

DIALOGUE OF CIVILIZATIONS: VIEWS OF FETHULLAH GÜLEN AND MR. MOHAMMAD KHATAMI¹ TO THE RESPONSE OF THE CLASH OF CIVILIZATIONS BY SAMUEL P. HUNTINGTON

Abdul Rehman Kaloi, Assistant Professor Department of Comparative Religion & Islamic Culture University of Sindh, Jamshoro, Pakistan. abdrehman@usindh.edu.pk,

Aijaz Ali Khoso, Asst. Prof. University of Sufism and Modern Sciences, Bhitshah, Sindh. aijaz.khoso80@gmail.com ,

Zahid Hussain Chana, Asst. Prof. Shaheed Benazir Bhutto University, Shaheed Benazirabad, Sindh. Zahid.channa@yahoo.com,

ABSTRACT: Dialogue is the only way which can be a good tool for making less and cease the conflict and tension among the groups. It is the channel for clearing the misconceptions, slanders and acquisitions from both sides. Islam provides a framework for peaceful coexistence and form the plate form for socio-political and cultural interaction in multi religious and pluralistic societies. It comprises tolerance, freedom of faith and conscience, the concept of universal brother hood of mankind. It rejects the racial superiority by declaring the common origins of all human kind. This paper will discuss the views and contributions of Muslim scholars of modern age, like Fethullah Gülen's (Turkish Muslim scholar) and Mohammad Khatami's (Ex. President of Islamic Republic of Iran) over the presumption of the clash of civilizations¹ and their solutions, the open invitation for dialogue in the promotion and shape of interfaith dialogue in the modern age for the religious, cultural and civilizational harmony and coexistence.

KEYWORDS: Dialogue of Civilizations, Fethullah Gülen, Mohammad Khatami, the clash of civilizations.

INTRODUCTION:

Regarding the views and contributions of Muslim scholars in the modern age, there are many who are engaged in this task to enhance the good relationship among different people of faiths and traditions. Among them, Mr. Fatehullh Gulen, and Mohammad Khatami, the ex- president of Iran, are the outstanding figures that have

¹ Ex. President of Islamic Republic of Iran

been selected here in this paper to be focused on their worldviews, contribution and examples.

Dialogue, in short, according to Ahmet Kurucan and Mustafa Kasim Erol (2012) is a meaningful interaction and exchange between people of difference groups with a view for increasing the understanding of particular subjects.² While, interfaith dialogue is conceived as the interaction and exchange of religious views among the followers of different faith traditions to listen and understand each other, in a spirit of tolerance, truthfulness, sincerity, respect and good will, without willing the other to accept any respective beliefs or ideas.³ Md. Sanaullah (2014) describes the term interfaith dialogue comprehensively; according to him, “it’s a cooperative and positive interaction, be it individual or institutional, with the purpose of understanding and developing a common ground in beliefs, concentrating on similarities between faiths, understanding of values and commitment to the world.”⁴

THE VIEWS AND CONTRIBUTION OF FETHULLAH GÜLEN:

Fethullah Gülen,⁵ known as one of the pioneers of inter-religious understanding since the early 1980’s, has laid the groundwork for an Islamic approach to interfaith dialogue.⁶ According to Akbar Ahmed (2004), the twenty first century has become a period of unpredicted disaster that may occur anywhere in the globe. Religious, cultural and civilizational differences are at large that, to some extent, deliberately push the world to the demolition of peace, prosperity and tranquility.

In this era, there are some people whose ideology is only to bring violence and chaos in the peaceful milieu; that handful perpetrators have threatened the peaceful world, whether they are religious or secular, just for gaining the power, imposing their ideology with their self-created notion of wickedness; they are devoted to violence, death and destruction of peaceful coexistence. But, on the other hand, there are some good virtuous and religious scholars with in the religious communities who have challenged these radical and evil ideas, and have come forward to endeavor for peace, love and tolerance.⁷ Among such good people, if the Muslim scholar is considered,

according to Ahmed (2004), Fethullah Gülen in true sense, is one of the great figures and symbols of love and compassion of the twenty first century, whose contribution toward love, peaceful coexistence and service for humanity is worth mentioning.⁸ He defended and supported the benefits of interfaith dialogue to understand each other through some common human inherited commitments that people share among themselves despite of differences on many issues, such as religion and civilization.⁹

He further says that Mr. Gulen, a pioneer of interfaith dialogue for over thirty years, believe that dialogue is not an extra work, but is necessary to understand one another. Dialogue is among the duties of Muslims to make our world more peaceful and safer place, acting upon the teachings of Quran and Sunnah to promote love, compassion and Kindness towards others.¹⁰

According to Dougla Pratt¹¹ (2007) Fethullah Gülen is totally correct in his opinion and desire for conducting and observing interfaith dialogue that must be aimed on the base of mutual understanding, a dedication to justice and priority to mutual respect that are requirements for the principles to be engaged in interreligious dialogue. Gülen's worldview is, says Mr. Pratt, to present the true values of one's faith in today's world is a big challenge, and has gained an even greater significance than before. Gülen always contemplates interfaith engagement is the need of the hour for making better relationship with each other¹²

Zeki Saritoprak and Sidney Grifith (2005) argue that in Ottoman Empire, there were many examples exist of Islamic understanding of tolerance towards non-Muslim people, in particular, the people of the book. But, in the contemporary world, it is the only one leading figure, is Fethullah Gülen, who had a vision and inspiration for peaceful coexistence with other faiths, felt the intense necessity to initiate the interfaith dialogue and realized that it is high time now for promoting the interfaith dialogue, especially with people of the book (Christian and Jews.)¹³

Saritoprak and Grifith (2005) examine that Gülen's tendency towards interfaith dialogue and the good relationship towards others that Gulen has got inspiration from

Sufi doctrine and it has been reflected in his philosophy of love, tolerance, compassion and forgiveness, and these are the clear representation form the Sufi teachings. Speaking of love in the Sufi tradition, Gülen focuses his attention on one of the “beautiful names” of God, *al-Wadud*¹⁴, the Beloved One. By pointing this, he points out that Muslims are expected to reflect this attribute in their lives by being a people of love.¹⁵

Gülen, they describe, also finds the sources and inspirations of such themes from the teachings of the Prophet of Islam himself, from whom he quotes the following tradition, “Whoever is humble, God exalts him; whoever is haughty, God humiliates him.” From this precept, that is core of Islamic ethics, Gülen finds the basis for interreligious dialogue. He strongly affirms that dialogue will be the natural result of the practice of Islamic ethics. If someone is having superiority complex, he will never be able to initiate the dialogue, and on the contrary, one who bows towards peace and tolerance will achieve the benefits of dialogue for the rest of community.¹⁶

After becoming the Pope in 1979, John Paul II visited Turkey and then Gülen had a meeting with former Pope John Paul II in February 1998, marked an important step forward in Muslim/Christian relations, especially in Turkey. Though, there was much criticism but Gülen neglected such issues and advanced ahead because the interfaith dialogue was very incumbent to stop the tension. Likewise, Samuel Huntington’s indication of “clash of civilizations” was the burning issue at that time, but Gülen, instead of this, felt the need to further struggle to establish dialogue.¹⁷

Furthermore, Saritoprak and Griffith describe that Gülen’s visit to the Pope has continued to bear fruits of dialogue among various groups. One example of their efforts came in the form of an interfaith conference organized by an interfaith dialogue organization, the Foundation of Journalists and Writers in Turkey. This conference, called the Abraham Symposium, was held in southeast Turkey in the city of Urfa, believed to be the birthplace of Prophet Abraham. Another positive step is the establishment of an interfaith university in the same city, currently under

consideration among members of the interfaith dialogue community backed by Gülen and Pope John Paul II. Recently, a Chicago based organization which is inspired by the teachings of Gülen invited about thirty members of religious communities in Chicago to Turkey for an inter-religious dialogue conference. Again, one of the fruits of this visit is that the Vatican representative in Turkey has worked actively to realize Muslim/Christian dialogue in more appropriate ways.¹⁸

Having views of Gülen about Interfaith dialogue that are totally based on the Quran and Sunnah, and if it is to be taken in to account historically, then, after Muhammad, his successors caliphs also encouraged interfaith interaction. So, in the light of above mentioned instances and events, it is highly recommended for Muslim leaders to have good relationship with other faith fellows to live in a peaceful environment.

GÜLEN'S VIEWS OVER THE PRESUMPTION OF THE CLASH OF CIVILIZATIONS BY SAMUEL P. HUNTINGTON.¹⁹

Regarding Huntington's claim about the clash of civilizations,²⁰ Gülen understands that rather than being realistic evaluations regarding the future, these types of claims seem to him to be imposing new misconceptions on public opinion within the framework of these aims. He further elaborates that earlier, before the collapse of the Soviet Block, there was the idea of a clash between the East and West, or between NATO and the Warsaw Pact countries, but now this term is being transformed in a clash of civilization. And, surely, this time new enmity will be emerging among the civilizations based on religious and cultural differences. This is not but fake propaganda is make the masses fear and to be involved in cold war again.²¹

Mr. Gülen believed that no any divine religion has been based on war, and Islam, especially teaches to be lived with harmony accordance to the natural laws. It has always breathed peace and goodness. It considers war as secondary event. Rules have been placed in order to balance and limit it. For example, Islam takes justice and world peace as a basis: he quotes the verse from Quran,

“Let not the hatred of others to you make you swerve to wrong and depart from

He advocates the idea that

*“Islam developed a line of defense based on certain principles in order to protect the freedom of belief, life, property, the mind and one’s descendants, as has the modern legal system. Christianity, as a religion of abstract love, from the very beginning categorically condemned war and did not lay down any rules regarding this human and historical reality. But it was not able to prevent wars like the World Wars or the Hundred Years’ Wars or the Nagasaki and Hiroshima incidents from occurring. The views of Huntington and others like him of the future are unfortunately based on conflict, and reflect plans to continue domination through conflicts.”*²³

He ensures that for the purpose of living peacefully, we have to understand each other’s tradition and culture and solve our internal and external issues. The message of love, tolerance and concurrence are powerful words that must be in praxis. This is the same message that prophets, Sufis and devotees spread among the masses. In this respect, he suggests that tolerance and dialogue should be represented in our country in the best possible way and should be an example to the whole world. Such an example will encourage people to come together, to gather round the same basic human values, and humankind will live one more spring before seeing the end of the world.²⁴

Views of Mr. Mohammad Khatami to the response of the clash of civilizations by Samuel P. Huntington.

In the response of Samuel P. Huntington’s assumption, *“The clash of civilizations”*, in which Huntington speculated that conflict between civilizations will be the latest phase in the evolution of conflict in the modern world and central focus of conflict for the immediate future will be between the West and several Islamic-Confucian states.²⁵ He further says that *“The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural.”*²⁶ *Nation states will remain the most powerful actors in world affairs, but the principal conflicts of global politics will occur between*

nations and groups of different civilizations. The clash of civilizations will dominate global politics.”²⁷ And “The next world war, if there is one, will be a war between civilizations.”²⁸

The ex-president of Iran, Mohammed Khatami, addressed in United Nations, on the topic of “Dialogue among civilization”. Mr. Khatami suggested the solution of conflict, presumed by Huntington, is the dialogue among nations, describing it different tools and the best way to cease the conflict among nations and possibility of correlations in the globe.

Mr. Khatami went on to say that in order to provide natural unity and harmony in form and content for global culture and to prevent anarchy and chaos, all concerned parties should engage in a dialogue in which they can exchange knowledge, experience and understanding in diverse areas of culture and civilization. Today it is impossible to stop the ideas from freely travelling between cultures and civilizations in disparate parts of the world. However, in the absence of dialogue among thinkers, scholars, intellectuals and artists from various cultures and civilizations, the danger of cultural homelessness seems imminent. Such a state of cultural homelessness would deprive people of solace both in their own culture and in the vast open horizon of global culture.²⁹

He said that “Nature has endowed each and every human individual, living in each and every corner of time and place has unique qualities and Islam emphasis on human dignity. Islamic civilization is indeed one of only a few world civilizations to have become consolidated and to have taken shape around a sacred text, in this case the noble Quran. The essential unity of the Islamic civilization stems from the unique call that reached all Islamic peoples and nations. Its plurality derives from the diversity of responses evoked after Islam reached various nations.”³⁰

Mr. Khatami said that “what we should consider today is the emergence of a global culture”. Global culture and its characteristics, and the requirements of native local cultures cannot and should not be ignored. Every culture has its own criterion of

living on its own way. Cultures and civilizations have naturally evolved among various nations and have adopted different aspects and elements within themselves. There is diversity and differences among the nations. In spite of all constitutive plurality and diversity, a unique and harmonious form can be distracted from the collection.”³¹

He further said that from an ethical perspective, “the paradigm of dialogue among civilizations requires that we give up egoism and the craze of power to be dominance on other nations. Instead to be dominating on others we should incline towards the will for empathy and compassion. Without the will for empathy, compassion and understanding there would be no hope for the prevalence of order in our world.

Another goal of dialogue among cultures and civilizations, he remarked, is to recognize and to understand not only the cultures and civilizations of others, but also one's own. One ought to take a step away from oneself in order to get an enhanced perspective on oneself. Seeing in essence requires taking distance in perspective, and distance provides the grounds for immersion into another existential dimension.”³²

He suggested that in dialogue among cultures and civilizations, great artists should certainly get due recognition together with philosophers, scholars and theologians. This world is completely controlled by political, military and economic giants, and it is a big challenge for the humanity to create any spiritual, artistic and intuitive heavens. We need artists and the inspired poets to liberate the life from the suffocation of egoism and racism, and to make life better and the world heaven.”³³

In last, he believes in dialogue that shows the path of love, hope and coexistence. And it can be only be acquired through good deeds, virtue, humility and love; not merely by the source of wealth or arms, but it is possible with the spirit of dialogue that prevails in inner human nature and civilization.”³⁴

He hopes that we should all have faith in this triumph and better hope that all citizens of the world will be prepared to this revolution to listen each other in the best way for the solutions of common sufferings of the world and to come on the same page of

common teachings of love, sympathy and harmony. He concluded to say that “Let us hope that hostility and oppression will end and that the appeal of love for truth, justice and human dignity will prevail.”³⁵

CONCLUSION

Dialogue is a conversion among persons or different groups to know each other. Human being always have been in search of interaction and connection with each other for getting the common problems solved as it is inner human natural disposition that God has already imbedded in human nature to discuss and exchange the views with each other.

Islam is one of the major world religions and claims to be the religions of all humans. Thus, it teaches the lesson of equality of all human beings produced from one single parent with common feelings and sharing the common characteristics and instincts of humanity. Islam propagates the diversity of culture, religions and civilizations. Therefore, the Quran as well as Prophet Muhammad have never closed the channels of dialogue with other communities. Dialogue is a kind of religious duty of Muslims, they have to participate in dialogue with others so that the misconceptions regarding Islam may be cleared³⁶ and, thus it will enhance the contribution towards peace, religious harmony and coexistence.

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- ² Ahmet Kurucan, Mustafa Kasim Erol, (2012). Dialogue in Islam: Quran-Sunnah-History, p. 18.
- ³ Ibid, p.20
- ⁴ Sanaullah, Md. (2014). Interfaith Dialogue in Islam: A Scriptural Scrutiny, IOSR Journal Of Humanities And Social Science, Vol. 19, Issue 3, Ver. IV, pp.86-91
- ⁵ Mr. Fethullah Gülen is a Turkish great scholar, spiritual leader, an Imam and preacher. He was born in Erzurum in eastern Anatolia on April 27, 1941, the very day when Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, founder of modern Turkey, died in faraway Istanbul. See Zeki Saritoprak and Sidney Griffith (2005) the Muslim World vol. 95, p.330.
- ⁶ Saritoprak, Zeki & Sidney Griffith. (2005). Fethullah Gulen and the people of the book: A voice from Turkey for Interfaith dialogue, the Muslim World, vol.95, p.329
- ⁷ Akbar Ahmed, 2004, *A dialogue of civilization*, foreword.
- ⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Professor (Theology & Interreligious Studies) at the University of Bern, Switzerland.

¹² Pratt, Douglas. (2007). Islamic prospects for interreligious dialogue: the contribution of Fethullah Gülen, In Muslim world in transition: contributions of the Gülen movement, (Conference Proceedings), pp.391-405, London, Leeds Metropolitan University Press.

¹³ Zeki Saritoprak and Sidney Griffith, 2005, *Fethullah and the People of the Book: A voice from Turkey for Interfaith Dialogue*, Muslim World, p, 330.

¹⁴ An Arabic word and one of the attributes of God that mentioned in Quran. He is the Beloved One.

¹⁵ Saritoprak and Griffith, p. 334.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid, p.334-335.

¹⁸ Ibid, p.336.

¹⁹ Huntington is a professor in the Harvard University, where he is also the director of the John M.O lin institute for strategic studies and the chairman of the Harvard Academy for international and area studies.

²⁰ What is civilization? According to Huntington, A civilization is a cultural entity. Villages, regions, ethnic groups, nationalities and religious groups. It is thus the highest cultural grouping of people and the broadest level of cultural identity people have short of that which distinguishes humans from other species. It is defined both by common objective elements, such as language, history, religion, customs, institutions, and by the subjective self-identification of people. See Huntington, p.23-24. Thus civilizations include Western, Confucian, and Japanese, Islamic, Hindu, Slavic-Orthodox, Latin American and possibly African civilization. The most important conflicts of the future will occur along the cultural fault lines separating these civilizations from one another. See, Huntington, p. 22.

²¹ Gülen, Fethullah, M. (2006). Towards A Global Civilization of Love and Tolerance, p.256. New jersey, The light, Inc

²² Al-Quran, (5:8).

²³ Gülen, p.256.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.p.48.

²⁶ Why will this conflict happen? Huntington says, because, first, differences among civilizations are not only real; they are basic. Civilizations are differentiated from each other by history, language, culture, tradition and, most important religion. The people of different civilizations have different views on the relations between God and man, the individual and the group, citizen and the state, parents and children, husband and wife, as well as differing views of the relative importance of rights and responsibilities, liberty and authority, equality and hierarchy. These differences are the product of centuries, p.25.

²⁷ Huntington, the clash of civilizations.p.22.

²⁸ Huntington,p.3.

²⁹ Mohammad Khatami speech, 2000, Round Table: Dialogue among Nations, available at <http://www.unesco.org/dialogue/en/khatami.htm>

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Gul Dar, Naseem, Dr. (2013). Dialogue: A Muslim Perspective. P.7. New Delhi, Adam Publishers