

Dialogue among civilisations

by Gilani Kamran

H.E. Muhammd Khatami, President of Iran has in a lecture during his recent visit to Pakistan, illustrated his idea of the dialogues among civilisations as against the current view of the clash of civilisations. The President had earlier presented and advocated dialogue among civilisations as a positive way of bringing about peace in the world.

In the context of the dialogue, the President referred to Structuralism and Deconstruction and discussed Iqbal's Reconstruction of Religions. Thought in Islam as a subject for understanding and interpretation the placed Iqbal's work within the background of Structuralism and Deconstruction. President Khatami suggested that Iqbal has in fact, brought the concepts of Islamic civilisation under examination as structure, and through interpretation released a new wave of meaning as Deconstruction of the concepts of Islamic thought.

Just as any cultural manifestation is a structure, in the same way civilisation is a structure, and alongwith its concepts, it can also be treated as a structure. Thus, every civilisation has an external (outer) aspect, which is its material aspect, and an internal (inner) or spiritual aspect which always has priority over the material aspect.

President Khatami points out that the western civilisation too, is a structure and its outer material aspect is the immediate, visible aspect which has allured the non-western young men and has caused their self-abasement and moral degradation. Their dialogue with the west has, thus, proved unproductive to the young people.

affected by one-sidedness, rush towards the West to curry favourer with the West which is selfishness. Thus, all those who resent the west for past colonialism or for its advancement in science and economic prosperity lose their vitality and do not gain any positive benefit.

The Western civilisation has a spiritual aspect which has given it a human culture and the tender creative achievement. Our eye must be focused on the spiritual aspect of Western civilisation to seek development in arts and sciences.

President Khatami says: 'If Islam in the early days of its history, shortly after its advent, and long before conquering the first cities, managed to win over the minds and hearts of the people it was because of implementing the famous features of Islam'. It was the vitalising fragrance of Islam which changed the spirit of people; it was so new, so invigorating that it created a new civilisation in the history of the world.

President Khatami points out that in those days Islam emitted the enlivening odour of justice and human dignity. He says, "Today when we are calling for the defence of our Islamic creed and our religious doctrines we must seek guidance from our great teacher, Iqbal, and take many fruitful lessons from him on how to support and how to safeguard Islam."

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President Khatami has not given the details of the effect of a civilisation's material aspect. He has simply stated that the external aspect of a civilisation when it is totally accepted by an outsider, it works out a superficial influence. The dialogue with civilisation remains incomplete; and it is simply misunderstood. It can be admitted that the clash hypothesis has, also failed to understand Islam and the Muslims, and it has only followed a superficial view of Muslim identity. The material aspect of the western civilisation has created a crisis for Muslim youth.

President Khatami has advised that Muslims should not surrender their spiritual heritage under the lure of Western civilisation's external aspect.

What, however, is President Khatami's central theme is the view that the Muslims should look at the world through "two separate pairs of eyes" The Muslim view of contemporary world should be bifocal. They must have a view of their own spiritual heritage, and also a view of the West's scientific achievement.

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In the context of the Lecture: 'It is important to note how different and fruitful is the language of the Muslims from the harangue of other people and their leaders who are keen to impose the image of terrorism on Muslims. Peace and security cannot be established in the world by threats, weapons, and the mania of self conceived superiority.

It may be inferred that the upholders of the clash philosophy only know the way through warfare. All that is incorrect. Mankind can have an era of peace through understanding, Islam accommodates other people. It guarantees a good time for the people of the world. Yet this great religion expects human beings to follow justice, and to stop genocide and violence in self interest.

The speech of President Khatami underlined the end of evil in the world by referring to the spiritual aspects of civilisations. Only that way lies hope for man and good news of a future of peace and progress. ■