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THE QURAN'S MATRIX OF INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

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Abstract

Islamic view of interfaith dialogue is radically different from modern secular approach. While the Quran invites religious other to share the burden of shared responsibility i.e., to develop a just world order, the theme and thrust of secular conception of interfaith dialogue is to oust religion from the business of state and society. However, to the Quran success [falah] or failure [khusran] lie in collective human endeavor i.e., moral solidarity of humanity to build just world order. The fulcrum of the Quran's narrative of interfaith dialogue is economic and democratic organization of world society based on grand ethical principle of Tawhid which demands relentless human egalitarianism smacking of no elitism. To the Quran the multi-religious world or diversity of religions despite their same origin is rooted in divine mystery so that they should *compete for goodness*. Secularism inspires self-narcissism which leads to lunatic economic competition hence, secular view of interfaith dialogue does not cede space to religion to shape socio-economic and political life of state and society. For Muslims, the basis of interfaith dialogue lie in how the Quran and the Prophet engaged Judaism and Christianity in his 23 years prophetic career, on what terms and what broader contours and principles for future it left as guiding principles. On the other, as modern secular West developed on the ashes of religion it is natural for it to dance about the calves of modernity i.e., secularism and nationalism etc. Its secular vision of interfaith dialogue is to diminish religion for secular materialistic ends. This paper explores the Sitz im Leben which shaped Western attitude to religion along with the Quran's normative discourse on interfaith dialogue.

INTRODUCTION:

Since the dawn of modernity religion is receiving the short end of the stick. As the modern West born out of its rebellious reaction against the church and medievalism, it was at the very outset destined to seal the fate of religion in Western hemisphere and the world at large after its assumption of global leadership. Three events, the Muslim exodus from Spain, the Edict of Expulsion between King Fernandez and Queen Isabela, and Columbus Expedition laid the foundation of European Renaissance or modern Western civilization[1]. These events led to the protestant reformation movement in Europe which culminated into Peace of Westphalia (1648) i.e., a subtle ploy to corner religion from socio-political and economic spheres. The thousand years' Church rule was deemed responsible for the long backwardness and subjugation of Europe and the ages of the sway of religion on Western minds were termed Dark Ages. The dawn of this reality must have forced them to examine the historical aberrations to separate normative Christianity from historical one but reactions seldom evoke response it assumes extreme position. It was religion that inspired solidarity and kept the unity of the Europe intact for centuries. However, divested of religious superstitions, now the mind of Europe was all set to venture into the realm of science hitherto terra incognita due to the overwhelming grip of Church-inspired myths about the laws of nature. Again, instead of seeking true adjustability and adaptability between religion and science the whole religion was swept away as myth of the bygone generations and condemned to oblivion. The development led to *scientific revolution* which paved the way for *Industrial Revolution.* In turn the Enlightenment Movement came on the back of scientific and industrial revolutions to establish the hegemony of reason against revelation to efface the remaining remnants of religion or at least to relegate religion to the private life for the establishment of human order under human reasons. Here, materialistic metaphysics with materialistic democracy as a system of governance run by positive law and with nationalism as its sole spiritual value i.e., semi-god takes definite shape.

As Descartes was one of the most effective mind behind European renaissance who established the superiority of reason in the conduct of socio-political affairs and almost all great minds of European renaissance concurred that reason can stand on its own, it struck a chord with the scientific temperament of European minds and was mistakenly construed as if Scripture/Revelation is no more needed to guide human affairs. However, what the French philosopher intended was "rejecting blind conformity to authority and proclaiming the right of reason, he prescribed the duty of everyone to yield only to real and irresistible evidence…in formulating this rule with such care for the method which admits only clear and distinct ideas, he has specified in the reflections that he does not intend to talk about things which concern faith or conduct, but about the speculative truth which can be realized only in natural light[2]". For he thought that Christianity "concerns itself with obscure things[3]". However, whatever weighed heavy on him was that in Western socio-scientific parlance God lost His logical relevance and to address the problem starkly and squarely

he raided the archives of his traditional religion to bring God in social reality on the principle of reason but to his utter despondence he found nothing except obscurantism. His unsettling mental problems and intellectual formulations have so similarities with al-Ghazali that had Ghazli's Ihya al-Uloom been translated in French before his "Mathematical Methods", it would have been termed pale copy or plagiarized version of al-Ihya-ul-Uloom. It might be an interesting quest to find that what led Ghazali to the affirmation of faith and what failed Descartes in his endeavor of affirming God. However, what is beyond doubt is that "while Descartes was trying to establish rationally God's existence which was in doubt, Sheikh Sirhindi [16th century Reformer of Islam in sub-continent] is attempting to establish the real existence of the world which was being doubted by the Sufic-Vedantic monism[4]". The monistic doctrine of the God-world identity in the over-spiritual east had rendered the reality of the world unintelligible, obscure, and meaningless or mere an illusion and Sheikh Ahmad emerged victorious to rescue the reality of the world from the iron-clad grip of traditional Sufism. At this juncture of history, the Western world had turned violent against spiritual past, and religion in Western hemisphere failed to prove the validity of God on the criterion of science i.e., irrefutable evidence which led the Europe to atheistic materialistic secular metaphysics.

Hence, modernity in the modern West came to be understood as departure from *mythos* (myths) to *logos* (rationalism) i.e., shift from religion to science[5]. What they forgot was that reason as a broader unit constitutes both perceptive and formulative faculties. The Arabic word Qalb expresses the symbiosis of the reason of the heart and mind. On the realm of adequate framework of reason perceptive (intuition) and formulative (purely intellectual) reasons organically involve each other and negation of the one implies the rejection of the other. "Say [God is] He Who has brought you into being, and has endowed you with hearing, and sight, and fuad i.e., Qalb yet how seldom are you grateful (67:23)". Herein, the faculty of hearing and seeing points to the tools of senses to be employed for empirical sciences and Fuad is a faculty of heart which points to the discernment of ultimate ends behind all natural phenomena. So, whereas the physical laws are to be discovered for beneficial ends, the moral laws are anchoring points. Man is not entitled "to make and unmake the moral law at his own convenience and for his own selfish and narrow ends[6]". Fuad is a faculty of heart or at best the faculty of faith. "The Quran, indeed, insists throughout that to read the signs correctly and to understand the Quran requires a mental-cum-spiritual attitude so that one may "really hear", "really see" and "really understand". For that matter, the signs do not become subjective for the Quran because many do not "see" them, any more than the sun becomes subjective because animals habituated to darkness cannot see it[7]". "How many a town have We destroyed because it did wrong [to itself]; it was laid waste with its roofs crumbling down to its very foundations, its defunct wells and its desolate castles hewn out of rocks and strengthened with lead. Have these people not travelled on the earth so that they might come to possess hearts wherewith they can understand or ears wherewith they can hear- for it is not [the physical] eyes that become blind but the hearts that are set in breasts (22:45-46)". In this scenario physical avenues of information i.e., ears and eyes remain intact- in fact, may improve vastly as efficiency of hearing and seeing is augmented by technological instruments- but the heart on which positive human nature is engraved becomes dull and fails to perceive and discern rightly. For this matter God has not left man all alone or to his own devices. He interacts with history through the minds of prophets. The Quran terms Revelation "Nur" which equips man with eyes of the heart to see his path.

So far this inner light was in constant supply the Muslims remained at the helm of global affairs. In the medieval era when the constituent elements of reason began to work in isolation speculative thought and mystic deliriums were the logical outcomes destined to seal the fate of Islam as a global power. In early normative community reason in fact was fusion of intuitive and scientific faculties but in medieval era scientific approach was abandoned in favor of intuitive or mystic faculty Now, the so called infallible kashf (intuition) reigns supreme in Islamic thought with pure intellect i.e., fallible reason on long leave. This development along with other factors drove a last nail in the coffin of positive knowledge in Islamic academy and was bound to lead the Muslim Asia and Africa to decline and its colonization by Western Imperialism.

Quite interestingly, exactly opposite happened in the West amidst its renaissance resurge. Being a true inheritor of Greek civilization it took pure intellect as holistic reality. They failed to accommodate pure intellect into reason as a mega unit working both as perceptive and formulative. So, they accepted Greek epistemology lock, stock, and barrel. The fall of Greece is attributed to the philosophers who failed to discover moral vectors which could orient their political dispensations to run the affairs rightly. To George Sarton their intellectual endeavors were "hopelessly out of proportions to their political wisdom and morality[8]". The fact is that the working of the gigantic machine of universe can be explained both by natural law and moral law. Science can sufficiently define nature as an automatic and autocratic phenomena without taking God into account. Similarly, moral law can define God without the involvement of science. Of course, God is the most hidden reality, nearest than the jugular vein and farthest than everything else. Religion was there when science had no existence. No doubt mystic religious experience has its "pitfalls and illusion just as the scientist who relies on sense-experience has his pitfalls and illusion. A careful study of his method, however, shows that he is not less alert than the scientist in the matter of eliminating the alloy of illusion from his experience[9]". However, the sui generis character of Islam lies in the fact that God of Islam is an Absolute Reality justified on the criteria both of religious experience and science for science and intuition organically involve each other and are two sides of the same reality i.e., reason. Reason is both intuitive and analytical. Its partial operations bring partial half-

glittering truths, only holistic approach leads to perfect reality. When reasons of the heart and reasons of the mind are in perfect harmony the most balanced point is reached and truth emerges as a complete reality which is beyond the approach of partial, truncated and piecemeal reason. However, intuitive and analytical reasons can work in isolation in their respective spheres the real test of man is to strike fusion between constituent elements of reason.

"This is precisely what Iqbal meant when he said that "aql (scientific reason) without Ishq (positive moral creativity) is a misguided devilish *exercise* (and he accused the West of patently indulging in it), while ishq without aql was not just sterile but even pure self-deception (and he particularly accuses the Muslims of having been guilty of it over the past few centuries) [10]". He says only the symbiosis of scientific reason and positive moral vision can help us to strike a just egalitarian social moral world order. For man is a torch-bearer of "Trust" to which the Quran refers when it says, " we offered this Trust to the heavens, the earth and the mountains but they declined to bear it and shrank back in fright, but man bore it-he is, indeed, aggressively foolhardy (30:72)". The tremendous immensity of the task here points to the fusion of intuitive and analytical reasons - combining of aql and ishq, metaphysics and social reality i.e., to take a scientific picture of the universe, conquer the laws and forces of nature "and then use this mastery, under the human moral initiative, to create a good world order[11]". This requires man's summoning up all reserves of his positive nature which in turn needs man's all-out endeavors termed Jihad in the Quran.

However, what transpired in West's re-birth was the triumph of science against religion. Reason lost its intuitive component i.e., moral eyes and ears, inner torch to direct its endeavors in proper constructive channels. Science emerged as God and whatever was beyond its scope and purview was subjective, futile and liable to be condemned as subjective, false and futile. They forgot "what is called science is not a single systematic view of Reality. It is a mass of sectional views of Reality- fragments of a total experience which cannot fit together. Natural science which deals with matter, with life, and with mind; but the moment you ask the question how matter, life and mind are mutually related, you begin to see the sectional character of the various sciences that deal with them, and the inability of these sciences, taken singly, to furnish a complete answer to your question. In fact, the various natural sciences are like so many vultures falling on the dead body of Nature, and each running away with a piece of its flesh. Nature as the subject of science is highly artificial affair, and this artificiality is the result of that selective process to which science must subject her in the interests of precision. The moment you put the subject of science in the total of human experience it begins to disclose a different character. Thus religion, which demands the whole of Reality, and for this reason must occupy a central place in any synthesis of all data of human experience, has no reason to be afraid of any sectional views of Reality. Natural science is by nature sectional, it cannot, if it is true to its nature and function, set up its theory as a complete view of Reality[12]".

Hence, West's obsession with truncated reason i.e., science which cannot see beyond sensory realm and offers sectional view of Reality led them to Peace of Westphalia (1648) where with the change of baton of command to pure reason the fate of religion as a social proposition to shape social life was sealed. Though it ended successfully the spells of Thirty Years War and Eighty Years Wars in Europe this might be termed a reaction rather than a response to the excesses committed in thousand years' church rule. From the womb of this treaty takes birth a concept of sovereign nation state with all powers vested in political authorities leaving not even an iota or fraction of power for religion to decide in whole range of socio-political affairs of the state. So, now the law and the constitution of the state was said to be developed by social dialectics alone without any reference to religion that was myth of bygone generations hence mere a relic of the past, for now reason can stand on its own, what they ,indeed, needed was human order with human reasons. With an intuitive faculty or moral perception an integral part of reason as a unit, thrown to the winds an analytical reason that deals with sensory realm i.e., science offers herself to call the shots in all spheres of life. Pretty different would have been the case had moral and spiritual sciences outpaced the science or at least continue to grow at a rate similar to that of the mechanical and biological sciences. However, clergy in Europe proved failed its task, science rushed to fill the vacuum.

The triumph of science over religion equipped philosophy with more reliable adequate framework of intellectual tools and techniques which in fact transformed epistemological structure. Thus, it gave rise to natural philosophy which "as Nature's great book, is written in mathematical language[13]". So, natural philosophy is what we "hear" and "see" with the ears and eyes of science. Hence, metaphysically exhausted West put all weights in the scales of analytical reason severed from its integral intuitive faculty. As earlier said, to the Quran it is the grand organic fusion of analytical and intuitive reason by whose joint venture man can "really hear", and "really see" and negation of one essentially implies the rejection of other. Partial reason or natural science's sectional view brings truncated view of Reality. However, thanks to excesses committed by the Church, the West stood all-intent to pursue the dictates of pure reason instead of blind conformity to religious authority. It was all-set to defy everything religious to opt for everything irreligious. The subtle ploy to serve this purpose was of course *secularism* - at face value separation of state and church, in depth negation of religion for it denies religion its role of shaping social life- though new in coinage of term still the most-trodden path of all old rebellious civilizations which through natural political processes met their tragic end. "When We wish to destroy a city [or a civilization-the term *qarya* in this context can mean a town like the prophet Shuaib's or a civilization like the Pharoah's] *We commands* its wealthy ones so they indulge in unrighteousness, and when it is

ripe for harvesting [literally: when the judgement upon it has matured", but the Quran- 11:100 and elsewhere- actually uses the metaphor of "harvesting a people"], We destroy it (17:16)".

Thus, the Peace of Westphalia not only ended the long wars between Catholicism and Protestant reformation movement but sealed the fate of religion as well in Western hemisphere. Religion was reduced to husk with bare minimum of rituals relegated to private life, at the realm of sociopolitical spheres positive law reigns supreme i.e., the parliament given carte blanche to decide socio-economic and political life of people without taking into account the moral dimensions and concerns. Secularism makes man law unto himself. A study of civilizations, nature and historical performance of man bears ample proof that shorn of morality man could be the most dangerous specie of our planet.

 Man is party to his affairs he can but seldom govern his affairs by the criteria of laws and judgements devised by himself. Reason and scripture harmoniously dictate us that while man is free to act, the criterion of judgement on his deeds must lie outside of him. The constitution of his psyche/self is a complex of desires when man bows to his instincts i.e., demands of lower life on the cost of the values or ends of higher life then means take the place of ends.. The Quran suggests "had it not been for an already-existing [evil] dispositions due to lusts, anger, superstition or fanciful ideas, these [satanic] insinuations would have had no effect whatsoever[14]". Among many alternatives the choice rests with man only when he tilts to evil devil enters the foray. Observation shows that when one is consistent in wrong behavior and persistently follows bad habits after a long habituation with typical interests he loses the capacity to discern what is holy and what is not. When by long habituation with vested interests man is rooted in evil or deep-set beneath the debris of self-interest, power, wealth, superstitions and fancies the rescue or excavation of his self or personality from the moral morass becomes almost next to impossible. When the Quran says "And even if We were to send down angels unto them, and if the dead were to speak them, and [even if] We were to assemble before them, face to face, all the things [that can prove the truth], they would still not believe unless God so willed (6:111)" or " yet even if [they should listen to] a [divine] discourse by which mountains could be moved, or the earth cleft asunder, or the dead made to speak-[they who are bent on denying the truth would still refuse to believe in it] (13:31)", it does not merely point to the secular religious, mercantile and political elites of Mecca, the immediate addressees of the Prophet but what it intends is to establish through their example that how deep-set in human psyche are the tentacles of extrinsic and immediate concerns. Endowed with complex constitution of personality, frail his being and hard his lot man has not been left to his own devices. Aided by revelation and apostles man finds God always as active co-worker in his initiatives whatsoever (92:5-11). However, "according to principle the moral values cannot be made and unmade by man at his own whim or conscience and should not be misused or abused for the sake of expediency[15]". For "it is not always easy for a person who works with the endlessly complicated twists and enmeshing folds of the materials of history, trying to bend it to a clear and long range course, to take decisions that are cut and dried; it is easy for an idealist to depreciate or ignore the complications of historical forces and to swim superficially on the surface, without bending history to a definite course at all; it is easier still for a non-idealist to get lost in the folds of historical forces and imagine short-sighted gains to be prodigious[16]". So, be it an average person, an idealist or non-idealist no one can direct history to a constructive channels unless the ethical moral dimensions are properly pursued. The tragedy of secular societies had been that "man appears incapable of wielding peace, prosperity and power; something impels him to commit one of the various forms of fasad fil-ard, so that he loses all these three- which are indeed, also the supreme object of his desires and priceless blessings of God[17]".

Now, after Peace of Westphalia with the wings of religion clipped positivism calls the shots in Europe's socio-political affairs. Scientific and industrial revolutions along-with Enlightenment movement deal a deadliest blow to the religion. The modernization and secularization which followed was nothing more or less than to clean the institutional frameworks from the remnants of religion. It aggressively seeped into all disciplines of knowledge and made strong inroads in the fields of psychology, sociology and history which play key-role in the reconstruction of societies and civilizations. Thus, all modern sciences both natural and social developed on the lines of secularism or at least were given secular dimensions. Philosophy which historically had been an arbiter of truth between science and religion was reduced to natural philosophy which   reduced itself to the parameters of scientific reason. Philosophy is a light-house for all disciplines, at each crucial juncture it knits together all data for an organic picture of the universe. When philosophy leaves disciplines to their own devices the inner integrity of the knowledge is lost. Take the case of modern sociology, social truth is what the majority of people come to feel and believe. History and anthropology with preconceived notions and purpose of atheistic materialistic secular metaphysics, for the most part, negate and reject religious bearings of primitive human civilizations just to establish that religion is not intrinsic to mankind, it born out of extrinsic exploitative concerns.

Capitalism and Communism being materialistic philosophies are two sides of the same coin with an only difference that while the former pays lip service to religion by relegating it to private affairs the latter rejects religion lock, stock, and barrel. However, both have an inherent aversion to religion for which they are prepared even to distort scientific facts and socio-historic data. Capitalism chooses subtle devices while Communism is blunt and straightforward. As natural sciences being a scientific truth cannot be refuted their orientation is administered in such way that suit secular ends. Therefore both harness scientific data for secular orientation and sometimes even modify the outcomes of science

to legitimize their ideologies and imperial interests. We know how Russian biologists were manipulated by Stalin to emphasize environmental influence on the cost of heredity .To justify the superiority of whites over non-whites French biologists asserted that the white man's brain cell is larger in size and better in quality than non-whites. To safely put, the edifice of brave new world i.e., secular world order was built on the ashes of religion. So, "When man's moral vision is narrowed and the transcendental dimension is gone, then, from the universally objective moral point of view, it is immaterial whether one worships oneself as God or one's society or nation as God (pace Emile Durkheim!). All particularizing of Truth, whether individually subjective or socially (by nation or sect) subjective, numbs moral faculties, and numbs them equally. It is a large price to pay for one's smallness[18]". For when man begins to live for day to day extrinsic and immediate concerns on the price of higher ends of life, with his moral eyes and ears gone he is seized and surrounded by utter materialism.

So, the secular world order which science built with half-dumb ears and half-blind eyes needed both irreligious and areligious values leaving no trace of religion whatsoever in sociopolitical order. Positivism invented secular values grounded in reason hence considered to be scientifically formulated truth with the overriding principle that reason can be refuted only with reason not faith whose locus is heart not mind, though "The heart has its reasons of which reason knows nothing [19]." Thus, with dazzling certainty science-inspired secular values assume steering wheel of modern world terming revelation to be a myth of bygone generations, hence a relic of the past. Although this vision sprouted from Western history and experience, still so dead cert of its scientific character   Western powers were that they deemed it necessary to impose and implement in the lands wherever they went even on the cost of native realities. So, "imperialism and epistemicide, observes de Sousa Santos, are part of the ineluctable trajectory of Western modernity[20]". This happened because dogma of science held the baton of command. It was quite natural in Western context for church had kept human reason hostage for almost a millennium. So, the triumph of science against religion was bound to eliminate the dumb heritage of church altogether. But, pretty different would have been the case had philosophy been allowed to flourish on its own terms. Its subservience to science robed of it its intuitive, intellectual reason and subjected it to diminution. Had it been allowed to retain intuitive faculty along with analytical reason it was quit probable that it would have secured balanced position of religion in socio-political affairs. However, reduced to naturalism philosophy stayed party with science. The fact is that "philosophy is a perennial intellectual need and has to be allowed to flourish both for its own sake and for the sake of other disciplines, since it inculcates a much-needed analytical-critical spirit and generates new ideas that become important intellectual tools for other sciences, not least for religion and theology[21]". But once deprived of intuitive reason philosophy with its lopsided vision was not in position to deal with the cause of religion justly when science calls the shots in human affairs.

 These are the Sitz im leben i.e., sociological, historical and psychological backdrop against which developed the rule of science with religion reduced to purely spiritual movement. William Montgomery Watt points out, "the recent Occidental conception of 'a purely spiritual movement' is exceptional. Throughout most of human history religion has been intimately involved in the whole life of man in society, and not least in his politics. Even the purely religious teaching of Jesus- as it is commonly regarded- is not without political relevance[22]". But, purely spiritual conception of religion in science-inspired world grew to the extent that it's any relevance to or bearing on the temporal world came to naught. So obsessed with this orientation Western mind is that as Islam directs the socio- economic life of its adherents so it is conceived as worldly in nature for it interferes in and orientates the socio-economic and political life of the community.

However, though excluded from sociopolitical realm, religion continued stoking wars of hate in Christian sects and in Asia and Africa was a force of resistance against colonialism, a permanent thorn in the flesh of science-inspired secular world order. So, against this background arose the need of interfaith dialogue as a two pronged strategy. At home, it was needed to counter sectarian hate, at foreign lands particularly Muslim Asia and Africa it was intended to mitigate the religion-inspired resistance against alien rule. The be-all-and-end-all of the secular idea of interfaith dialogue is to keep the religion out of socio-political life so that it could not hinder the progress of society and become challenger to secular materialistic metaphysics. Thus, secularism inspired Christian idea of interfaith dialogue is quite different from what the Quran puts in place to deal with other religious communities. The Secular world-view for economic profit turns everything into play, into entertainment, and the scale of meaning and values fades away this is what Umberto Eco calls the "carnivalization of life[23]". So, the interfaith dialogue which modern West expounds never does talk about the synthetic approach of multi-religious world to seek consensus on major moral values which all religions share but here religion works as body of dead-ideas only to distil economic political interests on its name without any reference to the moral values it offers. This is contrary to what the compact whole of Quranic enunciations directs us on the subject of interfaith dialogue.

To grasp the Quran's viewpoint of interfaith dialogue it is essential to know with what program in what sociological, historical and psychological settings Islam appeared, what stance it took against the prevalent human crisis of the Arabs and the world around, how it preached and dealt with its immediate arch-nemesis i.e., pagans of Mecca, Judaism and Christianity in 23 years of Muhammad's prophetic career, last but not the least how from 2nd to 4th century A.H with clarity of vision it met challenges successfully with its creative genius when it launched its world career out of Arabia. The field of Islamic studies is strewn with historical formulations and fundamentalist extremities- and no less

are the alloys of illusion which Orientalists knowingly and unknowingly superimposed and implanted onto Islam under whose impact secular Muslim modernists believe Islam to be a movement of Arab nationalism with secular outlook on life. In such a scenario Islam needs to be understood on its own terms i.e., from the entirety of the Quran and exemplary model of the Prophet. Only this approach can yield us its true spirit of interfaith dialogue.

Be it the nebulous form in which the Quran descended on a Blessed Night i.e. Night of Determination, in its entirety on the heart of the Prophet in the Cave of Hira or its differentiation i.e., how it unfolded in 23 years prophetic career of Muhammad, both insinuate that Islam emerged with the program of monotheism organically linked with socio-economic justice. So, "Islam appeared in moral necessity of destroying the corrupt socio-economic structures of Byzantium and Persia[24]". The vehement reaction which the prophet met in the first address to his people portrays enough that it was the pivotal core of his message i.e., socio-economic reform which hit their vested-interests, not the conception of one God for they were least bothered by the monotheism of Hanifs- certain Meccans who arrived the idea of monotheism having no bearing on socio-economic conditions. Polytheism was rooted in socio-economic disequilibrium of Meccan society, an outcome of social inequalities and economic disparities, hence different tribes and clans had devised idols suited to their socio-economic status and their idol worship was nothing more or less than the worship of their own desires. So in an ultimate analysis "The religion of the Arabs, which varied in strength and importance from locality to locality throughout the peninsula, was originally the worship of tribal symbols, which later became identified with certain forces of nature represented by numerous deities[25]", which to the Quran "were nothing but empty names for which God has bestowed no warrant from on high (53:23)".

So, polytheism and gross socio-economic injustice the two immediate acute problems before Islam were two sides of the same coin, as a corollary monotheism and socio-economic justice the two props of Islamic movement being a befitting response were also converse and obverse of the same coin which organically involve each other. An obvious fact is that "The interest of the Quran, indeed, centers not around God but on man, with whose guidance and conduct it is concerned. Although the Quran mentions God thousands of times, it tells us little about His nature. Indeed, the concept of God in the Quran is strictly functional; He has created universe and man with certain autonomous laws; He guides man and judges man[26]". "Belief in God is absolutely essential, of course, but not in order to entice us to pry into His nature, but in order to save and develop the integrity of human personality[27]". Thus the challenge which at the very outset the Prophet flung to the side of Meccans was not solely of theological nature but was of combining metaphysics and social reality- if God is one mankind is one. One God- one humanity paradigm requires socio-economic equilibrium which transpires into egalitarian moral social order. So, "when Muhammad began his prophetic career in Mecca in 610 C.E., a central part of his mission was social reform in terms of strengthening the socio-economically weak and depressed classes- the have-nots in general, orphans, women, slaves and so on in the prosperous, mercantile Meccan society. Both he himself and his opponents knew that social reform on this scale would require his assumption of political power, and there is no doubt that the source of a good part of the opposition to him came from this situation[28]". Too entrenched in their clannish pride and arrogance of wealth they were they feared that "recognizing Muhammad as an absolute religio-political head could involve rule by Banu Hashim, Short of recognizing him as the absolute as the absolute religio-political head, they offered him an effective share in the decision-making city council of Mecca, an offer which he refused. In his later years in Mecca (before emigration to Medina), the upper-class Meccan merchants offered to accept his faith provided he got rid of his poor and weak followers. The Quran condemned such offers and warned against them; he, of course, refused to accept them[29]". They did so because of their attitude rooted in vainglorious pride termed *jahiliyya* which is opposite of *hilm* (clemency or moderation). So, the biggest obstacle for them was their narcissistic attitude rooted in tribal pride and opulence and related vested interests not the discourse of the Quran against which they proved like terrified asses fleeing from a lion (74:50-51) or as if timbers [firmly] propped up (63:4). Otherwise, the glass-clear transparent moral program of the Quran landed straight into their hearts against which they were dazzled and defeated seeking refuge hither and thither to no avail. So obviously and vividly the Quran presents this vision that even the Western scholars of Islam, the product of Enlightenment movement seldom fail to attest it. The late H.A.R Gibb puts "but there was a darker side to the prosperity of Mecca. It displayed the familiar evils of a wealthy commercial society, extremes of wealth and poverty, an underworld of slaves and hirelings, social class barriers. It is clear from Muhammad's fervent denunciation of social injustice and fraud that this was one of the deep inner causes of his unsettlement….this deep-seated malaise of the Prophet, instead of issuing into a movement of social revolution was transformed into a religious movement under the impact of a vivid and immediate experience of unique God[30]". While this picture depicts the unmistakable reality that the upshot of Islamic movement was a social reform, the dichotomy of social and religious in the statement bears specious argument. it points that the religion turned into the movement of social reform or social reform took the form of religion . This is due to the Western scholar's long habituation with the particularized norms of Western modernity which under peculiar conditions Enlightenment movement brought forth and on which secularism with its dazzling exterior built its edifice. To the Quran, as earlier said, monotheism and social justice are integral to each other. "Muhammad's monotheism was, from the very beginning, linked up with a humanism and a sense of social and economic justice whose intensity is no less than the intensity of monotheistic idea, so that whoever carefully reads the early Revelations of the Prophet cannot escape the conclusion that the two must be regarded as expressions of the

same experience[31]". If one instead of placing too much emphasis on the discrete external events of his biography attends sufficiently to the inner vicissitudes of the Prophet, after the Call "the whole subsequent inner history of the Prophet is thus set between two limits, i.e., the frustration caused by the attitude of the Meccans, which was outside his control, and the endeavor to succeed, for it is a part of the Quranic doctrine that simply to deliver the Message, to suffer frustration and not to succeed, is immature spirituality[32]".

Now, with the monotheism based social reform in view, the Quran begins to address the Meccan pagans its immediate addressees along with Jewish and Christian communities with whom Meccans had entertained long encounters over the generations and whose ideas had made large scale penetrations in Mecca's social milieu though neither there were the considerable Jewish or Christian settlements in environs of Mecca nor their ideas have won the hearts of pagan Mecca. This invites us to understand the Sitz im leben which Islam appeared to address.

Abrahamic monotheism through the evolutionary process of history and the basic teachings of Judaism and Christianity having exhausted and outgrown the racial and territorial categories was all-set to launch its world career when Islam appeared in Arabia. In a perfect logical harmony to this sociological and historical backdrop the Quran asked Muhammad "Say O mankind! Verily, I am Apostle of God to all of you (7:158)". The statement that "We favored them [children of Israel] above all other people [of their time] (45:16; 2:47 etc.)" is meant to say at that time they were the only truly monotheistic community. "The Old Testament addresses itself only to the children of Israel, and even Jesus, whose message had a wider bearing, speaks of himself as sent only unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Mathew xv.24)". Hence, Judaism and Christianity at their advent were limited to racial and geographical boundaries due to evolutionary constraints though later Christianity assumed universal bearings. However, the Quran addressing Judaic-Christian tradition makes it crystal clear "beware of the Day when no human being in the least shall avail another, nor shall intercession be accepted from any of them, nor ransom taken from them, and none shall be succored (2:47)". "The taking of ransom here is an obvious allusion to the Christian doctrine of vicarious redemption as well as to the Jewish idea of "chosen people" " exempted from punishment. Thus, in response to the Biblical tradition corrupted and essential historical evolution   reached the God of the Quran deemed fit to address mankind as a whole irrespective of racial or territorial spheres. So Muhammad, on whom this message descended, is described in the Quran (21:107) as God's mercy and grace towards all the worlds and as "the Seal of all prophets (33:40)", i.e., the last of them. However, as God interacts with history through the minds of prophets hence psychological, sociological, and historical settings and social milieu wherein the Message of God reveals are of foremost concern.

Now, after the brief contrast of Sitz im leben against which Islam with its moral program appeared in 7th century Arabia and modern Western civilization with its areligious and most pertinently irreligious, so called anti-transcendentalist scientific secular world view, from 15th century onward assumed her career; we are in a better position to understand what approach both Islam and the modern West entertain towards interfaith dialogue. On this realm, both are deep-rooted in their respective tradition. Hence, the dictum "Render unto Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's" depicts enough that dichotomy of sacred and profane was deep-set in the very seeds and genesis of Christianity and as maintaining the equilibrium has ever proved hard task for every religion, a slippery pole indeed, hence in Christian tradition slippage to either extreme i.e., sacred or profane had been favorite pattern. Thanks to the Christian doctrine of atonement or vicarious redemption and Jewish election theory i.e., the chosen people of God, the Judaic-Christian West indulged in profane, worldly pursuits and pleasures at the cost of moral perils. Hence, render unto Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's first led Christianity to the dichotomy of sacred and profane, then amidst 15th century Western renaissance violent Protestant movement successfully secured break with its spiritual past i.e., European medievalism designating religion as a purely spiritual affair and in turn relegated the same to private life. This was what transpired in Peace of Westphalia (1648) wherefrom sprouted the concept of modern nation state and the twin doctrines of nationalism and secularism. Nationalism substituted God with secularism a doctrinal ploy to run the socio-political order i.e., human order under human reasons as the positive law has replaced the revelation. Here, being the true inheritor of Greeks the West to some extent adopted Hellenized idea of God- that God being a silent spectator is not in an intimate touch with history. This conception of God was poles apart from the God of Abrahamic family of religions particularly Quran's God which is strictly functional, saves and develops the integrity of human personality, Who is in an intimate touch and interacts with history through the minds of prophets, Who in poignant phrase of Ibn Taimiyya " Speaks and Acts". The God of the Quran bestows new sets of potentials on His creatures when existing are fully exhausted. Hence, Peace of Westphalia truly sealed the fate of God in Western hemisphere, so Nietzsche unwittingly rightly proclaimed that "God is dead" for the God Who does not direct and shape the socio-economic and political life of the People is really 'dead', not a sleepless living God, "ever on the watch (89:14)". Thus, the roots of "recent Occidental conception of 'purely spiritual movement'" which in the words of Montgomery Watt is unprecedented and exceptional could be traced in Peace of Westphalia, "otherwise throughout the most of human history religion has been intimately involved in the whole life of man, and not least in his politics". Hence, Western approach to interfaith dialogue is indebted to its native psychological, sociological and historical conditions obtaining. They conceived religion as anti-science, anti-progress and anti-reason phenomenon and rolled it back from sociopolitical sphere and everything religious was deemed antediluvian with secular materialistic metaphysics calling the shots. And as secular values were deemed scientifically calculated and inter-woven the West

thought it to be its cardinal duty to impose and implement the same on the world at large. So imperialism and epistemicide became integral part of Western secular modernity. Its orgiastic technological prowess and performances ensured its swift military conquests which extended its political domain from continent to continent while its epistemic endeavors distorted native intellectual traditions putting them to subaltern status to secure intellectual colonialism. However, despite its leave from socio-economic and political affairs religion was still a thorn in the flesh of capitalist West both at domestic and external fronts. Internally, though the state was saved from the intrusion of religion on socio-economic and political realms, on theological plane Christian sects were at loggerheads and daggers-drawn, at foreign front in the colonized world religion was a force of resistance hence the mercantile imperial West stood in need of interfaith dialogue to pacify sectarian mayhem at home and religious resistance at foreign fronts.

So, internally to counter sectarian strife for the broader cause of the unity of Christianity the West found panacea in "Ecumenism" a measure through which all Christian sects express solidarity with each other for interfaith harmony but religious other is seldom engaged for it revolves around Christian creed. Therefore, it thrashed and emphasized theological norms shared by all Christian churches to avoid sectarian rifts, frictions and conflicts on the realm of intra-faith dialogue. As religion was perceived as a pernicious divisive force and human division on national lines a sacred secular value so mantra of interfaith dialogue i.e., "a sort of an extended ecumenism" was initiated to mar freedom initiative inspired by religion in the colonized world. It was a dance around the golden calves of modernity i.e., nationalism and secularism to defy God which was dead in Western hemisphere. Mercantile West's marketing genius was at full play to build narrative against religion as a potent factor for mutual discord and civilizational and cultural decay for it had proved itself anti-progress, anti-reason and anti-science. Developed in the cast of secular education system and grown in secular judicial tradition native elites took the narrative as coming from the heavens. They took Western modernity a vantage point to judge native realities and failed to weave out home-grown world-view responsive to their own need and tradition.

Now, after having amply elaborated the broader contours and context against which Judaic-Cristian West's approach to religion developed and took definite and defined shape it is pertinent to see how the Quran treated its immediate adversaries i.e., Pagans, Christianity and Judaism on the realms of dialogue and battle-grounds. As history does not present, at the advent of Islam, any considerable Jew and Christian settlements in or around Mecca, it is self-evident that the immediate addressees of the Islam were pagans of Mecca who though like Jews and Christians were the descendants of Abraham yet Abrahamic monotheism had lost on them almost in its entirety. However, it does not mean that they were unaware of Judaic-Christian ideas or had no encounters with them. On the one end there was considerable Jew settlement in Medina which had some family or business ties with Meccan pagans and there were frequent visits between them on the other the Quran refers to Meccan's winter business trips to Syria and shores of India and summer trips to Rome of which they have become habitual and the centrality of Mecca to Pagan Arabs because of Kaba, all these contribute to their power, prosperity and peace. There were some Christian populations in peripheries of Arabian Peninsula and as Meccan trade caravans had the wide exposure of Christendom in the West and Persia in the East they had an ample awareness of Christianity as well as Zoroastrianism. As trade requires socio-economic security therefore not only the religion but the political situations of the lands they would visit were of utmost importance to the pagans. This all is evident from the Quranic account of their interests in political affairs of Persian and Byzantine empires.

However, the Quran also points that there was a religious ferment and some kind of Messianism in pagan Arabs. It was perhaps inspired by the Messianic hopes of the people of the book. Yet the pagan Arabs looked askance at the religious content and performance of Jews and Christians. The Quran points to it "Although these people (pagans) used to say, if only we had a Reminder from the ancients, we would be God's sincere servants, but they disbelieved in it [when it came] (37:178-70)". The situation points to their dissatisfaction with both paganism and Judaic-Christian ideas. In turn, some had come to an idea of monotheism whom the Quran terms Hanifs, some had converted to Christianity. However, a considerable bulk of pagan Arabs was desirous of new Arab prophet is beyond doubt. "And they swore with all their strength that if a warner should come to them, they would certainly be better guided than any other community, but when a warner did come to them, it increased them only in aversion (35:42)". In all probability they want to do better than earlier communities.

But as too much time had passed on earlier communities and the Message had been distorted yet the Quran elicited positive response from some of the adherents of Judaism and Christianity. "….those who have been given the Knowledge [Revelation] before it [the Quran], when it [the Quran] is recited to them, fall upon their faces in prostration. And they say, Glory be to Our Lord! Our Lord's promise has been fulfilled [in Muhammad]. And they fall upon their faces weeping and it increases them in God-fearing-ness (see17:107)". Furthermore, "Those to whom We have [already] given the Book know that [the Quran] has been sent down from your Lord in truth- so be not one of the doubters (6:115)". "Those to whom We have [already] given the Book, know it as they know their own sons- those who have lost their own souls because they would not believe [in the Quran] (6:20)". The Quran recurrently refers to these people as "people of Knowledge" "people of the Book", "People of Admonition" as witness to the truth of Muhammad's prophet-hood. Even amidst bitter opposition to Muhammad when his message hits a snag and he seemed to lose hope the Quran advises the Prophet to consult "the people who recite [previous] Book (10:94)".

Still, Jews and Christians prove as stubborn as Pagans themselves. Judaism despite its close cultural and religious affinities with Islam termed the pagan religion superior to Islam (4:51). Perhaps, along with evolutionary constraints rigid formalism of the Jews which developed the doctrine of "chosen people of God" to limit revelation to racial bounds and the liquidity of Christianity which on the basis of the doctrine of atonement had adopted laissez fair morality, were responsible for their adamant attitude towards the message of Islam.

As is evident from the initial impulse of the Quran which early Meccan Suras amply demonstrate, the socio-economic disequilibrium of society was the most immediate concern of Islam. The interplay of socio-economic injustice and polytheism played havoc with the lot of disenfranchised segments of that society with trichotomy of religious, political and mercantile elites calling shots in sociopolitical affairs. This issue was not limited only to Arabian Peninsula, Persia and Byzantium the center of world geography were immersed in same corrupt socio-economic structures. Islam had emerged to address the issue starkly and squarely. Hence, what culminated in Muhammad's mystic experience at Cave of Hira was One God- one humanity i.e., human egalitarian order based on monotheism-if God is one mankind is also one. This was a monotheism wrapped up in socio-economic justice to address the issues of economic injustice and polytheism of Meccan society and the world at large. This, without political power was a distant dream. His truthfulness and trustworthiness was established fact, opposition to his message was not based on the falsity or truth of his mission. Meccan Oligarchy's vested interest made them fierce enemy of Muhammad and his cause.

Thus, to avoid Muhammad's position as a leader and statesman, they offered everything they could but he responded even if you place sun on my right hand and moon on my left I will never compromise on the guide-lines of Revelation of which I am a torch-bearer.

Now, as the Prophet was asked by the Quran to proclaim himself to be an Apostle for all mankind (7:157), in addition to pagan Arabs, other religious communities and the world at large was his constituency i.e., addressee as Abrahamic monotheism having exhausted and outgrown racial and territorial boundaries was about to assume world career. So, initially the Quran and the Prophet both seemed insistent on absorbing Judaism and Christianity in the fold of Islam to materialize single universal religious community socially geared to strike just sociopolitical world moral order, all intent to strike genuine human egalitarianism. To see this task through, active goodwill and mutual cooperation (tawasi o taawun) of not only the adherents of Islam but the world at large is needed, that by other religious communities' entry into Islam.

The Prophet through unique mystic experience cultivated bond with earlier prophets and became their witness (28:45) and the stories of earlier prophets became revelation which bring out the real moral import of those tales in contradistinction to the additions and deletions made by followers of earlier prophets. On this premise the Prophet was of view that all prophets were truly sent by Allah with the same Message of Tawhid. All Scriptures gush forth from a same Source, which the Quran terms "the Mother of Books", "Preserved Tablet" and "The Hidden Book". Hence, Muhammad is made to declare "Say I believe in any and every Book that God has revealed (42:15)". So, the term "the Book" instead of particular Scripture is employed as a general term for revealed scriptures. Thus, the Prophet expects other communities to believe him, just as he and his followers believe in all other Scriptures.

Thus, it dawns on the Prophet if God is one and His Message is also one and fundamentally indivisible, surely mankind should be also one. Now, when his message confirms the veracity of earlier prophets and some of earlier communities rejoice and affirm him the Prophet seemed all-intent to integrate mankind on the principle of monotheism and thought multi-religion world could be transformed into a single-religion world on his own terms.. However, this was not going to be. This set the Prophet a theological problem of the first order. Despite "same origin" of Divine Message why communities differ so largely! As Divine guidance has come to all people it can never be an exclusive possession of any single community. On this premise the Quran "definitely regards mutually exclusive and mutually confronting religions as a form of polytheism. It sternly rejects Jewish election-ism and also castigates Christians for laying proprietary claims on truth. At the same time, it tells Muslims that if they turn their backs on the Divine Message "God will bring another people who will not be like you[33]"". Hence, proprietary claims of any community on Divine guidance point to the existence of many gods inspiring communities of their own liking is polytheism indeed.

Thus, to absorb the earlier communities (Christian, Jews and non-Semitic religions) into Islam the Quran terms them "People of the Book" without giving them identity as separate communities and the term "the Book" is employed in generic sense rather than specific scripture in a hope to strike single religious community. So these earlier communities are termed as "sects", "partisans", "hizbs" i.e., "groups" who broke away from straight-line of religion. These sects have deviated from the original straight path. Muhammad is true inheritor of earlier prophets so Arab pagans are wrong in idolatry and other communities in their schismatic character. So the Quran terms him "Hanif" i.e., true monotheist and his religion as the straight religion [al-Din al-qayyim] from which idol-worship and sectarianism are deviations par excellence (30:43; 30:30-32). Had the earlier monotheistic communities- people of the Book, kept this line straight there would not have been the sectarian splits. So to the Quran Hanif means not just a monotheist, but a rock-solid monotheist undeterred and unmoved by concerns whatsoever. So neither pagans nor Jews and Christian fall in this category. This definition of Hanif differentiates Muhammad even from those Meccans who logically arrived the conception of one God whom the Quran also terms hanifs whose monotheism was not linked with social reform. So, the pure monotheism was attributed to Abraham which developed against the cult of pagan deities (12:37-

40). So Abraham as an archetype monotheist is presented against the Meccan pagans towards the end of Meccan phase; the stories of earlier prophets except Abraham have ceased and Abraham is portrayed how he arrived at the idea of monotheism (6:79-82).

However, as the knowledge of the Prophet about earlier communities grew he found they were not only split up from straight line of religion there were inner fault-lines in them as well. To lead them back to the harbor, straight line of religion in early Meccan phase the Quran incessantly terms them "sects", "ahzab", and "groups" no identity of particular scripture and its adherents emerge. In the middle and late Meccan period the term "the Book" exclusively refers to the Book of Moses as forerunner of the Quran, the mention of Gospel appears only once in late Meccan period. It was at Mecca that the Prophet realized that his attempt to unify multiplicity of religions into one religious community was not going to materialize. This was a theological problem of first order which the Quran begins to treat well from Mecca till the end of his term at Medina.

So, Muhammad's disenchantment with earlier communities occurred at Mecca not Medina as Orientalists assert not by distorting actual facts but by the mistreatment of the facts. Snouk Hurgronji writes "in the beginning, Muhammad was convinced of bringing to the Arabs the same [Message] which Christian have received from Jesus and the Jews from Moses etc., and against the Arab pagans he confidently appealed to " the people of knowledge"…whom one has simply to ask in order to obtain confirmation of the truth of his teaching. [But] in Medina came the disillusionment; the people of the Book will not recognize him. He must, therefore, seek an authority for himself beyond their control, which at the same time does not contradict his own earlier Revelations. He, therefore, seizes upon the ancient Prophets whose communities cannot offer him opposition [i.e., whose communities are not there, or no longer there: like Abraham, Noah, etc.][34]". Such statements have become patriarchal legacy of Western Islamicists who attribute the origin of Islam to the Christian or Judaic sources though some like "Montgomery Watt, Maurice Gaudefroy-Demomlyness,and, above all, H.A.R Gibb, have convincingly argued that in its nativity Islam grew out of an Arab background, although in its formation and development there have been many important influxes from the Judeo-Christian tradition[35]".

As earlier said, Muhammad's disillusionment with Judaism and Christianity happened at Mecca not Medina and the Quran dissociated Abraham from Jews and Christians, claiming him exclusively for Islam for both have deviated from Abrahamic creed. To the Quran only the ideological followers of Noah and Abraham are their real progeny not the physical offspring (2:124). "We made his [Noah's] progeny to survive him (37:77)", refers not to his physical progeny but ideological followers for his son was denied as his family member and destroyed. On this premise Jews and Christians were dissociated from Abraham for both split up from straight line of Abrahamic creed.

At Medina, important developments do take place which is not a radical departure from initial impulse of the Quran as Western scholarship attempts to establish but a seamless continuation of the Prophet's religious orientation at Mecca. "A closer study of the Quran reveals, rather, a gradual development, a smooth transition where the later Meccan phase has basic affinities with the earlier Madinan phase; indeed one can see the latter in the former[36]".   In fact, Prophet's first address to his near ones had enticed their defensive instincts for he presented monotheism encapsulated in social justice. This was not mere a creed but a working formula of addressing the twin malaises of polytheism and socio-economic injustice since polytheism was a result of socio-economic disequilibrium. So his opponents knew from the very outset that this monotheism requires large scale social reform which without his assumption of political power was exercise in futile. So after the Call at Hira, the Quran puts upon the Prophet a burdensome call (73:5) of successfully executing the Message i.e., Applied Monotheism which in turn requires the establishment of Just Moral Social Order. Hence, emigration to Medina was not to leave Mecca for good, it was aimed to consolidate power at Medina to capture Mecca, economic hub and the Vatican City of Arabia since to launch Islam's career as a world religion control of Mecca was of utmost importance. So to state that at Medina seer in the Prophet recedes back and a statesman in him comes forward is hypocritical which without the distortion and mistreatment of the facts is impossible.

The Quran since the middle Meccan career had begun to address the theological problem of unifying the multiplicity of religions i.e., earlier communities into a single one religious community. Hence, mention of "the Book" which initially was a general term to denote the totality of divine Message begins to refer to the Book of Moses as forerunner of the Quran, Gospels appear in late Meccan phase only once though Moses, Jesus and other New Testament personalities are frequently referred with Quran as confirmer and preserver of earlier dispensations. The Meccan usages "sects", partisans and "parties" employed for earlier communities disappear in Medina and are replaced with the terms umma or collective term the "People of the Book" and each umma is acknowledged with its respective sharia law.

So after eighteen months of Hijra, the Muslim community was formally instituted at Medina with Jews and Christian recognized as separate communities when permission for jihad was enunciated. "[this is] the community of your forefather Abraham, who already named you Muslim before this; let the Messenger be a witness over you in this regard and let you be the witness over the mankind. So establish prayer, pay zakat and hold fast to God Who is your protector- what an excellent protector and what an excellent helper! (22:78)". About the same time the Quran declares Muslims as a "median community" against extremities of the Judaism and Christianity setting "the Muslims witnesses

to mankind and the Messenger be a witness over you (2:143)". They were categorized as "the best community produced for mankind who command good and forbid evil and believe in God (3:110; 3:104). Their task was to be, "those who, if we give them power on the earth, shall establish prayer, pay zakat, command good and forbid evil (22:41)".

Variety and multitude of religions despite the unity of their origin was theological problem which so persistently and painfully pressed itself on the Prophet's mind that the Quran deals well since the beginning of his awareness of the issue at Mecca until well into the last phase of his life at Medina. The Quran though recurrently deplores the splitting of religions from each other and their inner schisms still it holds that this diversity is rooted in Divine mystery since if God willed he could unite them on one path (2:213; 11:118; 10:19). The Quran here does not propound the idea of mythical "golden age" which anthropology on the line of Greek philosophy asserts that first of five Ages at the dawn of man's history was a mythical period of peace, prosperity and harmony among all things including gods, man and nature. The Quran here, to Muhammad Asad, points to the "relative homogeneity of instinctive perceptions and inclinations characteristic of man's primitive mentality and the primitive social order in which he lives those days. Since that homogeneity was based on a lack of intellectual and emotional differentiations rather than a conscious agreement among the members of human society, it was bound to disintegrate in the measure of man's subsequent development. As his thought-life became more and more complex, his emotional capacity and his individual needs, too, became more differentiated, conflicts of views and interests came to the fore, and mankind ceased to be "one single community" as regards their outlook on life and their moral valuations; and it was at this stage that divine guidance became necessary[Muhammad Asad, The Message of the Quran, p.46]". Hegel on the pattern of human birth wherein one seeks its anti to get united in the third (offspring) drew the development of human thought that there arises a thesis which had antithesis both struck synthesis which against becomes thesis so on and so forth. Hence, when the Quran terms man khaseem um-mubin (of disputative nature) here it does not refer to his mere disputative nature but his capacity to articulate the argument.

So, to the Quran due to man's capacity to articulate, argue and differ prophets' messages act as watersheds and divisive forces. Some accept while other reject and inner schisms emerge on interpretive plane. It lightens the furnace of wars among different religious communities and sects as well, however, the wars and conflicts bring moderation in viewpoints, new realities dawn and sobering thoughts develop. Through the same human capability laws governing the rise and fall of communities operate which bring some to power staying other's exit inevitable. For it is set in "heavenly Archetype" the "Mother of the Book", Hidden Book, the "Preserved Tablet" a single source from which all revealed messages emanate that ultimately "the righteous people [who are constructive i.e., on the right side of history] shall inherit the earth" (21:105). In nutshell to the shared legacy of all revealed books only constructive deeds seal one's triumph against others. Should a society ceased to be creative, constructive and forward looking and fail to respond the challenges it ossifies; it is God's Sunna that fossils do not survive for long: "We did them no injustice; it is they who did injustice to themselves (11:101; 16:33, etc.,)". The factors sealing the fate of communities might be many like socio-economic and political exploitation of the poor and subject classes; however, the weak and oppressed eventually inherit the earth as was the case of Jews vs Pharaoh (7:137); idolatry and permissiveness which lead to pernicious divisions and crass materialism also bring fall and destruction as happened with the People of Noah and Lot. However, most often civilizations met their ultimate decay and destruction through natural political processes "when We wish to destroy a city [or a civilization—the term qarya in this context can mean a town like the prophet Shuaib's or a civilization like the Pharaoh's] We command its wealthy ones so they indulge in unrighteousness, and when it is ripe for harvesting, We destroy it (17:16)". So, here destruction really means destruction of the right to exist. "When the Quran talks about the death of individuals like Pharaoh or Korah, it is basically talking about the self-destructiveness of a way of life, of a society, of a type of civilization[37]".

However, though many vices effect the fall of communities there are three cherished patterns which history takes amidst struggle of power among them. Firstly, when the rot sets in there is a successful reaction against it from within, more often had been the case that dynasties substituted by other dynastic rule or a group of reformers from within the community with the power of healthy response to the situation obtaining. Secondly, the inner conditions invite invaders and power is imposed from without and the new dispensation usually build the edifice of clean civilization with a fresh start. Thirdly, to the Quran though rarely yet certainly there is an essential gap, discontinuity between a decrepit and decayed civilization and its successor when the former had exhausted its potentials to the fullest getting ossified. In such a scenario instead of a ready-made and quick succession or a symbiosis of decadent and virile God cleans the slate and makes a new beginning with a sort of cognitive revolution in human psyche. Islam struck such gigantic epistemological change in intellectual-cum-behavioral patterns of man- a giant leap forward from deductive to inductive approach.

History is neither static nor cyclic; it is spiral, forward looking and turns its page at critical junctures through the competition between the communities for goodness and only those turn victor who are on the constructive/right side of history. "This phenomenon, which has certain inevitability about it (judging from the Quran), is on the whole good, although it involves a certain loss for mankind, since the very struggle brings fresh blood to the veins of an aging humanity- it is as though dead earth has quickened and blossomed once again. This struggle between good and evil,

fresh and stale, new and decrepit, between the vigor of moral youth and the dotage of senility, is of positive benefit, for it keeps the perennial moral values alive (22:40-44)[38]". It is recurrent theme of the Quran that prosperity prospers on healthy moralism. So long as a community preserves a keen perception of the Message, it prospers: "Whoever turns away from My reminder shall have a highly straightened life and on the Last Day We shall raise him up as blind (20:124)".

Hence, Taqwa i.e., balanced and constructive conduct is the standard whereby communities are judged in history. "If the people of the Book were to believe and develop taqwa, we would remove their evils, and cause them to enter the luxuriant gardens. If they were to establish the Torah, the Gospel, and what has been sent down to them from their Lord [the Quran], prosperity would be showered upon them [literally: they would have eaten], from above and from beneath them (5:64-66)". In the same vein pagans are being addressed "had the people of the towns [pagan Arabs of Mecca and elswhere] believed and developed taqwa, we would have opened up for them the blessings of the heavens and the earth (7:96)".

But the obduracy of Mecca and Taif was all-intent to foil the progress of Islam, and people of the Book were not ready even to resurrect the original impulse and élan vital of their own scriptures. However, as Islam had appeared against the cult of idolatry and as it won them they became the torch-bearer of Islam, the promise of showering blessing from above and beneath them came true ; they held the steering wheel of history for about a millennium; Judaism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism, Buddhism etc., suffered reverses as per their belief and conduct. So, though in last Meccan phase pagan Arabs and the People of the Book showed no signs of turning to Islam, aided and abetted each other to nip Islam in the bud and flung challenges of immense magnitude to the side of the Prophet, but "despite frustrations, however, and despite the Quranic protestation that he was only a warner, Muhammad neither really lost the hope of success nor, indeed, the dire and stark realization that he was duty bound to succeed[39]". Hence, after a negative response of Taif though his movement seemed to reach deadlock yet to the Quran itself Medina flung its doors wide open for Islam accepting the prophet as political religious head.

So emigration to Medina was not a sudden flight rather a two year's well-considered and deliberated plan. Nor it was a move of psychologically defeated or rejected and helplessly desperate person for the conversion of Umar and Hamza had strengthened Islam so much that "they were able to compete with or withstand the Quresh in power [azzu Qureshan][40]"; "in his second meeting at the Aqaba before hijra the prophet was accompanied by his uncle Abbas, who was not then Muslim but who told the Medenise that Muhammad and his cause were being entrusted to them for aid and were not being surrendered to them, since Muhammad had enough protection at Mecca[41]". Moreover, the Quran's command for retaliation with emphasis on forbearance and patience still a better choice endorses that the Prophet was of a view that, if some elements from outside support him, he could secure Mecca for Islam which was a master plan of his strategy. Muhammad had too moral prestige and statesman like ability to be invited by the Medenese as their religio-political head for people never choose leaders out of pity for them.

At Medina, the Quran proclaimed the Muslims a separate community in connection with three events: incumbency of pilgrimage, declaration of the duty of Jihad and change of Qibla from Jerusalem to Kaba. This is because at Medina the terms "sects", Hizb", "groups", "partisans" are dropped and identities of Jew and Christian communities along with Muslims begin to emerge. On change of Qibla the Quran unreservedly said "it is no virtue that you turn your faces east and west [in prayer]. Virtuous are they who believe in God, the Last Day, the angels, the Book [in generic sense, i.e., all Revealed Books], the prophets, who give of their wealth- despite their love for it—to needy kinsmen, orphans, the poor, the wayfarer, those who ask for financial help and for ransoming war captives, who establish prayers, pay zakat, fulfil their pacts when they make them, are steadfast in hardship, adversity and war- these are the true [believers] (2:177)". The virtues like "commanding good", "forbidding evil", "establishing prayer", and "paying zakat" become leitmotif of the Quran and task of the Muslim community. Thus, in turn the Quran asked Muslims to establish just order for elimination of social inequalities, economic disparities and corruption from the earth. So, socioeconomic equilibrium based on monotheism was the be-all-and-end-all of Muhammad's applied monotheism. Jihad was declared a cardinal duty for the execution of the task, first time at Medina (22:41). In fact, monotheism as a creed seldom invoked fierce opposition, it was its excessive emphasis on socio-economic justice which earned the wrath of Meccan polytheists since it was all-intent to interfere in and shape social life on its own terms.

It was the solidification and recognition of Jews and Christians as distinct communities which led to the announcement of Muslims as a separate community. Now, as earlier said, the Quran termed the just filial and racial links with Jesus, Moses and Abraham insufficient to qualify as genuine followers of them. "When God tested Abraham by some words and he [Abraham] fulfilled them, God said [to Abraham], I am going to make you a leader of men. What about my progeny? Asked Abraham; He [God] replied, My promise does not extend to the unjust ones (2:124)". On this premise the clement Abraham said "He who follows me is truly of me and as for him who disobeys me You are, verily, Much Forgiving, a Dispenser of Grace (14:36)". When Noah pleaded mercy for his son in the hereafter after he drowned he was denied as family member on ideological grounds. "We made his progeny to survive him (37:77)" points to Noah's ideological followers not a physical progeny.

The Quran rejected the proprietary claims of Jews and Christians over guidance. "The Jews say, The Christians have nothing to stand on, and the Christians say, The Jews have nothing to stand on- while both recite the same Book

(2:113)". "They say, No one shall enter the paradise except those who are Jews or Christians- these are their wishful thoughts (2:111)"; "Jews and Christians will never be pleased with you [O Muhammad] unless you follow their religion; say [to them] the guidance of God [not of Jews or Christians] is the guidance (2:120)". However, despite rejection of exclusivist claims of Jews and Christians over guidance the Quran repeatedly recognizes universal goodness and good people in other communities- Jews, Christians and Sabaeans – just as it acknowledges the people of faith in Islam: "Those who believe [Muslims], the Jews, Christians, and Sabaeans- whoever believe in God and the Last Day and do good deeds, they shall have their rewards from their Lord, shall have nothing to fear, nor shall they come to grief (2:62; 5:69)". From it some commentators deduce that Islam does not mean a particular group of people but belief in God, Day of Judgement and to do good deeds which have been the common agenda of all prophets. However, majority of medieval commentators like Jews and Christians endeavor to establish Muslim's exclusive claims on guidance and salvation. They either say the Jews, Christians etc., mentioned here are the people who turned to Islam even though Muslims constitute the first of the four categories or claim that here those Jews and Christians are meant who died before the advent of Islam. This is also wrong for the Quran rejects proprietary and exclusivist claims of Jews and Christians on guidance. In 2:62; 5:69, however, to Muhammad Asad "with a breadth of vision unparalleled in any other religious faith, Islam made the "idea of salvation" conditional upon three elements only: belief in God, Day of Judgement, and righteous action[42]".

The tenor of the Quran insinuates that there is divine mystery in multi-religious world: "And We have sent down to you the Book in truth, confirming the Book that existed already before it and protecting it…For each one of you [several communities] We have appointed a Law and a Way of Conduct[while the essence of religion is identical]. If God had so willed, He would have made all of you one community, but [He has not done so] that He may test you in what he has given you; *so compete in goodness.* To God shall you all return and He will tell you [the truth] about what you have been disputing (5:48)". So the positive value of multi-religious world, then, is that they may compete with each other in goodness. It is the element of universal goodness that keeps its capitals changing from East to west and vice versa. No one is the chosen community of God. Supreme importance is attached to Laws of God. Muslims are warned that they are not indispensable if they turn back from the responsibility God will bring other community. It is universal goodness that brings communities on the steering wheel of history and when they emptied out the goodness from conscience and actual affairs of life, cease to be creative and forward looking, begin to spread corruption on earth are replaced and substituted by others. This is not an easy-going process, struggle among communities for power entails wars and loss of blood, and however, it is on the whole of positive benefit for the very struggle keeps the moral vigor alive.

From the beginning of his prophetic career Muhammad was convinced that his message was a continuation or, indeed, revival of earlier prophets, as an early Meccan Sura points to the scrolls of Abraham and Moses (87:19). Islam adopted some of Judaic-Christian ideas and criticized their distortions, however, in its fundamental impulse and nativity it grew out of Arab backdrops. Jew scholars assert had there not been the Prophet' bitter experience with Jews at Medina Mecca would have attained 2nd position to Jerusalem. The Quran terms Palestine a "blessed land" more than once and there is Judaic content in the Quran on purely theological realm and Moses is most frequently quoted in the Quran but it is far from any doubt that Islam grew against polytheism. The Pagan Arabs were not content with the Judaic-Christian content and wanted to excel them by fresh revealed religion. They were Abraham's blood and Kaba had centrality in Arab milieu. If Jerusalem had ab initio had such paramount position in Islam it could have been religiously dissociated from Jews and Christians as were the personalities of Abraham etc., dissociated from them. Similar are the claims of Christian scholars, to them had well articulate sophisticated instead of raw idea of trinity been presented to the Prophet he might not have rejected it. Our stand is that the idea of Meccan polytheism was not really crude and grossly physical. Moreover, as Islam expanded westward at the expense of Christendom, some Christian scholars say had Muhammad not entertained political motivation he would embrace Christianity as his religion. The Quran had accepted Jesus as prophet, however, the Quran very early at Mecca had refuted Christian's claims of Trinity and Divinity of Jesus (Sura 9)

However, at Medina despite recognition of Judaism and Christianity as separate communities the Quran kept them inviting to Islam well until the end on its own terms. But this solidification of separate communities resolved the theological problem of first order i.e., One God-one humanity which had tormented the Prophet's mind since the middle of Meccan period when he came to know that these early communities are beset with schismatic character not only from without but from within as well. So soon after the announcement of Muslims as a separate community in connection with three events i.e., incumbency of Hajj, promulgation of Jihad as a cardinal duty and change of Qibla from Jerusalem to Kaba, the Quran begins to talk about *Umma* and its *task* and *function,* since all these three are closely related and have a direct bearing on community's life and constitution.

The Quran deals with the task, function and inner constitution of the Muslim community with scientific precision and accuracy without leaving an iota of doubt or any shred of ambiguity in them. For it is the real sense of these terms which distinguishes Islam from earlier communities, defines its terms of engagement with them, and in sharp contradistinction to them presents its own peculiar idea of salvation in contravention to ecumenism. From this we can

discern Quran's matrix of interfaith dialogue which distinguishes it from prevalent secular conception of interfaith dialogue and harmony.

On the establishment of Muslim community (22:78), about the same time the Quran defines its function: "And even so have We appointed you as a median community that you may be **witness over men** i.e., mediate their extreme positions and balance these out (2:142)". The term "witness" here points to the two sides of the balance to weigh something justly, thus the Muslims are the scale whereby extremities are to be found and they are also the modifiers whereby those extremes are to be balanced. To find the extremes is diagnostic process while balancing them is an operational work. "What the Quran has immediately in mind is the middle position or balancing effect of the Muslim community as between the immobility or rigidity of Jewish particularism on the one hand and the excessively "accommodating" nature of Christianity on the other. But, of course, this immediate objective of the Quran can and must be extended by the principle of *qiyas* to other extremes, for example, that between Communism and Capitalism[43]" .This mediation or balancing the extremes is not a one-off enterprise as man's nature is unstable (70:19-21), weak (4:28); he is excessively foolhardy and unjust one (33:72), so oscillates between two extremes. As arriving the mean position of two extremes is not to be a mean but middle of the two extremes is a position which the Quran terms taqwa i.e., balanced conduct the most cherished and recurrent theme which the Quran intends to inculcate in its adherents. History amply demonstrates that men, communities and civilizations most often go from one extreme to another prophets and reformers come to collapse the extremes into middle position. Hence, the Quran presents the instrument of taqwa whereby the Muslims are charged to redeem the balance of history. What the immediate addressees of the Quran i.e., Arab pagans, Jews and Christians lacked they could not developed taqwa. Hence, the function of Muslim community was to diagnose their extremes and smooth them out.

 Specifying the function of Muslim community the Quran delineates their task entailing endeavors and dangers in crystal clear terms. This task, the Quran says is not exclusive responsibility of the Muslim community but of mankind in general. For "at creation God set a challenge for mankind: to create a just society, a society in which the equality all people share in the eyes of God would be reflected in the socio-economic and political order. Failure to meet that challenge would mean the failure of humanity[44]". This is what the Quran says in verse 33:72; it is an inherent duty of man (7:172) which he has not fulfilled yet (80:23). So gigantic, huge and immense this task is that in the middle of Medina career of the Prophet the Quran says "had we sent down this Quran i.e., devolved duty of establishing moral social order upon a mountain you would see it humbling itself, breaking asunder by the fear of failing before God (59:21)". This, indeed, was the responsibility which amidst creation heavens despite their height earth despite its vast expanse, and mountains despite their firmness frightened and shrank back to take on (33:72).

The Quran states the task of Muslim community in concrete scientific terms, "Those (are Muslims) who, when We give them power on the earth, shall establish prayers, pay zakat, command good and prohibit evil- and to God belongs the end of the affairs (22:40)". Since the community has a solid and sound function of balancing out the extremes of the world around it, it has been characterized as the "best community ever produced for the mankind for you command good and forbid evil, and you believe in God (3:110)". So, the fundamental objective of the Muslim community is to strike an **egalitarian moral social world order** based on **applied monotheism**. From 2:142; 22:40; 3:110 transpires that the task of establishing social moral order and function of the community as a "witness" over mankind are interwoven, interdependent and having a symbiotic relationship are indispensable to each other and neither is possible without other. However, the verses cited above talk about the role of Muslim community in the world at large rather than internal constitution or structure of the community.

So far as the internal constitution and working relationship of the Muslim community goes the cohesiveness and solidarity of the Muslims are of paramount importance. The Quran instead of passivity and extending typical brand of salvation to each other; or faith by affirmation believes in **active goodness** wherein action justifies the faith for "faith without good works is equivalent to having no faith at all (6:158)". Hence, the Quran requires active goodwill and mutual cooperation of the believers to see their function and task through. This is a steep uphill task which requires one to free his neck from the sin of socio-economic and political exploitation of others. it requires "feeding upon a day of one's own hunger of an orphan near of kin, or of a needy [stranger] lying in the dust, they believe and mutually admonish each other with steadfastness and mutual mercy (90:11-17)". "They are those who believe, do good works and support each other by admonishing with the truth and with steadfastness (103:3)".

Hence, Muslim community was charged with the task of establishing egalitarian moral world order through the common endeavor of humanity so it invited religious other "People of the Book" from the platform of Tauheed to share the burden of shared responsibility. So, the Quran's terms of engagement and dialogue with Jews and Christians were not based on just good-will gesturing to be good to each other by relegating religion to private life as modern secular doctrine of "ecumenism" depicts, it was to seek their cooperation to share the burden of shared responsibility which to the Quran humanity at large not only Muslims pledged in Primordial Covenant. Thus, to the Quran the terms of engagement with Jews and Christians are no more or less than to jointly build a **just moral world order** (3:64). Since, to the Quran failure to meet that challenge means the failure of humanity as unjust societies are self-destructive by nature, they inevitably lead to rebellion. However, when the Prophet realized that it is not going to be, there is some divine mystery in multi-religious world so that they compete for goodness since single religious community mars the

prospects of positive competition. So, the Quran resolved the problem by recognizing Judaism and Christianity as separate communities with the Muslims as separate "median" and the "best" community all-intent to strike just moral social order. Still, Muslims are advised to keep "the people of the book" inviting for the shared task.

However, in this endeavor God is not a silent spectator as "Hellenized idea of God insinuates Him as a principle which explains this world rather than a Creator who directs this world; as an intellectual formula rather than as a moral and dynamic imperative[45]". To the Quran whatever initiative "good" or "bad" man takes God appears to be as Co-creator and Co-worker (92:5-11). This is because when the Muslim community faces severe opposition both from Meccan pagans and the "people of the book" amidst their struggle to implement the will of God they are not left to the mercy of the forces of history, they are aided and supported by the Grace of God in their struggle. "And [as for] the believers, both men and women they are protector of each other, enjoin the doing of what is right and forbid the doing of what is wrong, are constant in prayer, and render the purifying dues, and pay heed unto God and His Apostle, they are upon whom God is going to have mercy (9:71)" . God shall help them to build an ethical world order. For "A God to whom it is, in final analysis, indifferent whether He is effective in history or not is certainly not the God of Muhammad and the Quran[46]".

Thus, the political control of Arabian Peninsula, to Shah Wali Allah was the fulfilment of God's promise extended in 9:71. In last days of the Prophet Islam was poised to begin its world career i.e., to venture out of Arabian Peninsula.

After the Prophet Islam expanded westward to defeat Byzantium and eastward it conquered Zoroastrian Persia. It treated Zoroastrianism and others of same ideology like "the people of the book". When Islam was psychologically strong "the caliphal courts of Damascus, Baghdad and Cordova gave such honor to the Abrahamic family of religion that inter-religious debate was the subject of salon conversation, a public pastime[47]". To Iqbal, "Islam as a polity is only a practical means of making this principle a living factor in the intellectual and emotional life of mankind. It demands loyalty to God, not to thrones. And since God is the ultimate spiritual basis of all life, loyalty to God virtually amounts to man's loyalty to his own ideal nature[48]".

However, dynastic rule in Islam for the most part emphasized unity and interest of state rather than moral solidarity of the Muslims or mankind at large. So, "the Quranic ideal of the final unity of mankind could not be realized so far, because of the wars of Islam and Christianity and latter European aggression against the Muslim world[49]". But verse 3:64 and other of its ilk urge us to loss no hope on the matter of interfaith dialogue and "something can still be worked out by way of positive cooperation, provided the Muslims hearken more to the Quran than to the historic formulations of Islam and provided that recent pioneering efforts continue to yield a Christian doctrine more compatible with universal monotheism and egalitarianism[50]".

Modernity is both an opportunity and a challenge. "For while modernity had expanded our line of sight, our expression had become increasingly prolix. One is left to wonder whether, in our deluge of words, we are saying anything meaningful at all [51]". The choice rests with us whether we direct the forces of modernity to positive moral end or dance around the golden calves of modernity turning our planet into an entertainment theater. The crisis which West's orgiastic technological performance has created and has rendered the earth unlivable demand moral solidarity of mankind. "A new world society is gradually emerging. It is growing quietly, imperceptibly in the minds and hearts of men. The tumult and excitement, the anger and the violence, the perplexities of spirit and the ambiguities of expression are the pangs of the birth of something new. We of this generation are called upon to work for this new order with all the strength and capacity for suffering we possess…….the human race is one. This oneness of humanity is more than a phrase, it is not a mere dream. It is becoming a historic fact. With the speeding up of communications, ideas and tools now belong to man as man. The necessities of the historical process are making the world into one. We stand on the threshold of a new society, a single society. Those who are awake to the problems of the future adopt the ideal of the oneness of mankind as the guiding principle of their thought and action[52]". This is true picture of the single world-society in making, sketched by an eminent Indian philosopher, however this "essential unity of humanity" will remain a distant dream unless the grand ethical principle of Oneness of God with its practical implications is realized. We are pretty hopeful that integration of mankind on the principle of Tawhid is an ultimate destiny of mankind.

CONCLUSION

On interfaith dialogue Islam and secular metaphysics are poles apart. While Islam as a social proposition intends to shape socio-economic and political-cum-cultural life of society secularism does not cede an inch to religion to interfere in the business of state or public life i.e., society. The Quran says "We offered the "Trust" to the heavens, and the earth, and the mountains, but they refused to bear it because they were afraid of it. Yet man took it up, indeed man is unjust and foolhardy (33:72)". What does mean by "Trust"? To the Quranic metaphor at creation God set a challenge for humanity to create an ethical world order which could reflect the equality all people share in the eyes of God. This refers to the Primordial Covenant which man struck with God i.e., it is embedded in man's psyche to heed and respond to his positive nature which will lead him to his task (7:172). Here, the bearer of task are not only Muslims but humanity at large. Failure to execute that task means the failure of humanity. This is because though due to the time-tested persistence of "the people of the book" in defying the purpose of Islam the Quran termed them perennial enemies

of Islam on historical plane on universal plane the Quran kept inviting them and still invites to cooperate in building world ethical order ***to share the burden of shared responsibility*** since not only Muslims but mankind at large is the bearer of "Trust" i.e., responsibility to erect moral social order which man has not fulfilled yet (80:23). This requires economic and democratic organization of the world society on the ethical principle of Tauheed. While secularism and nationalism divide mankind on racial, ethnic, linguistic and cultural basis and secular approach of interfaith dialogue is nothing but a therapeutic measure to effectively deal with religious fault-lines for pluralism the Quran invites religious other for active cooperation in building a just world society as Islam is divinely ordained to be humanity's salvation. Secular conception of interfaith dialogue does not talk about this shared responsibility of mankind. While secularism harness materialistic democracy and its agenda of social reforms is based on materialistic metaphysics the ultimate aim of the Quran is "spiritual democracy" which serves as a vehicle to achieve socio-economic equilibrium of society based on monotheism. There are no common TORs (terms of references) between aims and objectives of secular conception of interfaith dialogue and the Quran's idea of interfaith dialogue: Abraham accord is a case in point. The title of the accord insinuates that as Jews, Christians and Muslims share common descent from Abraham so the shared beliefs and common basis of Abraham family of religions would be sought out to strike unity among them; no such things are agenda of Abraham Accords. True to its basics i.e., secular conception of interfaith dialogue Abraham Accords here emphasizes only common racial or blood ties among the three religions for the safeguard of their materialistic political interests. The Quran instead of racial or blood ties presents Abraham as an ideological progenitor as it says "Abraham was neither Jew nor Christian"; in the same vein said Abraham "who follows me is mine and who forsakes me o God you are Forgiver and Merciful". So to the Quran ideological progeny rather than physical progeny is the true inheritor of Abraham's creed.

So, any interfaith dialogue based on secular creed i.e., blood, racial or linguistic identities is contrary to the Quranic doctrine of interfaith dialogue which seeks commonality of thought and action. Addressing to the OIC conference at Lahore the first elected Prime Minister of Pakistan Z.A Bhutto said that in sharp contradistinction to "the materialist West" and "spiritual east" Muslims are "the People of the Middle" and Pakistan "the midmost" of "the People of the Middle" to arbitrate their conflicts. So, in an ultimate analysis Muslims being a gold-median and the best community are duty-bound to remove the extremities from the globe. Any secularism inspired interfaith dialogue which does not make the "shared spiritual foundations" of the multi-religious world as referent points is faithlessness par excellence on the name of faith.

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