible that such cults call themselves mystical schools.

If the Abrahamic religions did not have even a single commonality in divinities, ethics and commandments, they enjoy a common viewpoint about Satan and also have common approaches to his tricks and ploys for misguiding human beings. Satan is misguided and misguiding and following his commandments is wrong and is disobedience to the Almighty God. God and Satan are the borders of fidelity and infidelity, good and bad and value and counter value. Indeed the community of believers belong to one single camp which is exposed to the attacks of Satan, Satan worshiping and followers of Satan. Hence they need a specific unity among themselves in this great challenge to be able to guarantee the collective faith of their followers, particularly the youth. Thus, today’s dialogue is not a dialogue for mere mutual understanding; it is a dialogue for protection of the faith.
Role of Religion in Modern Society

Mohammad Reza Dehshiri (PhD)
Islamic Culture and Relations Organization’s Deputy President for Research and Education

Text of speech delivered at the seventh round of dialogue between Center for Interreligious Dialogue of Iran and Vatican Catholic Church

Today, modern societies pay double attention to religious values because the modern world has come to make a distinction between the soft power of religion and its role in promoting ethics, spirituality and creating a safe and sound atmosphere for social interaction, intellectual perfection and human upbringing. After the victory of Islamic Revolution and the resulting Islamic awakening in the world of Islam concurrent with the progress of Christian Divinity since 1970s, a sort of return to religion has been observed in the world that is known as post-secularism. The new doctrine restudies the role of religion in establishing a modern system based on peace, social equity, and cohesion. As a matter of fact, the modern-day world has come to realize the importance of religious identity to the extent that it is called “millennium of religious renaissance”. On this basis, since 2000 various religious seminars and conferences have been held around the world. It is because of the spiritual power of religion that in the age of globalization, the world is
ready to accept religious beliefs and preaching. In the meantime, a drastic change is taking place in the intellectual paradigm of international relations that stresses on the role and influence of religion in shaping a modern system of international relations.

With the spread of the idea of world community and the emergence of globalization that relies more or less on the world influential players, religion has been introduced as both an identity-restoring element for the individual and society with great influence in political and social institutions, and as a world key player. Therefore, in post-secular world, religions can play major roles in exerting influence on decision-making processes in modern societies as well as management of the world. In this connection, it is necessary to focus on religious commonalities and organize seminars and conferences to find the most appropriate language for conveying messages, identifying addressees, responding to the civil, regional and international demands, making use of available opportunities and transforming threats to opportunities. This will help religions demonstrate their individual, social and global characteristics more effectively. The monotheistic faiths must promote their role in global decision-making processes by placing emphasis on social equity, justice, rationality, peace, coexistence and interaction. While exercising time management, religion must concentrate efforts on bringing to norm the existing materialistic global structure.

Undoubtedly, fundamental religious dialogues will bring about exchange and consensus of opinions of Muslim and Christian scholars on religion-society relationship from various philosophical, Gnostical, historical, and sociological points of
Role of Religion in Modern Society

view as well as from cosmological, epistemological, and methodological perspectives. In the meantime, religious players are not the jurists, muftis, priests, or bishops only; rather, in addition to religious leaders, scientific and academic elite, religious researchers, religious scholars participating in the religious ceremonies and institutions, religionist politicians, non-governmental activists, and even ordinary individuals as influential elements in the society can play their roles in promoting and publicizing religious tenets. The globalization process has helped the religious players boost their religious performance in the modern-day transnational society. In this connection, instead of hard war, the above mentioned groups have managed to make use of cyberspace and information and communications technology to fight opposing ideas and ideologies. This has empowered religion to play a transnational role in the contemporary international system and exert influence on international relations as a dynamic variable. Religion, in this sense, has brought about facilitation, generalization and expansion of ethical cohesion at international level. Moreover, religion has regained its significance at local, national, regional and international levels.

The ultimate goal behind religious dialogues is reaching a mutual understanding to help recognize joint interests while learning about differences of opinions. These differences can prepare the grounds for more dialogue through in-depth discussions. As the two major monotheistic religions with largest religious communities and enormous spiritual wealth in the contemporary world, Islam and Christianity are able to demonstrate the power of religion in producing thought and
introducing religious theology along with political-cultural dialogue in the world as well as in international political arena and social life. These religions will thus play a constructive role in international interactions for peace, security and peaceful life. Meanwhile, religious leaders can publicize role of religion as a new international player amid other players and help return of the religion to the geopolitical and geo-cultural arenas in the contemporary world.

Such interreligious dialogues between Muslim and Christian scholars and thinkers can be interpreted as a positive step towards joint endeavor for development of religious and cultural interactions. This, in turn, can lead to détente, removal of misunderstandings and realization of peaceful life among monotheistic religions. Such fundamental exchange of ideas centering around “role of religion in contemporary society” will pave the way for attentive look at the importance and status of religion in individual and social life of human beings and their relationship with the culture and identity. Contemplation on the characteristics of Islamic and Christian societies will help us understand the fact that religion can play an influential and constructive role in realization of social equity, welfare, global peace and security and mutual understanding among human beings that will finally lead to eternal salvation of individual and social lives. The dialogues will be useful only when they present a plan for promoting mutual understanding, removal of misunderstandings and positive steps toward cooperation in international spheres.

One challenging problem may be diverse ideological and legal interpretations of a single word. It is hoped that religious scientists and scholars will work on an “Islamic-Christian
lexicon” to create a joint dictionary to help better understanding of similar concepts in theoretical fields and religious opinions. This dictionary can help the two sides learn about mutual approaches towards a single concept that will finally result in “unity in diversity”. This will need objective and subjective connection, scientific dialogue and interaction, and joint research by the thinkers of the two monotheistic religions. In the meantime, one problem that looms large with regard to interreligious dialogue is that some try to use “spirituality” instead of “religion” and “believing” instead of “belonging”. Religion, however, embraces all higher concepts and values so that in addition to the emphasis of religion on ethical principles, values and norms, it has paid due attention to real discussions such as social equity and international peace. In this sense, religion is able to build a bridge between ideals and reality. Therefore, religionists and religious researchers ought to redouble efforts on learning about characteristics and conditions of the contemporary world.

Another problem is the concerted efforts for otherization. Some religious leaders try to asset themselves through negating others instead of testimonial identification. Also those opposing religious values and beliefs create panic, hostility and animosity in the hearts of non-believers over monotheistic religions. Both approaches are harmful for the influence of religion. As a matter of fact, religion possesses well-proven power for creating thought, consolidating ethics, identity as well as individual and social values. Moreover, religions are sources of legitimization for norms and cultures. The soft of religion, indeed, possesses the required capacity for creating new
norms and values and presenting a new interpretation of modern identities.

In the meantime, it is necessary to create an atmosphere for respecting religious symbols and protecting revered religious sanctities. This should be done by avoiding any extremism and violence. An interactive, rational and ideological approach is needed in a knowledge-based epistemological society to realize this goal.

Religion indeed, needs ideological and intellectual recreation to fight psychological warfare wage by the neocolonialism and to consolidate dignity and reverence of religionists against humiliation and accusations made by Western mass media and news corporations.

The materialization of this idea needs cooperation and collaboration of religions for building a type of civilization based on a joint endeavor to boost the role of religious institutions, universities, education and research centers. This also includes clarifying joint stances on such issues as the relationship between tradition and modernity, justice, anti-despotism movements, and future of history with due attention to common belief of all monotheistic religions on Messianism or the Promised Savior.
The Catholic Church and Political Power: a Long and Complex Relationship
Alessandro Ferrari (Università degli Studi dell’Insubria – Como and Varese)

1. Introduction

The contemporary debate about the so-called de-secularisation of the world has given new interest to the relationships between religions, states and public spheres. Nevertheless, this new attention is often characterised by emotional stereotypes which affect both religions and political systems. In this context, it seems that a historical perspective of these relationships could offer a wider framework and contribute to better understanding.

The Church has always existed in a space already politically occupied by very structured political institutions, starting with the Roman Empire. At the same time, its primary mission does not concern monadic individuals but “situated man”, placed, in a precise historical-geographical context, within a network of relationships which assume a crucial role for salvation. This fact inevitably causes the Church to be interested in the public dimension of human existence and explains why Church social action has always been on the border between private and public spheres.
It is for this reason that the history of the relationships between Church, state and civil society is a history of borders: borders between different spheres, different responsibilities and different authorities. It is not an easy history in view of the fact that several times borders have been crossed by these actors. In fact, it has only been after many conflicts and considerable suffering that the state and the Church have started to better understand their specific roles and the need to recognise civil society as a free space where common good can be achieved for the benefit of all.

2. Three paradigmatic examples

Throughout history, relationships between Church, state and civil society have been very different owing to the different roles played by them.

It is impossible to summarise all this intricate history here, but we could individuate some general elements by distinguishing three main periods, or paradigms, of these relationships1.

In the first of these periods, Western Europe was perceived as a religiously homogeneous entity, and this homogeneity was extended to the social and political spheres too. In this context, relationships between political powers and the Catholic Church, despite the frequent struggles, were always considered to lie within the framework of the so-called “Christian society”. In the second period, characterised by the division between Protestant communities and the Catholic Church, religious homogeneity broke down and this rupture
extended its effects to social and political spheres, causing a fragmentation of the societal framework. Finally, the third period can be interpreted as the moment when this fragmentation was no longer necessarily intended in a negative way but deriving from some basic principles already typical of the Christian tradition such as human dignity and pluralistic and subsidiarity principles.

2. 1. The first paradigm

The temporal borders of the first paradigm can be considered two symbolic dates, 580 and 1519 A.D. The former was when the emperor Theodosius I declared Christianity the only religion allowed in the Empire; the latter when Martin Luther burned the bull of condemnation from Pope Leo X, together with the canon law books, which were a symbol of Rome’s authority.

This long period is pervaded by the idea of a monistic Europe, unified under a single religion and a single political power, represented at first by the Roman emperors and later by the emperors of the Holy Roman Empire.

During this period, in Europe, religion was the unifying societal link, the gravitational centre around which culture and politics found their meaning and their stable and orderly position. Moving away from its previous features, when the Christian religion was principally connected with personal conversion and closed communities, the religion of the Empire had become a national religion, covering the essential institutional role of responsibility for the legitimation of political
power. Christianity became the link between the emperor and his subjects; and non-Christians, who could not fit into this framework, were often persecuted or, at best, but only with many difficulties, merely tolerated.

Within this framework, in which each authority tried to obtain greater advantages from the connection with the other, the relationship between the pope and the emperor was, as is very well known, quite conflictive. The problem was that, once the central role of religion had been recognised, it was difficult to define the border between the respective spheres of pope and emperor. In fact, ecclesiastical and civil functions were extremely intricate and very often connected with important economic positions, such as the benefices, which were incomes — frequently linked to land - enjoyed by the clergy in ecclesiastical office. It was not easy to make the famous distinction between the imperial and papal swords, the distinction between the secular and religious jurisdictions, described by Pope Gelasius I in the V Century, a concrete reality. In fact, papal major auctoritas and imperial minor potestas were linked by the right of the pope to intervene in political matters, ratione peccati, that is when a sin was publicly committed and not repressed by the civil authority.

This claim for the moral superiority of the pope over the emperor had different vicissitudes and accompanied the relationships between these two authorities which followed a sort of pendular movement, where the balance was now in favour of the emperor and now of the pope.

From Theodosius to Charlemagne, in fact, we have a period of benevolent cesaropapism: a time where supreme imperial authority even in ecclesiastical matters was quite well
accepted by the Church, which took the advantage of this situation to radiate its influence. But from the X and XI centuries, the pendulum starts changing direction. The degeneration of cesaropapism encouraged the spread of theocratic ideas, which had already been in incubation at the time of the Carolingian empire, and canon lawyers prepared the ground for the clear affirmation, by the Dictatus papae of Gregory VII, of the potestas directa in temporalibus, the direct papal power in temporal affairs, the pope’s right to use his sword even in secular matters. In fact, while Gregory used this sword principally to free the Church from the emperor’s interference, following popes, such as Innocence III, Gregory IX and Boniface VIII, tried to extend their power, putting into effect the image of the sun and the moon which in medieval iconography represented the universal papal superiority over the emperor².

In any case the pendulum continued to oscillate and theocracy remained more an abstract ideal than a concrete practice. In fact, the emperor and the new kings, especially the French and English, continued to interfere in the life of the Church, nourishing harsh internal divisions which seriously weakened both its spiritual and social authority.

2. 2. The second paradigm

This situation of general weakness led to the second paradigm, which started with one of the most dramatic ruptures inside Western Christianity: that between the Catholic Church and the Protestants communities.
When in 1519 Luther burned his bull of condemnation and the canon law books, it was an entire world which was burning and a new one which had been born.

The ancient religious and political unity between the imperial and the papal swords was broken in favour of multiple swords representing multiple different religious denominations and kingdoms. The age of pluralism and modernity was beginning.

For the first time after centuries, Europe experienced religious, cultural and political fragmentation, and political power was exercised over subjects who did not share the same religion.

This division had multiple and immense consequences. Politically, we see a process of nationalisation with the birth of state entities free from imperial authority and characterised by a slow but irresistible process of “secularisation” of politics. In fact, the end of religious unity weakened the role of legitimation of political powers played by the Church and moved the pendulum from the will of the Church to the will of the people. Therefore, the religious division increased the role of civil authorities, which were called to arbitrate between subjects of different faiths, and promoted the shift from religious tolerance to religious freedom. In fact, the religious division, putting individual choices at the centre again, opened the way to individual rights and to the passage from subjects to citizens. The state became the master of the public sphere trying to substitute its gravitational centre over society for the old central role played by the Church.
In this context State-Church relationships became much more complex. Some European States, in fact, did not hesitate to openly continue a policy of interference in internal ecclesiastical affairs. This policy, which was called jurisdictionalism, was aimed at defending - and controlling - the National Church: it was the case of Northern European countries and of the confessional State of Central and Southern Europe. Other States, on the contrary, pursued a policy of separation which reduced the public role of the Church without necessarily stopping controlling ecclesiastical activities. More in general, in any case, independently from the formal qualification of State-Church relationships and, consequently, irrespective of the definition of a state as confessional, separatist or jurisdictionalist, the direction was towards a merely human and rational legitimation of public power.

As regards religion, the Church had difficulty in mastering all these changes and its response seemed more concentrated on not losing its ancient role than on finding new spaces for its mission. Faced by political fragmentation and secularism, it defended confessional states, even accepting the restriction of its freedom and the reduction of religious homogeneity from the universal space of the empire to the more restricted spaces of national states. Faced by the process of modernisation and individualisation, it challenged what it interpreted as a disorderly and totally negative anomie without proposing a new approach or a new inculturation of its message. For many years, in fact, the Church remained tied to the old order, where only its own institutions and those of the empire - now the (confessional) state institutions - could find their place.
The Church discourse continued posing the old potestas theory again, with the only novelty being the move from the potestas directa to the potestas indirecta and, later, the directiva, in temporal affairs. These new definitions, which only considered the state and Church roles, without any regard for the role of civil society, sadly testified to the increasingly narrow space left by the modern state to the Church mission.

The Syllabus of errors of 1864, with the condemnation of the “modern” mistakes of this new era, such as the separation between Church and State and all modern freedoms, ended the second paradigm of the history of Church-State relationships.

2. 3. The third paradigm

In fact, if the Syllabus of Pius IX seemed to lock the Church in the past, like Lot’s wife in front of the ruins of Sodom, in reality this document marked the start of a new age in State-Church relations. That was because the Syllabus forced Catholics to reflect about the new times and about the ways they could find to revitalise their social role and, more generally, their mission. Very engaged Catholics such as Félix Dupanloup and John Henry Newman claimed that the Syllabus was widely misinterpreted by readers who did not have access to, or did not bother to check, the original documents of which it was a summary. The propositions listed had been condemned as erroneous opinions in the sense and context in which they originally occurred. Félix Dupanloup, as Bishop of Orléans, published a pamphlet in January 1865 (La convention du 15 septembre et l’encyclique du 8 décembre – “The September Convention and the Encyclical of December 8”) in which he interpreted the
Syllabus in terms of thesis and antithesis. The Church, he said, condemned general propositions stated in terms of the ideal society, not in terms of what might be prudent or just at a particular time and place. Cardinal Newman wrote more or less the same in one of his last major works, the Letter to the Duke of Norfolk, ten years after the Syllabus, in 1874.

In other words, the Syllabus itself forced the Church to discover some benefits of the end of the confessional state and of its “separation” from the state. “Separation”, in fact, was increasingly less interpreted as something unnatural and merely obliged. On the contrary, little by little, it came to be interpreted as an instrument for its own freedom. Therefore, as has been observed, the First Vatican Council itself, which was held between 1869 and 1870, marked the beginning of a new era. Its most important act was to declare that the papacy enjoys a universal jurisdiction. Consequently, local churches and their hierarchies were no longer in the state but in the universal Church. There would be no more national churches. Thus the council, not the states, ended Catholic political Christendom as it had been known and practised for centuries.

At the same time, not unlike theocracy, even separation was more an ideal than a reality. State and Church spheres were, in fact, not separated, but distinct, with porous borders and many bridges between them, as the several concordats which were signed between the XIX and the first decades of the XX century demonstrated. In other words, “separation”, even if often suffered and not chosen, helped the Church to focus its attention not just on its relationships with the state but also with society as a whole. It was consequently not so strange that the
secular freedoms previously only used by the contested liberal Christians, such as Lacordaire and Lamennais, became indispensable instruments of the mission of the Church itself.

Therefore, the end of the XIX Century, with the appearance of the “social question” and the “socialist danger” compelled the Church to face the hard reality of social life in industrial societies. This situation, connected with the extension of political participation with the new numerous political parties, revealed the end of the old dualism between state and Church and the full emergence of civil society, of the ensemble of uncontrollable forces which nourish social life.

This time found the Church more ready than before. In fact, the difficult years of the struggle against modernity and the secular state and the forced marginalisation of the Church from the control of temporal affairs had allowed it to concentrate on focusing its attention on the fundamentals of its mission. From Leo XIII onwards a new attention was paid to the doctrine of Saint Thomas and to the concept of the human person, read in its dialogueical relationships with the other members of society, allowing the construction, little by little, of the Church’s social doctrine, around the core principles of human dignity, pluralism and subsidiarity. The old reference to the potestas of the Church and the exclusive reference to the apical State-Church relationships could finally be consigned to history.

The general acceptance by the Church of contemporary constitutionalism arising from the tragedy of the Second World War and based on human rights, pluralism and a distinction between politics and religion - the so-called “healthy
3. Constant attitudes

Faced by this complex history, I think it is important to draw your attention to four general constant attitudes of Church social action.

The first attitude has been the Church's concern to keep its own sphere clearly distinct from the state sphere, trying at the same time not to be totally absorbed by civil society. This could sound paradoxical if we recall some moments of history, and especially theocratic discourse. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the “theocratic moment” was, in reality, strictly connected with the Church's need for autonomy and coincided with the maximum distinction of the Church from secular society: Gratian's Decretum, with the clear distinction between clergy and lay people testifies to this. Over time, this distinction from the state, which at the beginning was only required for the autonomy of the institutional Church - the so-called libertas æclesiae, the freedom for Church institutions - has become absolutely crucial for civil society as a whole and, we can say, for every human being.

The second attitude of Church social action has been the attempt to prevent competition between different and alternative social agents from deteriorating into an antagonism which is merely motivated by selfish individual and sectarian interests. This attitude explains the Church option firstly for a Christian and ordered Empire, then later for confessional states.
and, today, for civil institutions able to manage peacefully pluralistic societies with the integration of all their members. The image of the family for describing the “human consortium” well describes this orientation: family is associated with humility and simplicity: with essentiality; it is associated with subsidiarity and cooperation; with, if possible - and sometime even suitable - bitter arguments, but not with irrevocable ruptures and violence, which belong to the category of the unwished for pathology.

Thirdly, Church social action was never inspired by an interpretation of civil society as a mere juxtaposition of plural and disconnected social agents but as the plural space where the common good is pursued, and individuals and groups can flourish through the virtues of dialogue and reciprocal understanding. As Pope John XXIII said “the attainment of the common good is the sole reason for the existence of civil authorities” (Pacem in terris, n. 54)

Fourthly, the history of church social action testifies to its possible role as a sort of counter-balance to the totalitarian expectations of politics. This role was particularly evident in the condemnation by Pius XI of the so-called “political religions”, like Nazi, Fascist and Communist ideologies, which, even in different ways, and, in the case of Communism, with some paradoxes, tried to absorb individuals and civil society into the state.

Finally, the history of relationships between state, Church and civil society reveals continuous osmosis between all these three actors. Not only because private, personal and religious virtues have always been translated into public, collective and
political virtues but also because the relationships between these three actors have always obliged them to find a language which allows their reciprocal communication. For the Church this has signified the necessity to abandon its old language based on the concept of potestas for a new language, based on human dignity and, consequently, comprehensible by all who share the common political space.

4. Conclusion

Not only this ability to speak a language which is understandable beyond Church borders, but all these attitudes continue to interpellate and question Church action.

The passage from dissimulation to tolerance and from tolerance to the acceptance of pluralism, as definitely declared by the Second Vatican Council, has not been, and is still not, easy. It seems like the path of the three wise kings to Bethlehem: a very tortuous, contradictory path, and one which, as ever in human history, is never achieved, at least on this earth.
References

1 The bibliography for this matter is huge. For our purpose it is enough to remember the volumes of the History of the Church of Hubert Jedin, which have been published in Italian by Jaca Book (Milano). A useful tool is also the collection edited by Rafael Navarro-Valls and Rafael Palomino, Estado y Religion. Textos para una reflexion critica, Editorial Ariel, Barcelona 2000.


4 Cf. Ruffini, La libertà religiosa, cit., pp. 159 ff.


Role of Religion in Society: A Philosophical-Sociological Approach

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Different aspects of human life are intertwined and impossible to separate, neither practically nor theoretically. Thus religion could not be limited to a certain aspect of human life, private or social. The effort to introduce religion as a private issue with no social aspect is now rejected by religious researchers, philosophers and sociologists and lacks any scientific validity. Today, great theologians insist on multidimensional definition for religion and reject one-dimensional definitions. Hence, one-dimensional definitions like those by Schleiermacher, Taylor, Marx, and even Tillich are rejected in contemporary theology and instead multidimensional definitions like those by Ninian Smart are emphasized. To elaborate the role of religion in society, we will start with Smart’s definition. To Smart, religion is a multi-aspect reality that is contrary to one-dimensional definitions. Therefore, it will have various roles in social life.

Smart sevenfold definition of religion (Ninian, 1996) includes the following:
1- Ritual or Practical
2- Doctrinal or Philosophical
3- Mythological or Narrative
All religions specially the monotheistic ones like Islam, Judaism and Christianity possess some kinds of religious practices such as various prayer ceremonies, donations, sacrifices, and group prayers, religious holidays and others that form their practical aspects. Every religion encompasses a set of beliefs called “world view” which presents a unique view toward universe, God, human, eternity and the Judgment Day. These beliefs are of philosophical nature indeed. Each religion has its own story of the prophet, like Muhammad, Christ, Buddha, that represents the hero of the religion. Also in all religions there is a set of value order, moral norms, behavioral merits and a collection of ought to’s and ought not to’s which form its moral-legal codes along with legal and religious obligations and prohibitions. All religions, especially the great ones, form a “religious community” of their believers with certain organizational and hierarchical order. Here, religious leaders, priests, preachers, and saints grow through a system of defined processes and traditions and assume their special place and activity which is the social and organizational aspect of religion.

Finally, religions have their own material-artistic aspect that includes products such as mosques, churches, temples, cloths, books, and other art works which magnify the certain world view and beliefs of their religion.

This, of course, is not to say that Smart’s sevenfold definition of religion is complete and needs no corrections or changes, rather, it is to prove the time of one-dimensional
definitions is over, especially those rejecting religion's social aspect, either intentionally or unintentionally.

Famous theologians like Emile Durkheim clearly insisted on various functions of religion, especially its social function. His official definition for religion says:

"Religion is an interconnected set of beliefs and practices related to supernatural and unearthly issues, these beliefs and practices unite their followers in a moral community called church or nation" (Durkheim, 1912).

This clear definition is derived from Durkheim's "The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life". It is obvious that Durkheim does not believe in religion without religious community or organizations and social functions. The main function for religion is to create social unity through common religious beliefs and practices. Religion is naturally a social and general phenomenon and is not merely a private issue. We will, however, discuss that social functions of religion go beyond merely uniting the nation and Durkheim's theory needs revision although he has introduced a very important point.

Max Weber also strongly believed that religion can play expanded roles in politics and economics. His "The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism" (Weber, 1994) is completely devoted to this subject. In this book, he proves how religious beliefs in society can result in work and endeavor and economic development and even capitalism. He maintains that the opposite is also true, i.e. if the religion preaches laziness, inaction, and negative piety it could prevent its followers from activity and cause poverty and underdevelopment.
Durkheim and Weber are usually considered as the fathers of sociology, especially theological sociology. Weber is important for his introduction of hermeneutic approach in sociology and a kind of typology for theology where religions were classified and their effects and functions are studied based on such ordination. Terms like prophetic religion, Gnostic religion, materialistic religion etc. are exclusive to him.

But Durkheim tries to understand the reasons for continuous and permanent presence of religion in society and thus study its social roles and functions. He struggles to define the certain position of religion among other social facts. He began his discussion with elementary societies and a certain kind of religion and religious life (Totemism) and concluded that religion has two main parts: practices and beliefs. Religious beliefs have the outstanding characteristic of dividing the universe into sacred and profane issues which are opposed to each other and entering one is not possible unless you reject the other (Life and Thought of Great Philosophers).

Durkheim believed that religion originally prepares people for social life through imposing personal order which shows the ordering role of religion. Religious practices bring people together thus confirm their common bounds resulting in stronger “social unity” which in turn shows the unifying role of religion. People revive their social heritage through accomplishing religious practices and pass this heritage on to the next generation which depicts the life-giving role of religion. Through reviving happiness and belief in righteousness of the moral world in believers, religion fights back their unhappiness and disbelief which shows the happiness-giving role of religion (Life and Thought of Great Philosophers).
The two mentioned examples from Durkheim and Max Weber talk about positive roles of religion in the society but there are figures among sociologists, intellectuals and philosophers who maintain a chiefly negative view toward religion’s role in the society. Karl Marx, for example, is a renowned sociologist-philosopher and the founder of Marxism. He believed that religion acts as delusionary drug which in fact paves the way for great powers to loot the poor instead of awakening them. According to Marx religion has this delusionary effect only so people will not realize being looted by great powers, while priests prevent them from rioting through preaching patience and warning them of otherworldly punishment. Hence, religion prevents revolutions while paving the way for looting by criminal capitalists. This negative delusionary and anti-awakening role is the sole art of religion. Religion is a tool for looters to tame the mass and pave the way for their looting by capitalists. Obviously such a picture of religion is so negative, disgusting and repulsive that there would be no need to find reason for diminishing religion. Marx’s idea should be subject of criticism so it may not deceive newcomers and unaware people. We will return to some of its shortcomings later while elaborating our own ideas.

Some sociologists, however, have positive attitude toward religion’s functions while pointing to its meaning and maintaining that it has supportive, identity, normative-legitimating, and growth functions.

Secular theories which tried to marginalize religion got a great hit from great sociologists like David Martin, Robert Wuthnow, Rodney Stark, Bainbridge, and Peter Berger. Those
theories have been marginalized and are about to fade. Today, there are no serious and deep-thinking sociologists who may defend secularization as resolute as their previous generation. There is a visible withdrawal in such theories. Therefore, the naive struggle by some sociologists to deny the social functions of religion did not succeed in taking religion off social arena.

Now, we will present some sociological views about religion’s role in society while questioning some of these negative ideas about religion.

By comprehending the nature of religion and rejecting baseless negative views about religion, we will underline its crucial role in the society. The significant role of religion in social entities, social behaviors, interactions, politics and culture is not deniable. If we define religion as a way of life with value, legal and educational cognitive worldview, there would be no place to deny its social role when it will be present all in war and peace with its cognitive, political, economic, cultural and educational functions.

Of course, we should immediately warn that there is no equal function for all religions where great ones like Islam and Christianity are definitely different from local ones like Confucius or Taoism. There is no equal social function for all these religions where their impacts throughout history and in different societies were not alike. Certain conceptions of a religion have had greater impacts in some societies while in other times these impacts have diminished, so the history of a certain religion is not the same for all times and places. Hence, we may say that some religions are more social with stronger political-social orders while others are poor in their social and political aspects. This means they have weaker social and
political impacts. Another important point is that we should avoid any exaggeration about the role of religions like claiming that all religions had positive impacts in all times and places with no shortcomings or defects. This claim is too big to prove and contradicts some of the most obvious historical facts. Sometimes, the defects were due to the performance of religious leaders while in other times it was the defect in the religion itself that had led to adverse impacts in the society. These two types should be distinguished. This article tries to elaborate on the social functions of Ibrahimi religions especially Islam. Islam has answers to all private and social human questions through its various aspects and expanded organization. Its role in building great civilizations is very outstanding. Islam has always encouraged its followers to learn sciences with an unprecedented enthusiasm - it regards science learning in the level of greatest prayers- which finally resulted in one the greatest human civilizations with vast historical heritages (The best evidences in this regard are the books on history of civilization; some of which are: Zarinkub, The Dawn of Islam and Record of Islam; Mutahari, Morteza, Mutual Services of Islam and Iran; Zaidan, Jorji, History of Islamic Civilization). Muslims achieved outstanding scientific progress in a short period which included thousands of libraries, mosques, hospitals, schools, universities, and scientists; today, also, there is profound interest in the Muslims to enter science production and software and theoretical movements.

The great power of religion in mobilizing the mass for political revolutions and social mobility is undeniable and the Iranian Islamic Revolution is a tangible example where the mass
adhered to their religious beliefs and gathered around religious leadership to overthrow a dictatorial regime and build a new religious system instead.

The huge power of religion in identity construction is also undeniable. Religion is intertwined with identity, culture, language, manners, and education of different groups and affects them in various ways. Religions, Islam in particular, deal with all aspects of life and efforts to separate religion from politics are pointless. This has been proven throughout the history. Religions may not be limited to certain fields, especially the great monotheistic ones which claim to provide human being with worldly and otherworldly happiness. How could we confine happiness to a certain field and leave the others while speaking about human eternal happiness? The vast orders of these religions –Islam in particular- leaves no place for such claims. This religion has great rules and traditions for wedding and divorce, to judgment and economy and foreign politics and relations -personal to international- to military issues. Therefore, such a religion cannot be limited to personal and private issues and excluded from social aspects of life.

The role of religion in family relations is also important. Surely religion has sustainable founding role through its important and comprehensive orders.

Religion’s role in creating social unity by educating and recommending good deeds such as donation and charity should not be neglected. Religion could be the origin of certain outstanding social entities and programs.

Additionally through orders for collective practices like congregational prayers, Hajj or major and minor pilgrimage to
Mecca, etc. religion affects a large part of social life and creates great social activities.

Some religions with more social, political and economic orders could have a greater effect on development. We should not forget the role religion may have in fighting poverty and illiteracy through encouragement of charity and education. There are many examples of this kind in Islam and Christianity. Thousands of active infantries, hospitals, shelters and schools in Islamic and Christian countries are solid evidences for this claim. A single woman called Mother Teresa became the origin of great social, cultural, economic and educational services. There are similar examples which show the important role of religion in these issues.

Another certainty is the role of religion in providing and sustaining social justice, public welfare, and peaceful life. In fact, apart from religion with those deep and humanistic orders, what could teach humans to put aside meanness and go for peace? What could better fight against social damages, crime and drugs through its ritual and moral education, and through playing its great role in organizing social relations, preserving citizenship obligations and creating general interest?

The role of religion is undeniable in rehabilitating prisoners, drug addicts and criminals where there are thousands of reports on this subject.

Religion gives life a meaning. Presenting people with ontological worldview is an obvious function of religion. Religion keeps hope alive and boosts people’s happiness. Religion also pays profound attention to healthcare issues in the society.
To be realistic, we must see the negative side of religion too. Unfortunately, sometimes religion and religious leaders propagate oppositions, superstitions, sectarian problems, prejudice, harmful conservativeness, wrong creation or removal of legacy, extremism, etc. and even misuse of the religion itself. Some religions care only about the otherworld and deprive people from worldly happiness and developments while some others slow down development and create an atmosphere of terror and insecurity.

Some religions neglect the social and universal developments and the threat that comes from dominating powers. They prefer to remain indifferent or show some degree of cooperation with those developments and encourage their followers to be either inactive or merely surrender. This is where the all-defective theory of Marx about religion – that it is has a delusive power - comes to life. He had witnessed masses, workers and women in particular, being looted by dominating powers while religious leaders not only did not complain but also tried to prevent any kind of public uprising. Marx’s mistake was to expand that rule. Methodologically he was not right to expand the behavior of one religious leader to all religions. He totally missed the revolutionizing power of Islam. As about Christianity, he was not right to expand the behavior of one certain church to all Christianity and commit a mistake that is known as “fallacy of miss-generalization”. To judge a religion, it is not sufficient to look at the manners of its followers and leaders, but we also should refer to its original texts and orders. This is absent in Marx’s evaluation of religions and their functions. Additionally, Marx neglected the fact that interpretations on readings of a particular religion in a particular
society and at a particular time cannot be expanded to all religions. He had missed the original text and educations of the religions.

Finally all divine religions, Islam in particular, insist that the society should be dynamic and responsible and all people should enjoy happiness.

The social aspect and the relationship between personal and social orders are of great importance for Islam.

In Islamic communities, people are part of a whole and their movement, activity, corruption, happiness, etc. are interconnected with all others in the community.

In Islam’s ideal healthy society, justice, respect to civil rights, Islamic brotherhood, common welfare, dignity, and unity are tangible.

The political-social system of Islam represents the territory of religion. One of the manifestations of this system is responsibility of people. Humans are responsible and this responsibility comes from their worldview and monotheistic worldview makes people responsible. Responsibility without God and religion is meaningless.

The principle of freedom is another manifestation of Islamic social-political system, while social justice is another. The Islamic Ummah or nation is the political-social territory of Islam. The Islamic nation is formed based on common beliefs not based on racial or geographical advantages. The government is also the real manifestation of Islamic political-social ideas. Islamic government is kind of democracy which gets its legitimacy from God. This means it has religious aspect while enjoying popularity too. The system which Iqbal calls it
“spiritual democracy” (Iqbal) and Motahhari names it “Islamic Republic” has fundamental differences with liberal democracy in the West. This, however, requires another time and opportunity to discuss.

Finally, we sum up the most important functions of religion and its roles in society as: recognition, identity, civilization building, normative, legitimating, motivating, culture making, ordering, psychological health, education and morals.
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Religion and Society

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The current reassertion of some Islamic states on the compatibility of politics and Religion has created unnecessary tensions for some and calls for clarification. Islamists and Muslim societies in turn lose some of their best elements in the process.

I will argue here that what is needed is a creative framework that succeeds in projecting a new system of ethical and universal values that the educated and activist Muslim can share with the rest of the world community, and that the Muslim community can in turn share with the rest of humanity.

I will try to present here an Islamic-based framework of universal values that Muslims can share and promote. To do that, I will use two models: historical and Qur’anic. First, I will shed some light on Islam’s humanistic legacy that is often overlooked, and then I will present a Qur’anic-based framework of universal values that can function as basis of a new perspective on the law and Muslim relations with others. For the humanistic legacy in Islam, I will discuss five main elements: the value of the human being; cosmopolitanism and the unity of humanity; the attainment of happiness; the value of reason and knowledge; and the mutual cooperation of humanity to achieve
happiness. As for the universal framework, I intend to focus on the dignity of the human being; pluralism; justice and excellence; and individual and public liberties.

Islam’s Humanistic Legacy

The use of the term “humanism” and “humanistic” in a religious context is germane, yet risky. The concept is often misunderstood, mishandled and manipulated. It immediately recalls historical animosities and intellectual distrust. Enlightenment and secular humanisms have manifested hostility toward religion and religious authorities. Both have placed human beings in sharp contradiction to God and nature, which “in their pursuit of happiness” and endeavor to replace God and conquer nature, have subjected individuals to a perpetual state of conflict, anxiety, and uncertainty.

This is not the humanism I am concerned with. The humanism I am suggesting is religious in orientation and Islamic in legacy. It drove its inspiration from the Qur’an, the traditions of the Prophet, and Muslim history, as well as from external sources (Greek, Aristotelian philosophy in particular, and others). These humanistic tendencies reached their apogee in Islam in a movement that emerged in the 10th century under the Abbasid caliphate and the Buyid rulers. It marked what George Makdisi, Joel Kraemer, and Mohamed Arkoun label the “Renaissance of Islam.” This movement epitomized the intellectual and cultural flowering within Islamic civilization in Abbasid Baghdad.

Tenth century Baghdad was a vivid and bustling intellectual and cultural center. It was a cosmopolitan city—a hub for intellectuals and philosophers from different religious
and doctrinal backgrounds. Scholars, thinkers and skeptics, driven by their pursuit of truth, love for reason, and curiosity, engaged in lively debates and candid refutations without fear or intimidation.

The humanistic movement within Islam was not secular. It was a clear synthesis of Muslim traditions and external philosophies. Muslim humanists glorified reason, affirmed the value of the human being, appreciated natural phenomena and empiricism, and stressed the concept of human progress, yet they were committed Muslims. Commenting on their approach, Lenn Goodman explains that,

Perhaps what binds together figures like Miskawayh, Farabi, Avicenna, Hamadani, IbnTufayl and IbnKhaldun is their ability to examine the tradition they live in, to look at it both sympathetically and critically, and to select, develop, and combine values and ideas that are conducive to human understanding, human growth, and human flourishing.” (2003, 27).

The great Muslim Philosopher, IbnRushd (Averroes, 1126-1198) saw no contradiction between rational reasoning and the essence of the revelation. According to him, truth cannot contradict truth, but both (rational reasoning and revelation) are mutually re-enforcing. (See Dallmayr 2002, 121-146).

But what are the main tents of the humanistic tendencies within Islam?

We can discern five features: The first is the value of human beings as the center of the universe; second, cosmopolitanism and the unity of humanity (wihdat al-khalq); third, attainment of happiness (tahsil al-sa’ada); fourth, knowledge and reason as the driving force for the attainment of
happiness and progress; fifth, universal cooperation to achieve global happiness (al-taʿun fi al-insaniya).

1. The Value of the Human Being

Classical Islamic humanists viewed the individual (insan) as the center of being. They placed much confidence in the ability of individuals to perfect themselves and were concerned with equipping human beings with the skills necessary to improve their character and attain happiness. They viewed human beings as an accurate image of God and thus deserving to be entrusted to fulfill His will on earth, capable of reaching perfection and acquiring the highest ethical values.

Ibn Miskawayh, a towering 10th century moralist, expected a refined individual to possess certain positive ethical virtues: faith, moderation, justice, wisdom, tactfulness, generosity, nobility, and courtesy (Ibn Miskawayh, The Refinement of Character).

2. Cosmopolitanism and the Unity of Humanity

Muslim humanists believed in the unity and common destiny of humankind. They were driven by a genuine cosmopolitan spirit that reflected their love for humanity. The concept of humanity (insaniya) was a central theme in al-Farabi's (872-951) thought and work. According to Joel Kraemer “The... philosophers displayed the quality of philanthropia” (1984, 161).

Reflecting a universal outlook, the Brethren of Purity describe the ideal individual as, “Persian by breading, Arabian in faith, Hanafite (thus, moderate) in his Islam, Iraqi in culture, Hebrew in lore, Christian in manners, Damascene in piety,
Greek in sciences, Indian in contemplation, Sufi in intimations, regal in character, masterful in thoughts, and divine in insight” (Goodman 2003, 24).

3. The Attainment of Happiness

Muslim philosophers shared a genuine concern over human beings, their anxiety and happiness. It is remarkable to come across book titles such as al-Kindi’s [801-871] On Freedom from Grief; al-Farabi’s The Attainment of Happiness; Abul al-Hassan al-`Amiri’s Happiness and the Generation of Happiness; and al-Ghazali’s The Chemistry of Happiness. Influenced by Greek philosophy, these Muslim intellectuals wrote extensively on the nature of happiness and the means to achieve it.

The Muslim philosopher al-Kindi tried to set human beings in harmony with nature and provide individuals with the practical skills to overcome their sorrows. According to al-Farabi, and the rest of the philosophers, the ultimate goal of human beings is to attain happiness. The essence of this happiness is to refine oneself to be able to relate to God, the source of all beauty, goodness, and virtue.

But what then are the means to attain happiness?

4. The Value of Knowledge and Reason

Muslim thinkers viewed humans as rational beings capable of attaining happiness through knowledge, reason and education, and global cooperation.

Happiness could only be attained through the refinement of character (tahdhib) and the acquisition of (adab)--paedia. A dab refers to the human knowledge and conduct leading to happiness. It refers to an educational process that cultivates in
the individual specific moral virtues, knowledge, urbanity, nobility, etiquette, and civility (Moosa 2005, 208-210).

Muslim philosophers believed in education as the greatest good and highest ideal that humans should seek. They synthesized a system of knowledge and reasoning in which religious sciences were combined with philosophical and rational thinking leading to the elevation of empirical perspectives and logical induction. This spirit permeated the natural sciences as well as theology, philosophy, jurisprudence, mysticism, historiography, poetry, and music.

The ideal education, according to Ibn Miskawayh, occurs when the young happen to be brought up according to the education of the religious law (adab al-Shari`a) carrying out its duties until they become habituated in them. There follows the study of ethical works, which confirms the good habits (adab) and acquired virtues in the soul by proofs. Then comes the study of arithmetic and geometry, accustoming individuals to veracious speech and valid proof. So they advance until they reach the ultimate level of humanity, becoming perfectly happy (Kraemer, 151).

5. Cooperation of Humanity to Achieve Happiness

Muslim humanists hoped to promote cooperation among humankind as the best way to achieve collective happiness. Ibn Miskawayh believed that the attainment of human perfection (al-kamal al-insani) was only possible through mutual cooperation. (Miskawayh 1962, 14).

Al-Farabi envisions an ideal human community comprising the entire inhabited world (ma`mura)... In his vision of world peace in a perfect world state, al-Farabi argued that,
"Beings like men, who belong to the same species... have to cease fighting one another; for they are bound by... common humanity." He believed that “true cooperation can only be achieved by a permanent bond, by natural affection (tahabub/philia) and concord (I’tilaf/homoioia).” (Kraemer 1984, 162 and 163-164).

All these features strongly impacted Arab and Islamic culture and continued to influence the intellectual formulations of later Muslim reformers.

**Twentieth Century Muslim Modernists**

Twentieth century Islamic modernists, such as Jamal al-Din al-Asadabadi, Muhammad`Abduh, and Muhammad Iqbal tried to infuse many of the humanistic values I discussed above into their programs of reform. They were driven by a deep concern for the internal decay that was disintegrating the Muslim ummah and the external threat that was snatching its territories. As part of their reformist orientations, they hoped to achieve a synthesis between Islam and modernity, text and reason, and devise an ethical framework that contains the values of progress and elevates the collective character of Muslims. While maintaining a strong belief in Islam as containing the necessary civic and moral virtues leading to progress and civilization, they tried to transform the normative and static beliefs of the individual into a dynamic system of social thought and action.

The great twentieth century Islamic reformer Jamal al-Din al-Asadabadi was deeply concerned with restoring Muslim viability and reconciling Islam and modernity. He believed that Islam contained the necessary virtues for reestablishing a vibrant
civilization. Unlike modern Europeans, what Muslims needed was not to abandon religion but to understand it correctly. To do so Muslims must have the will to progress. They need to appreciate the virtues of monotheism, equality, reason, independent reasoning (ijtihad), and science.

Asadabadi’s disciple, Muhammad ʿAbduh, believed that true civilization was compatible with Islam and based his plan of reform on two main pillars: first, the significant role of religion in the life of nation, and secondly, the need for intellectual reform to generate a new social system of thought and action to equip Muslims with the necessary virtues of modern life. ʿAbduh was convinced that society progresses by moral laws and civic virtues (such as justice, equality, individual and collective responsibility, and participation). He believed that the Qur’an contained all of these values and it is the Muslims’ duty to return to the true religion and regenerate them. However, Muslims must maintain a critical perspective, reconcile Islam and reason, abandon imitation, and utilize the adaptability of Islam to the fullest. Abdul believed that “God has sent two books to men, one created, which is nature, and one revealed, which is the Qur’an. The latter leads us to investigate the former by means of the intelligence which was given to us”. (Vatikiotis 1957)

The Indian Muslim philosopher Muhammad Iqbal regarded reason and science as allies of revelation, love, emotion, and inspiration in the evolution of the human spirit. Ali Shari`ati wrote affectionately about Iqbal and his approach. Iqbal’s work and thought, according to Shari`ati, pay “careful attention to this world and the material needs of humanity, yet give the human being a heart.”
Now I turn to the Question of whether Islam Needs New Luthers?

Recently, Western media has focused on a number of Muslim intellectuals, philosophers, and thinkers who realize the urgent need for reform within Islam and try to undertake a “Radical Reform,” or a complete “Reformation.” Some have been hailed in the Western media and academic circles as the “Luthers” of Islam. Even though some Muslim thinkers approach the issue of reform from different perspectives, they all focus on the Qur'an (the text) and try to “humanize” and “historicize” it in order to generate fresh insights into Islam and the application of its rules in modern time. For these intellectuals, Islam needs more than a reform; it needs a reformation similar to 16th and 17th century Europe and a sweeping force of Enlightenment. Perhaps because of their radical and secularizing orientations they attract more attention in the West.

On the other hand there are other Muslim reformists and progressive intellectuals that take a different approach and seek to undertake reforms on the basis of Islamic frameworks.

My approach differs from the radical reformers. I believe that what Islam needs is not radical reformation or new Luthers, but a reform within the Islamic frameworks.

**Islam’s Universal Values**

Islam endorses certain universal values that need to shape our modern ethical frameworks and perception of the law. Universal here refers to overarching and general values and concepts that the Qur’an and the traditions of the Prophet endorse for all human beings, and not particularly for Muslims,
regardless of their color, race, gender, and religion. Hence, they acquire a general applicability and enforcement.

What are these universal values? I will focus here on four and explain their practical implications: 1) the dignity of the human being and free will; 2) pluralism; 3) justice; and 4) individual and public liberties. As directly driven from the Qur'an and the traditions of the Prophet, these concepts would have a resilient impact on the attitudes of Muslims and can resonate better with them because they reflect the general will. They become not only a system of laws, but a religious, moral, legal, individual and societal obligation.

1. The first value is the Dignity of the Human Being: This value in Islam, like in Christianity, is universal and non-exclusive. It pertains to all human beings, regardless of their beliefs, religion, race, or origin. The Qur'an asserts the dignity of the children of Adam (17:70). This dignity is manifested by certain capacities foremost among them are reason and free-will. Dignifying humankind requires the respect and protection of the well-being and the free choice of the individual (Qur'an, 18:29). According to the Islamic tradition, belief and obligations are based on reason [`aql]; and therefore, are not to be subjected to coercion (ikrah). That is why the Qur'an highlights the universal rule, “There shall be no coercion in matters of faith.” (2:256).

It is not the task or the duty of Muslims to convert the entire universe into one Muslim community, but they are obliged to protect the diversity of human beings.

2. Pluralism and Toleration of Diversity: Another universal value of Islam is the equal origin of all humans, regardless of their color, race or ethnicity. The Qur'an refers to humankind as created from a single soul (4:1). Muslims are
supposed to perceive diversity and pluralism as a divine design and a natural reality that is meant for a purpose. The recognition of diversity goes beyond mere forbearance or resignation, it allows for mutual acceptance, toleration and appreciation of difference.

3. Justice (’adl) and Excellence (ihsan): A third central value is justice. It is a cardinal objective of the Shari’a. Like human dignity, it is a universal, irreducible value that applies to everyone. Justice implies diversity of sides, differing views, and thus requires impartiality. The injunctions to adhere to justice take a variety of forms, ranging from establishing justice—in the best of ways—to pursuing this value with those from whom one differs, or even dislikes.

4. Finally, Individual and Public Liberties: It is often argued that Islam is a religion of duties and not rights. Though it might recognize communal and public rights, it overlooks the liberties and rights of the individual. Therefore, Islam has not been able to promote a system that recognizes human rights. This argument is widely popular, but incorrect. Based on the universal principles discussed above, the Shari’a grants the individual certain irrevocable civic, political and social rights. Individual rights include security of life and property, protection of honor and dignity, sanctity and security of private life against state violation, security of personal freedoms, protection of religious sentiments, and equality of all Muslims and non-Muslims before the law. Political rights comprise the right to protest against tyranny, freedom of expression, freedom of association, freedom of conscience and conviction, protection from arbitrary imprisonment, and the right to participate in public life. Socio-economic rights entail the right to the basic
necessities of life (food, shelter, clothing, education) (Mawdudi 1976, 25-37). These rights are not that different from Western classifications. In comparison to the post-colonial modern nation state, the classical Islamic state has never been as intrusive and interventionist as the modern state (Goitein 1970, 101-116).

What are the practical implications of my discussion of the humanistic and universal values in Islam and the need to anchor the Shari`a on an ethical theory?

**The Shari`a and Ethics**

The Shari`a, commonly and inaccurately translated as ‘Islamic law’, is a more comprehensive system than legal injunctions and juristic procedures. The law is just one aspect of the Shari`a, whose general principles are contained in the Qur'an and the Prophet's traditions. The Shari`a is an entire way of life. It refers to the guidance, precepts, rules and ethical values that God has ordained and obligated Muslims to follow in their relationship with Him, their mutual interactions, and their relations with others (Shaltut 2007, 29). J. Anderson makes an interesting point on how the Shari`a is wide in scope. He explains, "[The Shari`a] covers an enormous field which would not be regarded as law at all in any modern classification. Every human act is regarded as characterized, to some degree, by husn [moral beauty] or qubh[ugliness]... conformity or deformity; and these qualities can only be known by divine revelation" (1957, 14).

There is a growing awareness among Muslim intellectuals and scholars today of the need for an ethical theory or a moral framework that should underlie our contemporary
understanding of the Shari`a and its legal dimensions. This is crucial for reformulating our understanding of the legal injunctions and the interconnection between the law and our modern time. Fazlur Rahman argues that, “The need for an ethical system, guided by rational criticism and insights, has never been greater in the Muslim world than it is today” (1985, 13).

In fact, Muslim intellectuals and theologians past and present have made serious attempts to construct a modern moral theory of Islam on the basis of the Qur`an. As Ebrahim Moosa’s superb work on al-Ghazali illustrates, al-Ghazali’s seminal work Revival of the Sciences of Religion aimed at reconstructing an ethical framework that guides the legal aspects of the Shari`a, links ethics to jurisprudence, and reforms the moral conduct of Muslims. Muhammad `Abduh’s plan of reform sought to devise a comprehensive system of ethics based on the model of al-Ghazali.

Viewing the Shari`a through moral virtues and universal values has an immediate practical implication in addressing some of the challenges that Muslim intellectuals are currently facing particularly with the issues of freedom, pluralism, citizenship, democracy, woman, relations with the outside, and the ethics of war and peace in Islam. In other places, I have applied this framework to the concept of toleration in a modern Islamist polity and to the issues of democracy and the rule of law.

However, this project ought to be even broader than that. These values need to be taken to the grassroots level. An important means is the Friday sermons which are effective pedagogical avenues for instilling these values into the average Muslim.
What I tried to accomplish in this paper was to rely on the Qur'anic precepts, the traditions of the Prophet, and the Muslim historical legacy to present a humanistic and ethical outlook and draw certain universal values that can shape our worldview and redirect our understanding of the Shari`a and contemporary issues. My objective at the present is to shift the focus away from the state and politics to the Muslim individual, community, and ethics.

This approach looks at the Shari`a through an ethical framework that can reshape Muslims attitudes towards the law, society, and change. It seeks to address the Shari`a in a balanced way which is governed by the divine and the human, justice and compassion, freedom and commitment, rights and duties, and individual and collective responsibility. Hopefully, understanding and upholding certain universal values, such as the dignity of the human being, pluralism, justice, and individual and public freedoms as central to our formulation of the law and Muslim attitudes would generate a worldview that is more reflective of the true essence of Islam.
References


1) Theological and anthropological foundations.

“For us, our homeland is in heaven, and from heaven comes the Saviour we have been waiting for, the Lord Jesus Christ.” (Phil 3, 20)

St Paul’s statement seems to be a paradox; Christians live on the earth and in historical time, but Paul invites them to consider themselves citizens of heaven. But precisely because of this apparent paradox, St Paul’s statement is able to offer us a useful starting point for understanding what is the relationship between religion and civil society according to Christianity.

In the first place, the sentence confirms that a Christian’s ‘homeland’ is not on this earth, but in heaven: thus it underlines the fact that a Christian belongs in the first place to God. The Bible reveals to us that men and women were created by God to live a life project characterised by communion: communion with God and mutual communion with each other. This is the fundamental meaning of life at the beginning of creation: in the Garden of Eden harmony is triumphant, harmony between man
and woman and harmony in nature. Communion and friendship with God, who walks in the garden Himself and speaks directly to man, is fundamental to this harmony. This is all deeply symbolic and intended to suggest a situation of deep relational harmony between the Creator and His creatures.

This original harmonious relationship, which expresses communion between the Creator and man and woman – within the framework of complete harmony among all creation – was, however, destroyed by sin. Sin expresses man’s rebellion against God, the wrong use of his free will, that faculty most typical of human nature. Free will is, moreover, the faculty which renders man ‘like’ God: man is called to love God and to love his neighbour, but only free will renders love possible. As God is free in His sovereignty and freely loves with infinite love, so man – being finite – is given real free will – given to him by God – in order to live freely, in a responsible way, the expression of true love, the relationship with God and with other men. In his freedom man is made responsible and capable of true love.

At the level of created things, however, freedom means choice: man lives out his freedom through his choices; man lives out his communion identity by freely choosing to love, thereby choosing to enter into a harmonious relationship of ‘listening’, of obedience in respect of the other. But biblical revelation tells us that man’s choice was changed by an act of autonomy and disobedience towards God. Instead of accepting his place within this relationship with God – and thus recognising God’s primacy in his life – man set himself up as equal to God. In this sense he wanted to “play God”: in the sense, that is, that man affirmed his own autonomy and considered himself to be the last reference for his choices. Instead of living in a relationship
with God where God’s primacy is recognised, man has entered into competition with God, breaking the relationship of close communion with Him.

We are not dealing here simply with the breaking of a norm or a law or of specific disobedience with regards to an order. It is a matter of going contrary to the expression of a fundamental existential relationship: in his disobedience man has set himself up as self-determining; he has withdrawn himself from a relationship with God based on listening in faith; man, who was created for such communion, has withdrawn himself from this relationship with God which formed the taproot and horizon of his whole being.

From this original sin is derived not only the breaking of communion with God, but, at the same time, the breaking of communion with other men and of man with himself. In fact the Bible presents us directly with the fact that the man and the woman accuse each other of responsibility for the sin, are separated, enter into conflict, and are both ‘ashamed’ and hide themselves when they hear the voice of God calling to them: they are ashamed, that is they lose the relationship of communion and peace with themselves. Sin separates us from God, and at the same time creates divisions between men, and creates division and discord within man himself.

The capacity to love becomes fragile, because human love is fragmented and directed towards many desires, and is expressed more in possession – of people, of things – than in the free offering of self which communion generates. In this way freedom is seduced by multiple attractions, and finds
expression more in possessing and dominating than in the gift of self which is communion.

The Bible tells us that another fruit of sin is a diminution in man’s capacity to know God. All Creation reveals the existence and the grandeur of God, but man has turned towards the created rather than to the Creator, and risks living solely in the historic present, which ends with death.

The Bible also tells us, however, that God in His mercy has not abandoned man in his sin, but has put into effect a saving action, salvation: God has met man in history, making Himself known to man. God has revealed to man his Word, so that man can learn to know not only God, but also himself, in the light of God. Not only this, God also promises a definitive salvific intervention, through which He means to bring man himself back to health, renewing him from within, purifying him from the sin which corrupts him, in order to restore to man the capacity to love in communion, and thus to live in communion with God, with other men and with himself.

Jesus Christ is the Word of God which became man and lived in historical time; the Eternal Word, which becoming man, lived in total loving obedience to the Father. Living this loving obedience in his life and in his death, Jesus Christ triumphs over the forces of sin, disobedience and man’s autonomy and leads humanity back to full communion with God. In the person of Jesus Christ, God and man are in perfect communion; in the mystery of the death of Christ, his obedience to God – over man’s sin – reaches a culminating point, which is one with the gift of his life for love of the Father and of his fellow men. Every bit of human egoism is vanquished. And this gift of self in
love and full freedom triumphs in the Resurrection. The communion which Christ experienced in the drama of the crucifixion, triumphs with force in his resurrection. In the resurrection the freedom of his love and faith in God triumphs, and Christ becomes the source of forgiveness and grace of a new life for all men. In Him it becomes possible for man to live again as a son of God, in communion with God, with himself and with other men, because in Christ God offers forgiveness of sins and the gift of a renewed capacity to love.

God is love, in fact, and in Him is the source of love and of life. In Christ this source of love and life is made accessible to us, because united with Him and in Him, we live our own lives in communion with God recognised as Father and other men recognised as brothers. The freedom with which Christ lives his obedience to the Father and his love for his brothers, gives us our own freedom from the ties of sin, which enslave us and make us un-free. In Christ our freedom is freed: sustained by grace it becomes capable of choosing and accepting true good.

2) The believer’s place in history

St Paul’s statement that our homeland is in heaven from whence comes the Saviour we have been waiting for, Jesus Christ, thus underlines a particular Christian concept about man and about history. History does not have immanent significance, but finds its meaning in relation to transcendence, in relation to God, who is the origin and end of history. And this is true both for universal history and for our own personal histories. Creation comes from God and it is ultimately destined
to return to full communion with Him; men come from God and are called to return to Him.

History is the history of encounter between God and mankind - by means of revelation - and for this reason is the story of salvation, because it finds its guide and its meaning in God. For Christians to state that our homeland is in heaven means to state that God loves us, and takes care of us - a love and a care which have taken on a particular face: Jesus Christ - and that we are called to communion with Him, and through this communion we are established as his sons.

To state that “we are waiting for our Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour” means to emphasize that history is running towards its end, which is full recapitulation in God through the Lord Jesus Christ. History is not eternal, it does not develop in continuous repetition of cosmic cycles: it is ultimately directed for the purpose of salvation, of full communion with God, which in the person of Christ has already been fully realised, but in which every person and all created things are called to share.

Paul’s phrase thus synthesises two fundamental aspects: that man the Believer belongs both to heaven and to history. Heaven expresses his belonging to God in communion given by God Himself and accepted by man as gift; this belonging expresses the final and fundamental meaning of the life of man and his personal identity. It expresses the fact that the meaning of our existence is rooted in God and in our relationship with Him, who comes to meet us, loves us, calls us, and saves us. But, if waiting for the final and definitive coming of the Lord is, on the one hand, that history is called to find in Him its fullness of
salvation, on the other it also says that our belonging in history as believers is fundamental.

History in fact becomes the space, time and the whole of experience in which we learn to know the Lord, to know ourselves in Him, to become capable of living communion with Him, with ourselves and with other men, in all its fullness and beauty. History is the great background against which we are called to fully develop our choices, our freedom, our intelligence, and our love, because in a responsible and mature way we learn to live in communion with God and with our fellow men, which is the purpose, the meaning, and the ultimate end of our existence according to the will of God. History is the space and the time of our becoming mature as believers, it is the space and the time for giving witness to faith.

To state that our homeland is in heaven does not in fact mean that history is undervalued or underappreciated; it does not mean that we flee from it. History, our own personal and our collective historical existence, is the precious experience in which we are called by God to know Him and to love Him, and we are at the same time called by Him to know and love each other. From the moment that we know and love God, and know ourselves and love ourselves in Him is eternal life of perfect communion to which God calls us, it derives that personal and collective history is for man the great school in which one prepares for eternity. Not only, but history and eternity are deeply interconnected: this life prepares us for eternity, because until that moment we are called to live our life starting from the fundamental reality that ‘our homeland is in heaven’. History, then, is the way which leads us to God, if we welcome God into
our life and live in communion with Him, in obedience to His will of love and justice.

All this, I hope, synthesises a theological framework for understanding the relationship between religion and civil society throughout history according to the Christian point of view, which will now be developed.

3) Religion and its relationship with the historical and social dimension.

Religion expresses the supernatural tension existing in man, his desire for the absolute and his search for the ultimate meaning of history and the universe. All religions express this tension and, in different ways, seek to teach man to live in a way which conforms to the ultimate meaning of reality which is God Himself, in order to find real truth. The supernatural tension existing in man is also stressed by those modern philosophical schools (such as existentialism, personalism) which evaluate the “transcendence” of the human being: the human being is the only creature capable of reflecting on the world, on the creation, on facts of history, thus revealing his openness towards “the Other”.

The Christian faith holds that at the natural level man has this fundamental opening towards God, even if sin has rendered it more difficult to find the way to reach the truth which is God Himself. This is because God Himself, on His own free initiative, through His free love, has revealed Himself, has, that is, spoken with man, has made Himself known through Words and Events during the course of the story of salvation, in
particular in His relationship with the Ancient Israelites. For the Christian faith this revelation reached its culmination in the Person of Jesus Christ, the Word of God become man. But the Christian faith is also aware that everything that is true, good and holy in other religions comes from God and leads to God (cf. Lumen gentium 16; Nostra aetate 2).

According to Christian theology there is, therefore, a universal action of the grace of God which flows from the mystery of Christ and leads all men to Him; this action of grace is also present in all which is good, true and holy in other religions and is lived by their followers.

From this perspective, therefore, religions are called to develop a single and beneficial mission in the history of human society. The mission of the religions is that of recalling man to the truth of his existence, that is to the fact that to live one's own life in obedience to the truth which is God Himself, and to translate this obedience through real choices and historical actions. In Christianity there is a deep conviction that history and eternity are profoundly united, that God and man are in a profound reciprocal relationship. History is the account of the proof of this, but also the occasion of grace, to live loving God through a life of intelligent and intense dedication towards one's brothers: whoever loves God also loves his brother, and he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen (1 Jn 4,20).

The studies in Comparative Religions demonstrate that all religions teach individuals how to live their relationship with God; but the same studies demonstrate that religions also teach
individuals how to live their relationships with others and with themselves, and also teach them how to relate with social community and with history.

This common feature, shared by religions, has prime important consequence: religion always has a social expression and mission which is at the deepest part of its nucleus and identity. Religion does not offer purely individual solutions, but always places the individual in relation to others: God, other people, history. This is particularly evident in the Christian faith in which there is a continuous reference from God to men, from history to eternity, from the most intimate sphere of relationship with God to the stringent necessity of its historical expression in relation to real situations and real people. Jesus says that everything which is done to men is done to Him. (See Mt 25, 31-46; Mt 10, 40-42)

The reply offered by the Biblical revelation – which achieved its fullness in Jesus Christ – to the personal and global meaning of existence has a dimension of truth - believed as coming from God - which appeals to man’s freedom, because he accepts this truth into his own life. And since man is a personal being, that is pre-eminently relational, the call of God to man always includes his relationships with other men. Each one of us is certainly destined to receive the call of God, His Word, in a very personal way – because each one of us in his or her deepest identity is a completely original and unique individual; but all of us are loved by God and all of us called by Him to listen and to communion. Relationship with God is always uniquely personal, but also profoundly communitarian. Our belonging to Him gives rise to our reciprocal belonging. The practice of our responsibility towards God comes through
the practice of our responsibility towards the other men in our history. Love for God becomes real in our love for other men; sincere dedication to God is translated into the care which we show to other men and women. Because God loves us all together and in an absolutely personal way, and asks us to learn from Him and in Him how to live an analogue tension of love, care and dedication, in which all are faculties are put into service: intellectual, affective, aesthetic, moral and spiritual faculties.

4) Religion and civil society

Religion therefore has an inevitable relationship with the historical and social dimensions of life. This relationship is part of the deepest and most basic identity of religion. Social life is, however, a complex system: within social life there are cultural, political and economic dynamics; social life itself is often organised giving institutional expression to these dimensions and dynamics which in turn structure social life. Social life is the space of pluralism: it is the area in which different cultural and religious currents find - or have to find - space to express themselves.

One important dimension of social life is political life, which supports the structure of the state and the various forms of government found therein.

But society cannot be reduced simply to the State: in this case one lives in a State which has very strong powers to intervene in all areas of social life. When the power of the State is very strong and controls all areas of social life the creativity of both groups and individuals is limited or blocked.
From the Christian theological point of view the best model for society is that in which there is a fertile balance between the State itself – which has clearly defined duties to govern and to guarantee civil order and to pursue the common good – and its society, seen as the result of a rich and variegated cooperation of initiative. We are talking here of initiatives which arise from the efforts of individual citizens, who associate themselves and express initiatives of different types: economic, cultural, religious, educational, caring services of various sorts – to give just a few examples. These initiatives as a whole constitutes the living tissue of civil society.

Civil society is rich and vital when the State does not absorb into itself all the duties and prerogatives, but instead actively promotes creativity and associated entrepreneurial activities from which the so-called ‘intermediate bodies’ can arise, that is structures of a collective nature which are managed by the citizens themselves, within a basic institutional framework guaranteed by the State. This vision of society, which sees civil society as working alongside the State, does not see these two dimensions in competition, but rather in reciprocal dialogue. This vision affirms in a stronger way the centrality of man (and of the citizen) – with his creative capacity to give a morally adequate response to the challenges of history – with respect to other visions of society largely centred on the state institution as an organ of control and of direct action concerning various duties inherent to social life. The political vision which values civil society, and intermediate bodies between the State and its individual citizens, is a vision which appeals directly to individual conscience, placing them in reciprocal dialogue and promoting a reciprocal sense of responsibility and care. It is a vision which
seeks to translate onto the political and social plane the responsibility which men have in relation to God and in their reciprocal relationship within history.

In this model a central role is taken by the principle of subsidiarity: this means that various initiatives organised ‘from below’ are called to respond to cultural, social, educational and economic needs of society, reserving only those things aimed at filling gaps and insufficiencies to the State, where initiatives at the basic level have not succeeded. The principle of subsidiarity states, in fact, that the highest institutional bodies must not do anything which can be done and managed by basic organisations. This principle gives much value to individual creativity and responsibility, and places man at the centre; man is considered in his capability to freely take up responsibilities before God and his neighbour, in a relational identity; at the same time the principle of subsidiarity limits the area of direct influence and management by the State. From it we derive a model of a more ‘human’ and less institutionalised society in the strictest sense of the terms (a less centralized society, a society less directed from the top). It is at the same time a model of a pluralist society, in which, within a shared civil order, creativity and plurality of cultural and religious expression find ample space to develop.

According to Christian social vision, civil society is in fact the privileged place where religion is able to organise itself, express itself, spread itself through society by means of its own structures and develop the social role expected of it.
But, this vision has also a consequence concerning the relations between religions and the State. Accepting the civil society as the privileged space for the fruitful expression of religions, also means that the principle of distinction between State and religions must be accepted. That means that religions belong to the sphere of civil society not to the sphere of the State institutions. The distinction of the two “orders” is very clear in Christian tradition.

If, in fact, one religion decides to permeate society starting with the State and the state institutions, there is a high risk that pluralism within society will be limited or blocked by direct political power that a single religion does express by means of juridical and institutional apparatus.

So-called ‘ethical states’, where the predominance of a single non-religious ideology permeates a State and imposes an absolute vision of the State on its citizens in relation to their consciences, arise in a similar way. The expression of freedom of conscience at both the individual and the group level is prohibited.

A correct secularisation of the State is therefore meant as a positive value. A correct conception of secularisation certainly does not mean State hostility toward religion. On the contrary, a “healthy” secularism means that the state institutions do not identify themselves with a single religion or ideology, but are founded on a strong nucleus of shared values which find formal expression in the constitutional Charter and which safeguard the basic dignity of each citizen. On the basis of these values and this safeguarding, which is the basis for formal citizenship equal for all, the citizens can then express individually and in groups,
privately and in public, their own particular religious, cultural and political allegiances, giving rise to a multiple expression within civil society in reciprocal dialogue within the framework of a shared context.

According to the Christian vision, this model of society is that most favourable to both the religious life of individuals and communities and to the role played by religion in public. The fact of being autonomy from political institutions allows religion to be fully itself: the positive influence of religion is always developed starting from free choice by individuals and communities, vastly diminishing every form of constriction including those due to social pressures. A real religious choice (and the choice of religion) is always a question of freedom.

On the other hand, to accept autonomy – in the sense of distinction – of political and religious institutions also means to accept the evident fact that in a given society people express a wide range of different cultural, religious and political positions; it means to accept that these different positions have the right to be expressed within the context of a shared civil order, which is based on equality of citizenship necessarily released from a specific religious allegiance.

It is clear that in the Christian vision religious allegiance should not have either positive or negative power to control the exercise of citizenship through the law. This, however, does not mean that personal religious allegiance does not contribute greatly to the way in which an individual carries out his responsibilities as a citizen. Religion, in fact, encourages its followers to be exemplary citizens as far as morals are
concerned, to fulfil their duties for the benefit of all, and to build up an increasingly more 'human' society. But in this case the influence of religion is achieved by means of the coherence of the moral and religious lives of individuals and the associated initiatives to which they give rise, that can also include the political level.

On the other hand, religion, as active member of civil society, can be fully itself and act in an effective way in conformity to its own spiritual identity. By means of the many initiatives it promotes, religion witnesses in a capillary way the nearness of God, and reminds men to make a free personal response to this call. In this way religion is able to mould society or give it a precise character; in this way society can express its own religious tradition fervently, without, however, forcing this upon all its other citizens, without prohibiting religious pluralism, without impeding other contemporary cultures from expressing themselves. Civil society is truly the space where religion can witness creatively, when it is open to dialogue and close to man.

Italy would not be the country it is without the charitable initiatives of the Catholic Church, without all those churches in which the liturgy is celebrated, without all those many reminders of Christianity; but all these are real expressions of faith, in so far as they are experienced in dialogue with the whole of society: a dialogue which is developed not only with members of the other religions present, but also with non-believers and with those whose religious life is fragile, to whom the Church does not impose, but proposes a real witness of faith.
According to Christian tradition a direct relationship of dependency between politics and religion, between the State and the Church, is risky for religion itself for two reasons. First, that religion becomes a necessary tool of political power, where logic is flawed and where, far too often, the needs of power are more important than the needs of the common good. Second, when a religion becomes strongly institutionalised in the State it loses much of its inner energy: for ‘reasons of State’, its interior cultural and reflective life is channelled in ways which always express the position of a minority, to the detriment of that pluralism that each religion bears historically within itself in the framework of a basic orthodoxy. To think that politics helps religion ‘to be itself’ is a dangerous idea, particularly for religion, which ends by being enslaved by a logic not its own, and finishes by ceding compromises at the level of fundamental religious values, such as the safeguarding of individual human rights, fundamental human freedom, and the refusal of violence and forcible domination.

The clear distinction between State and Religion can help religion to be itself, and resist becoming an instrument for worldly and political logic, which are even capable of using religion as an instrument means of violence.

From this point of view, Christianity has its own clear and specific contribution to offer: political power must never be confused with the saving power of God.

The Lord Jesus knowingly refused to be a political Messiah, even though many Jews of the time were expecting such a Messiah to arrive. He thus distinguished once and for all
political praxis from the praxis of faith. This did not prevent Jesus from witnessing to the primacy of God in His life, of restoring mankind, of giving a new meaning to history. But Jesus did all this from the beginning by not using political power, but rather living a life of intelligent service to God in favour of mankind; a service which He lived with the whole of Himself and His existence.

According to the Christian vision, believers, both as individuals and as community, are called to live and develop an analogous service of witness to God and ‘care’ of fellow men. This service, to which the religions and their believers are called, finds a rich and fruitful space to express itself within civil society. This service, which is performed both by individuals and by groups, can also assume political shape (for example, militant party politics), but in this case always without the direct involvement of the religious organisation itself; and always only to assert more ‘human’ values for which consensus is sought in the widest context in society.

Christians live in the world among other men and are, and wish to remain, citizens just like other people. They are and must be responsible for the construction of the polis - of the earthly city, of society - along with other citizens: they are not allowed to desert this responsibility, to flee this world and take no interest in the evolution of civil life; on the contrary, they must play an intelligent, creative and competent part in the realisation of an integrated society in which human values and quality of common life are paramount. And from the Christian point of view, this is the duty of all believers from all religions.
Because they possess this certain vision of the world and the people living in it, Christians hold convictions that cannot be relegated absolutely to the personal or private sphere, but which must be present in a pluralist society and heard in the public arena. Secularisation of the State does not mean that religion must be silent, but rather that the State guarantees it self-expression, even though other citizens are under no obligation to listen. True religion, by its very nature, cannot arise from coercion.

For Christianity the distinction between political authority and religious authority is clearly defined: this distinction protects religion from being “used” for merely political ends and never makes political power – which is always in the hands of men – a sacred object.

At the same time, the Christian view sees in civil society a space for positive influence between the Church – and other religions – and the institutional political dimension.

The Christian faith wishes to be able to contribute to the moulding of the social life and culture of all men: without claiming the right to a ‘political’ superiority with respect to the contribution of other philosophical, religious and ideological components, but aware of the importance and the moral duty of expressing its own convictions in the public sphere of civil society, and in the political sphere whose legitimate autonomy is accepted.
Islam and State

Mohammad Jafar Elmi (PhD)

The relation between religion and state is an important subject and very much debated by both Muslim and non-Muslim scholars. Some thinkers believe that religion in general cannot be considered as the governing body for running a state. For there exists, according to them, a clear contradiction between these two and consequently they should be separated from each other. There are a series of different explanations for this, that the ultimate goal of a religion is to detach people from worldly affairs, or a religion has a set of fixed principles which can not be applied in different circumstances, or religion can not reconcile with modern values such as democracy and finally it brings social hatred and enmity between different segments of a given society, whom they believe in that particular religion and whom they do not. Historically most or even all of these arguments were not questions between Muslims themselves, and it is suffice to say that the appearance of these ideas in Muslim countries go back to the nineteen century when they become acquainted with the philosophies emerged at the time of enlightenment in response to a totally different context. On the other hand, some Muslim thinkers, like Ayatollah Imam Khomeini, maintain that there is no incompatibility or conflict between the principles of Islam and state. They believe that the Islamic governance is completely feasible and indeed desirable according to the Islamic principles.
Here in this paper I explore and explain how this group of Muslim thinkers succeeded to make a combination between Islam and state; which is in my view is the most important theory of the last century in the field of Islamic political science, the effects of which are yet to unfold in the Muslim world and also at a larger scale in global arena. It is hoped that by doing so, a clearer understanding of Islamic governance is provided, as this concept is formally embodied in the constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

First of all, it is clear that any given society, regardless of being Muslim or not, can not survive without having a form of government and rejecting this fact will end to anarchism which can not be accepted. The history of mankind shows that any prosperous and successful community or country benefited of a strong political system which looks after different aspects of the social affairs of this country or society in national or international scale. This fact which is near to be self-evident is endorsed by Islamic sources, Quran and the tradition of the Prophet. In a prophetic tradition, it is stated that if three people intend on taking a trip it is essential that one of them be chosen as the guardian. Conforming to this is the saying of Imam Ali: “every society needs a leader, no matter if he is righteous or a sinner”. He continues his argument for the necessity of the existence of a government in any society, by referring to the necessity to defend the country’s borders against enemies, the prevention of oppressors’ transgression upon people’s rights, the protection of social order, and the establishment of security.

Here, there are two fundamental questions; the first one is who has the right to power? and the second is how can we be sure that the power does not fall in the wrong hand?
According to Islamic teachings Allah is the only owner and commander of the heavens and earth (Quran, 2:107; 3:189). He is the only truthful ruler and guardian of the believers (Quran, 2:257; 6:57). He is the one who gives authority, out of His freewill, to specific people or takes it away from them (Quran, 2:247; 3:26). Allah gave the promise of governorship on earth to the righteous believers (Quran, 25:55). In some verses the authority of some believers and prophets, through divine permission, is discussed, for instance the authority of the families of Abraham and Saul, of Joseph, David, and Solomon. The term ‘political leader’ (khalafah) is used for the prophet David (For instance, Quran: 2:247, 251, 4:54, 12:22, 21:79, 38:20, 26, 35). Political leadership divinely structured, which has been given to some people, denotes that this political leadership should be dressed with divine ethics. Likewise, the Quran mentions the qualities of a few oppressive rulers and governments, such as Pharaoh (Quran, 7:127; 10:83, 28:4). The necessity of not obeying the oppressors; of not relying on oppressors, and of the prohibition of accepting the guardianship of rebels (taghut) has been emphasized (Quran, 2:257; 11:113, 34:31-33). These so many verses of the Qur’an shows clearly that the right to power according to Islamic teachings is confined to Allah and people whom are chosen such as the prophets and ordinary righteous people who have knowledge to religious instructions and also ability to implement it.

In addition to this, it is argued for the necessity of the existence of a government in the Islamic society with a number of characteristics of the Islam.
1. The universal nature of Islam: Islam does not consider itself as a religion of a particular race or region rather its message encompasses and address all mankind (Qur’an 7:158). If this occurs it would mean that everyone would be guided towards monotheism and shun away from serving anything other than Allah. This would entail that a suitable accommodation to be in place, for instance the establishment of a government, so people who might resist the complete realization of monotheistic ideals, would not be able to prevent their realization. This is why the Noble Prophet, in addition to the station of prophecy and propagation of the divine message, also bore the station of social and political leadership over the believers, which is termed guardianship (wilayah) in the Quran (33:6).

2. The continuance of Islam until the Day of Judgment. This requires all of the stations of the Messenger of Allah, including the station of guardianship and government (except the station of prophethood which was definitely sealed) to continue after his death. It can be understood from the Quran 3:144 that the death or martyrdom of the Prophet should not cause his Sunnah to become obsolete.

3. The comprehensiveness of the Islamic code which is a compilation in congruence with all of man’s individual, social, material, and spiritual needs and includes, in its expansive nature, all of the dimensions of man’s relationship with Allah, with himself, and with others - even with nature. The achievement of the code’s goals in various dimensions is not possible without considering government and its necessary characteristics. Legal, social, and political laws of a society are only practical if they fall under the power of a suitable
government. Using terms found in traditions, guardianship and imamah protect all obligations and recommended actions.\textsuperscript{4}

Considering the above mentioned explanations, it can be understood why politics is not a strange and foreign components of Islamic teachings rather is an essential one. It is because of the fact that the ultimate goal of humanity in its totality - personal and social- can be achieved under a state which is based on Divine instructions. Further, it shows that according to Islam there is not even any contradiction between religion and worldly affairs but in fact to materialize the ultimate objective of it there is no other way except of implementing divine instruction in different aspects of social affairs as well. Therefore, the Quran rejects man from submitting himself to anyone other than Allah and from following rebels, whom they turn against Divine orders. (Quran, 4:60).

In response to the second question, that is how can we be sure that the power does not fall in the hand of wrong people after the prophet and Imams in the case of Shi'a Islam? The Shi'a opinion about government during the time of the occultation, i.e disappearance of the Divine guide, is that governance should be given to a just jurist (wilayah al-faqih) and only such a government is religiously legitimized. However, according to Shi'a the establishment of a government depends on the acceptance of the population. Without the desire of the public a legitimate government cannot come into place, especially since forced and oppressive governments are not considered permissible or legitimate in Shi'a Islamic texts.\textsuperscript{5} Therefore, a legitimized government is the one which is under the supervision or leadership of a just jurist to safeguard its
religious legitimacy, and also elected by the people through a voting system. It means a just jurist does not have the ability of governing without the satisfaction of the people. An accepted and legitimate government in the Islamic opinion is a responsibility with the purpose of correctly guiding human society. From here one may draw the concept of a religious or Islamic democracy from the Islamic sources.

It has to be noticed here that religious democracy has its own distinctions and differences with other kind of democratic systems. For a democratic system does not have a single form. What makes a political system to be democratic is the fact that governing power is derived from the people. Since it is not possible for any single issue to be referred directly to all member of a given community or country, it is left to the people to chose their representatives and leaders through a voting system both in the area of the decision making process, that is parliament, and also the administration, that is the government. This fact can be seen in different countries that have chosen a democratic system to run their own countries. However, it can be seen that there is not a single form of democracy, rather; we do have different models and forms of it and each democratic country, on the basis of their history, customs, culture or religion developed a model of democratic system. Nevertheless, the common denominator in all these different forms of democratic systems is that the people have the right to choose or to change the governing body, either parliament or government. In addition, in each of these democratic countries, there are some principles and foundations, written or not, which form their own constitutions and it is not possible for the governing body, be it the parliament or government, even having the majority, to go
against their constitution except through a process that is mentioned in their own constitutions; usually is by referring to the direct vote from the people. The constitutions of the democratic countries, as we know, differ from each another. In some, the symbolic presence of an individual, a king or a queen is accepted, while in others certain authority is given to him or her; and yet in some others the presence of such a position is rejected. In one country, the government is led by a prime minister and while in others it works under a president. In fact it is not possible to find a democratic country with no limitation in the scope of democracy. With all these differences in the forms and scopes of democracy in different countries we can still consider them as 'a' democracy because in all of them people have the right to participate in political power of their society through 'a' system of voting.

Therefore the key issue concerning religious democracy is the capacity of a religion to draw an appropriate framework for a democratic government that meets the above-mentioned criteria. Here in what follows, I will explain how Ayatollah Imam Khomeini, as the most significant advocate of religious democracy, based on the Islamic sources, combined democracy, as the form of governing an Islamic states, and Islam as the constitution of it.7

First of all it has to be noted that in Islam there are certain principles pertaining to the issue of social decision making. The most famous one is the one which is known as Shawra or consultation. In brief, it means that Muslims, according to the instruction of the Quran8, before taking action in any social issues must consult with each other. Shawra, in its
historical function within the Islamic world, does not totally overlap with the modern concept of democracy and the political status of parliament in contemporary democracies. Nevertheless, it would be appropriate for shaping a kind of democratic model for an Islamic state. From what have mentioned above, Ayatollah Imam Khomeini has drawn one important conclusion which shows the dynamic and flexible nature of the Shari’a according to the Shi’a point of view. In his discussion about the role of parliament in an Islamic state, he argued that the law which is passed by the parliament is sacred as the rulings of the Shari’ah. Since, according to him, the status of the Shwara in an Islamic state is the continuation of the sovereignty (or Walaya) of God. Therefore, any legislation shall be considered as part of the Shari’ah. His view, Ijtihad, is in direct opposition to the views of some Muslim scholars who oppose the parliamentary system of government and are of the opinion that enactment of bonding rulings alongside the Shari’ah may result in parliament sovereignty upon the people at par with that of God Almighty; while according to the text of the Glorious Quran sovereignty is confined to God only. Ayatollah Khomeini, contrary to this view, emphasizes that since consultation is an essential part of the Shari’ah, the outcome of it also has to be considered as part of the Shari’ah. This is an important theorization in the Muslim political philosophy which supports dramatically the position of the role of people in enacting laws in Islamic states.

**Ideals of Islamic State**

Here I would like to explore some of the key features of an Islamic state which are in fact based on Islamic norms and values.
Justice:

The first and foremost objective of an Islamic state is justice in its absolute sense and with no restriction. The justice that not only encompasses social justice, which is related to the material life of the mankind, but more importantly justice to man's essence in order to pave the way for the spiritual exaltation of each human being and in a way that he or she may become the best possible model of humanity. That is, according to Islamic teachings, man is expected to become a true worshiper of God. Therefore, it can be said that the purpose of government in Islam is the facilitation of growth and perfection of the people's morality and ethics, personal and social, and to free people from their worldly desire which is according to the Qur'an one of the main goal of prophets. Justice in this wider sense encompasses all those deeds that are defined as good as well as to produce a morally just and God-fearing society. Neither government, nor its themes are viewed as ends in themselves. In fact all other ideals which follow are the manifestation and demonstration of justice in a particular issue.

Although the Islamic state is opposed to popular sovereignty, it has within it, many of the themes of modern democracy. However, there is a far greater emphasis on human duties than human rights, public and communal welfare over individualism and the morality is far more strongly integrated into law than in a modern secular state. The basis of just government in Islam is founded upon its ethics.
**Accountability**

One of the most important characteristics of Islamic state is its accountability to people. An Islamic state must be accountable and its citizens have the right to criticize its policies and functions. Advocates of Islamic state maintain that “al-amr bi’l-ma’ruf wa al-nahy ‘an al-munkar” (enjoining good and forbidding evil) is one of the most significant Islamic duties placed upon Muslims. Many Qur’anic verses emphasize on this fundamental injunction\(^1\), which if it is taken seriously would produce a healthy society that is far remote from tyranny, injustice and dictatorship.

**Equality**

Equality is one of the goals and objectives an Islamic state which provide legal equality for its people. There are numerous verses and sayings of the Prophet of Islam which emphasize on this fact. However, equality in Islam must not be viewed in a piecemeal and atomistic approach; rather it has to be viewed in the framework of Islamic rules in its totality and under the light of justice. Having said that, in the Shi’a fiqh the door is open for modification in cases which are proved to contain some element of injustice. There are examples of modification in the laws of Shari’ah which have taken place during the last three decades in Islamic Republic of Iran.

**Conclusion**

As the conclusion of this paper, based on what I have explained, mankind has different needs, personal and social and
if a religion is in the position to guide mankind it is needed to address these two aspect of the life of mankind without which mankind would be left in a dualism. Governance and state is among the social issues which does have a vast effect not only on other aspects of social life of the mankind but on the different part of his personal religious life as well. In Islam this needs has been addressed and the necessity of running the state according to Islamic values and norms is endorsed.
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6 Imam Khomeini, Hukumat Islami : Qum:1357 A. H.S.
7 To cite an example, Ayatollah Khomeini, during a meeting with the representative of Pope John Paul VI said:
“I do not want to impose (my will) on my people, and Islam does not permit us to establish a dictatorship. We follow our nation’s votes and act according to their views. We have no right, God has not conferred such a right to us, and the Prophet (pbuh) never permitted us to impose our ideas upon Muslims”.
8 And those who respond to their Lord and keep up prayer, and their rule is to take counsel amongst themselves. (Qur’an 42:38)
And ask pardon for them, and take counsel with them in the affair. (Chapter 3, Verse 159)
And take counsel with them in the affair, so when you have decided then place your trust in Allah. (Qur’an3: 159)
9 Indeed judgment (hukm) is only for Allah. (Qur’an 6: 57)
A nd in whatever thing you disagree, the judgment thereof is with A llah. (Qur’an 42: 10)
A nd if you were in dispute in anything amongst yourselves, refer to A llah and H is Messenger. (Qur’an 4: 59)
10 Qur’an 7:157
11 As such see Qur‘an: And from amongst you there should be a party who invite to good and enjoin what is right and forbid the wrong, and these it is that shall be successful. (3:104)

And (as for) the believing men and believing women, they are guardians of each other, they enjoin good and forbid evil. (9: 71).
Religion and Society

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Religious scholars and philosophers have always, but to a varying degree, been concerned about the extent, the reason and the various aspects of the involvement of religion in man’s social affairs. This paper is an attempt on the part of the author to prove that the non-involvement of religion in social affairs as well as its indifference towards the laws that regulate such affairs are contradictory to the purpose for which religions were founded. For the purpose of establishing this point of view I deem it appropriate to discuss the issue by looking into the following several points:

1- Man’s Dependence on the Society

Since an individual’s life is highly interconnected with that of other people and his society in general, religion cannot alter and improve his various economic, cultural and social conditions without dealing with these issues at the level of the society. Thus, in the absence of rules and regulations concerning the society and social life religion cannot ensure individuals’ welfare and happiness. The quality of people’s life, to a large
extent, depends on their governments and, therefore, in the absence of appropriate do’s and don’ts for the rulers and the way they should govern their people no religion can come up with appropriate instructions for the personal life of individuals.

2- Happiness

Man needs religion to ensure his true happiness both in this world and in the hereafter and this calls for a real understanding of the general laws and plans that govern all aspects of man’s worldly life as well as his eternal life in the hereafter. Since man’s sources of knowledge are subject to limitations he requires reliable and flawless sources that can guarantee him true guidance and if such guidance is merely confined to individual and ritual issues without touching upon social affairs, leaving the administration of these affairs to man himself, the above-mentioned purpose cannot be achieved. Therefore, it goes without saying that if religion fails to deal with man’s social affairs it will not be in a position to provide man with his required guidance and, thus, falls short of the basic philosophy of its very essence.

With the view to reasoning this point let us briefly examine the views of some Muslim philosophers.

Farabi considers happiness as the supreme purpose and goal of man’s efforts far above his other goals or objectives. Happiness is a justified goal pursued by every human being and it is a goal beyond which no other goal can be visualized for him.
Ultimate sublime goal of man is arriving at a stage of perfection in which he is no more in need of the material world. In other words, he intends to reach a stage in which he becomes incorporeal in essence.\(^2\)

From the viewpoint of this philosopher, whose views have come to form the foundation of later philosophers, any virtues of lower degree can only serve as a stepping stone for attaining happiness and so far as man has not attained the ultimate stage of being incorporeal in essence he has not, in fact, attained true happiness.\(^3\)

Molla Sadra defines happiness in these words: “Know that being is all goodness and happiness. Understanding the being is goodness and happiness too. However, different beings are different from the viewpoint of virtues and the degree of their perfection. Thus, whenever the being becomes perfect it gets distanced from non-existence and attains higher degrees of happiness and involves evil and wretchedness so long as it remains imperfect.”\(^4\)

**Personal Happiness and Collective Happiness**

Even though the approach adopted by Muslim philosophers, towards happiness and ultimate sublime goal of man and its related issues as well as the literature used by them for throwing light on various concepts related to it, basically refer to personal happiness, they have also made it a point to touch upon collective and civil happiness. And this can be clearly seen in the views and works of the philosophers that view happiness from an ethical point of view.
The Concept and the Position of Personal Happiness

Beyond all doubts most of the definitions presented for the concept of happiness refer to personal happiness. In other words, since most philosophers have viewed happiness as a status of detachment from material needs of life and have considered all forms of corporeal attachments as hindrances to the attainment of happiness, they have, thus, held the owners of exalted spirits in high esteem and it is for this reason that they have paid more attention to personal happiness. In their opinion, even if this process, by way of which man’s potential and aptitude is fully actualized is not necessarily personal, it cannot be considered as collective either. This trend has continued to hold a prime position among the Muslim philosophers and mystics who have always been preoccupied with distancing themselves from the material world and social life.

Viewing human intellect as the most important factor in acquiring knowledge and human values, philosophers believe that man has no other means of arriving at absolute and perfect knowledge except through his intellect and it is through this faculty that he can attain happiness and reach a stage of progress and perfection the most outstanding characteristic of which is freedom and liberation from the bonds of corporeal and material world. With this principle in mind happiness becomes an individualistic concern for which reason the philosophers have not been able to go beyond individual and individuality.
The Concept and the Position of Collective Happiness

In their ethical and yet collective approach to happiness some Muslim philosophers have, in the course of their analysis, come to the conclusion that it is rather impossible for man to develop virtues that lead to the attainment of happiness individually. They believe that by virtue of his creation man is a social being and is in need of his fellow human beings. Thus, they tend to criticize the ascetic schools that believe happiness can only be attained with solitude and isolating oneself from other people and the society. In the view of the Muslim philosopher a so called ascetic is, as a matter of fact, a bully and aggressor who relies and depends on other people for his most basic needs without making any efforts to contribute to his society.

In his book, “Al-Fawz al-Asghar”, Ibn Maskouyeh corroborates this argument in the following words:

“Unlike many animals, birds and sea animals that can live on their own without being dependent on others, man has not been created to live in solitude and yet survive. To the contrary, by his very nature, man requires other people’s training and cooperation. Justice calls on us to help and support other human beings, just as they help and support us.” To support his argument he states some examples from religious laws in order to prove that even Islam has recommended social life and the attainment of collective happiness. For instance, he states that even though “Salat” is one of the most virtuous of prayers for every Muslim, it has been highly recommended that Muslims
perform it collectively. In fact, in Ibn Maskouyeh’s view, which emphasizes on society rather than individual, it is man’s love for his other fellow human beings that gives rise to the society and social life and in the absence of this virtue no society can be formed.

In Ibn Maskouyeh’s view the attainment of ethical virtues and merits is only possible in and through social life and, therefore, after recommending moral refinement, austerity and rejection of worldly desires he emphasizes that he does not propose total abandonment of worldly affairs and social development and stresses that those who recommend absolute refusal of worldly affairs are ignorant about the world and its conditions and do not know that man is by nature a social being. He is of the opinion that a person who does not live as a citizen of a city is incapable of attaining virtues and happiness. He believes in collective endeavor towards correcting the ills of the society and emphasizes that in order to traverse the path of happiness one needs to evaluate himself in respect of his efforts towards the development of his society, for an individual’s happiness is the function of the happiness of the society. It is for this reason that in his book “Tahzib al-Akhlaq” he stresses that “since the number of human virtues are larger than one can individually attain, it is, thus, imperative that a large number of people should join hands and endeavor towards their achievement collectively. And it is by virtue of this collective effort that common good as well as happiness shall prevail among them.”

Similarly, even though in Farabi’s view man’s perfection and happiness is a function of his detachment from the corporeal and material world, he believes the attainment of such
a state is only possible if one lives in a virtuous society. In his words:

“The Attainment of happiness and bliss depends upon the elimination of evils and vices from the society. Every citizen of the virtuous city (utopia) needs to recognize and fully understand the meaning of happiness and the status of the ruler of the virtuous city and then take on certain actions that could lead to happiness for all the members of their society.”

In Farabi’s view no one can attain the status of the perfect man, which he refers to as the “virtuous man”, individually and on his own and rather the perfection he looks for can only be attained in a community or “ummah” that is in possession of exalted virtues and values. Therefore, the denial of collective happiness and excellence, besides being indecent by essence, is contrary to the teachings of Islam that invites human beings to cooperation and collective efforts towards their common goals in life. Thus, it is not possible to say that the Muslim philosopher thinks in an Islamic way but his thoughts are not in alignment with the teachings of Islam or are in outright contrast with intellect. In other words, what the Muslim philosopher means by emphasizing on personal happiness is that even though personal happiness can take place in the absence of collective happiness, it is in no way contradictory to collective happiness. Secondly, the personal happiness of a perfect human being can result in the happiness of a society, for after attaining happiness he reaches a state of spirituality in which he does not consider his mission as complete and, therefore, chooses to return to his society and becomes the cause of collective happiness by spreading virtues. It could, thus, be concluded that
happiness is not merely a state of personal intellectual perfection, since true happiness can be said to have be attained only if it is manifested in the society in the form of spreading human virtues and values.⁸

3- External Reality

Many Islamic texts provide evidence that in numerous cases religions were involved in the governance and administration of social affairs and, in fact, in certain cases religious leaders had even established governments and taken on the religious, social and state affairs of their people.⁹ Therefore, having these religious texts - including a large number of Quranic verses and religious narrations - at our disposal as well as having access to authentic evidences about the approach adopted by many religious leaders towards this issue it would not be possible to deny the important role of religion in regulating social relations.

4- God’s Wisdom and Power of Creation

Religion is fundamentally based in man’s relationship with God Almighty. As the creator, God Almighty has laid down certain commandments for man’s daily life and has planned his livelihood through a flawless mechanism that is compatible with his essence and nature. At the same time He has made man’s happiness a function of obedience to His commandments.

Being the Creator He has made it incumbent upon Himself not to leave His Creations alone in the ups and downs of their lives. Moreover, the dependence of the entire world of
creation on Him and His Wisdom calls on Him to plan man’s life in a way that would guide him to a path that ensures a life of happiness for him. He has also defined an interdependent system, which could lead to the establishment of justice and ensure man’s human dignity.

On the other hand, justice, security and human dignity can only be ensured through a program that caters to both man’s relationship with his Creator as well as his relationship to others and his social life. Thus, it would not be wise to believe in a wise creator and deny the fact that He has laid down laws and rules for man’s social life that would serve his interests in the best possible way.

5- Innate Nature and Conscience

Interest in and inclination towards other human beings is part of man’s innate nature as a result of which love and friendship develop and relationships and bonds are formed and religion, which is an inseparable part of man’s innate nature, systematizes and recognizes, inter alia, such innate emotions.

Therefore, one of the important responsibilities of a religion, which is harmonious to man’s innate nature, is to lay down laws and rulings that could organize and regulate man’s social desires failing which it would cease to be a comprehensive religion.10

6- The Law of Divine Grace

The term “lotf” or grace is used by theologians to denote a kind Divine blessing that brings people closer to obeying God
Almighty and drives them away from being disobedient to Him and committing sins.

Many theologians are of the opinion that Divine grace is an obligation on God Almighty in the sense that He is expected to grace man with a blessing that would lead him to the path of obedience and prevent him from indulging in sins. Both Shiite and Mutazilite theologians believe that from the viewpoint of reason it is incumbent upon God Almighty bless man with Divine grace.

In his book “Tajvid al-E’teqad” Khwajeh Nasiruddin Tousi emphasizes: “Divine grace is obligatory so that man’s purpose of creation can be fulfilled”.11

Allameh Helli elaborates on Tousi’s statement in these words: “Divine Grace is something that draws man close to God Almighty in obedience and prevents him from being disobedient to Him and indulging in sins.”

The above discussion indicates that it is incumbent on God Almighty to provide man with whatever draws him close to Him in obedience and stops him from being disobedient and indulging in sins.

Allameh Helli explains this further by stating: “the reason behind the necessity of Divine grace is that it is through this grace that man recognizes the purpose of his creation and his responsibilities and duties and if God Almighty were to withhold His grace He would have then acted contrary to purpose behind His creation of man”. He throws further light on this concept by giving the example of extending an invitation to someone without paying attention to certain customs that are
generally expected by guests and at the same time expecting the guest to accept the invitation.\textsuperscript{12}

**The Law of Divine Grace on the Need for an Imam**

In the opinion of renowned Shiite theologians like Sheikh Mofid and Khwajeh Nasiruddin Tousi, imamate - the main purpose of which is providing guidance to mankind - is one of the greatest forms of the manifestation of Divine grace. And it is required from God Almighty to appoint imams and vest them with the responsibility of guiding people and directing them towards happiness.

Khwajeh Nasiruddin Tousi explains the need for imamate in these words: “Imam is a Divine grace and, therefore, his appointment is incumbent upon God Almighty so that the purpose of man’s creation can be fulfilled.”\textsuperscript{13}

Allameh Helli explains this statement of Khwajeh Nasiruddin Tousi in the form of the following syllogism:

1- Imam is a Divine Grace,  
2- Grace is incumbent upon God Almighty, therefore,  
3- The appointment of Imam is incumbent upon God Almighty.

Human intellect, logic and even innate nature acknowledge and agree with this syllogism. In other words, since the main purpose of man’s creation is the attainment of human perfection, an infallible imam is required to play a significant role in providing the required guidance to the mankind.
The Incompetence of Human Intellect and Innate Nature

All divine religions, in general, and Islam, in particular, as well as all other religions that give importance to human intellect and intelligence have acknowledged the fact that man is incapable of the providing solutions to all his personal and social problems. In other words, they all agree that man is unable to recognize all his true needs and in the absence of Divine revelation the human intellect and innate nature cannot see the line of perfection in its entirety.

Since early times a number of philosophers have dealt with this issue by trying to provide philosophical reasoning for it. For instance, Augustine, the renowned Christian philosopher and thinker of the 4th Century C.E. whose philosophical and religious views and thoughts dominated the western philosophy for a period of about 900 years until the 13th Century C.E. believes that Divine guidance is only possible through prophethood. He further explains that man’s purpose of life if to attain happiness and bliss, for a man who is caught in the turbulent sea of life looks for a safe shore to save himself and attain peace and happiness. He also quotes Socrates as saying that happiness cannot be achieved unless one gets to know himself first.

Such happiness is valuable when it is stable and eternal rather than temporary and transient. When man loses something he cannot rest in peace before he finds it and is constantly fearful and this fear can only go away when he realizes his being is dependent on an alive, conscious and eternal being, which is called God Almighty. Thus, if we want to arrive at happiness we
need to choose God Almighty and religion as our goal and it is religion only that can lead man to happiness and bliss.

Muslim philosophers have paid extensive and profound attention to the issue of divine guidance and its necessity and have arrived at some valuable results. In chapter II of part ten of his book “Al-Shefa” which is dedicated to an elaborate discussion on prophethood, Sheikh al-Ra’is Ibn Sina (Avicenna) writes as under:

“It would be unfair to leave people to their own views and opinions, for should any dispute arise between them each side would consider it just whatever is in his favor and refer to it as injustice if it is not in his interest. The need for such a man (prophet and the messenger of God Almighty) is more important for man’s survival than his eyelashes and eyebrows and it would not be justified on the part of God Almighty’s initial blessing to bestow man with such endowments (eyelashes and eyebrows) and disregard man’s most fundamental requirement (the appointment of messengers) and ignore it.”

From whatever has been discussed so far it becomes quite clear that God Almighty is concerned about man’s guidance and His guidance should take place through a perfect man whose presence is a must at all stages of the human history.

The Reason behind Divine Grace and the Continuous Divine Guidance

Divine providence in the form of providing man with internal and religious guidance throws light on his need for growth and the development of his aptitudes as well as the emergence of the virtues that he possesses potentially. This is a
need which is eternal and man is incapable of catering to it on his own. In other words, in every age man is in need of this Divine providence and guidance and it is due to this eternal need that Divine grace and guidance should continue even after the age of prophethood and in the form of imamate and vilayah.15

Imamate and Velayah is the Continuation of Prophethood

Velayah, which is the essence of prophethood should be viewed from two different angles and while from one angel it is related to the Creator from the other angel it concerns the created (the mankind).

In other words, the first angle is related to the status of the prophet in respect of his servitude and nearness to God Almighty and the second angle concerns man’s guidance. Imamate is the manifestation of velayah and the very essence of prophethood and with the conclusion of the age of prophethood the age of imamate begins and the imam is vested with the responsibility of providing the required interpretation on the true meanings and concepts of the divine verses of the scripture. As the renowned French Orientalist, Henry Corbin, very rightly states “Imam is responsible for interpreting the Glorious Quran”.16

From the viewpoint of the Glorious Quran the imam must possess the true essence of the founder of the religion and it is under his spiritual guidance that man’s potential for perfection can be actualized.
With the demise of the Noble Prophet of Islam, Mohammad bin Abdollah (s) the age of prophethood came to an end forever and the stage of velayah, i.e. the age of the interpretation of Divine revelation and adapting them to the social developments of each age began. That is to say human beings were now expected to follow the teachings of the Noble Prophet and adapt them to their personal and social life under the guidance of the imam and it was for this reason that the imams began introducing the path of monotheism and defining the purpose of human creation to their followers through the ages. This purpose is stated in the Glorious Quran in these words: “I did not create the jinn and the humans except that they may worship Me”.

Not only have all the great Muslim scholars including, philosophers, theologians and mystics, acknowledged the importance of velayah, but many western scholars, too, have recognized and acknowledged it and many Christian philosophers and theologians have looked upon vali and vilayah as an irrefutable principle of their thoughts.

Molla Sadra Shirazi, who has in many of his works elaborated on the supreme Divine order of the universe and considers revelation and prophethood as one of the main pillars of this Divine order, has an elaborate discussion on the issue of imamate and refers to it as one of the brightest aspects of the world of creation. He believes that an imam receives the light of guidance from the unseen Divine dominion and puts it at the disposal of the humankind and in this way guides to higher realms (of their being) with the permission of God Almighty and it is for this reason that the Glorious Quran says: “And
amongst them We appointed imams to guide (the people) by Our command... “18

7- The System and Essence of Creation

The existing order in the universe, which is the creation of God Almighty, as well as man’s innate nature call for Divine laws concerning different areas of their social life and relations. This in turn necessitates the existence of certain human beings with divine connections to provide the humankind with the necessary guidance in order to regulate their social life and ensure the attainment of worldly and eternal happiness by them. Here it would be appropriate to quote Ibn Sina’s reasoning in this regard.

a) Man is incapable of providing for all the requirements of a relatively peaceful life on his own.
b) He, thus, turns to social life in order to live a better life by cooperating with others and dividing the responsibilities.
c) Man’s greed forces him to use others to the maximum possible extent and at the same time avoid serving them as far as possible.
d) As result, man’s social life turns into a scene of oppression and violation of the rights of his fellow human beings and what was suppose to serve his interests and provide him with comfort and happiness becomes the cause of his sufferings.
e) This calls for a law to regulate the relationships among the people in the course of their social life.
f) Such a law, however, should not be formulated by humans, since every human being or every class of human
beings consider it just if his or their interests are served and regard it as unjust whatever does not cater to his demands and claims.

g) Thus, lawmaking and formulation of laws should take place outside the realm of the human world.

h) God Almighty who has blessed man with such not so important blessings as eyebrows and the curve of the foot to make life easier for him would certainly not be oblivious to such an important and decisive factor in the lives of human beings.¹⁹

Since human life has come to be more complicated in the modern times and the facilities that are produced and administered by man have increased to a great extent, it is quite evident that the first two points of the above-mentioned eight points presented by Ibn Sina are acknowledged today more than ever.
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Religion and Civil Society: Contemporaneous Difficulties and Opportunities

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1. Civil society. Civil society is a relatively modern concept. It was born at the end of the XVIII century and it is employed to define a sphere of human activities that presents peculiar features. Philosophers and lawyers make recourse to this concept to explain that every individual spends his life within a network of social relations that can be classified in four areas: the family, the State, the market and, finally, the civil society. Free and voluntary are the adjectives characterizing the relations that take place within civil society; associations, trade unions, political parties, non-profit organizations, religiously oriented schools, social movements, and so on, are the actors that populate this area of human life. They offer individuals the opportunity to develop together projects of life and social organization that can be reproduced on a larger scale as a model for organization of the broader social community. In other words, civil society is the space where, through particular experiences, the common good is pursued, and the institutions of civil society are the places where individuals develop and test the principles and convictions that guide their actions as citizens. This process can occur only in a context of freedom, where
associations that have different aims, schools that are inspired to different value systems, political parties with different programs can coexist and interact. This explains why civil society tends to flourish more fully in democratic than in authoritarian or totalitarian States. As a matter of fact, civil society movements like Solidarność in Poland and the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa played a decisive role in the fall of the Communist or racist regimes that were in power in those countries.

2. The significance of civil society. Civil society therefore requires liberty, with all the advantages and at the same time with all the risks that liberty always entails: it is an open space, that can be filled with good experiences as well as bad ones. Why then does civil society deserve to be defended and expanded? What does it deliver in exchange of the dangers it involves? Basically, civil society can generate a social capital constituted by three fundamental civic virtues: it teaches individuals to live in a committed, responsible and trustful way. Each of us is ready to volunteer time and effort to the associations of which he is a member, to the political projects in which he believes, to the schools his children attend: each of us feels responsible for those ventures in which he is involved and, in order to make them flourish, is ready to establish relations of trust and cooperation with other individuals who share the same ideals. This education to responsibility, commitment and trust that takes place in the institutions of civil society is indispensable to form good citizens, who are able to reproduce these same civic virtues when they act as members of the larger State community: therefore, the existence of a vital civil society can offer a decisive contribution to the common good of the State by providing both values and attitudes that foster social
commitment and cohesion without giving up plurality and differences.

To sum up what I have said, I shall refer to an American lawyer, Robert Cover. According to him, any society is based on balance between two forces: the force that creates the world and the force that maintains it. Cover says we live in a space inhabited by many normative worlds, each of them characterized by its own set of values and rules. These normative worlds are the social groups (religious, cultural, political groups and so on) that are capable of generating new legal values and meanings through the personal commitment of their members: by applying their will to transform the extant state of affairs according to their visions of alternative futures, they create worlds governed by a new law. But these normative worlds, if are left to themselves, can become sectarian, violent and dissociative. Therefore the coexistence of different legal worlds requires a system-maintaining force. The modern State can offer it, provided it understands that it has not the task to create new legal values but to foster the birth and development of the normative worlds where these values take shape.

In conclusion the institutions of civil society play a generative role both for the values that support the State’s laws and for the civic virtues that support the State’s political activity. A State based on principles of freedom and democracy cannot properly claim to generate the values that citizens are called to share nor the attitudes that should support their participation in the life of the polis: for both of them the State can rely on civil society. Therefore the State’s contribution to the common good is not in the field of creation but in that of conservation and it
performs this task by providing a legal framework where different projects of common good can peacefully coexist.

2. Religions and civil society. Religions offer a peculiar element to the civil society debate, that is, the conviction that man is repository of a truth given by God. This conviction is highly significant to the development of a sound civil society. It has already been said that civil society can create commitment, personal responsibility and mutual trust: but what is the foundation of these virtues, what persuades men to behave in a responsible and committed way? Religions -or at least those religions that are founded on divine revelation- answer that this attitude is ultimately rooted in man’s responsibility towards God: the commitment to build the common good, through personal responsibility and a relation of trust with other persons, is generated by recognition of the truth that has been given by God to human beings.

This approach to civil society, typical of the monotheistic religions, gives a sound and stable basis to the research of the common good and connects it to some non negotiable principles that, being rooted in divine revelation, transcend social consensus and political expediency. At the same time this approach raises the problem of harmonizing truth and liberty. If the central feature of civil society is the free research of the common good through a committed participation in particular experiences, how can this research be shared by those who know they possess the truth?

There are two answers to this question. The first is a theological answer that goes beyond the scope of my presentation. Therefore I shall deal with it very briefly. In a
religions perspective, man is not the master of the truth he proclaims nor the craftsman of its success among men. Being in the service of truth and affirming it without hesitation is all that can be expected by man: on the contrary, trying to impose the truth denies that its recognition, although in need of human cooperation, depends on God’s will. In this perspective I can profess unconditionally the truth of my faith and publicly witness the events that changed my life and my world view without the need to affirm the supremacy of my religion and the obligation of everybody to accept it. It seems to me that this answer has a sound foundation in the theological and legal tradition of different monotheistic religions.

The second answer is too complex to be considered in relation to every religion. Therefore I shall give it in relation to just one of them, Christianity.

3. Christianity and civil society. Religion is first of all a personal relationship between God and man: this is the starting point for analyzing the relationship between Christianity and civil society. This principle is the novelty brought by Christianity into the Greco-Roman world, where religion had more a national and family dimension than a personal one: and this is also what makes Christianity different from Judaism, which conceives religion as a covenant between God and one people. In the Jewish and Roman societies, where in different forms the collective dimension of religion prevailed, Christianity affirms a new principle: religion is the choice of conscience of a person who, questioned by Jesus Christ’s message, decides to answer yes. Obviously in Christianity too there is a communitarian dimension, that manifests the solidarity –more exactly, the
communion—of the faithful who share faith in the same God. But this dimension is based on a personal assent that questions the responsibility of each individual. In other words, persons are not born Christian but become Christian: and they become so not because they are members of a community, a people or a family, but because of a personal choice.

The accent placed on the personal dimension of the religious experience paved the way for the birth of a new right, that was unknown in the ancient world: the right of religious liberty. According to Christian doctrine nobody—the State, the community and even the family—can take the place of the individual in deciding a matter of conscience: therefore every person must be completely free to choose his religion (and also to change or abandon it), because an authentic religious experience cannot exist outside a state of liberty. This right to religious freedom is absolute, that is it is due to every person (not only to Christians) by virtue of his being a person. Moreover, it is unlimited, that is no human power can restrict the right of an individual to choose the religion he deems to be the true one. Sadly, this right is infringed in many parts of the world and the faithful of many religions—Christianity included—are subjected to persecution or, because of their religion, do not enjoy civil and political rights on equal footing with other citizens.

Religious freedom has not always been respected in the history of the Christian countries nor in the teachings and actions of some representatives of the Church itself: John Paul II publicly asked forgiveness for these sins. But the principle that the religious faith requires liberty was never forgotten in the Christian tradition and it was fully reinstated on the occasion of
the Vatican II Council by affirming that religious liberty is a right that “has its foundation in the very dignity of the human person”. The significance of this statement is evident: as a German lawyer, Ernst Wolfgang Böckenförde, put it, religious freedom “that previously was a concession, now becomes a commandment, an obligation that is rooted in the Christian faith itself and in its correlated image of man”. In this way truth and freedom can be reconciled: if “religious freedom is inherent to the truth itself of Christianity”, affirming that the Gospel is the truth for every man implies affirming “the religious freedom of every man, including those who do not have any faith or have and practice a faith that is different from mine or, simply, have given up their faith”. At this point the contradiction between truth and liberty reveals that it is only an apparent contradiction: it is possible to fully participate in the free and open debate of civil society without giving up or marginalizing the claim that Christianity is the true religion, as the freedom of non-Christians is coessential with this claim.

Once it is clear that taking part in the civil society debate does not imply a relativization of truth, it is possible to underline two other reasons for looking to civil society with sympathy.

First of all, the recognition that a sound State requires a sound civil society strengthens the subsidiarity principle, according to which the State does not have to take on those tasks that can be performed equally well by the institutions of civil society, for example by associations or social movements. From the perspective of the subsidiarity principle, the State has basically the task of providing the legal context and the
economic support for developing the civil society initiatives. Only when the needs to be faced are so huge that civil society alone cannot cope with them (one can think, for example, of the need to put in place a national health service), is the State entitled to act on its own. In this way State power is maintained within its proper dimensions, avoiding its hypertrophic and potentially dangerous over-development.

Second, the central role recognized to civil society engages the Christian faithful to take on its responsibilities in the social and political fields. The distinction between religion and politics, Church and State, that is traditional in Christian thought, has sometimes been misunderstood and interpreted as something that limits the responsibility of Christians to the spiritual affairs, leaving the temporal and political world outside the area of concern of the faithful. I think the opposite is true. For centuries the Christian community has sought security in the confessional character of the State: State laws supporting Christianity and affirming the Christian character of the State were misunderstood as the guarantee of the Christian character of society as well. This mistake had a negative impact on the vitality of the Christian community, as the responsibility of transforming society according to Christian values was regarded more as a duty of the State than the mission of each Christian. The decline of State confessionism and the principle that State institutions cannot become the instruments of any religion – including the one professed by the majority of the citizens – has encouraged Christians to take on the responsibility to witness the values they uphold in the places where people live, in schools, families, workplaces, that is in civil society.
4. Civil society, State, and religion: a delicate balance. One last and problematic feature of civil society still has to be taken into consideration before concluding my presentation. It would be naïve to believe that civil society, simply by virtue of its being a free and open society, is always conducive to the common good. The projects and initiatives that are generated by civil society can pursue the interest of the few instead of justice, create divisions instead of solidarity, intolerance instead of mutual understanding. Faced with this ambiguity that is inherent in civil society, the question is how to sort its products so that what is helpful for common good can be separated from what is harmful. But who can perform this job and what are the criteria that can guide this selection?

This problem can be summarized in the following terms: on the one hand there is civil society, that is the place where projects and proposals for the organization of social coexistence are freely elaborated; on the other hand there is the State, that is the entity that selects some of these projects and puts them at the foundation of its laws. How the State can perform this task of filtering and selecting without destroying liberty, which is essential for the sound development of civil society and, on the other hand, without falling into an anarchy of competing values that is incompatible with the idea of common good?

Some think that this dilemma has no solution. Böckenförde for example wrote that “the liberal and secular State lives on the base of presuppositions whose truth it is unable to guarantee”. I think that this statement is correct only in part. First of all, civil society is not totally free, does not live
in a vacuum, but operates within a framework defined by rules that grant respect for some fundamental and non-negotiable principles upon which every State is based (nobody could appeal to the liberty of civil society to support, for example, slavery or human sacrifices). Second, within this large framework there are further rules that are rooted in the tradition and culture of each national community. They reflect the identity of every community and shape accordingly its relations and institutions, from the family to the work place, from the relations between man and woman to those between citizen and State. They provide a more narrow framework within which the civil society is contained, a framework that exists in all the civilizations of our world but that has different characteristics in each of them as it is the outcome of different histories and cultures. In other words, the State is not an empty container that can be filled with whatever content: on the contrary it has a memory and a history that provide guidance in selecting the inputs coming from civil society. This State framework is far from being immutable, as it is continuously in transformation under the inputs of civil society; but at the same time it is far from being neutral, as it is made by people with a culture and an identity that has taken shape in history and that inevitably influence court decisions, Parliament laws and their application by public administration.

From history we have learnt that the balanced development of any social community requires that two equally grave dangers be avoided: the revolutionary utopian effort to get rid of tradition and the conservative one to crystallize it, irrespective of the changes that continuously take place within any social group. Both approaches have proven to be wrong. The identity of a social community is not an immutable genetic
code, that is given once for all and cannot be changed for eternity, but an inheritance that should be enlarged through exchange with the other identities, old and new, that inhabit the world: understanding this fact is the way to approach in a correct way the relation between civil society and State or, to make use once more of Cover’s language, between the forces that create and those that maintain the world.

In this perspective a State that is attentive to the common good cannot but recognize religion’s full liberty to take part, within civil society, in the formation of the public ethos that is indispensible to the life of the State itself. For many decades, particularly in Europe, religions have been confined to private space and basically excluded from public debate. Today things are different and religions have to face new responsibilities and new opportunities: both the first and the second require a sound relation between religion and civil society in contemporary world.
References

2 See Robert D. Putnam, Robert Leonardi, Raffaella Y. Nanetti, Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1994. Obviously it is possible that some associations, social movements, political parties foster intolerance and extremism instead of trust and responsibility: on this point see infra, par. 4.
3 Nomos and Narrative, in Harvard Law Review, 97, 1983, pp. 4-68.
5 Dignitatis Humanae, n. 2.
6 Lo stato secolarizzato e i suoi valori, in Il Regno-attualità, 18/2007, p.640.
9 Neutrality, if intended as the absence of any distinctive quality or characteristic of the State, is a chimera: State institutions cannot be severed from society and their activity is inevitably influenced by the history, culture, belief of the people they represent. State neutrality makes sense only if it is intended as the conscious effort of State institutions to pursue an impartial and well balanced policy towards the different groups and organization that constitute the civil society.
Religion and Society: New Paradigmatic Shifts in Sociology of Religion

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Introduction

Religion is one of the major essentials in any society that has emerged and reemerged in various forms in the course of time and certain incidents. In other words, religion has both changed the societies and undergone drastic changes in some periods to find new presentations, but it has never been faded from the face of the society. The impact of religion on human societies is inevitable. Apart from the fact that religion is believed to be a celestial and supernatural reality, it has deeply and impressively influenced human beings - specially its followers - and human societies in the course of ages. While religious beliefs and practices vary from society to society, no known society in the history of mankind have existed without practicing or believing in some form of religion or other. (Giddens, 2000: 514)

Peter Berger defines religion as: “Religion is the human enterprise by which a sacred cosmos is established. Put
differently, religion is cosmization in a sacred mode. By sacred is meant here a quality of mysterious and awesome power, other than man and yet related to him, which is believed to reside in certain objects of experience.” (Thompson, 1974; also Bab al-Havaeji, 2008: 24) Religion addresses man and its goal is to epitomize his existence and direct his actions in his material world. The end of the world, or the end of the material life for all individuals, is the end of human action, therefore, it is coincident with the end of functionality and workability of the religion. (Shojaei Zand, 2009: 8)

In the contemporary world, modernization has made some changes in the religious institution, understanding and performance of human societies. These changes came as rapid and shocking. The speed of changes in religious arena was so fast that it made many social thinkers and researchers and philosophers give up religion and renounce its functionality in some occasions. Some intellectuals in human and social sciences talked about the decline of religion and the intensification of secularism, anticipating the religion would be totally faded from the face of human societies. Time after, however, facts and figures proved such a claim was wrong. (Azad Armaki, Zare’, 2008: 134)

The survival of religion in the society does not mean the prevalence of traditional religious institutions and behaviors. These institutions and behaviors have to change nature in the new society to be in conformity with rationality and individualism along with modernization. (Kazemipour, 2009: 35)

The essentiality of studying religion in contemporary world is because of the fact that religion or religiousness is one
of the ultimate values (Max Weber’s value-judgment criteria) according to which a large number of people act in the society. Moreover, modern mass media and globalization phenomenon have facilitated and accelerated communications, the consequence of which has been increased interactions among countries, nations, cultures and most important of all, the interaction or counteraction between the religions. Today, the pluralistic world requires vast studies on various religious paradigms. Moreover, socioeconomic developments coupled with submission of modern man to various structures have given birth to such modern social problems as self-alienation and objectivity. These complications necessitate the return to spirituality and the return to religion.

Religion legitimizes abnormal situations and experiences outside the realm of everyday experiences such as dreams, death, disasters, war, social unrest, suicide, pain and evil. Pursuing Weber’s ideas, Berger names clarifications of the above phenomena as religious justifications. The role of religious justification is to fight the abnormalities. In the course of history, religion has been one of the most effective strongholds of man against abnormality. (Hamilton, 2008: 282) However, after the age of enlightenment, specifically in French Revolution in 1789, a sort of anti-religious sentiment – later known as secularism – grew fast in the world and became the only sustaining paradigm in the world. Nevertheless, since mid 80s new signs appeared on the scene that were not explainable by “secularization thesis”. Increased modernization did not lead to a fall in religiosity of people. Proponents of secularization thesis worked for some time to analyze and moderate these unordinary
phenomena by their secular theories. However, the gradual rise of social and political phenomena that proved to be non-interpretable by the conventional theories gave birth to new paradigms. Since then, rival theories appeared and questioned the authenticity of secularization process and believed in the religiousness of the modern world to the extent of the traditional religious world. (Serajzadeh, 2004: 11-12) This study examines the crisis in the dominant paradigm in the realm of religion. The importance of paradigmatic developments and the use of paradigmatic analysis method lie in the fact that it gives us the chance to review the changes in a fundamental level.

Paradigm by definition is "widely accepted scientific achievements that are used for some time by the practitioners of pertinent field as a pattern to solve the problems in that field." (Moini, 2006: 43) In every scientific revolution and change of government a new paradigm is introduced as a major solution for the problems. Thomas Kuhn considers four periods for each paradigm: pre-paradigmatic period, normal or paradigmatic science, crisis period, and new scientific revolution when new paradigm becomes dominant. (Effrat, 2006: 20)

Thomas Kuhn in his book “The Structure of Social Revolutions” has used the word paradigm to explain about the structure of scientific revolution. He has studied the way scientists have changed their paradigms and the results coming out of these changes. His method will help us in our study of the changes.

Paradigms are barriers to the admission of the ideas that are outside their framework. They organize the existing information but paradigms might play a negative role either.
They might prevent understanding the exceptions and new developments. Since we assume the world is experiencing major changes in societies and human understanding of religion, we believe theoretical basis of secularism - as the dominant thesis on sociology of religion - is unable to analyze these changes, therefore it needs a rival paradigm. The review of these paradigms will be very helpful in analyzing modernity and post-modernity.

In this paper we will study the social role of religion in the contemporary world and review new paradigms in sociology of religion, and finally we will anticipate the role of religion in future societies.

**Reviewing New Paradigms of Religion**

A review of sociological theories on religion will give us five paradigms for sociology of religion: secularization, institutional, return of the religion, post-secular and religious pluralism paradigms. These paradigms are indicatives of the change in religious identities as well as the change in social rank of the religion in modern-era Europe. It should be noted that modernity discussion has been included in secularization paradigm for historical considerations but philosophically it is under discussion in all other paradigms. This is because modernity is the cause of the emergence of paradigms and the need for studying sociology of religion and related theses. Hereunder, we will study and explain about each paradigm.

- Secularization paradigm (Dechristianization or Dechristianisierung): This paradigm intends to make all aspects
of life completely secularized. The word derives from the original French word of de'christianiser that refers to political and religious struggle in French Revolution. In the course of the revolution, groups of people attacked churches in France and executed the priests. The word came to be interpreted as stability, glorification and sanctification of the rationale of the revolution. (Graff, 2004: 71) The dispute over the fate of Christianity in the new age was not on the religion and faith only, rather “fuga temple”, norms and nature of culture, moral bases of the government, and the legal system were also disputed. (Ibid, 74)

Modernity, in its general and classic sense, has been considered as the most important factor behind secularism. It is expected that the expansion of modernity would delete religion out of human mind and would drive it out of the life of modern man. (Shojaei Zand, 2005: 33) This theory is known as secularization thesis: in reaction to modernization “religious institutions, actions and awareness will lose their social significance”. Secularism is a procedure that is taking place in three levels of individual, social and the religion itself. (Wilhelm, 1998: 141) Secularism, in its commonest sense is a procedure during which religion loses its significance in the “society” and “individual” thus “religion” undergoes epistemic and value revisions. (Shojaei Zand, 2005: 39)

Since the advent of social sciences in the age of enlightenment, renowned intellectuals of social sciences have claimed about the end of religion, such as Freud, Taylor, etc. Max Weber believes that the contemporary world is the age of the end of religion.
Getting disappointed of the traditional religion Saint Simon tried to introduce scientists as the new religious leaders. Auguste Comte declared in France that as a result of modernity the “spirituality” period has put behind social evolution. He saw that in the new age the worship of scientific insight could replace traditional religion. In the 19th century, the most distinguished and widely accepted application for reformation of secularization was introduced by Holyoak and his freethinking organization known as the “secular society”. He called his curriculum “secularism” and regarded it as the practical philosophy of the people whose duty was regulating life affairs without reference to supernatural concepts.

Ludwig Feuerbach was the man who tried to change theology into anthropology, when he said the true sense of theology is anthropology. His insight came from materialistic attitude according to which “God is a projection of human mind.” On the nature of Christianity he says: “The Supreme Being is indeed the essence of man and the historical moment will be when man becomes aware that he is the God of himself.” (Jalili, 2004: 16)

According to Weber, charisma is the major concept of primitive religions. Generosity and quality, according to him, are outside the circle of life. Generosity is flowing into the existence of creatures, animals, plants and things; therefore, the point of departure for religious history of man is in the world enriched with sanctities. Its finish point is in our age, i.e. in a world free of fascination. (Aron, 1991: 589)
Some certain manifestations of modernity such as materiality, individualism, rationalism, plurality and relativity play decisive roles in secularization of religion, individual and society. (Wilhelm, 1998: 147-150) Human individual is one basic component of modernism wherein individual is prior to and more real than the society. As far as worthiness is considered, priority of individual means that moral worth of individual is prior to and more important than the society and any other group. According to individualists, the individual himself is the best arbiter to make a judgment on his desires and other institutions must avoid making judgments on this. (Johnson, 1979: 84) Since 1960s many sociologists have talked about privatization of religion in the West. Casanova describes privatization of religion as an inevitable incident of modernity. In individual sphere, he interprets religious freedom as the “freedom of conscience” and says it is the prerequisite for a modern life. (Casanova, 1994: 55) Talcott Parsons, Thomas Coleman and Robert Bellah are the most distinguished scientists in this group. (Korner, 1997: 39) Privatization if religion is a procedure that Parsons had already anticipated in the course of the ongoing developments in social substructures for the future of religiosity in the Western Christian societies. The theory attests to a situation in which religion has been banned from any social presence and life. It is only useful to help man tolerate the iron cage of life, a world without meaning, and turn to be a personal attachment to entertain man in his free time and loneliness. (Shojaei Zand, 2009: 65) Individualism discarded the social aspect of religion and changed it chiefly into an individual concern. (Kashefi, 2003: 32) Until 1960s, religious masses, specially Catholics, saw the modern world as the enemy of their
Christian beliefs and way of life. It was the general attitude of the Christians that the modern world in its early stages after the age of enlightenment and the French Revolution had been rooted on denying and rejecting legitimacy of faith, Christian belief and sovereignty of the churches. To them, modernity was synonymous with secularism and deprivation of church from interference in the social life and management of the society. (Davis, 1994: 73) According to this group of sociologists, the traditional religion has chiefly turned to be an individual concern and people tend to various religions, the type of religions that are practically unable to make connections with those other than their followers. (Beyer, 2006: 36-37) Davis quotes Marcel Gauchet (1986) as insisting that “Further, as Gauchet himself insists, the end of religion which he speaks is the social end of religion. In this view, religion has become outdated as a structural principle of society, but that does not exclude the continuance, even the perpetuity of other forms of religious experience and the level of thought, imagination and self-consciousness. Religion as structure has come to an end because its function has been reabsorbed in the worldly human; religion as a culture, however, still remains.” (Davis, 1994: 79) Some solid evidences on auspicious presence of religion in modern world have questioned the theory and its anticipations. Evidences of coexistence between religion and modernity in some epochs of history and in some regions of the world have led us to the conclusion that the so-called challenge between the two is not inherent, rather it is because of certain interpretations of religion or modernity. (Kadivar, 2006). Reviewing classic perspectives on secularizing elements of modernity as well as past-oriented approaches of religious movements Berger has
insisted on two different strategies of “rejection” and “adaptation” by the religionists against modernity. He believes that in at least one strategy there is promising ground for compatibility and understanding between religion and modernity. As an evidence he refers to the modernist leaders of religious movements in some Third World countries. (Berger, 1999: 3-6) On this basis, secularization is not the inevitable fate of modernity, and it does not totally negate religion by itself either. Therefore, to protect religion in the modern world we can mix modern life with spiritual seasoning and move toward modern religion. (Kadivar, 2005)

This paradigm can be called extremist secularism. Secularization in this sense is a type of philosophical outlook that does not recognize religion officially. Church was a part of oppression so it had to be put away. The intellectuals had made their minds to fight against oppression, therefore, they fought with the church. This approach has paid attention to other ethical and epistemic areas of secularism (epistemic aspect of secularism) in addition to political sphere of secularism. The philosophical and epistemic secularism rules out the role of metaphysical or supernatural concepts in natural and historical phenomena. In terms of ethics, the secular ethical system lacks any traditional, universal, general or absolute principle. History and time have been intermixed with human ethics and no authority outside the influence of history, time and ‘changing-and-experiencing’ man can dominate secular ethics. It is clear that in secular ethics there is no place for fear of God or heavenly torture. Secular ethics is exclusive to human being whose values and criteria are not fixed and absolute, rather it
comes out of human conscience and endeavor. The modern day freedom and human rights too, are based on this concept.

- Institutional paradigm (religion as a civil institution): From the viewpoint of this perspective, secularism does not necessarily mean disbelief, anti-religious or counter-religious. Therefore, a distinction should be made between secularism and religion. In other words, the two concepts are parallel in some applications and sometimes secularism and religiousness can be even brought together. Norris & Inglehart and also Charles Taylor in their works have talked about secularization of the society in the current century. They say, signs of institutional separation can be seen and that, this separation will happen soon or late in various other fields such as separation of labor, specialization, separation of values and institutions, all of which will reduce the institutional dominance of religion. The religion, according to them, will be subject to institutional separation. Therefore, as Berger notes in his “Sacred Canopy” the incident will spell the end of religious hegemony and sovereignty in the society. At the same time, we should note than along with institutional separation happening in the society, the religion will also lose its pivotal significance in every-day course of enlightenment.

In late 1990s, secularization paradigm was massively impressed by paradoxical realities. Rodney Stark says: “Let us declare an end to social scientific faith in the theory of secularization, recognizing that it was the product of wishful thinking. After nearly three centuries of utterly failed prophesies and a misrepresentation of both past and present, it seems time
to carry the secularization doctrine to the graveyard of failed theories.”

John Fowles writes that: “Today, we are witnessing a world that does not accept the idea that modernity and modernism necessarily lead to keeping the religion away from life.” (Abdolmohammadi, 2004: 12-14) The situation marks the appearance of an important aspect of what has been called the rise or revival of religion or religions in the closing years of the 20th century and early 21st century. The collapse of many communist regimes in Europe in 1989 astonished the entire world. The spiritual fight against communism was led by Catholics in Poland and Protestants in East Germany. Although it was interpreted to be in favor of Western democracy, the truth behind the fall of communism was the rise of spiritualism and religiousness that had been already told to Gorbachev in a letter by Imam Khomeini.

In institutional paradigm religion is only an institution with certain functions and it has no interference in social, political, ... affairs. Saint Simon’s thesis “New Christianity”, Kant’s innovative theory of “humanity religion” and Durkheim in his quest for “functional equivalents for religion” in modern world (Hamilton, 1995: 185) showed there is no end for religion in the future world, rather it will be subject to transformation and substitution. Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) believes that social cohesion is the most important function of religious institution. His thesis suggests that the most important aspects of human life such as rules and moral principles, labor and recreation, family and individual, science and culture, and most important of all, religion are created by the society. In his book “Elementary Forms of Religious Life” Durkheim has tried to
show how society plays a role in the rise and formation of religious rites and beliefs. (Lotfi, 2005: 23) Durkheim does not connect religion to social inequities or power, rather he establishes a relationship between religion and social institutions of a society. (Afrough, 1994: 109)

In his “Elementary Forms of Religious Life”, Durkheim sees religion the sort of conduct through which the society manifests itself as a nonmaterial social reality. (Lotfi, 2005: 25). Upon his distinction between sacred and profane, Durkheim defines religion as a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden - beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a church. (Wilhelm, 1998: 21-22) Durkheim has indeed a functional approach toward religion, where he says religion has an important role in creating cohesion and social solidarity. In his exploration of the beliefs and rituals of the tribal religions in Australia he came to the conclusion that society is the origin of religion and that it is the society that distinguishes the sacred from the profane. He reasons that society and religion are of a single essence and the dominant values in the society manifest themselves in the form of religious beliefs. (Reitz, 1998: 23) Durkheim sees God as society and says an abstract force or MANA lies behind these totems that are both institution for God and institution for society. One of the major contributions of Durkheim to the sociology of religion was his belief that religious beliefs and behaviors change according to the morphological changes and structure of social group that depend upon those beliefs and behaviors. In other words, any change in religious beliefs and behaviors will have a
change in the structure and morphology of the society. (Swatess, 1998: 75)

In general, we can say that secularism in its first attempt prevents religion from authority in social and individual life and in the next stages questions religion’s institutional authority. Instead, it places emphasis on structural distinction and independence of institutions, and finally invites other social institutions to get out of the normal dominance of religion. The trend continues until changing religion to a minor institution with no institutional domination. The final haven for religion in this process is an individual entertainment shown as spiritualities of life. (Shojaei Zand, 2005: 41)

In institutional paradigm religion is not totally wiped off the face of human life but it loses institutional authority. Therefore, secularism is considered to be relative independence of civil society from any official authority and sovereignty in the public sphere. On the other hand, secularism intends to put an end to the rule of religion on social interactions and behaviors. On this basis, secularism means equality of all citizens irrespective of religious, national, legal or racial affinities, in view of law, freedom of expression and freedom of thought. This is the political aspect of secularism that is expressed in the form of separation of religion from the politics and state and shows its institutional aspect in privatization of religious institutions and dependence of religious societies and institutions to a certain source of power outside the circle of power in the civil society.

- Return of the religion or religious modernity: We observe an important paradigmatic change in religious perspectives in the 21st century. Secularism is not a general
Religion and Society: New Paradigmatic Shifts…

criterion anymore. Signs of the return of religion can be seen in all aspects of social life. The fall of secularization as a dominant thesis in sociology of 20th century and the shift toward theories to give a correct clarification of social role of religion in human societies distinguish one of the most important scientific phenomena in the recent decades. Since 1960s drastic changes appeared in secular paradigm. The increased emergence of religious movements and new religious rites and rituals convinced sociologists that religion has returned to the society. (Davis, 1994: 80) Little could be found not to admit to the growing influential role of religion in political and social developments in the world during the past couple of centuries. The most recent manifestation of this phenomenon was the explosion in World Trade Centers and Pentagon building in the United States, and most important of all, the advent of Islamic fundamentalism and the victory of Islamic Revolution in Iran. The return of religion, however, did not confine to the violent and bloody manifestations only. There are myriads of signs all over the world that show the return of the religion to sociopolitical scene. (Kazemipour, 2009: 30-32) This renaissance of religious movements has created new revisions in policies so that the theory of Huntington known as “The Clash of Civilizations” is a product of this revision. Religious movements are not exclusive to the world of Islam. The growth in charismatic Christianity in the third and fourth worlds, and the power to mobilize protestant Christian right in the United States suggest that religion has regained its past importance. This has paved the ground for creating a collective identity as well as political, social and cultural authority. (Graff, Ibid: 106) This cultural change, known also as a linguistic change, is recognized
as “new cultural history” by the historians, in which religion and religious institutions are important subjects of study. The end of 19th century and early 20th century can be called “second religious age”. The theory says that even in modern societies religion can produce culture where religious rites are the symbolic language of religion and main forms of individuals are its moralistic codes and both share to build collective identity. (Ibid, 106) Therefore, the return of the religion does not necessarily mean the return of the past traditions and religious institutions. This is because modernity is not returnable. Modernity, however, is not the final stop of man. The advent of new developments marks the commencement of an age of post-modernity and the beginning of a new stage of human life. It is not yet certain for the sociologists whether the synthesis of these developments is modernity, new modernity or post-modernity, but it is open to discussion. Peter Berger is one of the renowned thinkers of this paradigm. He is the initiator of new secularization tradition that chiefly discusses privatization of religion. According to Berger and Luhmann in the “Sacred Canopy: Elements of Sociological Theory of Religion” the core of discussion rests upon social justification of religion. (Kachouian, 2007) He believes that in its first attempt modernity will lead to the decline of religion and expansion of secularism. In the second stage, he revises his opinion and says that modernity does not necessarily lead to the decline of religion (Berger, 2001: 18, reviewed by Azad Armaki and Zare’, 2008: 137) Berger believes in a new sort of secularism in the modern society. He claims that in modern society social secularism has taken place but individual secularism is yet to happen. (Ibid, 2008: 157) Berger assumes that society is a dialectic
phenomenon in that it is a human product, and nothing but a human product that yet continuously acts back upon its producer. By this process and with the aid of mental and physical capabilities we can create our social world and experience it like an independent external world in which we have acquired our form. In this socially constructed world, a meaningful order is imposed upon our discrete experiences. (Hamilton, 1998: 28) He believes that masses construct social realities. By this he means the course of actions and interactions in which masses build a common reality that is objectively real and subjectively meaningful. In everyday life reality is constructed based on a social structure thus individuals impose an order on life phenomena to build subjective and objective realities. By subjective we mean meaning for the individual and by objective we chiefly refer to social order or institutional order created by man. (Azad Armaki & Zare’, 2008: 136) Berger defines religion as the establishment, through human activity of an all-embracing sacred order (cosmos). (Ibid, 2008: 137) The paradigm on the return of religion talks about the return of the social role of religion to the modern day world.

- Post-secular paradigm (Habermasian): Religion in post-secular societies is defined based on rationalism. Sponsors of this paradigm claim that religion alone and without awareness and modern rationalism has no application in modern day world. New rationalism means embracing the human mind functionality in all areas of life and the superiority of human wisdom over other sources of knowledge. In this paradigm, wisdom should serve like an instrument for realization of modernity ideals. (Tillich, 1997: 73) The prefix “post” signifies
that religion is still a major constituent of personality formation of the masses in a distinctive order in comparison with modernity. Religion applies resonance of churches and religious circles to deeply impress the political public opinions. (Malekian, 2001: 22) From the viewpoint of the social scientists, rationalism is the broadly recognized symbol of modernity on one hand, and on the other hand, it is the claimant and substitute for religion. Jurgen Habermas is one of the distinguished thinkers of this paradigm. For Habermas post-secularism is a kind of return and reaction. (Habermas, 2007: 2, quoted by Philip, 2009, 60) Habermas sees rationalism at the peak of evolitional mind of human being, originated from the depths of mythology, passed through craggy bed of metaphysics and religion and ascended to the peaks of rationalism. (Mesbah, 2009, 42) Major Habermasian presuppositions in his notion of communicative action are evolitional interpretations of rationalism and instrumental attitude toward religion. On one hand, religious beliefs are believed to bring epistemological situation for secularists that is not irrational anymore (Habermas, 2005: 322), and on the other hand, religion ought to officially recognize independence of natural wisdom, the outcome of institutionalized science, and the essentials of universal equality in law and ethics. (Habermas, 2007: 2) According to Rudolf Bultmann: “For a modern man, the mythological conception of the world, the conceptions of eschatology, of redeemer and of redemption are over and done with. Today, we acknowledge as reality only phenomena which are comprehensible within the framework of a rational order of universe.” (Bultmann, 2001: 113-125)

Post-secularism depicts a process in which religious and material sentiments and understanding go hand in hand and that
the tradition of enlightenment as well as religious teachings are needed to control them in their boundaries. (Habermas, 2005: 322) Habermas believes that the feeling of social identity has put behind developments in the course of diversified stages of human history, from the primitive societies with their mythological imagination of the world up to the atheistic religions with their outlook resting upon religious narratives, up to the major world religions with their universal claims, up to the modern age rationalism that apparently lacks a unifying outlook and strategy to shape up and direct individual identity. The procedure is a sign of growing process in which nothing remains from the world religions but the essence of universal ethical systems. (Habermas, 1974: 94) He goes on to say: “At this age, religion has no place in social and individual life of man and it should be replaced with philosophy.” (Ibid, 1974: 95)

Habermas perceives post secular situation as “rationalization of the life world” (Habermas 2005: 322) He characterizes rationalization of the life world through the following three features: 1- Individualism within individual scope of action; 2- Instability and relativism in cultural traditions and as a result “increasing pluralism in values and outlooks”; 3- Devaluation of all institutions and constant renovation of institutions according to modern norms and values (Malekian, 2001: 23) For Habermas, secularism was first a filter, then gradually it grew into a sacred instrument and finally it is understood today as a transmitting method that changes the wave of tradition. (Habermas, 2007: 2, as quoted by Philip, 2009: 62)
Calling himself post-secular, Habermas considers the two secular models of “replacement” and “expropriation” erroneous and says: “These models regard secularization as being a kind of zero-sum game. This image does not suit a post-secular society.” At the same time, he regards the “disruptive secularization” as inappropriate too. His favored model is the Kantian model indeed. According to Habermas, Kant presented the first ever excellent model that deconstructs realities of faith and it is both secular and sacred. (Mesbah, 2009: 46-47)

Habermas concludes that in the long course of rationalization of life world, the religions must give up their claims on formation of life structure that embraces not only the existence of individuals but also that of state and society.” He adds that “thus the relationship between the state and religion will be broken.” (Malekian, 2001: 15) According to Habermas religion is a product of human mind that meets certain demands created in the course of man’s struggle with triple objective, subjective and social worlds. Religion is not an eternal solution to man’s major problems, rather, it is a temporary response efficient for a limited period of time, i.e. until a time an alternative is found for religion. (Mesbah, 2009: 49)

In post-secular paradigm, religion in the context of modernity will survive only when it is capable of meeting the following:

1- Religious awareness: Religion must be able to organize its confrontation with other religions that are epistemologically different.
2- Comprehensiveness of sciences: Religion must be able to conform to the religions holding materialized social knowledge monopoly.

3- Religious perspective: From religious perspective religion must seek to link itself to popular sovereignty and human rights.

The point is this that post-secular societies have adapted themselves to the continuation of the existence of the sort of religion whose life-forming power will survive only when it addresses independently and with its own rhetoric all walks of life without any help from political influence. (Malekian, 2001: 24)

- Religious pluralism paradigm: Some sociologists assert plurality is one major necessity for the modern society. In-depth changes against homo religiosus or religious human beings in the medieval ages led to the idea that faith in the modern situation has no place in the social life but its existence is inevitable for social cohesion of the individuals. Before anything else, this idea pushed back natural life form (Naturaliche Lebensform) in favor of individual affection toward religion (Individuellen Zuwendung zur Religion) in the modern world. (Luhmann, 2000: 296) Homo religiosus did not confine to sovereignty and legal communications, rather, it embraced their outlooks, philosophies and sentiments. (Bloch, 1986: 128 quoted by Schwab, 199)

Modernity creates a particular crisis for the religion: “sovereignty crisis”. In the past religious sovereignty was usually exclusive to the religious scholars who were experts in
memorization and interpretation of sacred texts (precepts, holy books, revelations, and prophetic messages). They used to transfer their interpretations and understandings of these texts to the generally illiterate and uneducated masses. In modern world, however, the growth in education level of the masses has seriously challenged monopoly of the religious leaders. Today, sacred texts are regularly posted for discussion on Internet websites and weblogs that are uncontrollable. Various TV channels, too, broadcast diversified religious discourses. Also numerous cassettes and audio files of sermons by preachers are handed out among the followers and practitioners of various religions. Changes of this type are signs of democratization of religion in some respect. This is because understanding other sacred texts is no more a monopoly of lecturers, scholars, leaders and official religious personalities. (Turner, 2007: 86)

This religious pluralism turned to be a real predicament for Christian theology because Christianity was an “absolute” faith. Absolute, here, means perfect or perfect realization. According to a Roman Catholic tradition, “Outside the church there is no salvation.” (Horsten, 2001: 68) Familiarity of the Occidental masses with other religions, popularization of religious pluralism, rapid development and finally universalization of human awareness led Christianity to the bitter fact that Church is but a tiny particle in the history of the universe. (Kashefi, 2003: 38) More than three centuries ago, early scholars of comparative religion assumed that by publicizing the beliefs of the world’s many faces, they advance the cause of atheism, that by virtue of their competing claims each religion would refute the others. (Preus 1987, quoted by Bayangani) This view has led to the claim that faith is a very
fragile thing that cannot survive challenge; hence, pluralism—the existence of several competing religious bodies in a society—is said to be incompatible with strong religiosity. All of these claims are erroneous. They are brainchildren of European state churches to ease monopolism. Religious pluralism is the outcome of an attempt to provide a basis in Christian theology for tolerance of non-Christian religions; as such, it is an element in a kind of religious modernism or liberalism. (Legenhausen, 2006: 21) The outcome of giving admission to various interpretations of religion, meant to keep conformity with the variable situation, was indeed accepting and publicizing a kind of pluralism in exploring the truth of religion. Relativism in the exploration process will extend fast to the truth of religion and finally there will remain nothing of the religion. Pluralism, a joint product of “secularization of individual” and “secularization of religion” will expose society to the secularization process. (Shojaei Zand, 2009, 78) Wilson, too, believes that religious pluralism and tolerance will inevitably weaken religion’s influence on the minds of individuals. Pluralism also promotes a certain kind of relativism, therefore, unquestioned recognition of the legitimacy of pluralism will weaken the religious essence. Peter Berger has made a similar reasoning that pluralism leads inevitably towards secularism. If there are diversified religions, and if they are all believed to be true, and if we select and follow a religion that seems to be the best one for an individual life, then the selected religion will be quite a personal and spiritual affair that will lose its nature as ultimate existence. According to Berger, pluralism changes religion into an unknown affair and facilitates its decline. (Gregory, 2005)
Hamilton says that pluralism in the long run upholds secularization not religion. Secularization process has put behind a period of religious pluralism for which it has been a promoter too. (Hamilton, 1998: 300) In this paradigm, it is clear that religious competition would uphold religion. This is because when followers of various religions are forced to compete to meet their demands, more and more individuals will join religions. Given the above, this paradigm discusses the coexistence between religions and cultures and highlights the need for creation of a culturally and religiously pluralistic society. In tandem with globalization, expansion of religious communications, empowerment of the religious circles, and the return of religion to the political, social and international arenas the doctrine of peaceful coexistence becomes an outstanding issue. Any claim on absolute legitimacy and monopolism will result in intolerance of others, violence and lack of communication. Therefore, the monopolistic religions that spare others the minimum share of the truth, or never find fault in their understanding, trade the chances for dialogue and coexistence for clash with others.

**Conclusion**

Paradigms are typical models that allow us how to analyze and clarify the incidents. The dominant paradigms, however, consider all incidents outside their framework as exceptions that have no impact on the paradigmatic general course. Paradigms may gain dominance for social or political reasons, but increasing social or political developments impose crisis on them. Today, as a result of the ongoing social and
political developments in the world, secularization has lost its credibility. After World War II, all of a sudden, human hope for peace and freedom turned to despair. In European communities, where they had worked a lot – say, after the age of enlightenment - against religion and substitution of rationalism, neither religion nor wisdom was a safe haven for them. Islamic East that had long been under the influence of Occidental rationalism and the capabilities of secular system, gradually experienced Islamic enlightenment and anti-colonial movements. Secularism came to be understood as a natural historical movement - an exception - that had come to being in Islamic states concurrent with historical events in Europe but they never conformed to the Islamic culture and history. This is how the early paradigms faced the crisis; but an alternative paradigm to fully define new political and social phenomena as well as the role of religion in various societies based on certain criteria is yet to prevail. A study of new religious paradigms will lead us toward the role of religion in future of the world. The modern-day enlightenment and modernity have terminated the traditional function of religion. Traditional religion is no more able to respond to the questions and concerns of modern-day man. Modern rationalism is one major indicator of new life. Traditional religion needs a metamorphosis in contrast with rationalism. The policy of contradiction and conformity to modernity will undermine religion to a fundamentalist-retrogressive being or even down to a moralistic institution with limited functions. By studying the status of religion and religiosity in the developed nations we will come to this conclusion that rationalism alone cannot meet man’s demands. The failure of secular theses and the decline of religion are two
solid evidences for the above claim. Modern-day man is still in dire need of religion for recovering identity, finding peace of mind, making his life worthwhile and meaningful, and getting rid of obscurities of a pluralistic world. The fate of religion is closely associated with the fate of modernity. It is impossible to meet the first without realizing the latter. Given the contemporary social and political developments, it seems that man has attained sort of self-awareness toward faults and flaws with modernity and secularism. Therefore, man intends to direct modernity without any return to the obscure world of medieval ages, or pass by it and recreate a new age - a safe and advanced world enriched with pluralism and coexistence - in which not only a certain religion, but also all religions play maximum roles in the communities. Creation of this new world will be impossible with religious monopolism and without dialogue among religions, to identify joint ethical and religious standards, and return to the common religious tenets, to be used instead of secular values.
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Press Release

The Centre for Inter-Religious Dialogue of the Islamic Culture and Relations Organisation (Tehran, Iran) and the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (Vatican) held their seventh Colloquium in Tehran from 9 – 11 November 2010 under the joint presidency of H. E. Dr Mohammad Baqer KHORRAMSHAD, President of the Islamic Culture and Relations Organisation, and of His Eminence Cardinal Jean-Louis TAURAN, President of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue.

The delegation of the Islamic Culture and Relations Organisation (I.C.R.O.) comprised:
- Dr Homayon HEMMATI
- Dr Younes NOURBAKSH
- Dr Abdolrahim GAVAHI
- Hojjat al-Islam Dr Mohammad Jafar ELMI
- Hojjat al-Islam Dr Seyyed Mahdi KHAMOUSHI
- Dr Rasoul RASOULIPOUR
- Dr Mohammad Hossein MOZAFFARI

The delegation of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue comprised:
- His Excellency Archbishop Pier Luigi CELATA
- Reverend Monsignor Khaled AKASHEH
  - Reverend Father Prof. Andrea PACINI
  - Reverend Father Francesco PIRISI
- Prof. Silvio FERRARI
- Prof. Alessandro FERRARI
During the inaugural session, moderated by Dr Mohammad Reza DEHSHIRI, Vice President of I.C.R.O. (Research and Education) besides the welcome address by H.E. Dr KHORRAMSHAD and the inaugural remarks by His Eminence Cardinal TAURAN, there were interventions by Ayatollah Mohammad Ali TASKHIRI, Secretary General of the Forum for Proximity among the Islamic Schools of Thought, and H.E. Archbishop CELATA, Secretary of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue.

The participants, with the help of papers presented by scholars from both sides, examined the theme "Religion and Society Today: Christian and Muslim Perspectives", which was developed through three subthemes from the points of view of Catholics and Shi’a Muslims: 1) Religion and Civil Society: A Philosophical and Theological Perspective; 2) Religion and Civil Society: A Historical-legal Perspective; 3) Religion and Civil Society: Contemporary Difficulties and Opportunities.

At the end of the meeting the participants agreed upon the following:

1. 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;

2. 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;

3. Believers are called to cooperate in the search for common good, on the basis of a sound relation between faith and reason;

4. 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;

5. Faith, by its very nature, requires freedom. 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;

6. Education of the young generation should be based on the search for truth, spiritual values and promotion of knowledge.

The participants, pleased with the friendly atmosphere of the meeting, recognizing the similarities and respecting the legitimate differences, emphasized the necessity of continuing on the path of a genuine and fruitful dialogue.

The Proceedings of the Colloquia held since 1994 will be published both in English and in Farsi.

The next Colloquium will take place in Rome in two years and will be preceded by a preparatory meeting.
Don’t Break the Wings of Angles
(Religious Worldviews and Environmental Crisis: Islamic Perspective)

Bagher Talebi Darabi,
Faculty Member, University of Religions and Denominations, Qom, Iran

There is a saying attributed to the prophet of Islam which says: "the branches of trees are as the wings of angles, do not break the wings of angles".

The environmental crisis is not a new issue. What is new today is the scale of the crisis. It has become a worldwide crisis. However, most people in modern societies feel that this is the issue of technology and public policy; What has this got to do with religion?

From the point of view of environmental studies, religious worldviews propel communities into the world with fundamental predispositions toward it, because such religious worldviews are primordial, all-encompassing and unique. (Lawrence Sullivan, 2003). Today’s environmental crisis is the concern of many secular and religious thinkers who have begun to look into underlying theological and sociological causes for man's attitude towards his environment. This is because of the important role religions play in shaping our attitude toward
nature. In 1967, Lynn White\textsuperscript{1}, observed: “What people do about their ecology depends on what they think about themselves in relation to things around them. Human ecology is deeply conditioned by beliefs about our nature and destiny- that is, by religion” (White, 1967).

Confirming the importance of the role of religion and then seeking solution for this large scale crisis, two main different approaches have been raised:

1. The claim of need for ignoring or at least rethinking worldviews and ethics; that is, the need to re-examining religions in the light of the current environmental crisis.
2. The claim of the need for “returning to religious worldview about man’s relationship with environment.

Meanwhile there is a very important question. That is, Do we really need to rethink worldview? Or shall we talk about “returning to religious worldview”? Despite this intellectual awareness, most people feel that this is the issue of technology and public policy. What has this got to do with religion?

**Historical Review: religion as problem**

Christianity is supposed to be anthropocentric tradition. Writers like Lynn White observe, Christianity, especially, in its western form, “the most anthropocentric religion the world has

\textsuperscript{1} Lynn Townsend White, Jr. (April 29, 1907 – March 30, 1987) was a professor of medieval history at Princeton, Stanford, for many years, University of California, Los Angles. He was president of Mills College, Oakland from 1943 to 1958.
seen.” He sees this as being the main cause for the environmental crisis of today. He decries not only the dualistic nature of man’s relationship with nature but also the idea “that it is God’s will that man exploit nature for his proper ends…” as “Man shares, in great measure, God’s transcendence over nature.” In his words:

“Christianity in absolute contrast to ancient paganism and Asia’s religions (except perhaps, Zoroastrianism), not only established a dualism of man and nature but also insisted that it is God’s will that man exploit nature for his proper ends.” (White, 1967).

He also says: “Our ecologic crisis is the product of an emerging, entirely novel, democratic culture. The issue is whether a democratized world can survive its own implications. Presumably we cannot unless we rethink our axioms.”

He maintains: “Both modern technology and modern science are distinctively Occidental. Our technology has absorbed elements from all over the world, notably from China; yet everywhere today, whether in Japan or in Nigeria, successful technology is Western. Our science is the heir to all the sciences of the past, specially perhaps to the work of the great Islamic scientists of Middle Ages, who so often outdid the ancient Greeks in skill and perspicacity: al-Razi in medicine, for example; or ibn-al-haytham in optics and; or Omar Khayyam in mathematics.” (White, 1967).

He argued that Judeo-Christian theology was fundamentally exploitative of the natural world because:
1. The Bible asserts man's dominion over nature and establishes a trend of anthropocentrism.

2. Christianity makes a distinction between man (formed in God's image) and the rest of creation, which has no "soul" or "reason" and is, thus, inferior.

He posited that these beliefs have led to an indifference towards nature which continues to impact in an industrial, "post-Christian" world. He concludes that applying more science and technology to the problem won't help, it is humanity's fundamental ideas about nature that must change; they must abandon "superior, contemptuous" attitudes that make them "willing to use it [the earth] for our slightest whim." White suggests adopting St. Francis Assisi as a model to imagine a "democracy" of creation in which all creatures are respected and man's rule over creation is limited.

Modern society and unsacred nature: religion as solution

In contrast to White's view, this is also true that in technologically sophisticated urban societies we have become removed from the recognition of our dependence on nature. We no longer see the earth as sacred. When man begins to talk of him/herself without paying attention to God, the creator, and tries to govern his/her life by only the human-made laws, nature is being ignored, God is being forgotten and then the environment becomes "profane".

Unfortunately, most theologians and philosophers have remained silent or have bent backward in order to avoid
offending the prevailing scientific mood of the day (Nasr, 1997). But we are not hopeless! Some voices still can be heard, they are calling us to be aware that the current environmental crisis which is caused by the domination of the nature is, from the religious point of view, the usurpation of man’s role as the custodian and guardian of nature. Man has employed his scientific knowledge to exploit nature rather than to use it wisely in accordance with God’s will. (G.D.Yarnold, 1959). Two important examples of this view are:

1. American educated Shiite Muslim scholar from Iran, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, drew attention to the spiritual origins of environmental abuse. As a Traditionalist Shiite Muslim, Nasr argued that the imbalances in nature being brought about by human activities were rooted in “the destruction of the harmony between man and God”. He believes that modern humans have lost the sense of the sacred that enabled them to know their true place in the universe. (Nasr, 1997, and 2003)

2. Thomas Berry, a Christian well-known thinker and activist, observed that we have become autistic in our interactions with the natural world. In other words, we are unable to value the life and the beauty of nature because we are locked in our own egocentric perspectives and shortsighted needs. He suggested that we need a new cosmology, cultural coding, and motivating energy to overcome this deprivation. He observed that the magnitude of destructive industrial process is so great that we must initiate a radical rethinking of the myth of progress and of humanity’s role in evolutionary process. (Berry, 1988, see Foltz, Islam and Ecology, p. xvii).
We appreciate these intellectual concerns about environmental crisis. But there are some evidences that show some of those who are talking about the role of religions in environmental crisis today, do not have a clear definition of religion. There are still questions to be answered by them: what do you mean by religion? Do you see religion as a cultural system or a system of beliefs? Whether you see it as a culture or a system of belief, is there any God in it or you also, like some others, talk about “Religion without God”.

**Islamic Worldview and Environmental Crisis**

This paper tries to investigate the validity of White’s view that the disrespect for nature is inherent in the very nature of religion. The main question here in this paper is: **What would Islam tell people about their relations with the environment?**

Contemporary Islamic writers tend to articulate Islamic environmental ethics in practical terms. They often try to respond to Lynn White’s criticism of western Christianity. White’s essay, “Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis”, is

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1 White’s question was: ‘ what would Christianity tell people about their relations with the environment? He says: “Especially in its Western form, Christianity is the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen. As early as the 2nd century both Tertullian and Saint Irenaeus of Lyons were insisting that when God shaped Adam he was foreshadowing the image of the incarnate Christ, the Second Adam. Man shares, in great measure, God’s transcendence of nature. Christianity, in absolute contrast to ancient paganism and Asia’s religions (except, perhaps, Zoroastrianism, not only established a dualism of man and nature but also insisted that the God’s will that man exploit nature for his proper ends. (White, 1967).
often read as unqualified attack upon Christianity. White claimed that the roots of our ecological crisis are religious in essence. In other words, he saw Christianity as a powerful and unavoidable influence on environmental attitudes, which, in the past has had largely negative consequences, but which also holds the possibility of a positive response to ecological crisis (Peterson Anna, 2000, 237-261).

Despite White’s claim in comparing Islam to Marxism as two Judeo-Christian heresy (Peterson Anna, 2000, p. 5), we discuss Islam as a divine religion and one of the great religions of today’s world. We have to take into consideration the Islamic worldview and its cosmology and social approach to nature of man, his place in relation to God, his rights and responsibilities before God, and his relationship to the rest of the world with regard to his rights over it.

Islam and Christianity, as two major religions of the world, may play important role in resolving environmental crisis. As another monotheistic religion, Islam is somehow anthropocentric as well. Both religions are criticized by environmental activists for approach. Both religions, like other religions of the world, have worldview. This worldview is based on the belief in the existence of an all powerful creator who is the same God that the three monotheistic faiths, Judaism, Christianity and Islam believe in.

Islam, in all its complexity and varieties of approaches remains as the principal resource for symbolic ideas, spiritual inspiration and ethical principles for Muslims all around the world. As other world religions, Islam has provided
comprehensive cosmologies and worldviews for interpretive direction, moral foundations for social cohesion, spiritual guidance for cultural expression, and rituals for meaningful life.

The basis of an Islamic worldview is the idea of Tawhid, or the oneness of God. A worldview based on tawhid sees this universe as originating from God, returning to Him, and centered around Him. The reference point, the center of all things is God. Tawhid is the origin of a theological doctrine of ecology. All things seen or unseen are God’s signs (ayat) and act as witnesses to His existence. All things in the universe are His manifestations, all are from Him. The meaning of tawhid is the concern of some other religious thinkers as well. William Chittick, an American Christian thinker says: “God the Ultimate reality is One, and everything other than God comes from God and is related to Him. No true understanding of anything is possible unless the object in view is defined in relationship to the divine. All things are centered on God.” (Chittick, 1991)

Muslims, morally concerned about environment crisis for they as religious and spiritual human beings see themselves obligated to taking care of earth. They believe that their religious and spiritual rights and duties make them see their domination on nature not just a beneficent but as sacred as well about which they have responsibility.

Having such worldview, Nasr observes that: “Secularized knowledge of nature divorced from the vision of God in nature has become accepted as sole legitimate form of science” by modern man and this results in regarding “nature as something to be used and enjoyed to the fullest extent possible. For modern man nature has
become like a prostitute- to be benefited from without any sense of obligation and responsibility toward her.” He adds that “the difficulty is that the condition of the prostituted nature is becoming such as to make any further enjoyment of it impossible. And, in fact, what is why many have begun to worry about its condition” (Nasr, 1997).

What can we say with regard to the anthropocentric view of Islam? The main criticism directed to Christianity and somehow to Islam is related to this issue. Human nature is of course the key facet of the worldview of Islam. Man fulfills a very important role in this cosmos. According to Islam, Allah created Man and gave him/her the position of Vicegerency:

و اذ قال ربك للملائكه اني جاعل في الأرض خليفة (بقره: 30).

So the vicegerent should do what the creator wants; Creativity and responsibility about creatures is the main work of Creator, the client! (Quran2:30).

Accordingly, man has the duty to do his/her best to make the environment and the nature safer and more fruitful and be submitted to His commandments and laws. Whenever he/she wants to do anything freely should be aware that his/her free will is limited to the will of God. (Javadi Amoli, 2007).

Although man is a creation of God he/she is superior to the rest of God’s creation as he/she has within him the Spirit of God. In this way he is unique among the creations of God. It is only man to whom the angels are commanded to prostrate.
Dialogue, 1, 2011

When thy Lord said unto the angels: lo! I am about to create a mortal out of mire, And when I have fashioned him and breathed into him of My Spirit, then fall down before him and prostrate." (Qur'an: 38: 71-72)

Another aspect that separates man from the rest of the creation is his/her acceptance of the trust offered by God. This trust was offered to all of creation and man was the only one who accepted it.

"We did indeed offer the trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains; but they refused to undertake it, being afraid thereof. But man undertook it (the trust);..." (Qur'an:33:72)

In a matter of trust and trusteeship, the giver of the trust is giving a responsibility to the trustee. In other words the guardian of the trust has a high degree of freedom and accompanying responsibility in the use (or misuse) of the given trust. The trustee is expected to fulfill the trust in the manner that the giver of the trust expects of him. If man did not have the power to either use or misuse this trust given to him by God, then the whole idea of offering the trust, in the first place, would be futile.

This is not an attitude that is unique to Islam as can be seen in the following quote from the Bible “When a man has
had a great deal given him, a great deal will be demanded of him; when a man has had a great deal given him on trust, even more will be expected of him.” (Luke 12:48). It is, however, an attitude that is all pervasive in the Islamic worldview.

Thus man has the freedom to do what he wills with the power invested in him through these two means. One is his closeness to God in spirit and second is his acceptance of the trust. Man’s superiority, control and power over nature and the rest of creation was thus a part of this trust. After having taken the responsibility man had to show that he was indeed worthy of keeping it. If he forgets about the responsibility of the trust and instead takes full and destructive advantage of the power conferred upon him, the other side of his superiority takes over. Because he has the spirit of God within him, he now deems to set himself up in rivalry to God. He wishes to take control of the destiny of the world not as a trustee but as a demigod. (Atiya and Irshaad Hussain (1991)

“...He was indeed unjust and foolish. ” (Qur’an, 33:72)

Nature has been given to man as a trust and nothing more. His right of domination over it is not as a rebel against nature.’ (Nasr, 1997). For modern man nature has become like a prostitute to be benefited from without any sense of obligation and responsibility toward her.

Concerning the environmental crisis as a spiritual and ethical one, the role of religions and religious tradition will become much more important. But not as negatively as White
argued about Christianity. Lynn White refers specifically to the problem inherent in the Christian tradition, but in a general sense extends it to all the monotheistic religions, as opposed to the pantheistic ones.

Man’s role of vicegerency, his mantle of superiority and his responsibility of trust are laid bare before him in the Qur’an, it is then his/her decision to choose which path to take. On the one hand he has before him all the treasures of nature to use and exploit as he wishes through the misuse of his knowledge. On the other hand is the temperance of the responsibility which coexists with the trust and intelligence given to him by God. The worldview of man and the conceptual foundations which underlie that worldview decide which course man will take.

It has been the contention of this brief paper that the roots of the manmade environmental crisis, and therefore their resolution, lie in man’s conception of his role in the overall scheme of creation. The crisis that is being faced today is approaching a point of critical mass such that man is forced to confront certain basic questions about his/her relationship to environment. These are not questions of technology, but questions about the fundamental nature of man, the nature of the universe he exists in, and of the ultimate nature of Reality.

Expanding the Dialogue of Religion and Ecology: Muslim’s role

We note the growing calls for the world’s religions to participate in these efforts toward a more sustainable planetary future. There are various appeals from environmental groups and from scientists and parliamentarians for religious leaders to respond to environmental crisis.
1. The Parliament of world Religions held in Chicago in 1993 and attended by some 8,000 people from all over the globe issued a Statement of Global Ethics of Cooperation of religions on Human and Environmental issues.

   It is important to note that there are and have been conferences and publications regarding the role of the world's religions as moral forces in preventing environmental crisis. Shiite Muslim community and Islamic world as a whole, inspired by Islamic traditions contained in Holy Quran and Hadiths, have contributed to this process and the intellectual enterprise to preventing the crisis.

2. Iran is constitutionally concerned with it.¹ The constitution of Islamic Republic is derived from and adjusted to the Islamic law (Shariah or will of God) and common understanding and historical experiences of man (will of people).

   In this spirit, the Islamic Republic of Iran together with United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) sponsored the International Seminar on Environment, Religion and Culture in Tehran in June 2001.

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¹ The constitution of Islamic Republic states: “In the Islamic Republic protection of the natural environment, in which the present and future generations must lead an ever-improving community life, is a public obligation. Therefore all activities, economic or otherwise, which may involve pollution of environment or cause irreversible damage to it, are forbidden. (The constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Article 50).
3. The conference of Islam and Ecology held at the Center for the Study of World Religions, Harvard Divinity School, in May 1998 marked a watershed moment in bringing together, for the first time, Islamic scholars and practitioners from North Africa, South and Southeast Asia, The Middle East, Europe and North America.

I hope that this paper will be simply a beginning of further studies on conceptual and symbolic resources, methodological concerns and practical directions for meeting this environmental crisis in accordance to Islamic point of view.

There are rich resources for rethinking views on environment in the mainstream tradition of Islam which can be mainly found in Quranic conception such as above mentioned VICEGERENCY (khalifatollah). The concept of humans as vicegerent of Allah on earth suggests that humans have particular privilege, responsibilities and obligations to creations. These are the resources that are already being explored by theologians and biblical scholars.
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A Glimpse of the Sabaean Thought and Philosophy

Abdul Majid Mirdamadi (PhD)

The Sabaeans were a group of people of Semitic race living among the Muslims as As-Saba’iyun, known to Europeans as Mandaeans. The followers of this sect live today in parts of Iraq and Khuzestan Province of Iran. In the course of history, the term Sabaean has been erroneously used to refer to two groups of followers of independent sects for similarity of name. The Sabaean Mandaeans or the indigenous Sabaeans are the first group who are mistakenly believed to be the same as the star worshippers of Harran. The Harrani people were indigenous to northern Mesopotamia. Harran was the first town built after the big tempest in Noah’s time. They were known for their philosophy, astrology, mathematics and medicine. There are diversified views on their origin and beliefs but according to Shahrestani, they fall into the following four major groups:

1- Adherents of clerics: They believe in Divine origin of the universe and say that man is unable to apprehend God because he is dominated by lust. Therefore, they consider their clerics as the medium between man and the incorporeal beings.

2- Adherents of apparitions: They say man needs physical tools, like stars, for proximity to God. For worshipping the stars they embark on gaining thorough knowledge on every star.
3- Adherents of personalities: They say the clerics and stars are not accessible all the time, therefore, an idol should be made based on each source of worship. Each idol was named after a cleric or a celestial figure.

4- Adherents of incarnation: Ibn Batuta and others say they are the same as Harran Sabaeans. They maintain that God is one and the creator of celestial figures and masses. They maintain that God has been incarnated in the seven planets without severality in His Eternal Being.

Many historians believe that Harranis are the true Sabaeans, while others reject their claim. Abureyhan Birouni in his Asar al-Baghiya says the true Sabaeans live in Iraq in a region called Jaffar and Jamedah near the two rivers of Saleh.

Russian Orientalist Chwolsohn in his book distinguishes Harrani Sabaeans from the true Sabaeans. Contemporary historian Taghizadeh, too, makes the same distinction and says that the Sabaeans addressed in the Holy Qoran live in Mishan Plain, Khuzestan plateau and Iraq and that, the star-worshipping Harrani people have mistakenly attached themselves to the Sabaeans. Baptism is one major religious practice of the Sabaeans.

According to some historians Sabaeans migrated from Jerusalem to Mesopotamia after the death of John the Baptist to escape the cruelties of the Jews. They settled in a mountainous area close to the town of Harran, where they continued their religious rites and rituals and built a chapel for worship. The Jewish enmity was extended to their new abode and forced them to migrate to the banks of Karkheh River in a plain known as Mishan.
The advent of Islam gave them freedom of faith, because the Holy Qoran introduced them as the followers of a monotheist faith. Since then, the Sabaeans live in peace in Khuzestan under the protection of Islam.

**True Sabaean Thought and Philosophy**

**1- Belief in the universe**

Sabaeans worship the Eternal God and consider Him high above the world of materiality. They say God has created 360 angels and used them as mediums between man and Himself. These angels know about the unknown, live in a world of light, and marry one another. All angels are directed based on a hierarchy of high-ranking angels.

**2- Creation**

On creation, a Mandaean source of imitation says that God has always been present, from the beginning, no one before or after him. When he decided to create the universe, he began with the angels - the five great angels. He continued with creation of the world of water and the world of light. The latter is comprised of three layers upper, lower and median. Man is placed in either of these layers according to his behavior on earth.

**3- Creation of man**

Sabaeans believe in the creation of a material man. They say God sent Gabriel to the earth to make the image of man out
of dust. He made Adam, and Eve from Adam’s rib and God blew of his spirit into them. Angels taught man all about art and industry and God asked them all to bow before Adam. All did except Lucifer.

4- Prophets of Sabaeans

Mandaeans believe that they have inherited their faith from Adam and later from his offspring. They consider their faith the most ancient religion on earth and maintain that many generations from Adam to Noah were disappeared by natural disasters and war and disease, but two pious ones named Rud and Rom remained to teach man how to live. Sabaeans consider themselves the offspring of Shem, who appeared fifteen generations after Adam. Upon the birth of John the Baptist, the Sabaeans gathered around him to find the bygone glory and power.

5- Resurrection (Heaven and Hell)

Mandaeans refer to the heaven and hell by Alma d Nhura and Alma d Hashukha. They believe that heaven is the world of light and hell is the world of darkness. Heaven is very important to the followers of this faith. That is why they wear white clothes to represent the world of light.

In their book, heaven is the world filled with light, pleasant smells, affection and compassion and social equity. It is free of any bad things, while the hell is full of evil.

6- Holy Books

Sabaeans believe their holy books have been first sent by God to Adam, then transferred to Shem, Rom, Abraham, Moses, and finally to John. They say the books have lost parts of
their materials in the course of time but the entire structure and
the language have remained intact.

A) Ginza Raba: Ginza Raba means great treasury. It
is divided into two left and right parts, written in Mandaean
language in 700 pages. Sabaeans consider protecting the book as
a religious duty. Any Sabaean family has a Ginza Raba that
contains the story of creation, incidents befallen on man and
qualities of the Almighty God.

B) Qulesta (collection of religious duties): Qulesta is
second only to Ginza Raba in antiquity. It is a collection of
religious rules and regulations on marriage, death, and prayers.
The author is miscellaneous, but the clerics living in between the
first to third centuries BC have compiled the book.

C) Edrasa ed Yahya (Teachings of John): This book
contains teaching and preaching by John the Baptist on
individual life, the battle between light and darkness or good and
evil and a biography of John himself.

D) Enyani (Anashid): Enyani means praying or
responding to the Creator. The book contains required materials
on performing prayers, burial ceremonies, reading supplications
and the like. The verses of this book can be found in the other
books too. It seems a pious man needs to recite the
supplications in this book to get closer to the Creator in the
world of light.

E) Book of Spirits: This book contains instructions
on the rites and rituals of death ceremonies, burial ceremonies
and parting of the soul from physical body. The book also
contains instructions for upbringing human mind to be good.
F) Masvatta: This book is about rules and regulations of baptism. Masvatta itself means ablution or submerging in water.

G) Esfar Malvas: It is the book of religious names and contains directions for extracting names based on the 12 celestial bodies. The religious name of any person contains his/her hour and month of birth and his/her mother's name.

H) Alf Tarisar Syala: It means 1012 questions. The book in seven chapters considers a number of frequently asked questions and responses among the angels of higher and lower ranks.

I) Paghra Book of Interpretation: Paghra means body. A part of Tarisar, Paghra discusses organic relations in the body. The work also contains religious regulations on religiously prohibited and recommended rules.

J) Divans: They are among important books in Sabaean culture. Divans are paper scrolls explaining various religious and non-religious subjects.

K) Magic and anti-magic scrolls: The belief in magic and the influence of celestial bodies on material and spiritual wellbeing of the people has been highly intermingled with the religious culture of the Mandaeans.

7- Clerics Hierarchy

The clerics had to observe strict rules and regulations to attain the title. The would-be cleric had to be physically and mentally healthy. The clerics in this faith fall into five groups of Halali or Shamas (familiarity with elementary religious sciences), Tarmida (familiarity with holy books), Quinz Bira (expert in religious tenets and interpretations, knowing Ginza Raba by
8- Religious Ceremonies

Among important religious ceremonies of this faith we can refer to the following:

Ablution and its types: This contains types of official ablution known as Masvatta and minor ablution or Tamasheh.

Barakheh or praying: It is practiced three times a day.

Fasting: Mandaeans fast for 32 days during the year. It is of the two types of heavy and light fasting.
CID’s Initiatives for Convergence among Religions and Cultures

From the onset, the CID has carried out many programs regarding Inter-religious dialogues in general and dialogue among Asian religions in particular. One aspect and outcome of these programs has been some prolific achievements in organizing and introducing Inter-religious dialogues with religious-epistemological themes and fundamental monotheistic religious values. These achievements that are the outcome of a number of fruitful Inter-religious dialogues represent the extent of interest of numerous nations in religious dialogues as a strategy for attaining peaceful coexistence among nations.

During the last decade, religious cooperation between the Islamic Culture and Relations Organization and other religions as well as global and regional Inter-religious organizations in the fields of friendship, peacefulness coexistence, moral principles, peace and spirituality has provided a friendly sphere among different religions to talk with each other and consolidate their ties.

In the previous editions of the Dialogue we introduced the proceedings of major Inter-religious dialogues from the beginning to 2006. The dialogues and meetings held from 2007 onwards are briefly introduced below.
1. **Initiatives at Continental Level**

- Sixth meeting of the Secretariat of the International Council of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions, August 2007, Astana, capital city of Kazakhstan, The Palace of Peace and Reconciliation

- A meeting of leaders and personalities of religious minorities entitled “Spiritual Get-together with Followers of Monotheistic Religions”, concurrent with the Ten-Day Dawn celebrations, Feb. 6, 2008, Tehran

- The sixth meeting of CID with Russian Orthodox Church entitled “God and Man in Islam and Christianity”, July 17-18, 2008

- A delegation from six Canadian and U.S. Mennonite universities paid a visit to Iran on Oct. 4-11, 2008. The delegation was made up of Jessie Daryl (Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) representative for Iran), Dr. Theodore Koontz (professor of ethics and peace studies at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary), Dr. Sally Weaver Sommer (vice president and dean of academic affairs at Bluffton University), Dr. Harry John, Dr. Loren Swartzendruber (president of Eastern Mennonite University), Anita K. Stalter (vice president and dean for
academic affairs at Goshen College), Harry Huebner (professor of philosophy and theology at Canadian Mennonite University), and Dr. Jim Nathan Pankratz (academic dean at Conrad Grebel University College. The delegation paid a visit to the President of Islamic Culture and Relations Organization, universities of Tehran and Isfahan, religious centers in Qom and Christian personalities in Tehran.

- The first round of Islamic-Buddhist religious dialogue entitled “Ethics and Religion”, in cooperation with I. R. of Iran Consulate, CID of Islamic Culture and Relations Organization, University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka, Dec. 4, 2008, Sri Lanka, Colombo, Department of Pali Literature and Language & Buddhism, University of Kelaniya

- Second trip of Sri Lankan cultural-religious five-man delegation to Iran, Dec. 22, 2008

- Joint meeting of Iranian leaders of religious minorities for “supporting the oppressed people of Gaza” at the initiative of CID of Islamic Culture and Relations Organization, Jan. 14, 2009
The third Islamic-Buddhist dialogue conference entitled “Commonalities between Islamic and Buddhist Schools of Thought”, Feb. 7, 2009, Thailand, Chulalongkorn University.

The seminar entitled “Participation in Finalization Working Committee”, April 1, 2009, Kazakhstan; Delegation made up of Messrs. Dr. Rasoulipour, CID caretaking director and Chavoshi, a CID expert.

Preparations for organizing dialogue with Shinto, April 13, 2009, Japan; Delegation made up of Dr. Rasoulipour, CID caretaking director, Dr. Abdolrahim Gowahi, member of the Council for Policy-making on Religions, and Dr. Mohammad Mehdi Alimardi Deputy President for Qom University of Religions and Faiths.

Seminar entitled “Peaceful Coexistence among Iranian Muslims and Assyrian Christians”, May 16, 2009, Tehran, Islamic Culture and Relations Organization; participants: Dr. Reza Maleki, Deputy for Research and Educational Affairs at ICRo, Dr. Rasoul Rasoulipour, Director General of the CID, metropolitan Archbishop Mar Georgis Soliba, deputy patriarch for Mar Dinkha IV.
Priest Yousef, Younatan Beth Cholia Assyrian MP in Iranian Majlis (Parliament), Deacon Benjamin Dumara, patriarch representative and Head of Assyrian Church of East Iran, Archbishop Ramzi Garmou, official in charge of East Iran Chaldean-Assyrian Catholic Church, Priest Yousef Rashidi from East Assyrian Church, Priest Ninous Moghaddasnia from Anglican-Assyrian Church, Dr. Shafiei Shakib, director general for Asia and Oceania at Islamic Culture and Relations Organization, Taqavi, director in charge of religious minorities at Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, and Molavi, director in charge of religious minorities at Ministry of Interior.

- Sixth congress of the International Council of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions, July 1-2, 2009, Kazakhstan; delegation made up of Dr. Mehdi Mostafavi, Advisor to the Iranian president and Head of Islamic Culture and Relations Organization, Dr. Rasoul Rasoulipour Director of the CID, Hojjatoleslam Seyed Abolhasan Navvab chancellor of Qom University of Religions and Faiths, Dr. Behrouz Haddadi, deputy for
research affairs at Qom University of Religions and Faiths

- Seminar entitled “Status of Peace in Monotheistic Religions”, July 11-17, 2009, Syria and Lebanon; delegation comprised of Dr. Rasoul Rasoulipour Director of CID and Mrs. Zahra Rashid Beigi, expert at CID.

- International conference on inter-religious dialogue entitled “Culture, Religion, Philosophy and Literature”, Sept. 7-10, 2009, India; delegation comprised of Dr. Mohammad Hossein Mozaffari, Director General of CID, Dr. Abolqassem Jafari and Dr. Mehdi Lakzayi, academic board members from Qom University of Religions and Faiths,

- Seminar entitled “Fasting from the Viewpoint of Religions”, Sept. 13, 2009, Tehran, Islamic Culture and Relations Organization; participants were Dr. Mehdi Mostafavi President of the organization, a number of officials and representatives from the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, Ministry of Interior, Council for Policy-making on Religions, representatives from the Iranian news agencies, representatives from the Iranian religious minorities including Rev. Sebuh Sarkisian,
Archbishop of the Prelacy of Tehran and North of Iran along with Armenian members like Priest Benjamin, Dr. Siamak Marreh, Chaldean MP at Iranian Parliament, Morris Motamed, former Chaldean MP, Farhad Aframian, editor-in-chief of Ofogh Bina Magazine, Dr. Youness Hamami Lalehzar, editorial board member of Ofogh Bina Magazine, Zoroastrian priest Dr. Ardeshir Khorshidian, Head of Zoroastrian Priests Society of Tehran, Rostam Khosraviani, Head of Zoroastrian Society of Iran, Mrs. Touran Shahriari, a Zoroastrian poetess, and a number of officials from churches in Iran.

- Seminar entitled “World Peace through Inter-religious Dialogue”, Oct. 7-9, 2009, Bangladesh; delegation made up of Dr. Mohammad Bagher Qayumi and Hojjatoleslam Ghazanfar Rostamnazhad Charati (from Al-Mostafa International University).

- Secretarial Session of the International Council of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions, Dec. 3-9, 2009, Kazakhstan, Astana; key participant: Dr. Mohammad Hossein Mozaffari, Director of CID
v Official visit of Iranian Chaldean religious source of imitation with the Director of CID, Jan. 4, 2010, Tehran, Islamic Culture and Relations Organization; in the presence of Chaldean Rabbi Mashallah Golestaninejad, Dr. Mohammad Mozaffari and Mrs. Hayedeh Rostamabadi

v Official visit of CID Director General with Archbishop Sebuh Sarkisian, Jan. 23, 2010, Tehran, Prelacy of Tehran; participants: Mrs. Zahra Rashid Beigi and Messrs. Rev. Sebuh Sarkisian, Archbishop of Armenian Prelacy, Dr. Mohammad Mozaffari, Director General of CID and his deputy Dr. Shojakhani

v Seminar entitled “Role of Religions against Terrorism”, Jan. 26-31, 2010, Georgia, Tbilisi; participants: Dr. Mohammad Mozaffari, Director of CID, Ayatollah Taskhiri, Secretary General of the World Forum for Proximity of Islamic Schools of Thought, Dr. Seyed Abdelkarim Be-Azaar Shirazi, dean of University of Islamic Faiths, Dr. Ahmad Qolizadeh, dean of the Faculty of Religions, Dr. Mohammad Reza Vasfi, academic board member and professor at Faculty of
Religions, Akbar Moghaddasi, researcher on religious studies

- Visit paid by Iranian religious delegation to Archbishop of Georgia, Jan. 26, 2010, Georgia; participants: Ayatollah Taskhiri, managing director of Taghrib News Agency and advisor to secretary general of the World Forum for Proximity of Islamic Schools of Thought, Dr. Mozaffari, Director General of CID, Dr. Seyed Abdelkarim Be-Azaar Shirazi, dean of University of Islamic Faiths, Dr. Ahmad Qolizadeh, dean of the Faculty of Religions, Dr. Mohammad Reza Vasfi, academic board member and professor at Faculty of Religions, Akbar Moghaddasi, researcher on religious studies, Hojjatoleslam Ali Aliev, representative of Caucasian Religious Bureau at Georgia, Zurab Tsetskhladze, Muslim Mufti of Ajara, Ehsan Khazaei, cultural attaché of Islamic Republic of Iran Embassy to Georgia

- Visit paid by a delegation of Iranian Armenian Christians with the President of Islamic Culture and Relations Organization, Feb. 3, 2010, Tehran, Islamic Culture and
Relations Organization; participants: Dr. Mostafavi, President of the organization, Dr. Mozaffari, Director General of CID, Rev. Sebuh Sarkisian, Archbishop of Prelacy of Tehran and North of Iran, Bishop Charian, prelate of Armenian communities in Isfahan and southern Iran, Vartanian, Armenian MP in the Islamic Consultative Assembly (Iranian Parliament), and Mrs. Zahra Rashid Beigi, an expert at CID.

- Preparatory meeting for the 8th round of inter-religious dialogue with Orthodox Church of Russia, Feb. 22, 2010, Tehran, Islamic Culture and Relations Organization; participants: Sergei Zova Nariev, secretary in charge of foreign affairs at Russian Orthodox Church’s Foreign Relations Bureau, Vladimir Sakhanov, professor at Religious Academy of Moscow, Dr. Mozaffari, Director General of CID, Dr. Shojakhani, Deputy Director of CID, Mrs. Hayedeh Rostamabadi, Mrs. Zahra Rashid Beigi, an expert at CID

- First international seminar entitled “Peaceful Coexistence in Islam and Indian Faiths”, March 5-6, 2010, India; participants: Dr. Abdolrahim Gowahi, head of Eastern
Religions Committee of Council for Policy-making on Religions, Bahman Akbari, head of Arabic Bureau

- NAM conference in Manila, March 2010, The Philippines, Manila; key participant: Dr. Mohammad Hossein Mozaffari

- Second specialized session entitled “Islam and Inter-religious Dialogue: a Glance at the Past and Future Prospects”, Mashhad, 2010, representative office of Islamic Culture and Relations Organization. The session was held to make use of capacities and capabilities of professors and scholars at universities and theological schools of Mashhad on inter-religious dialogues. It was attended by Dr. Hossein Latifi, Dr. Gholamreza Jalali, Dr. Mehdi Hassanzadeh, Dr. Javad Qassemi, Dr. Mansour Motamedi, Hojjatoleslam Abdolali Sahebi, Dr. Khomegar, Dr. Mortaza Ostadi, Mrs. Dr. Azimzadeh, Ms. Zahra Tehranian, Mrs. Dr. Azam Rahmatabadi, Dr. Mohammad Hossein Mozaffari, Director of CID, Mohsen Shojakhani, Deputy Director of CID, experts from CID, Amini, head of representative office of
Islamic Culture and Relations Organization in Mashhad, and Abedini an expert from this representative office

- Fourth round of inter-religious dialogue with Armenian Christians of Cilicia, April 18-19, 2010, Beirut, Amphitheater of Armenian Catholicosate of the Great House of Cilicia. This dialogue was organized for exchanging information and experience on activating inter-religious dialogues. The scientific board members of this meeting, headed by Dr. Mostafavi, Advisor to the Iranian president and Head of Islamic Culture and Relations Organization, exchanged views with members of Council of Middle East Churches and the National Committee of Muslim-Christian Dialogues.


- Two-day scientific symposium entitled “Islam-Christianity Inter-religious Dialogue”, in partnership with cultural attaché of I. R. of Iran Embassy in Manila and De la Salle University of Manila, in cooperation with
secretariat of CID of Islamic Culture and Relations Organization, Sept. 15-16, 2010, Manila, Mary LanGarlan Amphitheater of De la Salle University

- Visit of 26-man Lebanese delegation, headed by professor Alec to Iran for talks with CID and Islamic Culture and Relations Organization officials, Sept. 21, 2010

- Seventh round of inter-religious dialogue between Islam and Russian Orthodox Church entitled “Role of Religion in Individual and Social Life”, Oct. 8-9, 2010, Tehran, Islamic Culture and Relations Organization

2. Initiatives at International Level

- First meeting of Center for Inter-religious Dialogue with Orthodox Church of Ukraine in M.A.O.P College of Kiev entitled “Role of Religions in Contemporary Life” March 2007, Ukraine

- Second meeting with U.S. Cathedral Church entitled “Solidarity and Coexistence of Abrahamic Faiths for
Global Peace and Justice” Sept. 2007, Tehran, Islamic Culture and Relations Organization

- Hosting the first Jewish-American delegation: CID hosted the first Jewish-American delegation for 10 days from May 12, 2008. The 20-man delegation was headed by Mrs. Lynn Gottlieb, a prominent Jewish-American rabbi. The delegation also visited the Director General of CID and some state officials, and held inter-religious dialogue at the office of CID.

- The sixth meeting of CID and Vatican Catholic Church entitled “Faith and Wisdom” was held in Rome on April 29-May 1, 2009.

- Bulgarian Orthodox deputy patriarch bishop Simeone, also the Head of Religious School of Bulgaria, as accompanied by Father Konstantin Tsanko paid a visit to Iran from May 20-27 for a week.

- First meeting of CID with representatives of Faculty of Divinity, Ljubljana University, in May 2008

- The third meeting of CID with Armenian Orthodox Church of Cilicia entitled “Family from the Viewpoint of Islam and Christianity” Nov. 4, 2008, Tehran, Islamic Culture and Relations Organization

A delegation from Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR) of the United States paid a visit to Tehran on Nov. 28-Dec. 9, 2008. CID hosted the 14-man delegation headed by Mrs. Lynn Gottlieb, one of the ten female Jewish rabbis in the United States.


Dr. Hans van den Bergh, chancellor of Catholic University of Bolivia paid a visit to Iran on December 20-24, 2008

Seminar entitled “Peace and Justice from the Viewpoint of Holy Books and Philosophical Ideas” April 18, 2009, Tunisia; Delegation made up of Dr. Shojakhani Deputy Director of CID, Hojjatoleslam Seyed Abolhasan
Navvab chancellor of Qom University of Religions and
Faiths, and Mortaza Shafiee Shakib director general for
Asia and Oceania at Islamic Culture and Relations
Organization.

- Seminar entitled “Peace and Peaceful Coexistence among
Monotheistic Religions”, May 29-June 3, 2009, Croatia,
Zagreb; delegation comprised of Messrs. Morris
Motamed and Mohsen Khandan as well as Mrs.
Rostamabadi and Mrs. Jamileh Alamolhoda.

- “The Seventh Annual Conference in Rhodes”, Oct. 8-12,
2009; delegation comprised of Ayatollah Taskhiri, Mehdi
Imanipour, Dr. Mehdi Mohaqeq, Dr. Mohammad Jafar
Elmi, Dr. Mohammad JafarYahaqi, Mohammad Ali
Shokuh, Rasoul Dadashi Azar, Parviz Qassemi, Amir
Fatemi Sadr, Mehrdad Karim Khavardi, Fardin Karim
Khavardi, Reza Mahdavi, Moshtaq Kardashian,
Mohammad Ali Vadoud, Hossein Alidousti, Abbas
Pasandideh, Mohammad BagherAghamiri, Hamid Ajami,
Kurosh Qanooni, and Mrs. Tahereh Jahanparvar.

- Seminar entitled “Peaceful Coexistence among
Religions”, Nov. 2, 2009, Tehran, Islamic Culture and
Relations Organization; Participants: Dr. Mozaffari
CID’s Initiatives for Convergence

Director General of CID, Ansari, Assistant to the Deputy Foreign Minister of Iran for Asia and Oceania, Dr. Shojakhani, Deputy Director of CID, Marc Innes-Brown, Australian ambassador to Tehran, Mrs. Zahra Rashid Beigi, an expert in CID, and Mrs. Stephanie Werner, first secretary of Australian Embassy.

- The seventh round of preparatory meeting for inter-religious dialogue with Vatican, Nov. 18, 2009, Tehran, Islamic Culture and Relations Organization; participants: Dr. Mozaffari, Director General of CID, Hojjatollah Feghani, deputy director of European institutions at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mrs. Rostamabadi, expert at CID, as well as representatives from Vatican namely Archbishop Pierre Luigi Chelatta, secretary of Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue, Vatican, Monsignor Khaled Akasheh, head of the Office for Relations with Islam at the Pontifical Council and Father Franco Percy.

- Fifth Parliament of the World Religions, Dec. 3-9, 2009, Australia; participants: Dr. Mohsen Shojakhani, Deputy Director of CID, Hojjatoleslam Mohammad Nasser Saqaye Biriya, advisor to president in clerical affairs, Dr.
Mohammad Jafar Elmi, Deputy President for Research Affairs of Al-Mostafa International University, Javad Ansari, Assistant to Deputy Foreign Minister of Iran for Asia and Oceania, Hojjatoleslam Mohammad Bagher Talebi Darabi, faculty member of Qom University of Religions and Faiths, Hojjatoleslam Fakhreddin Saberi, representative of Cultural Heritage Organization, Dr. Shahriar Shojaeipour, scientific board member at Islamic Culture and Thought Research Center, Hojjatoleslam Faramarz Sohrabi, scientific board member of Ayandeh Rowshan Research Center, Dr. Seyed Razi Mousavi Gilani, scientific board member of Ayandeh Rowshan Research Center, Mojtaba Soltani, advisor to the secretary general of Ahlul Bayt World Assembly, Dr. Hossein Qashqai Khavas, Head of Bagher al-Olum Research Center in Qom, Hossein Shahbazi from Islamic Culture and Relations Organization, Ahmad Bidi, official in charge of exhibitions at Cultural Heritage Organization, Hamed Barati, assistant to Hojjatoleslam Saberi, Faramarz Farsian, official in charge of audio-visual services of Islamic Culture and Relations Organization, Dr. Shojakhani Deputy Director of CID,
CID's Initiatives for Convergence…

Mrs. Dr. Shohreh Shahsavandi, academic board member of Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Hossein Divsalar, director general of public relations at Islamic Culture and Relations Organization and four-man crew of documentary filmmakers from the IRIB and Islamic Ideology Dissemination Organization

- Seminar entitled “Status of Peace in Monotheistic Faiths”, Feb. 2010, Spain, Madrid; participants: Zoroastrian priest Mehraban Firouzgari, Rabbi Mashallah Golestani

- Visit paid by the CID Director General to Geneva for dialogue with secretary general of World Council of Churches (WCC), Feb. 11, 2010; delegation members: Dr. Mozaffari, Director General of CID, Dr. Olaf Tveit, general secretary of the World Council of Churches, Mathew, official in charge of WCC Middle East Section, Mrs. Rima Barsoum, WCC program executive for Christian-Muslim Dialogue

- Seventh round of meeting with Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue, Vatican, entitled “Role of Religion in Contemporary Society”, Nov. 8-9, 2010,
After six rounds of inter-religious dialogues, the first of which was held in 2004 in Tehran and the sixth one was observed in 2008 in Rome, the seventh meeting was headed by Dr. Mohammad Bagher Khorramshad, President of the Islamic Culture and Relations Organization and Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran, president of Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue, Vatican.

Preparatory meeting for the third round of inter-religious dialogue with the Swiss Bishops’ Conference entitled “Human Excellence from the Viewpoint of Monotheistic Religions”, Jan. 8, 2011, Islamic Culture and Relations Organization. The event was attended by Muslim and Christian thinkers and scholars as well as representatives from monotheistic faiths in Iran. It was headed jointly by Dr. Mohammad Bagher Khorramshad, President of Islamic Culture and Relations Organization and Bishop Pierre Giyagomo Grampa, President of Muslim-Christian Dialogue Office at the Swiss Bishops’ Conference. The scientific sessions of this event entitled “Human Excellence from the Viewpoint of Islam and
Christianity” were held in the presence of thinkers and scholars from the two sides at the University of Qom and Culture and Islamic Sciences Research Center on January 10 and 11, 2010 respectively.