

THE ROLE OF INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE IN PROMOTING ISLAMIC EDUCATION TO THE EUROPEANS¹

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ABSTRACT

*This study investigates the crucial role played by inter-religious dialogue in promoting Islamic education to the Europeans. Its goal is to provide a better understanding of Islam and its teachings through the channel of education in order to shift the views of Europeans on Islam and Muslims from hostility and enmity to mutual respect and friendliness. This paper starts with a brief introduction on the Europeans and their religious identity. Then, the main discussion focuses on: (1) **what** is inter-religious dialogue and Islamic education? (2) **why** inter-religious dialogue is an important means for the promotion of Islamic education to the Europeans (looking at the situation of European Muslims, their relationship with others, and contemporary issues)?, and (3) **how** inter-religious dialogue promotes Islamic education (discussing themes addressed in inter-religious dialogue activities, establishment of teaching modules, educational centers and institutions, where Islamic education is taught to the Europeans in a dialogue form)? Descriptive and analytical methods are employed by the researcher. This paper has achieved very useful findings that will serve as solid solutions for the proper understanding and interpretation of Islamic tenets through an appropriate Islamic education promoted by inter-religious dialogue.*

Key Terms: Inter-religious dialogue, Islamic education, the Europeans, religious identity, mutual respect.

INTRODUCTION

The misunderstanding and misinterpretation of Islam and its tenets by some of its followers and others have given the impression to many that Muslims and their religion, Islam, are the sole source of all ongoing conflicts witnessed by most of the Muslim countries and other parts of the world, like Asia, USA, Russia, Europe, and so on. It can be argued here that such assumption is perhaps encouraged by *firstly* the limited knowledge of others, i.e., non-Muslims towards Islam and Muslims, *secondly* the inappropriate educational network used by Muslims in their communication of Islamic teachings to other fellows and vice versa, *thirdly* diverse interpretations of Islam by Muslims according to their nationalities, cultures, traditions, and customs, and *lastly*, the way how media portrays Islam and Muslims to others with stories focusing exclusively on hatred, war-making, and devastation.

The above mentioned situation can be improved, enhanced, and even brought to an end through the usage of a proper means of communication, where the right knowledge about Islam, its tenets and its followers (the Muslims) is delivered to others. Various ways and methods are employed by Muslims in their intra-religious and inter-religious engagements in order to convey the Message of Islam properly to both Muslims and non-Muslims. Indeed, inter-religious dialogue is regarded by this study as the most important way to be used by the Muslims to promote Islamic education to others and especially the Europeans.

Many contemporary Muslim intellectuals consider inter-religious dialogue as a very useful means of communication through which better understanding of Islam and its teachings can be provided. Indeed, inter-religious dialogue assists the Muslims to enhance the educational network with their fellow Europeans in the process of conveying the Islamic tenets to them and corrects their misinterpretation of Islam. Numerous literatures have been written separately on the subject of inter-religious dialogue, education, religious education, religious identity, Europe and Europeans, and Islamic education. However, there is insufficient literature discussing the role of inter-religious dialogue in promoting Islamic education to the Europeans. This makes the undertaking of this study very significant.

The importance of religion, inter-religious dialogue, and education as such, motivated religious intellectuals, clergies, educational institutions and organizations to initiate inter-religious activities between Muslims and non-Muslims in order to promote mutual respect, better understanding and peaceful coexistence. In fact, the concept of inter-religious dialogue is a new phenomenon of the 19th and the beginning of 20th centuries that demanded the mobilization of the resources of great religions especially Islam and Christianity.

Europe in the last hundred years has experienced a great transformation on the religious level. Besides, the pagan religions of Greek and Roman antiquity and the later religion of Christianity, Europe's religious identity has been enriched with other religions like, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, etc. According to Stefano Allievi, "the arrival of Islam in Europe, in the wake of the immigrants who have brought it, means...the second religion, or better the principal religious minority in the

¹ This paper is the result of the Research Initiative Grant Scheme (RIGS) funded by MOHE – 2016/2018.

majority of European countries.”² The being of Islam in Europe as the second religion after Christianity, has encouraged both, the Muslims and the Europeans in different levels like, individual, institutional, and state, to engage in different activities in order to facilitate their understanding of each other’s religious and cultural identities. Thus, inter-religious dialogue has been seen as the most appropriate means of communication between both, the Muslims and the Europeans.

The concept of inter-religious dialogue for education purposes has been initiated by the European Ministers of Education in their *Declaration on Intercultural Education in the new European context* (2003:1): “...by introducing respect for human rights and diversity, foundations for managing diversity, openness to other cultures, inter-religious dialogue and “Euro-Arab dialogue.”³ A. Abdool and his research team consider inter-religious dialogue as “part of teachers’ pedagogical duty to prepare learners for engagement with others in the religiously pluralistic world in which they live, especially at the deepest spiritual level of their religions.”⁴

European Muslims have initiated many inter-religious dialogue activities in order to promote better understanding about Islam to the Europeans. Mohammed Abu-Nimer asserts that King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural based in Austria uses inter-religious dialogue to provide better understanding about Islam to the Europeans. The centre provides online programmes to train international interreligious dialogue trainers.⁵ Islam has been presented to the Europeans by European Muslims, who are constituted by different ethnic groups, religious affiliations and movements like, Sunni, Shiite, Alevi, Ahmadiyah, Sufis, philosophical beliefs, political convictions, secular trends, languages, and cultural traditions. If Islam is introduced to the Europeans by Muslims based on their ethnicities, cultures, and affiliations, and not based on the Qur’an and Sunnah, then what kind of Islam do you expect the Europeans to understand? In recent times, the Europeans have invented their own brand of Islam that it EURO-ISLAM or the European Islam. The question at this point is that who has to be blamed, the Muslims or the Europeans?

Inter-religious dialogue is considered by this paper as an important means of communication through which the Islamic teachings in light of Qur’an and Sunnah are promoted to the Europeans. This paper discusses, *firstly*, Europeans and their religious identity; *secondly*, concept of inter-religious dialogue and concept of Islamic education; *thirdly*, importance of inter-religious dialogue in promoting Islamic education to the Europeans; and *lastly*, ways through which inter-religious dialogue promotes proper Islamic education (discussing themes addressed in inter-religious dialogue activities, establishment of teaching modules, educational centers and institutions, where Islamic education is taught to the Europeans in a dialogue form). Descriptive and analytical methods are employed by the researcher with the intention to provide findings that will serve as solid solutions for the proper understanding and interpretation of Islamic tenets through an appropriate Islamic education promoted by inter-religious dialogue.

EUROPEANS AND THEIR RELIGIOUS IDENTITY:

Europeans are people with different socio-cultural-religious identities, who live in a place called Europe. The scientific discoveries with the help of archeology have shown that “the European population has not evolved according to a tree of descent,” rather, it has been created based on mass “migrations in both prehistorical and historical times.”⁶ Europeans are a population belonging to “different historical traditions, different nation-states with their own histories, different cultures, different languages, different political, national, regional and local interests and traditional ideologies, different interest groups, different economic concepts, different organizations,”⁷ and different religious identities.

The Greek historian, Herodotus (484–406), in his *History* mentioned the geographical term of “Europe,”⁸ while discussing how his contemporaries divided the world into three parts: Asia, Libya (Africa), and Europe.⁹ He mentioned in his book that Europe

² Stefano Allievi, “Relations Between Religions,” in *Muslims in the Enlarged Europe: Religion and Society*, edited by Brigitte Maréchal, Stefano Allievi, Felice Dassetto, Jørgen Nielsen, (USA & Netherland: Brill, Leiden, Boston, 2003), p. 382.

³ *Declaration by the European ministers of education on intercultural education in the new European context*, 21st session Athens, Greece, 10 to 12 November 2003, p. 4.

⁴ A Abdool, F Potgieter, J L van der Walt & C Wolhuter, “Inter-religious dialogue in schools: A pedagogical and civic unavoidability,” *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies*, 63(2) 2007, p. 554.

⁵ See, Mohammed Abu-Nimer and Rena’ta Katalin Smith, “Interreligious and intercultural education for dialogue, peace and social cohesion,” *Springer Science+Business Media Dordrecht and UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning*, 2016, Vol. 62, p. 396.

⁶ Alberto Piazza, “Who are the Europeans?” *Science*, Vol. 260, (June 1993), p. 1767.

⁷ Ruth Wodak, “‘Doing Europe’: the Discursive Construction of European Identities,” in *Discursive Constructions of Identity in European Politics*, edited by Richard C.M. Mole, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 72.

⁸ Europe is the planet’s 6th largest continent including 47 countries. It has a recognized surface area that covers about 9,938,000 sq km (3,837,083 sq mi) or 2% of the Earth’s surface, and about 6.8% of its land area. It is bordered by numerous bodies of water, is separated from Asia by Russia’s Ural Mountains and by the Caspian and Black Seas. It is separated from Africa by the Mediterranean Sea. Europe comprises the following countries: Albania, Andorra, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Belarus, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Macedonia, Malta, Moldova, Monaco, Montenegro,

is the name of a woman: "...But as for Europe...the land took its name from the Tyrian Europa,...it is plain that this woman was of Asiatic birth, and never came to this land which the Greeks now call Europe, but only from Phoenicia to Crete and from Crete to Lycia."¹⁰ In addition, Europe is traced back to the word "*Ereb*," denoting "dark" and the land of the setting sun, or the West. The ancient Greeks perceived Europe as "Wide-eyed," seeing (hearing) far. But most of the Greek philosophers referred to "Europe" as a geographical nation.¹¹ In this sense, *Europe* and *Europeans* have been there since antiquity. Europe's contemporary vision would contribute to the psychological map of the world an integrative model of political, cultural, economic,¹² and religious relations.

Europeans' *religious identity* has been developed during a long period. Historical evidences show that ancient Europeans "were not at some primitive stage of intelligence because they practiced pagan rites or focused their worship at stones and trees, nor they were supercilious slaves to ghosts, spirits and ancestors."¹³ So, *Europe's religious identity* starts with a *pagan* flavor, which was mixed later on with Greek and Roman religious flavor. The religions practiced by both, the Greeks and the Romans were not much different in nature by the existing pagan religions of Europeans. Thus, Europe's *religious identity* is clearly seen in the description of the term "EUROPA," which is viewed by antiquity in different versions.

Firstly, *Europe* is perceived as "*Europa*" the daughter of King Agenor of Phoenicia that was kidnapped by Zeus in the form of Cretan bull. She had been a Phoenician princess, possibly from Tyre, South of Beirut on the Eastern Shore of the Mediterranean.¹⁴ *Secondly*, it is viewed as "*Europa*" the daughter of Agenor (king of the Levantine city of Tyre), with her beauty and charms, one day attracted god Jupiter, who kidnapped her and swam with her to Crete. He turned into a man and impregnated Europa, and her children became the founding *Europeans*.¹⁵

Thirdly, it is narrated that "the very name of Europe is itself derived from a tradition lying somewhere between Africa and the Middle East ... Europa was carried by her father across the Mediterranean to Greece, but never abandoned her non-European origins."¹⁶ *Lastly*, Europe is regarded as a combination of *map* and *queen* by Sebastian Münster in his traditional work that was popular during that time. For Münster, Spain is Europe's crowned head, Bohemia her heart, and Italy is one of her arms holding Sicily as an orb. Europe's other hand, has a sceptre that touches Scotland and England.¹⁷

Early in the 4th century (312 C.E.), *Europe's religious identity* was changed from Greco-Roman to *Christianity*, when the Emperor Constantine embraced Christianity. In 325 C.E., he called for a Council at Nicaea, which settled disputed questions of Christian doctrines. In the fifth century, Christianity became the only religion for the Roman Empire¹⁸ that had a universal approach and vision.¹⁹ Europe's Christian identity was promoted by many Christian leaders in order to protect the territories of the Roman Empire from the Muslims as well as conquer the eastern countries. The first Crusade Wars (1096–99) displayed for the first time Europe's Christian identity under the leadership of the Pope,²⁰ who represented the Catholic Church. Christianity was dominating Europe up to the seventeenth century, and therefore, Europe was known as *Christendom* and not as Europe.

It was after the Enlightenment that the term "Christendom" was replaced by the term "Europe." Currently, it is apparent that Christianity is the official religion of most European states. Also, it is evident that different churches dominate different places: Roman Catholicism in the Western part, Protestantism in the Northern part, and Orthodox Christianity alongside Islam in the

Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russia, San Marino, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, Ukraine, United Kingdom, England, Scotland, Northern Ireland, Wales, and Vatican City. Worldatlas, Europe, accessed Friday, 23 March, 2018.
<https://www.worldatlas.com/webimage/countrys/eu.htm>

⁹ See Herodotus, *The Histories I*, Books I & II, A.D. Godley (Trans.), (U.S.A.: Harvard University Press, 1975), Book II, pp. 15-17; and Book IV, pp. 40-42.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, Book IV, pp. 44-48.

¹¹ See Tchoubarian, Alexander, *The Europe Idea in History in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries: A View from Moscow*, (England: FRANK CASS. & CO. LTD. Newbury House, 1994), p. 5.

¹² See Serfaty, Simon, *Understanding Europe: The Politics of Unity*, (London: Printer Publishers, Ltd., 1992), pp. 99-100.

¹³ Ken Dowden, *European Paganism: The Realities of Cult from Antiquity to the Middle Ages*, (London and New York: Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, 2000), p. 2.

¹⁴ Lewis, Flora, *EUROPE: Road to Unity*, (USA: Touchstone Simon & Schuster Building, 1992), p. 21.

¹⁵ Hale, John, "The Renaissance Idea of Europe," in Soledad Garcia (Ed.), *European Identity and the Search of Legitimacy*, (London and New York: Printer Publishers, 1993), pp. 48-49.

¹⁶ Kearney, Richard, *The Vision of Europe*, (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1992), p. 10.

¹⁷ Wilson, Kevin & Dussen, Jan van der (Eds.), *The History of the Idea of Europe*, (London: The Open University, 1993), p. 53.

¹⁸ See Gay, Peter, *Modern Europe to 1815*, (U.S.A.: Harper Collins Publishers, Inc., 1973), p. 19.

¹⁹ See, Ahrweiler, Hélèn, "Roots and Trends in European Culture," in Soledad Garcia (Ed.), *European Identity and the Search of Legitimacy*, (London and New York: Printer Publishers, 1993), p. 35.

²⁰ See, Mikkeli, Heikki, *Europe as an Idea and an Identity*, (UK: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1998), pp. 21-22.

Eastern part.²¹ The speech made by Pope John Paul II in Prague, in April 1990, reminded Europeans of their Christian basis of unity: "...Christianity is at the very roots of European culture."²²

At the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of twenty first century, Europe's religious identity is again presented with a *pagan flavour*. Europeans have revived their ancient nature-venerating indigenous spiritual traditions on which the bases of new religion called *neo-Paganism* for twenty-first century stand. It is a form of nature-mysticism that views the Earth and all material entities as a theophany (appearance of God or deity to a human). The recognition of deities of both genders has re-emerged in many parts of Europe. The Earth is sanctified by showing a great respect through the idea of the ecological 'green' movement,²³ in order to restore her beauty that technology has destroyed. In this sense, today's religious identity of Europe is *paganism*, which is a possible religious philosophy for a Europe's pluralistic and multicultural society.²⁴ According to a field study, Islam is presented as the fastest growing religion in Europe, which makes Europe's Muslim population to be increased by 63%, growing from 43 million in 2010 to 71 million in 2050.²⁵ In this sense, besides paganism, Europe's contemporary and future religious identity will be shaped by both its major religions, Christianity and Islam.

CONCEPT OF INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE:

Inter-religious dialogue is a new concept addressed by many scholars since the beginning of 19th century. It is the most important means through which a better understanding between people of different religious background can be achieved. This kind of dialogue is viewed as "a dimension of human consciousness ... the fulfillment of the command of reality to become known, to be compared and contrasted with other claims, to be acquiesced in if true, amended if inadequate, and rejected if false."²⁶ It is a genuine reciprocal process, in which two parties stand on an equal footing of readiness to listen, as well as to be heard.²⁷ Besides, it enables the dialogue participants to: (1) learn and change their attitudes; (2) understand each other's systems of belief; and (3) open rooms for mutual respect and better understanding.²⁸ It also allows people from different religious background to have a sense of openness to value the distinctiveness of the others and a willingness to listen to what they have to share, without rejecting the faithfulness to one's own religion.²⁹ This is how scholars from different religious background and especially Muslims and Christians, have defined the concept of inter-religious dialogue through their writings, i.e., articles and books, as well with their participation in many national and international seminars, forums, and conferences.

CONCEPT OF ISLAMIC EDUCATION:

Islamic education has been introduced by the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) since the beginning of Islam. It is founded based on the Qur'an and Sunnah. *Masjid* of the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) is the first Islamic learning institution. However, the concept of Islamic education has been discussed during the end of 19th century and the beginning of 20th century, when the system of education in the Muslim world was revived. Muslim scholars who contributed to the development of Islamic education through the process of Islamization are Said Nursi, Abu Ala Maududi, Sayyid Qutb, Jamaluddin al-Afgani, Muhamamd Abduh, Rashid Rida, Ismail Raji al-Faruqi, Syed Naquib al-Attas, Husain Nasr, AbdulHamid AbuSulayman, and so on. They have developed a new platform for the Islamization and integration of human knowledge and established Islamic oriented educational institutions, where their ideas and thoughts were applied.

The concept of Islamic education introduced in light of the Islamization of Human knowledge denotes a long process that depends on a well-planned strategy in order to achieve specific goals as dictated by Islam and its tenets.³⁰ Moreover, the concept of Islamic education has been viewed in light of three Arabic terms, (1) *al-Ta'leem* (التعليم), (2) *al-Tarbiyyah* (التربية), and (3) *al-Ma'aarif* (المعارف). The usage of these three different Arabic terms denoting Islamic education reveals the fact that yet Muslims do not have a clear picture about the concept of Islamic education.³¹ Otherwise, they had agreed to use one unique term denoting Islamic education. According to Ali Mohammad Jubran Saleh, Islamic Education is viewed as:

²¹ Unwin, Tim, *A European Geography*, (U.K.: Addison Wesley Longman Ltd., 1st ed., 1988), p. 52.

²² Heater, Derek, *The Idea of European Unity*, (London: Leicester University Press, 1st Ed., 1992), p. 194.

²³ See, Prudence Jones and Nigel Pennick, *A History of Pagan Europe*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 2-3.

²⁴ See, *Ibid.*, pp. 219-220.

²⁵ See, *The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010-2050*, (USA: Pew Research Centre, 2015), p. 147.

²⁶ Isma'il Raji al-Faruqi, "Islam and Christianity: Diatribe or dialogue," in *Muslims in Dialogue: The evolution of dialogue*, edited by Leonard Swidler, (U.S.A.: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1992), p. 9.

²⁷ Maurice Wiles, *Christian theology and inter-religious dialogue*, (London: SCM Press, 1992), pp.4-5.

²⁸ See Leonard Swidler, "Religious pluralism and ecumenism from a Christian perspective," in *Religious issues and inter-religious dialogues: An analysis and sourcebook of developments since 1945*, Charles Wei-hsun Fu and Gehard E. Spiegler (eds.), (USA: Green Wood Press, 1989), p. 338.

²⁹ Redmond Fitzmaurice, "The Roman Catholic Church and inter-religious dialogue; Implications for Christian-Muslim relations," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, vol. 3:1 (1992): pp. 83-84, 97,107.

³⁰ See, Louay Safi, *The Foundation of Knowledge*, (IIUM-Kuala Lumpur: IIUM Press, 1996), p. 7.

³¹ See, Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *The Concept of Education in Islam: A Framework for an Islamic Philosophy of Education*, (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1999), pp. 36-38.

“...a comprehensive process for fulfilling human needs. It comprises spiritual education, which develops the human conscience, and mental education, which establishes the basis of human scientific thought. It also promotes physical education in order to develop the human body...it is an ethical education that focuses on cultivating the best human behaviour. It is a stirring education that fosters and directs human emotions like, happiness, sorrow, love and hatred... is also a social education, which helps an individual understand his society, and highlights his duties towards it.”³²

IMPORTANCE OF INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE IN PROMOTING ISLAMIC EDUCATION TO THE EUROPEANS:

Inter-religious dialogue has a very genuine nature, and therefore, it is a very important means as it assists Muslims to promote lifelong learning for Islamic education to Europeans. Muslims can promote through it proper knowledge that educates them and others about the ways how to deal with each other. The very aim of inter-religious dialogue is to promote mutual respect and better understanding as well to create friendly climate between the dialoguing participants. Indeed, this makes inter-religious dialogue a very significant means of interaction between Muslims and Europeans. The importance of inter-religious dialogue in promoting Islamic education to the Europeans can be discussed as follows:

Firstly, inter-religious dialogue teaches Muslims to accept inclusivism while informing Europeans about Islam. It makes both Muslims and Europeans to transcend their conflicts resulted from their religious divergence. Here can be argued that if the Muslims practice exclusivism while dialoguing with their fellow Europeans hostility, violence, and hatred will prevail. But, if they practice inclusivism a climate of friendly relationship with Europeans will be established, where mutual respect and better understanding will be promoted.

Secondly, a genuine inter-religious dialogue does not allow its participants to be exclusivists in their approaches while conversing with each other. According to the scientific study of religion, exclusivism is rejected as it deals with logical claims based on the law of non-contradiction made by two religions, which are incompatible in nature. The monotheism of Islam, Judaism and Christianity, and the polytheism of Shintoism and Hinduism, cannot be true at the same time as one of them has to be considered as a true claim. It also refers to a religion's claim that it is the only true way to God, or the only way of salvation. All religions are exclusivist in a manner claiming to present a worldview that is universally true and accurate.³³ It can be argued here that from the religious perspective religions are exclusive in the sense that they adopt as uniquely true a particular worldview that is, if not logically incompatible with, certainly very different from other worldviews.³⁴ However, inter-religious dialogue does not reject the exclusivism that deals with fundamental principles of one's own religion. Rather, it rejects the exclusivism manifested by the dialogue participants in their inter-religious engagement promoting hostility, violence, and hatred.

Thirdly, inter-religious dialogue governed by the Islamic sources inspires Muslims to promote lifelong learning for Islamic education to the Europeans. It teaches Muslims the right ways how to deal with them. The exclusive approach often taken by some Muslims in the European countries has built walls of disconnection and isolation between them and the Europeans and has created a major barrier for the development of friendly relationship. Thus, openness is required in such dialogues in order to enable Muslims to create a friendly environment with the Europeans.

Fourthly, inter-religious dialogue promotes inclusiveness in such a way that it does not affect the belief system of those Muslims who participate in dialogue directly or indirectly. Rather, it opens rooms for them to improve and enhance their understanding of their own religious teachings. Besides, it makes them to have the right knowledge of Europeans' cultural and religious values. For instance, in an inter-religious engagement, the dialogue participants (Muslims and Europeans) have to converse with one another freely in that sense that each one of them can give accurate information about his/her own religious identity and at the same time acquiring the right knowledge of others' religious identity. Therefore, inter-religious dialogue must begin with sufficient openness (where others are accepted as they are and not as they want each other to be) in order to value the distinctiveness of others and a willingness to listen to what they have to share, without rejecting the faithfulness (being exclusive) to one's own religion.³⁵

Fifthly, inter-religious dialogue requires from both, the Muslims and the Europeans high cooperation with good esteem and mutual respect leading to the understanding of the others' beliefs between the participants. It also involves a genuine reciprocal process, in which two parties stand on an equal footing of readiness to listen, as well as to be heard,³⁶ and therefore, implement the two-sided project of interaction. In this two-sided project, each participant has to enter into a dialogue not only with his partner

³² Ali Mohammad Jubran Saleh, *Educational Administration: An Islamic Perspective*, (Kuala Lumpur: A.S. NOORDEEN, 2002), p. 47.

³³ See John B. Cobb, "Beyond pluralism," in *Christian uniqueness reconsidered: The myth of a pluralistic theology of religions*, ed. Gavin D'Costa (New York: Orbis Books, 1990), pp. 88-89.

³⁴ See Daniel B. Clendenin, *Many Gods, Many Lords: Christianity encounters world religions* (Michigan, U.S.A.: Baker Books, 1995), p. 29. See also Kate Zebiri, *Muslims and Christians face to face* (Oxford: Newworld Publication, 2000), p. 29.

³⁵ Redmond Fitzmaurice, "The Roman Catholic Church and inter-religious dialogue; Implications for Christian-Muslim relations," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, vol. 3:1 (1992), pp. 83-84 passim, 97, 107.

³⁶ See Wiles, *Christian theology and inter-religious dialogue*, pp. 4-5.

across the faith line - the Christian with the Muslim - but also with his co-religionists, with his fellow Muslims (intra-religious dialogue), or Christians, in order to share with them the fruits of such inter-religious dialogue. This way will enable the dialogue participants (Muslims and Europeans) to: (1) learn and change their attitudes; (2) understand each other's systems of belief or ways of life; and (3) open rooms for mutual respect and better understanding,³⁷ of one another. All this has to be done with the true sense of inclusiveness to one another's religious teachings without polemics or refutations, which is against the true nature of inter-religious dialogue.

Finally, inter-religious dialogue promotes a genuine Islamic education, when a Muslim wants "to talk to another person and get meaningful results, [he] must see what he is, right now, in himself, not what [he] would like him to be in order for [him] to talk to him."³⁸ It means that dialoguing parties should accept each other as they are and not as they want each other to be. It can be argued here that if a Muslim enters in a dialogue with the Europeans regardless of their socio-cultural-political-religious background without imposing on them Islam and its teachings, he can promote lifelong learning for Islamic education. In this sense, the possibility of maintaining Islamic education through inter-religious engagements (with Europeans) concerning all aspects of life becomes very enduring.

HOW INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE PROMOTES ISLAMIC EDUCATION TO THE EUROPEANS?

According to some studies, European Muslims are seen as the largest group in Europe that raises important challenges of cultural and religious diversity. Despite their differences within themselves they (Muslims of Europe) are often depicted in the media and other policy discourses as a single community and population that shares common traits.³⁹ Moreover, the incident of 11 September, 2001 and the controversy over Danish cartoons depicting Muhammad (p.b.u.h.), have somehow shaken and even worsen the relationship between the Muslims living in Europe and the Europeans. The Pew Global Attitudes Project conducted a survey in countries, where Muslims are considered as minorities like, Great Britain, France, Germany, and Spain. The findings show that Muslims are generally positive about conditions in their host nation - Europe.⁴⁰

In order to improve the relationship between Muslims living in Europe and their European hosts, it is a must for Muslims to use inter-religious dialogue to promote Islamic Education teachings to the European. It is also required by the European Muslims to discuss in such dialogue topics and issues of various natures. But, the most important thing about the scope of inter-religious dialogue is that it forbids the dialogue participants (Muslims and Europeans) to engage themselves in promoting violence and hostility, instead it commands them to find proper ways that lead to peace, harmony and coexistence. To promote Islamic teachings to the Europeans through inter-religious dialogue, the following steps have to be undertaken by Muslims:

Firstly, European Muslims have to equip themselves with *proper knowledge* about their own religion – Islam, and practice it in their day-to-day life. Besides, they have to study and understand Europeans' religious-cultural identities. This can be achieved by providing educational centres, where Islamic tenets are taught by learned Muslim scholars or intellectuals. Also, they have to teach Muslims in these centres about the history of their hosts, the Europeans. Indeed, this will enable Muslims to prepare themselves before running inter-religious dialogue activities.

Secondly, European Muslims have to be aware of the fact that the *focus* of inter-religious dialogue is not on verbal communication only between the adherents of World Religions, and is not on the theological issues related to these religions and traditions. Rather, it is on all aspects of people's life: (1) **People's dialogue of life** - peaceful and respectful co-existence, including active participation in one another's lives, between people of different races, cultures, and religions; (2) **People's social dialogue** - cooperation between people of different races and cultures in socio-economic enterprises; (3) **People's spiritual dialogue** - exchange of religious experiences and practices by people of different cultures and religions; and (4) **People's inter-religious engagement**, where conversation and explanation by experts and students of different religions about the teachings and practices of their faiths, shall take place.⁴¹ To have a better understanding about the *focus* of inter-religious dialogue, one has to look at religious resources that are presented through the "four main elements of which religions consist: *religious ideas* (content of belief); *religious practices* (ritual behaviour), *social organisation* (religious community), and *religious* – or spiritual – experiences (psychic attitudes)."⁴² Peace and harmony can be achieved, when all these various dimensions of religion are understood by both, the Muslims and the Europeans, and then, presented properly by both of them in their day-to-day life.

Thirdly, European Muslims have to avoid the discussion about themes of *comparative or critical nature* in inter-religious dialogue activities with the Europeans, as it completely diverts the friendly nature of dialogue. It may lead people to a climate prevailed by hostility and hatred instead of peace, respect, care of, and harmony. The main objective of themes discussed in

³⁷ Swidler, "Religious pluralism and ecumenism from a Christian perspective," p. 338.

³⁸ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "Christianity and World Religions: Discussion," *The Muslim World*, vol. 78, no. 2, (April 1987), p. 122.

³⁹ See, Anna Triandafyllidou, *Religion and Secularism in Defining European Identity and Culture*, (European University Institute, 2 April 2016), p. 3.

⁴⁰ See, 13-Nation Pew Global Attitudes Survey, *Muslims in Europe: Economic Worries Top Concerns About Religious and Cultural Identity*, (USA: July 6, 2006), p. 2.

⁴¹ Mathieu Geijbels, "Mission and dialogue," *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue*, vol. 10:1 (2000), pp. 34-35.

⁴² Gerrie ter Haar, "Religion: Source of Conflict or Resource for Peace?" in *Bridge or Barrier: Religion, Violence, and Visions for Peace*, ed. Gerrie ter Haar and James J. Busuttil (The Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2005), p. 22 (pp. 3-34).

inter-religious forums is to *solve problems* and not *converting to the faith* of the other party or to make others doubt about their own faith. Also, it is to “help all concerned to find a way to become better in themselves and to improve their relations with one another, so as to make the world as a whole a better place in which to live.”⁴³ Thus, inter-religious dialogue includes multiplicity of themes that the dialoguing participants and the representatives of both, religion and politics see it of a great importance to be discussed. In addition, the most important theme to be discussed in such dialogue should be on the “very down-to-earth level, the existential level on which man comes face to face with the real problems of life and is actively engaged in trying to solve them.”⁴⁴

Fourthly, European Muslims have to propose themes with a diverse nature in inter-religious dialogue activities as such dialogue involves people with differences as well as similarities. Thus, the *scope* of inter-religious dialogue depends on the form and the dialogue participants’ level of interests, understanding, and knowledge.⁴⁵ For instance, if a European Muslim enters into a dialogue with his European Christian neighbour or any adherent of other religions, the theme of discussion has to be related to their day-to-day life. Perhaps, they will talk about their careers, families, social ills, and so on. Thus, the focus will not be directly related to issues concerning their religious identities – Islam or Christianity. Unless, the Muslim would like to know about the religious approach of his Christian neighbour towards the contemporary conflicts between Muslims and Christians or others, and so on.

The theme or topic of their dialogue depends on their level of interest, understanding and the knowledge they would like to share or acquire from one another. The topic can be decided on the bases that at the end of the day both neighbours can achieve peace, security and tranquillity. I would like to suggest here that inter-religious studies provided for both, the Muslim and his Christian neighbour should provide for them the basis of peacebuilding between one another and make them aware of sensitive points that lead to hostility.

Finally, European Muslims have to provide *educational centres* with proper modules concerning the fundamental teachings of Islam. The content of these modules has to be unique and simple. They have to be translated into the languages used by their hosts, the Europeans. For instance, if Muslims reside in Germany, they have to provide educational literature in German language. This will ease the process of learning about Islam by the German people. Besides, these educational centres have to facilitate inter-religious dialogue activities, where Islamic education is promoted. Different topics about Islamic tenets should be discussed. An exhibition about the Islamic heritage has to be presented in these centres, while the discourse of dialogue is taking place between European Muslims and other Europeans. Inter-religious dialogue organized by these educational centres should cover issues that will not create conflicts between the European Muslims as well as the members of contemporary European society. Muslims have to discuss in such inter-religious engagements issues that “increase mutual knowledge and decrease tensions between religious groups, and to create a shared platform to present the represented beliefs in a positive or constructive way towards society at large.”⁴⁶ In this sense, Muslims have to organize seminars or forums in their education centres dealing with the approach of Islam towards contemporary problems witnessed by both, European Muslims and other Europeans in order to find the right solution.

CONCLUSION:

This study has reached at the conclusion that inter-religious dialogue is a very important contemporary means that helps Muslims in Europe to promote Islamic Education to the Europeans. Muslims have to equip themselves with the right knowledge about their own religious identity and heritage – Islam, and the religious-cultural-social identity of the Europeans. Also, European Muslims have to establish proper educational centres, where inter-religious activities like, classes, seminars, forums, conferences, and exhibitions with the presence of the Europeans are organized. Proper teaching modules containing Islamic tenets and heritage have to be designed. Europeans will have the proper perception about Islamic education only when European Muslims provide to them a unique perception about Islamic Worldview based on Islamic Sources, Qur’an and Sunnah. I would like to suggest in a humble way that if Muslims would like to achieve mutual respect and better understanding with the Europeans they have to achieve peace and tranquillity in their inner and outer aspects of life. Then, they have to excel in their relationship with other Muslim fellows through intra-religious dialogue. This will make the European Muslims to easily excel in their relationship with others and especially the European fellows.

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⁴³ *Guidelines for a Dialogue between Muslims and Christians* (Edizion Ancora – Roma, 1st ed. 1969), p. 9.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁴⁵ For more information about the themes of inter-religious or inter-faith dialogue refer Muhammad Shafiq and Mohammed Abu-Nimer, *Interfaith Dialogue: A Guide for Muslims* (U.S.A.-Herndon: The International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2007), p. 34.

⁴⁶ Anne Hege Grung, “Inter-religious or Trans-religious: Exploring the Term ‘Inter-religious’ in a Feminist Postcolonial Perspective,” *the Journal of Inter-Religious Studies* 3 (2014), p. 12.

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