

ARTICLES

CATHOLICS AND MUSLIMS IN DIALOGUE: WORKING TOGETHER TO SERVE OTHERS*

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Abstract: This paper explores the ways Muslims and Catholics can cooperate to help the youth and advance better interreligious understanding among themselves. Cooperation needs to be informed by the nature of the issues involved and how best they can be addressed. The youth feel marginalised and in the decision-making bodies, the employment sector and government. Youth culture and lifestyle, youth issues among minority religious communities are also faced with challenges. The second part on interreligious dialogue looks into the ways how Catholics and Muslims have engaged with one another in the past, their main achievements, and the challenges they have faced in better understanding one another. Interreligious dialogue has also developed in various ways and become diversified over the years, not just focusing on doctrinal matters but also on practical cooperation. The aftermath of 9/11 brought our two communities face to face with new challenges over the spread of outlandish and extremist interpretations of our religions and the more pressing threats to security and peace we now face on both sides. The paper concludes with a set of practical recommendations.

Preliminary Remarks

The selected topics of the present Forum focus on ‘working together’ to serve the youth, to serve society and to advance inter-religious dialogue – all emphasising practical cooperation and service. These are also inter-related in that helping the youth involves helping society and would most likely also benefit interreligious understanding if Catholics and Muslims help their youth through joint cooperation. In both our great religions, each individual is called upon to work and service in response to that which gives purpose.¹ The good things that are done in such service can be the basis for collaboration in seeking better lives for all persons everywhere.

A sparkle of the divine light and spirit of our Creator inheres in everyone and all of us, which constitutes, in turn, the genesis of our association with dignity, an association that cannot be expunged nor terminated.² The dignity of others around us – both near and far – calls us to moral relationships of solidarity and justice with them. To work for the benefit of others opens the path to experience of our own dignity and to our ability to honour the dignity of others. Work is relational and deeply moral, and working together adds to the moral substance of its outcome. Work also challenges us to go beyond the comfortable and the accustomed. Work is, furthermore, a quest for meaning and the achievement of human dignity in the eyes of our Creator.⁴ Work without faith can be mean and selfish and fall short of our stewardship responsibilities within creation. Work with faith, however, brings us to our proper stewardship and is not disconnected from our salvation hopes and possibilities.⁵

Working together underpins the Qur’anic concept of *ta’āwun*, and the verse in which it occurs⁶ specifies two areas of cooperation among people: cooperation in good works (*al-birr*) and in pursuit of piety (*al-taqwā*), both of which have practical import. Cooperation and working together is thus an integral part of both our great religions. I confine this presentation to the first two of the three selected themes, and draw attention toward the end to helping the religious minorities together. I conclude with a set of actionable recommendations.

I. Working Together to Serve the Youth

The young are arguably the segment of population most open to embracing alternative visions of life worth living as they grow into their own responsibilities as citizens, parents and leaders. Yet the more accelerated pace of mobility and change in the era of globalisation, the information revolution, university campus life and modes of education have brought the youth face to face with many unprecedented challenges.

Youth is also an age of instability and flux due to changes in relationships, societal expectations, and the development of new emotional and psychological characteristics. The result is often a feeling of anxiety to cope with the hectic pace of life, survive and succeed. These pressures are not unique to Arab or Muslim countries; they are felt throughout the world. Many young Muslims feel, however, that they have little control over their lives or a stake in their nation’s future. Such pessimism leads to disengagement. To quote Malaysia’s Prime Minister, Najib Razak “We risk losing a generation of young Muslims to apathy and extremism. I believe Islamic countries must better understand what young people aspire to.”⁷

The youth also respond to challenges, and those who successfully do so, become harbingers of progress. Many of the momentous changes in the Muslim world during the decades of Islamic revivalism since the 1960s were youth movements for the most part reflecting their frustrations and aspirations – so that “Islamic revivalism has in such cases effectively become a youth movement.”⁸ Youth involvement in the early stages of the Arab Spring in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region was similarly described in 2011 as “the sight of corrupt old Arab tyrants being toppled at the behest of a new generation of youth idealists, inspired by democracy, united by Facebook and excited by the notion of opening up to a wider world.”⁹ I now raise the question: what are the challenges our youth are grappling with?

Although most of the challenges facing today’s youth are not restricted to any one ethnic or religious group, the nature of the issues faced may, more specifically, differ in different countries and communities. Youth in minority and immigrant communities have their own sets of problems, whereas young people in these groups as well as the larger societies surrounding them experience common challenges with regard to employment and marginalisation. The youth almost everywhere feel they are marginalised and under-represented in the economy and government. Politically and economically disenfranchised, young people find an outlet in protest. Two major challenges that currently face the youth are demographic and technological.

The Muslim world is experiencing a “youth bulge.” In 2010, people under 30 comprised about 60 percent of the population in Muslim-majority countries. A younger population means a bigger labour force. A youth bulge introduces latent energy into a nation’s economy and society. Left untapped, it can become a destabilising force.

In 2010, youth unemployment in the Middle East was 25 percent and in North Africa 24 percent. In Malaysia, while the country enjoyed full employment, one quarter of the graduates, or 52,000, mostly from public universities – were unemployed. The writing is on the wall. Graduates remain unemployed because they lack the skills to make them relevant in the workplace. They lack language skills and industry-related competencies.¹⁰

When young people lack opportunity, they grow restless. From 1970 to 2000, eight out of 10 countries experiencing new civil conflict had populations in which 60 percent were under 30. Furthermore, 23 percent of the world population are Muslim, but the 57 member countries of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) conduct just over 8 percent of global trade. Structural reforms are thus needed to create employment opportunities, dynamic private sectors, political and constitutional reforms to enhance accountability and opportunity reallocation in the system.

The age of information technology has its own generation, the digital natives – those who have only ever known a connected world. Empowered by technology, young people can articulate their frustrations to a global audience. This has profound implications over the emergence of a new international political consciousness.

These two forces – demography and technology – shape young people's aspirations: they crave for freedom of opportunity. They reach out and often take the course of the debate outside traditional boundaries over such issues as accountability, role of media, poverty and corruption, racism, and environmental issues. Traditional career choices, lawyer or doctor, for instance, are changing – youth are taking new roles as film makers, artists, entrepreneurs and business managers. Access to education is also improving, yet young people often find that their qualifications do not match the opportunities available.

The information revolution is here to stay. This should not, however, mean unregulated behaviour. The youth should be equipped with the skills to think critically about sources, and have better grounding in values. They should understand that free information does not mean it is accurate; they should also appreciate and encourage the best traditions of discourse. To quote Najib Razak again: “we should see our youth not as a liability, but as an asset. They are an untapped resource that can lay the foundations for great success. Economic and political reform can give young people what they aspire to: a future defined by opportunity, not despondency.”¹¹

Youth Culture and Lifestyle: ‘Youth culture’ is typically associated with dress fashion, forms of entertainment, music, sports and sport heroes, and the attempt to live in the present moment – which can lead to a certain generational gap and rebellion against traditional society. Modern lifestyle is also characterised by an earnest search for meaning. It is the loss of meaning of life for many of the youth that leads them either down the road of immediate sensual gratification, drug abuse and violence, or alternatively the quest for new philosophies, cultures and even religions.¹² Survey reports among American children of immigrants indicate that parents often did not understand the American social context and its youth culture, which made it difficult for parents to be supportive as their children negotiate their way through adolescence.

Survey reports in the U.S. carried among Muslim youth also indicate that they did not feel supported by their parents, peers, educational institutions, or the larger society. The Islamic centres and mosques were similarly felt to have little knowledge of the challenges facing the youth and were, therefore, unable to provide contextualised religious education. Muslim youth felt torn between their parents' culture and mainstream American culture, prompting them into

maintaining a dual identity, one in the family and immediate community, and a separate “American” identity among peers and the school environment – so as to increase their acceptance and sense of belonging.¹³ While some youth mentioned negative portrayal of Islam in the media, almost 70% reported experiencing negative incidents due to their religious beliefs. Negativity and disconnect with the larger society often led them to radicalisation and engagement in risky and destructive behaviour.¹⁴ Traditional sexual ethics were also questioned especially in big cities. Only the fear in recent decades of dreaded diseases such as AIDS had to some extent put a limit to sexual promiscuity.

Teaching is most needed in a human community overcome by material concerns and secular suspicions of religion. Whereas true religion enhances our capacity for having dignity of self and respecting the dignity of others, advocacy of sectarian biases turn us away from our highest and best nature. Cultivating both the sense of service and acts of service within ourselves and among all peoples will bring together the human family in mutual respect, cooperation, peace and justice throughout the world.

Muslim Youth and the Role of Religion: It is the responsibility of scholars (*‘ulamā’*) to provide the needed responses to challenges facing the youth, to make those responses easy for the people to understand, and address issues in the context of real life situations. They should, furthermore, present Islam in a contemporary language and draw attention to the most universal and all-encompassing teachings of Islam away from narrow and disputed theological positions. Some progress has been made along these lines in recent decade but the effort needs to be carried further.

Muslims should also increase their knowledge of Christianity. During the last two centuries, Western scholars have studied Islam extensively, some without predetermined biases, even sympathetic, but many have also done so with preconceived notions of Islam. Yet there have not been many studies of Christianity from the Islamic point of view in a contemporary language the way our ancestors did a thousand years ago. Today’s Muslim youth should be able to distinguish between western modernity and what remains of the authentic religious traditions of the West, which have a great deal more in common with Islam as members of the Abrahamic family of religions.¹⁵

The Qur’an values morally upright conduct, honesty, humility and compassion in everyone, including the youth. Everyone is accountable for what they do and none is to carry the burden of another. Yet religion and ethical norms have been challenged by secularist modernity and scientism. Pursuing social and moral causes based on purely human constructs may be liable to change with the rapidity of social change. The youth should oppose bigotry and corruption

in their own society and wherever they live, but the criteria for such judgment should, as Seyyed Hossein Nasr observed, be grounded in religious beliefs and ethics.¹⁶

Economic activity and finance must also relate to social objectives. Our share of material wealth comes with responsibilities to those around us; we have benefited from those who have gone before and need to provide for those who will come after.¹⁷ The dangers of rampant ‘financialisation’ and ‘monetisation’ of the economy are visited upon us when financial transactions are reduced to mere exchange of papers that move further and further away from economic realities and welfare needs of the people. Such transactions are known to benefit mainly the banks and financial operators themselves, much to the detriment of a stable and sound moral economy that relates to societal needs. In this domain, the revival of Islamic economics and finance in the latter half of 20th century merit attention. Islamic banking, finance, and insurance proceed, in principle, over the real economy and advise against financialisation of the kind that wreaked havoc to the global financial system. Disparity levels between rich and poor have grown wider, and the number of people caught in poverty trap has increased, despite unprecedented overall growth in the larger economies.¹⁸

It is not common knowledge, even among Muslims, that youth feature prominently in the Islamic scripture. The Qur’anic depiction of Prophet Abraham, for instance, is of a young man rebelling against his people’s decadent ways, and the tyranny also of a king (Nimrod), who claimed divinity.¹⁹ The narrative of Pharaoh similarly features a group of youth who defied Pharaoh and joined Moses: “And none believed in Moses except some youngsters of his people...”²⁰ The wise Luqman counsels his young son to widen his horizons in facing the vicissitudes of youth with a blend of rationality and emotion.²¹ Prophet Noah’s problematic relations with his wife and son underscore the values of individual character, filial and family loyalties.²² The story of young Prophet Joseph, as is well known, accentuates self-discipline and control of passion.²³ The Qur’anic narrative concerning the youth of al-Kahf underlines the potency of faith and prayer, perseverance and peaceful resistance against political tyranny.²⁴

Prophet Muhammad’s mission was supported, in no small measure, by the youth, most of whom had not reached the age of twenty; the Prophet had a good rapport with them and entrusted many among them with leadership positions. Speaking of the social make-up of his followers, the Prophet said in a hadith that “he was supported by the young, and opposed by the old,”²⁵ attested by the fact also that many of the Prophet’s closest friends and supporters were younger people.²⁶

The Islamic scripture thus recognises the youth as a particular segment of society with their own set of challenges. This can be seen from the naming

of some chapters (surah) and the main characters that feature in them. Youth issues are also identified and addressed in their own context, be it personal character, religion, family, politics or society. Textual guidelines provided in each narrative also consist mainly of teaching by example in connection with real life situations.

II. Working Together to Enhance Inter-Religious Dialogue

Catholics and Muslims together comprise over half of the world population. In their long-standing relations, they had varied experiences. At times they have misunderstood, opposed and even exhausted each other in polemics, yet their extensive commonalities have also held the promise of cooperation in good works between them alive. From the viewpoint of scripture, as Nasr wrote, Islam shares with Christianity and Judaism devotion to the one God, to the goodness of creation, the immortality of the soul, the accent on the inner life and the very basic principle that revelation is given in scripture. We are all people of the book in this sense, and though our books are different we share common narratives, sacred history, and basic values such as the sanctity life, reverence for the laws of God, humane treatment of others, honesty, justice, kindness to neighbours and so forth. And this gives us, despite all differences, common grounds for discussion of the issues that both divide and unite us.²⁷

Our common challenges include the economic crisis, environmental concerns, weakening of the family unit, violence and threats to world peace. But the biggest challenge remains, as Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran, President of the Vatican's Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue aptly said is *ignorance*. "We don't really know each other. At the same time, dialogue is a necessity." Tauran noted that Pope Francis, when he was still Cardinal of Buenos Aires, appreciated the value of training Catholics in dialogue with Muslims. "We have to invest in education," he said, "there should be courses in seminaries about world religions, especially Islam. Dialogue takes place between people who have the same skills to discuss what they have in common."²⁸

These statements stand true for both sides. The Qur'an ordains the faithful to engage in interreligious dialogue with the people of scripture in the best of forms and in wisdom (al-Nahl, 16: 125). The expressions employed in this verse and also in (al-'Ankabūt, 29: 46), prompted Yusof al-Qaradawi to write that interreligious dialogue must aspire to excellence. "Only the best and most persuasive options that appeal to intellect and reason, conveyed most tactfully in acts and in words would qualify." There must be intellectual decency and respect for the views and beliefs of the different other. Abdullah Yusuf Ali also wrote that dialogue must

neither be dogmatic nor self-regarding, but sincere and considerate, motivated by the love of God and love of fellow humans.²⁹ Wisdom in a dialogue also implies rationality and role-relatedness. Each dialogue party should take into account the other party's culture and values and show understanding of its overall position. Dialogue should, furthermore, be informed by relevant technical knowledge of the issues.³⁰

Qaradawi recounts his own experiences of the 1970s when he participated in a Muslim World League delegation to the Vatican on "Human Rights in Christianity and Islam," together with his colleagues Muhammad Ma'ruf al-Dawalibi and Muhammad al-Mubarak. The proceedings of that dialogue were subsequently published in a book by the same title. Qaradawi added, "I recall Professor al-Mubarak saying that these encounters and dialogues are positive and beneficial for Islam and Muslims."³¹ Qaradawi further recounts his participation in separate dialogues in Paris and in Cologne in the mid-1990s together with a number of Azhar University scholars including Muhammad al-Ghazali and Mahmud Hamdi Zaquq - that they were engaged in penetrating questions and answers, that led to "understanding, information and closeness – *tafāhum, ta'āruḥ, wa taqārub* – that I thought were beneficial for both sides."³² In this connection, Qaradawi also quotes the hadith that "wisdom is the lost property of the believer; he is entitled to it wherever he finds it."³³

Wahabah al-Zuhaili observed that Muslims should maintain their relations with followers of other religions on the basis of dignity, equality and justice, and aim at "strengthening the foundations of security and peace. There should be no hostility... Islam also stands for moderation (*wasatīyyah*), which offers a firm basis for developing our relations with other communities and nations."³⁴ The two important factors which encouraged interreligious dialogues between the Vatican and the Muslim faculty at Al-Azhar University since the late 1990s, according to Scott Alexander, Director of Catholic-Muslim Relations at the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago were 1) Vatican Council II's initiative to approve *Nostra Aetate*,³⁵ and 2) personal endorsement of Pope John Paul II, who reached out to Muslims on many occasions - including his visit in May 2002 to the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus.³⁶

In a 1985 address to the Muslim youth in Casablanca, Pope John Paul II said:

Christians and Muslims! We have many things in common, as believers and as human beings. We live in the same world, marked by many signs of hope, but also by multiple signs of anguish. For us, Abraham is a model of faith in God, of submission to His will and of confidence in His goodness. We believe in the same God, the one God, the living God, the God who created the world and bring His creatures to their perfection.

This resonates well with the Qur’anic verse addressing people of the scripture: “We believe in what has been sent down to us and sent down to you. Our God and your God is one, and to Him do we surrender.”³⁷

It is a testimony to the strength of these two communities that at a challenging juncture of their relations, following Pope Benedict XVI’s 2006 Regensburg Lecture, *A Common Word Between Us and You* was initiated. A number of leading Muslim personalities approached the Pope and sought dialogue with him, to which he responded positively. Later the Pope himself went on record to say that “Inter-religious dialogue and intercultural dialogue between Muslims and Christians cannot be reduced to an optional extra. It is in fact a vital necessity on which in large measure our future depends.”³⁸ Christian leaders welcomed the Common Word initiative with enthusiasm. The messages the two sides exchanged between them basically came to this: we need to work together because we share an interest both religiously and also with regard to the security of our populations. Muslims, Jews and Christians hold in common between them the love of God, and love of neighbour.

The question as to ‘who is the neighbour’ may need to be readdressed in the context of today’s highly globalised world, which only serves to accentuate the meaning and purpose of neighbourliness. We have many interests in common, and the one uppermost is that as neighbours we should be able to live in peace and security alongside one another.

The Qur’anic conception of neighbour is inclusive of “neighbours who are near, neighbours who are distant, the companion by your side, and the wayfarer [you meet]”.³⁹ The first two need no explanation. As for companion by your side, this may be one’s friend and associate, or one who may be sitting next to at a congregation, meeting or event, just as the wayfarer one meets may be a travel companion or even a casual acquaintance on one’s travels. The renowned Qur’an commentator *al-Qurṭubī* (d. 1273 CE) wrote that neighbours in this verse include Muslims, Jews, Christians and polytheists. Abdullah Yusuf Ali further commented that of the four types of neighbours referred to in this verse, “the last is much wider” than the preceding three.⁴⁰

Without wishing to enter details, hadith reports provide categorical evidence on how the Prophet Muhammad, pbuh, repeatedly advised his Companions to be kind to their neighbours, observe their sensitivities and respect their rights. The Prophet had himself done so on numerous occasions, and also elaborated, more specifically, the rights of neighbours over one another. The neighbour’s rights include as in the following hadith:

If he seeks your help, help him; if he asks you for a loan, loan him;
if he becomes poor, support him; if he falls ill, visit him; if he dies,

participate in his funeral; if a calamity befalls him, comfort him; do not build higher than his house nor block fresh air and light on him; and do not annoy him.⁴¹

Following the Regensburg Lecture, the then Archbishop of Buenos Aires, and now Pope Francis advised “careful construction of a relationship with Islam that Pope John Paul II built over the last twenty years.” Muslim religious scholars and institutions welcomed Pope Francis’s election, as he had indeed lived up to his reputation of humility, compassion, and support for genuine dialogue. After his election at a large gathering with ambassadors from foreign countries, Pope Francis called for more inter-religious dialogue “particularly with Islam.”⁴²

Leonard Swidler, a Temple University Professor, wrote that dialogue is about experience, listening and explaining, not just scoring points in an argument. He advised that a dialogue participant may define himself but not the other, as one seeing from outside cannot fully define another. To invite others to reveal their opinion, one must reveal one’s own opinion first even if the truth be unpleasant. Participants should also come to the dialogue with no hard and fast assumptions as to where the points of disagreement may be.⁴³ Dialogue needs to be a continuing effort of engagement and response to issues. The alternative would be, as Dr Adil Ozdemir and Dr Terence Nichols of University of St. Thomas’s Centre for Muslim-Christian Dialogue jointly wrote “Misunderstanding and suspicion,” dialogue is therefore “a vital necessity.”⁴⁴

Dialogue occurs in many practical ways too. David Burrell recounts Muslim-Christian personal encounters at university campuses, as roommates, in conversations, and in mixed neighbourhoods. In religiously mixed societies in the Middle East, neighbours share in each others’ feast day celebrations, exchanging food and concern for family members in need. In such circumstances, those involved often come to realise how much more they need to know about their own faith in encountering what they have of another’s. What is telling about each of these scenarios is that persons are drawn to persons in a milieu which calls for sharing, only to discover that their sharing reaches into hitherto unsuspected faith dimensions. So sharing human concerns allows the manifest differences to be fruitful rather than off-putting.⁴⁵

The rising interest in peace studies has put a spotlight on religion as the missing link. Religion was often not included in such studies, but this has now changed. In his *Religion: The Missing Dimension in Statecraft*, Douglas Johnston noted the near silence about religion in many contemporary fields – peace and development studies among them. The religious dimension is significant whether a community enjoys a fragile peace or is enmeshed in outright violence. There is

little probing analysis of how religious factors are involved in peace building.⁴⁶ In her *The Mighty and the Almighty*, Madeline Albright stressed that the religious factor must be taken into account. Human security, a widely-used but also a fuzzy term, marks a shift about security. Historically, the literature on *security* was dominated by armament and war, which is now changing toward a broader concept of the development of human potential.

Religions for Peace, the global interfaith organisation, took the concept of security still further by using the notion of “shared security” to underline the message that no one is safe unless everyone else is.⁴⁷ Interconnectedness is the hallmark of globalisation, which has also meant globalisation of crises. Interconnectedness has, moreover, accentuated common responsibility, which underlines the work of international interfaith forums, such as the Common Word, Charter for Compassion, the Earth Charter, Building Bridges Seminar, and Groupe de Recherche Islamo-Chretien. Smaller national level Muslim-Christian forums also operate in Lebanon, Egypt, Turkey and elsewhere over issues mainly of pluralism and interfaith cooperation.

From the Islamic perspective, dialogue is meant to identify and strengthen commonalities between the dialogue partners, who are also advised to recognise but manage and reduce their differences. All effort toward these objectives should be informed by ethical norms and goodwill.⁴⁸ Interreligious dialogue should aim at securing the common good, enjoining what is right and rejecting what is wrong and harmful.⁴⁹ These objectives could subsume a wide variety of subjects: global security, international peace, socio-economic justice, ensuring adequate supplies of food and energy, as well as waging a joint campaign against human trafficking, drug abuse, production of weapons of mass destruction, and terrorism.⁵⁰

A different approach to interreligious dialogue which has become the focus of much attention as of late is the dialogue of praxis. It is essentially about working to bring different religious communities together to address practical problems that may have little to do with religious beliefs. The result can be better understanding and even new friendships and alliances. Dialogue of praxis may thus focus on environmental issues, media coverage, water issues, policy and practice of orphanages and the like.⁵¹

To take a somewhat unlikely example, an interfaith group in Ghana came together concerned about garbage and sanitation. They called their effort a ‘crusade against filth’ underlining the idea that cleanliness is a common theme in every religion. The impulse to act also came from an upcoming sporting event. So the religious leaders worked together on a clean-up campaign, public education and media outreach. They succeeded initially but then ran up against problems as they lacked a clear organisation and had no comparative advantage in running

garbage trucks. However, returning to Accra a year later, the religious leaders were focused on a complex election saga that threatened to produce tension. But because they had known each other on the garbage challenge, they were able to mobilise and head off conflict during the elections.⁵²

Notwithstanding many promising initiatives that have come from younger Catholics and Muslims in Britain, France, Germany and elsewhere in recent years, most of the participants in interreligious dialogue have remained nevertheless to be older people. As for the question: who is involved? Religious leaders, scholars and experts or lay congregations? In response it is said that inter-religious dialogues are often held among exclusive groups who hardly need persuading, and they operate in relative isolation from the lay congregations.

One particular area of common concern where Christians and Muslims can work together is to improve the conditions of the religious minorities.

III. Working Together to Help Religious Minorities

Muslim minorities living in the West face the challenges of a secular consumerist culture as well as issues of identity and citizenship that have taken a turning for the worse in the aftermath of 9/11. Yet compared to Muslim minorities elsewhere, those living in the West enjoy greater freedom to practice their religion. Some of the challenges they face are unprecedented and the rules of Islamic law concerning them have also remained relatively under-developed. This would explain the emergence of a new branch of Islamic jurisprudence under the rubric of *fiqh al-aqaliyyat* (jurisprudence of minorities) in recent decades, which is still developing.

While endorsing the numerous UN Conventions on the rights of minorities, Abdullah b. Bayyah considers the case of Muslim minorities in non-Muslim majority countries, from the juridical viewpoint, as a situation of necessity – even emergency (*awḍāʿ ḍarūrah wa idṭirār*). This would justify concessionary rulings, the development indeed, of a special jurisprudence that takes into account the prevailing conditions of each country and community.⁵³

Broadly, Muslim minorities are expected to observe the religious and ethical guidelines of Qur'an and hadith concerning their relations with followers of other faiths. They must accordingly cultivate mutual respect and friendship with their host communities. The same holds true with regard to the treatment of religious minorities living in Muslim majority communities. It is important, however, that text and scripture is read and interpreted in the light of historical and contemporary developments. Sayyid Fadlullah of Lebanon thus wrote in his comment on the Qur'an (al-Mumtahanah, 60:8) - that this verse “emphasises upon us to treat

them [non-Muslim minorities] well, show favour to them, be just to them by acknowledging their rights, and not impinge on their legal and human rights.”⁵⁴

In response to a question whether Muslim minorities abroad may submit to the laws of non-Islamic countries, Sayyid Fadlullah made the following observations: If the laws in question do not contradict a clear injunction of Islam, then Muslims must abide by them, according to contract, and the entry visa, leave of stay or asylum by which he or she has been admitted into the host country is their contract. “A Muslim must abide by the rules of public order in any society he dwells in.”⁵⁵ The detailed five-point advice that Fadlullah gives to Muslim youth and emigrants who live away from their home countries may be summarised as follows: 1) to be honest and trustworthy; 2) to preserve their internal unity and protect it in terms of ideas and voicing of their legitimate needs and interests; 3) to build good relations and preserve peace and security in their host country; 4) to open up to beneficial political, cultural and social conditions that help them live at ease wherever they are; and 5) to present a positive image of Islam.⁵⁶

The historical context has evidently changed due to new political realities. The modern nation state has effectively removed the earlier distinctions among citizens based on religion. The laws of citizenship and constitutional guarantees of equality before the law have, on the whole, departed from the earlier positions of differentiation based on religion in favour of citizens’ equality in rights and obligations. A number of Muslim scholars, including Muhammad al-Ghazali, Abdul Hamid Mutawalli, Yusuf al-Qaradawi, Salim el-Awwah, Rashid al-Ghanouchi and the present writer have gone on record to say that non-Muslim minorities have the same rights and obligations as other citizens - they pay tax and participate in military service just like other citizens. The *fiqhi* expression *dhimmi* (non-Muslim citizens) should therefore be replaced by *muwāṭinūn* (compatriots); for they are citizens and compatriots in the full sense entitled to be treated equally before the law, as I elaborate below.⁵⁷

Dhimmi is a derivative of *dhimma*, a contract that is concluded between two parties. It is not a ruling or *hukm* of Shariah of permanent standing and has no independent existence unless it is created by the contracting parties. *Dhimma* exists when the parties to it are in existence. In historical terms *dhimma* came to an end, as Salim el-Awwah has aptly observed,⁵⁸ with the onset of colonial rule in the Muslim lands, because the parties to it no longer existed, hence neither the *dhimma* nor its bearer *dhimmi* existed any longer. This was because the western colonial state did not apply the regime of *dhimma* and no *dhimmi*s could therefore be said to exist as of that time. The whole concept of *dhimma* has therefore been replaced by *muwāṭanah* (citizenship).

On a broader note, Muslims and Catholics may decide to explore the prospects of cooperation between them in many other areas, such as the ones outlined below.

Conclusion and Recommendations

- Muslim and Christian leaders and intellectuals are called upon to learn more about each other, their beliefs and their concerns with a view to minimise misunderstanding and ignorance that breed suspicion, unfounded accusation and prejudice.
- Selected Muslim and Catholic universities and institutions of learning should establish exchange programmes for visiting individuals and groups to take specially designed orientation courses. This may also include youth visits and interviews that could help generate better understanding of the two religions. If so desired, the programme may be further extended to involve researchers and twinning of research projects on issues of mutual concern.
- School and university textbooks in Christian and Islamic countries should be revised to refrain from making derogatory references to each other, and advise their respective youth to nurture conciliatory approaches toward better understanding. That said, derogatory references to Christianity are probably less of an issue in Islamic sources and literature compared to their western counterparts – due mainly to Islam’s recognition of Christianity as a valid religion.
- Governments should provide opportunities for youth and women to participate in decision-making and in leadership training programmes. This is already happening in varying degrees but greater effort is needed and called for.
- The ‘*ulamā*’, imams, church leaders, interfaith groups and associations should improve the ways they communicate with youth and women. They may need to make themselves less judgmental and more approachable so as to improve the climate of understanding with youth and women that need their guidance.
- Universities should revise their curricula to address youth and societal issues in consultation with civil society and business leaders to map out the skills required of their graduates. Youth unemployment can partially be addressed by greater access to vocational and technical training.
- Islamophobia and extensive misrepresentation of Islam in western media have become widespread and a hindrance to successful interreligious cooperation. Religious leaders, scholars and media leaders are called upon to rectify false and exaggerated presentations of both Christianity and Islam in their respective constituencies.⁵⁹

Notes

- * Paper presented at the Third Catholic-Muslim Forum on *Working Together to Serve Others*, the Vatican, 11-13 November 2014.
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- 1. Bible, Genesis, 9:1; *Laborem Exercens* (social encyclical based on Pope Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum* 1891, published in September 1981); al-An'ām, 6:164; Hūd, 11:61. Interesting details are found in a "Statement of Concern and Common Understanding," issued by Steven B Young, Ibrahim M Zein, Theodore Cardinal McCarrick, and Abdullahil Ahsan exploring commonalities in the scriptural sources of Christianity and Islam.
- 2. Qur'an, 17:70. See for details Mohammad Hashim Kamali, *The Dignity of Man: An Islamic Perspective*, Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 2002.
- 3. Compendium (of the Social Doctrine of the Church, 2004, published by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace at the request of Pope John Paul II), 193; Qur'an, al-Nisā', 4:58, 125; al-Mā'idah, 5:9.
- 4. *Laborem Exercens*; Qur'an, al-Tawbah, 9:105; al-Inshiqāq, 84:6.
- 5. Bible, James, 2:17; Qur'an, al-Baqarah, 2:25, 82, 277; Aal 'Imrān, 3:57.
- 6. al-Mā'idah, 5:3.
- 7. Najib Razak, "The Challenges of Muslim Youth," *The New York Times*: Opinion Pages, December 14, 2012.
- 8. Seyyed Vali Reza Nasr, "Youth Movements," in ed. J. L. Esposito, *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World*, OUP 1995, vol. 4, p. 362: Due partly to their presence in large numbers on university campuses, student leaders played a visible role in Islamic revivalism and anti-government protest movements. Notable examples were Organisation of the Iranian People's Mujahidin in the 1970s who adhered to the left-of-centre interpretations of the Islamic scholar 'Ali Shari'ati (d. 1977), Hamas in the Occupied Territories of Palestine, and the Muslim Youth Organisation of Afghanistan. The Afghan youth movement disappeared in the 1980s and mostly joined the Jami'at-e Islami and Hizb-e Islami, both of which played important roles against the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.
- 9. Declan MacCullagh, "Islam and the Arab Revolutions," *The Economist*, <http://www.economist.com/node/18486005> (accessed 3 June 2014).
- 10. Cf., John Anthony Xavier, "Are our varsities still relevant?", Kuala Lumpur, *New Straits Times*, 20 August 2014, p. 14.
- 11. Najib Razak, "The Challenges".

12. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *A Young Muslim's Guide to the Modern World*, Kuala Lumpur: Reprint of 1993 ed. by Islamic Book Trust, 2007, pp. 230-2.
13. Sameera Ahmed and Maha Ezzeddin, "Challenges and Opportunities Facing American Muslim Youth," *Journal of Muslim Mental Health*, vol. 4, no. 2 (2009), 159-74, at 160-1.
14. *Ibid.*, 162.
15. Cf., Nasr, *A Young Muslim's Guide*, 238-9.
16. *Ibid.*, 243.
17. Centesimus Annus (encyclical written by Pope John Paul II in 1991 on the 100th anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*), chapter 4; Qur'an, 43:32; 24:33.
18. Yet there is a groundswell of criticism that Islamic banking and finance too have imitated conventional banking practices and are mostly grappling with the same problems as their conventional counterparts.
19. *Šāffāt*, 37:102.
20. *Yūnus*, 10:83.
21. *Luqmān*, 31:12-13.
22. *Al-Ra'd*, 13:43-46.
23. *Yūsuf*, 12:12:24.
24. *Al-Kahf*, 18: 12-15 and *passim*. It is interesting to note that the Qur'an names this sura after the youth of al-Kahf and the sura *Luqmān* after the wise (old) man *Luqmān*. See for further details Āyatullāh al-'Uzmā al-Sayyid Muhammad Ḥusayn Fadlullāh, *World of Youth* (*Dunyā al-Shabāb*), tr. Khaleel Muhammed, Montreal: Organisation for the Advancement of Islamic Knowledge and Humanitarian Services, 1998, pp. 14-57.
25. The Arabic version reads "*fa-ḥalafanī al-shabāb wa khalafanī al-shuyūkh*." Even though al-Bukharī and Muslim have not recorded this hadith, its meaning is endorsed by the fact that most of the prophet's early supporters were youth.
26. This included leading figures such as 'Alī b. Abū Ṭālib, 'Umar b. al-Khattāb, Zubayr b. al-'Awwām, and Usāmah bin Zayd.
27. See further details Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "Islam's Attitude Toward Other Religions in History," in ed. Muhammad Suheyl Umar, *The Religious Other: Towards a Muslim Theology of Other Religions in a Post-Prophetic Age*, Lahore: Iqbal Academy Pakistan, 2008, pp. 123-4; Steven Kepnes, "Islam As Our Other: Islam As Ourselves," in ed. Suheyl Umar, *The Religious Other*, 257.
28. <http://blogs.reuters.com/faithworld/2013/10/04/french-catholic-muslim-conference-concerned-about-future-for-dialogue/> (accessed 24 October 2014).
29. Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur'an: Text, Translation and Commentary*, Leicestershire: the Islamic Foundation, p. 689, n. 2161.
30. Cf., Osman Bakar, *The Qur'an on Interfaith and Inter-Civilisation Dialogue: Interpreting a Divine Message for Twenty-first Century Humanity*, Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought Malaysia (IIITM) and Institute for Study of the Ummah and Global Understanding, 2006, p. 28.
31. Yusuf al-Qaradawi, *Thaqāfatunā Bayn al-Infītāḥ wa'l-Inghilāq*, 2nd printing, 1425/2005, p. 50.
32. *Ibid.*, 51.
33. *Ibid.*, 31.
34. Wahbah al-Zuhaili, *Qadāyā al-Fiqh wa'l-Fikr al-Mu'āṣir*, Damascus: Dar al-

- Fikr, 2006, p. 415. Zuhaili quotes in authority the Qur'an (2: 143) : "And thus We made you into an ummah justly balanced that you may be witnesses over nations, and the Apostle a witness over yourselves."
35. Nostra Aetate, the Second Vatican Council's document issued in 1965 provides guidelines on how the church should relate to non-Christian religions, and lists a few common elements with Islam: worship of one God, esteem for the Virgin Mary, reverence for Jesus Christ, belief in a day of divine judgment, fasting, charity and prayer.
 36. <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2003/dec/1/20031201-091332-2655r/#ixzz39xXZi5u0> (accessed 24 October 2014)
 37. Al-'Ankabūt, 29:46.
 38. <http://www.stthomas.edu/media/catholicstudies/departments/documents/2010-Nove.pdf> (accessed 24 October 2014).
 39. Al-Nisā', 4:36.
 40. Cf., Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur'an: Text, Translation and Commentary*, footnote no. 552.
 41. Abu Bakr al-Bayhaqī, *Sunan al-Bayhaqī*, Riyadh: Maktabah al-Rushd, 2003/1423, Vol.12, p. 104, hadith no. 9113. Al-Bayhaqī added the note that one of the narrators of this hadith was *weak*. See for a discussion also Arif Ali Nayed, *Duties of Proximity: Towards a Theology of Neighbourliness*, London: Global Centre for Renewal and Guidance, & Dubai: Kalam Research & Media, 2010, 6-7.
 42. Zafar Siddiqui, Star Tribune, May 23, 2013: <http://www.startribune.com/printarticle/?id=208683701> (accessed 24 October 2014).
 43. Leonard Swidler, *Dialogue in Malaysia and the Global Scenario*, Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Centre for Civilisational Dialogue, 2003, p.79.
 44. <http://www.stthomas.edu/media/catholicstudies/departments/documents/2010-Nove.pdf> (accessed 24 October 2014).
 45. David B. Burrell, "Christian-Muslim Dialogue in a World Gone Religiously Awry," *The Muslim World*, vol. 100, No.4 (October 2010), 414.
 46. Qamarul Huda and Catherine Marshall, "Religion and Peacebuilding," in *Integrated Peacebuilding: Innovative Approaches to Transforming Conflict*, edited by Craig Zelizer, Westviews Press, 2013, p. 151: A simplistic gauge is to flip through book indices. Thus in a 2000-page history of the World Bank's first 50 years, only one reference in the index is to religion and a passing mention of a 1962 conference of Catholic bishops. Islam does not appear, nor Muslims nor Imams.
 47. See for details, Katherine Marshall, *Interfaith Engagement and Positive Peace: What Works and What is Missing*, Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Advanced Islamic Studies (IAIS) Malaysia Occasional Paper Series 7, 2013, pp. 6-7.
 48. Cf., al- Hujurat, 49:13.
 49. Al-Baqarah, 2: 148; Aal-'Imran, 3:104 and 110.
 50. Cf., Osman Bakar, *The Qur'an on Interfaith*, 21-23.
 51. Cf., Marshall, *Interfaith Engagement*, 15.
 52. *Ibid.*, 16-17.
 53. Abdullah b. Mahfuz b. Bayyah, *Ijtihād bi-Taḥqīq al-Manāṭ: Fiqh al-Wāqī' wa'l-Tawaqu'*, Silsilah Waraqāt Ṭāba, No. 8, 2014, p. 50.

54. Grand Ayatollah Sayyid Muhammad Hussain Fadlullah, *Islamic Lanterns: Conceptual and jurisprudence questions for natives, emigrants and expatriates*, Eng. Tr. S. al-Samarra'i, Beirut: al-Malak Press, 1425/2004, p. 95.
55. Ibid., 91-92.
56. Ibid., 250-57.
57. Cf., Mohammad Hashim Kamali, *Freedom, Equality and Justice in Islam*, Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 2002, p. 78; Idem., *Citizenship and Accountability of Government: An Islamic Perspective*, Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 2011, p.113. See also Nasr, "Islam at the Dawn of the New Christian Millennium," 30.
58. This was the subject of a lecture delivered in London by Salim el-Awwah "*al-Muwāṭanah hiya Asās al-'Alāqah bayn al-Muslimīn wa Ghayrihim*," *Islam* 21, No. 20 (December 1999), 11. See also generally Rashid al-Ghanouuchi, *Huqūq al-Muwāṭanah: Huqūq Ghayr al-Muslim fi'l-Mujtama' al-Islāmī*, 2nd revised edn., Herndon: Va: al-Ma'had al-'Ālamī li'l-Fikr al-Islāmī, 1989/1410. Although Muslim jurists have identified *dhimmah* as a permanent contract, yet it cannot exist unless it is concluded in the first place, and it comes to an end or dissolved under certain conditions. A contract normally comes to an end when the contracting parties no longer exist.
59. In 2001, two percent of all news stories in western media presented images of Muslim militants, while just over 0.1 percent presented stories portraying ordinary Muslims. Ten years later in 2011, militant images went up from two percent to 25 percent, yet coverage of ordinary Muslims remained the same as in 2001 at 0.1 percent. See for details John L. Esposito, "2013 AAR Presidential Address: Islam in the Public Square," *J. of the American Academy of Religion*, vol. 82, no. 2, June 2014, pp. 291-306 at 301.