

Chapter Four

**Is The Meeting Of Civilizations a Dialogue
or a Conflict?**

Throughout the whole history, it was difficult to find a nation, or people who belong to only one race, or religion. Racial or religious purity is difficult among humans.

Man, is a social being that cannot live alone, because his numerous needs motivate him to mix with others surrounding him to exchange mutual benefits. The more his relations with others expand, the more secure he feels. However, such safety of human individuals can be threatened with feelings of love or hatred, or when racial, religious, or belief conflicts take place.

Human nature is an ambitious one, always seeking development and advance, this goes in an endless chain. Reaching a higher step of development, is an incentive that urges humans to work for a new and higher one.

In other words, continuous human efforts to reach new dimensions beneficial to humanity are by additions to civilization, also In co-operating other peoples within any civilization is an addition to it, and a means to spread it to the rest of mankind.

In that sense, human history never witnessed the so called unmixed civilization, but rather an interchange of human cultural heritage in all its literary, scientific, philosophical and artistic aspects.

Accordingly, the call for accepting the other is beneficial for all societies. In tracing back the roots of human civilizations, we shall find that Arabic /Islamic civilization was one of the most important, this same civilization benefited from other civilizations like ancient Egyptian, Indian, Chinese, and the Greco-Roman.

Many writings in Europe claim that Arabs were a mere only mimicking the Greek civilization with no basic civilization of their own, and that their present civilization, is itself a mirror image of that of the West. This point of view is indicating that it is obligatory for Arabs, and peoples of the orient to conform to Western life style, if ever they want to be civilized.

Though we accept the fact that Greek culture deeply affected the European renaissance during the middle ages, we still object to the idea that Greek intellect liberated Europe from the dark ages to achieve its major

renaissance. Conforming with the views of fair European historians, we can state that the European current cultural awareness current, was distanced from the Greek heritage, while very close to Arabic cultural sources, the sources that preserved Greek sciences, and developed them more, starting with the 12th century, whereupon, indications appeared in Europe, of a scientific, literary renaissance, with new characteristics, representing a blend of several previous civilizations, particularly the Arabic/Islamic one.

Regarding the allegations that our literature, science, language, traditions, way of life, and religion do not suit modern life and that we have to change to cope with the western life style, they are wrong. The truth is that Arab/Islamic civilization enlightened Europe during the dark middle ages and laid the bases and rules of modern civilization on which it built its renaissance.

This fact was assured by the orientalist *Nicholson* on saying that: "*Arabic scientific works in the middle ages were distinguished with precision and profound knowledge. Modern science derived its elements from them.*" . The orientalist *Gustave Lebon* also repeated many times that Europe is indebted to the Arabs for its civilization, and without them; the West would have remained in darkness.

We can finally say that people should assist each other to maintain civilizations and serve humanity at large regardless of origin, religion, race or color.

The mission of Islam was a global one, for the entire world integrating all the preceding holy messages that all aimed to orient man to goodness. Islam also respected all the prophets mentioned in the Quran as the branches of one tree, and they all aimed to reach the same goals: achieving love, peace, mercy, tolerance, among people, and call for a dialogue that enables people to be closer to each other, and able to exchange different viewpoints.

Accepting the other is a very human and civilized idea, if not spoiled by the desire for domination and authoritativeness. It can be the way to reach a dialogue, which gradually turns into mutual understanding of the other, and recognizing his culture, and religion.

Such an attitude must be adopted by the West, to acquire new ideals that can resolve the current civilization crisis, augmented by the collapse of ideologies, the end of the Cold War, and the fall of the two poles world system. It has to stop looking for an enemy and liquidating the other to spread a global, world system and replace this with the concept of conducting an actual dialogue between civilizations to achieve human welfare.

A true dialogue with the U.S.A and Europe is necessary to clarify all binding matters, and concentrate on the different concepts of terrorism along with the Arab/Muslim attitude that opposes violence. This will help to overcome the crises and the unsettled international circumstances, and to find opportunities for the meeting and interaction of civilizations, as well as continuing the mission of man on earth.

International understanding became, therefore, so necessary for all nations and peoples as a means to face problems. A common dialogue language among different cultures should exist, to be able to contain the morals of that dialogue, and its values.

Fukuyama - a Japanese American - was provoked by Western quest for a new enemy, and by the fragile social relations between people in Western communities, he wrote a book that gained a vast reputation.

In his book, *End of History, and the last man*, Fukuyama instigated thinkers of the world - with their different trends -, to hold cultural discussions on the world future, having in mind the advances in information technology, and the absolute superiority of Western civilization over any other existing ideologies and civilizations. His second book *The Great Choice*, recorded the shift to the first twentieth century with stress on human nature, rebuilding social systems, and emphasizing the great collapse of relations in progressed communities due to the information revolution. It aimed to reshape the social system, and reform the prevalent collapse of social and domestic relations.

Because of all that, the issue of civilizations' clash began to be more pressing, causing tension, and complications, particularly after *Samuel Huntington* - professor of politics in Harvard University - discussed the subject. He prepared a study on "*The Changing Security Environment and American Interest*" under the title of *The Clash of Civilizations*.

In his study, Huntington discussed the coming conflict after the fall of communism, the collapse of the polar duality, and the disappearance of ideological conflicts between the capitalist West and the Soviet Union. He indicated that civilizations' conflict would substitute the ideological clashes and other former forms of conflict. The research was published in the summer of 1993 in the most famous magazine for researches of foreign policy, which resulted in serious repercussions because he openly indicated that *Islam has become the major enemy of the West*. He expected a clash between them and attempted to put Islam in the position occupied before by the Soviet Union. Thus, he considers Muslims the new enemies of the Western world, due to some social, and economic differences, beside the incidence of some violent actions in Islamic world regions. Meanwhile, he indicated the necessity of the domination of Western civilization over other ones. His theory can be proved to be wrong in a very simple way, because it is built on a false concept of Islam, and other religions. He is ignorant of the plain obvious fact that Islam is a religion that calls for peace, and advocates for good, and continuous relations and dialogue among peoples, and nations and completely rejects disputes. In that sense, Islam is an important, and effective partner of globalization and in strong touch with different world countries.

It is noted that after the events of 11th of September in New York and Washington, the American society became aware of its points of weakness and therefore reacted in a nervous, confused way. The concept that Islam is the new enemy has become stronger, particularly after asserting that most of the persons involved in the attacks, were Muslims, or using Islam as a disguise to camouflage their intentions.

Some deliberately tried to draw a false image of Islam that completely differs from its true nature. Islam is distinguished with calling for kindness, tolerance, and deep understanding of the human soul with its motives and inclinations. Cries of agitation, and anger inciting for violence against all Muslims, became as incredible as considering every Muslim a terrorist, or at least a potential terrorist.

The most famous biased and ridiculous sound came from an Italian journalist, the so called *Oriana Falatchi*. Her book *Pride and Anger* is full of hatred, she attacks Islam in a prejudiced, disgraceful manner and calls for

a religious war against Muslims. Though an atheist herself, she uses religion to stir the public. She also denounces the sympathy of the Vatican with the Palestinians as a kind of support for Islam, the source of terrorism in her ill-opinion.

In that way, Islam enemies attempted to relate the phenomenon of terrorism with Islam, while the fact is that the essence and nature of Islam contradict completely all sorts of terrorism.

It is therefore necessary to break this ugly artificial bond between Islam and terrorism, and to emphasize the facts that Islam recognizes all holy religions and respects all prophets, and that Quran assures in many verses that religion should never be a cause of conflict. Still, it is wrong to combine terrorism and religions because they all religions are against killing and frightening peaceful people. Thus, terrorist actions are always inconsistent with any religion, logic, legislation or ration.

In order to settle matters, there are indeed, a number of problems facing the Arab world which are in need of a fair and just solution, particularly the Palestinian issue.

Terrorism should not be confused with legitimate struggle for liberation. The ongoing conflict between Islam and the West triggered the rising of fundamentalist movements, and call for hating the West; on the other side, there in the west are screams calling for the hatred of Islam. This conflict is of no benefit to either party. Both sides must co-exist and converse to create the suitable cultural atmosphere for accepting the other.

The world must move to face the hazard of what is called the conflict of civilizations, through spreading the culture of accepting the other, to build a better life for all, based on mutual recognition, appreciation, and co-operations among civilizations instead of their clash.

Understanding the motives of human societies, approaching all problems, primarily the Palestinian case, integrating civilizations for facing clashes among them and using all religions to spread tolerance, and mercy, and combat evil, can all help to achieve the same lofty goal.

There is an urgent need to activate civilizations' dialogue for the following reasons:

- 1) Eliminating the reason used by major forces like the *U.S.A* to rush to wars, or attacks under the pretext of fighting terrorism, especially after

the events of 11th September. War in our present days will be threatening with the annihilation of human civilization.

- 2) Clarifying the real image of Islam and the East, and correcting the wrong ideas about them, and face the biased propaganda against Islam and Muslims.
- 3) Approaching all civilizations with no particular focus on the *U.S.A* and Europe and attempting to find common concepts representing bridges to link Islam and the West.
- 4) Endeavoring to prove that no separate civilization can claim full responsibility towards the whole humanity, and absolute right to manage the world, especially that modern civilization is a collective one, established by the contributions of all human peoples.
- 5) Discussing the concept of globalization and the extent of its relation with the meetings of civilizations, the continuation of cultures and interaction with others, to prove that difference of civilizations must not be a source of panic, but of mutual exchange.

To sum up, the world now urgently needs a reasonable dialogue. Arabs and Muslims should participate in the modern civilizations' dialogue to reach new cultural concepts derived from national heritages, and coping with different cultures, with their positive orientations towards social and economic justice as well as political justice based on the right of self-determination. Certainly, what happened in Sept.2001 imposes upon us a degree of awareness and reconsideration of what we achieved so far, as some of our thinking about the future needs to be re-evaluated. New techniques in relations between states must be put in consideration; some of them concern prevalent cultural trends and the possibility of drafting a future cultural strategy, while others are concerned with the mechanisms of cultural work, beside the challenges they are facing after the latest events and means of suppressing them.

A balance between religious and worldly thinking should be attained, in order to have a new vision of the world away from radicalism and extremism.

We must also give great attention to our deeply - rooted Egyptian identity in a way that does not contradict in the least with our Arab and

Islamic national affiliation, also with causing no contradiction with the outer world as well. Such an attitude suits Egypt's unique location as the intersection of civilizations and cultures, and having a civilization able to assimilate, and to conduct a dialogue.

September events demonstrated the lack of inter-civilizations dialogue, and the pre-dominance of political concepts over that of civilization. It is, therefore, inevitable to know the fundamentals and origins of civilizations and co-operate to reconsider universal issues from a humanitarian perspective.

As U.S.A has finally realized the importance of having a dialogue with many peoples, the Islamic world must move to present itself, and change the form of this conflict from a political to a cultural one. Muslims also have to introduce themselves to the other parties in the proper form of Islamic religion that managed to establish a glorious civilization, which had positive interactions with all world civilizations and became an integral part of human civilization.

Aside from discussing the past, we should also look forward to what we can offer to humanity in the future. The coming stage is, thus, serious due to the current air of anxiety, tension, instability, and violence everywhere in the world; particularly after the events of September in the U.S.A.

We need an Arabic civilization initiative to fight the notion that every Arabic person is a potential terrorist, which is exaggerated, and promoted by Zionism. The image of Arabs in European mass media must be changed, to detach Islam from terrorism and stress its ability to build reasonable and constructive social relations.