

'The clash of civilizations'

By Qazi Faez Isa

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A refusal to compromise anchored in truth without the desire to strike at one's persecutor was the message of the penultimate prophet, Jesus Christ, upon him be peace and blessings. In the land that bore Jesus' gentle footprints, oppression neither stopped nor abated. Two millenniums after the son of Mary was put on trial, the tragedy of the Palestinian people, now in its second generation, continues to engulf the world.

The world turns and the world changes,

But one thing does not change.

In all of my years, one thing does not change.

However you disguise it, this thing does not change:

The perpetual struggle of Good and Evil.

(Choruses from *The Rock*, T.S. Eliot)

guided ones. Greed motivated Judas Iscariot, and more recently a satanic and perverted zeal fed on the plight of the Palestinians brought down the Twin Towers. What has followed is a war of sorts, which is devilishly labelled as 'a clash of civilizations'.

In this alleged Muslim-Christian clash, Judaism's followers have arrayed themselves with power centres, all of which lie within predominantly Christian areas. A common Judaic-Christian viewpoint is sustained by another myth, a so-called 'Judeo-Christian Tradition'. History gives the lie to this brotherhood of Jews and Christians. The high priests of the Jews levelled charges of blasphemy against the founder of the Christian faith and tried God's prophet before their Sanhedrin. A mock trial secured a conviction. And Jewry joined hands with pagan rulers appointed by Rome to carry out the sentence. Christian hurt at such treatment of Jesus Christ has at times overflowed into hatred against the Jews, contrary to the teachings of Christ.

The Inquisition saw the forced conversion and the exile of Jews. In modern times, too, Christian Europe approved, tolerated or ignored the plight of the

persecuted in Christendom. Jews sought and were provided refuge in Muslim lands when they fled from the deprivations of the Inquisition and of Hitler. Jews entering Muslim lands were not treated as outcasts or simply tolerated as refugees eking a living on the outskirts of society, but were favoured and placed in top positions. Two shining examples of Jews flourishing in Muslim societies are those of Muslim Spain and Turkey. The 'Judeo-Christian Tradition' pointedly seeks to exclude Islam, despite the fact that Islam reveres all the preceding prophets, acknowledges them as Messengers of God and confirms the revelation of the psalms of David (Zabur), the Books of Moses (Tawrat) and the Gospels (Ingil). Therefore, if there is a tradition it ought to be a Judeo-Christian-Muslim tradition or none at all. Creating zones of exclusivity fosters suspicion and ultimately leads to hatred.

Peace, salvation and hope must expose the myth of civilizations clashing. Islamic and Christian worlds, for the first time, have come to share in each other's experiences. The Muslim has never been so without comparable economic, political or military power. In reaching this posi-

me, and hath not made me arrogant, unblest. Peace be on me the day I was born, and the day I die, and the day I shall be arised alive" (19:30-32). We are told of the touching reaction of the Christians who, upon hearing the Holy Quran, had "eyes overflow with tears because of the recognition of the Truth" (5:83). Sentiments like these do not inveigle a clash.

Christendom was established, and with it the attendant Christian economic, military and political power, upon the conversion of Emperor Constantine and his adoption of the Church. In contrast, the Holy Prophet (Peace be upon him), after an initial period when the Quraish ruled in Makkah, was blessed with authority and power. Muslims continued to enjoy his legacy till the invasion of the 'house of peace' (Dar-al-Islam), not by Christian soldiers but by Seljuks, Mongols and Ottoman Turks.

The initial centuries found Christians without and Muslims with political power. An innocent Christianity devoid of power is Christianity's defining moment. An origin which Muslims are able to relate to now, and may come to appreciate! Jesus rebuked Satan in the desert for offering "all the kingdoms of the world and the glory that goes with it", provided Jesus did homage

Quran, which categorizes Christians as "the nearest in affection" to Muslims (5:82). Almighty God, in the Holy Quran, commends Christians for "not being proud"; an honoured humility categorizing this special relationship. The 20th and the 21st centuries have seen Muslim and Christian-Arabs sharing in the subjugation of the Palestinian people. "The common history of exile, dispersion, dispossession and injustice could readily make also common the symbolism of pain and travail central in the faith and rite of one of the partners" (*Jesus and the Muslim* by Kenneth Cragg). Arab-Palestinian poetry is replete with such symbolism:

*Ants gnaw his flesh
Crows peck his flesh
The Arab refugee nailed to the cross.*

(*The Arab Refugee*, Abdul Wahab Al-Bayati)

*Under the weight of the cross
On the road of agony
Jerusalem is whipped:
The Soldier's lashes draw blood.
But the world's heart is closed to the tragedy.*

*This stone-cold world, Lord,
is blind.
(The Christ, Fadwa Tuqan)*

In events leading up to the sentencing of Jesus, the interest of Rome through its proconsul and Jewry through the Sanhedrin had a joined cause. In first bringing Jews and Christians together under a fabled 'Judeo-Christian Tradition' and then arraying this 'civilization' against the Muslim causes are now again sought to be joined. A falsehood perceived as reality may become self-fulfilling, therefore there is urgent need to expose it. The abomination of the bombing of the synagogues in Istanbul is proof that the lie is gaining ground. If the perpetrators

verance and a quiet revolt would better expose the red bloom gathering on a young child's chest. Occupation sustained by money, tank and helicopter gun-ships makes a deafening din and ought to arouse the conscience of Jews, Christians and Muslims. Israel, aware of its illegitimacy, craves recognition. Let it, however, first gather onto itself the flowing salt and crimson from Palestinian eyes and veins. If the Palestinians were all to die or be brutalized into insensitivity, from whom would forgiveness be sought in the hope that it may be given?

Jesus was denied, but he did not succumb to the demands made upon him. His is a story of money, power and force of arms lying vanquished in the heart and at the feet of Truth. Those who suffer do not do so in vain. In the sermon delivered on a Palestinian mount, Jesus extended a promise. "How blest are the sorrowful; they shall find consolation. How blest are those who hunger and thirst to see right prevail; they shall be satisfied. How blest are those who have suffered persecution for the cause of right; the kingdom of Heaven is theirs" (*Sermon on the Mount*, Matthew 5:3-10).

Religions are said to be the reason and cause for violence in today's world, whereas in truth only true allegiance to our respective faiths will make us abandon violence. To attain salvation we have to actively pursue peace. Lying ensconced in exclusive zones and gorging on hatreds can only culminate in a clash. "Current pressures on religious faith, from the bewildered and skeptical world are compelling reason not to stay content with due courtesy in our relating, but to be ready for exacting self-scrutiny and a supple humility"

THOSE WHO PRESSED charges against God's Messenger and secured a sentence from a disinterested and distant power, the 'superpower' of its age, are closeted with the 'superpower' of our times. The story then was the attempt at usurpation of Jesus's message and the story now is the usurpation of a people's land. Jesus was betrayed by one of his own for '30 pieces of silver' paid by Jewry's high priests, and today Palestinians and Muslims have been offered up for trial by their own mis-

deeds when they were subjected to maniacal cruelty by one of their own. To ease the conscience of the Christian world, Jews from different countries were facilitated into the Palestinian homeland. The guilt equation looms large in the Jewish-Christian equation and now it has become so painfully sharp that both sides have willed it away by pretence; a shaky and dangerous foundation for a relationship.

On its part, the world of Islam treated Jews with kindness when they were being

persecuted, the Muslim resembles the early Christian.

How can Muslim and Christian civilizations clash when Islam venerates Jesus as a prophet? The Holy Quran records the words of Jesus Christ when he spoke in the cradle thus: "*I am the slave of Allah. He hath given me scripture and hath appointed me a Prophet. And hath made me blessed wheresoever I may be, and hath enjoined upon me prayer and almsgiving so long as I remain alive; And (hath made me) dutiful toward her who bore*

me to Satan (Luke 4:5-6). "*You shall do homage to the Lord your God and worship him alone*" (Luke 4:8) was Jesus's answer to Satan, a response to which every Muslim aspires.

Followers of the prophets Jesus and Muhammad, upon them be peace and blessings, have nothing to compete for, or fight in the service of the one and only God. A 'clash of civilizations' is not premised on religion or borne out by history. It is but a Satanic yearning. A Muslim's faith is derived from the Holy

Scripture. Some of these crimes were committed by Muslims, they are so in name alone for Muslims are enjoined to protect, by fighting if necessary, "*monasteries, churches, synagogues*" and all places of worship in which God is "*commemorated in abundant measure*" (22:40).

For the despairing Palestinian families robbed of land and rights, and visited upon by daily deprivations, the future lies not in suicide bombings (an anathema to God's law, Quran 4:22, 6:151, 5:32). Patience, perse-

verance. Let not the Jewish 'fear of assimilation and a preoccupation with threat and survival...not least in Israel' (*Jesus and the Muslim* by Kenneth Cragg) mark our age. Let not "the confrontation with the actuality of Zionism" leave us standing:

With empty hands and palms turned upwards

In an age which advances progressively backwards.

(Choruses from *The Rock*, T.S. Eliot) ■