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About the Book's Author

Ahmad Kuftaro
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In the name of God, the Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful

His Eminence, Sheikh Ahmad Muhammad Amin Kuftaro, the Grand Mufti of Syria, Head of the Supreme Council of Fatwa, was born in Damascus in 1915, son of Muhammad Amin Kuftaro (1875–1938), a great Muslim scholar of his day.

Education: He studied privately with the most renowned Jurists and Islamic scholars in Damascus.

Diplomas: He holds three honorary doctorates in the teaching and principles of Islam, granted to His Eminence by universities throughout the Islamic world.

■ In 1968, he was awarded, his first honorary PhD in the Science of Islamic Call by the Sharif Hedaya University of Jakarta, Indonesia.

■ In 1984, he was awarded an honorary PhD in Islamic Jurisprudence by the University of Umar Al-Farouk, Pakistan.

■ In 1994, 10–24 July, he received a state invitation to visit Sudan, and while there was awarded an honorary PhD in Science of Islamic Call by the Islamic University of Um-Durman.

Awards:

i. In 1968 the Sitaret Gold Medal of Justice from Ayoub Khan, President of Pakistan.

b. In 1984 from Umar Al-Farouk University in Pakistan.

c. In 1998 the Medal of Arts & Sciences from the Egyptian President, M. Housni Mubarak, during the festival of Prophet Muhammad's birthday.

Sports: Daily walking and swimming.

Religious and Academic Activities:

■ In 1938, after the death of his father, His Eminence Ahmad Kuftaro took over his role of preaching and calling for universal spiritual values.

■ In 1946, he was a founding member of the League of Muslim Scholars.

■ In 1948, he became a teacher of Islam at Dar el-Fatwa in Quneitra.

■ In 1950, he transferred to Dar el-Fatwa in Damascus.

■ In 1951, he was appointed Mufti of Damascus.

■ In 1954, he was a member of the Syrian delegation to the Muslim-Christian conference held in Lebanon.

■ In 1957, he visited Egypt at the invitation of the government to lecture at Al-Azhar University in Cairo.

■ In 1958, he was appointed first Mufti of Damascus and a member of the Supreme Council of Fatwa. He was also the founder of Al-Ansar Society and the Islamic Institutes for Call and Guidance in Damascus.

■ In 1959, he visited many European countries, including Switzerland, Spain, Germany and Italy, where he met orientalists and other eminent persons

concerned with Islamic studies. He gave lectures at several European Universities and visited Islamic centres there.

■ In 1962, he attended the 5th session of the Islamic World Conference in Baghdad.

■ In 1964, he delivered a speech at Al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem.

■ In 1964, he was elected Grand Mufti of Syria and Head of the Supreme Council of Fatwa as well as the Supreme Council of Waqf.

■ In 1965, he was elected a member of the Central Council of the Afro-Asian Islamic Organisation in Bandung, Indonesia.

■ In 1966, he received an invitation from the North Lake College Association of Indiana, Ohio and Michigan, where between April and June he delivered more than forty-four lectures on Islam and contemporary issues, including the Palestinian Question.

■ In 1967, he represented Syria at the meetings of the Central Council of the Afro-Asian Islamic Organisation in Jakarta, Indonesia.

■ In 1969, he accepted an invitation to meet the Chairman of the Religious Department of the USSR, where he met many Soviet officials. As a result of these contacts many mosques in Central Asia were reopened. He also contributed to the opening of the Supreme Islamic Institute in Tashkent.

■ In 1970, he headed a delegation to the general meeting of the International Islamic Conference, held in Jakarta, Indonesia.

■ In 1971, he established the Abu Nour Islamic Foundation, which teaches students between the ages of 12 and 18, both male and female, home and foreign. Branches of various colleges were opened in it:

1. In 1982, a branch of the Islamic Call College began, with four years of study;

2. In 1989, the Master's degree programme from Lebanon's Al-Ouzai College of Islamic Studies opened;

3. In 1989, a branch of Islamic Studies University of Pakistan opened, teaching its Master's degree;

4. In 1992, a branch of Um-Durman College of Sudan opened, teaching its Master's and Doctoral degree programmes;

5. In 1992, a branch of Usul Al-Din College of Abu Nour Islamic Foundation opened, with four years of study;

6. In 1998, a branch of Al-Azhar University began, with a four-year degree in Islamic Sciences & Law.

■ In 1972–1974, he visited Algeria, Iran and India, giving lectures at Islamic conferences there.

■ In 1976, he visited Saudi Arabia to represent the 1st Conference for the Mosque's Message.

■ In 1979, he accepted an invitation from the Cardinal of Austria to visit Austria, where he delivered many lectures at the University of Vienna and various Islamic centres on Muslim and Christian cooperation.

- In 1980, he accepted an invitation from the Vice President of East Germany where, on 17 April, he met many officials and held discussions with a delegation representing the Faculty of Theology from Berlin University. An official statement was issued later in which both sides confirmed the Oneness of God and that Jesus and Muhammad (peace be on them) were both Messengers of God.
- In 1981, he delivered a lecture at the Academy of Sciences in Moscow, entitled "Islam and Peace".
- In 1982, he presented the Muslim position at the Inter-Religious Conference in Moscow, 10–14 May, where he delivered a speech, entitled "The Principles of Peace in the World's Major Religions". The speech was designed to increase the awareness and responsibility of men of religion in spreading peace and thus preventing the onset of events that could lead to a nuclear holocaust.
- In 1983, he represented the Syrian Scholars at the International Conference for Peace, held in Prague, Czechoslovakia.
- In 1984, in April, he headed a delegation at the Round Table Conference for Peace in Moscow.
- In 1985, he accepted an invitation from the vice-president of East Germany. During this visit, 21–26 August, he met with the Minister of Religious Affairs and many other dignitaries from universities throughout the country.
- In 1985, in December, he accepted an invitation to visit Italy and to lecture at a number of its universities. In Milan he lectured on "Islam and Religious Tolerance", and in the Vatican on the "International Prospects for Islam and Christianity". He also visited the head of the Catholic Church, Pope John Paul II, at the Vatican and met some of the officials there.
- In 1986, 1–3 February, he represented the Syrian Scholars at the International Conference for Peace, held in Prague, Czechoslovakia.
- In 1986, 1–3 October, he participated in the Islamic conference at Pako, USSR, delivering a lecture, entitled "Peace in Islam".
- In 1987, he visited Poland and East Germany and lectured in various science academies on "Islam and Peace" and "Islam and Modern Problems".
- In 1987, he lectured on the "Coexistence in the Mediterranean" in Malta.
- In 1987, he visited the Vatican and held a second meeting with the head of the Catholic Church.
- In 1988, he visited Bulgaria, where he participated in celebrating the reopening of the Sofia Mosque and the establishment of the new Imam Institute. He also delivered a speech at the Academy of Sciences, entitled "Islam and World Peace".
- In 1988, he received an invitation to act as a co-chairman for the religious position at the Global Forum on Environment and Development

for Human Survival at Oxford University, UK. Unfortunately, he was unable to attend.

■ In 1989, 17–21 May, he accepted an invitation to Turkey and the Soviet Union, where he delivered lectures at various conferences, universities and Islamic centres.

■ In 1989, on 30 May, he began a two-week visit to Washington DC, Massachusetts, Connecticut, New York and Texas, at the invitation of the American State Department to visit, lecture and meet many religious centres and leaders in the USA.

■ In 1990, 15–19 January, he was elected chairman for the religious discussion in the Global Forum on the Environment and Development for Human Survival held in Moscow, and gave a speech at the Kremlin, entitled "The Responsibility of Man Towards Himself".

■ In 1990, 15–21 August, he accepted an invitation to lecture at a religious conference held in San Francisco, where he delivered a series of lectures, entitled "The Quran Extends its Helpful Hand to All Mankind" and "Spirituality in the 21st Century".

■ In 1990, 19–21 October, he accepted an invitation to a religious conference in Cairo, designed to prevent a Muslim-Christian conflict over the UN and Western countries' military action against Iraq because of its invasion of Kuwait. Unfortunately, he was unable to attend and the speech was delivered *in absentia*.

■ In 1990, he travelled to Tokyo, Japan, to attend a meeting that led to the establishment of the Global Forum Conference in Kyoto in 1993.

■ In 1991, in June, he attended a Muslim-Christian conference in Istanbul, heading the Islamic delegation in an inter-religious dialogue, where he lectured on "The Role of the Family in Muslim Society".

■ In 1991, he visited Japan, Korea and China, where he met the leaders of many Islamic centres and organizations.

1. In Japan, on 21 August, he delivered a speech to the Oomoto people in Kameoka.

2. In Seoul, Korea, 26 August–1 September, he presided over an inter-religious conference as guest of honour. On the last leg of his tour he stopped in China where he delivered several speeches before an audience of thousands of Muslims.

■ In 1991, in November, he attended an international religious conference held in Sudan, where he met the leaders of many religious traditions and delivered a speech.

■ In 1992, in June, he was invited by the UN to the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, to lead the religious session and to give a speech before an audience of hundreds of world leaders, entitled "The Abrahamic Religions: Shared Roots and Responsibilities". Unfortunately, he was unable to attend.

- In 1992, in December, he was invited to a religious conference held in Greece to give a lecture, entitled "The Conscience in Islam"; however, he could not attend because of poor health and the speech was delivered *in absentia*.
- In 1993, 19–21 January, he was invited to the 5th conference of the Islamic Affairs Supreme Council, Cairo, where he gave a lecture, entitled "The Solution to the Crisis of Religious Extremism".
- In 1993, 30 March–2 April, The Arab League named him chairman of the religious delegation to the Peace for Humanity Conference held in Vienna, where he gave a lecture, entitled "Brothers Under the Banner of Faith: the Banner of Muhammad and Jesus".
- In 1993, 17–23 April, he was elected chairman of the religious caucus at the Second Global Forum on Changing Values for Human Survival, held in Kyoto, Japan, where he delivered a speech, entitled "The Eternal Values".
- In 1993, 19–22 September, he received an invitation from the Community of St Egidio to attend a conference in Milan and give a lecture on "Faith and the Unity of the Human Family". The speech was delivered *in absentia*.
- In 1993, 3–6 November, he travelled to Ayabe, Japan, where he delivered the same lecture that he could not give in person earlier in the year in Milan, concluding that particular conference by delivering his proposals in the final paper given at the conference.
- In 1993, 30 November–4 December, he headed the Syrian Islamic delegation to the Muslim Conference for Bosnia in Istanbul, Turkey.
- In 1994, 14–24 January, he received a state invitation to visit India where he met the President, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Speaker of the Parliament. While there, he headed a Muslim University Professors' meeting.
- In 1995, 26–27 November, he received an invitation from SID (Swiss Institute for Development) and SAD (Swiss Academy for Development) to head the Syrian delegation to Biel and to give a lecture. The conference topic was "900 Years Are Enough: An End to the Crusades".
- In 1996, on 16 February, he received Louis Farrakhan, leader of the Nation of Islam, USA, and his delegation at Abu Nour. Mr. Farrakhan's speech identified the need for a closer relationship between Muslims for the sake of better and fruitful cooperation.
- In 1996, he received a Canadian delegation of theologians. During the Friday lecture on 12 April, a Waterloo University professor of the Bible expounded on the need for a close relationship between the Muslim and Christian worlds and for better understanding and cooperation.
- In 1996, 14–16 June, he received an invitation from the MECC (Middle East Council of Churches), Beirut, to represent Syria at the conference, where he gave a speech, entitled "An Invitation to the Islamic and Christian Worlds for the Sake of Jerusalem".

- In 1996, he received Dr Joe Elmore, ex-dean of Earham College, Indiana, USA, (and long time friend who had invited him in 1966 to give lectures at the Great Lake College Association of Indiana, Ohio and Michigan). Dr Elmore gave a speech at the mosque on 1 November, calling for more Muslim-Christian cooperation and for worldwide peace.
- In 1997, he received at his residence an American delegation headed by Reverend Edmond Lee Browning, from the Episcopal Church, New York City, during their visit to Syria on 23 March.
- In 1997, on 2 May, he received at Abu Nour Mosque a Christian delegation from the MECC. It consisted of bishops and church leaders headed by Pope Shnuda III of Alexandria and the Patriarch of the Orthodox-Coptic Church in Egypt, Patriarch Zakka Ewas I of Antioch, delegates from the All-East Syriac-Orthodox Church and others from various churches. Pope Shnuda gave a speech to the thousands of Muslim men and women gathered there before Friday prayers.
- In 1998, in October, he was invited to a conference in Los Angeles, California, but instead delivered his speech, entitled "Islam and Will-power" by a phone link from Damascus.
- In 1999, he received the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr George Carey, during his visit to Syria and the Holy Land.
- In 2001, he received the head of the Catholic Church, Pope John Paul II, at the Umayyad Mosque on 6 May, during part of his pilgrimage to Syria and the Holy Land.
- In 2001, on 24 August, he oversaw the graduation of students of the ninth (and the last) circle of imams and mosque leaders.
- In 2002, on 5 April, he received the Sufi Sheikh Nazem Al-Hakaani from Cyprus and his guests at Abu Nour Mosque. Sheikh Nazem addressed the Muslim audience. His previous visit had been in 1999.
- In 2002, 5–10 June, he was invited to the IVth Symposium on Religion, Science & Environment: the Adriatic Sea. His son Sheikh Salahuddin delivered his speech, "The Stewardship of Water," on his behalf.
- In 2002, on 27 September, he received the director of the Danish Institute in Damascus, and Dr Peter and his guests at Abu Nour Mosque. Dr Peter addressed the Muslim audience.
- In 2002, on 13 December, he received the Austrian Counsellor from the Damascus Embassy with a delegation, who delivered a speech on behalf of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, who had visited on 26 May 2000.
- In 2003, on 17 January, he welcomed Sheikh Jaffree from Yemen, (*alhabibali.org*) who delivered a speech about his visit to Syria and the Abu Nour Foundation.
- In 2003, on 14 February, he received President Dr Shon, the Secretary General and his assistant from the Korean Muslim Federation. Dr Abdul-Raziq Shon is also President of the Korean Association for Middle Eastern Studies and a professor at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies.

- In 2003, on 2 May, he received the French historian Dr Michel Bertrand, who delivered a speech about his experience before the war in Iraq and declared his *shahada* (acceptance of Islam) and his new name, Ahmad.
- In 2003, 31 May–9 June, he was invited to the Vth Symposium on Religion, Science & the Environment: the Baltic Sea. His son Sheikh Salahuddin gave a speech to the conference guests.
- In 2003, on 13 August, he received the Swedish professor Dr Leif Stenberg of Lund University with a delegation, who delivered a speech on his long experience of the Abu Nour Foundation and the Grand Mufti since 1992 on behalf of the group of students and researchers in Islamic affairs.
- In 2003, on 12 September, he received Joergen Simonsen, director of the Danish Institute in Damascus with a delegation, and Dr Mohammed Ayoob, the distinguished professor of International Relations at Michigan State University. Both delivered speeches on behalf of their guests.
- In 2003, on 19 September, he received an American delegation headed by Dr Arafat, who runs the *civilizationsexchange.org* centre, and his delegation members. Dr Arafat addressed the Muslim audience at Abu Nour Mosque.
- In 2003, on 26 September, he received a Japanese delegation headed by Tokyo University's professor of history and his religious delegation, who addressed the Muslim audience at Abu Nour Mosque.
- In 2003, on 7 November, he received the French film producer Dr Christian Bel, who delivered a speech and declared his *shahada* and named himself Issa (Jesus).
- In 2003, on 14 November, he received an American delegation from *Nonviolent Peaceforce* and Elias Amidon, director of the Boulder Institute for Nature and the Human Spirit (*boulderinstitute.org*) his first visit was on 22 May, who delivered a speech and showed a great interest in Islam and the Grand Mufti.
- Sheikh Ahmad still lectures regularly at Abu Nour Mosque, where thousands of male and female Muslims and non-Muslims attend his lectures, which appear weekly live on the web at *abunour.net*, with simultaneous translation into various languages (English, French, Turkish, Russian, Dutch and Japanese),

The Way of Truth

***“We Prophets are brothers;
our religion is one.”***

Authentic saying of Prophet Muhammad

Sheikh Ahmad Kuftaro
Grand Mufti of the Syrian Arab Republic

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Preface*

Perhaps there are some who have not heard of Sheikh Ahmad Kufaro, the Grand Mufti of Muslims in Syria. Nothing better describes the Sheikh than the fact that he has now been vigorously working, on all possible levels for over sixty years, to bring all the different members of the human family together. He has been directing all his efforts towards conducting interfaith dialogue and cooperation, establishing Islamic inter-sect dialogue and cooperation and shaping people who are equipped with today's knowledge but have not abandoned the heavenly spiritual message of the past.

Many may have missed out on Sheikh Ahmad's activities because there are no books out in his name nor, for those seeking sensationalism, did he ever make outrageous statements of the type that attract the curious. As for books, the Sheikh has been like the man whose house is on fire and while engaged in putting it out does not have time to sit down and have tea. Everywhere on Earth, there is one corner or the other suffering from symptoms of the spiritual stagnation that has befallen humanity. The Sheikh's lifelong mission is focused on the Quranic edict:

“O mankind! Lo! We have created you male and female, and have made you nations and tribes, that you may know one another. Lo! Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you, Allah is Knower, Aware.” Translation of the Holy Quran, Sura 49, The Inner Apartment, verse 13.

This Quranic verse outlines two of the most important Islamic principles. First, diversity in creation is a sign of the Creator's power, which should only lead to cooperation and love among the members of the human family. Second, competition among mankind, in the sight of God and man, should be based on who

* Written by Nabil Hijazi, PhD

is better in following God's commands in their moral, spiritual as well as everyday conduct. In the pursuit of such guidance, Sheikh Ahmad has always been, even when it was not fashionable to do so, travelling the globe to bring the message of understanding and cooperation that all of God's messengers have been sent with. Thus, working on all levels he has been busy contributing to the revival of God's heavenly message, as manifested throughout the ages by God's prophets and messengers. Often facing insurmountable odds, he has directed his efforts towards treating all the schisms of man. Hence, alongside his efforts in spurring and achieving interfaith dialogue, he has put vigorous efforts into reviving and revolutionising the Muslims' understanding of Islam and their cooperation with others.

Like the rainbow whose beauty one colour alone cannot capture, it is difficult to appreciate all Sheikh Ahmad's efforts or personality through the collection of lectures presented here. However, all the selected lectures are abundant with his essential message and with the deep spirituality of his person.

These lectures were selected, from among others, because of the topics discussed. It is hoped that they will be useful in furthering human understanding. A few notes about the lectures are in order. First, they are arranged chronologically. Second, all lectures were originally written in Arabic and as with every translation errors are bound to arise. Third, all translations of Quranic quotations are referenced as *Sura number*, *Sura name*, *verse number*. In fact, no single Quranic translation is adopted since some are better than others in some cases. However, Yusuf Ali's translation has mainly been used. Finally, for those who are language sensitive, most of the references to man and mankind in the text come from the Arabic words *Insān* and *Nās*, which are gender neutral and do not address a limited audience. Peace be upon you.

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The Grand Mufti of the Syrian Arab Republic

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Introduction

In The Name Of God, The Most Merciful, Most Beneficent

WGS Eng. Yasser Al-Osthi - Damascus, Syria

Islam as a new concept was introduced to mankind more than fourteen centuries ago, but in fact it is a reality with roots in creation itself. It is the Truth that has accompanied man from his very beginning. Since then, a chain of prophets has been continually sent to remind him of this Truth and, by so doing, linked man to his Lord and Creator, Who through His prophets has progressively expanded His message over the millennia.

Islam, which means “submission to God,” reflects the relationship between man and God that is seen in all religions and in the messages of all messengers of God. Thus, there can be no conflict between what was revealed to Moses, Jesus or Muhammad. The Holy Quran affirms this religious unity and the common prophetic brotherhood of the messengers and condemns their segregation.

“He has ordained for you that religion which He commended unto Noah, and that which We inspire in you, and that which We commanded unto Abraham and Moses and Jesus, saying, ‘Establish the religion and be not divided therein.’” T.Q. (Translation of the Holy Quran), Sura 42, The Counsel, verse 13.

Despite differences of time, place and people, this comprehensive unity, which is the religion of God, is founded on a natural disposition cultured by a rational mind and heart. Man’s aptitude to live this life and that of the hereafter finds completion within the framework of this rationale.

The teachings of Islam, therefore, aim to protect this disposition and strive to maintain its purity despite the diseases continually afflicting it. The protection is afforded through a religious education that sees the importance of man's natural disposition, as the sciences see the universe, in its ability to expand knowledge and the intellect. Such religious training purifies and refines man's nature, teaching him to recognise his true purpose and goal. The Holy Quran considers piety the essence of man's nature, like that seen in the lives of the prophets.

The life of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) represents a rejuvenation and not a pioneering struggle, a confirmation and a complement to the work of earlier prophets. This confirmation arises because the central theme of Islam revolves around the unity of God, a subject to which the Holy Quran devotes much attention. The Holy Quran is filled with arguments that guide man towards God, teaching him to recognise his Lord and Creator. Its arguments are highly eloquent and enlightening, making man reflect on the universe around him.

Confirmation of the unity of God is the distinguishing feature of Islam. For Muslims, He is Unique, the Sponsor of mankind to Whom hearts turn and with Whom all seek to connect. He is One, without a partner, and He is without equal, for He is the Lord of creation. He is the Pre-eternal, Uncreated, neither begetting nor begotten, possessing neither spouse nor offspring, neither limited by space or time, nor having any substance. All that exists is His creation and stands in need of Him. He is the Ultimate Sanctuary in times of difficulty.

"He is the Originator of the heavens and the Earth. How can He have a child, when there is for Him no consort, when He created all things and is aware of all things? Such is Allah, your Lord. There is no God save Him, the creator of all things, so worship Him and He takes care of all things." T.Q., Sura 6, The Cattle, verses 101-102.

The consequence of this monotheistic belief is action, which manifests itself in the believer's love for his Lord, a love that binds him through reliance and sincerity.

Islam demands belief in the Hereafter, where our deeds in this life are rewarded and our lives continue after our earthly existence. Hence, the lives of the unbelievers are futile, despite the pleasure and ease they may find in their present existence; they will eventually discover unhappiness and despair in this life and an eternity of the same in the next. On the other hand, those who pursue this life more seriously with God-consciousness that directs their deeds and actions towards good meet with the best rewards in the next, although their rewards in this life may be insignificant and subject to disdain from those around them.

"The scale of that day is of justice. As for those whose scale is heavy, they are the successful; and as for those whose scale is light, those are they who have wronged their souls because they disbelieved in Our revelations." T.Q., Sura 7, The Heights, verses 8-9.

Regarding the present world, even a passing glance will show a strong connection between the perfection of faith and a positive outlook on life. Mankind, as understood by Islam, is the lord of his environment.

"Do you not see how Allah has made subservient to you whatsoever is in the skies and whatsoever is in the Earth and has bestowed upon you of His favours both seen and unseen?" T.Q., Sura 31, Luqman, verse 20.

Thus, we see that the Holy Quran connects humanity with the universe by drawing attention to the myriad spectacles of creation that life has to hold. It ties the material life of man to his actions in that he must struggle in this life for material gain. Similarly, the more aesthetic aspects of life bear fruit in intellectual exercises.

Of course, Islam disagrees with the idea that life is a ‘free for all’, having no one to govern it, and that man was created by a mere act of chance. This philosophy encourages man to squander his life in idle pursuits. Muslims believe that God has granted us this life and settled us in this world as a means to know Him. Early Islamic civilisation was founded on this reasoning and sound moral principle. Highly cultured societies developed from it, which brought much good to the world and bequeathed to it a rich heritage.

Islam proclaims freedom of thought, while simultaneously limiting the freedom of desires that bring about disorder in society. It concerns itself with the affairs of man in both the present world and the world to come by focusing on the physical and spiritual activities in this life, because it sees man as an intricate whole without division. Thus, man’s desired perfection lies in the successful struggle in both the material and spiritual planes, in a formula that equates success in this world with the everlasting success in the Hereafter. Failure to build a proper foundation will bring about the collapse and eventual destruction of man and his society in this life and eternal despair in the afterlife.

“Whosoever is blind here will be blind in the hereafter and yet further from the road.” T.O., Sura 17, The Children of Israel, verse 72.

It is the physical body of man, therefore, through which he attains his goals. If the body becomes ill or weak, man is no longer able to benefit himself or those around him. Thus, Islam is the religion of both body and soul. It provides a high standard of ethics and moral values for man to follow, and a straight path, which results in harvesting the good of this world and that of the Hereafter.

Islam also denies total asceticism, for it may stunt life. Instead, it looks for the middle ground that allows both body and soul to grow and develop. The Muslim is one whose inner self is absorbed in the love of his Lord, while his outer self faces the

world fighting to correct it, and by doing so perfects his belief in the Oneness of his Creator.

His love detaches his soul from all material things, a love whose light purifies and strengthens not only the soul but also the body that houses it, creating the perfect symbiosis energised and guided by the faith in the Most Compassionate God, Who says,

“And he who rejects false deities and believes in Allah has grasped a firm hand-hold which will never break. Allah is Hearing, Knowing. Allah is guardian of those who believe. He brings them out of the darkness into the light.” T.Q., Sura 2, The Cow, verses 256–257.

The fruits of such guidance are men who strive to purify themselves and look to create the perfect society whose foundation is piety. These men see the racial and other differences between themselves as a sign of the majesty of their Creator and, in so doing, strengthen the bond of faith that lies between them.

“O humankind! We created you from [a single pair of] a male and female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know each other (and not that you may despise each other). Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you, Allah is All-Knowing, All-Aware.” T.Q., Sura 49, The Dwellings, verse 13.

Thus, the compassion of Islam lies in its seeing mankind as one brotherhood. For the prophet of God said, “All creatures are God’s dependants and the most beloved of His creation is the most beneficent to those under his care.” An example of such care and concern is seen in the life of the prophet who, when a funeral bier of a Jew passed by him, stood up out of respect. When asked about his action he replied, “Is it not a soul?” By such demonstrations of sincerity and love for mankind, the Holy Quran — the word of God — gives testimony to the mission of God’s prophet as a mission of mercy to all.

“And We did not send you save as a mercy to all of creation.” T.Q., Sura 21, The Prophets, verse 107.

God further describes in the Holy Quran the call of His prophet as an address to the intellect of mankind towards a willing acceptance of humility based on conviction rather than forced submission.

“Let there be no compulsion in religion; Truth stands out clear from Error.” T.Q., Sura 2, The Cow, verse 256.

The very word ‘Islam’ means the willing submission of creation to its Lord. The prophet said, “Lo! The friends of God are those who when seen remind others of Him.” For the believer is as the sun during a beautiful sunset or the full moon on a clear night: they are signs of the wonders of this universe that remind you of the beauty of their Creator. “God is beautiful and loves all that is beautiful.” It is a beauty that stems from the conformity of such bodies to the plan of their Creator. Thus, when a believer reaches a state where his submission is complete, he parallels the universe surrounding him and is as his intended design.

“Surely we did create man in the best of moulds.” T.Q., Sura 95, The Fig, verse 4.

The prophet of God said, “The heirs of the prophets are the scholars.” However, the prophets of God did not leave behind scholarly works as such, but bequeathed an infinitely more important legacy to man: knowledge and wisdom acquired from their Creator. That is to say, the prophets came to teach and purify man under the instructions and direction of his Lord. The legacy of Islam is seen in the sincere people who dedicate themselves to the betterment of humanity and improving the welfare of mankind. It is around such persons that men have gathered and will continue to gather to learn of their religion and their Creator.

“In it are men who love to be purified and Allah loves those who look to purify themselves.” T.Q., Sura 9, The Repentance, verse 108.

اللقاء بين الإسلام و المسيحية

Islam and Christianity: Two Faiths, One God

**The University of Vienna, Austria
18 May 1979**

In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful.

The mission of all God's apostles and prophets was based on an essential cornerstone and well-grounded pillar, namely to guide mankind to the existence of the Creator of the universe. Therefore, mankind must believe in, and worship, God to be happy in this life and lead a righteous life. Furthermore, God's apostles emphasized the fraternity of mankind whom God created (Adam and Eve were their parents), the criterion of excellence being righteousness, piety and virtuous deeds. The Holy Quran says,

"O mankind! We have created you from [a single pair of] a male and a female, and have made you into nations and tribes, that you may know one another. Verily, the most honoured of you in the sight of Allah, is the most righteous of you, Allah is All-Knowing, All-Aware." T.Q. (Translation of the Holy Quran), Sura 49, The Dwellings, verse 13.

As a result of belief in God and the fraternity of all human beings, mankind must necessarily live a life of love, agreement, cooperation and peace.

All of God's legislations were revealed to emphasize this point. The prophets of God at various times showed humanity that God's religion is always the same, that they are intimate brothers with no enmity or conflict, that the aim of their message is one, that He Who raised them is One, and that the fundamentals of their religions are one — void of any contradiction or contrast.

To fix this fact in the minds and hearts of generations, world thinkers of all revealed religions must undertake strenuous efforts and close collaboration. This doctrine I have been striving to propagate and preach for the last 35 years, for it is the key to the welfare of human beings and their peaceful life without malice or hatred. Further, the Holy Quran and Gospel both testify that all revealed

religions do not disagree in their doctrinal origins and human objectives. The Holy Quran says,

“He has ordained for you that religion which He commended unto Noah, and that which We inspire in you, and that which We commanded unto Abraham and Moses and Jesus, saying, ‘Establish the religion and be not divided therein.’” T.Q., Sura 42, The Counsel, verse 13.

This text doubtlessly testifies that God’s religion at all times and with all prophets is the same, and that God orders His prophets and their peoples to unite and agree and not to be different and separate.

The Holy Quran contains many examples of this meaning, such as,

“We have sent you Inspiration, as We sent it to Noah and the Messengers after him: We sent Inspiration to Abraham, and Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob and the Tribes, to Jesus, Job, Jonah, Aaron and Solomon, and to David We gave the Psalms.” T.Q., Sura 4, The Women, verse 163.

Thus, God gave the same revelation in quality and content, all prophets drawing from one main source. Moreover, it is evident that the Holy Quran orders Muslims to believe in all of God’s prophets and to obey their commandments:

“Say (O Muslims), ‘We believe in God and that which has been revealed to us and that which was revealed to Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac, and Jacob and the Tribes, and that which Moses and Jesus received, and that which the Prophets received from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them.’” T.Q., Sura 2, The Cow, verse 136.

Anyone reading the Holy Quran will see that its long chapters ennoble and dignify Christ and his mother, the Virgin Mary. The Holy Quran also mentions and clarifies

Christ's miracles and tells of miracles not found in the Gospel itself, such as creating birds out of clay into which he breathed life with God's assistance. Another miracle of Jesus is speaking to people from the cradle.

Two other long chapters in the Holy Quran refer to Christ: the first is *Mary* and the second is *The Family of Imran*, the family of Jesus Christ. In them we are told of Mary giving birth to Christ after her immaculate conception:

“And when the angels said, ‘O Mary! Behold, God has chosen you and made you pure, and has preferred you above the women of creation.... O Mary! Verily, God gives you glad tidings of a word from Him, whose name is the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, illustrious in the world and the Hereafter, and one of those brought near [to God]. He will speak to mankind when in his cradle and when in his manhood, and he is of the righteous.’” T.Q., Sura 3, *The Family of Imran, verses 42–46.*

The Holy Quran addresses the Muslims clearly indicating Christ's high rank with God:

“The Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, is [only] a messenger of God and His word which He conveyed unto Mary, and a spirit from Him.” T.Q., Sura 4, *The Women, verse 171.*

These ideas, or more precisely, this belief, which Muslims are ordered to embrace about Christ, made their hearts open to receive all of Christ's teachings and facilitated convergence and cooperation between Muslims and Christians.

The Holy Quran shows, very clearly, that Christians are the closest to Muslims because of the good morals and virtues they share with them. It says,

“You will find the nearest in affection to those who believe are those who say, ‘We are Christians.’ That is because there are among them priests and monks, and they are not given to arrogance.

When they listen to what has been revealed to the messenger, you see their eyes overflow with tears because of their recognition of the truth. They say, 'Our Lord, we believe, so inscribe us as among the witnesses....' God has rewarded them for their saying with Gardens under which rivers flow, wherein they abide forever. Such is the reward of the good." T.Q., Sura 5, The Table Spread, verses 82-85.

As a result of this positive attitude of Islam towards Christianity and the Gospel, many ancient Christians were moved to express their belief and recognition of Muhammad (peace be upon him) and his religion. Some even granted the Muslims moral and financial aid to solidify and propagate Islam, such as the Emperor of Ethiopia (Abyssinia) in the 6th century AD, who asked the oppressed Muslims who migrated to his country to recite some verses from the Holy Quran concerning Christ and his faith. He and his monks wept and declared their recognition of Muhammad's prophethood. He said, "The teachings of Christ and Muhammad flow out from one source." The Emperor did not renounce Christianity when he said that, for Islam does not order Christians to ignore the commandments and teachings of Jesus Christ. The Holy Quran addresses Christians:

"Let the people of the Gospel judge by what God has revealed in it." T.Q., Sura 5, The Table Spread, verse 47.

"We bestowed on him (Jesus) the Gospel in which was guidance and light." T.Q., Sura 5, The Table Spread, verse 46.

Prophet Muhammad said, "I am the closest of all people to Jesus, son of Mary." He also said, "Prophets are brethren from one father, from different mothers, but with one religion." He said, "You Muslims shall conquer Egypt. If so, be kind to its Christian people." The fourth Caliph, Ali, and the great leaders of Islam used to say to their contemporary Christians, "We do not prevent you from

believing in Christianity; indeed we order you to obey it.” Such examples are countless.

Was it not the utmost degree of fraternity, affection and collaboration when Muhammad made his mosque a place for worship for his Christian guests in Madinah?

Do not be surprised when you hear that the Muslims made of their great Umayyad Mosque a joint temple of worship for Muslims and Christians, who entered it through one gate, when Damascus was the capital of their great state. They divided the mosque into two parts and they used to say their prayers side by side.

All this was the inevitable outcome of understanding the closeness and respect between these two great revealed religions in ancient times. They agreed in aim and object; there was no long opposition in their essence and origin. It is well known, in this respect, that Omar, the second Caliph, when in Jerusalem, refused to say his prayers in the Holy Sepulchre lest the Muslims turn that church, or part of it, into a mosque. Thus, he observed its sanctity.

Muhammad commanded Muslims to be kind to Jews and Christians, the followers of the two revealed religions. He said, “Whoever causes mischief to a Christian or Jew shall be my enemy on the Day of Judgment and he shall pay for it.” He also said, “Be good to Coptic Christians.” When the son of the Muslim governor of Egypt beat a Christian on his head after a quarrel, the latter went to Omar in Madinah asking for justice. Omar summoned the governor and his son and gave the Christian a whip to beat his opponent in the presence of the great men of the state. After the Christian took revenge but refrained from beating the governor himself when Omar asked him to do so, he said, “I have received justice. May God reward you!” Turning to his governor, Omar said, “Why do you enslave freely born people?”

Islam has not stopped at the border concerning respect for other revealed religions. It has gone further by implanting love and affection. For example, we recall when the Persian idolaters defeated the Byzantine Christians, the Muslims grieved. Gabriel descended, consoled the Muslims and brought good tidings that the Christians would be victorious in less than nine years. This incident occurs in the chapter entitled *The Roman Byzantines*:

“Alif, Lam, Mim. The Byzantines have been defeated in the lands close-by; yet it is they who, despite their defeat, shall be victorious within a few years. With God rests all power of decision, first and last, and on that day the believers will rejoice in God’s support; He gives support to whom He wills, and He [alone] is the Almighty, the Dispenser of grace.” T.Q., Sura 30, *The Romans*, verses 1–5.

The prophecy came true and the Muslims were delighted.

Islam, by its teachings and principles, had been able to turn millions of heathens into believers in God, in Christ and in all prophets and revealed testaments.

The Holy Quran used to make Muslims and Christians affectionate brothers, who lived in happiness and cooperation. Why do we not see this again in our time, especially when atheism has shrouded most parts of the world with its dark shadow and injustice, and is getting ready to swallow the remainder? It is high time we called aloud for a meeting between leading Muslim and Christian religious men and thinkers. The meeting would create an affinity between the souls of all followers of revealed religions and a spiritual familiarity, with all mankind adopting the maxim of cooperation in common points and tolerance concerning trifling differences.

In this world of trouble and disorder, there is no need for separation or discord. Why do we not meet and come to a mutual understanding when both our religions call for

piety, kindness, charity and virtue? Christianity says, "Love God your Lord with all your heart and mind, and love your kin as you love yourself!" Muhammad says, "None of you will be a true believer unless he loves for his brother what he loves for himself." Christ says, "The merciful will be in Paradise by virtue of their mercy." Muhammad says, "The Merciful God will be compassionate to those who give mercy; be merciful to those on Earth to receive the mercy from Him in heaven." Christ says, "Give whoever begs you and do not send back one who wants to borrow from you." Muhammad says, "All creatures are God's dependants. The most favoured to Him is he who is most beneficial to them."

Even the theological doctrine about God, the Creator, the Matchless, the Partnerless Lord, is clearly illustrated in the Bible and Quran. In St John's Gospel, Christ says, "And this is life eternal, that they might know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent." In St Matthew's we read, "To the Lord, your God, kneel and Him alone worship." God addresses Muhammad in the Holy Quran saying,

"Say, 'He is God, the One!'" T.Q., Sura 112, The Purity, verse 1

and

"Know there is no god but Allah." T.Q., Sura 47, Muhammad, verse 19.

When Christ was asked about Doomsday, he said, "None knows when that day and that hour comes." The same was told to Muhammad in the Holy Quran,

"They ask you of the [destined] Hour, when its appointed time will be. Say, 'The knowledge of it is with my Lord [only]. He alone will reveal it at its proper time.'" T.Q., Sura 7, The Heights, verse 187.

Countless texts in the Holy Quran and Bible suggest that the two religions agree on the worship of the Almighty Sole-Creator. Thus, it is taken for granted that there will

be trifling differences in interpretation, which even occur among the followers of one religion. Such differences ought not to prevent compromise, accord of hearts and spiritual affiliation for the benefit of peace, faith and mankind, the likeness of which is a bouquet of variegated flowers that dazzles and fascinates when arranged in good proportion.

The proximity of our two religions in origins and aims led many scholars on both sides to preach cooperation, study and dialogue between Islam and Christianity for the sake of faith, the welfare of humanity and peace. This standpoint led the great Christian poet Halim Damous to say,

*“By God, all religions are merely windows,
Through which worshippers see God.
Mankind will not discriminate between
Muhammad and Jesus,
If they understand the essence of their religion.
I feel the presence of Jesus in the Quran,
And in the Bible I sense the spirit of Muhammad.”*

The Arab poet-laureate Ahmad Shawqi said, “The diversity of religions must not lead to hostility among mankind, a division in the revealed books and a separation of the prophets. All faiths are the store of utmost wisdom; their essence is the love and fear of God as well as tolerance.”

Is it not incumbent upon us, the believers of all revealed religions, to meet and cooperate as our prophets did meet in their teachings and commandments? Should not all leaders of religions rise in a spiritual revolution to reject fanaticism and stagnancy, and to preach affection, fraternity and peaceful living? Should we not strive to build a new spiritual world for humanity based on integrity, nobility and genuine well-being?

The politicians and diplomats of this century have established the United Nations and the Security Council. They hold protracted conferences and councils to discuss

disarmament and banning nuclear and strategic weapons, which if used but once would not leave a living creature on the Earth. So, has the world gained the long-awaited peace? Do human beings live in peace? Has misery been abolished? Is there no more hunger? Are there no more wars? Have inventors stopped producing new kinds of destructive weapons?

Cannot theologians and religious leaders significantly contribute to the enlightenment of people of various countries and religions by emphasizing that God and His prophets command nothing but brotherhood, peace and affection among the human race, and that malice and hostility are loathed by the prophets?

If humanity does not receive deliverance through the people of profound integrity and faith working in mutual acquaintance and religious toleration, the situation will be awful and God will rebuke us in the world hereafter for every shortcoming, fanaticism and discord that may increase devastation, agony and bloodshed.

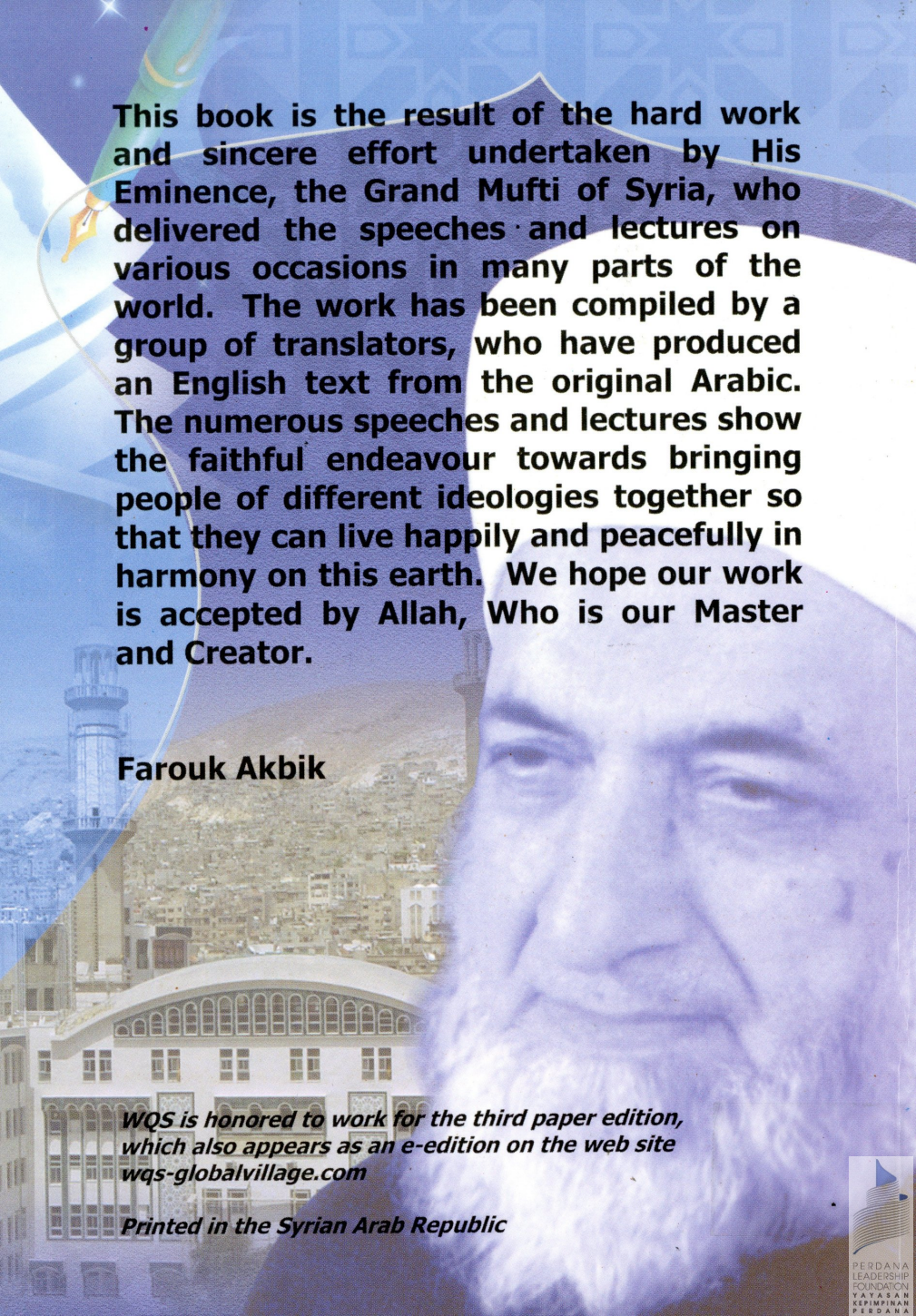
We, the faithful, are badly in need of a heavenly spiritual organisation that will allow us to collaborate to bring about peace to a world that needs cooperation and brotherhood. The field of science requires our efforts because we still find the weak and the powerful, the oppressed and the oppressor, the usurped and the usurper. No modern accomplishment — in geology, outer space, the depths of the oceans, polar expeditions, and the oil and metal industries — has been able to cure mankind of malice and ill will.

Remedies are available, the illness is harmful and it calls for operations by physicians of the heart and soul who have excellent prescriptions to rid humanity of wretchedness and ruin.

We are no enemies to atheists; we are their fellow beings. We call them to present their arguments and seek the truth. We invite them on to the path of safety and fraternity. We wish to be sincere advisers to them, and this can be achieved by cooperation between faithful thinkers of revealed religions and other schools of thought. The attempts by contemporary politicians to bring peace have proved fruitless; so let us try rational faith. Let the followers of the three religions collaborate. Muhammad says, "Man is the brother of man whether he likes it or not." Christ says, "Love your kin as you love yourself." Moses preached the same thing.

Even the Soviets, though professing the non-existence of God and that life is materialistic, have held scores of religious conferences for the sake of peace. What has the free world done, the Western world I mean? How many religious conferences have been held here? Hardly any.

In spite of shortcomings and negative indications, I am optimistic that Christians must one day embrace Muslims and the Gospel must come to an understanding with the Holy Quran. Here in the East they have long been with each other, and they will meet once more, with God's leave, in our present day all over the world. Thus, a new spirit will be imparted to the world with the fragrance of love, brotherhood and peace, and God's reward and pleasure in the Hereafter will be the result. This optimism is not emotional or sentimental, but impelled by what many Christian and non-Christian thinkers have declared in various religious conferences. Before relating their recommendations to you, I would like to impart to you what George Bernard Shaw wrote: "I have always held the religion of Muhammad in high esteem for its flooding vivacity. However, owing to some ignorance or hateful fanaticism it was portrayed to be the opponent of Christianity and Christ. After I had studied the life of Muhammad as being a great man, I found out that he was



This book is the result of the hard work and sincere effort undertaken by His Eminence, the Grand Mufti of Syria, who delivered the speeches and lectures on various occasions in many parts of the world. The work has been compiled by a group of translators, who have produced an English text from the original Arabic. The numerous speeches and lectures show the faithful endeavour towards bringing people of different ideologies together so that they can live happily and peacefully in harmony on this earth. We hope our work is accepted by Allah, Who is our Master and Creator.

Farouk Akbik

WQS is honored to work for the third paper edition, which also appears as an e-edition on the web site wqs-globalvillage.com

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