Interfaith Dialogue between Christianity and Islam
– the Role of Spiritual Paths –

Dr. Liana Trufas, Former Professor, Lecturer, University of Tsukuba

Introduction

With the hardening of fundamentalist movements and in the wake of dramatic events in recent years, the desire to avoid inter-religious conflict and to reach a better mutual understanding has made the need for a constructive interfaith dialogue between Christianity and Islam more urgent than ever.

Contrary to a widespread idea, the present tensions between Christianity and Islam do not derive primarily from pure religious reasons, nor come they from a supposed "clash of civilizations". One of their important sources is the fact that, besides the distaste for the manifest decadence of Western culture and mores that many people of all religions have, the Arabs and other Muslims have an additional ground for complaint. It is the fact that, ever since the beginning of the 20th century, large parts of the Islamic world are been subjected to certain major injustices of which the majority of people in the West are not even aware. It is this unawareness that is the main cause of the pain and bitterness throughout the Muslim world.

That is why to prevent the inter-religious conflicts and to heal the wounds caused by the fundamentalist movements of various stripes which have sickened our societies is not an easy task. From the standpoint which is our, that of academic studies, it seems that the only thing we can do is to contribute to the process of achieving a real and fruitful interfaith dialogue. There have already been many approaches, all of them valuable for their effort in finding a solution, and there will be surely many others.

In this paper I will suggest an approach to the interfaith-dialogue based on the notion of "religious diversity":

1. The stance on religious diversity in Christian and Islamic fundamental texts;

2. Two approaches to religious diversity in the philosophy of religion: John Hick and S.H. Nasr;

3. Christian and Islamic spiritual paths: means leading to a better attitude towards religious diversity

Before proceeding any further I have to clarify some notions.

Every religion makes the dual claim to be a vehicle of truth and a provider of a means of salvation; truth and a means of salvation are the defining characteristics of every religion. Were it no so, it would not be a religion, but a man-made ideology.

In considering this dual claim of religions, three stances or attitudes towards religious diversity have emerged in contemporary religious studies: pluralism, exclusivism and inclusivism. They can be roughly characterized as follows. A pluralist maintains that different religions provide an equally salvific path; an exclusivist claims that only his or her religion offers a true salvific path, while an inclusivist holds that salvation is also available in some degree in other religions, but that his or her own religion offers its highest form. However, each stance has variants which can differ significantly as regards their reasons for adopting it.

Now the notion of "religious diversity" or coexistence of a plurality of religions is neutral in itself. What matters is the attitude towards this diversity or the "others": their claims can be accepted or rejected. In the classification above, though for different reasons, "pluralism" and "inclusivism" accept them, while "exclusivism" rejects them.

1. The stance on religious diversity in Christian and Islamic fundamental texts

A. The Christian stance on other religions

(1) Statements interpretable in a pluralist sense:

1. Truly I perceive that God shows no partiality, and that anyone in every nation who fears Him, and does what is right, is acceptable [to Him]. (Peter, Acts 10:34-35)

2. In past ages God allowed all nations to go their own way. (Paul, Acts 14:16)

3. [There are among the Athenians a yearning for the] unknown God (Paul, Acts 17:23), [a search for God who] is not far from each one of us, for in Him we live and move and in Him exist. (Paul, Acts 17: 27-28)

4. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? (John 14:2)

(2) Statements interpreted in an exclusivist sense:

1. I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me. (John 14:6)

2. I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved. (John 10:9)

3. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. (Matt. 11:27)

4. Neither is there salvation in any other [name]: for there is none other name under heaven given among men [except Jesus' name], whereby we must be saved. (Peter, Acts 4:12)

Though the last statements (2) allow a non-exclusivist interpretation (see below), they have always been understood *ad litteram*. The Church resumed this exclusivist attitude in the famous dictum *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* ("there is no salvation outside the Church") (Saint Cyprian of Carthage, 3rd c.), which became a central tenet of the Catholic Church. And the poor harvest of statements on a possible pluralist attitude (1) was never really developed. Surely, in the primitive Church there were some timid attempts made by a few Church Fathers to interpret them in a vague pluralist sense. But unfortunately, from the same period to our days, the Christian theology was dominated by exclusivism: all people must be Christian if they are to be saved.

Let us look at some authoritative testimonies:

1. Let no man deceive himself. Outside this house, that is, outside the Church no one is saved. (Origen, d. 254, *In Iesu Nave homiliae*)

2. No man can find salvation except in the Catholic Church. Outside the Catholic Church one can have everything except salvation. (Saint Augustine, d. 430, *Sermo ad Caesariensis Ecclesia plebem*)

3. There is no entering into salvation outside the Church. (Saint Thomas Aquinas, d. 1274, *Summa Theologiae*)

4. Those who are outside Christianity, be they heathens, Turks, Jews or false Christians [i.e. Roman Catholics], although they may believe in only one true God, yet remain in eternal wrath and perdition. (Luther, d. 1546, *Large Catechism*)

5. We therefore challenge all non-Christians, who belong to God on the basis of creation, to believe in him [Jesus Christ] and to be baptized to in his name, for in him alone is eternal salvation promised to them. (*Frankfurt

Declaration, 1970)

From the quotations above, it is clear that in order to reach a real interfaith dialogue on the theological ground, the Christian Church must renounce the claim that Christianity is the sole true religion and that salvation is an exclusive prerogative of Christians.

B. The Islamic stance on other religions – the Quran

(1) Statements on pluralism:

(a) The universality and diversity of God's revelation:

1. The East and the West belong to God; wherever you turn, there is His Face. (2:115)

2. We sent a messenger to every nation [community], saying, 'Worship God and shun false gods.'(16:36)

3. We have sent other messengers before you – some We have mentioned to you and some We have not. (40:78)

4. [Believers] Say, 'We believe in God and in what was sent down to us and what was sent down to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes, and what was given to Moses, Jesus, and all the prophets by their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and we devote ourselves to Him'. (2:136)

5. We have never sent a messenger who did not use his own people's language to make things clear for them. (14:4)

6. We sent to you [Muhammad] the Scripture with the truth, confirming the Scriptures that came before it…We have assigned a law and a path to each of you. If God had so willed, He would have made you one community…you will return to God and He will make clear to you the matters you differed about. (5:48)

From the quotations above we can see that Islam explicitly endorses the universality of God's revelation. The God of the Quran is not only the God of Muslim people but the God of all humankind. He did not leave any nation in dark; rather he sent a messenger to all of them to assure the salvation of all people. Although God sent a messenger to every nation, he did not mention all of them in the Quran. Accordingly, Muslims receive a Quranic sanction which enables them to expand the Islamic notion of prophecy so that it could include those messengers who are not mentioned in the Quran, for instance Gautama the Buddha and the avatars of the Hindus. And although all the messengers spoke about the same reality and conveyed the same truth, the messages they delivered were not identical in their forms. Every message was expressed in the language and the form which would accord with the community to which it is revealed. (See Aslan, 188)

(b) There is no compulsion; rather there must be tolerance:

1. Say, 'Now the truth has come from your Lord: let those who wish to believe in it do so, and let those who wish to reject it do so.' (18:29)

2. Had your Lord willed, all the people on earth would have believed. So can you [Prophet] compel people to believe? (10:99)

3. Say, 'People of the Book, let us arrive at a statement that is common to us all: we worship God alone, we ascribe no partner to Him, and none of us takes others beside God as lords.' (3:64)

4.God will defend the believers…those who have been driven unjustly from their homes only for saying, 'Our Lord is God'. If God did not repel some people by means of others, many monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques, where God's name is much invoked, would have been destroyed. (22:38; 40)

5. So let the followers of the Gospel judge according to what God has sent down in it. (5:47)

6. [Believers], Say, 'We believe in what was revealed to us and in what was revealed to you; our God and your God is one [and the same]; we are devoted to Him.' (29:46)

(c) Requirements for salvation:

1. The [Muslim] believers, the Jews, the Christians, and the Sabians – all those who believe in God and the Last Day and do good – will have their rewards with their Lord. No fear for them, nor will they grieve. (2:62)

2. To whoever, male or female, does good deeds and has faith, We shell give a good life and reward them according to the best of their actions. (16:97)

(2) Statements interpretable in an exclusivist and inclusivist sense:

1. The [true] religion with Allah is Islam. (3:19)

2. Whoever seeks a religion other than Islam, it will never be accepted from him, and in the Hereafter he will be one of the losers. (3:85)

(*The Quran. A Modern English Version*, translated by Majid Fakhry, Garnet Publishing 1997)

These two verses are among the few verses in the Quran which seem to point to an exclusivist position: "for Allah, the only true religion is Islam". However, they are ambiguous and open to an exclusivit as well as a pluralist interpretation. As regards their interpretation there is also a problem with the translation of the Arabic word *Allāh*; it is not a proper noun, "Allah", "Islam's God", but a common nous, simply "God". But their ambiguity stems mainly from the significations of the word *islām* itself: it is not only a name given to a religion, but also the name of an act of complete submission to the will of God. In this sense, all of revealed religions can be called "Islam", and anyone who submits to the will of God can be called a "Muslim" (Quran 3:67, 2:128, 3:83).

So the two verses above can be, and are actually translated also in a pluralistic sense:

1. True Religion, in God's eyes, is *islām* [complete devotion to Him alone]. (3:19)

2. If anyone seeks a religion other than complete devotion to God [*islām*], it will not be accepted from him: he will be one of the losers in the Hereafter. (3:85)

(*The Qur'an, A new translation*, by M.A.S. Abdel Haleem, Oxford University Press, 2010)

As regards the same verses in the Japanese translations of the Quran, we have the following stances. Toshihiko Izutsu (Iwanami Shoten, 1957) translates *Allāh* by the proper noun "Allah" and *islām* by "submission to God's will", while Katsuji Fujimoto, Kousai Ban and Osamu Ikeda (Chuokoronshinsha, 2002), renders *islām* by "Islam", and *Allāh* by the common noun "God".

There is also a Quranic verse which can be interpreted in an inclusivist sense; it is the verse in which Muhammad is designated as "The Seal of the Prophets":

> Muhammad is God's Messenger and the Seal of the Prophets. (33:40)

This is generally understood in the sense that Muhammad was the last divine prophet of the present cycle of humanity, the first being Adam. But it is also understood in the sense that Muhammad achieved in himself all the perfections possessed by all previous prophets and, consequently, that the revelation he received from God – the Quran – gathers all other revelations in a synthetic whole. The inclusivist position implied by this latter interpretation was adopted by some Muslim scholars all along the history of Islam. But it seems that there is no explicit verse in the Quran that declares the abrogation of previously revealed religions; on the contrary, it recognizes all of them (5:48).

On the other hand, there are also many verses in the Quran in which Jews or Christians are criticized. But in such cases what is criticized is not Judaism or Christianity as religions, but individuals. Consequently, these verses can not be given as "proofs" for an exclusivist position.

I could resume this first part as follows:

1. For any interfaith dialogue between Christianity and Islam, on any ground and at any level, the knowledge of their tenets on religious diversity as expressed in their respective fundamental texts is a necessary prerequisite.

2. As long as the official Christian exclusivist position is not amended, an interfaith dialogue between Christianity and Islam at least on a theological ground seems very improbable. Obviously, such a dialogue can never have any serious meaning if there continues to lurk the idea that the non-Christian religions are all false and that what they claim to be their highest perfection is nothing but an illusion.

2. Two approaches to religious diversity in the philosophy of religion: John Hick and S.H. Nasr

What solutions for a better interfaith dialogue does the philosophy of religion offer us?

I think that, among the solutions suggested in the last decades, John Hick's theory of "religious pluralism" and Seyyed Hussein Nasr's "traditionalist approach" are the most representative.

A. Hick's theory of religious pluralism

The most important features of Hick's theory of religious pluralism can be summarized as follows:

Hick maintains that the exclusivist claims of religions (he generally considers only the major living traditions: Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism) have to be modified. Any exclusivist claim, and especially that of Christianity, cannot go hand in hand with the notion of universal salvation, a necessary premise for a pluralistic and conciliatory approach to religious diversity:

> We say as Christians that God is the God of universal love… that he wills the ultimate good and the salvation of all
>
> men. But we also say, traditionally, that the only way to salvation is the Christian way. And yet we know…that the

large majority of the human race who have lived and died up to the present moment have lived either before Christ or outside the borders of Christendom. Can we then accept the conclusion that the God of love who seeks to save all mankind has nevertheless ordained that men must be saved in such a way that only a small minority can in fact receive this salvation? (Hick, *Disputed Questions*, 172.)

Nor is inclusivism a solution. The solution, according to Hick, is only a "Copernican revolution" in theology. What does this notion mean? Hick says:

And the needed Copernican revolution in theology involves an equally radical transformation [as Copernican revolution in astronomy] in our conception of the universe of faiths and the place of our own religion in it. It involves a shift from the dogma that Christianity is at the centre to the realization that it is God who is at the centre, and that all the religions of mankind, including our own, serve and revolve around him. (Hick, *God and the Universe*, 130-131.)

These are impressive and persuasive words, but they do not tell us how the "radical transformation in our conception of the universe of faiths" must be understood, nor do they explain how could "the needed Copernican revolution" be brought about. To understand these points, we have to say a few words about Hick's stance on religion, this stance being the very foundation of his whole religious pluralism theory.

According to Hick, religion is mainly a human response to the transcendent or the "Real", not a divine revelation. It is a man-made construction, even if it is conceived as the result of a genuine "encounter with the Real" or "religious experience". This means that religious truth claims and doctrines are subjective in their essence; being human-products, they can be subject to more or less radical modifications. In other words, the truth claims of each religion do not originate from the Divine Reality (God, the Absolute, the One, the Ultimate, etc., depending on the religious tradition), but from each religion's self-determined decision. Consequently, they are open to modification: they can be amended and, if necessary, they must be.

It is this conclusion, based both on his understanding of the notion of religion and his sincere desire to reach a solution to the problem of religious diversity, which leads Hick to suggest a "Copernican revolution" in theology. For him, this "revolution" means that the theologians of our time must modify or even reject some of the truth claims and tenets of their respective religions, beginning with their exclusive claims. By doing so, they have to prepare the way leading to what Hick calls a "global theology", in other words a man-made "global religion" or "supra-religion". In this regard Hick states:

We must be prepared to respond to the new situation by beginning the long-term task of forming a global or human theology. It should be noted that a global theology would be compatible with the continued existence of a plurality of religions as concrete forms of religious life. (Hick, *God and the Universe*, 103.)

In other words, Hick thinks that, in order to reach a harmonious mutual acceptance and understanding between religions, the solution is a "global religion" superseding all traditional religions, suitable for and acceptable to all.

This kind of "global religion" can be realized, according to him, through the removal of boundaries between religions by modifying or renouncing those tenets which conflict with and upset the most others. The question is, would such a "global religion" really be compatible, as he claims, with the living religions? To give an

example, he asks Christian theology to renounce the dogma of Incarnation, of the divine origin of Jesus, and of Trinity. But it is highly improbable that this proposal could ever be endorsed, not only by theological authorities but by the common people as well. However, if there is a real need for an interfaith dialogue, it is not so much so in the theological field, but on the level of common people.

In my opinion, a realistic solution to the problem of religious diversity should not require religions to renounce their fundamental tenets, all the more if these tenets are supposed divinely revealed; rather, it should require them only to interpret them in a non-exclusivist sense.

In conclusion, though meant to eradicate the disputes between the different religious traditions and for this reason praiseworthy, Hick's very personal and rather utopian theory of religious pluralism seems to lead nowhere.

B. Nasr's traditionalist approach

Unlike Hick, Nasr's traditionalist approach to religious diversity is not so much a personal theory than a personal expression of what is called the "traditionalist school of thought". For this reason, first I will give a brief account of the most relevant features to religious diversity of this philosophical school of thought.

1. All traditional religions are divinely revealed. Consequently, their fundamental doctrines, including their truth claims – which can, but should not be interpreted exclusively –, must be respected as sacred. The problem is that these claims need to be properly interpreted.

2. The notion of "relative absolute". This notion means that the Divine Reality or the Absolute in itself alone is "absolute", and below it everything which is considered "divine" or "sacred" is "relatively absolute".

3. The principle of "transcendent unity of religions". According to this principle, each great revelation or traditional religion – with its corresponding way of worship – is a particular manifestation or the "providential clothing" of the Divine Reality for a particular sector of humanity in space and time. The unity of religions cannot be reached but in this Divine Reality of which they are different manifestations.

Precisely because it is transcendent, this unity does not reject any particular traditional religion. As an illustration of this point, in the traditionalist writings it is often given the metaphor of climbing a mountain.

Climbers can start from different positions at the foot of the mountain. From these positions, they must follow the particular path that will lead them to the top. One can, and even must believe in the efficacy of all the paths, but he is not able to follow two different paths at the same time. Eventually, all the paths meet at the summit, but only there. Likewise, the religions "meet", that is, reach their unity, only in the transcendent Divine Reality. (See William Stoddart, 68.)

To return to Nasr, it can be said that his approach to the problem of religious diversity consists mainly in the development, through clear explanations, of the above points. For him, what we must do first in order to reach a real interfaith dialogue is to properly understand and interpret the tenets of traditional revealed religions and by doing so to accept them without seeking to change or dispense with them.

A case in point is the statement which has the most given rise to the Christian exclusivist stance: "No one can come to the Father except through me" (John 14:6).

According to Nasr, these words aim to emphasize not so the uniqueness of Christianity but Christ's role as Mediator for the community to which he addresses. They mean that if anyone tries any other way, that is, tries to reach God through his or her own endeavor without his mediation, he or she could not reach the goal. In other words, such a warning was issued not to deny the authenticity of other religions, but to express the necessity of divine help in one's quest of salvation, to express the impossibility of a human endeavor to attain God without this help. *Mutatis mutandis*, the same interpretation applies in those cases in which such "exclusive" language is used in other traditional religions as well. (See Aslan, 207; 107.)

As regards the notion of "relatively absolute", Nasr thinks that it can be helpful for a pluralist approach. For instance, the Quran in the case of Islam and Jesus in the case of Christianity are considered "absolute" though they are not the Absolute in itself; they cannot be but "relatively absolute" realities. If a Christian sees the historical Jesus as God and holds this view in an absolute sense, this is perfectly understandable from a religious point of view, while metaphysically speaking this is "relatively absolute", since only the Divine Reality as such is above all relativity. (See Aslan, 165.)

According to Nasr, the solution to the problem of religious pluralism is the mutual recognition, by all traditional religions, of their "essential unity", while preserving their own identity and specificity within this "unity in diversity". But he emphasizes the fact that this unity of religions cannot be found at the level of their historical forms; it is above and beyond the external manifestations of religions. Unlike Hick's "global religion on Earth", it is a "transcendent unity of religions in Heaven". He writes:

> The unity of religions is to be found first and foremost in this Absolute which is at once Truth and Reality and the origin of revelations and of all truth… Only at the level of Absolute are the teachings of the religions the same. Below that level there are correspondences of the most profound order but not identity. The different religions are like so many languages speaking of that unique Truth as it manifests itself in different worlds according to its inner archetypal possibilities, but the syntax of these languages is not the same. Yet, because each religion comes from the Truth, everything in the religion in question which is revealed is sacred and must be respected and cherished while being elucidated rather than being discarded and reduced to insignificance in the name of some kind of abstract universality. (Nasr, *Knowledge*, 293.)

To substantiate the fact that the unity of religions is and cannot be but transcendent, Nasr often quotes the following verses of Ibn 'Arabī (1165-1240) and Rūmī, two of the greatest Sufis: (1207-1273):

> My heart has become capable of every form: it is a pasture for gazelles and a convent for Christian monks, and a temple for idols and the pilgrim's Kaa'ba, and the tables of the Torah and the book of the Quran. I follow the religion of Love: whatever way Love's camels take, that is my religion and my faith.
> (Ibn 'Arabī, *Tarjumān al-Ashwāq* XI, 13-15, translated by R. A. Nicholson, 67.)

> I am neither Christian nor Jew nor Parsi nor Muslim. I am neither of the East nor of the West, neither of the land nor of the sea... I have put aside duality and have seen that the two worlds are one. I seek the One, I know the One, I see the One, I invoke the One. He is the First, He is the Last, He is the Outward, He is the Inward."
> (Rūmī, *Selected Poems from the Dīvāni Shamsi Tabrīz*, edited and translated by R. A Nicholson, 125-127.)

The difference among creatures comes from the outward form; when one penetrates into the inner meaning there is peace. Oh marrow of existence! It is because of the point of view in question that there have come into being differences among the Muslim, Zoroastrian and Jew.   (Rūmī, quoted in Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Sufi Essays*, 123.)

At these, I would like to add some verses of Yunuf Emre (?- ca.1320), the great but little known Turkish Sufi poet:

We entered the house of realization, we witnessed the body.
The whirling skies, the many-layered earth, the seventy-thousand veils, we found in the body.
The night and the day, the planets, the words inscribed in the Holy Tablets, the hill that Moses climbed, the Temple, and Israfil's trumpet, we observed in the body.
Torah, Psalms, Gospel, Quran — what these books have to say, we found in the body.
(*The Drop that Became the Sea, Lyric Poems of Yunus Emre,* translated from Turkish by K. Helminsky and R. Algan, 20.)

Without doubt, all these verses support Nasr's interpretation of the "transcendent unity of religions". Religions "meet" only by "knowing the One", by knowing their "inner meaning" in God, at the summit of "spiritual realization".

However, the problem with such statements, born from the deepest mystical experiences, is that the people not accustomed to mystical language, that is the large majority, could receive them in two extreme ways. That is, either they would understand nothing at best, or they would consider them blasphemous at worst. So that the knowledge of such statements does not seem to be particularly helpful for an interfaith dialogue where it is the most needed: among the common people.

That is why there is a strong likelihood that Nasr's traditionalist approach will remain confined to a theoretical and academic level; there are indeed few people who could grasp such complex philosophical notions as "transcendent unity of religions" or difficult mystical language.

Nevertheless, I think that the traditionalist approach in itself could be a solution to the problem of religious diversity. It can accommodate the diversity of religions without upsetting the faithful. Considering all traditions as the different paths which lead to the same summit, it can strengthen the religious tolerance. It is also able to construct a framework in which a multi-cultural and multi-religious community could be united without dismissing particular values.

Only, in order to have a better chance to become actually a solution, I think that the stance of the traditionalist approach should be broadened by giving a greater place to ethical and moral aspects of religions, especially of their different spiritual paths.

3. Christian and Islamic spiritual paths: means leading to a better attitude towards religious diversity

I think that a reciprocal better knowledge of the spiritual paths of Christianity and Islam could really strengthen their interfaith dialogue. And here I do not think at the highest metaphysical and mystical

expressions of such spiritual paths. It would be of no avail to try to make better known the doctrines and the mystical outpourings of, let us say, Ibn 'Arabī or Eckhart in order to reach a better interfaith dialogue not in the clouds of academic world but on a large scale among the common people.

Fortunately, there are in the spiritual paths other aspects as well. And I think first and foremost at their ethical and moral aspects. It is they that could have a deep and direct impact on large categories of people, because before being Christian or Islamic, the ethical and moral principles are simply human. Besides this, these principles clothe themselves in particularly beautiful and impressive expressions. That is why I think that a better knowledge of such expressions could become a real means leading to a true much hoped for interfaith dialogue.

In order to substantiate my claim, I give bellow a number of quotations from texts belonging to spiritual paths from both Christianity and Islam. As these texts speak better than any comment, I will quote them at length.

A. Christianity

(1) Excerpts from *Apophthegmata Patrum* (*The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*)

1. Agathon said, 'I have never gone to sleep with a grievance against anyone, and, as far as I could, I have never let anyone to go sleep with a grievance against me.'

2. Abba Agathon was walking with his disciples. One of them, finding a small green pea on the road, said, 'Father, may I take it?' The old man, looking at him with astonishment, said, 'Was it you who put it there?' 'No,' replied the brother, 'How then,' continued the old man, 'can you take up something which you did not put down?'

3. Abba Ammonas said, 'I spent fourteen years in Scetis asking God night and day to grant me the victory over anger.'

4. Abba John the Dwarf said, 'When you are despised do not get angry; be at peace, do not render evil for evil. Do not pay attention to the faults of others.'

5. Abba Macarius said, 'If slander has become to you the same as praise, poverty as riches, deprivation as abundance, you will not die.'

6. Abba Paphnutius said, 'Do no evil to anyone, and do not judge anyone. Observe this and you will be saved.'

7. Abba Moses said, 'Do no harm to anyone, do not think anything bad in your heart towards anyone… Do not rail against anyone, but rather say, "God knows each one."'

8. Abba Xanthias said, 'A dog is better than I am, for he has love and he does not judge.'

(*Apophthegmata Patrum* (*The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*)

(2) Isaac the Syrian (7th century)
Sayings

1. The day you open your mouth to denigrate somebody, consider yourself as dead to God and empted of all your labors.

2. Be someone persecuted rather than become a persecutor.

3. Even if you are not a peacemaker, at least do not be a trouble-maker.

4. Prayer that is not accompanied by a good way of life is an eagle whose wings have been plucked.

(*The Wisdom of Saint Isaac the Syrian*, translated by Sebastian Brock, England, 1997)

The compassionate heart: Prayer for the World

What is a compassionate heart? It is a heart on fire for the whole creation, for humanity, for the birds, for the animals, for demons and for all that exists. At the recollection and at the sight of them such a person's eyes overflow with tears owing to the vehemence of the compassion which grips his heart; as a result of his deep mercy his heart shrinks and cannot bear to hear or look on any injury or the slightest suffering of anything in creation. This is why he constantly offers up prayers full of tears, even for the irrational animals and for the enemies of truth, even for those who harm him, so that they may be protected and find mercy.

(*Heart of Compassion: Daily Readings with St Isaac of Syria*)

B. Islam

(1) Sufi Sayings

1. Gnosis is the inability to find a single particle of anger or aggression within oneself. (Hasan al-Basrī, d. 728)

2. The sign of the friend of God is that he has three qualities: a generosity like that of the ocean, a compassion like that of the sun, and a humility like that of the earth. (Bastāmī, d 875)

3. Poverty is not complete until one likes giving more that receiving. (Haddād, d. 879)

4. A man will not be a Gnostic until he is like the earth which both the righteous and the sinner tread upon; like the clouds, which cast their shade upon all things, and like the rain, which irrigates and waters things, - regardless of whether it likes them or not. (Junayd, d. 910)

5. No one is a Sufi until he considers all humankind as his own family. (Shiblī, d.946)

(2) Sulamī (d. 1021) Spiritual Chivalry (*Futūwa*)

1. In your relationships, if you should encounter an insolent person, show understanding and forbearance; and if you should meet someone who does you harm, respond with forgiveness…Always leave room for peace and harmony. (4: introd.)

2. And do not let others know of your good actions… When good is told, there is no longer any good in it. (4:15)

3. You should not wait for a need to be expressed before you try to satisfy it; but from circumstances and signs you should discover needs among your brothers and help before being asked…
Anyone who claims to be on this path [of *futūwa*] must show three signs: total loyalty without fear, generosity without any demand or hope for praise, and the desire to give without being asked. (5: introd.)

4. Stay away from evil so that evil will stay away from you. (5:6)

5. One on the path [of *futūwa*] gives up all he possesses but never gives up his generosity. He gives without being asked, for he does not wish others to suffer the pain of asking. (5:11)

6. Be honest, loyal, and dependable; be generous; …do not listen to slander; wish to do good; be a good neighbor; speak well and be loyal to your word;… refrain from holding grudges and seeking vengeance; do not cheat or manipulate people, or criticize or talk against them… Do not expect appreciation or praise… serve your guests with your hands, and serve and give lovingly, not grudgingly… do not see the faults of others, keep secret their wrongdoings, and advise them only when no one can hear; pray for sinners and pardon their wrongdoings… and keep others' secrets…These are some of the signs of the ones who follow the path of *futūwa*. (5:14)

(Sulamī, *The Way of Sufi Chivalry*)

To conclude this paper, after the lecture of so many touching words, I will ask two questions I hope many others will ask too:

1. Could not such words unite Muslim and Christian, East and West, Heaven and Earth?

2. If, as it is said, each tree is known by its fruits, how could the trees which have brought out such marvelous fruits be bad?

Reference Books

1. *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*, Crossway, 2006.

2. *The Qur'an*; *A new translation*, by M.A.S. Abdel Haleem, Oxford University Press, 2010.

3. John HICK, *Disputed questions in theology and the philosophy of religion*, Macmillan, 1993.

4. John HICK, *God and the universe of faiths: essays in the philosophy of religion*, Macmillan, 1973.

5. William STODDART, *What Does Islam Mean in Today's World?*, World Wisdom, 2012.

6. Adnan ASLAN, *Religious Pluralism in Christian and Islamic Philosophy; The Thought of John Hick and Seyyed Hussein Nasr,* Routledge Curzon, 2004, Japan Library,1994.

7. Seyyed Hossein NASR, *Knowledge and the Sacred*, State University of New York Press, 1989.

8. Ibn 'ARABĪ, *Tarjumān al-Ashwāq* XI, 13-15, translated by R. A. Nicholson, Theosophical Publishing House, 1911.

9. RŪMĪ, *Selected Poems from the Dīvāni Shamsi Tabrīz*, edited and translated by R. A Nicholson, Curzon, 1898, 1999.

10. RŪMĪ, quoted in Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Sufi Essays*, ABC International, 1999.

11. Yunus EMRE, *The Drop that Became the Sea, Lyric Poems of Yunus Emre,* translated from Turkish by K. Helminsky and R. Algan, Boston & London: Threshold Books, 2000.

12. *Apophthegmata Patrum* (*The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*), translated by Benedicta Ward, London & Oxford: Mowbray, 1975,1983.

13. Saint ISAAC, *The Wisdom of Saint Isaac the Syrian*, translated by Sebastian Brock, England, 1997.

14. Saint ISAAC, *Heart of Compassion: Daily Readings with St Isaac of Syria*, Ed. by A. M. Allchin, translated by Sebastian Brock, London, 1989.

15. SULAMĪ, *The Way of Sufi Chivalry*, An interpretation by Tosun Bayrak al-Jerrahi, Inner Traditions International, 1983, 1991.

Interfaith Dialogue & "Harmony of Civilizations"

① Christian and Muslim playing *Cantigas de Santa Maria* by King Alfonso X
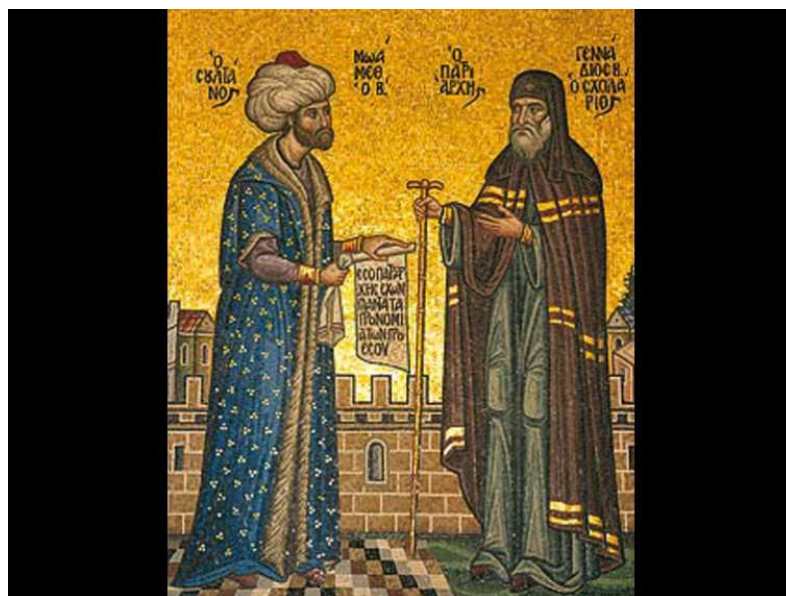
② "Interfaith Dialogue" between Christians, Muslims and Jews in Medieval Spain

③ Christian and Muslim playing Chess

④ Christian and Muslim practicing geometry, 15th century manuscript

⑤ In 1493, Mehmet II "the Conqueror" gives the first privileges to the Orthodox Patriarch, Gennadios Scholarios, saying: "Be Patriarch and have the privileges of those before you."
Mosaic in the Patriarchal Residence in Isrtanbul.