

INTER- FAITH DIALOGUE: THE QUR'ĀNIC AND PROPHETIC PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Inter-religious discourse is a pertinent aspect of a comparative religion studies especially in a pluralism society. By pluralism it refers to the differences in term of belief holds by the believers towards the concept of god, belief, ritual and religious ceremony, ethics and culture which function as the backbone of a religion. History has proven that inter-faith dialogue is not new as it existence can be traced in both the Islamic and western civilizations. However, limited knowledge and understanding on this issue resulted it to be viewed negatively especially by the Muslim. Most of them are not aware of the Qur'ānic exegesis on the concept of inter-faith dialogue and how it was practised by the Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) since the first year of hijrah. In addition, many do not realize the important role inter-faith dialogue as an effective method of da`wah (propagation of the truth). Thus, this paper intend to literally analyse the basic concept on inter-faith dialogue and how it is used in Qur'an. Among the elements of dialogue identified from the

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analysis are (1) the basis of dialogue: objectives, principles, guidelines, methodologies and rules of dialogue, (2) history of inter-faith dialogue relationship, (3) Qur'anic exegesis on the Prophets' dialogue, (4) understanding of a religion and its tradition, (5) understanding of the inter-faith dialogue which took place during the rise of civilizations, (6) current context, needs and obligations. Thus, a conclusion and accurate definition can be specified clearly; theoretically and practically. Besides, the closed relationship between the inter-faith dialogue and da`wah will be analysed as practised by Prophet Muḥammad (p.b.u.h). It is also important to further analyse the aspects constituting a dialogue as sometimes a peace, non-violent dialogue can be transformed into a debate or as serious as swearing with one's life (mubāhalah) as has been witnessed between Prophet Muḥammad and the Jews in Madīnah and the Najrān Christian. Thus, with a solid ground of understanding, the Muslims are able to put inter-faith dialogue into practice and view it as part of the new method of da`wah.

Keywords: *Islam, Inter-Faith Dialogue, Inter-Civilizational Dialogue*

BACKGROUND

Inter-faith dialogue or discourse is one of the most pertinent aspects in comparative religion studies and the important role played by it in a pluralism community is indubitable. This is because; pluralism is closely connected to the concepts on God, belief, rituals, religious activities, ethics and cultures; which are the back bone of a religion.

Long before the modern practiced of inter-faith dialogue, the literature attests that comparative religion study has received an appraisable introduction in the West as early as 14th century. Discovery of some books such as “*Tischreden(Table Talk)*” by Martin Luther (d. 1566),¹ “*Dialoguesconcerning Natural Religion*” by David Hume (d. 1779),² “*Dialogue on Hindu Philosophy*” by K.M. Banerjea (d. 1861) and “*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*” as it was in India (d. 1897)³ serve as a solid proof to such claim. In 19th century, comparative religion studies has become a scientific knowledge which is known as ‘the science of religions’ or

¹ Eliade, Mircea (1987), *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, Vol.3, U.S.A: Macmillan Company, p. 345.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

'*religionswissenschaft*' in Germany and '*la science de religion*' in French.⁴ Among prolific figures of this time were Emmanuel Kant (d. 1840),⁵ Max Muller (d. 1900),⁶ Emile Durkheim (d. 1917),⁷ Sigmund Freud (d. 1939)⁸ and Joachim Wach (d. 1955).⁹ Only in the mid 20th century that inter-faith dialogue received the general public attention.¹⁰

Outside the European and American continents, the Islamic civilization proved that inter-faith discourse has started as early as during the first century of hijrah. It is best reflected in the meeting between Prophet Muḥammad (p.b.u.h) and the Najrān Christian delegation in Madīnah.¹¹ Besides the Prophetic account, there are great numbers of Islamic scholars who have contributed actively to the development of comparative religion either through writing or non-writing medium. Among them were al-Bīrūnī (d. 1051),¹² Ibn Ḥazm (d. 1066),¹³ al-Shahrastānī (d. 1085),¹⁴ Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 1328) and among the contemporary scholar who has wide and in-depth knowledge on this is Ismā'īl R. Al-Fārūqī (d. 1986)¹⁵. These scholars' contributions are really useful as they function as the main references in comparative religion studies and inter-faith discourse.

⁴ *Ibid.*.

⁵ His contribution in comparative religion studies was "*Philosophy of Religion*".

⁶ His contribution in comparative religion studies was "*Anthropology of Religion*".

⁷ His contribution in comparative religion studies was adalah "*Sociology of Religion*".

⁸ His contribution in comparative religion studies was "*Psychology of Religion*".

⁹ His contribution in comparative religion studies was "*Phenomenology of Religion*".

¹⁰ Eliade (1987), *op.cit.*, Vol.3, p. 344.

¹¹ Haykal, Muhammad Husein (2002), *The Life of Muhammad*, Isma'īl R. al-Faruqi (trans.), 8th ed. Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Trust Book, pp. 195-197; Muhammad Husayn (1982), *Sejarah Hidup Muhammad*. Hayat Muhammad (trans.), 18th ed. Jakarta: Dunia Pustaka Jaya, pp. 239-244.

¹² Among his contribution was "*Kitāb al-Hind*" and "*Kitāb al-Āthār*".

¹³ Among his contribution was "*Kitāb al-Faṣl fī al-Mīlāl wa al-Ahwā' wa al-Niḥāl*".

¹⁴ Among his contribution was "*Kitāb al-Mīlāl wa al-Niḥāl*".

¹⁵ Among his contribution were "*Christian Ethics: A Historical and Systematic Analysis of its Dominant Ideas*". (Some of the ideas mentioned above are from Mohd Noh Abdul Jalil (2002), "al-Rānīrī's Perception of Other Religions in his book *Tibyān fī al-Ma'rifah al-Adyān*", Dissertation for Master in Usūl al-Dīn & Comparative Religion submitted to International Islamic University Malaysia, pp. 1-2)

INTER-FAITH DIALOGUE FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF ISLAM

INTRODUCTION

Inter-faith dialogue is new to the heterogeneous Malaysians and its diversified religious context, despite the fact that it has been well-recorded and populated among the historical inter-faith societies in both Islamic and western civilization. The important roles played by inter-faith dialogue need lesser expression as the vitality of the term speaks on its own. Its emergence and development have been striding along the philosophy and religion advancement.¹⁶

Dialogue is built on the ultimate values and principles of Islamic culture and civilization which need to be preserved. Therefore prior to further discussion, it is important for the author to operationally define the term dialogue of different languages literally and semantically. The definitions were presented in order to highlight the semantic elements of the term 'dialogue'. Thus, it will lead to more accurate and plausible conclusion or definition. In addition, the Qur'ānic application of the word dialogue will also be scrutinized.

DEFINITION OF DIALOGUE

In Malay, dialogue is defined as speech, action, story or any form of speech acts engaged in exchanging views; let it be discussion or consultation between two or more parties on an issue openly.¹⁷ Dialogue also refers to the discourse or conversation between forum participants.¹⁸ In English, the word 'dialogue' is originated from Greek; "*dialectic*" which means "*discourse*".¹⁹ It has been introduced by two great Greek philosophers – Socrates (470-399 B.C) and Plato (429-348 B.C). The concept of dialogue

¹⁶ Eliade (1987), *op.cit.*, Vol. 3, pp. 344; *The Encyclopedia Americana* (2000), Vol. 9, USA: Grolier Incorporated, p. 56; Sutcliffe, John M. (1984), *A Dictionary of Religious Education*, London: SCM Press Ltd & The Christian Education Movement, p. 112.

¹⁷ Hajah Noresah Baharom *et al.* (eds.) (2000), *Kamus Dewan*, 3rd ed. Kuala Lumpur: DBP, p. 302.

¹⁸ *Kamus Dwibahasa* (1999), Vol. 13, Kuala Lumpur: DBP, p. 357; *Global Encyclopedia* (2001), Vol. 5, Kuala Lumpur: Smart Genie Corporation Sdn.Bhd., p. 120.

¹⁹ Reese, William L. (1996), *Dictionary of Philosophy and Religion*, New Jersey: Humanities Press, p. 175.

applied by Socrates viewed dialogue on question and answer basis²⁰ whereas Plato was based on the philosophies of drama and fiction²¹.

In addition to the above, dialogue is also defined as conversation, talk, debate, discussion, consultation and conference between two or more parties. This word is commonly used in both formal and written conversation, and it is usually being utilized by participants in discussing and presenting different ideas and philosophies intellectually.²² With reference to the Greek etymology, the term dialogue is a combination of two words. The first is prefix “*dia-*” which meant “*through*” and the later is “*logos*” which can be defined as “*word*” or “*the relationship between principle and point of view on certain issues*”.²³ Thus dialogue is defined as point of view or idea which is discussed to come to an agreement which is constructive to the parties involved.²⁴ However, there is misinterpretation of this Greek word which hinders its true meaning from being understood. Instead of “*dia-*” the prefix has been viewed as “*di-*” which means two. Thus it becomes “*Di-logue*” referring to a number of parties which have different views or ideas and this might lead to an uptight situation and as a result, a conclusion cannot be attained. And this is different to the definition presented earlier. As for monologue, it refers to a discussion between several parties who are selfish, refuse to accept and have no respect on others’ ideas and views.²⁵

Generally, based on the above discussion, the author concluded that dialogue refers to a discussion between several parties of different perspective and ideas with the objectives to know, learn and share their views and as a result will be an advantage to all or individual.

In Arabic dialogue is “*al-ḥiwār*”. With reference to its etymology, it is originated from (ج, و, ح). Ibn Manẓūr in his book *Lisān al-Arab* has defined dialogue as “*al-rujū*” which means *going back*.²⁶ As a plural verb,

²⁰ *The Encyclopedia Americana* (2000), *op.cit.*, Vol. 9, p. 59.

²¹ Whalen, John P. (1981), *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 4, Washington: Jack Heraty & Associates, Inc, p. 849.

²² *Ibid.*; Rappoport, Angelo S. (eds.) (1989), *Encyclopedia Dictionary of the World*, 4th ed. New Delhi: Akashdeep Publishing House, p. 17; *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica* (2000), Vol. 4, 15th ed. Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica Inc, p. 63.

²³ Forward, Martin (2001), *Inter-Religious Dialogue: A Short Introduction*, Oxford: Oneworld Publication, p. 12.

²⁴ *Ibid.*.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 11-12.

²⁶ Ibn Manẓūr (1990), *Lisān al-`Arab*, Vol. 4, Beirut: Dār-Şādir, p. 217; Altwaijri, Abdul Aziz (1997), *Dialogue and Civilizational Interaction from an Islamic Perspective*, Cairo: Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

“*yataḥāwarūn*” means *they dialogue* or *they take and give in the course of speech*.²⁷ It also referring to *the act engaging in a dialogue* or in Arabic it is called as “*ataḥāwuru*”. Thus, it can be clearly defined as *responsiveness or ability to respond*²⁸ towards something. On the other hand, “*al-ḥawru*” means *stepping away from something or going back to it*.²⁹ The term “*al-muḥāwara*” is defined as *resort to logic and rhetoric in a dialogue*.³⁰ Above all the meanings listed, it is also defined as ‘mind’ or known as “*al-aḥwār*”³¹ in Arabic. In Arabic dictionaries, dialogue is also known as “*al-ḥiwār*” which carries the same meaning as conversation, discussion between two parties or more and the exchange of thoughts and ideas.³²

In the introduction, the author has highlighted the intrinsic values and principles of dialogue in Islamic culture and civilization. Hence, with reference to the above definitions, it is evident that emphasize is placed on the primary concepts of the Islamic culture and civilization. Thus, with reference to the definitions presented it can be said that the essence of dialogue in Islamic culture is in favour of *take and give in the course of speech*. Dialogue is built of responsive characteristics based on tolerance, good deeds, sound mind and thinking.³³ Other vital characteristics include confidence and balance in all aspects. This means the atmosphere and each participant must possess certain characteristics such as the ability to adapt, respond, and be courteous in interacting and communicating each ideas and suggestion.³⁴ Thus, the author sees dialogue as one of the fundamental elements of Islamic culture. It was the result of Islamic message and principle together with the general elements of culture and the essence of civilization itself.

The above definition also stresses on the relationship between dialogue and mind. This relationship ensures that it happened at higher level of consciousness. This is because a dialogue with higher level of sensibility and consciousness operates on a good stable ground, can easily

(ISESCO), pp. 8-9.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 218.

²⁸ *Ibid.*.

²⁹ *Ibid.*.

³⁰ *Ibid.*.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 219.

³² Shaykh Aḥmad Ribā (1958), *Mu`jam al-Lughah*, Vol. 2, (n.p.): Dār al-Maktabah al-Ḥayāt, p. 190; *idem* (1986), *al-Munjid fī al-Lughah wa l`lām*, 28th ed. Beirut: Dār al-Mashriq, p. 160; Rūḥī Ba`labākī (1995), *al-Mawrid (A Modern Arabic-English Dictionary)*, Beirut: Dār al-‘Ilm li al-Malāyīn, p. 413.

³³ Altwaijri (1997), *op.cit.*, p. 9.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

be controlled, and has clear goal and objective.³⁵ Looking at dialogue as; “*stepping away from something or going back to it*”, dialogue instills a high level of consciousness in oneself and willingness to accept own mistake. Mistake here refers to the one done due to lack of knowledge and preparation by the participants on the issues discussed. It also emphasizes on the concept of *revision* where all decision are checked for accuracy and truthfulness.³⁶ From the author’s perspective, the principle of *revision* encompasses higher value in which it does not only defend one’s mistake but also examine the issue as a whole to ensure the decision made is precise and abiding the *truth* characteristics. The above definition can be better understood by looking at the basic principles of dialogues which are (1) objective, (2) principles, (3) guidelines, (4) methodology and (5) rules of the dialogue.

With reference to all of the above, the author concluded that the definition of dialogue covers: (1) Dialogue is a conversation, discussion, consultation and conference between two or more parties. (2) Dialogue happens in a formal predetermined environment. (3) In a dialogue, there are differences in point of views, perceptions and ideas towards the issue being discussed among the participants. (4) Dialogue is done open-mindedly in a controlled situation with due respect paid to each participants. (5) The objectives of a dialogue are to listen, learn, know and exchange ideas that might benefit some or all parties. (6) In vein, the Islamic definition of dialogue is viewed as comprehensive as it was built on the sound state of mind and willingness to admit one’s mistake in attaining the truth. The definition is founded by Islamic message and guidelines which are parts of dialogue’s basic principles. From the conclusion, the essential elements of the word dialogue can be better understood by the author and they function as a solid ground in defining the term dialogue for the purpose of discussion in this paper.

CONCEPTUALIZATION OF DIALOGUE IN THE QUR’ĀN

As an elaborated-detailed-discussion and explanation have been presented earlier on the definition of dialogue technically and linguistically. In this section, the author wishes to further interrogate the definition of dialogue from the Qur’ānic perspective through its application and meanings presented in the Qur’ān. For this purpose, reference has been made to several surahs and verses: Sūrah al-Naḥl 16:125; Sūrah al-‘Ankabūt 29:46; Sūrah al-Kahfi 18:34 and 37; Sūrah al- Mujādalah 58:1; Sūrah al-Anfāl 8:6;

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

and Sūrah al-Ḥajj 22:8. In Qur'ān, two different words have been used to signify dialogue. First, it is a derivative of “*hiwār*”, and second it is “*jidāl*”. Both words can either be used in positive or negative context. As in these two Qur'ānic verses; mean:

*Invite (all) to the Way of thy Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching; and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious: for thy Lord knoweth best, who have strayed from His path, and who receive guidance.*³⁷

*And dispute ye not with the People of the Book, except with means better (than mere disputation), unless it be with those of them who inflict wrong (and injury): but say, “We believe in the Revelation which has come down to us and in that which came down to you; our God and your God is One; and it is to Him we bow (in Islam).”*³⁸

In Sūrah al-Naḥl verse 125, denoting dialogue, the word “*jidāl*” is used. According to Ibn Kathīr, the word “*jidāl*” in this verse carries a positive and encouraging meaning. In addition, “*jidāl*” is said to be the most important principle of *da`wah* in which the word “*jidāl*” is accompanied by the phrase “*billati hiya aḥsan*” (by good ways).³⁹ Thus from the author point of view, despite defining and elucidating the best way to conduct a dialogue, the Qur'ān also highlighted its differences by exemplifying the application of negative “*jidāl*”. Thus a positive dialogue should not consist of any form of insult, defamation and higher level of ego which may diminish the listeners' confident and trust especially in the context of *da`wah*.⁴⁰ A good application of dialogue will enhance the objective of dialogue which is not to attain victory however its aim is to propagate the truth.⁴¹ The author believes that it is difficult for each human being to change their stand especially those related to their pride and status. However, readiness to change one's stand, conduct, perspective and thought can only be achieved when they are convinced and free from the feelings of being defeated or belittled as far

³⁷ Sūrah al-Naḥl 16:125. The translation of the above Qur'ānic verses were based on *The Holy Qur'ān, Text and Translation* by Abdullah Yusuf Ali. For full translation please refer to Ali, Abdullah Yusuf (1994), *The Holy Qur'ān, Text and Translation*, 5th ed. Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust.

³⁸ Sūrah al-‘Ankabūt 29:46.

³⁹ Ibn Kathīr (2000), *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-‘Aẓīm*, Vol. 8, Cairo: Mu'assasah Qurṭubah, pp. 367-368.

⁴⁰ Siddiq Fadhil (2003), *Perspektif Qur'ani: Siri Wacana Tematik*, Petaling Jaya: Tradisi Ilmu Sdn. Bhd, p. 54.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*.

as pride and status are concerned.⁴² In Sūrah al-Kahfi the word dialogue is repeated in the verse 34 and 37. Allāh S.W.T. says; mean:

*(Abundant) was the produce this man had: he said to his companion, in the course of a mutual argument: "more wealth have I than you, and more honour and power in (my following of) men."*⁴³

*His companion said to him, in the course of the argument with him: "Dost thou deny Him Who created thee out of dust, then out of a sper-drop, then fashioned thee into a man?"*⁴⁴

In both verses, the term "ḥiwār" is used to signify 'dialogue'. According to Ibn Kathīr in his *tafsīr*, the word "ḥiwār" in these two verses denote a negative connotation in which it meant "to debate him, oppose him and boastfully undermine him."⁴⁵ However, Ṭabarī held a contrastive view in which he is prone to define dialogue from a positive perspective which is "they take and give in the course of speech."⁴⁶ And this is inline with the definition forwarded in the *Lisān al- 'Arab* book⁴⁷. Furthermore, in Sūrah al-Mujādalah verse one, similar term has been used in a positive context which it denotes a calm, peaceful dialogue (*al-ḥiwār al-hadī*)⁴⁸ in searching and proving the truth. As Allāh says, means:

*God has indeed heard (and accepted) the statement of the woman who pleads with thee concerning her husband and carries her complaint (in prayer) to God: and God (always) hears the arguments between both sides among you: for God hears and sees (all things).*⁴⁹

The word dialogue has also been defined as a mere questioning on the truth supported by made up reasons as practiced by the non-believers and this is known as 'jidāl'. As for this, it is a negative approach to the word dialogue. Allāh says, mean: "Yet there is among men such a one as disputes about god, without knowledge, without guidance, and without a Book of Enlightenment."⁵⁰ And, "Disputing with thee concerning the truth after it

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ Sūrah al-Kahfi 18:34.

⁴⁴ Sūrah al-Kahfi 18:37.

⁴⁵ Ibn Kathīr (2000), *op.cit.*, Vol. 8, p. 11.

⁴⁶ Al-Ṭabarī (1997), *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*, 5th ed. Damsyiq: Dār al-Qalām, pp. 161-164.

⁴⁷ Ibn Manẓūr (1990), *op.cit.*, Vol. 4, p. 218.

⁴⁸ Ibn Kathīr (1983), *Tafsīr al-Qur 'an al- 'Aẓīm*, Vol. 4, Beirut: Dār al-Ma`rifah, p. 318.

⁴⁹ Sūrah al-Mujādalah 58:1.

⁵⁰ Sūrah al-Ḥajj 22:8.

*was made manifest, as if they were being driven to death and they (actually) saw it.*⁵¹

Ibn Kathīr in his exegesis of verse eight, Sūrah al-Ḥajj forwarded that the dialogue applied in the above is based on unsound mind (*bi lā ‘aql ṣaḥīḥ*), and it is lack of clear and truth worthiness sources (*lā naqala ṣaḥīḥ ṣarīḥ*), and it is inclined towards lust and it is not governed by thinking⁵². Similar explanation has been forwarded by Ibn Kathīr in his exegesis of Sūrah al-Anfāl verse six in which dialogue is seen as a mere questioning on the truth supported by made up reason/excuses⁵³.

From the above Qur’ānic verses, the author found that dialogue can be exemplified through two perspectives which are positive and negative; represented by its own individual traits. In reality, these differences existed due to context in which the word dialogue has been used and applied.

DIALOGUE AND *DA`WAH*

In defining the word dialogue as used in the Qur’ān, the author often associates dialogue with *da`wah*. Thus, it is necessary for the author to first clarify the relationship between the two by providing extended definition of the word *da`wah* as this will lead to further discussion on inter-faith dialogue which is the main concern of this study. Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, an Islamic scholar defined *da`wah* as a well-planned process in which at all levels, its activity implementation requires basic important knowledge. Understanding the purpose of life and providing guidance to the whole mankind should be the primary objective of this program.⁵⁴ Among other definition of *da`wah* are to; (1) deliver the teaching of Islam, (2) promote virtues and avoid vices for the benefit here and hereafter, (3) divert man’s view to a belief which is beneficial to them and a responsibility to save man from divergence, (4) transport man from one place to another and (5) comprehensive knowledge program needed by man to understand life’s objectives and to know the signs which are misleading them.⁵⁵

With reference to the above definitions of *da`wah*, the author concludes that *da`wah* is not only promoting man to apply Islamic way of life but more important is how a *da`wah* takes place. Thus, it requires different approaches, techniques and methods to be applied in a specific situation.

⁵¹ Surah al-Anfal 8:6.

⁵² Ibn Kathīr (2000), *op.cit.*, pp. 19-20.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, Vol. 7, pp. 18-19.

⁵⁴ Ibn Kathīr (2000), *op.cit.*, Vol. 10, pp. 19-20.

⁵⁵ Ḥasan, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān (1996), *Fiqh al-Da`wah ilā Allāh*, Damsyik: Dār al-Qalām, pp. 15-16.

In other words, these approaches, techniques and methods are synonym to *minhaj* or *manāhij* in the field of *da`wah*. Both meant ways⁵⁶ or how *da`wah* is applied. Thus with reference to the overall focus of this article, the author comes to the initial conclusion that the discussed dialogue is an approach, technique, or method in *da`wah* in which both shares a very close-relationship. Therefore, *minhaj* or approach, technique and method will be adopted according to the various situations and needs nevertheless the objectives remain unchanged. Thus the mere differences between dialogue and *da`wah*; *da`wah* is a large umbrella and underneath it is a specified/definite objective and direction whereas dialogue is one of the *da`wah* approaches that change based on situations and needs.

To elaborate further, the author will analyse the dialogue between Prophet Ibrāhīm and his father as mentioned in the Qur`ān, means:

(Also) mention in the Book (the story of) Abraham: He was a man of Truth, a prophet. Behold, he said to his father: "O my father! Why worship that which hereath not and seeth not, and can profit thee nothing? "O my father! To me hath come knowledge which hath not reached thee: so follow me: I will guide thee to a Way that is even and straight. "O my father! Serve not Satan: for Satan is a rebel against (God) Most Gracious. "O my father! I fear lest a Penalty afflict thee from (God) Most Gracious, so that thou become to Satan a friend." (The father) replied: "Dost thou hate my gods, O Abraham? If thou forbear not, I will indeed stone thee: Now get away from me for a good long while!" Abraham said: "Peace be upon thee: I will pray to my Lord for thy forgiveness: fir He is to me Most Gracious. "And I will turn away from you (all) and from those whom ye invoke besides God: I will call on my Lord: perhaps, by my prayer to my Lord, I shall be not unblest."⁵⁷

The above Qur`ānic verses describe the story of Prophet Ibrāhīm propagating the truth (*da`wah*) to his father – an idol worshipper through dialogue. The dialogue is seen as an instrument to stop mental-blocked and promote his father's rational thinking to worship Allah and not the idol which he had crafted with his own hands. In addition, it highlights the important characteristics of a positive dialogue and the application of a real *da`wah* especially those discussion on God. Thus, the author calls this as islamization dialogue (*dialog pendakwahan*).

⁵⁶ Ma'lūf, Louis (n.d.), *al-Munjid*, 19th ed. Beirut: (n.p), p. 841.

⁵⁷ Sūrah Maryam 19:41-48.

Based on the above dialogue extract, the author has concluded a few important points which are (1) the delivery of religious message through dialogue should be done politely and full of sympathy, however it should not hamper the original message. (2) The islamization dialogue should not consist of ill-words; it should be as exemplified by Prophet Ibrāhīm. (3) Dialogue should not be of any fun-making elements but more to make people think. (4) The dialogue process should take place in a controlled emotional setting and be open in all situations. It means harsh and emotional words should not be replied with similar tone. The above have indirectly explained the differences between *da`wah* and dialogue besides detailing the characteristics of a positive dialogue.

INTER-FAITH DIALOGUE

Another important aspect in understanding inter-faith dialogue is the theoretical and practical approaches to it. The author feels that the theoretical understanding only is not enough and it may not represent the reality of its practical implementation. Moreover, the author is aware that the theoretical aspect is important as it is the foundation of the implementation process. As been explained in the *Encyclopaedia of Religion*, inter-faith dialogue means “*conversation [dialogue] about the meaning of beliefs, ritual and ethic...*”.⁵⁸ Besides, it is also defined as a dialogue between religions which talk about religious beliefs and practices which act as the framework in all discussions as it is clearly related to the culture, racial or nationality of a religion.⁵⁹ Based on the above definitions, inter-faith dialogue is based on several fundamental elements of each religion such as theology, doctrines and dogmas, and rites and rituals. Through a more practical understanding, the author will use several term of application approaches. It is necessary in order to provide detailed explanation to each of the applications below.

First Application

In this application, the author will examine this application approach from the Islamic perspective. It includes textual approaches; using al-Qur’ān. Observation will also be done on works or ideas of both classical and contemporary Islamic intellectuals and scholars in the Malay Archipelago including Malaysia who have involved directly in the inter-religious dialogue. Basically al-Qur’ān does not provide a comprehensive understanding of what is meant by inter-faith dialogue. However there are verses which talk about the relationship between religions and special encouragement and

⁵⁸ Eliade (1987), *op.cit.*, Vol. 3, p. 344.

⁵⁹ Sutcliffe (1984), *op.cit.*, p. 112.

emphasize are given to *ahl al-dhimmī* who is seen relevant to the inter-faith dialogue understanding process.⁶⁰ From the author's point of view, based on the discussion on the conceptualization of dialogue in the al-Qur'ān earlier, approaches to inter-religious activities such as dialogue, religious studies in academic context (comparative religion), need to be built and developed based on the *ibādah* concept. It is seen as a continuation of Prophet Muḥammad's *da`wah* agenda. In addition to the above, it also stresses on justice, peace and respect towards freedom in practising religion as explained in the Qur'ān⁶¹.

Apart from the above, there are also Islamic scholars' who have forwarded their views on this issue. Among the Islamic scholars who participated actively in studying world existing religions was Abū Rayḥān Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad Al-Bīrūnī (973 C.E – 1051 C.E).⁶² For religion study process, either belief or practise, he has developed principle which is objective and unbiased. In explaining this in his work *Kitāb al-Hind*,⁶³ indirectly he has explained his understanding of an inter-religious dialogue. He wrote “*We think now that what we have related in this book will be sufficient for anyone who wants to converse [dialogue] with the Hindus, and then discuss with them question of religion, science or literature, on the very basis of their own civilization*”.⁶⁴ The author

⁶⁰ Among the verses as discussed above are in the Sūrahs (Āli `Imrān 3:104, al-An`ām 6:108, al-Anfāl 8:6, Yūnus 10:99, al-Naḥl 16:125, Maryam 19:41-48, al-Ḥajj 22:8, al-`Ankabūt 29:26 and 46, al-Kahfī 18:34 and 37, al-Mujādalah 58:1.

⁶¹ Sūrah al-Baqarah 2:256.

⁶² Al-Bīrūnī was among earliest Muslim scholars in Islamic history that talked about the best methodologies in religion studies or comparative religion studies (*religionswissenschaft*) from Islamic perspective. He has forwarded a scientific and objective approach to a methodology used in studying, scrutinizing and analysing all existing religions. His work is included in *Kitāb al-Āthār al-Bāqiyah `an al-Qurūn al-Khāliyyah* widely known as *Kitāb al-Āthār*, year 999 C.E. (Al-Bīrūnī, Abū Rayḥān Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad (1923), *Kitāb al-Āthār al-Bāqiyah `an al-Qurūn al-Khāliyyah*, Sachau, Edward S. (ed.), Leipzig: Otto Harrassowitz). It has been translated into English by Sachau entitled *Al-Biruni's Chronology of Ancient Nations or Vestiges of the Past* (1983), Lahore: Hijra International Publisher.

⁶³ This is his second greatest book in which he stresses on religion studies especially on Hinduism and its civilization. This book was known as *Fī Tahqīq Mā li al-Hind min Maqūlah fī al-`Aql aw Mardhūlah*. This book has been translated by Sachau, Edward C. entitled *Albērūnī's India* (1983), New Delhi: Oriental Books Reprint Corp.

⁶⁴ This is taken from Kamar Oniah Kamaruzaman (1996), “Early Muslim Scholarship in Religionswissenschaft: A case study of the Works and Contribution of Abu

believes that by understanding the above idea or framework, it will facilitate comprehension on al-Bīrūnī's implementation of inter-faith dialogue. Even though inter-faith dialogue activities did not take place during that time, nevertheless he has opened the door for later scholars to be acquainted with the importance of civilisation dialogue⁶⁵ and inter-faith dialogue. Another Islamic scholars in comparative religion field was Ibn Ḥazm or his real name is Abū Muḥammad `Alī ibn Aḥmad ibn Sa`īd ibn Ḥazm (994 C.E- 1064 C.E). Ghulam Haider Aasi in his work entitled *Muslim Understanding of Other Religion: A Study Of Ibn Ḥazm's Kitāb al-Faṣl fī al-Milal wa al-Ahwā' wa al-Niḥal*⁶⁶ has explained the methodology used by Ibn Ḥazm in studying and understanding other religions which is known as *dialectical-dialogical method*.⁶⁷ Even though Ibn Ḥazm did not provide detailed explanation on how inter-faith dialogue implementation should take place, however with the methodology possessed, the author concluded that intended dialogue includes all aspects of a religion which are theology, doctrine, practices, culture, historical background and comprehension of the holy book. Apart from that, participants in a dialogue should be free and unbiased in searching after the truth and it requires conversion to the truth. Once the truth is attained and accepted, they are responsible to disseminate it to others. Thus it will boost other's appreciation on the religion's culture and tradition.⁶⁸ Hasan Askari based⁶⁹

Rayhan Muhammad ibn Ahmad Al-Biruni", Ph.D thesis at ISTAC, Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilisation (ISTAC), p. 58.

⁶⁵ Chandra Muzaffar (2003), "Civilisational Dialogue in Asia" dalam *Muslim Dialogue Terror*, Kuala Lumpur: International Movement for a Just World (JUST), p. 61.

⁶⁶ Aasi, Ghulam Haider (1999), *Muslim Understanding of Other Religion: A Study of Ibn Ḥazm's Kitāb al-Faṣl fī al-Milal wa al-Ahwā' wa al-Niḥal*, Pakistan: Islamic Research Institute Press Islamabad. (The content of this book is based on his PhD dissertation, Temple University, 1986).

⁶⁷ This method is used in analysing data under studied with reference to logical and dialectical elements. This method is not for recoding as done by modern historian and anthropologist but it aims to study a religion through its fact by understanding the perception of its followers, their life and the differences (belief, culture, holy book) that existed in history or its civilization. All this will unveil the truth about all religions under studied thus it will eliminate methodological bias and prejudice.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

⁶⁹ Hasan Askari is an experienced and active participant of inter-faith dialogue especially in a dialogue between Muslim and Christian. He was born in 1932 in the Deccan (South) region of India. He started as early as in 1970s, and has participated in various inter-faith meetings, lecturing and presenting on various dimension of inter-religions relationship. His prominence in the field

on his understanding on the implementation of inter-faith dialogue between Christian and Muslim has once written:

Dialogue is an attempt on the part of a few individuals, primarily initiated by few Christian organizations, to bring people of various backgrounds together. This is taken the form of local meeting and international gatherings. It occurs when people who function autonomously come together. And, in the very act of their coming together and listening to one another, they surrender part of their autonomy. As soon as two distinct persons come together, a relationship is apprehended. That relationship, now, has got a three-fold characteristic: mutuality, conflict and self transcendence. One and three are complementary. On a spiritual level, there is a lot that is unknown. The outcome is totally unpredictable. If you predict the outcome of dialogue, it is not dialogue; it is a command, an imperative, a kind of strategy. If you can approach the dialogue with an openness, you should be ready to hear the world of God from a Muslim, for instance.⁷⁰

However, the understanding portrayed by John Alembillah Azumah in his work put heavy emphasis on the dialogue implementation ethics. He stated that dialogue is consciousness in a relationship which involved exchanging point of views, shared ideas or vice versa happens among individuals or communities. The main objective is to avoid prejudice and fanaticism and it intensifies on understanding and valuing the similarities and differences existed between the religions.⁷¹ Therefore, this principle stresses on knowing each other better, sharing the trust and getting engaged in a sound

of Christian-Muslim encounter is noted by Kenneth Cragg, a pioneer and acknowledges authority in the area of Christian-Muslim relations. He has written several books and articles on Christian-Muslim relationship, some of them are (1) "Bible Studies", in *Christian and Muslim Witness to God in a Secular Europe*, by Slomp, Jan (ed.), Geneva: Conference of European Churches, 1985, (2) "Dialogue and Devotion", in *Dialogue between Men of Living Faiths*, by Samartha, S. J. (ed.), Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1971, (3) "Worship and Prayer", in *Christian-Muslim Dialogue: Paper from Broumana*, 1972, by Samartha, S. J. and Taylor, J. B. B. (eds.), Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982. For detail information about him please refer Kimball, Charles Anthony (1987) "Striving Together In The Way Of God: Muslim Participation In Christian-Muslim Dialogue", PhD. Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Theology, The Divinity School, Harvard University, pp. 167-246.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 237-238.

⁷¹ Azumah, John Alembillah (2001), *The Legacy of Arab-Islam In Africa: A Quest for Inter-Religious Dialogue*, Oxford: Oneworld Publication, pp. 171-172.

relationship.⁷² In addition to the above, another author in his work entitled *Kaum Beriman dan Peningkatan Saling Percaya (The Believers and Trust Building)* has written on the understanding of a practical dialogue, he wrote: “Dialogue is a process where people of different religious background gathered ad vowed on their identity and belief, holding hands on similarities with respect to demolish threat which stop all of us.”⁷³ Furthermore this he believes that inter-faith dialogue should go beyond discussion on theology, doctrine, rituals which are obviously different. As for him, the best approaches would be discussion on social, economics, and politics which are the centre of shared similarities. This will strengthen the trust among the religions involved as it promotes continuous interaction on other issues.⁷⁴

The concepts and understanding of inter-faith dialogue forwarded by Kamar Oniah Kamaruzaman⁷⁵ is interesting, practical and it suits a multi-racial community such as Malaysia. It is also a reflection of a true understanding on how a good inter-faith dialogue should be. She stated that inter-faith dialogue does not only discuss theology and doctrine, but also function as a medium to know and understand a religion closely and obviously it is a place to seek knowledge. On the other hand, it strengthens close relationship and respect among mankind.⁷⁶ She also looks at dialogue as a field to chart out common plans and initiate actions for the common good of all such as humanitarian issues which can be realized together as in community services/activities.⁷⁷ Thus she is really interested if the inter-faith dialogue can be built on two platforms which are (1) dialogue on religions and (2) Dialogue on inter-faith cooperation.⁷⁸

Second Application

In this second application, the author will look at the understanding of an inter-faith dialogue from the western perspective. It is going to focus on

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 172.

⁷³ Syed Z. Abedin (ed.) (2000) ‘Kaum Beriman dan Peningkatan Saling Percaya’. Ali Noer Zaman (trans.), *Dailog Muslim-Kristen: Dulu, Sekarang, dan Esok*. Yogyakarta: Penerbit Qalam, p.65.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

⁷⁵ Kamar Oniah Kamaruzaman is a lecturer at the Department of Usūl al-Dīn and Comparative Religion, Kulliyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences, International Islamic University Malaysia. She is actively involved in inter-religious activities and inter-faith dialogue.

⁷⁶ This is being discussed in her article entitled “Inter-Religious Dialogue-Moving Forward: Setting Premises and Paradigms”, International Islamic University Malaysia..

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*.

works written by the Christians and the point of view held by the Christians authorities. The World Churches Council in its 6th symposium stated: “Dialogue may be described as that encounter where people hold different claims about ultimate reality and can meet and explore these claims in a context of mutual respect”.⁷⁹ In addition Paul F. Knitter explains inter-religious as:

*Dialogue must be based on personal religious experience and firm truth claims. Dialogue must be based on the recognition of the possible truth in all religion; the ability to recognise this truth must be grounded in the common ground and goal for all religions. Dialogue must be based on openness to the possibility of genuine change.*⁸⁰

In contrast, the author observes that John Scott in his book entitled *Christian Mission in the World* holds a different understanding. Among his views is rejection towards dialogue or debate on theology.

*God is not to be discussed or debate....Believing what we do about God, we cannot in any circumstances allow Him to become a subject for discussion or debate or investigation....as if He were but a philosophical proposition. And same goes for the Gospel: the Gospel is suitable for proclamation, not for amiable discussion...*⁸¹

On top of that, there are also radical views which use dialogue as a field for debate to prove the truthfulness of Christian teaching and find mistake and weaknesses of non-Christian religions. As stated:

⁷⁹ The excerpt is taken from the speech in the World Council of Church Symposium held in 1971, themed “WCC Dialogue with People of Living Faith and Ideologies”. For further information, please refer to Cornelius, Mereweather-Thompson (1995), *Christian Approaches to Dialogue with Other Faith Communities*, Lewiston: Mellen University Press, p. 8; Swidler, Leonard (1989), “Religious Pluralism and Ecumenism from a Christian Perspective”, in Charles Wei-hsun Fu *et al.* (eds.), *Religious Issues and Interreligious Dialogue: An Analysis and Sourcesbook of Developments Since 1945*, pp. 335-336.

⁸⁰ Knitter, Paul F. (1985), *No Other Name*, London: SCM, pp. 207-211; Cornelius (1995), *op.cit.*, p. 9.

⁸¹ John Scott explained that this understanding was held by the conservative evangelica. They believe that Gospel cannot be a subject of a discussion or debate as it is a revelation from God and they have no rights to discuss about it. However, its meaning and interpretation can be discussed in order to facilitate better understanding. For more information please refer Scott, John (1975), *Christian Mission in The World*, London, p. 59; *Ibid.*, p. 10.

Although there is an important place for dialogue with other faiths, there is also a need for 'encounter' with people of other faith, and even for 'confrontation', in which we seek both to disclosed the inadequacies and falsities of non-Christian Religion and to demonstrate the adequacy and truth, absoluteness and finally of the Lord Jesus Christ.⁸²

However, Vatican II understanding of inter-faith dialogue is the most applauded depiction as it is opt to be the foundation of all inter-faith dialogue between Christian and other religions. The understanding posed by Vatican II is:

Dialogue presupposes that each wishes to know the other, and wishes to increase and deepen its knowledge of the other. It constitutes a particularly suitable means of favouring a better mutual knowledge and, especially in the case of dialogue between Jews and Christian, of probing the riches of one's own tradition. Dialogue demands respect for the other as he is; above all, respect for his faith and his religious conviction.⁸³

With reference to the understanding of inter-faith dialogue posed by both applications, the author found that the understanding is not restricted to one framework only. It is influenced by other factors such as (1) history of inter-faith relationship, (2) deep understanding on religious tradition (3) understanding, experience and participation of scholars in inter-faith activities, (4) current situation, (5) current relationship and (6) global situation.

Third Application

Even though there are similarities and differences in the above understanding, there is a noticeable difference between the understanding forwarded by the conservative Christian group who is comparing dialogue with debate and this may be true to some Muslim also. Therefore the author will further elaborate on the definition of *debate*.

Kamus Dewan (the most reputable Malay dictionary) defines debate as "(a process of) exchanging thoughts which usually took place between

⁸² John Scott views on dialogue is positive. He mentioned that as long as the Christian can ensure that their commitment and belief is on Christ, inter-religious dialogue with other non-christian religion should be carried on. He has listed a few reasons to support inter-religious dialogue application. Among them are inter-religious dialogue is a symbol of *authenticity, humility, intergrity, and sensitivity*.

⁸³ For more information please refer to Cornelius (1995), *op.cit.*, p. 15; Swidler (1989), *op.cit.*, pp. 336-338.

opposite parties or argument on certain issue". Apart from that it also means "exchanging one's thoughts and defending his/her stand, with each of them presenting reasons to support their claim".⁸⁴ In the *Oxford English Dictionary*, debate means strife, contention, dissension, quarrelling, wrangler, fight.⁸⁵ It also refers to arguments in discussion or a controversial discussion.⁸⁶ *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English* too provides the same definition as in the above.⁸⁷ With reference to the above definition, the author believes that literally debate is different from dialogue as what have been explained earlier. Dialogue is characterized as open, controlled, with sense of respect and the objective is not to succeed over others stands but it is a learning process which brings benefit to all. Even though, in reality there are some arguable points in it. Debate on the other hand is a conflict and its objective is to find the winner. Thus the author believes it is not a controlled-open discussion especially if we focus on the needs of participated parties.

Based on the above arguments, the author feels that debate is not suitable to be used in the discussion between religions as the objective of generating understanding and cooperation will not be achieved. Moreover the aim of having a deeper understanding of a religion through dialogue cannot be attained. The same view is also shared by Swidler, a western writer: "*Dialogue clearly is not debate. In dialogue each partner must listen to the other as openly and systematically as he or she an attempt to understand to other's position as precisely and, as it were, as much from within, as possible*".⁸⁸ Besides him, there are also other works which are in vein with the above view.⁸⁹

PROPHET MUḤAMMAD'S APPLICATION OF DIALOGUE (DIALOGUE, DEBATE AND MUBĀḤALAH)

If we look into the history of Prophet Muḥammad, there is not much on inter-faith dialogue. The main topic of discussion was only his *da`wah* to the Jews and Christians before and after hijrah. However there was one

⁸⁴ Hajjah Noresah bt Baharom *et al.* (eds.), *op.cit.*, p. 279.

⁸⁵ Simpson, J. A. & Weiner, E. S. C. (1989), *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed. Vol. 4, Oxford: Clarendon Press, p. 309.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*.

⁸⁷ For more information please refer to Wehneier, Sally (ed) (2000), *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English*, 6th ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 299.

⁸⁸ Swidler (1989), *op.cit.*, p. 338.

⁸⁹ For more information, please refer to Coward, Harold (ed), *Hindu-Christian Dialogue: Perspective and Encounters*. New York: Orbis Book, p. 219.

incident which took place in the first year of hijrah; a meeting of three different followers of Jews, Christians and Islam. This story and several others will be used by the author in discussing about the application of dialogue between Prophet (p.b.u.h), the Jews and Christians. Thus we can clearly understand the application of dialogue done by the Prophet.

1. First Anecdote: The Meeting between Prophet Muhammad and the Quraysh Representatives⁹⁰ (Before Hijrah)

The Quraysh has assigned a messenger by the name of Utbah bin Rābi'ah (a prolific figure in Makkah) to meet Prophet Muḥammad (p.b.u.h). The objective of this meeting was to persuade Prophet Muḥammad (p.b.u.h) to stop propagating Islam to his people. The Quraysh offered him power, wealth, woman and others as part of the deal. In the meeting, the Quraysh asked a lot of illogical questions, tricks and also threats to prove the truthfulness of Prophet's teaching. Disregard of what was happening, Prophet Muḥammad (p.b.u.h) remained calm, and stick to Allāh's command; persuading people to accept the truth and warned the Quraysh with the incidents happened to the previous society with Sūrah Fuṣṣilāt verses 1-18 as the evidence, means:

Hā Mīm.. A revelation from (God), Most Gracious, Most Merciful- a book, whereof the verses are explained in details; a Qur'ān in Arabic, for people who understand- Giving Good News and Admonition: yet most of them turn away, and so they hear not. They say: "Our hearts are under veils, (concealed) from that to which thou dost invite us, and in our ears in deafness, and between us and thee is a screen: so do thou (what thou will); for us, we shall do (what we will!)" Say thou: I am but a man like you: It is revealed to me by inspiration, that your God is one God: so stand true to Him, and ask for His forgiveness." And woe to those who join gods with God. Those who practice not regular charity, and who even deny the Hereafter. For those who believe and work deeds of righteousness are a reward that will never fail. Say: Is it that ye deny Him Who created the earth in two Days And do ye join equals with Him? He is the Lord of (all) the Worlds. He set on the (earth), mountains standing firm, high above it, and bestowed blessings on the earth, and measure therein all things to give them nourishment in due proportion, in four Days, in accordance with (the needs of) those who seek (sustenance). Moreover he comprehended in His design the sky, and it had been (as) smoke: He said to it

⁹⁰ Shaikh Sofiy al-Rahman al-Mubarakfuri (n.d.), *Sirah Rasulullah (S.A.W)*, Mohd Darus Senawi Ali (trans.), Selangor: Kumpulan Usahawan Muslim, pp. 165-169.

and to the earth: "Come ye together, willingly or unwillingly." They said: "We do come (together), in willing obedience." So He completed them as seven firmaments in two Days, and He assigned to each heaven its duty and command. And We adorned the lower heaven with lights, and (provided it) with guard. Such is the Decree of (Him) the Exalted in Might, Full of Knowledge. But if they turn away, say thou: "I have warned you a stunning Punishment (as of thunder and lightning) like that which (overtook) the 'Ād and Thamūd!" Behold, the apostles came to them, from before them and behind them, (preaching): "Serve none but God." They said, "If our Lord had so pleased, He would certainly have sent down angels (to preach): now we reject your mission (altogether)." Now the 'Ād behaved arrogantly through the land, against (all) truth and reason, and said: "Who is superior to us in strength?" What! Did they not see that God, Who created them, was superior to them in strength? But they continued to reject Our Signs! So We sent against them a furious Wind through days of disaster, that We might give them a taste of a Penalty of humiliation in this life; but the Penalty of a Hereafter will be more humiliating still: and they will find no help. As to the Thamūd, We gave them guidance, but they preferred blindness (of heart) to Guidance: so the stunning Punishment of humiliation seized them, because of what they had earned. But We deleivered those who believed and practiced righteousness.⁹¹

Upon listening to those verses, Utbah rose in fear and placing his hand at Prophet's mouth. Those verses have touched his heart as he understood the meanings (a sign of fear to Allah's threat).

2. *Second Anecdote: Multiple Questions from 'Aws, Khazraj and the Jews*⁹²

This took place when Prophet Muḥammad (p.b.u.h) has moved to Maḍīnah. The Jews, 'Aws and Khazrāj were actively finding faults on Prophet's teaching and making enemies with the Muḥājirīn and Anṣār. The Jews, 'Aws and Khazrāj were known as the double-faced men pretended to be pious Muslims, but they expressed their doubt publicly. Their aims were to create doubt and misunderstanding among Muslims with questions creating doubt on Prophet Muḥammad's teaching. As an example, they asked Prophet in a dialogue if Allāh created all the creation than who/

⁹¹ Sūrah al-Fuṣṣilāt 41:1-18.

⁹² Muhammad Husayn (1982), *op.cit.*, pp. 234-235.

what is responsible in creating Allāh? Prophet Muḥammad answered with Sūrah al-Ikhlāṣ, means: “*Say: He is God, the One and Only. God, the Eternal, Absolute. He begotten not, nor is He begotten. And there is none like unto Him.*”⁹³ The polemics between Prophet Muḥammad and the Jews reached its peak when the Jews refused to accept their own Holy Book and was denounced by Allāh (as mentioned in the Qur’ān). Among them are Sūrah al-Baqarah verse 87-89 and some parts of Sūrah al-Nisā’, mean:

*We gave Moses the Book and followed him up with a succession of apostles; We gave Jesus the son of Mary Clear (Signs) and strengthened him with the Holy Spirit. Is it that whenever there comes to you an apostle with what ye yourselves desire not, ye are puffed up with pride?- Some ye called impostors, and others ye slay! They say, “Our hearts are the wrappings (which preserve Allāh’s Word: we need no more).” Nay, Allāh’s curse is on them for their blasphemy: Little is it they believe. And when there comes to them a Book from Allāh, confirming what is with them,- although from of old they had prayed for victory against those without Faith,- when there comes to them that which they (should) have recognised, they refuse to believe in it but the curse of Allāh is on those without Faith.*⁹⁴

3. Third Anecdote: The Story of Abū Bakr, Finḥash (the Jews) and Allāh’s Warning on the Jews’ Lies

At this point, the polemic between the Jews and the Muslims were at its climax even though there was a written understanding between them. As an example, an incident which tested Abū Bakar patience which resulted him to slap a Jews named Finḥash. This incident happened when Abū Bakr invited Finḥash to revert to Islam. But Finḥash’s response was “*Abū Bakr, it is not us who ask from Him but He is the one who ask from us. We don’t need Him but He is the one who needs us. If He is rich, he will not borrow from us as claimed by your leader (Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h)). We are told not to take interest but we are given deed. If He is rich, He will not do what He is doing now.*” This saying lead to the revelation of Sūrah al-Baqarah verse 245, means: “*Who is he that will loan to Allāh a beautiful loan, which Allāh will double unto his credit and multiply many times? It is Allāh that giveth (you) Want or plenty, and to Him shall be your return.*”⁹⁵ With reference to the above argument, Finḥash told Prophet Muḥammad (p.b.u.h) that he

⁹³ Sūrah al-Ikhlāṣ 112:1-4.

⁹⁴ Sūrah al-Baqarah 2:87-89.

⁹⁵ Sūrah Baqarah 2:245.

did not say that Allāh is poor. Allāh reminded Prophet Muḥammad through Sūrah Āli `Imrān verse 181, means:

“Allāh hath heard the taunt of those who say: “Truly, Allāh is indigent and we are rich!” We shall certainly record their word and (their act) of slaying the prophets in defiance of right, and We shall say: “Taste ye the penalty of the Scorching Fire”.”⁹⁶

In another occasion, the Jews once again try to play foul on Prophet Muḥammad (p.b.u.h). Their leaders met Prophet (p.b.u.h) and told him “God knew our condition and situation. If we follow you, the Jews will too follow you and they will not go against us. The truth is between us and our group, there is misunderstanding. Thus we came here looking for your final say. Give us your word. We will follow and believe in you”.⁹⁷ With that, it was clear to Prophet Muḥammad that the Jews were full of lies and Allāh has reminded Prophet through His verse, means:

And this (He commands): Judge thou between them by what Allāh hath revealed, and follow not their vain desires, but beware of them lest they beguile thee from any of that (teaching) which Allāh hath sent down to thee. And if they turn away, be assured that for some of their crime it is Allāh's purpose to punish them. And truly most men are rebellious.⁹⁸

4. Fourth anecdote: The Highlights of Three Religion Leaders Meeting and Prophet Muhammad's Approach (Mubahalalah).

The meeting of these three religion representatives took place with the arrival of the Christians from Najrān in Madīnah. At this time, they were there due to the polemic between Islam and Jews were at its peak. The Najrān hoped that their presence will spark oil to the burning fire and this will make their disagreement with the Muslims visible to all. The participants were among those of sound knowledge in their belief. This meeting can be classified as a theological debate between three religions. Its aim was to determine who is right among them on the theological concept (Which God is rightful for them to surrender). To resolve this, Prophet has invited the Najrān Christian to pray with him (*mubāḥalah*) and the Jews to sign a peace memorandum. Relating to that, the Najrān Christian had conducted a meeting and decided to reject Prophet's invitation. They came to an agreement that Prophet Muḥammad should stand for his religion and leave the Christians with theirs. The Jews on the other hand rejected the teaching of Prophet Muḥammad

⁹⁶ Sūrah Āli `Imrān 3:181.

⁹⁷ Muhammad Husayn (1982), *op.cit.*, p. 237.

⁹⁸ Sūrah al-Mā'idah 5:49.

and `Īsā (p.b.u.t). They claimed that `Uzayr is the son of Allāh. On the other hand, the Christians believe in the trinity concept of God and `Īsā is the son of God. Allāh has recorded this debate in Sūrah al-Baqarah, means:

Say ye: "We believe in Allah, and the revelation given to us, and to Abraham, Ismā`īl, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes, and that given to Moses and Jesus, and that given to (all) prophets from their Lord: We make no difference between one and another of them: And we bow to Allāh (in Islam)." So if they believe as ye believe, they are indeed on the right path; but if they turn back, it is they who are in schism; but Allāh will suffice thee as against them, and He is the All-Hearing, the All-Knowing. (Our religion is) the Baptism of Allāh. And who can baptize better than Allāh. And it is He Whom we worship. Say: Will ye dispute with us about Allāh, seeing that He is our Lord and your Lord; that we are responsible for our doings and ye for yours; and that We are sincere (in our faith) in Him? Or do ye say that Abraham, Ismā`īl, Isaac, Jacob and the Tribes were Jews or Christians? Say: Do ye know better than Allāh. Ah! who is more unjust than those who conceal the testimony they have from Allāh? But Allāh is not unmindful of what ye do! That was a people that hath passed away. They shall reap the fruit of what they did, and ye of what ye do! Of their merits there is no question in your case.⁹⁹

The debate continued as revealed by Allāh in Sūrah Āli `Imrān, means:

Say: "O People of the Book! come to common terms as between us and you: That we worship none but Allāh; that we associate no partners with him; that we erect not, from among ourselves, Lords and patrons other than Allāh." If then they turn back, say ye: "Bear witness that we (at least) are Muslims (bowing to Allāh's Will). Ye People of the Book! Why dispute ye about Abraham, when the Law and the Gospel Were not revealed till after him? Have ye no understanding? Ah! Ye are those who fell to disputing (Even) in matters of which ye had some knowledge! but why dispute ye in matters of which ye have no knowledge? It is Allāh Who knows, and ye who know not! Abraham was not a Jew nor yet a Christian; but he was true in Faith, and bowed his will to Allāh's (which is Islam), and he joined not gods with Allāh. Without doubt, among men, the nearest of kin to Abraham, are those who follow him, as are also this Messenger and those who believe: And Allāh is the Protector of those who have faith.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ Sūrah al-Baqarah 2: 136-141.

¹⁰⁰ Sūrah Āli `Imrān 3:64-68.

Due to the boastfulness of the Christians, finally Prophet Muḥammad (p.b.u.h) invited them for a *mubāḥalah*; a meeting in which each party will stand for their belief and pray to God dutifully that God will condemn those who lie. As mentioned in Sūrah Āli `Imrān, means:

*Say: "O People of the Book! come to common terms as between us and you: That we worship none but Allāh; that we associate no partners with him; that we erect not, from among ourselves, Lords and patrons other than Allāh." If then they turn back, say ye: "Bear witness that we (at least) are Muslims (bowing to Allāh's Will)."*¹⁰¹

After a detail scrutiny on the Prophet Muḥammad (p.b.u.h) history and the Qur'ānic discussion on it, the author has come to several conclusions on Prophet's application of dialogue. They are:

- a) Dialogue practised by Prophet Muḥammad (p.b.u.h) is '*dialog pendakwahan*' or 'islamization dialogue' – dialogue used to propagate the truth on Allāh's revelation and inviting the non-believers to belief in the oneness of Allāh.
- b) Dialogue (islamization dialogue) is built of several stages which are: (1) dialogue, (2) debate, (3) *mubāḥalah* (swearing with one's life).
- c) At the dialogue stage, Prophet Muḥammad (p.b.u.h) tends to be nice, polite, calm, emotion-less and continuously propagating Allāh's message through Qur'ānic verses even though others bad-mouth him.
- d) On top of that, Prophet Muḥammad has stimulated the thinking of the Jews on the truthfulness of Allāh by reminding them on Allāh's condemn on earlier community as examples so that they will not turn their back from Prophet's teaching as mentioned in Sūrah Fuṣṣilāt verses 1-18. This is in vein with the definition of dialogue presented earlier.
- e) Once the polemic reached its peak; the outgrown number of pretenders and liars among the Jews (al-Baqarah 2:2-89), Allah reminded Prophet Muḥammad to be strict and strong in propagating his message and debate should be applied to uphold the truth as what had happened between Prophet Muḥammad and the Jews and Christians in Sūrah al-Baqarah 2:136-141 and Āli `Imrān 3:64-68.
- f) *Mubāḥalah* is the last option where Prophet placed a little bit of threat on the Jews and Christians due to their boastfulness and ego

¹⁰¹ Sūrah Āli `Imrān 3:64.

in accepting the truth. This application is chosen once Prophet has done it nicely, politely, full of tolerance and they did not work and it pose a threat to the message propagate by Prophet Muḥammad as in Sūrah Āli `Imrān 3:64.

The author concludes that the decision in choosing either dialogue, debate or *mubāḥalah* by Prophet Muḥammad (p.b.u.h) was based on several situations and condition which were: (1) defending Islam as a true religion from ill-words and threats, (2) either a muslim or non-muslim country, (3) numbers of Muslims and their strength, (4) either it is a threat to the believers or not as happened in Madīnah, (5) either they (the Jews and Christians) were really searching for the truth of Prophet Muḥammad's (p.b.u.h) message or did they have hidden agenda; to create doubt and misunderstanding among Muslims.

CONCLUSION

From the very beginning the author has stated that a real understanding of inter-faith dialogue should be viewed from several aspects such as (1) relationship between religions throughout the civilization development process, (2) deep understanding of the religion and their tradition (3) understanding of the past experience of what had happened in inter-religious dialogue throughout the development of a civilization (4) current situation, requirements and needs (5) relationship in current context and (6) global environment. In this discussion, the question on the application of dialogue, inter-faith dialogue, *da`wah*, debate and *mubāḥalah* is inter-related. The relationship is observed through definition, usage and it is based on certain conditions. This can be deduced from the few episodes on Prophet Muḥammad's ways of propagating Islam to the Jews and Christians in Makkah and Madīnah as presented earlier. Thus with reference to the above discussion, inter-faith dialogue should function as a platform to know and learn new things besides building a relationship and gaining respects on each other. Besides that, inter-faith dialogue should not be used to discuss or debate contrasting points which can never be compared for example theology, doctrine, and rituals. Thus, inter-faith dialogue should be perceived as a place to chart an effective action plan which may bring benefit to all regardless Muslim or non-Muslim. Among the issues suitable to be discussed in this context are humanitarian issues and developmental issues. Thus upon scrutinizing all aspects of inter-faith dialogue, the author believes that inter-faith dialogue should be expanded on two basis which are (1) Dialogue on Religions and (2) Dialogue on Inter-religious cooperation.

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