Before Starting

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Introduction to a lecture by HH Prince Faisal Bin Muhammad Bin Nasser

Praise be to Allah and peace be upon His Prophet. The lecture entitled “The relationship with others – between the clash of civilizations and the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques Project for Interfaith Dialogue” by HH Prince Dr. Faisal Bin Muhammad Bin Nasser, Assistant Professor at the Higher Institute for the Judiciary in Imam Muhammad Bin Saud Islamic University that comes within the activities of the Fourth Cultural Season is gaining importance. The lecture is deriving its importance from the fact that it tackles the relationship with others in its concepts, dimensions and practices from the perspective of Islamic moderation that sees in tolerance, dialogue, rejecting violence and advocating coexistence on the basis of the human common factors as an approach for dealing with one another and in order to come out of the predicament of conflict and clash of civilizations. The lecture sees in the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques Project for Dialogue an example to be followed in terms of dialogue within our society and with the others. It stresses that the strategy of dialogue in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has succeeded because it was characterized by pragmatism and gradual implementation. Due to these matters and others that the intellectual will find in this lecture including valuable ideas and views, the university has decided that this lecture be published within the series of publications of the cultural season of Jazan University so as to be within reach of the reader. We hope this valuable lecture would achieve the objectives required of it and would be a distinctive cultural contribution toward upgrading cultural awareness in all segments of the society. May Allah grant us all success.
Jazan University
Series of the cultural season symposia

The relationship with others - between the clash of civilizations and the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques Project for Interfaith Dialogue

Lecture by HH Prince Dr. Faisal Bin Muhammad Bin Nasser,
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In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful

Praise be to Allah and peace be upon Prophet Muhammad and all his companions (may Allah be pleased with them).

Your Royal Highness Prince Muhammad Bin Nasser Bin Abdul Aziz, Emir of Jazan Region, Your Excellences, Your Eminences and distinguished gentlemen

Peace and blessings be upon you.

First, I would like to express my deep thanks to Jazan University represented by its President Prof. Dr. Muhammad Bin Ali Aal Hayaze’ and all its personnel for the warm welcome and hospitality and for giving me this opportunity to speak before an elite of this nation. I express my great pride for the good reputation achieved by Jazan University and the great accomplishments made within a short period.

I am honored and happy to be among you tonight to speak about one of the most important issues facing the Muslim world – the relationship with others in the light of what is being publicized as the clash of civilizations and its dialogue through three themes: Islamic civilization, the roots of Western civilization and its phases in time and the strategy of Saudi dialogue. So with Allah’s help I begin.

Introduction:

The conflict and clash between mankind is an innate matter that they cannot get rid of. This is indisputable because it has been made inevitable by man’s nature in striving to survive, his fear of the end of life, and the difference in severity of this fear depending on the difference in level of civilization based on the inculcated morals, values and lofty principles that rectify the motives and conduct. Hence, due to Allah’s mercy on His servants, He has sent prophets as bearers of glad tidings and to warn people. Allah Almighty said: “Verily, We have sent you with the truth, a bearer of glad tidings and a warner. And there never was a nation but a warner had passed among them. [Surat Fatir or Al-Malaikah (The Originator of Creation, or The Angels), verse 24].
The divine messages created the lofty divine criteria which blended with the cultures and traditions of peoples to create human civilizations based on what organizes their society and guarantees for it the bliss of this world and the Hereafter. As much as man abided by these criteria, he interacted positively with his environment. And when he keeps away from them, he frees himself from what rectifies and disciplines his conduct, hence slipping to a lower position. In this regard, Allah Almighty said: “And surely, We have created many of the jinn and mankind for Hell. They have hearts wherewith they understand not, and they have eyes wherewith they see not, and they have ears wherewith they hear not (the truth). They are like cattle, nay even more astray; those! They are the heedless ones.” [Surat Al-A’raf (The Heights or the Wall with Elevations), verse 179].

1 – The first theme: Islamic civilization

History bears witness that the divine criteria revealed (to the prophets and messengers) have changed the conditions and destinies of many nations including the Muslim nation (Ummah), as the impact of the divine criteria was evident in the Arabs from whom Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was sent to mankind. Hence, the Prophet’s message converted them from a divided nation rife with discord into one united nation in which harmony prevailed. Allah Almighty said: “And hold fast, all of you together, to the Rope of Allah (i.e. this Qur’an), and be not divided among yourselves, and remember Allah’s Favour on you, for you were enemies one to another but He joined your hearts together, so that, by His Grace, you became brethren (in Islamic Faith), and you were on the brink of a pit of Fire, and He saved you from it. Thus Allah makes His Ayaat (proofs, evidences, verses, lessons, signs, revelations, etc.) clear to you, that you may be guided.” [Surat Al-Imran (The Family of Imran), verse 103].

And from a pre-Islamic pagan nation whose slogan was mentioned by Ibn Kulthum in his collection of poems (May no one treat us unknowingly, thus leading us to lack knowledge more than the unknowing) to a nation with a civil culture which contributed to laying the foundations of peaceful co-existence among peoples. The influence of this blessed call was transmitted to the world in its entirety and civilizations and peoples fused with the nation
of Islam until the slogan of its civilization became as said by a poet:

My father is Islam and I have no other father, even if others take pride in the tribes of Qais or Tammam and if the waters which run across nations take different courses, our waters are sweet and have flown from a single cloud. Or if our lineage is disparate, a religion to which we have given the standing of a father brings us together.

The Islamic creed (Aqeedah) in it organized man’s relationship with his Creator and the Islamic Shariah arranged a Muslim’s relationship with fellow Muslims or others and made his ultimate goal to call people to Allah in what is known as Islamic Da’wah as a mercy to the world and to transfer them from the gloom of unbelief to the light of belief.

Never was dominion over others the goal of Islam nor was plundering their civilizational and cultural gains the objective of this religion, for the justice of the Islamic Shariah determined the relationship in peace and war and in impartiality. Thus, this has made the Islamic state an oasis of peace, a minaret of knowledge and a spring of civilization.

2 – The second theme: The roots of conflict in Western civilization and their stages in time

When the Muslims moved away from the source of strength of their civilization, which is abidance by the teachings of their religion, their civilization reached the stage of decline after flourishing. The course of events in history shows that the decline of a civilization is the basis for the beginning of emergence of other civilizations.

Hence, Western civilization started forming as a result of the weakness and decline of Islamic civilization beginning with the fall of Andalusia in 1492 until the end of the Ottoman State in 1924.

a) The ideological roots of Western civilization

This civilization derived its thought and principles at the start from the Greek and Roman civilizations, which were founded on creedal bases taking root in conflict between man and the phenomena surrounding him whether visible or unseen - like the ancient Greek beliefs that are based on “conflict with god”, “the conflict between good and evil” and “the conflict between man and god”. Besides this, was the contribution of the Jewish creedal inheritance represented by “the Old Testament scriptures” in building the ideological bases for Christian civilization, which is not devoid of the spirit of conflict due to viewing themselves with superiority and looking down on the followers of other religions. Allah Almighty described their condition in the following verse:

“Among the people of the Scripture (Jews and Christians) is he who, if entrusted with a Qintar (a great amount of wealth, etc.) will rapidly pay it back; and among them there is he who, if entrusted with a single silver coin, will not repay it unless you constantly stand demanding, because they say: There is no blame on us to betray and take the properties of the illiterates (Arabs).” But they tell a lie against Allah while they know it.” [Surat Al-Imran, verse 75].

These inherited ideologies and beliefs fused and formed one civil culture characterized by democracy, justice, equality and freedom in the Western societies only, with the lack of concern to disseminate these good attributes in other societies. In this regard, Allah Almighty said: “Never will the Jews nor the Christians be pleased with you (O Muhammad (pbuh)) till you follow their religion. Say: Verily, the Guidance of Allah (i.e. Islamic Monotheism) that is the (only) Guidance. And if you (O Muhammad (pbuh)) were to follow their (Jews and Christians) desires after what you have received of Knowledge (i.e. the Qur’an), then you would have against Allah neither any Wali (protector or guardian) nor any helper.” [Surat Al-Baqarah, verse 120].

b) The temporal phases of Western civilization

1- The phase of proving oneself (1492 – 1798G): This is the stage that followed the fall of Andalusia, as the winds of the old colonialism began to reach the eastern and western coasts plundering the resources, spreading their religion and beliefs by force and by following the crusade campaigns against the orient. These campaigns had economic objectives coated with religion.
2- The Napoleonic Phase (1798 – 1945G): It is the stage in time when Napoleon Bonaparte turned to the Arabian East (Mashriq) and directed his armies towards it. He occupied Egypt militarily, culturally and economically. It is noteworthy that the main focus during that campaign was on the cultural aspect of occupation, as it boosted the oriental movement, which studied and investigated on Islamic civilization. It benefited a lot from these studies and investigations and acquired knowledge in enhancing Western civilization later and forming the basis for its civilization and scientific Renaissance.

Napoleon's campaign gave other ambitious nations the road map for invading and colonizing the Muslim and Arab countries using what the orientalists had written about the secrets of that civilization and its base being Islam – the main source of its strength. The neocolonialist strove to spread his civil culture among the colonized peoples in an attempt to replace the original and deep-rooted Islamic values and principles these peoples had inherited.

3- Bipolar phase (1945 – 1991G): It is the stage in time following the victory of the allies over the axis countries. During this stage, the countries of the world were divided, and they included the Arab and Muslim world, into an Eastern camp influenced by communist and socialist thought and a Western camp following capitalism and liberalism. The leaders of the two camps were keen to re-demarcate the boundaries of the region and permit the formation and support of strong countries in the Arab and Muslim region that derived the basis for their formation from nationalist thought with the importance of the existence of racial, sectarian, historical and social differences in those countries.

4- Single pole phase (1991 – until now): This stage started with the decline of the Soviet Union as a basic party to the conflict. Even though this disappearance appeared as a victory for the Western camp, others did not view it as such because the West had built its strategies and formed the patterns of its scientific, economic, industrial and military life for confronting a visible enemy. In other words, the existence of a threat guarantees depleting finance from peoples under the pretext of defending Western civilization. So Western thinkers strove to find a way out this problem. As a result, the theory of “the clash of civilizations” by Samuel Huntington...
came up in 1993 and spread. This theory made the existence of a conflict inevitable, even reaching the level of fighting, between the followers of Western civilization and those of other civilizations. This theory was influenced by the ideas of many Western thinkers including Bernard Lewis – a British orientalist a Jew by religion and having Zionist inclinations. His ideas were based on the inevitability of the clash between Western civilization and Islam and that Islam cannot be defeated unless the countries of the Arab and Muslim world were divided further and changed from strong united countries to what he described as “paper mosaic” that are divided within and rife with internal disputes. According to Lewis, this can be achieved by following methods like full military occupation, or reviving sectarian, racial or cultural conflicts under slogans such as the freedom of peoples from dictatorship, striving to support democracy, uprooting Islamic fundamentalism that generates terrorism so that Western civilization remains as the pioneering civilization and Israel exists as a strong bulwark protecting Western civilization from the imminent Islamic danger…

Though these theories were disseminated through scientific lectures and forums or were written in cultural books, they form an ideological framework from which others get inspiration for future plans that would achieve prosperity for a certain category of people while misery and decadence prevails among the others.

c) The effects of applying the clash of civilizations theory: The theories of the clash of civilizations received a lot of attention from some Western leaders. Furthermore, the principles of Western civilization based on conflict found a place in their sentiments, so they adopted them within an ideological framework to carry out the following:

1- Making room for the leaders of extremist thought in the West to occupy leading posts and carry out their agenda against the Arab and Muslim world. Therefore, this created counterterrorism that contributed greatly in the emergence of the manifestations of conflict.

2- The utilization of the new communications and media revolution in disseminating the major principles of Western civilization while criticizing and distorting the consistent principles of other civilizations. This has resulted in winning supporters, who can be described as Western more than the Westerners themselves.

3- Contributing in supporting extremism of all forms in excess or as negligence so as to create the atmosphere for conflict that might contribute in destroying the other societies.

4- Causing some of the governments of the nationalist countries that originated as a revolution to distance themselves from the principles of their revolution either by force through threats or to entice them to achieve social growth and prosperity. This led to the occurrence of lack of trust and a widening gap between them and their peoples. Ultimately, this led to huge popular revolutions that viewed their governments as no longer legitimate, as their legitimacy disappeared by their abandoning the very principles for the legitimacy of their power.

5- To stoke seditions and old conflicts in the united societies so as to create an atmosphere of conflict and chaos that would permit the West to interfere in the internal affairs of these societies with all parties to the conflict seeking to win the West’s support.
3 – The third theme: The Saudi strategy of dialogue

The leaders of this blessed country had realized quite early the plots being hatched by the enemies of the nation (Ummah). These plans aimed at shaking the Ummah’s security and stability and affecting its national unity, which is based on the Islamic creed (Aqeedah) and Shariah. They decided to deter this by following the strategy of dialogue to block the way before the calls for conflict and their theories in the West by taking two major steps:

1- Creating a plan to boost the internal front and preparing internal matters in what is described as renovating the Saudi house based on Monotheism (Al-Tawheed) in faith and approaches before the lands and gains, disseminating the culture of dialogue so as to review the viewpoints of different segments of the society, and to sincerely strive to resolve the problems without a mandate or influence by others. So it was decided to establish the King Abdul Aziz Center for National Dialogue in 2005G (1424H), which aims to consolidate national unity within the sphere of Islamic creed and to contribute in maintaining the correct Islamic discourse based on moderation within the Kingdom and abroad, to tackle national issues whether social, cultural, political or economic, among others; to present them through the channels of intellectual dialogue and its mechanisms, to come up with views for the strategy of national dialogue and to guarantee activating its products. Numerous national forums were held at this radiant center to probe the depths of many local and international issues. This resulted in numerous solutions. The most prominent results achieved by the strategy of national dialogue in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia are as follows:

a) To reduce pent up feelings due to isolation and cocooning oneself by encouraging openness between different parties of the Saudi society, to present their opinions openly and to judge them according to the Islamic Shariah in order to come out with a solution that is in harmony with the state’s thought and approach.

b) To warn against following a policy of exclusion and single opinion among different segments of the Saudi society, which in turn lead to abominable extremism that causes conflicts.
c) To open popular channels for presenting opinions whose goal is to guide decisions for the interest of the nation and the citizen.

d) To come out with united views aiming to safeguard the constant principles of the Islamic Shariah while leaving the door open for dialogue on the variables that affect man's life, in an endeavor to find compromise solutions in harmony with the intentions of the Islamic Shariah that suit every time and place.

2- In a successive step after intensifying its efforts in bolstering the internal front, in line with the call by King Abdullah, Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, the Saudi state invited the followers of cultures and religions to an interfaith dialogue conference organized by the Muslim World League (MWL) in Madrid in July 2008. This conference opened the way for numerous successive international conferences and symposia in which Muslim Ulama and thinkers carried out a big role in highlighting the following:

a) To explain the Islamic rulings on dealing with non-Muslims during war and peace as well as its stance of tolerance toward the followers of other religions.

b) To highlight the universality of Islamic civilization and its establishment on the basis of well-established humanitarian principles resulting in peaceful coexistence with the followers of other religions and in turn leading to a civil culture in which different people's cultures got fused. These were a direct cause for a human renaissance later.

c) To win the support and sympathy of the fair followers of other religions with the Islamic causes.

d) To prove that Islam is a religion of moderation and the extremist trend of some of the followers of this religion is nothing but a reaction towards counter-extremism, which appeared through wrong policies in dealing with the crucial issues in the Muslim world.

Conclusion:

Distinguished gentlemen

I can say that the strategy of dialogue in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has succeeded because it was characterized by pragmatism and gradual implementation, as the rulers realized the existence of differences in views between the segments of the Saudi society. So it was necessary to adopt dialogue as a means to solve them. This dialogue later formed a unified intellectual front led by the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques for dialogue with others.

It is noteworthy that one of the most important effects of dialogue is the Saudi people's stance and their rallying behind their leadership, which converted the days of revolution against the state into pledging allegiance for it anew.

Finally, I hope I have succeeded in presenting my thoughts. If I have succeeded, then it is from Allah. And if I have erred, then it is due to me and the Satan.

Praise be to Allah Almighty and peace be upon His Prophet (pbuh) and all his companions (may Allah be pleased with them).

References:

1) Surat Fatir, verse 24
2) Surat Al-A'raf, verse 179
3) Surat Al-Imran, verse 103
4) Al-Muhami, Muhammad Fareed Bek, 1401H, The History of the Ottoman State, Investigation by Ihsan Haqi, Dar Al-Nafais, Beirut, Lebanon, 1st ed., p.750
5) Surat Al-Imran, verse 75
6) Surat Al-Baqarah, verse 120
7) Cook, Jonathan, Israel and the Clash of Civilizations, Pluto Publishers, Israel, 2008, pp.21