

Belief and Righteous Work
An Open Vision on a New World

As I begin my address, I would like to thank Professor Nizami, not only for inviting me to address you but also for his friendship and cooperation over many years. Whenever I think of Professor Nizami, I recall the institution that is associated with his name — the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies — and I am honoured to speak from its platform today. The centre has become an authentic environment for in-depth academic research and a centre for distinguished scholars and VIPs from both the Islamic and Western worlds. I would like also to express my appreciation and respect to the honourable audience.

A. The Basis of Vision and Harmony

The Holy Qur'an, in defining and governing the relationship between Muslims and People of the Scripture, follows a two-fold approach. It first appeals for the Call, or invitation, to People of the Scripture to join Muslims in worshipping the One God. 'O people of the Scripture: Come to a word that is just between us and you, that we worship none but God, and that we associate no partners with Him, and that none of us shall take others as lords besides God. Then, if they turn away, say: "Bear witness that we are Muslims.'" (Al-'Imran, 64). Second, it ordains Muslims themselves to treat Christians fairly 'And argue not with the people of the Scripture, unless it be in a way that is better except with such of them as do wrong, and say: "We believe in that which has been revealed to us and revealed to you; our God and your God is One, and to Him we have submitted (as Muslims).'"

The approach, with its two perspectives, is based on two principles. The first is contractual and relates to a sort of ‘sharing’ by Muslims and People of the Scripture of the one Faith that believes in the One God. Ensuing from that principle is the second principle, which provides that people must deal with each other on an equal footing in terms of humanity, dignity and equality. It further implies that no one should ever claim superiority over another and ‘that none of us shall take others as lords besides God’. Let us note here how the call for abstaining from polytheism or false worship stresses that polytheism is synonymous with wrongdoing. Anyone committing the sin of polytheism is eventually committing a sin, as cited in several verses in the Holy Qur’an: ‘Except those of them who did what is wrong’ and ‘... false worship is a grievous wrong’ (Luqman, 13). Hence, wrongdoing arises from two sources: encroachment on the principle of the One Creator and infringement of the equality of people between one another and before God.

The above two verses, particularly their Call and Address, conclude that whatever the reaction of the People of the Scripture, Muslims must continue to their commitment to the Call and Address. As the above verses state, ‘If they turn away say “Bear witness that we are Muslims”’, and ‘We have submitted to Him as Muslims’, Muslims are committed to upholding the principle of the One Divine and the One Lord and, as a result, are committed to treating other people equally throughout their lives.

The above preliminary approach is supported by a fair representation of the history and creed of Christian groups. Such representation is desirable in Islam, which has set benchmarks for its followers for the respectful treatment of Christians, as peers and partners, in a new era. Muslims should not forget that they inherited the Scripture and that some of them have proven to be forerunners in performing good deeds. ‘Then We gave the Scripture for inheritance to such of Our servants whom We chose. Of them are some who wrong themselves, and of them are some who follow a middle course, and of them are some who are, by God's Leave, foremost in good deeds. That is indeed a great grace.’

Muslims should also remember, that the Apostles of Christ, even when committing errors in good faith, showed good and noble manners, as testified in the Holy Qur’an: ‘And We sent Nuh (Noah) and Ibrahim (Abraham), and placed in their line Prophethood and Revelation: and some of were on right guidance, but many of them became rebellious transgressors. Then, in their wake, we followed them up with (others of) our Messengers: We sent after Jesus, the son of Mary, and bestowed on him the Gospel; and We ordained in the hearts of those who followed him, Compassion and Mercy. But the Monasticism which they invented for themselves, We did not prescribe for them: (We commanded) only the seeking for the Good Pleasure of Allah; but that they did not foster as they should have done. Yet We bestowed, on those among them who believed, their due reward, but many of them are rebellious transgressors.’ (Al-Hadid, 26-27)

The Holy Qur'an considers Christians the best for partnership with Muslims: '... and nearest among them in love to the believers (Muslims) those who say: "We are Christians": because amongst them are men devoted to learning and men who have renounced the world, and they are not arrogant. And when they listen to the revelation by the Messenger, thou wilt see their eyes overflowing with tears, for recognise the truth: they pray: 'Our Lord! We believe; write us down among the witnesses.' (Al-Ma'idah, 82-83)

Hence resurfaces the notion of One Belief that stresses the sharing of faith and its values, and good work. It also underscores the unity of vision of the humanity of people, be they Christian or Muslim. Such a 'sharing' principle serves as a guarantee for the prevalence of amicability and compassion not only between Christians and Muslims but also among human beings generally. The essence is to abide by the Divine obligation on men to reach a 'common word', and the ethical obligation to safeguard such a principle among themselves and with all other people.

This 'common word', which is based on the Oneness of God and is guided in earthly life by equality and refraining from claiming Lordship, is governed and guided by those ethical values known for People of the Scripture as the Ten Commandments, which have the same common values of dignity, compassion, justice, friendship and fulfilling the public good. Those values are reiterated hundreds of times in the Holy Qur'an

and can be subcategorised into three groups on the basis of context. Firstly, they address Muslims either to observe such values or to applaud their existence in Muslims. Secondly, they are mentioned in order to underline for Muslims that Christians share those values. Thirdly, they praise a healthy competition between Muslims and Christians in their interfaith transactions and in their dealings with other people, either through proselytising, since Christianity and Islam share not only the same notion of Oneness but also the fact that both are proselytising religions. In Islam, the Messenger Mohammad is depicted as the Messenger of Mercy to the world. Likewise, Christianity says it proselytises salvation. Therefore, the Islamic Calling and Christian proselytising bear witness on mankind before God, meaning the existence of a mutually positive desire to involve the Other in such divine goodness (basically in terms of values) that both Christians and Muslims observe.

B. Conflict of Hegemony and the Imbalance of Relationships

Given that the unity and synergy between Christians and Muslims were based on belief and a set of ethical values, there is a need to explain why the imbalance, a grave one indeed, occurred. The rise of Christianity, then Islam, led to the spread of tremendous conflicts in all facets of life and at every local and global level. Such conflicts and struggles had, from time to time, different labels, including, for example, Arabs versus Byzantines, Christianity versus Islam, the wars of Crusades, Ottomans versus Europeans, and Orient versus Occident.

Some historians have been tempted to ascribe such conflicts to the differences in backgrounds of faith. While this assumption holds true to some extent, it is widely known that even wars that were fought under religious banners had ulterior motives that had nothing to do with the religions of the combatants. Furthermore, it is known widely that intra-faith wars were much more ferocious than those fought between people of two religions or cultures.

It is important, therefore, to look for other sources of conflict between Christians and Muslims, on the one hand, and between people of those religions and people of other faiths on the other. Here, I recall what the Dalai Lama said in 1999 when the Taliban destroyed the statues of Buddha in Bamiyan, an Afghan district to which Buddhism was introduced in around the fifth or sixth century. The Dalai Lama said, 'We've been here for centuries in South and East Asia witnessing and suffering from the Christian-Muslim struggles on our lands and their assaults on our peoples. They love dominance and hegemony and cannot accept the Other on an equal footing.'

So, a real characterisation of conflicts among human beings, though belonging to the same religion, has roots that are forbidden by the Holy Qur'an: '... and that none of us shall take each other as Lords besides God.' Such a forbidden inclination to seeking Lordship, following the

Qur'anic expression, is equal to our modern and contemporary expression of 'the will for hegemony'.

The centuries-old imbalance between nations, religions and cultures is, therefore, attributable to a wish for hegemony by all parties involved, leading to conflicts and wars worldwide for military, economic or cultural designs.

Despite the fact that the above imbalance cannot be fully attributed to Christians and Muslims alone at the world level, they are too often blamed and given the responsibility for world imbalances and conflicts. There are three reasons for this. The first relates to an obsession with a specific comprehensive scheme of salvation based on faith, proselytising or the Call, and bearing witness and upholding the burdens of trust. Christianity is a universal religion in terms of its methodology and call, as is Islam. Both Abrahamic religions impose on their respective followers responsibilities for happiness and salvation. Witnessing before God on humanity, and witnessing for humanity on the basis of belief and sacrifice in Christianity has a counterpart in Islam that believes in compassion, promoting virtue and preventing vice. The second reason is related to the large size and the roles assumed by followers of the two religions. Such roles have been exercised since the Middle Ages and have resulted in the increasing spread of each all over the continents of the old world.

More importantly, they still have a great cultural potential that dominates all values, notions and ways of living. Just as Islam was influential in terms of creed, culture and politics during the Middle Ages, Christianity has had a great global effect in modern times. In addition, followers of the two religions have outnumbered and outmatched, in influence, those of any other religion in world history and culture. The third reason relates to the great roles played by the two religions in universal transformation seen all over the world, particularly in the period between the late 1990s to the early 2000s. This period saw an alignment of the Protestant, Catholic and Islamic religions vis-à-vis the bipolarism that dominated the geopolitical, strategic, religious and cultural domains in the wake of World War II.

As in any decisive historical period, the desire for hegemony led to the dissolution of that alignment and the regression of its productivity in helping to create a new world order. The move, however, had benefited many nations in the arrangement of the lives and fates of their people amidst the new conditions and terms.

Therefore, the imbalance of the relations between the two human groups passed through two extended historical periods. The first extended from the seventh century until the sixteenth century, and the second from the sixteenth century until late 1990s.

The first stage, which extended for around nine centuries, saw the rise and spread of Islam throughout Asia, Africa and Europe. It also dominated areas in the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea, not to mention its geopolitical gains against the Christian Byzantine Empire.

After a resistance that lasted eight hundred years, the Ottomans managed to conquer Constantinople, the then capital of the Byzantine Empire. Muslims, however, could not achieve such progress in the religious and cultural domains, at least to the extent they desired. What they wanted was recognition by Christian theologians derived from the assumption that Islam is an Abrahamic religion just as Christianity and Judaism are. As explained before, the Prophet Mohammad and the Holy Qur'an were eager to achieve mutual recognition on the basis of common belief in the One religion and Oneness values. For those Christians living in countries conquered by Muslims in the seventh and ninth centuries, Islam was seen as a divine whip with which God was punishing their Byzantium lords, and themselves, for ignoring their own religious obligations. Theologians, however, considered Islam as a distortion of real and true Christianity. For those reasons, the two parties, ie. the Syriac community and the Byzantines, wanted to delimit, and eventually eliminate, the powers of the invading Bedouin, as they had done with previous nomadic waves. Such trends are found in the books of Syriac and Byzantium historians and theologians dating back to the seventh and ninth centuries. However, there is a need to trace the desire and ambition of Muslims to obtain

recognition from Christians. Such ambitions appear in abundance in the so-called 'Answering Christianity' literature, where many answers are given to Christians to prove the authenticity of Mohammad's prophethood by resorting to the old and new testaments. There is, in addition, a lengthy discourse on the importance of the notion of One God in Islam and the authenticity of Qur'anic revelation, all of which are claimed by Muslims to be more accurate than the old and new testaments.

Ibn Kammuna, a Jewish thinker, recognised the importance of that claim and how Muslims consider it a sensitive issue. So, in his book *Doing Justice for the Three Religions*, Ibn Kammuna concluded that all three religions are complementary to each other as they all derive from Abrahamic origin. His work, however, did not go uncriticised, especially by Christians.

Such criticisms led to the rise of radical trends among some Muslim scholars who said, 'Since you do not recognise our religion, we will not recognise yours' despite the fact that such thoughts are contradictory to the Holy Qur'an.

Other people claimed that the evidence for the authenticity of Islam achieved great success in increasing its spread and raising the number of its followers. But this is also a weak argument. At any rate, at the start of the sixteenth century, Christianity responded to the challenge in different

ways including the Crusades, which aimed to restore the Shrine of Jesus and seize the Arabian Peninsula and Arab Maghreb coasts. The Portuguese had already been sailing the Indian Ocean during the sixteenth century, which gave more strategic power to Christian Europe. At theological and cultural levels, any change towards the recognition and initiation of dialog with Islam had already started in the early years of the seventh century.

The second stage, therefore, began in the sixteenth century and was marked with a Portuguese assault in the Indian Ocean. After the Portuguese came the Spanish, Dutch, French, British and Italian. The multipolar assaults during the next three centuries was concomitant with four phenomena: geographical explorations and conquest by the advancing Europeans of the New World; the great schism in Christianity, which led to disrupted images of the world; the relationship between religion and the State, and the rise of several enterprises aimed at gaining control over the world, sometimes in the name of Christianity and at other times in the name of the Occident. The third phenomenon was the influence of the 'message' on all designs aimed at dominating the world. Sometimes it took the form of Christian proselytising, while at other times it was a cultural message. The fourth phenomenon was the dominance of retroactive mindsets among Muslims that met in other spheres, overwhelming desires for cognitive, proselytising and military advancement. Though the threshold of such trends on land and sea was

interpreted as a desire to seize the Islamic world, in a semi-crusade, the matter was much broader. The aim was to conquer the whole world by expending all conscious and systematic efforts, particularly by seeking technical and cultural superiority. It aimed painstakingly, deliberately and systematically to control the world through the use of military power and technical and cultural superiority. Afterwards it resorted to three ways for its struggle — contesting, subduing and dividing. Therefore, at the time when the newly discovered world was created as envisaged by the West, the great Asian civilisations — Islamic, Indian and Chinese — were vulnerable to reshaping and restructuring their very existence and priorities. This was to be accomplished in the mid 1800s when European (or Occidental) notions of progress and convenience started to dominate the greater Asian nations. That meant the demise of anyone or any country in Asia refusing those notions under the pretext of backwardness and rejection to cope with historical advancement. The conquered Asians, in particular, were overwhelmed with the idea of decay or cultural demise and that survival was for the fittest and the best, a principle that applies to religions and cultures as much as to nations. At that time, the new Muslim elite started to appeal to the notion promoted by Orientalism that denounced centuries-long Islamic backwardness and that salvation could only be attained by joining the new order under the leadership of the Western world, which dominated the whole world.

uring the last four decades, the Western enterprise to dominate the world faced three internal challenges: schism in Christianity, conflict on dividing the world, and German Nazi and Socialist Communism.

In the first case, schism in Christianity, it was possible after a period of belligerency, to segregate religion from public affairs and replace the religious bond with a national one. In the second case, conflict on the division of the world, two centuries of sometimes conflicting, sometimes interactive relationships passed before the establishment of an international system to regulate those relationships existing between sovereign states in Europe and in its colonies overseas.

In the third case, the German-Soviet challenge, the help of the United States was sought to vanquish Germany and partner with Russia in a bipolar system. The dilemma was finally disentangled when the United States and its allies managed, some twenty-five years ago, to dissolve the Society Union and end its regime. American attempts to create a dominant unipolar system faced great challenges, which required the creation of a new world order. Such an order is still impeded, however, by strategic and cultural hegemony that has been experienced in the world for the last three centuries.

The topic of this lecture is still the system of values and the Islamo-Christian relationship. The last few pages are meant to give a brief on the next stage of relations after establishment.

The first stage was between the seventh and sixteenth centuries, which was marked with the rise of Islam and its cultural and political dominance. Islam has considered itself, since Qur'anic revelation, as an Abrahamic religion. It aimed at establishing a partnership with the other two Abrahamic religions and succeeded in doing so, for example in the Andalusian experience where Muslims befriended Jews and Christians and shared belief in the Oneness of God and their set of values with them.

According to historian Toby Huff, the period between the ninth and sixteenth centuries saw a cooperation that almost took the form of a partnership between three great civilisations: the Islamic civilisation, the Chinese civilisation and the Christian European civilisation. After the sixteenth century, the European hegemony tended to disclaim its past experience. Rather it claimed roots in the classical eras of the Greek and the Romans. Furthermore, it developed a scheme for exercising hegemony on several universal domains including the world of Islam.

What is most important in European domination is that it was not only strategic, military and economic but also cultural and value based one. This relates to ideas, methods and ways of living and for this reason, while it was faced with attempts at resistance and manoeuvring to avoid its effect on the world's cultures and religions, it also left behind traces that will not disappear by reshaping the world, its geography and cultures according to or following its own model.

A Muslim scholar once said, 'The fact is that it is not the Romans (ie. the Europeans) that were Christianised; rather, it is Christianity that has been Romanised.' However, it is still a fact that the Christian value world still exercised some kind of influence on Europeans and Americans in their original homelands, their colonies and other countries influenced by them.

Hence arises duplicity in approaches and ways Europe and America perceive world's religions, cultures, nations, histories and destinies. Then, at a time when the interference of religious institutions in European affairs in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, there was a notable rush towards proselytising in all countries in the world where the West had already spread its hegemony. Such areas of new dominance included Asia, Africa and Muslim countries in those two old continents.

C. Islamo-Christian Dialogue and the Clash of Cultures and Religions

In the wake of World War II and the emergence of bipolarism and the Cold War era, the greater Protestant churches established communication with some Muslim bodies on the Indian subcontinent and the Middle East calling for a partnership of belief against the atheist communities. It was clear that this initiative arose in the context of the Cold War and the cultural war, in particular, between the two countries.

Some Muslims welcomed the initiative, the first one in a long time, particularly because it was not taking place in the context of answers and

debates. Muslims, however, demanded a reciprocal recognition at a religious level. They also demanded religious and value solidarity against hegemony, and they called for cooperation to eliminate traces of colonisation and division including the Palestinian Cause and Kashmir.

Repercussions varied among the churches. Some said the church had no control on states' policies while others said the achievement of such a partnership in the domain of belief and faith could be a prelude to looking into detailed issues. A significant development took place with the congregation of the Vatican II Council (1962-1965) where Abrahamic affiliation was first addressed and Islam was recognised as affiliated with Abraham.

Although Islam does not have a central body to pass strategic decisions, it is understood that Islamo-Christian relations tended to improve after the value issue was raised in the 1960-1970s. It was a big achievement, despite all the conferences that were held and that came up with various understandings of Abrahamic affiliations in addition to the political and religious aspects of the Palestinian Cause.

The Russians made a grave mistake with their military intervention in Afghanistan, which implicitly led to an undisclosed alliance between the Protestants, the Catholics and Muslims under the leadership of the United States to combat communism. All of a sudden, however, everything seemed to turn upside down with the emergence of the notion of 'Clash

of Civilisations’ and tendencies towards hegemony after the end of the Cold War. It was then that everyone, including Muslims, waited to agree on an Abrahamic value-based system and new world order.

The last two decades saw major events in all religions, particularly Christianity (Protestants), Islam and Judaism. Through such slogans as the ‘Green Danger’, ‘Clash of Civilisations’, ‘Risks of Fanaticism and Fundamentalism’, many Muslims started to believe that there is some overwhelming universal trend to combat Islam, considering it the new danger besetting the world after the end of communism and bipolarism. This was associated with talking about hegemony and unipolarism as the safeguard for world freedom and peace against ‘Islamic terrorism’, Western exception and Islamic exception. Then came Al-Qaeda’s attack on 11/9/2001 to further strengthen the premise that Islam poses a major danger to the world.

Even those wars that were launched to fight against terrorism were covered not only as combating violence that is perpetrated in the name of Islam, but also as a necessity to impose the values of tolerance, openness and democracy that are not prevalent among Muslims. Even those who did not talk about confrontation have accepted the Muslims’ call to meeting on common values and universal ethics. They have a clear understanding that both Abrahamic and non-Abrahamic religions possess such values. As for Muslims, they should develop such values by performing radical religious reform.

Afterwards, movements for Arab change were launched calling for the values and slogans of dignity, freedom, justice and democracy. Suddenly, then, all literature of conflict during the last two decades appeared. It also appeared that the desire for hegemony and strategies of conflict and attrition were the ones that had those tensions or pushed towards them. Perhaps those policies of conflict were the very ones that, for the last two decades led to the delay of change and peaceful transformation.

D. An Open Vision for a New World

Abu Al-Hasan Al-Amiri (381 AH) is a Muslim thinker who lived in the eleventh century AD. He explained, in his book *A'lam bimanakeb alislam* (*Telling about The Good Traits of Islam*) why Islam appealed to people and why they left their previous religions. Those religions used to divide people into classes and ranks, which is not acceptable for noble people.

This is the meaning of the call of Holy Qur'an to Muslims, Christians and Jews to refrain from taking themselves people as lords besides God. Their desire for hegemony and their practices have corrupted relationships among the followers of Abrahamic religions and also among all people in the world across the ages.

I read in such words the responsibilities of Muslims and Christians alike and their roles in corruption and corrupting, particularly taking into consideration that many of their scholars cite religion and morals to

justify this or that conduct. This is a source of interest and respect if taken into consideration seriously rather than taken for exploitation. The Holy Qur'an reiterates several ways the utterance 'Those who believe and do good deeds.'

Therefore, belief should always be an incentive for doing good works. It derives from a system of values including equality, freedom, dignity, compassion, peoples getting acquainted with each other and the public good. Through such a system, the five necessities cited by jurists on humanitarian issues will be protected. Those are: the right to live, the right to think, the right to religion, the right to reproduction and the right to possession.

One may say that there are no safeguards to apply to those necessities. They can further claim that the experience inside a nation and between nations proves that those necessities were often ignored either by people towards each other or by authorities towards people. This is the difference between religious and ethical responsibility and other civil and political responsibilities.

On the religious and ethical responsibility level, there are internal motives and commitments that make the deed good. These include intent, freedom, choice, conscious motive and goals. In fact, there was always a pressure on religious individuals in several trends. Therefore, nothing is

left through the experience except the 'narrow door' recalling the Prophet's tradition saying there will come a day when upholding Islam will become like catching fire coals. The religious or power institutions, however, are different from individual affairs.

Those parties tend to seek easiness and appearances. They choose hegemony as an easier path over values, ethical behaviour, responsibility, compassion and working for people. Max Weber, for example, says that the ethics of responsibility for a politician are difficult to pursue, and this is the difference between a senior statesman and an ordinary politician.

The historical experience in the relationship between the two major religions, Christianity and Islam, specifically during the last two decades in the domains of religion and politics, show that it is important to overcome hegemony and denial of the other through the promotion of acquiring allies and admission of religious and cultural pluralism. They also emphasise the recognition of political multipolarism through mutual recognition of rights and interests.

On the religious side, the problem was always relevant to belief in absolute reality and tended to deny the religion of the Other calling it a false religion. The Common Word advocated by the Holy Qur'an means recognition of the Other's religion and humanitarian existence and restraint from tending to annihilate others' religions. Political hegemony

has always meant a lack of respect for the rights and interests of others because of their vulnerability. The current movements for Arab change have now arisen to show how such exclusion has led to bitterness and a desire to die for the sake of aggrieved dignity.

What we recall now does not, however, rely on self-conviction alone. It also derives from balance, justice, an inability to continue to exist, going too far on the local or international levels because of increasing awareness and an overlap of unforeseen factors. Let us examine the experience of Christianity with Islam in modern times. We will find that Christianity must play an important role in becoming acquainted and the recognition of other religions. It has also a role in the Palestinian Cause, and safeguarding mutual living. This is not inclined on the principle of mutual benefits but on responsibility and witness, although interests allow for recognition even in religion.

The outcry of the Dalai Lama, which I mentioned before, shows it is necessary to criticise the self. It is a requirement that cannot be overlooked because it is the exit door for non-pluralistic despotic hegemony. It is the first safeguard of stability and balance. Major Asian powers have arisen, and it is no longer possible to ignore great powers such as China, India, Japan, Indonesia, Turkey or Brazil. This philosophy is not based on interest because old and contemporary experience is

telling us that unipolarism creates wars and leads to anarchism. There must be a new world that is multipolarised.

In 1971, [this book was published in 1971 not 1982] while the Vietnam War was flaring up, John Rawls published his book *The Theory of Justice* allowing him assume a more influential position than that of religious scholars in such a value-based issue. After hegemony, usurpation of power, attrition and the clash of civilisation, we, Muslims and Christians alike must work for the sake of belief and for the sake of righteous work towards the achievement of the value issue. This is important to overcome denial and hegemony on one hand and to start working on a new common enterprise between the two religions for the present and future of the world. This can be achieved through the following four points:

1. A careful study is needed to address the reasons of separation between Christians and Muslims in history and at the present time, despite agreement on belief and on the value system. Such a study will expose the desire for hegemony as the main reason that has always been a driving force behind that separation.

Therefore, a reform of relations at religious and strategic levels requires us to re-uphold the value system not only by Muslims and Christians but also by the whole world. Such values derive from

equality, dignity, freedom, compassion, justice, acquaintance, and public good. This is attested to in the Qur'an: 'Then, if they go far away, say: "Bear witness that we are Muslims."'

This means we need to insist on commitment to the system and its values even if the People of Scriptures fail to do so. However, commitment to refrain from seeking lordship in others besides God, hegemony and pride, if not getting the support of the powerful parties, will certainly appeal to those who suffered from hegemony and monopolisation of power as suffered by Muslims.

There will, therefore, be, in the mid-term, a coalition of civilisations, which should obtain the consensus when those practicing hegemony deem it impossible to proceed on their path alone. Insistence on leaving camps and hegemony arrangements is justified by looking carefully at the era of the Cold War and the last two decades. Advocates of the former Order (bipolarism) unanimously agreed on the prevention of freedom, while in the latter Order, advocates clung to the destructive unipolarism.

Hegemony failed, as did the Cold War order. Muslim nations, as any other nation, entered a new era to reject hegemony and spread familiarity, recognition, compassion and dignity. Such values spring from the Abrahamic religion that allows for sincerity, commitment,

bearing witness and proselytising among the followers of the Abrahamic creeds on the bases of such values. We need to read this truth critically and not lose hope in the possibilities of concordance on an equal footing if every side is to sincerely differentiate between hegemony and pride, on one hand and the belief in claiming absolute reality and exercising hegemony in its name on the other.

2. Insistence on differences, recognition, amicability and embarking on religious and ethical values is a rejection of hegemony, vulnerability and sway. This means a pluralist set of values in world strategic domain. The world has already suffered from the cons of hegemony in the name of religion, but has suffered even more from the cons of hegemony in the name of freedom, political righteousness, peacekeeping and stability.

Humanity has always aspired to the establishment of systems for human, religious and political freedom. It sought to establish such a universal order, whose partners are equal and cooperative, without any of them exercising hegemony on the other. What humanity strived for was a religious, cultural and political pluralism, which has been the aspiration of humanity since the end of World War II, which ended the reign of fascism. The promised order, as previously mentioned, was not based on bipolarism then unipolarism.

While calling for a religious pluralism, as required by our Abrahamic religion, we in the Muslim world cannot envisage peace, justice and stability except through pluralism in a world strategic domain. For the last two decades, we have seen the rise of big Asian powers and nations that had already suffered centuries of hegemony, vulnerability and colonisation. Therefore, our hopes and work should be geared towards a pluralism that involves all parties from all continents and ends bipolarism or unipolarism. This is something that we have experienced and suffered from, and there is a need for us to work according to ethics and religion.

3. We Muslims need a critical review of the work of our religious clerics and scholars. Division and pride prevailing everywhere has led to an erroneous understanding and characterisation, and sometimes to negative radicalism.

We need in this intra-Islam domain, and in the domain of relations with the followers of Abrahamic religions, a major review so that we are no longer dealing with old facts. We have to rethink the building of Islam and world scene, the relationships with the followers of Abrahamic religions and the relationship between state and religion without exclusion or exercising hegemony. As previously stated, all such issues were subject to division, hegemony or pride. A positive

approach, today, requires a positive vision because such an approach cannot be realised without a new vision.

4. Muslims form a great nation of traditional heritage and distinguished relations with others. However, during the last two centuries, our nation has suffered from regression and withdrawal to the extent that we have lost control of our relations with other Abrahamic religions and with our European neighbours. Muslim scholars and thinkers must contribute to the shaping of a vision on the world in the cultural sphere. We must proceed towards Asian nations, religions and cultures, and to Christian sects and new humanitarianism movements in Latin America. Needless to say, there is a history, but there are also great changes even with our Christian peers. And, we need understanding to correctly assess, deal with and build the right partnerships all over the world.

We are moving from hegemony and radicalism of division. We must start to deal with new realities with new visions and new methods either in terms of Muslim-Muslim relationships, Muslim-Christian relationships or relationships with the entire world. This new humanity has the keen desire to prove its human nature, dignity and freedom. We, Muslims and Christians, must be ready to receive that new era and be witnesses to it. Has not God said, 'O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one

another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you.' By getting to know each other, by recognising our differences and by setting up rules of integrity and righteousness, we will lay down new bases for a new world.

In a short time humanity has experienced all sorts of economic, political and ethical systems. Similarly we, the people of faiths, have experienced dialogue, discussion and convergence. However, what we see is that people's sufferings are continuing at an increasing rate. Thus, we need to rethink, correct and apply an unexploited economic exchange system, multipolar politics and ethical responsibility to humanity and dignity of man.