



## The Role of Intercultural Religious Interactions in the Formation of the New Islamic Civilization, with an Emphasis on the Second Phase of the Revolution Statement

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### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** In today's world, scholars pay significant attention to the importance of intercultural interactions among religions. The improper interactions of some followers of various religions have further highlighted the necessity of work in this area. Among the influential and legitimate phenomena in such interactions are religion and its teachings. The central question of this study is: 'What role do intercultural interactions among religions play in attaining correct belief and establishing a divine and human civilization based upon it?' Regarding intercultural interactions among religions, various views have been offered, which generally fall into three categories: "Extreme, negligent, and the balanced and correct approach."

**Method:** Using a descriptive analytical and critical method, this research seeks to examine the role of intercultural religious interactions in preparing the ground for guiding humanity toward the true religion and establishing the New Islamic Civilization. In doing so, it draws upon the thought and guidance of Ayatollah Khamenei, especially as articulated in the Second Phase of the Revolution statement.

**Findings:** Accordingly, the findings of the study show that focusing on religion and its ethical and human teachings, as well as the criteria of religious truth mentioned in the Second Phase document, such as being revolutionary and anti oppression, can accelerate and strengthen intercultural interactions and interfaith dialogue. This, in turn, can pave the way for people's inclination toward the true religion and the establishment of the global just government of the Promised Mahdi (AJ).

**Conclusion:** Therefore, one must adopt a reading of religion that proposes a balanced and correct path in interacting with other religions and sects, and avoid deviant readings, whether extreme or negligent.

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**Problem Statement**

Today, scholars around the world acknowledge and emphasize the role and importance of interactions among followers of religions and sects, particularly intercultural interactions. Moreover, the incorrect and improper interactions of some followers of religions and sects, such as Takfiri Wahhabi groups with Muslims and non-Muslims, have intensified the need for cultural interactions. Among the influential and acceptable phenomena in such interactions are religion and its teachings; therefore, intercultural interactions and interfaith dialogue must pay greater attention to the element of religion and its human and ethical teachings.

Ordinarily, works related to interfaith dialogue have mostly had an intra-religious orientation, often aimed at affirming a particular religion, though discussions on interfaith dialogue have also become prominent alongside this. In this study, we too adopt an intra-religious methodological approach, but from a different angle, namely, examining the role of interfaith dialogue in creating a positive atmosphere and convergence among followers, facilitating better presentation of beliefs, attaining true belief, and forming a divine and human civilization based upon it, with emphasis on the Second Phase of the Islamic Revolution Statement. Considering that the Second Phase is the continuation and completion of the First Phase, addressing the first Phase of the Revolution is also necessary. It is worth noting that the Islamic Revolution of Iran, which occurred in the name of religion, introduced its primary aim as paving the way for the establishment of Islamic civilization, an aim that multiplies the responsibility of Muslim scholars in presenting the discourse of "Engineering Islamic Civilization." (Erfan, 2014 AD/1393 SH: 178)

**The main research question of the present study is:**

- What role do intercultural religious interactions play in better understanding religions, attaining true belief, and forming a divine and human civilization based upon it?
- What is the role of intercultural interactions among religions in the creation of the New Islamic Civilization, based on the Second Phase of the Revolution Statement?

Therefore, this study, using a descriptive-analytical and critical perspective, seeks to explore the role of intercultural religious interactions in preparing the ground for guiding humanity toward the true religion and providing a model for Islamic societies in order to establish the New Islamic Civilization. In this regard, it draws upon the thought and guidance of Ayatollah Khamenei, particularly the Second Phase Statement.

**The importance and necessity of this research may be summarized as follows:**

- The results of this study may serve as a model for various systems and contribute to understanding the position and performance of religions and sects in communication.
- The research can emphasize expanding the interactions established for presenting pure and authentic Muhammadan Islam.
- Using Islamic teachings, one can pave the way for moderation in interreligious interactions and use it to address the problems of contemporary humanity and elevate its intellectual and spiritual dimensions.
- This study can serve as a preliminary Phase toward attaining true belief and establishing a

divine and human civilization based on it, with emphasis on the thought of Ayatollah Khamenei, especially the Second Phase Statement.

## **1. Research Background**

Regarding the research background, although discussion about "Intercultural interactions among religions and sects" is common worldwide and has received attention from scholars with various perspectives, it has **not** yet been studied from a civilizational angle, particularly regarding the formation of a divine civilization, drawing on the thought of Ayatollah Khamenei and especially the Second Phase Statement. It has also not been academically pursued in this specific context. Consequently, not only is there no independent work in this area, but no research has been found that reflects or examines the ideas and views of leading Muslim thinkers and prominent figures of the Islamic world, particularly Ayatollah Khamenei, on this matter. As an example, the following works may be mentioned:

### **1) Interfaith Dialogue: Global Perspectives**

This book examines the views of Raimon Panikkar and Ken Wilber concerning interfaith dialogue. It also includes discussions about the documented history of interreligious dialogue, such as the declaration on the relation of the church to non-Christian religions (Nostra Aetate), as well as documents concerning the relationship between Christianity and Judaism. Additionally, it addresses various methodologies, including the methodology of Christian interreligious dialogue and comparative theology.

### **2) A Theological Approach to Interfaith Dialogue (Principles, Boundaries, Goals, and Methods)**

Master's Thesis, 2017 AD/1396 SH, written by Sedigheh Hamidi, Supervisor: Saeed Arjmandfar, al-Mustafa International University, Bint al-Huda Higher Education Institute.

In this research, discussions related to interfaith dialogue are first presented in two sections: doctrinal principles and anthropology. Then, the origins of interfaith dialogue in the Islamic world and the West are examined, followed by a review of the historical process of such dialogues in recent centuries. The study also includes a pathology analysis of the governing principles, results, and methods of these dialogues, based on which the theological boundaries of interfaith dialogue are elaborated.

### **3) Religious Diversity and Interfaith Dialogue**

(Authors: Ulrich Winkler and Hans-Georg Ziebertz, Germany)

This article, published by Springer, examines the role of interfaith dialogue in promoting peace and harmony within diverse societies. It emphasizes the importance of gender-sensitive dialogue and highlights the role of women in inter-religious and intra-religious interactions.

### **4) Intercultural Communication and Interfaith Dialogue: A Case Study of "Three Institutions in England"**

This article by Hassan Bashir and Mohammad Hossein Shoa'i seeks to identify the modes

of interaction and key discursive foundations of interfaith dialogue in England, with an emphasis on intercultural communication.

### **5) Interfaith Dialogue: Objectives and Theoretical Foundations (An Interview with Professor Vincent Brümmer, Contemporary Philosopher of Religion)**

(Interview by Sayyid Amir Akrami, translated by Saeed Edalatnejad)

*Ishraq: Journal of Philosophy and Mysticism*, Year 1, Issues 2–3, Spring–Summer 2005.

This article discusses the goals of interfaith dialogue, examines aspects of inclusivism and pluralism, and explores the impact of new developments in hermeneutics on fundamental interfaith dialogue.

### **6) Interfaith Dialogue**

(Author: Sallie B. King, USA)

This article is part of *The "Oxford Handbook of Religious Diversity."* It provides an overview of interfaith dialogue and its various forms, including theological and spiritual dialogue. It also discusses the importance of interfaith engagement in promoting peace and understanding among diverse religious communities.

As evident, the above works address interfaith dialogue in general or from particular perspectives, such as pathology, principles, results, methodologies, and the role of women, and do not engage with the concerns or objectives of this research. The novelty of the present article lies in its focus on intercultural interactions among religions and sects from a civilizational perspective, specifically the formation of a new global divine civilization, with emphasis on the thought of Ayatollah Khamenei, particularly the Second Phase of the Islamic Revolution Statement.

## **2. Conceptual Clarifications**

### **2.1. Intercultural Interactions**

Barnouw, a contemporary scholar, defines intercultural interactions through the concepts of "Cultural Boundaries" and an "Internal Approach." He argues that the process of interaction takes place across cultural boundaries and that the best way to understand it is to view it from the perspective of the individuals involved (Barnouw, 1989: 330).

Samovar, author of "Communication between Cultures," emphasizes race and ethnicity in his definition, asserting that intercultural interaction occurs between individuals whose cultural perceptions and symbolic systems are sufficiently distinct. This intercultural interaction changes when the sender and receiver of a message belong to different racial or ethnic groups, and these changes can influence events (Samovar, 2000 AD/1379 SH: 103).

Accordingly, intercultural interaction can be defined as: "Respectful and balanced engagement between two individuals or groups belonging to two different cultures, aimed at familiarizing themselves with and benefiting from the positive aspects of each other's culture."

In such interactions, various factors, including religion, race, ethnicity, and plays influential roles.

### **2.2. Religions**

The term "Religions" is the plural of "Religion." In lexicography, "Religion" carries multiple

meanings, including law, customs and traditions, habits, judgment, and ruling (Dehkhoda, 1998 AD/1377 SH: Entry "Din"). In the Qur'an, the word "Religion" is used with several meanings, such as Islam, monotheism, worship of God, way or method, submission, reward and recompense, law, obedience, servitude, accountability, and order (Qarashi, 1975 AD/1354 SH: 2, 380-381; Turayhi, 1988 AD/1367 SH: 76-77; Raghīb Isfahani, 2004 AD/1383 SH: 175).

From the collection of definitions proposed by Islamic thinkers regarding religion, a comprehensive definition may be formulated as follows:

"Religion is a set of theoretical and doctrinal teachings, practical rulings and laws, and ethical instructions which, taking into account human reason and innate disposition, and addressing both individual and social dimensions, have been sent by the One God through prophets for the guidance of human society in both its material and spiritual aspects. If adhered to, it guarantees human happiness and salvation in this world and the Hereafter." (Tabataba'i, 2014 AD/1393 SH: 2-3; Mesbah Yazdi, 2005 AD/1384 SH: 1, 28)

### **3.A Brief Note on Interfaith Dialogue**

Regarding interactions and dialogue among religions, two general perspectives can be identified:

1. The cognitive (theoretical) perspective: This view refers to the awareness and knowledge obtained as a result of the exchange of ideas between two or more individuals.
2. The communicative (practical) perspective: According to this view, interaction and dialogue constitute an opportunity through which individuals can establish communication with one another (Neyestani, 2012 AD/1391 SH: 14).

It appears that these two perspectives significantly influence the way interfaith dialogue is defined. From the first perspective, dialogue is considered a method of understanding and being understood, with understanding itself as the primary objective. Thus, "Cognitive Dialogue" may be regarded as a means of transmitting ideas. From the second perspective, however, the act of dialogue itself is considered intrinsically important. Consequently, in "Communicative Dialogue," the focus is on dialogue as a channel of communication in itself, rather than on outcomes such as discovering truth or even achieving mutual understanding.

Interfaith dialogue may also be categorized in various ways. Some scholars classify types of dialogue based on their objectives, including:

- Dialogue aimed at acquiring new information;
- Dialogue intended to criticize the other party;
- Emphatic dialogue (Sana, 2013: 41).

The Second Vatican Council, categorizing dialogue based on its audience, proposed three types of dialogue corresponding to three groups of people:

- All human beings (often including the non-religious);
- Religious individuals who are non-Christians;
- Religious individuals who are non-Catholics (Razi, 1998 AD/1377 SH: 51).

From the perspective of content, three forms of dialogue may also be envisaged:

1. Dialogue within the framework of human relations;
2. Dialogue aimed at discovering truth;

3. Dialogue for practical rapprochement despite ideological differences.

Accordingly, "Dialogue" can be classified based on its fundamental elements, namely the participants, content, and objective, as follows:

#### Types of Interfaith Dialogue

Religions Dialogue based on	Types
<b>Audience</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Non-religious individuals</li> <li>- Followers of other religions</li> <li>- Followers of other denominations within a religion</li> </ul>
<b>Content</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Human relations</li> <li>- Seeking truth</li> <li>- Practical rapprochement</li> </ul>
<b>Objective</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Acquiring new knowledge</li> <li>- Criticism</li> <li>- Enjoyment or emotional engagement</li> </ul>

An important point is that the cultural environment of the followers of any religion can play a highly significant and influential role in determining the type and quality of interfaith dialogue and in achieving the objectives of such interactions.

#### 4. Historical Background of the Discussion

The history of interaction and dialogue among followers of religions is as long as the history of humanity itself.<sup>1</sup> Religious debates have long existed with the aims of mutual understanding, discovering the truth, or achieving doctrinal victory. For instance, in examining the history of intercultural interactions between major religions such as Christianity and Judaism, it can be observed that each considered itself to be in possession of the truth while regarding the other as mistaken (Shalabi, 1988: 1, 27).

The Holy Qur'an describes the relationship between Judaism and Christianity as follows: "And the Jews say, "The Christians have no basis," and the Christians say, "The Jews have no basis." (al-Baqarah: 113)

The emergence of Islam as a universal religion and its expansion across the world transformed the confrontation among religions into interaction and truth-oriented dialogue. Islam has opened the path to dialogue with other religions in order to attain truth and promote correct belief, considering it a noble method for the free expression of religious convictions (Shalabi, 1988: 1, 27). In this regard, Islam places strong emphasis on interaction and dialogue among religions. In verses 17 and 18 of Surah *al-Zumar*, the Holy Qur'an describes listening

1. The first dialogue took place between Abel and Cain regarding the acceptance or non-acceptance of their offerings. (See verses 27 to 30 of Surah *al-Mā'idah*.)

to all statements, including those of supporters and opponents of Islam, and engaging in dialogue as a sound approach for attaining truth. According to these verses, interaction and dialogue among religions, sects, and various intellectual schools, and selecting the best among them, are emphasized by religion and are among the qualities of God's guided and rational servants.

Based on Qur'anic verses (al-Baqarah: 30-32), the first being to initiate interaction and dialogue was the Almighty God Himself. He spoke with the angels about the creation of Adam, and they expressed their opinion. God, to demonstrate the validity of His statement, presented Adam to them so that his capabilities would become evident, thereby making the angels aware of their error regarding his creation. Likewise, God also conversed with the disobedient Iblis (al-A'rāf: 12-18). Throughout history, prophets communicated with their communities, other people, and even their opponents in order to guide humanity. Prophet Noah preached the true religion to his people for nine hundred and fifty years, speaking extensively (al-'Ankabūt: 14), and strove to such an extent that they eventually said to him: "O! Noah, you have argued with us, and you have prolonged your argument with us." (Hūd: 32) Prophet Abraham, in addition to speaking with his own people, conversed with God Almighty regarding the lifting of punishment from the people of Lot (Hūd 11:74). Other prophets, such as *Hūd*, *Ṣāliḥ*, Lot, Moses, and Jesus, peace be upon them, also engaged in dialogue and discussion with their communities, as mentioned in the Qur'an.

The Messenger of God (PBUH) and the Imams of the Ahl al-Bayt (AS) likewise engaged in dialogue and debate with their supporters and opponents. Some of these exchanges were compiled by *Ṭabrisī* in his valuable work *al-Ihtijāj*. At the beginning of this book, he discusses the concept of "Argumentation," its types, and provides examples of the Prophet's (PBUH) eloquent debates with disbelievers, followed by the arguments of the impeccable Imams (AS) with others.

In the contemporary era, various scholars and thinkers in the Islamic world have worked in this field. Among the most prominent is Ayatollah Khamenei, who approaches the discussion of interreligious and inter-sectarian interaction from a civilizational perspective. Based on this view, he presents the Second Phase of the Islamic Revolution as preparation for the global revolution of the Promised Mahdi (AJ) and the establishment of the New Global Islamic Civilization.

An important point is that dialogue and interaction, whether for peaceful coexistence or for intellectual elevation, are affirmed by Islamic and religious texts. However, such interaction is, in reality, a prelude to attaining the true religion and forming the New Islamic Civilization and the global Mahdavi government (AJ), which has been the goal of all prophets and divine friends, peace be upon them all.

#### **4. Theories of Intercultural Interactions**

Given the importance of interaction among followers of different religions and sects for the growth and advancement of human societies, the elevation of the true religion, and the establishment of the New Islamic Civilization, it appears necessary, toward understanding proper interaction, to briefly discuss theories of intercultural interaction, types of interaction,

the views concerning intercultural interaction among religions, and the correct perspective.

Gudykunst, one of the leading scholars in the field of intercultural interaction, classifies theories of intercultural interactions into seven categories in the introduction to his book (Gudykunst, 2002). In accordance with the subject of this research, two of these theories, "Acculturation to a new culture" and "Communication Accommodation," have been used.

## **5.2. Adopting to a New Culture**

Intercultural adopting occurs when individuals find themselves in unfamiliar cultural and social conditions and intend to establish and maintain a relatively stable, reciprocal, and functional relationship with the environment. At its core, intercultural acculturation involves creating harmony between one's internal conditions and the new external environment (Gudykunst, 2002: 388).

## **5.2. Communication Accommodation Theory**

This theory was developed in the 1960s by Howard Giles, a professor of communication at the University of California, along with his colleagues working in the field of cultural communication (Gudykunst, 2002: 121–294).

Communication accommodation explains the methods individuals use to influence one another and describes how individuals choose strategies of "Convergence," "Divergence," and "Maintenance" to express their attitudes toward the other party.

### **1) Convergence**

Convergence occurs within a communicative situation, namely when the communicator adjusts their expressive or behavioral patterns to create similarity with the other person (the interlocutor). According to communication accommodation theory, in certain communicative circumstances, individuals may exhibit convergence in their behavior or speech to show approval of the other party or to enhance the level of communication. The greater the communicator's convergence with the other party, the more positively and attractively they are perceived by their interlocutor.

### **2) Divergence**

Divergence occurs when a communicator feels the need to emphasize a distinct and differentiated communicative style in relation to the other party. The strategy of divergence is typically adopted to highlight differences between the two sides of a communicative exchange. Individuals resort to this tactic to express disapproval of, or reproach toward, the other party. In other words, in certain communicative situations, individuals may wish to display or assert their differences.

### **3) Maintenance**

Communication Accommodation Theory also notes that in a communicative situation, it is possible for communicators not to change their communicative style or mode of action (speech or behavior). In most communicative contexts, large portions of one's communicative style

remain unchanged. Therefore, maintenance occurs when a communicator does not alter their specific communicative actions or behaviors.

## **5. Major Views on Intercultural Interactions among Religions**

Regarding the approaches to intercultural interactions among religions and sects, three general categories of views may be identified: the extremist view, the lax (or overly permissive) view, and the moderate view.

### **6.1. The Extremist View**

This view pertains to radical groups such as Takfiri Wahhabism, which reject any form of interaction or dialogue with other religions and sects. Wahhabism, especially its more advanced manifestations such as jihadi-takfiri groups and ISIS, considers all Islamic sects other than itself to be infidels, and in their view, the ruling concerning an infidel is killing, leaving no room for discussion. Even in certain matters such as seeking intercession or visiting the graves of divine saints, dialogue is acceptable only if the other party acknowledges that such acts are "Polytheistic" and repents; otherwise, they must be killed on the spot.

In other words, these groups are exclusivists who deem only one religion or sect to be true and a source of salvation, while viewing the followers of all other religions and sects as doomed and as having lives, property, and honor that are licit to violate, even if some of their doctrines, laws, or rituals are in harmony with the true religion (Rabbani Golpayegani, 1999 AD/1378 SH: 73). In Christianity as well, extremists or "Exclusivists" consider Christianity to be the only true religion and the followers of other religions to be destined for destruction in the Hereafter. In the Islamic world, Takfiri Wahhabism places no value whatsoever on intercultural interactions among religions and sects. Their violent behavior toward followers of other religions and Islamic sects, and at times serving as tools of global arrogance has created numerous problems for humanity, especially for the Islamic world. For this reason, it is necessary to confront such an empty and irrational ideology, which contradicts both reason and religion, through scholarly and doctrinal means.

### **6.2. The Lax (Overly Permissive) View**

This view belongs to those who claim that religious interaction must involve tolerance in thought, meaning the abandonment of some of one's beliefs and acceptance of the opposing side's beliefs when necessary. Of course, tolerance and "Religious Forbearance," understood as leniency and patience toward the beliefs and behaviors of the other side (Fathali, 1999 AD/1378 SH: 9), and practical forbearance, meaning good neighborliness, mutual understanding, and communal coexistence, are acceptable. However, defining tolerance and forbearance as the acceptance of opposing beliefs (Kadivar, 1997 AD/1376 SH: 4) is incorrect and represents an overly permissive view.

According to this definition, one could, for the sake of interaction and unity with other religions and sects, overlook certain religious beliefs or, at the very least, refrain from committing to them in practice. However, it appears that neither interreligious interaction nor rapprochement requires abandoning one's own beliefs to find common ground. Rather,

intercultural interactions among religions, as well as debate and dialogue, must aim at creating a suitable environment for attaining the true belief and choosing the straight path. In this process, all doctrines and schools of thought may be subject to critique and examination.

### **6.3. The Moderate View**

According to this view, although the true religion is one, followers of other religions may still attain salvation (Rabbani Golpayegani, 1999 AD/1378 SH: 74). Moreover, interacting with and bringing religions and sects closer together does not require abandoning one's own religious beliefs in order to find common ground.

Karl Rahner (1904–1984), one of the most prominent Catholic theologians and religious scholars of the twentieth century, is among the proponents of this idea. He argues that by emphasizing similarities and commonalities among religions, existing differences can be reduced. According to him, Christianity is the best and only salvific religion; however, all individuals who lived before or after Christianity and did not accept it due to lack of awareness of Christ's teachings will still benefit from God's infinite mercy. He refers to them as "Anonymous Christians." (ibid: 74-75)

In Islamic teachings as well, a distinction is made between truth and salvation. The Holy Qur'an refers to such individuals as "Intellectually Oppressed," for whom the social and personal conditions necessary for discovering the true belief were not available (al-Nisā': 98). It is through interaction and dialogue that such conditions must be provided for them.

A review of the history of the Islamic Revolution of Iran shows that the Revolution today is based on this idea, and the views of the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution, Ayatollah Khamenei, are also rooted in this perspective. These views will be examined in the following sections.

A key point is that intercultural interactions among religions and sects encompass theoretical discussions, dialogue and debate, and the practical mode of engagement with the followers of other religions and sects, which plays a significant role in attracting them to the true religion and creating opportunities for discussion and exchange.

## **6. Ayatollah Khamenei and the Interaction of Religions and Sects**

Ayatollah Khamenei, in numerous statements, has emphasized interaction and cooperation between the two civilizational domains of Christian Western civilization and Islam, considering this approach the opposite of confrontation and conflict. He maintains that there are numerous capacities for interaction and cooperation between these two civilizational spheres that could lead to a correct and unbiased understanding of Islam. For example, in his letter of Bahman 1393 (February 2015) addressed to the youth of Europe and North America, he writes:

"Do not miss this opportunity for a correct understanding and an unprejudiced perception of Islam, so that perhaps, thanks to your sense of responsibility toward the truth, future generations may record this period of Western interaction with Islam with less bitterness and a clearer conscience." (Saeedi, 2017 AD/1396 SH: 1-4)

In this letter, Ayatollah Khamenei laments the obstacles to interaction and cooperation between the two civilizational domains of religions in the Islamic world and the West, including Islamophobia and the extensive negative portrayal of Islam. He urges them to obtain a direct

and firsthand understanding of Islam, an understanding based on reference to the original and primary sources of Islam, such as the Qur'an and the life of its noble Prophet (PBUH). One of the ways to understand Islam and resolve differences and conflicts, leading to positive interaction and cooperation, is interreligious dialogue, grounded in their shared divine origin.

An important point is that "Pure Islam, while emphasizing its own truth and showing respect for other religions and belief in the divine prophets, is the standard-bearer of global dialogue based on human nature, rationality, and mutual respect. According to this perspective, relations between Muslims and non-Muslims are founded upon peace, coexistence, and good conduct. Thus, war is an exceptional matter, and as long as nothing instigates war, peace prevails" (Moradi, 2011 AD/1390 SH: 269) as God states in verse 61 of Surah *al-Anfāl*: "And if they incline to peace, then incline to it [as well], and rely upon Allah; surely He is the Hearing, the Knowing."

Ayatollah Khamenei, "While criticizing the spirituality-averse and destructive Western culture, does not deny the importance and value of cultural ties; rather, he emphasizes them. In reality, Islam adopts an approach based on dialogue and interaction in relation to other religions and cultures. Alongside stressing human unity and the concept of one human community, it also respects racial and religious differences. Especially in the era of globalization, the cultural capacities of Islam and its support for cultural ties among religions and cultures can serve as a distinct hallmark of Islamic thought in contrast to Western aggressive and homogenizing ideologies. Furthermore, with human convergence, unity, and the governance of the faithful and the Islamic community, ultimately the global Islamic society, and in other words, the New Islamic Civilization under the leadership of the impeccable Imam (AS), will come into being. Therefore, by emphasizing the necessity of dialogue and interaction based on the common foundations of divine religions and human nature, the severity of confrontation among nations must be reduced, and the grounds for human elevation and a pure and wholesome life should be prepared." (Moradi, 2011 AD/1390 SH: 213-216)

Ayatollah Khamenei also considers "Interaction and cultural exchange" essential, placing it directly opposite "Cultural invasion." Advising cultural exchange and the necessity of benefiting from the positive aspects of other cultures, he states:

"In cultural exchange, the goal is to enrich and perfect the national culture; but in cultural invasion, the goal is to uproot and destroy the national culture. In cultural exchange, a nation that takes something from other nations chooses what is pleasant, appealing, good, and desirable."<sup>1</sup>

From his perspective, cultural exchange is necessary, and no nation is exempt from it. However, "Cultural invasion is different from cultural exchange; it is different from adopting the superior and refined elements of other cultures. Cultural exchange is permissible, indeed obligatory. Islam commands us, and reason independently demands from us, that whatever is good, beautiful, and valuable, wherever we find it, we must learn it and benefit from it."<sup>2</sup>

Therefore, "considering Islam's global approach, which emphasizes human unity and

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1. Statements of Ayatollah Khamenei in a meeting with the Minister, deputies, and heads of education departments from across the country, 21/05/1371 (August 12, 1992).

2. Statements of Ayatollah Khamenei in a gathering of the staff of the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB), 28/02/1383 (May 17, 2004).

acknowledges human diversity, it can be said that in the process of globalization, Islamic teachings affirm interaction and cultural exchange." (Moradi, 2011 AD/1390 SH: 218)

### **7. The First Phase Statement of the Islamic Revolution and Intercultural Interactions of Religions**

The First Phase Statement of the Islamic Revolution, which in fact constitutes the foundation and basis of the Revolution's first forty-year phase, is the collection of Imam Khomeini's speeches, especially his "Political–Divine Testament." The Second Phase Statement, as a roadmap for the Revolution's next forty years, is also of great importance; yet in order to understand and interpret it correctly, it is first necessary to study the First Phase and the path already taken, so that it may serve as a guiding light for the future.

When, in the course of explaining the Second Phase of the Islamic Revolution, we return to the statements of Imam Khomeini, the founder of the Islamic system, we find the fundamental framework and structure of the Second Phase Statement to be fully in harmony with the Imam's thought. This shows that the Islamic Revolution, under the leadership of Ayatollah Khamenei, has entered its second forty-year phase with firmness and without deviation from its foundational principles. Here, Imam Khomeini's speeches, especially his Testament, may be examined as the First Phase Statement and as a prerequisite for the Second Phase.

As a religious and political leader, Imam Khomeini consistently emphasized the importance of interaction and dialogue among the followers of religions and sects. He believed that interreligious and inter-sectarian dialogue could help eliminate intolerance and conflict, and that on the basis of shared human and religious principles it could generate peace and coexistence. Moreover, he held that agreement among the great monotheistic religions was necessary for the advancement and elevation of humanity (Khomeini, 2006 AD/1385 SH: 6, 177).

These points can be clearly discerned in Imam Khomeini's statements, especially in his conduct and theories concerning Islamic unity and the necessity of peaceful coexistence between Muslims and the followers of other religions. He also believed that all forms of discrimination and racism must be avoided, and that instead of enmity, common bonds should be emphasized (Khomeini, 2006: 18, 95, 334).

For further study on this subject, one may refer to the "Sahifeh Noor" (Collected Works of Imam Khomeini), which contains his detailed statements on these themes. In Imam Khomeini's speeches and messages delivered on various occasions, emphasis can be found on Muslim solidarity, respect for other religions, and the necessity of dialogue and coexistence among the followers of different religious traditions, demonstrating his view that intercultural dialogue among the followers of religions and sects can play a significant role in cultural elevation, the clarification of true belief, and the establishment of a new global civilization based on that belief.

### **8. The Second Phase Statement of the Islamic Revolution and the Interaction of Religions and Sects**

With the publication of the "Second Phase Statement of the Islamic Revolution" in Bahman 1397 (February 2019), Ayatollah Khamenei, the Leader of the Islamic Revolution, explained the achievements of the Revolution's first forty years and offered essential recommendations for continuing this bright path. The Second Phase Statement is, in reality, an executive charter

for progress and civilization-building, breathing new life into the Revolution. This second Phase will bring the Revolution closer to "Its great ideal, which is the creation of the New Islamic Civilization and preparing for the rising of the Sun of the Great Authority." (Khamenei, 2019 AD/1398 SH: 10)

In the Second Phase Statement, Ayatollah Khamenei introduces a novel method for the interaction and cooperation of religions. First, he emphasizes that one of humanity's greatest historical misconceptions has been the imagined conflict between religion and worldly life, a misconception that, with the emergence of the Islamic Revolution and the harmonious pairing of religion and life, was dispelled. This marked the beginning of a new era of humanity's return to religion. Indeed, this can be considered one of the major services that Islam and Shi'ism have offered other religions and sects in the field of intercultural interaction during this age. He writes:

"When the world had been divided between the material East and West, and no one imagined the possibility of a great religious movement, the Islamic Revolution of Iran entered the scene with power and magnificence; it broke the established frameworks, revealed the obsolescence of prevailing clichés, presented religion and worldly life side by side, and announced the dawn of a new era." (Khamenei, 2019 AD/1398 SH: 7)

Second, he emphasizes that in interreligious and inter-sectarian interaction and in the search for truth through dialogue and debate, attention must be given to the fact that one of the criteria of the legitimacy of a religion or sect, or various interpretations of it, and indeed the first criterion, is its revolutionary nature and its stance against oppression, rather than providing justification for injustice or the actions of powerful oppressors.

Accordingly, he presents the true and authentic Islam to the world as a religion that stands against global domination and opposes the colonization and exploitation of oppressed nations by the powerful. He strives to introduce the real face of Islam to the followers of other religions, Islam as resistance to oppressors and tyrants; that is, revolutionary Islam, the pure Muhammadan Islam, in contrast to the "American Islam." Such an Islam is concerned with the suffering of oppressed peoples and considers it its duty to defend them against global powers and injustice. This is the Islam that, following Imam Husayn (AS), believes in the triumph of blood over the sword and never bows to humiliation. In this regard, the Second Phase Statement declares:

"From the beginning until today, the Islamic Revolution of Iran has stood openly and courageously against tyrants and arrogant powers, and has defended the oppressed and the downtrodden. This revolutionary honor, this honesty and courage, this global and regional outreach in standing beside the oppressed, is a source of pride for Iran and the Iranian people, and may it ever remain so." (ibid: 9-10)

Ayatollah Khamenei also emphasizes that with the occurrence of the Islamic Revolution of Iran, which arose from true and revolutionary Islam, "The magnificent and honorable symbol of standing firm against the bullies, oppressors, and arrogant powers of the world, at the head of whom stands the predatory and criminal America, became more and more prominent each day. Therefore, refusal to surrender, safeguarding the Revolution, its divine grandeur and majesty, and its proud stance against arrogant governments have become a known characteristic of Iran and Iranians. On the other hand, the monopolistic powers of the world, who have always

considered their survival to depend on encroaching upon the independence of other nations and trampling their vital interests for their own sinister aims, have confessed to their helplessness before revolutionary Islamic Iran." (Khamenei, 2019 AD/1398 SH: 19)

Therefore, in the "Second Phase of the Islamic Revolution Statement," Ayatollah Khamenei emphasizes that with the occurrence of the Islamic Revolution of Iran and the removal of the false notion of a contradiction between religion and worldly life, a new era began in which humanity returned to religion and religious interactions and dialogues flourished. Considering the main aim of these interactions, reaching the true religion, he introduces certain criteria for determining the truth of a religion or denomination so that the followers of religions and free-minded humans may, through these dialogues and interactions, choose the true religion with clarity and help prepare the ground for the establishment of the global Mahdavi (AJ) government and the new Islamic civilization.

### **9. Evaluation of the Views**

As stated earlier, the extremist view blocks the path of interaction and dialogue, causes violence and hatred, violates human rights, and prevents reaching the truth. In reality, holding such a belief in today's society, where freedom of expression and the right to choose one's religion and beliefs exist, creates major problems and causes people to turn away from religion. Moreover, human societies will never witness peace, calm, or progress, because the window of opportunity for interfaith dialogue closes and only extremism, violence, and killing will remain.

The negligent (over-tolerant) view, by legitimizing all beliefs, even contradictory ones, and by permitting the abandonment of one's own convictions to align with other religions and denominations, blocks the path toward reaching the true belief. It renders interreligious interactions ineffective by contradicting their very purpose. This view is also clearly opposed to the unchanging and non-negotiable principles and rulings of religion, those fixed and immutable foundations that a believer must always accept and follow in any time and place, and from which religion never allows withdrawal or compromise.

But the third view, the moderate theory, holds that through interaction and dialogue, one should create the conditions for guiding human beings and enabling them to reach correct and true belief, while at the same time there is no need to abandon any true belief for the sake of interaction, rapprochement, or finding common ground among religions and denominations. This view, in addition to being compatible with the contemporary age, has the capacity to lead to the formation of a new Islamic civilization. Therefore, based on the earlier reports we presented from Ayatollah Khamenei's views and from the Second Phase Statement, it is clear that this theory is not only beneficial for Islamic society in Iran but can also be useful and influential in all Islamic and human societies.

### **Conclusion**

Attention to religion and its human and ethical teachings by the followers of different beliefs and schools can accelerate and strengthen intercultural interactions and interfaith dialogue, leading to the elevation of human beings and human societies. In this context, one must adopt an interpretation of religion that proposes a correct and moderate path in interacting with other

religions and denominations and avoid deviated interpretations, extremist or overly lenient ones.

Interfaith dialogue can also be divided into various types based on different aspects (audience, content, and objective), with each requiring its own method. The views discussed in the field of interreligious and intercultural interactions can generally be divided into three categories: extremist, overly lenient, and moderate. The first two views are unacceptable, because each faces fundamental problems. The extremist view blocks dialogue, causes violence and hatred, violates human rights, and prevents reaching the truth. The overly lenient view, by legitimizing all beliefs, even contradictory ones, and permitting the abandonment of true belief (to please the other side), blocks the path to true belief and, in effect, renders interfaith dialogues ineffective by contradicting their intended purpose.

However, the third view, namely the moderate theory, which posits that through interaction and dialogue, the ground should be prepared for guiding people and reaching correct and true belief, while at the same time, there is no necessity to abandon some of one's true beliefs for the sake of interaction, rapprochement of religions and denominations, and finding common ground, is a correct theory suitable for the contemporary era and possesses its own unique civilizational capacity, which has manifested in the thoughts of His Eminence Ayatollah Khamenei, particularly in the Second Phase of the Islamic Revolution Statement.

By examining the thoughts of Ayatollah Khamenei, we arrive at the fundamental point that interaction and cooperation between the two civilizational spheres of the Christian West and Islam is essential and stands in direct opposition to confrontation and conflict. Furthermore, there are many capacities for interaction and cooperation between these two civilizational spheres that can lead to a correct understanding and unbiased perception of Islam, thereby neutralizing the Islamophobia conspiracy in the Western world. In fact, one of the ways to recognize Islam and resolve differences and disputes, leading to positive interaction and cooperation, and paving the way for the establishment of the global Mahdavi (AJ) government, is through interfaith and interdenominational dialogue, considering their common divine roots. Therefore, from his perspective, "Cultural interaction and exchange" is necessary, which is precisely the opposite of "Cultural Aggression" and can serve as a prelude to people becoming acquainted with the true religion.

Ayatollah Khamenei also introduces the emergence of the Islamic Revolution of Iran in the Second Phase Statement as a prelude to humanity's return to religion, which is one of Islam and Shiism's greatest services in intercultural interactions with other religions and denominations in this era. This serves as a precursor for people to reach the true religion and establish the new global Islamic civilization. In this regard, by introducing pure Muhammadan Islam (PBUH), which is revolutionary Islam, in contrast to "American Islam," and opposed to oppression, colonialism, and arrogance, as the true religion possessing the capacity to establish a new global civilization, he emphasizes that in interactions among religions and denominations and in the pursuit of truth through these interactions and debates, attention must be paid to the fact that one of the criteria for the truthfulness of a religion, denomination, or its various interpretations, and indeed, the primary criterion, is its revolutionary nature and its opposition to oppression, not its justification of the tyranny of oppressors and the crimes of the arrogant.

The outcome of this thought and the criteria presented within it serve as a guiding light for free thinkers around the world to attain truth, turn towards the true religion, and lay the groundwork for the establishment of the new global Islamic civilization.

In conclusion, based on the thoughts of His Eminence Ayatollah Khamenei, especially the Second Phase of the Islamic Revolution Statement, intercultural interactions among religions and denominations have the potential to be beneficial and influential not only in the Islamic society of Iran but in all Islamic and human societies as a prelude to reaching the true religion and establishing the new global Islamic civilization.

Considering the importance of the subject of this research for the destiny of human societies, particularly followers of religions and denominations, and the significance of promoting the true religion, namely the clear religion of Islam, throughout the world, and the establishment of the universal just government of the Promised Mahdi (AJ), the savior of humanity and the dispenser of justice to the world, it is suggested that:

1. Further reflection and research be conducted on the subject of dialogue and interactions among religions and denominations, promoting tolerance and good relations with followers of other religions and beliefs, and that appropriate and significant works be published in this field.
2. Interfaith and intercultural dialogue be given more attention from a religious perspective and with consideration of internal religious sources in the clear religion of Islam, including the Quran and the narrations of the Prophet (PBUH) and the impeccable Imams (AS). Written and oral works in this regard should be presented to the academic community and the general public of followers of religions and denominations in different countries.
3. The thoughts of Islamic and Shiite scholars, especially the groundbreaking ideas of Imam Khomeini and His Eminence Ayatollah Khamenei, the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran, be studied more than ever by researchers and enthusiasts in this field.

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