THE WHOLE WORLD NEEDS
THE WHOLE WORLD:
A FRAMEWORK FOR MUSLIM-
AMERICAN DIALOGUE

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Introduction: Unity, Diversity and Hope

We are living in a world where borders have collapsed, as has our traditional conceptions of space, time and distance. Cultures and communities are exposed to and interact with one another in unprecedented ways as a result of revolutions in information. We are discovering that our fates and futures increasingly depend on one another, making mutual understanding, respect and cooperation essential to realizing the positive aspects of our growing interdependency. Our greater capacity for learning and our broadening familiarity with the foreign culture represents a powerful growth in knowledge and marks a turning point in human civilization.

This revolution in information has set in motion two contradictory trends in the world: increasing localization, which leads to self-assurance and the strengthening of each culture's own traditions, and globalization, which spans the sheer diversity of the human expression. This context defines the nature of our contact in a broader sense: in this growing awareness of our diversity lies our unmistakable unity: our humanity and our common values and needs. It is up to us, at this crucial time in our shared history, to ask three vital questions: How will we know and relate with each other? How will we define and benefit from our relationship? How will we cope together with the teeming diversity of our global community? Dialogue,
as a new paradigm in global relations, is based on sharing knowledge to achieve new knowledge, to see each other with open and empathetic eyes under a different light, and to look together toward a shared future in a global community will make our world safe for diversity.

The old ways of thinking are losing ground. Activists, leaders, and scholars wonder what will divide us in the twenty-first century. We are told that we will be divided as believers: adherents uniting as a group, and then pitting themselves against those with presumably opposing beliefs. We are, to this view, hurtling inexorably down a religiously based clash of civilizations, where only the strongest, most prepared, will emerge victorious.

Yet this proposition is old thinking. It comes from a position of scarcity: there is not enough truth, greatness, beauty, nobility, creativity to go around for all of us to possess. Either I have it or you have it, but not both. Wedged into this thinking is the reified "us" and "them", as fundamentally different beings, with unequal essences, irreconcilable dreams and unshared needs. This way of thinking can only survive where difference is reinforced through isolation, even if these differences are invented or live only in the imagination of one or the other. In our twenty-first century, with the global information revolution, travel and level of cultural exchanges, these degrees of separation cannot sustain themselves. So what options do we have?

Why a Dialogue of Civilizations?

The need for a dialogue among people is based on the recognition that our changing reality requires a new global ethic and a new perception of one another. Two of the world's most powerful civilizations have only known each other as deeply competitive rivals and adversaries reaching back through the historical memory and imagination of both.

If Islam has suffered estrangement, this condition is not the result of inattention. Historically, the second half of the twentieth century is remarkable for the slow and often painful reemergence of Islamic societies in the international system; this process has been accompanied by a great deal of story-telling, by Muslims and Westerners alike. The themes of these stories are familiar: some speak of political confrontation and inherent incompatibility between Islamic and Western civilizations, while others speak of common historical roots, cultural compatibility, and political accommodation. While much can be learned from listening to these two varieties of tales, we have reached a point where the old narratives no longer suffice, and we find ourselves in need of a third story. We are truly between stories — between the stories of the past, and the story, which we must now create together.
To this day, the presumption of incompatibility has provided the dominant motif for story-telling about Islam and Western Civilization. Both Western observers and Muslims paint with broad brush strokes when they engage in generalization about civilizational units of analysis, and they fail to account for the diverse strands of cultural legacies. As protagonists of the story of incompatibility, they often resort to a language of exclusivity, preoccupy themselves with defining boundaries, and retreat from intercultural experiences to psychological and cultural segregation. Implicitly or explicitly, the "other" is depicted as a threatening monolith. When American journalists write pieces on fanaticism and terrorism in the Islamic World, for example, they speak of Islam, terrorism, and militance in the same breath, without differentiating between Islam and Muslims. The religion of a perpetrator is thereby associated with acts of violence in ways, which are scrupulously avoided when Jews and Christians commit comparable offenses. We have come far enough to dispense with the cliches of confrontational discourse, which alleges an incompatibility of Islam and Western civilization while neglecting fundamental questions: Which Islam and which West? How are we representing the West (geographically as well as culturally and intellectually)? Who represents the "West"? Is the development of the West a finished project, or is the West still developing? Furthermore, what are we representing as Islam? Who represents "Islam"? Is Islam a static set of authoritative cultural norms, or is Islam a dynamic, spiritual response to life based on essential precepts?

The first story is, unfortunately, the most often repeated one. The story pertains to cultural incompatibilities, political confrontation, and protracted historical conflict, and we are all acquainted with at least one version of it. Since the Muslim version of the story is less familiar, we will accentuate those details of the script, which are important to this perspective.

Americans remember 1492 as the year Columbus, sailing under the Spanish flag, discovered America. Arabs and Muslims remember 1492 as the year of the fall of the kingdom of Grenada, the last Arab Islamic presence in the West. Islam receded to the East, to the periphery, to become a non-Western phenomenon. Beginning with the Treaty of Karlofca in 1699 and later the Treaty of Kuchuk Kaynarca in 1774, the Ottomans retreated from Europe and Muslims were reduced to passivity in world politics, leaving for Christianity the task of shaping the modern world. Since then, Islam has been seen as alien, and intrusive in a relationship of rivalry. More recently Western policy makers, influential pundits and scholars have advanced simplistic views that dominate the present debate on Islam and Islamic revival, also described as fundamentalism.

In effect, Muslims were excluded from history. Their destinies were determined by the West. The rules and practices of current international relations reflect nineteenth-century Western experience and interests. Thus,
the common bonding of the world today is a product of the conquest and acculturation of Islamic and other non-Western elites that occurred as the result of the West's political and economic expansion. The common language of the world has largely become Western in both form and content.

In contrast to the first story, which places emphasis on incompatibility, the second story accentuates compatibility, and posits coexistence as an alternative to confrontation. From this perspective, Islamic revival is not the enemy of the West. It is not really a religious movement, nor is it, as some fear, expansive and monolithic. Muslims seek to restore an old civilization, which has a genuine historical affinity with European civilization, not to create a new empire. Among the world's historical powers, only the Muslims, as a people, have not reversed the decline in their global status. The Japanese, the Chinese, and the Europeans have all regained their world influence; Muslims are likely to recover their dignity and stature if provided an opportunity to be modern within the framework of their own culture. The first story — the story of incompatibility — portrays dialogue between the West and Islam as an exercise in futility, and the second story — the story of compatibility — provides a hint of what might be gained by moving beyond facile, stereotypical language and judgments. The third story — a story of reconciliation, we hope — has yet to be written. Nonetheless, we would like to suggest a possible script for this new narrative.

The shared cultural roots joining Islam with the West are forgotten far too often. Although recently voiced (and frequently ill-conceived) opinions regarding a 'clash of civilizations' posit that Islam falls outside the Judeo-Christian and Hellenic cultural continuum, the reverse is in fact the case. Classical Islamic civilization was constructed out of Arab, Biblicist and Hellenic cultures, but cast a wider net by integrating Persian, Central Asia, as well as Indian components within its cultural synthesis. Historically, Islam is the true bridge between West and East.

Yet as each civilization pursued their own historical trajectories and encountered one another as rivals in competitive power politics, each retreated from the other to struggle with internal conflicts and questions, reducing the other to static images of threatening, unrelated, rival 'others'. Psychopathy operates at the level of symbols in order to generate a new system of meaning that is, ultimately, divorced from larger material or spiritual understandings, and feeds on the need to address despair through fear. These simplified, narrow images create relationships based on power and control.

Cultural contact between Islam and the West has been marred by historically unequal power relations, leaving the West arrogant and insensitive and the Muslim world defensive and insecure. The West and Islam are caught in a twin cycle of arrogance, which breeds contempt and fanaticism, with
no shortage of paranoia. Western cultural triumphalism is sustained through the use of mass media, educational systems, as well as the control over the symbols of legitimacy and status. The "with us or against us" simplification is yet the latest expression of Western cultural triumphalism, backed up on this occasion by overwhelming military force.

Today, such relationships and the images they were built upon are no longer sustainable. Instead, as each struggle to find their place and identity in a globalize world, we are discovering that each has held many of solutions to the questions the other has long been asking. Dialogue is key to surfacing these 'hidden treasures'; once we are able to unlock the secrets of effective communication and pierce through the walls of misperception and mistrust we can gather these valuable insights, lessons and opportunities that enrich us both.

Islam is Not the Enemy of the West

Islam is not the enemy of the West. There is a lingering, pervasive belief in the West that Islamic values are inherently incompatible with Western ideals and goals. The West hears only the voices that are the loudest, and these tend to be the ones who reject and openly despise them. The West sees only the anger from the Muslim and Arab world, which causes them to retreat into defensiveness and ignore the reasons, which drive these passions. It becomes easier to assume that beliefs are irreconcilable and irrational, view reinforced by images of outrage that are propagated by a sensationalist media, which thrives on such imagery.

Islam is perhaps the most misunderstood religion today, both among non-Muslims and Muslims alike. The saying of the Prophet Muhammad appears to have been realized: "Islam began as a stranger (gharib, i.e. exiled and unrecognized), and it will revert again to the condition of being a stranger. Blessed are the strangers". The West views Islam as quintessentially foreign; Muslims feel estranged from its ideals.

Religion is not only a theological doctrine but has historical dynamics to be taken into account. This dynamic involves today's Muslims as well as abstracted Islam. We need to understand both Islam and Muslims. In all religions it is the tension between the real and the ideal, the expectations and the achievements, that gives us the most profound understanding of the essence. Because Islam has no church, every Muslim is individually responsible for searching for the Muslim ideal. It is this tension between the real and the ideal that is key in the life of Muslims.
We complicate our understanding of Islam when we concentrate on the ideal or the real, and ignore the struggles of Muslims to achieve them. The history of Islam is a history of tension between the ideals of the Qur'an and the ability of Muslims to realize them. Ideals of Islam are not static but emergent. Every historical period and cultural milieu has given a different synthesis of Islamic Command extending from rigid Wahhabism to the more flexible Sufism.

American media often tends to portray the Islamic world (and various groups within it) solely through the prism of extremism and terrorism - so often, indeed, that some of those who attempt to debunk the notion of an "Islamic threat" inadvertently perpetuate the simplistic "good (or secular, moderate, pro-Western) Muslim"/ "bad (or militant) Muslim" dichotomy. Instead of taking seriously the criticisms of Western attitudes toward the Middle East written by Arab and Muslim scholars, many Western writers have preferred to isolate threads of hatred, irrationality and fear articulated through religious discourse, reinforcing notions of otherness, inferiority, and the need for pre-emptive actions and aggressive control. Even the governments of many Muslim countries play into this dichotomy, particularly when soliciting economic or military support from the United States.

A 'clash of symbols' is being waged between Islam and the West. This is not a clash of civilizations. Westerners are finding headscarves, turbans and other symbols of Islamic cultural and religious expression repellent, as fundamentalist Muslims have seen in blue jeans and other such manifestations of Western culture explicit anti-Islamic statements. Belief systems are becoming simplified into images to be either rejected or absorbed in their entirety.

As a result, Muslim world is reduced to a form, a static image that appears to be in its essence antithetical to the West. From this sense of threat, the West recoils from 'all things Islamic', and feels compelled to project an image of invulnerability and superiority, conflating its material strength with moral authority. Genuine opportunities for dialogue are then lost. Dialogue instead becomes power politics by other means, as a campaign to quiet or mollify an aggravated 'other', to manage conflict rather than resolve it, turning dialogue into a platform to convince the 'other' of the Tightness of their existing positions. These, however, are subversive contests to delegitimize others, not dialogues aimed at mutual understanding, respect and new knowledge.

The West is Not the Enemy of Islam

Nor is the West the enemy of Islam. While the West may suffer from a sense of cultural triumphalism at home and abroad, it is a civilization whose hard-won achievements are not only compatible with Muslim values but
which can broadly support and strengthen the Islamic community. The Western regard for individualism and political freedom, and its commitment to political accountability and democratic pluralism characterize some of the best of what the West offers the world. Muslims must not be so insecure as to believe that they can only reflect or reject the West, or that the accomplishments of one civilization serve only to underscore the failures of others. Genuine curiosity about the Western experience and serious reflection on the sources of Western strength may be necessary to move the Islamic community from its painful introspection and isolation into a new period of confident and inclusive building of a just and peaceful social order.

The experiences of religious wars and colonialism have engendered a profound distrust of Western motives and goals, while the images Muslims receive of the West, through television and movies, as well as from images depicting the deep suffering of Arabs and Muslims at the hands of non-Muslims, have generated a complex reaction of defensiveness and moral outrage. The inability to successfully challenge unjust policies and the fear that foreign values will induce Muslims to deviate from their faith have effectively closed off the ability to hear what the West may also be communicating.

What can we get from dialogue?

Muslims and Westerners have much to gain from moving away from images, symbols and postures. Attachment and commitment to these forms undermine the purpose of dialogue, keeping us estranged and unknown to one another.

Developing a process of communication is key to transcending this deep subjectivity, one that involves active listening and a commitment to sustained dialogue, not rushing to achieve the immediate rewards of transformation or understanding, but rather learning to understand how each communicates their shared concerns. In this way we can discover, as well as create, shared meanings and find our common ground, while better understanding our values and ideals as we are challenged to share them in a new way.

Instead, a framework for a dynamic and mutually rewarding dialogue is one where we bring to the table the best that our human civilizations have to offer the world and how these contributions can help one another to achieve a greater flourishing of our respective communities, who look upon one another as moral equals and partners in creating a global community. It is then that we may compete with one another in good works, and in our service to humanity. It is here that we show our truth, our essence, our beauty and our greatness, and it is in so doing that we find our place in God's greater plan for humanity.
A Common Concept of Peace

Moving beyond the first story of incompatibility towards a new narrative of shared understanding requires us to look more closely at the meanings underlying our concepts and symbols. Islamic traditions have conceptualized distinctive understandings of peace that can complement Western approaches. In Islam, peace is defined as 'presence of justice, well-being, and social integration and harmony, while the West has come to understand peace as 'absence of gross violations of human rights, violence, or militancy. In understanding the meanings we attach to our values we can then broaden them to encompass our own wisdom in ways that add and develop the other in positive directions. We can then begin to understand together that peace cannot be separated from justice and a vibrant, healthy society.

Through sensitivity and trust in moral equality of the other, dialogue opens the way to transform our relationships and perception of one another, in a gradual and respectful manner, and in the process reestablish the linkage between our actions and our most cherished ideals. Defensiveness which insists that one is absolutely wrong and the other is absolutely right only entrenches our distance and difference. Rather we can begin to see that our values and ideals complement and enrich one another, and can move each of us forward and that our difficulties are opportunities for learning and improvement. This is why we have difference: so that we may know one another, and better ourselves in the process.

An Inclusive Concept of Democracy

Dialogue involves shifting our assumptions that allows us to recognize that the achievements of one civilization does not imply or reflect that another is inferior, but rather that we are challenged to adapt these lessons to our own circumstances. In particular, the West offers much to the Islamic world in terms of institutionalizing democracy while Islam can offer the West its own considerable achievements and insights into community, spirituality, and diversity.

The West emerged after years of deep introspection, existential anxiety and conflict over its faith system with lessons and achievements in the realm of political coexistence. In closing our cars to this hard-won achievement we are losing an opportunity to meet one of modernity's greatest challenges on our own terms. Muslims are not required to reach the same conclusions that Christians adopted with regard to their faith, and do not need to in order to develop an authentically Islamic response to political empowerment. There is a great need in the Muslim and Arab world to
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consciously and deliberately integrate the person, the citizen and the Muslim. This involves a search for truth within Islamic traditions and contexts that begins at the level of the individual. Christianity has emerged with a close linking of personal behavior with citizenship and social values, while Muslims today are on the threshold of discovering the obligations and meaning of Muslim citizenship.

Islam and democracy are not incompatible. Islamic social institutions are more dynamic and variegated than is widely recognized, and provide the basis for genuine participation at the social and political level. It is the Muslim community itself that must discover how this integration can apply to modern living, and in the process discover original ways of implementing Islamic precepts in changing social conditions. Muslims have the right to participate in the unfolding and direction of their community, while creating their own values and terms within the enduring context of Islam. Democracy is not built upon a particular variety of electoral institutions, but upon genuine participation. In this regard there are democratic precepts in Islam, as there are in other religions, to include both the preservation and development of the community, and social justice and consultative mechanisms. Democracy is not a Western product; it is rather a universal process of organizing political needs on an equal basis that must be deeply rooted in the dreams and hopes of the great majority of a nation.

Just as there has been and continues to be a stamp of Calvinism on American culture, so too there is a stamp of Islam on Islamic culture. Modernization theory and scholarship on democracy have been somewhat misleading in the projection of cultural change in the West. Religion has not been simply left behind or rendered obsolete by modernization even when religion has been rejected there has emerged new satisfiers - nationalism, free market economy and cultural triumphalism.

In addition to social functions, Islam serves a practical role in politics by offering recourse to a transcendental order to which rulers can be held accountable. The oppressed can defend their rights by appealing to religious standards. Islam offers a vocabulary of resistance to corruption and repression, and a vocabulary of hope for a cultural future. This Islamic vocabulary is the way that Muslims express their political identity. Hence, everybody links Islam to their political concern.

For example, Muslims can ask themselves, what kind of citizens can Islam create, animated by Islamic values and contexts. What kind of solutions can Islam bring to affect participatory decision-making in the absence of authoritative guidance in social matters? What Islamic values and social
mechanisms can be brought to bear for ameliorating the conditions of modern, urban living? The flowering of the individual as citizen within Islamic community can inspire new avenues of meaning and institutions that testify to - and fortify - what is enduring in Islam.

A dialogue can move us away from rigid adherence to form, to defensive posturing, and toward promoting an exchange of ideas on how to incorporate the lessons learned from one civilization appropriately to another. In so doing, improvements can be made where creativity is allowed to flourish in dynamic interaction. The West, meanwhile, has developed a greater thirst for spirituality and ultimate meaning and has turned to such Muslim and Arab humanists as Muhayaddin Ibn Arabi and Jalal al-din Rumi, who have become some of America's best-selling figures. As Americans in particular wrestle with cultural diversity, there are opportunities to learn from the life-affirming side of Islamic precepts and considerable experience with cultural coexistence. There is room to rediscover the extensive Islamic contributions to Western philosophy and science and the spiritual content and interconnectedness that has been consistently devalued in their quest for material progress.

There is here a real opportunity for leadership to emerge from dialogue. Today's challenge for the West is to live up to its liberal tradition, which requires continual openness to new revelations of truth. Today's challenge for Muslims lies in the expansion of the original ideas of Islam, and a willingness to demonstrate curiosity about historical experiences and achievements of the West. Where are the Muslim 'Lawrence of Arabians' who seek to discover and know the Western Christian worldview? Why has there been so little research among Muslim scholars on the Christian perspective of the Western experience, or the encyclicals of the Catholic Church, or the Christian struggle to find religious meaning in politics? Much may be gained in insight from the historical political trials of Christianity for Muslims at this time, as it emerged at a time of profound oppression, injustice and during occupation. How did this path cope with such circumstances, organize their community and move beyond them?

A retreat to a cultural ghetto by any group, be it Muslim, Jewish, Christian, Buddhist or Hindu, is not only a denial of the rich diversity of the modern cultural experience, but also a rejection of responsibility for future generations. Retreat is one of two faces of political fundamentalism, which could be defined as a pathology of culture that arises when a group takes a subset of the basic tenets of a tradition, and either under the pressure of insecurity (in the case of today's Muslims), or in the pursuit of hegemony or total security (in the case of the West), uses them either to seal off others, or to maintain dominance.
In all conflict situations, people under stress react by reducing their own beliefs to a small, workable subset in order to fight and protect themselves. Fundamentalism implies a closing off of the ability to hear and communicate. Yet a return to the larger frame of a culture and its humane values, always present if sought for, can open up the space for understanding, cooperation, or at the very least, mutual respect. The inexorable dynamics of modern history rule out pretensions by any one group or cultural tradition of establishing a world hegemony. We have moved from a humanity that experienced its collective life as fragments of the whole to a humanity experiencing itself as whole.

What can America do?

The United States can best support development of the Islamic world by promoting political participation within structures appropriate to the needs and culture of the people, not by rigidly insisting on the transplantation of Western models or (in the absence of such models) supporting authoritarian regimes. The US and other industrialized nations could support Muslims to develop democratic forms that are appropriate to their needs, rediscover the life-affirming side of Islamic precepts, and develop structures that promise a cultural future for the people, not merely a technological future that negates their values.

Americans can influence the future of democracy in the Islamic world. This is not to say that the United States should substitute pro-democracy interventions for its traditional support of repressive regimes. While repressive regimes can be imposed by subversion, democracy cannot be successfully implanted from the outside, and certainly not by subversive means: it is an indigenous and delicate flower that only flourishes when deeply rooted in the dreams and hopes of the great majority of a nation.

America now has a chance to be part of a new process. The United States can offer the example of a new style of leadership and an ever-broadening concept of democracy that is continually renewed and deepened in American national life. The United States is open for all to see, with all its problems, virtues and strengths visible at will. Today Americans have a chance to be part of the struggle for democracy in the Islamic world. The most powerful weapon in American hands for the promotion and spread of democracy in the region is not subversion, or military aid, or even development aid or diplomacy. It depends on a strong American commitment to the ever-emerging transnational consciousness, one that trusts in the universal promise of democracy. The transnational consciousness is not molded by the media, nor created by elites and intellectuals. It is the cry for human dignity.
The Need for Active Engagement

The West and the Islamic world are out of touch with each other: the West is uncertain that the Muslim world understands its message that it is not waging a holy war against Islam, while Muslims remain uncertain that the US is not embarking on a Crusade. This degree of separation also suggests the antidote: before the West can effectively convey its intentions, it has to understand what is going on in the Arab and Muslim world today. This involves active listening to the voices from the region and engaging with them in sustained dialogue.

Most important for both communities at this time is the need for active engagement. As cultural symbolism assumes greater significance within the Western-Islamic relationship, active engagement with one another, through sustained dialogue, permits each to understand the deeper meanings, associations, and implications of this emerging "clash of symbols." Active engagement permits us to understand and recognize the authentic expressions of human religiosity, and protects us from the politics of manipulated symbolism. It defuses the need to defend or testify to what are legitimate religious beliefs and institutions. Healthy expressions of religiosity express a mature understanding of a faith tradition and a desire for correspondence between symbolism and substance. This system of confrontation we observe today is divorced from larger understandings of material circumstances and spiritual intents, and feeds on the need to address despair through actions predicated upon - and intended to spread - fear. The understanding derived from active engagement would allow the West to avoid entrapment in the system of confrontation, moving beyond immediate negative reactions to Islam to discover human commonality and shared experiences and needs.

It should not be difficult for Western Christians to understand the danger of misappropriating religious symbols, for we need only look at the experience of the Crusades, in which mobilization for material and political goals was cloaked in the symbolism of religious devotion. Sustained dialogue and active engagement give us a fuller awareness of the material circumstances and diverse motivations that shape the use of religious symbolism in politics, enabling us to differentiate that which is mature and substantive from that which is reactive, superficial, and psychologically opportunistic. In this way, we connect genuine religious sources with the symbols that are evoked, and recognize circumstances in which material goals have misappropriated sacred symbolism. We acquire greater discernment, and avoid both prematurely narrowed policy options and clouded distinctions between those who are innocent and those who are guilty.
Conclusion: Toward Humanistic Cultural Pluralism

Every community has experienced a flowering of Us culture. There are many roads to humanistic cultural pluralism, many potential systems of communitarian, free, creative life, and many potential languages, arts, music, dramas, and literatures that are compatible with humanistic ethics. No doubt, every community needs some 'cultural revolution' to remove those things that dehumanize society or inhibit human development. But only as the primacy of the cultural community is made clear will creativity have a chance to replace conformity, with cooperation replacing competition.

As Muslims seek to harmonize the Islamic spirit of communalism with the changing conditions of their own societies, they have a new opportunity for conceptualizing the nature of Muslim citizenship and assuming a greater role in the shaping of their history. A retreat to a cultural ghetto by any group, be it Muslim, Jewish, Christian, Buddhist, or Hindu, is not only a denial of the rich diversity of the modern cultural experience, but also a rejection of responsibility for future generations.

Historically, both the West and Islam have relied too much on the self-evident testimonies of their beliefs and accomplishments, without sufficient recourse to genuine interpersonal or inter-civilizational dialogue and bridge building. A new and mutually rewarding relationship has the potential to emerge between Islam and the West, where accumulated wisdom and insights for necessary progress provide the basis of a valued coexistence. Such a relationship would be premised not on ideas of cultural superiority, but on mutual respect and openness to cultural eclecticism. Common ground can be made when there is a mutual exchange of each other realities towards the individual and the community, Muslims and Westerners can learn from each other and cooperate in the pursuit of humane values. The West and Islam are not destined to meet as rivals; in knowing each other, the West can give Islam the best that it has in exchange for the best of Islam.

Popular slogans to the contrary, Islam and the West are not inherently incompatible. The first story — the dominant story in political and strategic analyses — informs us of tensions which do in fact exist, but it neglects the deep resonances between Islamic and Western civilizations which are cited by the reformers and specialists who narrate the second story. The third story exists only in the form of a working outline; we have attempted here to suggest the contents of future versions which draw lessons from the ongoing dialogue.

The third story points to the prospect of a cooperative, nonadversarial relationship between Islamic and Western civilizations. Such a relationship would be premised not on ideas of cultural superiority, but on mutual respect
and openness to cultural eclecticism. Muslims and Westerners can learn from each other and cooperate in the pursuit of humane values. Seeming contradictions will have to be dealt with on a higher plane. If Western individualism is to bring lasting happiness to the individual, a model of free community will have to be explored; if Muslim ideals of community are to reach their fulfillment, it will be necessary to revisit traditions, which underscore the dignity of the individual. Muslims can benefit from the Western experience with political pluralism, and Westerners can extract lessons from centuries of Islamic experimentation with cultural pluralism. In this way, we learn together that the whole world needs the whole world.