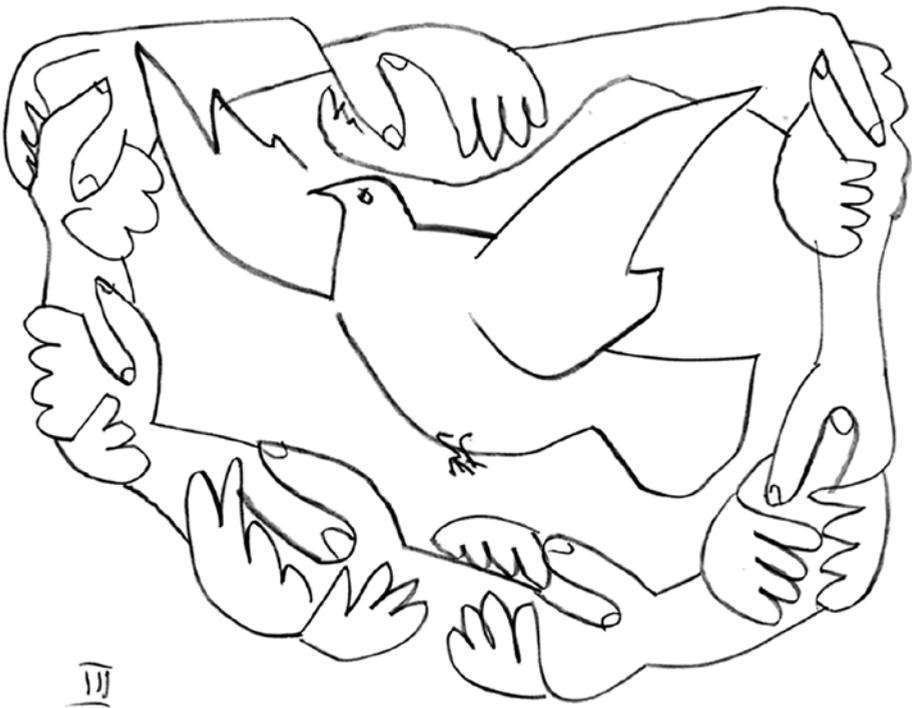




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Report on Religious Freedom in Civil-Religious Dialogue



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Adyan Institute
Al Alam Street, Badaro,
Beirut, Lebanon
P.O Box: 116-5303
Tel/Fax: 009611393211
Email: institute@adyanvillage.net
Website: www.adyanvillage.net
www.adyanonline.net

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Foreword

In a framework where religion is indissociable from public life and where inappropriate management of religious diversity has contributed to structural cataclysms ranging from trials to reinstate religious rule to identity wars and to persecution to the extent of slavery and genocide, the questions of religious freedom and management of religious and cultural diversity require being placed at the forefront of reflection and of policies.

Moreover, extremism and reactionary extremism have grown in mainstream culture, in contradiction with the fundamental principles of human rights, sanctity of human life, human dignity and the right to difference, making it imperative to reaffirm these principles as well as the value of human inter-communal solidarity.

The Adyan Institute that works on establishing an objective, critical and constructive approach of issues related to religion and public affairs in culture, education, higher education and policies, has thus given its attention to the above mentioned questions around the question of religious freedom, backed by the Canadian Embassy in Beirut.

Part of the *modus operandi* of the Institute is the production of resources, through a dialogical methodology, joining experts in different disciplines from academics to religious scholars to policymakers with the aim of crossing viewpoints and building consensus. These resources thus become a stepping stone for dissemination projects on the grassroots level and in the educational and religious spheres, and for further action on the policy making level.

The project entitled “Civil-religious dialogue on religious freedom” follows this methodology. It aims at contributing to the deepening of religious reflection and discourse about religious freedom, to fostering mutual understanding and emulation in view of building a shared narrative around the issue and its correlated topics between religious and secular thought. It took for starting point the valuing of the already existing Islamic and Christian religious initiatives in this regard,

especially reference texts about religious freedom issued in the past decades by religious authorities, namely the Beirut Declaration on Religious Freedom issued by the Makassed Philanthropic Islamic Association, the Declaration on Freedoms published by Al-Azhar and the Declaration on Religious Freedom issued by the Catholic Church in the second Vatican Council. The project was also founded on a methodology of dialogue between academics and experts in philosophy, politics, law and social sciences on the one hand and Islamic and Christian religious scholars on the other hand, placing civil and religious reflection next to each other instead of vis-à-vis each other in confrontation, with the aim that this proximity and in depth dialogue would redefine and identify problematics to be taken into account regarding religious freedom in both the academic and religious discourse.

A book in Arabic has resulted from this interreligious and interdisciplinary methodology that will be used as a resource for a renewed cultural and religious awareness and for the promotion of policies owning up to the present-day requirements of the region through countering the rise of extremism by promoting the two principles of religious freedom and freedom of conscience in addition to the foundations of citizenship inclusive of cultural and religious diversity in our societies.

The following is a comprehensive report about the project presenting at once the summary of the book that is published in Arabic and an account of the discussions that have taken place within the seminar that gathered the civil and religious experts, with the new perspectives that this dialogue was able to open for further research and discussion.

Dr. Nayla Tabbara
Director of the Adyan Institute

Summary Report on the Civil Religious Dialogue on Religious Freedom

Ziad Sayegh

In times where religions are being used in regional and international conflicts as means of excommunication and exclusion, the concept of “religious freedom” has become an essential subject of dialogue in order to reaffirm the right to be different, to respect plurality and to deal with diversity based on citizenship of equal rights and responsibilities and inclusive of cultural and religious diversity.

Among several relevant religious reference documents, Adyan Institute has chosen the following three as starting points for its “Civil Religious Dialogue on Religious Freedom” project:

1. The declaration on religious freedom “Dignitatis Humanæ” on the Right of the Person and of Communities to Social and Civil Freedom in Matters Religious of the Catholic Church from the Second Vatican Council
2. The Declaration of al-Azhar and intellectuals on Fundamental Freedoms
3. The Beirut Declaration on Religious Freedoms of the Makassed Islamic Philanthropic Association

Each of these references obviously has its own spatiotemporal context. The Second Vatican Council aimed at a deep re-evaluation of the role and apostolic mission of the Church as an institution. Al-Azhar issued its statement in light of the Arab Spring revolutions, whereas the Makassed Islamic Philanthropic Association came as a statement rejecting the sanguinary violence ravaging the Arab region, and the whole world, behind a religious mask.

Apart from the spatiotemporal context of these references, the “Civil Religious Dialogue on Religious Freedom” project at Adyan Institute seeks to extend and deepen knowledge of these documents in order to show their strengths, to pinpoint any elements that need to be further explored and to reconsider them from the perspective of philosophy, political science, and law.

Based on the above, questions that were seen as important to be addressed were divided into the following axes:

- **Religious freedom and human dignity:** is religious freedom intrinsic to human nature, or does it spring from a divine source? How can religious freedom be rooted in religious systems and adapted to positive laws in accordance with natural right?

- **Religious freedom and freedom of conscience:** to what extent is religious freedom linked to freedom of conscience? Isn't accepting a-religiosity and atheism part of respecting freedom of conscience and, thus, freedom of creed and expression? How do religions deal with the freedom to change one's religion and the freedom of individual believers to uphold their religious rituals?
- **Religious freedom and the State:** What are the margins of respect of religious freedom in dictatorship frameworks? What are the margins of respect of religious freedom in a religious State? How is religious freedom developed in the context of a civil State?
- **Religious freedom and the public sphere:** how does religious freedom relate to the public sphere especially with regard to the management of diversity and respecting the right to difference? How is religious freedom linked to the right of others not only to have their freedom of creed and expression respected, but also their right not to adhere to religious rituals regarded as postulates by one religion?
- **Religious freedom: a shared religious responsibility:** how does the concept of religious freedom help to lay the foundations of solidarity between religious groups? To what extent does the current bloodshed on the regional and international levels contribute to the promotion of interreligious solidarity and building a coherent system of religious freedom?

Based on these questions, Adyan Institute launched a two-stage civil religious dialogue on religious freedom. A condensed dialogue and reflection session was held in Beirut on January 20, 2016, as part of the first preparatory and exploratory stage joining the civil experts in philosophy, law and politics, who helped develop the above mentioned questions. The second stage witnessed a full-day specialized workshop, also held in Beirut on February 6, 2016, joining religious scholars, academics, legal experts and persons involved in public life, delving thoroughly into the topic of religious freedom and its relation to human dignity, freedom of conscience, the state and the public sphere, concluding that religious freedom is a joint religious responsibility.

The current crisis in the Arab world has inevitably led to launching a deep reflection process on religious freedom, especially given the propagating logic of majorities and minorities, hence the prioritization of religious freedom. A civil and religious-theological approach based on the aforementioned texts and questions can thus help answer the problematic issues brought forward by both reality and interdisciplinary reflection when tackling this concept.

1) Freedom goes hand in hand with dignity

Within the axis on religious freedom and human dignity, it was argued that religious freedom is intrinsic to human nature even if it has a divine dimension. In fact, this harmony between natural right and divine right is a founding element of religious freedom, which is structurally linked to human dignity despite the disagreement between theological and doctrinal schools on the extent of this correlation. Cultural, social and economic contexts exert an undeniable influence on defining the essence of human beings, of religious freedom and of human dignity, hence the need for dialogue around these concepts, keeping in mind that the ultimate goal is the consecration of human beings as the aim and of religions as values-based ethical references. Furthermore, upholding the dignity of human beings through safeguarding their freedom is a gateway to the management of plurality and the establishment of shared spaces. In this context, the mind plays an enlightening role to avoid any religious drift towards the confiscation of human dignity or freedom. The discussion also addressed the sacred character of religious texts and the difference between this sanctity and the freedom to interpret these texts knowing that preserving the founding importance of the freedom of the mind is at the very heart of human dignity.

In this context, **Sheikh Hisham Yahya Khalifeh**, stressed that “freedom is a natural and fundamental human right. Human beings have no value without freedom, which is the most important manifestation of the honor God bestowed on them as per the verse: “And We have certainly honored the children of Adam” (Qur’an 17: 70). Freedom is the focal point of humans’ prerogatives and of their preferential status among all creatures, allowing them to rise up to the position of angels, and sometimes even higher when they freely decide to opt for elevation and virtue.”

Sheikh Dr. Sami Abi Al Muna asserted in turn that “religious freedom is entrenched in human nature and preserved by divine right. There is no contradiction between the recommendations of religion on the one hand and natural right and positive laws, on the other. Pluralistic societies, although calling for the recognition and preservation of religious messages in their midst, can find stability only in a policy that reconciles the noble humanitarian message of religion with fair and democratic rule. This has been highlighted in repeated stances and declarations, which viewed extremism as a departure from religion and from the reality of diversity and religious freedom. He ended noting that dialogue is a necessity, the ‘daily bread of both Muslims and Christians’.”

Dr. Nassif Qazzi raised questions: “Are the Church council texts enough to reassure the other? Conversely, are the documents and jurisprudential decisions issued by Islamic references, and most prominently by Al-Azhar, enough to

reassure me? There are many jurisprudential decisions and ambiguities in this respect. Indeed, Church texts are held as sacred by those who adhere to the Church, but does the same hold true for the texts issued by Al-Azhar and others in the eyes of the [Muslim] community? If so, how can the current confusion and multiplicity of answers be explained? Is it a sign of wellness? Or does it indicate that the efficiency of reference entities is stumbling and deteriorating, especially in matters that pertain to the others and their status in our culture?!"

Esq. Gadir Alayli posited that "religious freedom, which is part of fundamental freedoms, is enshrined in the nature of human beings. Yet this does not mean that it does not spring from a divine source, which created nature as a whole, including human nature. The various positive laws have to be in harmony with the principles of natural right, and especially with religious freedom and human dignity. In comparison, there is no need for making efforts to ensure harmony between religious freedom, human dignity and natural right, for religious freedom and human dignity are originally an intrinsic part of natural right. In other words, any positive law has to adapt to, and even to abide by the principles of natural law, taking into consideration the requirements and circumstances of different human societies."

2) Freedom and conscience, the right to a-religiosity and atheism

The axis dedicated to religious freedom and freedom of conscience stressed that both concepts go hand in hand in recognizing the right not to have religious belonging or beliefs. This led to in-depth questions on the absolute character of truth per se and of monopoly over truth, as well as on the freedom of conscience and on knowledge, raising the question of its relativity. The core of the debate also focused on compulsion in religion and the guarantee provided by civil States through law to avoid any forms of compulsion, as well as the role of religious authorities in redirecting the religious thought, discourse and behavior away from exclusion and compulsion and in defending both freedom of religion and freedom of conscience. The debate also included the evils of apostasy and accusations of infidelity.

Mgr. Selim Bustros addressed religious freedom and freedom of conscience, arguing that "they should be fully respected in all societies, especially in our modern times wherein followers of various religions and creeds are to be found in one country. Instead of fighting and rejection, believers of all religions have to cooperate for the good of building societies that uphold the dignity of human beings, which are created in God's image. Rather than excluding the other from a different religion, we have to accept and respect him/her. We ought not to deny or condemn anyone, as

Jesus Christ told us: “Do not judge, and you will not be judged” (Matthew 7:1). Saint Paul also underscored this issue as he said: “And who are you, to sit in judgment over someone else’s servant? Whether he deserves to be upheld or to fall is for his own master to decide; and he shall be upheld, for the Lord has power to uphold him.” (Romans 14:4)

Mufti Bakr Ar-Rifai considered that “cultures, civilizations and lifestyles are neither conflicting nor colliding, but people are the ones conflicting over their interests, ambitions, illusions and whims. We ought to realize how interconnected our world and common existence are, and the dangers that face us all. They do not ask about the identity of their victims before ripping their bodies off. We must reject the dualities dividing human beings.” Mufti Ar-Rifai ended by wondering “if this world was free from any religion, would wars and conflicts still erupt? If religious scholars and priests agreed, would the world political and social problems be resolved from their roots, knowing that when these problems are masked with religion, they reflect religious tensions?”

As for **Mufti Ahmad Taleb**, he asked “if religions consider that every human being will be held accountable for his beliefs in the afterlife, how can this be consistent with coercion in beliefs? Doesn’t that shed light on the necessity of choice?” He stressed that Muslims are the ones to benefit the most from the freedom of belief and to lose the most from the doctrine of restrictions.

Dr. Mona Fayyad argued in turn that: “we hear a lot about religious reform and Al Azhar Declaration falls under this framework. But are we really noticing an improvement in the practical application? Did we get to the required level of tolerance in terms of taking a distance from tradition and rereading religious texts without any constraints or restrictions, while the attack on Nagib Mahfouz and the experience of Nasr Hamed Abu Zeid who died in exile are still present in our memory?” She added: “This leads us to addressing some questions to the religious authorities (...) What about the necessity of clearly criminalizing political infidelity labeling (*takfir*)?”

Prof. Antoine Kurban stressed that “freedom of conscience is an existential issue and has nothing to do with your role in society while religious freedom has a prerequisite which is your role in the community you belong to. This means that we are before a problematic related to the privilege of the individual’s role in the community on the one hand and the concept of the citizen at the heart of society.” He concluded that we need a comprehensive humanitarian culture since “the human being is neither considered a slave by God nor is he God’s arrogant adversary.”

3) Religious Freedom and the State...Citizenship as reference

Under the Religious Freedom and the State axis were tackled the issues of civil State and citizenship on the one hand, and the challenges of their adaptation to religious particularities on the other. Were thus highlighted the factors that ease the positive management of religious diversity by the State in the framework of religious freedom, such as nurturing diversity and coexistence, refuting tyranny and any superiority of one religion over the others, and impartiality of the State where equal rights and duties are guaranteed to all citizens.

Although the above could seem as an idealistic aspiration in light of the current trends of Religious State's hegemony or civil State's tyranny, the need arises to consider factors of cultural, social, economic and religious preparedness for the rule of law in order to put an end to that severe tension between religious freedoms as a system of values and the State as positive reference.

In this regard, **Sayyed Jaafar Fadlallah** argued that "I see that in our country, Lebanon, the State's corrosion started from its divergence from the human values acknowledged by all religions; hence, untruthfulness, dishonesty, and forgery prevailed over politics, personal interests took precedence over the common good, private groups took over peoples' capacities, and religious communities ended up protecting the rich and corrupt and the oppressors. So where does Religion stand on this?" (...) "What needs to be given very serious thought is the appropriate State structure that is adapted to our societies as they stand today at least, so that the practical accumulation of experience would lead to this structure's advancement".

As for **Dr. Ahmad Al Zohby**, he asked about the "factors of cultural, religious (and political) habilitation to promote civil-religious dialogue as well as religious freedoms together with public freedoms", answering that "it is not only about conducting religious and political reform, entering into an alliance of moderates gathering intellectuals from both camps or adapting universal values to local environments; we need to start working as of now amongst ourselves, our friends and colleagues, on the elaboration of ideas and visions that feed into our ultimate objectives. Al Azhar Declaration on the four freedoms, the Beirut Declaration on Religious Freedom, the Marrakech Declaration and the second Vatican Council declaration provide reference and enough support for such endeavor. We are also prompted by the word of God in the verse: "Allah does not forbid you from those who do not fight you because of religion and do not expel you from your homes - from being righteous toward them and acting justly toward them. Indeed, Allah loves those who act justly" (Qur'an 60: 8). Thus, despite an unaccepted distortion in religion and in coexistence, we can still,

with some courage and wisdom, find a way out of this terrible pre-birthing stage, by working for an enlightened awareness of our relationship with the world..."

4) Freedom and the public sphere...specificities and commonalities

This axis shed the light on the link between religious freedoms and Christian-Muslim relations seen as providing a space to bridge the gap in knowledge, this gap that often leads to prejudice. Interreligious relations were thus seen as a push toward interreligious cooperation for the common good. In parallel, it was argued that special attention should be given to the educational system determining the vision, values and behaviors that guarantee the specificity of the private sphere and the shared commonality of the public sphere, and that emphasize equal citizenship and democratic participation as defined by the Universal Human Rights Declaration. In fact, the public sphere is of political nature, but implies legal as well as educational aspects. Moreover, the question was raised as to what extent it would be possible for the private sphere to become public and uniting and to constitute a favorable space for religious plurality and common values.

Sheikh Ghassan Al Halabi considered that "the problem in the Middle East nowadays is related to the State's competence and to corruption prevailing over its multiple dimensions. He added: "We are in front of what may be called Homo Eschatiotis, humans living on the edge of time in closed communities and "private spheres" beyond time and space. This is a growing phenomenon that poses the greatest threat to the enlightened visions in our societies that hope for just and constitutional States where the public sphere embraces all "tribes and populations".

Dr. Antoine Sfeir then took the floor considering that the Apostolic Exhortation – a New Hope for Lebanon (1997) pointed out the painful experiences Lebanon has been through when believers diverted from their faith and mission, fought and killed each other. He called for breaking down prejudices and finding a way out of the "deadly psychological emigration". Dr. Sfeir also mentioned the "Bill for political action in the light of the teachings of the Church and the specificity of Lebanon" issued in 2009 that went clearly beyond the problematic relationship between religious and political affiliations and consecrated the concept of civil State founded on institutions, justice, and equitable development. He concluded saying that "religious freedom, lived in a natural and rational way is the basis for communication between nations and populations and not a space for disparity and violent competition that distorts religious values, twists religions, misrepresents their messages and pushes people towards dangerous and destructive ideas and ideologies".

Dr. Mohammad Al Sammak strongly invited academic and religious institutions to review educational curricula in order to counter the extremism and violence generating a culture that is feeding wars and tearing up societies. He urged politicians and decision makers to take the necessary political and legal measures to achieve “consensual citizenship” and promote initiatives aiming at mutual understanding and coexistence between religious communities in Muslim majority countries.

He added that “the cultural-educational dimensions of “Nostra Aetate” and Muslim statements help in bridging the knowledge gap and hence in breaking prejudice that each side has of the other for neither eastern Christians are remnants of the Crusades or spearheads of a colonialist west, nor eastern Muslims are terrorists or affiliated to ISIS or to Takfiri groups nor do they want to annihilate the other”. He concluded saying that “freedom, crowned by religious freedom, as it is advanced in the apostolic exhortation on the Middle East by Pope Benedict XVI, is an inalienable right; it is either given to us all, together, or taken from us all together, because life is freedom”.

Prof. Antoine Messarra considered that up until now documents on religious freedom often avoid fundamental issues related to the following:

- “Public Order: that does not mean the rule of the religious majority or the prevailing religion but the order that respects fundamental Human Rights.
- Criticism of religion: freedom of criticism is absolute in the scientific heritage and methodologies. However, defamation, slander and disdain do not fall under criticism and are punished by the penal code.
- Democratic management of religious and sectarian diversity: Arab societies are known for their glorious history of diversity and for their capacity to develop in conformity with international Human rights instruments.
- “*Kufr*” (infidelity/ disbelief): an obsolete term that should not be used anymore as history has shown its irrelevance.
- Religions and faith: religions are human institutions that are necessary for the transmission of faith and the continuity of the mission, but they can diverge from the spiritual essence of faith and hence religious education often turns into an obtuse ideology”.

He concluded by saying that: “people nowadays need more spirituality because, based on Theilhard de Chardin’s belief: “Everything that elevates ends up converging.”

5) Freedom and solidarity between religions

The final axis, on Religious freedom: a shared religious responsibility, dealt with the sanguinary series of events ravaging the Arab region and the world and called for promoting cooperation mechanisms between religious and civil authorities,

while shedding the light on the importance of sharing the tasks and responsibilities away from any statements that do not truly reflect reality. This panel emphasized the need to emancipate the Lebanese diversity experience from political and sectarian manipulation and polarization, and of tapping on the Lebanese model of pluralism to give an example of religious freedom combined with coexistence, guaranteed by the Lebanese constitution, the law and equality in rights and duties.

In this context, **Fr. Dr. Michel Jalkh** stressed that “the current deteriorating situation is ringing an alarm bell to religious authorities, bodies and leaders so that they all work together to avoid any escalation and advance in dealing with the current situation in a comprehensive manner, with the aim of trying to find radical and constructive cultural and societal solutions based on their shared religious responsibility in preserving the cohesion of the social fabric in all societies”. He added: “religious texts such as the second Vatican Council Declaration, Al Azhar statement and the Makassed Declaration in addition to the various conferences about dialogue and issues related to religious groups in the Arab region such as the Marrakech Declaration issued last week, are all signs of important initiatives and attempts paving the way to the creation and consolidation of a solid religious freedom foundation. But the most important thing is that religious authorities remain committed and use their mission in society away from any extremism and without undermining other beliefs.”

Judge Abbas Al-Halabi considered that “among the conditions for religious solidarity aiming at ensuring religious freedom is a return to the spirituality of religions away from monstrous acts perpetrated in their names and the edification of a legal culture based on the respect of the same legal grounds, shared by the followers of different religions who agree on living in the same country. This is a continuous educational process that makes of religions a constructive element in consolidating peace rather than a disruptive element contributing to the dismantling of societies.” Judge Al Halabi added that “we fear that our desire to learn lessons from past experiences be similar to the pattern that had previously led to internal conflicts, failure to establish a State and dismantling of society while the only immunity that can protect our countries comes from strengthening our internal situation so as not to allow outside powers to exploit our internal contradictions based on narrow interests, making religious communities hostages in the hands of one person who uses them to serve his own interests rather than the community’s interest.”

In his approach of the topic, **Emir Hareth Chehab** stressed that “freedom of belief alone is insufficient if not combined with political freedom related to the political system, the relationship between those in power and the citizens as well as the respect and development of public freedoms. Defending freedoms is

fundamental because this will be the most prominent future struggle for liberation, independence, development and stability. We ought to promote awareness related to freedom and its practices in various fields, notably education, media and culture". He added that: "We desperately need to revive the Muslim-Christian dialogue that is vital not only in Lebanon and the Middle East but rather in the world. Religion has returned to the public sphere after the West tried to vainly eliminate it by separating religion from the State and adopting secularization. Any State cannot but take into account therefore religious dimensions in many fields, especially the cultural, social and educational fields and those that aim at serving the public good."

As for the last speaker, **Dr. Amin Farchoukh**, he said: "Let us defeat fear first and be brave; fear from ourselves, from our honesty, from our frankness, fear from the other that we ignore. This cannot be done without our shared actions." He stressed as well that we need to: "Disseminate knowledge; knowledge of the other (the brother) because not all Muslims are extremists and not all Christians are isolated and ignore Islam and Muslims. Since people in power are not always true representatives of the people, the positions that are publicly declared are not the true ones. We should better understand the new generation (the civil movement despite the chaos reigning in it and the loss of its goals); this generation that wants a unified country rather than closed confessions, because a country has non-confessional, neutral competence norms that are up to this generation's efforts, assiduity, ambitions and aspiration for a unified equitable country". He also added that "Because it has not been proven that those in charge of religious official institutions have been working for the interest of believers away from political polarization and pressure, some of these authorities' positions did not help in promoting citizenship".

In conclusion, Dr. Farchoukh called for the "activation and renewal of these institutions in terms of reforming education and fatwas and in confronting any attempt to disfigure concepts in order to liberate religion's constants from the hold of extremists; this responsibility should be shared with various enlightened social science academics and intellectuals".

Conclusion

All the aforementioned details require a deep reflection about the rooting of religious freedom in civil and religious thought. The available religious reference texts ought to either be enriched with new elements that develop this rooting or serve as an inspiration for the elaboration of other more comprehensive and cohesive texts leading to operational initiatives making religious freedom a reality rather than another theoretical discourse or an elitist reflection. The above mentioned approaches can serve as an introductory reference in this context.

Postface

Comments and Prospects on Religious Freedom in Civil-Religious Dialogue

Fr. Prof. Fadi Daou

It is remarkable to note how much the content of the Beirut Declaration on Religious Freedom issued by the Makassed Philanthropic Islamic Association (2015) intersects with the Declaration issued fifty years ago by the Catholic Church in the framework of the second Vatican Council (1965) entitled “Declaration on Religious Freedom”. These two texts represent an advanced step in view of their adoption of the concept of religious freedom as an original and comprehensive right for every human being. Both are not far from the concept of religious freedom stipulated in article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), even though the details of the concept are not as clearly stated in both texts as in the declaration of Human Rights. No wonder therefore that Adyan Institute chose these two texts in addition to the “Declaration by Al-Azhar and intellectuals on Fundamental Freedoms” (2012) and the Marrakech Declaration (2016) to pave the way for a civil-religious dialogue with the aim of building on these texts perceived as an achievement, and of consolidating these first steps conceptually and politically.

After having reviewed these texts and having participated in the civil-religious dialogue around them, I was able to draw four points that I consider as landmarks on the path of the dialogue that ought to be pursued, developed and deepened in order to generate even more progress in clarifying this main problematic, in bringing together different points of view and in developing a common literature between the various religious discourses on the one hand and between them and the general civil discourse on the other.

1) Christianity and Islam recognize that religious freedom is inherent to human nature

The Beirut Declaration unequivocally recognizes that “man is endowed with dignity in his human essence. The foundation of his dignity is the fact

that he has been endowed with reason, freedom of belief, opinion and expression. He is directly responsible before God for the exercise of his freedom." (Paragraph 2) The Declaration stresses that "Religious belief is a free choice and a free decision for every person. [...] It is a right of the human being and the citizen that is guaranteed by Qur'anic verses that have compelling clarity". (Paragraph 2) In a similar context, the Declaration on Religious Freedom issued by the second Vatican Council emphasizes that the "right to religious freedom has its foundation in the very dignity of the human person". (Paragraph 2) The text concludes therefore that man "is not to be forced to act in a manner contrary to his conscience. Nor, on the other hand, is he to be restrained from acting in accordance with his conscience, especially in religious matters." (Paragraph 3)

It was thus not hard for the various interlocutors within the civil-religious dialogue on religious freedom project to agree on this principle even if they disagreed on its justifications and on the designation of its origins, namely whether it was linked to the human original capacity (*fitra*), to the natural eternal law of life, or to human nature itself. Most importantly, everyone acknowledged that the relationship between the human being and God, who is the source and origin of this right from the religious point of view, is not incompatible with the independence of the human being from religions and his/her freedom in choosing a religions and dealing with it. For every human being, with his/her mind and free will, is the sole responsible for that before God. Therefore, according to the Al-Azhar Declaration "based on the respect for the freedom of belief is the rejection of trends that exclude others, condemn their beliefs and label them as disbelievers amid attempts to examine the inner thoughts of those who hold those beliefs." (Paragraph 1)

We can thus conclude that faith in the Christian and the Islamic notion does not constitute a source of or a guarantee for religious freedom, but that it is humanity in general and every human being in particular who enjoys this freedom regardless of his/her belief. For believers, this freedom, in their faith-based anthropological understanding, is linked to the nature of human beings as God intended it from the very beginning. This position meets with the civil opinion in this regard, even though the two positions disagree on defining the origin, i.e. whether this origin is divine or human. It also became clear during the dialogue that there was both a possibility and a need to continue this joint reflection about philosophical anthropology, i.e. the essence of the human nature and human condition, especially amid the conflicts in the region, with a view to answer the following question: What kind of human being do we want in the East?

2) The elements of religious freedom and the respect of the right to difference

The Beirut Declaration considers that freedom of religion and belief is the basis for a system of freedoms and rights that are adjoined to it: freedom of worship, freedom of teaching and education, the right to difference and diversity as well as the right to political and social participation. For the Al-Azhar Declaration, freedom of belief entails necessarily the “acceptance of the legitimacy of plurality, [the] maintenance of the right to difference, and the obligation that every citizen should consider the feelings of others and that equality should prevail among all citizens on the firm basis of citizenship, partnership, and equal opportunities in terms of all rights and duties.” (Paragraph 1) As for the second Vatican Council’s Declaration on Religious Freedom, taking into account the social nature of humans, it links the individual’s right to religious freedom with their right to express it through exchanging opinions with others and practicing religion collectively. (Paragraph 3) This right also applies to religious communities in the organization of their private affairs and participation in general human activity. (Paragraph 4)

Consequently, religious freedom is to be perceived as a collection of interconnected freedoms that can be summed up into four freedoms. First is the freedom of conscience and its sanctity; conscience being the private inner space in the human being who seeks to base decisions and positions on his/her best interest in harmony with the best interest of humanity. Second is the freedom of belief that allows every individual to choose the faith and religious path he/she deems suitable or not choose any religion, in addition to his/her right to interact and adapt with religious beliefs and ideas in complete liberty, including criticism and free questioning so that no believer becomes a prisoner of the religious authority or community he/she belongs to and so that religious beliefs do not become closed and absolute ideologies but remain open to interpretations and different understandings and explanations. Third is the freedom to exercise religion in all its forms including collective rituals, teaching and openly expressing positions. Fourth is the right of the believer to express his/her views and opinions in public life and to take initiatives in civil society based on the religious spirit that moves him/her.

3) Labeling others as infidels (*takfir*), intellectual freedom and religious truth

The issue of tagging others as infidels (*takfir*) was the object of a wide and multi-dimensional discussion that noticeably acknowledged the necessity to face

this concept profoundly and continue the dialogue and the reflection around it. Labeling others as infidels (*takfir*) is understood here as the prevailing tendency amongst several religious and particularly Muslim groups to consider their own religious beliefs or convictions as a source to reject others seen as distant from this truth and hence as infidels and lost souls. While some asserted that labeling others as infidels was an understandable right related to the nature of a religious mindset that frames the truth in an absolute and unilateral religious context where any opposition or divergence is labeled as infidelity, many interlocutors emphasized that this paves the way for hate speech, disdain and religious violence and that it goes against the principle of “knowing the other” and having an honest dialogue.

This question also raises the issue of relativity of religious truth and the recognition that the historical dimension of religions is a human product or at least is under human influence, as well as the recognition that human beings act upon personal beliefs that can change over time, and not upon an absolute truth, as humans can never possess the absolute truth. Some argued however that religious ideologies and narrow convictions often take precedence over intellectual freedom amongst groups. In fact, believers in our societies frame their thoughts according to religion more than they build their faith on intellectual enquiry; hence, it can be argued that the obstruction of intellectual freedom in the religious sphere due to preconceived ideologies shaping religious convictions, is hindering religious freedom and leading to the exclusion of others as a religious principle and to the labelling of their beliefs as infidelity.

On this point, the Vatican Council’s Declaration on Religious Freedom considers that everyone is entitled to seek the truth and, whenever they find it, to live by it. (Paragraph 2) It emphasizes that “Truth, however, is to be sought after in a manner proper to the dignity of the human person and his social nature. The inquiry is to be free, carried on with the aid of teaching or instruction, communication and dialogue”. (Paragraph 3) On this point too, the Beirut declaration adds a call to “accept differences between people as an expression of God’s will” (Paragraph 2) leaving any judgement over people and over what is in their hearts to God alone.

From all of the above, it is clear that the issue of religious truth requires a deepened theological discussion amongst Christians and Muslims. Related to it is the theology of difference that is at the heart of religious freedom in that it entails respect of others’ convictions and rejection of any disdain or labelling of infidelity to other spiritual experiences. This issue is a matter of particular importance for the Islamic religious thought that is being exploited and used

by dissenting groups that allow themselves not only to exclude others but to enforce on them unjust and oppressive legal rulings on the basis of their religious difference defined as “infidelity”. Moreover, this matter requires connecting the concept of religious truth with intellectual freedom and thus a clarification of the relativity of religious thought and of religious interpretations and hence the inability for anyone to claim to hold the truth since the absolute truth belongs to God and cannot be limited or contained by any human mind.

4) A democratic civil State to guarantee religious freedom

Despite some disagreements in defining the concepts of civil State and of citizenship inclusive of religious diversity, as well as their intellectual and practical dimensions, all interlocutors, whether civil or religious leaders, agreed on the necessity to acknowledge a civil State, not founded on a unilateral religious basis. Such a State has the ability to protect citizens from extremism and all types of coercion, is responsible for ensuring freedoms and solely authorized to protecting those freedoms. A civil State here is not a State that is governed by a non religious or non military power, but the State where the system and legislations are not linked to any religious particularity or reference. It is the State where “the ruling of human dignity” is the reference for citizenship and where the people, who express their opinions democratically, are the source of authority.

The Beirut Declaration stresses that in Lebanon, religious and political freedom were the basis of coexistence (Paragraph 6) and the Vatican Council Declaration considers that the “protection and promotion of the inviolable rights of man ranks among the essential duties of government.” (Paragraph 6) It is interesting to note that the Vatican Declaration also mentions States identifying themselves with a specific religion stating that: “If, in view of peculiar circumstances obtaining among peoples, special civil recognition is given to one religious community in the constitutional order of society, it is at the same time imperative that the right of all citizens and religious communities to religious freedom should be recognized and made effective in practice.” (Paragraph 6)

We thus acknowledge here the progress in religious discourse, whether Muslim or Christian, in its liberation, although still varying from case to case, from the concept of “Religious State” in view of what historical evidence and current circumstances have revealed of its negative impact and even its dangers on religion itself. Yet it is clear that we still have a long road ahead to define the concept of civil State in the religious context and to build a common approach between civil-secular positions and religious-based positions towards this concept. Hence, is highlighted the importance of developing the notion of “public sphere”

which provides a real space for freedoms and where each person realizes him/herself as a political being included in a network of public relations. We have today a number of theoretical approaches that can be a foundation for the possibility of integration of religious communities and their political expression within the public sphere, with the condition that they acknowledge the relativity of their positions and the diversity of views and as long as they relinquish any form of theocratic authoritarianism in dealing with public affairs. Such a matter requires deep discussions to identify the different models of interaction between the State and religious communities with the aim of enriching the society and enhancing social cohesion without endangering individual freedoms and more particularly religious freedom.

Reference Texts

SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL DECLARATION ON RELIGIOUS FREEDOM DIGNITATIS HUMANAE

On the Right of the Person and of Communities
to Social and Civil Freedom in Religious Matters

December 7, 1965

1. A sense of the dignity of the human person has been impressing itself more and more deeply on the consciousness of contemporary man¹, and the demand is increasingly made that men should act on their own judgment, enjoying and making use of a responsible freedom, not driven by coercion but motivated by a sense of duty. The demand is likewise made that constitutional limits should be set to the powers of government, in order that there may be no encroachment on the rightful freedom of the person and of associations. This demand for freedom in human society chiefly regards the quest for the values proper to the human spirit. It regards, in the first place, the free exercise of religion in society. This Vatican Council takes careful note of these desires in the minds of men. It proposes to declare them to be greatly in accord with truth and justice. To this end, it searches into the sacred tradition and doctrine of the Church—the treasury out of which the Church continually brings forth new things that are in harmony with the things that are old.

First, the council professes its belief that God Himself has made known to mankind the way in which men are to serve Him, and thus be saved in Christ and come to blessedness. We believe that this one true religion subsists in the Catholic and Apostolic Church, to which the Lord Jesus committed the duty of spreading it abroad among all men. Thus He spoke to the Apostles: "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have enjoined upon you" (Matt. 28: 19-20). On their part, all men are bound to seek the truth, especially in what concerns God and His Church, and to embrace the truth they come to know, and to hold fast to it.

This Vatican Council likewise professes its belief that it is upon the human conscience that these obligations fall and exert their binding force. The truth cannot impose itself except by virtue of its own truth, as it makes its entrance into the mind at once quietly and with power.

Religious freedom, in turn, which men demand as necessary to fulfill their duty to worship God, has to do with immunity from coercion in civil society. Therefore

it leaves untouched traditional Catholic doctrine on the moral duty of men and societies toward the true religion and toward the one Church of Christ.

Over and above all this, the council intends to develop the doctrine of recent popes on the inviolable rights of the human person and the constitutional order of society.

2. This Vatican Council declares that the human person has a right to religious freedom. This freedom means that all men are to be immune from coercion on the part of individuals or of social groups and of any human power, in such wise that no one is to be forced to act in a manner contrary to his own beliefs, whether privately or publicly, whether alone or in association with others, within due limits.

The council further declares that the right to religious freedom has its foundation in the very dignity of the human person as this dignity is known through the revealed word of God and by reason itself.² This right of the human person to religious freedom is to be recognized in the constitutional law whereby society is governed and thus it is to become a civil right.

It is in accordance with their dignity as persons—that is, beings endowed with reason and free will and therefore privileged to bear personal responsibility—that all men should be at once impelled by nature and also bound by a moral obligation to seek the truth, especially religious truth. They are also bound to adhere to the truth, once it is known, and to order their whole lives in accord with the demands of truth. However, men cannot discharge these obligations in a manner in keeping with their own nature unless they enjoy immunity from external coercion as well as psychological freedom. Therefore the right to religious freedom has its foundation not in the subjective disposition of the person, but in his very nature. In consequence, the right to this immunity continues to exist even in those who do not live up to their obligation of seeking the truth and adhering to it and the exercise of this right is not to be impeded, provided that just public order be observed.

3. Further light is shed on the subject if one considers that the highest norm of human life is the divine law—eternal, objective and universal—whereby God orders, directs and governs the entire universe and all the ways of the human community by a plan conceived in wisdom and love. Man has been made by God to participate in this law, with the result that, under the gentle disposition of divine Providence, he can come to perceive ever more fully the truth that is unchanging. Wherefore every man has the duty, and therefore the right, to seek the truth in religious matters in order that he may with prudence form for himself right and true judgments of conscience, under use of all suitable means.

Truth, however, is to be sought after in a manner proper to the dignity of the human person and his social nature. The inquiry is to be free, carried on with the aid of teaching or instruction, communication and dialogue, in the course of which

men explain to one another the truth they have discovered, or think they have discovered, in order thus to assist one another in the quest for truth.

Moreover, as the truth is discovered, it is by a personal assent that men are to adhere to it.

On his part, man perceives and acknowledges the imperatives of the divine law through the mediation of conscience. In all his activity a man is bound to follow his conscience in order that he may come to God, the end and purpose of life. It follows that he is not to be forced to act in a manner contrary to his conscience. Nor, on the other hand, is he to be restrained from acting in accordance with his conscience, especially in religious matters. The reason is that the exercise of religion, of its very nature, consists before all else in those internal, voluntary and free acts whereby man sets the course of his life directly toward God. No merely human power can either command or prohibit acts of this kind.³ The social nature of man, however, itself requires that he should give external expression to his internal acts of religion: that he should share with others in religious matters; that he should profess his religion in community. Injury therefore is done to the human person and to the very order established by God for human life, if the free exercise of religion is denied in society, provided just public order is observed.

There is a further consideration. The religious acts whereby men, in private and in public and out of a sense of personal conviction, direct their lives to God transcend by their very nature the order of terrestrial and temporal affairs. Government therefore ought indeed to take account of the religious life of the citizenry and show it favor, since the function of government is to make provision for the common welfare. However, it would clearly transgress the limits set to its power, were it to presume to command or inhibit acts that are religious.

4. The freedom or immunity from coercion in religious matters which is the endowment of persons as individuals is also to be recognized as their right when they act in community. Religious communities are a requirement of the social nature both of man and of religion itself.

Provided the just demands of public order are observed, religious communities rightfully claim freedom in order that they may govern themselves according to their own norms, honor the Supreme Being in public worship, assist their members in the practice of the religious life, strengthen them by instruction, and promote institutions in which they may join together for the purpose of ordering their own lives in accordance with their religious principles.

Religious communities also have the right not to be hindered, either by legal measures or by administrative action on the part of government, in the selection, training, appointment, and transferral of their own ministers, in communicating with religious authorities and communities abroad, in erecting buildings for religious purposes, and in the acquisition and use of suitable funds or properties.

Religious communities also have the right not to be hindered in their public teaching and witness to their faith, whether by the spoken or by the written word. However, in spreading religious faith and in introducing religious practices everyone ought at all times to refrain from any manner of action which might seem to carry a hint of coercion or of a kind of persuasion that would be dishonorable or unworthy, especially when dealing with poor or uneducated people. Such a manner of action would have to be considered an abuse of one's right and a violation of the right of others.

In addition, it comes within the meaning of religious freedom that religious communities should not be prohibited from freely undertaking to show the special value of their doctrine in what concerns the organization of society and the inspiration of the whole of human activity. Finally, the social nature of man and the very nature of religion afford the foundation of the right of men freely to hold meetings and to establish educational, cultural, charitable and social organizations, under the impulse of their own religious sense.

5. The family, since it is a society in its own original right, has the right freely to live its own domestic religious life under the guidance of parents. Parents, moreover, have the right to determine, in accordance with their own religious beliefs, the kind of religious education that their children are to receive. Government, in consequence, must acknowledge the right of parents to make a genuinely free choice of schools and of other means of education, and the use of this freedom of choice is not to be made a reason for imposing unjust burdens on parents, whether directly or indirectly. Besides, the right of parents are violated, if their children are forced to attend lessons or instructions which are not in agreement with their religious beliefs, or if a single system of education, from which all religious formation is excluded, is imposed upon all.

6. Since the common welfare of society consists in the entirety of those conditions of social life under which men enjoy the possibility of achieving their own perfection in a certain fullness of measure and also with some relative ease, it chiefly consists in the protection of the rights, and in the performance of the duties, of the human person.⁴ Therefore the care of the right to religious freedom devolves upon the whole citizenry, upon social groups, upon government, and upon the Church and other religious communities, in virtue of the duty of all toward the common welfare, and in the manner proper to each.

The protection and promotion of the inviolable rights of man ranks among the essential duties of government.⁵ Therefore government is to assume the safeguard of the religious freedom of all its citizens, in an effective manner, by just laws and by other appropriate means.

Government is also to help create conditions favorable to the fostering of religious life, in order that the people may be truly enabled to exercise their religious rights and to fulfill their religious duties, and also in order that society itself may profit by the moral qualities of justice and peace which have their origin in men's faithfulness to God and to His holy will.⁶

If, in view of peculiar circumstances obtaining among peoples, special civil recognition is given to one religious community in the constitutional order of society, it is at the same time imperative that the right of all citizens and religious communities to religious freedom should be recognized and made effective in practice.

Finally, government is to see to it that equality of citizens before the law, which is itself an element of the common good, is never violated, whether openly or covertly, for religious reasons. Nor is there to be discrimination among citizens.

It follows that a wrong is done when government imposes upon its people, by force or fear or other means, the profession or repudiation of any religion, or when it hinders men from joining or leaving a religious community. All the more is it a violation of the will of God and of the sacred rights of the person and the family of nations when force is brought to bear in any way in order to destroy or repress religion, either in the whole of mankind or in a particular country or in a definite community.

7. The right to religious freedom is exercised in human society: hence its exercise is subject to certain regulatory norms. In the use of all freedoms the moral principle of personal and social responsibility is to be observed. In the exercise of their rights, individual men and social groups are bound by the moral law to have respect both for the rights of others and for their own duties toward others and for the common welfare of all. Men are to deal with their fellows in justice and civility.

Furthermore, society has the right to defend itself against possible abuses committed on the pretext of freedom of religion. It is the special duty of government to provide this protection. However, government is not to act in an arbitrary fashion or in an unfair spirit of partisanship. Its action is to be controlled by juridical norms which are in conformity with the objective moral order. These norms arise out of the need for the effective safeguard of the rights of all citizens and for the peaceful settlement of conflicts of rights, also out of the need for an adequate care of genuine public peace, which comes about when men live together in good order and in true justice, and finally out of the need for a proper guardianship of public morality.

These matters constitute the basic component of the common welfare: they are what is meant by public order. For the rest, the usages of society are to be the usages of freedom in their full range: that is, the freedom of man is to be respected as far as possible and is not to be curtailed except when and insofar as necessary.

8. Many pressures are brought to bear upon the men of our day, to the point where the danger arises lest they lose the possibility of acting on their own judgment. On the other hand, not a few can be found who seem inclined to use the name of freedom as the pretext for refusing to submit to authority and for making light of the duty of obedience. Wherefore this Vatican Council urges everyone, especially those who are charged with the task of educating others, to do their utmost to form men who, on the one hand, will respect the moral order and be obedient to lawful authority, and on the other hand, will be lovers of true freedom—men, in other words, who will come to decisions on their own judgment and in the light of truth, govern their activities with a sense of responsibility, and strive after what is true and right, willing always to join with others in cooperative effort.

Religious freedom therefore ought to have this further purpose and aim, namely, that men may come to act with greater responsibility in fulfilling their duties in community life.

9. The declaration of this Vatican Council on the right of man to religious freedom has its foundation in the dignity of the person, whose exigencies have come to be fully known to human reason through centuries of experience. What is more, this doctrine of freedom has roots in divine revelation, and for this reason Christians are bound to respect it all the more conscientiously. Revelation does not indeed affirm in so many words the right of man to immunity from external coercion in religious matters. It does, however, disclose the dignity of the human person in its full dimensions. It gives evidence of the respect which Christ showed toward the freedom with which man is to fulfill his duty of belief in the word of God and it gives us lessons in the spirit which disciples of such a Master ought to adopt and continually follow. Thus further light is cast upon the general principles upon which the doctrine of this declaration on religious freedom is based. In particular, religious freedom in society is entirely consonant with the freedom of the act of Christian faith.

10. It is one of the major tenets of Catholic doctrine that man's response to God in faith must be free: no one therefore is to be forced to embrace the Christian faith against his own will.⁸ This doctrine is contained in the word of God and it was constantly proclaimed by the Fathers of the Church.⁷ The act of faith is of its very nature a free act. Man, redeemed by Christ the Savior and through Christ Jesus called to be God's adopted son⁹, cannot give his adherence to God revealing Himself unless, under the drawing of the Father,¹⁰ he offers to God the reasonable and free submission of faith. It is therefore completely in accord with the nature of faith that in religious matters every manner of coercion on the part of men should be excluded. In consequence, the principle of religious freedom makes no small contribution to the creation of an environment in which men can without

hindrance be invited to the Christian faith, embrace it of their own free will, and profess it effectively in their whole manner of life.

11. God calls men to serve Him in spirit and in truth, hence they are bound in conscience but they stand under no compulsion. God has regard for the dignity of the human person whom He Himself created and man is to be guided by his own judgment and he is to enjoy freedom. This truth appears at its height in Christ Jesus, in whom God manifested Himself and His ways with men. Christ is at once our Master and our Lord¹¹ and also meek and humble of heart.¹² In attracting and inviting His disciples He used patience.¹³ He wrought miracles to illuminate His teaching and to establish its truth, but His intention was to rouse faith in His hearers and to confirm them in faith, not to exert coercion upon them.¹⁴ He did indeed denounce the unbelief of some who listened to Him, but He left vengeance to God in expectation of the day of judgment.¹⁵ When He sent His Apostles into the world, He said to them: "He who believes and is baptized will be saved. He who does not believe will be condemned" (Mark 16:16). But He Himself, noting that the cockle had been sown amid the wheat, gave orders that both should be allowed to grow until the harvest time, which will come at the end of the world.¹⁶ He refused to be a political messiah, ruling by force¹⁷: He preferred to call Himself the Son of Man, who came "to serve and to give his life as a ransom for the many" (Mark 10:45). He showed Himself the perfect servant of God¹⁸ who "does not break the bruised reed nor extinguish the smoking flax" (Matt. 12:20).

He acknowledged the power of government and its rights, when He commanded that tribute be given to Caesar: but He gave clear warning that the higher rights of God are to be kept inviolate: "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's" (Matt. 22:21). In the end, when He completed on the cross the work of redemption whereby He achieved salvation and true freedom for men, He brought His revelation to completion. For He bore witness to the truth¹⁹, but He refused to impose the truth by force on those who spoke against it. Not by force of blows does His rule assert its claims.²⁰ It is established by witnessing to the truth and by hearing the truth, and it extends its dominion by the love whereby Christ, lifted up on the cross, draws all men to Himself.²¹

Taught by the word and example of Christ, the Apostles followed the same way. From the very origins of the Church the disciples of Christ strove to convert men to faith in Christ as the Lord; not, however, by the use of coercion or of devices unworthy of the Gospel, but by the power, above all, of the word of God.²² Steadfastly they proclaimed to all the plan of God our Savior, "who wills that all men should be saved and come to the acknowledgment of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:4). At the same time, however, they showed respect for those of weaker stuff, even though they were in error, and thus they made it plain that "each one of us is to render to God an account of himself" (Romans 14:12),²³ and for that

reason is bound to obey his conscience. Like Christ Himself, the Apostles were unceasingly bent upon bearing witness to the truth of God, and they showed the fullest measure of boldness in "speaking the word with confidence" (Acts 4:31)²⁴ before the people and their rulers. With a firm faith they held that the Gospel is indeed the power of God unto salvation for all who believe.²⁵ Therefore they rejected all "carnal weapons"²⁶: they followed the example of the gentleness and respectfulness of Christ and they preached the word of God in the full confidence that there was resident in this word itself a divine power able to destroy all the forces arrayed against God²⁷ and bring men to faith in Christ and to His service.²⁸ As the Master, so too the Apostles recognized legitimate civil authority. "For there is no power except from God", the Apostle teaches, and thereafter commands: "Let everyone be subject to higher authorities... He who resists authority resists God's ordinance" (Romans 13:1-5).²⁹ At the same time, however, they did not hesitate to speak out against governing powers which set themselves in opposition to the holy will of God: "It is necessary to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29).³⁰ This is the way along which the martyrs and other faithful have walked through all ages and over all the earth.

12. In faithfulness therefore to the truth of the Gospel, the Church is following the way of Christ and the apostles when she recognizes and gives support to the principle of religious freedom as befitting the dignity of man and as being in accord with divine revelation. Throughout the ages the Church has kept safe and handed on the doctrine received from the Master and from the apostles. In the life of the People of God, as it has made its pilgrim way through the vicissitudes of human history, there has at times appeared a way of acting that was hardly in accord with the spirit of the Gospel or even opposed to it. Nevertheless, the doctrine of the Church that no one is to be coerced into faith has always stood firm.

Thus the leaven of the Gospel has long been about its quiet work in the minds of men, and to it is due in great measure the fact that in the course of time men have come more widely to recognize their dignity as persons, and the conviction has grown stronger that the person in society is to be kept free from all manner of coercion in religious matters.

13. Among the things that concern the good of the Church and indeed the welfare of society here on earth-things therefore that are always and everywhere to be kept secure and defended against all injury-this certainly is preeminent, namely, that the Church should enjoy that full measure of freedom which her care for the salvation of men requires.³¹ This is a sacred freedom, because the only-begotten Son endowed with it the Church which He purchased with His blood. Indeed it is so much the property of the Church that to act against it is to act against the will of God. The

freedom of the Church is the fundamental principle in what concerns the relations between the Church and governments and the whole civil order.

In human society and in the face of government the Church claims freedom for herself in her character as a spiritual authority, established by Christ the Lord, upon which there rests, by divine mandate, the duty of going out into the whole world and preaching the Gospel to every creature.³² The Church also claims freedom for herself in her character as a society of men who have the right to live in society in accordance with the precepts of the Christian faith.³³

In turn, where the principle of religious freedom is not only proclaimed in words or simply incorporated in law but also given sincere and practical application, there the Church succeeds in achieving a stable situation of right as well as of fact and the independence which is necessary for the fulfillment of her divine mission.

This independence is precisely what the authorities of the Church claim in society.³⁴ At the same time, the Christian faithful, in common with all other men, possess the civil right not to be hindered in leading their lives in accordance with their consciences. Therefore, a harmony exists between the freedom of the Church and the religious freedom which is to be recognized as the right of all men and communities and sanctioned by constitutional law.

14. In order to be faithful to the divine command, "teach all nations" (Matt. 28:19-20), the Catholic Church must work with all urgency and concern "that the word of God be spread abroad and glorified" (2 Thess. 3:1). Hence the Church earnestly begs of its children that, "first of all, supplications, prayers, petitions, acts of thanksgiving be made for all men.... For this is good and agreeable in the sight of God our Savior, who wills that all men be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:1-4). In the formation of their consciences, the Christian faithful ought carefully to attend to the sacred and certain doctrine of the Church.³⁵ For the Church is, by the will of Christ, the teacher of the truth. It is her duty to give utterance to, and authoritatively to teach, that truth which is Christ Himself, and also to declare and confirm by her authority those principles of the moral order which have their origins in human nature itself. Furthermore, let Christians walk in wisdom in the face of those outside, "in the Holy Spirit, in unaffected love, in the word of truth" (2 Cor. 6:6-7), and let them be about their task of spreading the light of life with all confidence³⁶ and apostolic courage, even to the shedding of their blood.

The disciple is bound by a grave obligation toward Christ, his Master, ever more fully to understand the truth received from Him, faithfully to proclaim it, and vigorously to defend it, never-be it understood-having recourse to means that are incompatible with the spirit of the Gospel. At the same time, the charity of Christ urges him to love and have prudence and patience in his dealings with those who are in error or in ignorance with regard to the faith.³⁷ All is to be taken into account-the Christian duty to Christ, the life-giving word which must be proclaimed, the

rights of the human person, and the measure of grace granted by God through Christ to men who are invited freely to accept and profess the faith.

15. The fact is that men of the present day want to be able freely to profess their religion in private and in public. Indeed, religious freedom has already been declared to be a civil right in most constitutions, and it is solemnly recognized in international documents.³⁸ The further fact is that forms of government still exist under which, even though freedom of religious worship receives constitutional recognition, the powers of government are engaged in the effort to deter citizens from the profession of religion and to make life very difficult and dangerous for religious communities.

This council greets with joy the first of these two facts as among the signs of the times. With sorrow, however, it denounces the other fact, as only to be deplored. The council exhorts Catholics, and it directs a plea to all men, most carefully to consider how greatly necessary religious freedom is, especially in the present condition of the human family. All nations are coming into even closer unity. Men of different cultures and religions are being brought together in closer relationships. There is a growing consciousness of the personal responsibility that every man has. All this is evident. Consequently, in order that relationships of peace and harmony be established and maintained within the whole of mankind, it is necessary that religious freedom be everywhere provided with an effective constitutional guarantee and that respect be shown for the high duty and right of man freely to lead his religious life in society.

May the God and Father of all grant that the human family, through careful observance of the principle of religious freedom in society, may be brought by the grace of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit to the sublime and unending and "glorious freedom of the sons of God" (Rom. 8:21).

NOTES

1. Cf. John XXIII, encycl. "Pacem in Terris", April 11, 1963: AAS 55 (1963) p. 279; *ibid.*, p. 265; Pius XII, radio message, Dec. 24, 1944: AAS 37 (1945), p. 14.
2. Cf. John XXIII, encycl. "Pacem in Terris", April 11, 1963: AAS 55 (1963), pp. 260-261; Pius XII, radio message, Dec. 24, 1942: AAS 35 (1943), p. 19; Pius XI, encycl. "Mit Brennender Sorge", March 14, 1937: AAS 29 (1937), p. 160; Leo XIII, encycl. "Libertas Praestantissimum", June 20, 1888: Acts of Leo XIII 8 (1888), p. 237-238.
3. Cf. John XXIII, encycl. "Pacem in Terris", April 11, 1963: AAS 55 (1963), p. 270; Paul VI, radio message, Dec. 22, 1964: AAS 57 (1965), pp. 181-182.
4. Cf. John XXIII, encycl. "Mater et Magistra", May 15, 1961: AAS 53 (1961), p. 417; *idem*, encycl. "Pacem in Terris", April 11, 1963: AAS 55 (1963), p. 273.
5. Cf. John XXIII, encycl. "Pacem in Terris", April 11, 1963: AAS 55 (1963), pp. 273-274; Pius XII, radio message, June 1 1941: AAS 33 (1941), p. 200.
6. Cf. Leo XIII, encycl. "Immortale Dei", Nov. 1, 1885: AAS 18 (1885) p. 161.

7. Cf. Lactantius "Divinarum Institutionum", Book V, 19: CSEL 19, pp. 463-464, 465: PL 6, 614 and 616 (ch. 20); St. Ambrose, "Epistola ad Valentianum Imp.", Letter 21: PL 16, 1005; St. Augustine, "Contra Litteras Petiliani", Book II, ch. 83: CSEL 52 p. 112: PL 43, 315; cf. C. 23, q. 5, c. 33, (ed. Friedberg, col. 939); idem, Letter 23: PL 33, 98, idem, Letter 34: PL 33, 132; idem, Letter 35: PL 33, 135; St. Gregory the Great, "Epistola ad Virgilium et Theodorum Episcopos Massiliae Galliarum, Register of Letters I, 45: MGH Ep. 1, p. 72: PL 77, 510-511 (Book I, ep. 47); idem, "Epistola ad Johannem Episcopum Constantinopolitanum", Register of Letters, III, 52: MGH Letter 1, p. 210: PL 77, 649 (Book III, Letter 53); cf. D. 45, c. 1 (ed. Friedberg, col. 160); Council of Toledo IV, c. 57: Mansi 10, 633; cf. D. 45, c. 5 (ed. Friedberg, col. 161-162); Clement III: X., V, 6, 9: ed. Friedberg, col. 774; Innocent III, "Epistola ad Arelatensem Archiepiscopum", X., III, 42, 3: Friedberg, col. 646.
8. Cf. CIC, c. 1351; Pius XII, allocution to prelate auditors and other officials and administrators of the tribune of the Holy Roman Rota, Oct. 6, 1946: AAS 38 (1946), p. 394; idem. Encycl. *Mystici Corporis*, June 29, 1943: AAS (1943) p. 243.
9. Cf. Eph. 1:5.
10. Cf. John 6:44.
11. Cf. John 13:13.
12. Cf. Matt. 11:29.
13. Cf. Matt. 11:28-30; John 6:67-68.
14. Cf. Matt. 9:28-29; Mark 9:23-24; 6:5-6; Paul VI, encycl. "Ecclesiam Suam", Aug. 6, 1964: AAS 56 (1964), pp. 642-643.
15. Cf. Matt. 11:20-24; Rom. 12:19-20; 2 Thess. 1:8.
16. Cf. Matt. 13:30 and 40-42.
17. Cf. Matt. 4:8-10; John 6:15.
18. Cf. Is. 42:1-4.
19. Cf. John 18:37.
20. Cf. Matt. 26:51-53; John 18:36.
21. Cf. John 12:32.
22. Cf. 1 Cor. 2:3-5; 1 Thess. 2:3-5.
23. Cf. Rom. 14:1-23; 1 Cor. 8:9-13; 10:23-33.
24. Cf. Eph. 6:19-20.
25. Cf. Rom. 1:16.
26. Cf. 2 Cor. 10:4; 1 Thess. 5:8-9.
27. Cf. Eph. 6:11-17.
28. Cf. 2 Cor. 10:3-5.
29. Cf. 1 Pet. 2:13-17.
30. Cf. Acts 4: 19-20.
31. Cf. Leo XIII, letter "Officio Sanctissimo", Dec. 22 1887: AAS 20 (1887), p. 269; idem, letter "Ex Litteris", April 7 1887: AAS 19 (1886), p. 465.
32. Cf. Mark 16:15; Matt. 28:18-20, Pius XII, encycl. "Summi Pontificatus", Oct. 20, 1939: AAS 31 (1939). pp. 445-446.
33. Cf. Pius XI, letter "Firmissiman Constantiam", March 28, 1937: AAS 29 (1937), p. 196.
34. Cf. Pius XII, allocution, "Ci Riesce", Dec. 6, 1953: AAS 45 (1953), p. 802.
35. Cf. Pius XII, radio message, March 23, 1952: AAS 44 (1952) pp. 270-278.
36. Cf. Acts 4:29.
37. Cf. John XXIII, encycl. "Pacem in Terris", April 11, 1963: AAS 55 (1963), pp. 299-300.
38. Cf. John XXIII, encycl. "Pacem in Terris", April 11, 1963: AAS 55 (1963) pp. 295-296.

AL-AZHAR DECLARATION ON FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS

Al-Azhar

January 8, 2012

After the revolutions that made freedoms and equality spring up and paved a way for the ideas of comprehensive reform and development in all the sections of society, it's logic for Egyptians, Arabs and Muslim World to start yearning for an initiative through which the scholars and intellectuals would define the relationship between the general principles of the Islamic *Shari'ah* and the set of basic freedoms that are adopted by all international conventions and created by the civilization and experience of the Egyptian people. In defining such a relationship, scholars shall establish the foundations and principles of those basic freedoms and determine their conditions which protect the development and open up the horizons of the future.

These are the freedom of belief, the freedom of expression, the freedom of scientific research, and the freedom of literary and artistic creativity. All these freedoms should have their roots in serving the objectives of the *Shari'ah* and grasping the spirit of modern constitutional legislation and the requirements of human knowledge advance. This relationship shall turn the spiritual energies of the nation into fuel and motive for development and progress and a means to achieving both spiritual and material advance. To this end, ongoing efforts shall be made where wise cultural rhetoric goes in harmony with enlightened religious rhetoric and both proceed in a fruitful path to the future, on which the goals agreed by all shall be clear. Hence, the group of Al-Azhar scholars and the Egyptian intellectuals – who issued the first document under the auspices of Al-Azhar and then issued a statement in support of the Arab uprisings– have resumed their meetings and discussed the common intellectual denominators in the set of freedoms and human rights.

The conclusion they have reached is to approve a collection of principles and regulations that govern the idea of freedom of equality, taking into consideration the requirements of the current historic moment and the need to safeguard social harmony and the public interests in the phase of democratic transition, during which the country shall build its constitutional institutions in a secure and proper manner and with help from Almighty Allah. It is believed that this will also block the spread of some prejudiced calls, under the pretext of commanding the right and forbidding the wrong, to interfere in public and personal freedoms. Indeed, this is incompatible with both the civilization and social development of modern Egypt

at a time the country needs unity and moderate approach to religion; this is the religious message and responsibility of Al-Azhar towards the society and nation.

First: Freedom of Belief

Freedom of belief and the associated right of full citizenship for all – which is based on complete equality in rights and duties – is regarded the cornerstone in the modern social structure. This freedom is guaranteed by the authentic conclusive religious texts and the clear constitutional and legal principles. Almighty Allah says: “There shall be no compulsion in the religion. The right course has become clear from the wrong” (Al-Baqarah 2: 256) and He also says: “So whoever wills – let him believe; and whoever wills – let him disbelieve” (Al Kahf 18: 29). Accordingly, any aspect of compulsion, persecution, or discrimination on the basis of religion is prohibited. Everybody in society has the right to embrace any ideas he chooses, without encroaching upon the right of society to the maintenance of divine faiths, in light of sanctity accorded to all the three Abrahamic faiths; so, everyone is free to perform his rituals, and none should hurt the other’s feelings or violate the sanctity of his rites whether by words or deeds, and without breaching the public order.

As the Arab region is the land blessed with the heavenly divine revelations, it therefore has a great commitment to protect the sacredness of all these revealed faiths, as well as respecting their rituals, and guaranteeing the rights of their believers to freedom, dignity, and brotherliness. As a result of this, , there should be acceptance of the legitimacy of plurality, maintenance of the right to difference, and the obligation that every citizen should consider the feelings of others and that equality should prevail among all citizens on the firm basis of citizenship, partnership, and equal opportunities in terms of all rights and duties. Also based on the respect for the freedom of belief is the rejection of trends that exclude others, condemn their beliefs and label them as disbelievers amid attempts to examine the inner thoughts of those who hold those beliefs. Such rejection rests on the well-established constitutional systems and, even before that, on the clear and categorical rules set by the Islamic *Shari’ah*. An example is the Prophetic hadith that says: "Would you inspect his heart?" This rule was also well expressed by the Imam Malik (*Imam Dar al-Hijrah*), and other Imams, when he (Malik) said, "If a person says something that most probably denotes disbelief, yet still there is a remote possibility it does not, it should not be taken to denote disbelief."

The scholars of *ijtihad* and legislation have attached great significance to the mind in Islam and left us a golden rule that says: "If the mind and the text are apparently conflicting, the mind should be given precedence and the text reinterpreted." This is to maintain the considered legal interests and serve the objectives of the *Shari’ah*.

Second: Freedom of Opinion and Expression

Freedom of opinion is the mother of all freedoms, and it is most manifest in the free expression of opinion by all different means, including writing, oratory, artistic production, digital communication. Indeed, it is the manifestation of social freedoms, which go beyond individuals to include, among other things, the formation of parties and civil society institutions, the freedom of the press and the media, whether in audio, visual, or digital form, and the freedom to access the information needed for expression of opinion. This freedom should be guaranteed by constitutional provisions so as to transcend ordinary laws, which are subject to change.

The Supreme Constitutional Court in Egypt has decided to broaden the concept of free speech to encompass constructive criticism, even if toughly worded. The court has stipulated that "It is not appropriate to restrict the freedom of expression regarding the public issues by limits not to be exceeded; rather, it should be tolerated." It is necessary, however, to note that the beliefs of the three divine religions and their rituals must be respected, as this is very serious for the national cohesion and security. No one has the right to incite sectarian strife and doctrinal feud in the name of free speech. This said, the right to present an independent scholarly opinion, supported by the relevant evidence and within the specialized circles, and away from incitement, shall be guaranteed. The attendees state that the freedom of opinion and expression is the true manifestation of democracy, and they call for educating the new generations the culture of freedom, the right to difference, and to show respect for others. They also appeal to those working in the field of religious, cultural, and political rhetoric over the media to pay attention to this important dimension in their practices and to seek a wise approach that helps form a public opinion marked by tolerance, broad-mindedness, resort to dialogue, and rejection of fanaticism.

To achieve this, we have to recall the classical civilizations and traditions of the Islamic thought, whose great imams would say, "I hold that my opinion is right, yet may be wrong, and that the opinion of others is wrong, yet may be right." Hence, there is no way to reinforce free speech but through the approach to confront an argument with another one, according to the ethics of dialogue and the civilizational customs that are deeply rooted in the advanced societies.

Third: Freedom of Scientific Research

Serious scientific research in humanities, physics, mathematics, etc., is the driver of human progress and the means to discovering the laws of the universe so as to use them for the goodness of humankind. Such research cannot be conducted and yield its theoretical and practical fruits without the dedication of the energies of the

nation and the mobilization of its capabilities for it. Numerous Qur'anic verses urge us to contemplate, deduce, conduct analogical reasoning, and ponder the human and universal phenomena with a view to discovering their laws. In fact, these verses paved the way for the biggest scientific advancement the East has even known. Such advancement became realities on the ground and spread welfare far and wide. And it was subsequently carried by the Muslim scholars to the West, sparking the age of renaissance there, as it is well known and established. If thinking in general is an Islamic duty in all branches of knowledge and arts, as held by the scholars of ijihad, theoretical and experimental scientific research is the instrument for the discharge of this duty. And the most important among its requirements is that research institutions and specialized scholars should enjoy full academic freedom to perform experiments and put forth hypotheses, and to test them according to accurate scientific criteria. Such institutions also have the right to possess the creative imagination as well as the adequate expertise needed for reaching new results that contribute to human knowledge. They should not be directed in that respect except by the ethics, methods, and unchanging principles of science. Great Muslim scholars, such as Ar-Razi, Ibn Al-Haytham, Ibn AnNafis, were the leaders and pioneers of knowledge in the East and the West for many centuries. It is time now for the Arab and Muslim world to make a comeback to the race of power and the age of knowledge. Science has come to be the source of military and economic power and the cause of progress, development, and prosperity.

Free scientific research is the basis for the development of education, the supremacy of scientific thought, and the prosperity of production centers, for which big budgets should be allocated, work teams formed, and major projects proposed. All these require the highest ceiling of human and scientific research. The West had almost put its hand on every scientific advance and secured a monopoly on the path of science. But the rise of Japan, China, India, and Southeast Asia gave vivid examples for the capability of the East to break that monopoly, entering the age of knowledge through a wide-open door. The time has come for the Egyptians and the Arabs and Muslims to get into the arena of civilizational and scientific competition. Indeed, they have the adequate potentials – spiritual, material, human, etc. – that qualify them for such advance in a world that shows no respect for the weak and those lagging behind.

Fourth: Freedom of Literary and Artistic Creativity

There are two types of creativity. One type is scientific creativity, which has been previously tackled. The other is literary and artistic creativity, which comprises different genres of literature, such as lyric and dramatic poetry,

stories and novels, theatre, biographies, and visual plastic arts, and cinematic, television, and musical arts, in addition to other forms newly introduced to all these genres. In general, literature and arts seek to raise awareness of reality, activate imagination, elevate aesthetic sense, educate people and expand their mental faculties, and deepen human experience with life and society. Moreover, they sometimes view society with a critical eye, envisaging a better one. All these are lofty roles that in reality serve to enrich the language and culture, stimulate imagination, and improve intellectual capabilities, while observing the sublime religious values and moral virtues. Arabic language had been distinguished by its literary richness and eloquence. Then the noble Qur'an came with the climax of eloquence and miraculousness, adding to the beauty of the language and manifesting its genius, and feeding the arts of poetry, prose, and wisdom. And thus, the talents and creativity of poets and writers – from different nationalities which embraced Islam and spoke Arabic – were released without restrictions in all fields of arts over the ages. Furthermore, many of the scholars in charge of Arabic and Islamic culture, among sheikhs and imams, were narrators of poetry and stories of all kinds. However, the basic rule that governs the limits of the freedom of creativity is the preparedness of society, on the one hand, and its ability to absorb the elements of heritage and renewal in literary and artistic creativity, on the other hand. So, freedom of creativity should be respected so long as it does not hurt religious feelings or run counter to the established moral values. The fact remains that literary and artistic creativity is one of the most important signs of the prosperity of the set of basic freedoms, and it is the most effective in reviving the awareness of society and enriching its conscience. The more the reasonable freedom is entrenched in society, the clearer the proof of its civilization. Literature and arts are the mirror of the consciences of societies and the true expression of their variables and invariables. They paint a bright picture of their aspirations for a better future. We implore Almighty Allah to guide us to that which is good and right.

THE BEIRUT DECLARATION ON RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Makassed Philanthropic Islamic Association

June 20, 2015

Lebanon, other Arab countries and Muslims are now in turmoil because of religion, sectarianism and confessionalism. People are being killed, forced out of their homes, deprived of their dignity, dispossessed of the basis of their citizenship, of their lives and of their freedoms.

This abnormal situation, where religion is exploited for political, strategic and nihilistic reasons, destroying people, countries and civilizations, is leading to the rise of Islamophobia in various parts of the world, to the destruction of our coexistence, of our civilizational heritage, as well as to the ruin of the future of our young people. Facing this, many Arab and Islamic initiatives have sprang, on religious, civil, cultural and grassroots levels, to confront the situation, to liberate, correct and reject the violence perpetrated in the name of religion, whether in Lebanon or other Arab countries.

The Makassed Philanthropic Islamic Association of Beirut, in conformity with its educational, Islamic and national mission in promoting the culture of moderate enlightened and tolerant Islam,

And in view of its insistence of continuing to play a role in building the edifice of national, free, civic and progressive coexistence and in facing the dangers that threaten the country, the citizen, the nation, religion and values,

Found that it is incumbent upon it as an Islamic, Arab and national organization, to oppose extremism and violence through the promulgation of the Beirut Declaration on Religious Freedoms, by which it reaffirms the heritage with which it was endowed and on which it was built, in order to safeguard the enlightened humanistic pacts of Beirut and Lebanon, to defend the dignity of every citizen and human being, and to protect religion from those who attempt to hold it hostage under false banners.

1. Freedom of religion, of worship and education

Religious belief is a free choice and a free decision for every person. On it are based freedoms in religious practices, education and higher education. It is a right of the human being and the citizen that is guaranteed by Qur'anic verses

that have compelling clarity "There shall be no compulsion in religion. The right course has become clear from the wrong" (Surat Al-Baqarah - The Cow, 2:256), and "So remind, [O Muhammad]; you are only a reminder. You are not over them a controller "(Surat Al-Ghāshiyah - The Overwhelming, 88:21-22).

For more than 1300 years, our country has seen mosques, churches and other places of worship flourish side by side, in a common social life and space. We want this legacy of freedom, solidarity and coexistence to remain prosperous and thriving in our land, in our cities and among our young people. Our religion and national traditions, our alliances and our laws compel us to adhere firmly to these principles.

To deny Christian communities their right to exercise their religious freedom and the right to have their churches, monasteries and educational and social institutions preserved is a violation of human rights and a violation of citizenship rights. On top of that, it is a violation of Islam's teachings, since these abuses are made in its name.

Therefore, we raise our voices, from Islamic, humanitarian and national perspectives, against these destructive acts and we call upon our kin, beloved Christians of the East, to resist the acts of terror that seek to drive them from their land, and to hold on to their countries and remain rooted in them, as dignified citizens, enjoying with other citizens the same rights and responsibilities, safeguarding together the values of coexistence in total equality and mutual solidarity in our diverse societies.

Our faith culture requires us to reject compulsion in matters of faith, respect intellectual freedom and accept differences between people as an expression of God's will. Only God can judge men on what is in their hearts and on what they differ.

2. The right to dignity and the sanctity of human life

This right is found in Qur'anic verses that are clear in their significance: "And We have certainly honored the children of Adam and carried them on the land and sea and provided for them of the good things and preferred them over much of what We have created, " (Surat Al-Isrā' - The Night Journey, 17:70).

Man is thus endowed with dignity in his human essence. The foundation of his dignity is the fact that he has been endowed with reason, freedom of belief, opinion and expression. He is directly responsible before God for the exercise of his choices. It is also a human right to enjoy this freedom and have it protected by governments, and respected by others; no one has the right to judge people for their faith, nor persecute or discriminate them on religious or ethnic grounds.

God Almighty says, "Do not say to one who gives you [a greeting of] peace "You are not a believer," aspiring for the goods of worldly life" (Surat An-Nisā' - The Women, 4:94). As the Prophet Mohammed (Peace Be upon Him) said in his last sermon "All mankind

is the progeny of Adam and Adam was created of earth" and he said "all human beings are equal as the teeth of the comb are equal". Thus there should be no preference of a group over the other nor discrimination nor oppression nor compulsion.

The Holy Qur'an recognizes two reasons only for defensive war: religious persecution and expulsion from one's land. The Holy Qur'an says, "Allah does not forbid you from those who do not fight you because of religion and do not expel you from your homes - from being righteous toward them and acting justly toward them. Indeed, Allah loves those who act justly" (Surat Al-Mumtahanah - She that is to be examined, 60: 8).

Thus, according to the Qur'an, no one has the right to wage war against a person or a group of people based on their beliefs or religious choice, nor to drive them from their homes, whether through colonization, occupation of land or annihilation. It is therefore our duty to unite our efforts to protect religious and national freedoms, and respect human dignity and safeguard coexistence on the basis of equity and righteousness.

3. The right to be different and the right to plurality

God upheld the right to be different when he said, "O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you"(Surat Al-Hujurat - The Rooms, 49:13).

Difference between societies and pluralism within them is a natural social and human phenomenon. It is also based on individual and communal or societal choices. To know and recognize one another is a divine command. To act upon that and go toward the other is the appropriate response to man's humanity, to the fact that man lives in societies and with the world. Never have Islamic societies been closed monolithic ones in terms of opinions or ways of life, and they have never been monolithic in terms of religious beliefs.

4. The right to participate in political and public life

The right to participate in political and public life is founded on the principles of equality, freedom of choice and individual responsibility. Islam, as the Al-Azhar Declaration said¹, does not impose a specific political regime nor does it endorse a religious state. The political system should thus be a civil state made by citizens,

¹ The reference here is to The Al Azhar Declaration regarding the future of Egypt (June 20, 2011) where it is calls for: "First: To support the establishment of a modern, democratic and constitutional national State based on the constitution chosen by the nation, one which states the separation of State powers and its ruling legal institutions. (...) Second: To adopt the democratic system based on direct universal suffrage, which is the modern method for achieving the principles of Islamic Shura."

Muslims and non-Muslims, committed to the rights of citizenship and its duties. Citizens develop their system of government and update it according to their free will on the basis of their best interests. Therefore, to consider a specific political system as sacred or infallible, or as a matter of religion, is a misunderstanding of religion and an imposition on people, both Muslims and non-Muslims. All citizens are united to and protected by the civil national State that they establish together, abiding by its Constitution and the laws that consider them equal in rights and duties.

5. Our commitment to Arab and international alliances

Arab culture has had a glorious and pluralistic civilization that has contributed to world progress. Our people have contributed to the contemporary civilization, and have established National States and systems of government and institutions that have never been countered by religion. If we now turn against this culture in the name of religion or in the name of a lost legitimacy, we betray the foundations of religion, as we betray the struggle of our people for dignity and freedom and participation in the progress of the world, its civilization and its security. We are committed to upholding the United Nations Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and subsequent declarations, the Arab Declaration of Human Rights, and numerous Islamic declarations carrying the same values, the final one being the Al-Azhar's Declaration on Fundamental Freedoms.

We are part of this world, and aspire to have a stronger participation in it. We do not want to fear the world nor do we want to be a source of fear for others. We

do not want to isolate ourselves from the rest of the world and we do not want the world to isolate itself from us. Muslims constitute one-fifth of the world population, and a third of them live in non-Muslim countries and societies.

6. We are committed to Lebanon as a homeland and a united democratic state

Based on the values of freedom, freedom of choice, freedom of association and coexistence, the Lebanese regime of governance was developed into a consensus-based system guaranteeing basic freedoms and allowing the individual to flourish. Of course, we acknowledge that the Lebanese regime suffers from major problems, but this system remains open to improvements. Religious and political freedoms in Lebanon are the basis of coexistence that reflects the will of the Lebanese and their decision to live together. Lebanon's Muslim thinkers and intellectuals, many of whom are Makassed graduates, have contributed to Islamic and Humanistic enlightened thought. They joined

other Lebanese intellectuals in establishing the National Pact, in reaching the Taif accords and in formulating the Ten principles that Dar Al Fatwa proclaimed in 1983. The latter state the principles of citizenship, civil State, coexistence, fundamental freedoms and loyalty to Lebanon as a sovereign independent State and homeland for all its citizens. We want Lebanon to remain united and regain strength through this union and through its democratic system. We want it to remain a safeguard for the rights and freedoms of all its citizens, a promoter of a culture of freedom and respect of plurality for the rest of the Arab world that suffers today from fanaticism, extremism and murder committed in the name of religion, as it suffers from displacement of populations and a denial of principles of coexistence and humanity.

7. Makassed's role and commitment

The Makassed Islamic Philanthropic Association in Beirut shall remain faithful to its mission and principles as defined 137 years ago by its founding fathers, namely freedom of education and its progress, and enlightened religious education. Makassed taught Islam to many generations via renowned scholars from Lebanon and other Arab countries.

We shall revive this tradition, and we shall reform the curricula of religious education in close collaboration with Dar Al Fatwa. We shall also make it a point to benefit from the latest innovations and methods in civic education. Makassed has always been a beacon of tolerant Islam and uniting patriotism. God willing, it shall remain so, with the efforts of its generations for progress and for national, Arab, Islamic and humanistic commitment.

Beirut is "the Mother of the laws" and a home for freedom and creativity. It has played an important role in the creation of the modern State as well as in progress and freedom. It strives to remain, with its Christians and Muslims, and with the Makassed Association included in it, in these difficult times for Arabs and Lebanese, a lighthouse for Muslim enlightenment, for Arab progress and for human peace.

Long live Beirut, long live Makassed, long live Lebanon!

Executive Summary of THE MARRAKESH DECLARATION ON THE RIGHTS OF RELIGIOUS MINORITIES IN PREDOMINANTLY MUSLIM MAJORITY COMMUNITIES

January 25-27, 2016

WHEREAS, conditions in various parts of the Muslim World have deteriorated dangerously due to the use of violence and armed struggle as a tool for settling conflicts and imposing one's point of view;

WHEREAS, this situation has also weakened the authority of legitimate governments and enabled criminal groups to issue edicts attributed to Islam, but which, in fact, alarmingly distort its fundamental principles and goals in ways that have seriously harmed the population as a whole;

WHEREAS, this year marks the 1400th anniversary of the Charter of Medina, a constitutional contract between the Prophet Muhammad, God's peace and blessings be upon him, and the people of Medina, which guaranteed the religious liberty of all, regardless of faith;

WHEREAS, hundreds of Muslim scholars and intellectuals from over 120 countries, along with representatives of Islamic and international organizations, as well as leaders from diverse religious groups and nationalities, gathered in Marrakesh on this date to reaffirm the principles of the Charter of Medina at a major conference;

WHEREAS, this conference was held under the auspices of His Majesty, King Mohammed VI of Morocco, and organized jointly by the Ministry of Endowment and Islamic Affairs in the Kingdom of Morocco and the Forum for Promoting Peace in Muslim Societies based in the United Arab Emirates;

AND NOTING the gravity of this situation afflicting Muslims as well as peoples of other faiths throughout the world, and after thorough deliberation and discussion, the convened Muslim scholars and intellectuals:

DECLARE HEREBY our firm commitment to the principles articulated in the Charter of Medina, whose provisions contained a number of the principles of

constitutional contractual citizenship, such as freedom of movement, property ownership, mutual solidarity and defense, as well as principles of justice and equality before the law; and that,

The objectives of the Charter of Medina provide a suitable framework for national constitutions in countries with Muslim majorities, and the United Nations Charter and related documents, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, are in harmony with the Charter of Medina, including consideration for public order.

NOTING FURTHER that deep reflection upon the various crises afflicting humanity underscores the inevitable and urgent need for cooperation among all religious groups, we

AFFIRM HEREBY that such cooperation must be based on a "Common Word", requiring that such cooperation must go beyond mutual tolerance and respect, to providing full protection for the rights and liberties to all religious groups in a civilized manner that eschews coercion, bias, and arrogance.

BASED ON ALL OF THE ABOVE, we hereby:

Call upon Muslim scholars and intellectuals around the world to develop a jurisprudence of the concept of "citizenship" which is inclusive of diverse groups. Such jurisprudence shall be rooted in Islamic tradition and principles and mindful of global changes.

Urge Muslim educational institutions and authorities to conduct a courageous review of educational curricula that addresses honestly and effectively any material that instigates aggression and extremism, leads to war and chaos, and results in the destruction of our shared societies;

Call upon politicians and decision makers to take the political and legal steps necessary to establish a constitutional contractual relationship among its citizens, and to support all formulations and initiatives that aim to fortify relations and understanding among the various religious groups in the Muslim World;

Call upon the educated, artistic, and creative members of our societies, as well as organizations of civil society, to establish a broad movement for the just treatment of religious minorities in Muslim countries and to raise awareness as to their rights, and to work together to ensure the success of these efforts.

Call upon the various religious groups bound by the same national fabric to address their mutual state of selective amnesia that blocks memories of centuries of joint and shared living on the same land; we call upon them to rebuild the past by reviving this tradition of conviviality, and restoring our shared trust that has been eroded by extremists using acts of terror and aggression;

Call upon representatives of the various religions, sects and denominations to confront all forms of religious bigotry, villification, and denegration of what people hold sacred, as well as all speech that promote hatred and bigotry; AND FINALLY,

AFFIRM that it is unconscionable to employ religion for the purpose of aggressing upon the rights of religious minorities in Muslim countries.

List of Participants to the Civil-Religious Dialogue on Religious Freedom

- **Abi Al Muna, Sami** (*Sheikh Dr.*) Secretary General of Al Irfan Institution, President of the Cultural Committee at the Druz Community Council
- **Alayli, Gadir** (*Esq.*) Barrister, Lebanese Bar Association
- **Bustros, Selim** (*Mgr. Dr.*) Metropolitan of Beirut and Byblos, Greek Catholic Church
- **Chehab, Hareth** (*Emir*) Co-Secretary General of the Lebanese National Committee for Dialogue
- **Daou, Fadi** (*Fr. Prof.*) Chairperson and CEO of Adyan Foundation
- **Fadlallah, Jaafar** (*Sayyed*) Vice-Chairperson of Sayyid Mohammad Hussein Fadlallah Charitable and Cultural Foundation
- **Fayyad, Mona** (*Dr.*) Professor at the Lebanese University, Psychology Department
- **Farchoukh, Amin** (*Dr.*) Dean of Islamic Studies Faculty at Makassed University
- **Al-Halabi, Abbas** (*Judge*) President of the Arab Group for Christian Muslim Dialogue, member of the Lebanese National Committee for Dialogue
- **Al Halabi, Ghassan** (*Sheikh*) Consultant of the Druze Sheikh Al Akl, Researcher at the Druze Council for research and development
- **Jalkh. Michel** (*Fr, Dr.*) General Secretary of the Middle East Council of Churches
- **Khalifeh, Hisham Yahya** (*Sheikh*) Dar Al Fatwa - Previously General Director of Awqaf
- **Kurban, Antoine** (*Prof.*) Director of Medical Sciences at Saint Joseph University
- **Messarra, Antoine** (*Prof.*) University Professor, member of the Lebanese Constitutional Council, founder of the Lebanese Foundation for Permanent Civil Peace
- **Qazzi, Nassif** (*Dr.*) Professor at the Lebanese University, Faculty of Humanities
- **Ar-Rifai, Bakr** (*Mufti*) Sunni Mufti of Baalbak and Hermel
- **Al Sammak, Mohammad** (*Dr.*) Co-Secretary General of the Lebanese National Committee for Dialogue, consultant of the Lebanese (Sunni) Mufti
- **Sayegh, Ziad** (*Seminar Coordinator*) Expert in Public Policies
- **Sfeir, Antoine** (*Dr.*) Lawyer and Lecturer in law, Saint Joseph University
- **Tabbara, Nayla** (*Dr.*) Director of Adyan Institute
- **Taleb, Ahmad** (*Mufti*) Mufti and Islamic Higher Education teacher with the Islamic Shiite Council
- **Al Zohby, Ahmad** (*Dr.*) University lecturer in political science and Islamic studies

In a framework where religion is indissociable from public life and where inappropriate management of religious diversity has contributed to structural cataclysms ranging from trials to reinstate religious rule to identity wars and to persecution to the extent of slavery and genocide, the questions of religious freedom and management of religious and cultural diversity require being placed at the forefront of reflection and of policies.

The Adyan Institute that works on establishing an objective, critical and constructive approach of issues related to religion and public affairs in culture, education, higher education and policies, has thus given its attention to the question of religious freedom, backed by the Canadian Embassy in Beirut, within a project entitled "Civil-religious dialogue on religious freedom".

The project, based on a dialogical methodology between religious scholars and experts in philosophy, politics and law, consisted of a seminar and the publication of a book in Arabic to be used as a resource for a renewed cultural and religious awareness. This booklet contains the reference texts on which this project was based, the comprehensive report of the project presenting at once the summary of the book that is published in Arabic and an account of the discussions that have taken place within the seminar that gathered the civil and religious experts, with the new perspectives that this dialogue was able to open for further research and discussion.

Cover picture: Pablo Picasso, Hands Entwined III
