

## *Role of international politics in inciting sectarian strife*

*And*

### *Islamic consciousness toward sectarianism*

*This research is part of several subjects undertaken by the researcher, for which he was awarded a diploma in political science and international relations from the Syrian International Academy.*

*This research was posted on the Academy's website ([www.sia-sy.net](http://www.sia-sy.net)) as a summarized version and that is for technical reasons, unfortunately it contained many literal errors; thus the original version will be re-posted.*

*The researcher wonders why the relationship between the different components of Syrian religious mosaic: Sunnis, Alawites, Christians, Shiites, Druzes, Ismailis and other are not spoken about openly and transparently, and for how long the rigid walls of history will still separate these components through misconceptions?*

*The researcher hopes that he will be able to address part of the sectarian question in Syria in a proper and balanced way.*

*The researcher would like first to elucidate certain points: the concept of compassion or tolerance doesn't imply in any way loosening or diluting any belief or divine principle of any person. Genuine faith is a vast and great mercy for all people. [1]*

*Variety and diversity is an attribute of human richness that adds more vividness and vigor to life and civilization itself consists of thousands of different colors, and indeed cultural integration is not a negative thing.*

*I am, as a Muslim, very delighted and proud that my country is the end product of ten thousand years of civilization and Syria is very rich in many beautiful colors.*

*As long as we live in this world we have to know that human strength of lies in their diversity and not in their conformity. What furnish our world with this fascinating beauty are without doubt the many colors around us, and diversity is one of the signs of God as stated in the Holy Quran: {And among His Signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the difference of your languages and colors. Verily, in that are indeed signs of men of sound knowledge}. [2]... [3]*

*Another Quranic verse, which states: {And if your Lord had so willed, He could surely have made mankind one nation}, [4] clearly conveys this meaning in the sense that God created people to be different.*

*In this earthly world we must do righteous good deeds and we should have mercy on one another and we should invite other people to do good deeds also but only by wisdom and fair preaching. Allah Says that there is no compulsion in religion and that He will judge between people in the day of Resurrection about that wherein they have been differing.*

*The researcher rejects some immature ideas for having opposite effect by diluting people's beliefs and making hasty propagandizing statements, which not only complicates things further but also only fails to lay down a foundation of tolerance and creates an atmosphere of tension, alienation and sensitivity. [5]*

*The researcher believes that the rhetoric of some figures in the media about the unity of religions is only a plot to dilute all religions and that those figures are merely puppets operated by irreligious masters tending to manipulate the public.*

## Dedication

To

The honorable scholars and genuine Islamic thinkers who were underappreciated during their life and after their death:

*Ahmad Mazhar Al-Azmeh*

*And*

*Mohammed Bin Kamal Al-Khatib Al-Hasani*

To

*Members of the Islamic Civilization Society*

*in every time and place*

I dedicate my modest work



Role of international **politics** in inciting sectarian strife and Islamic consciousness toward sectarianism

(Islamic Civilization Society as a showpiece)

Written by Ahmad Mouaz Al-Khatib Al-Hasani



In most parts of the world the impact of international **politics** is clearly visible in inciting sectarian strife. The most recent example of that is the statement made by former American president Jimmy Carter, who warned that a civil war and a regional religious war will erupt if the Sudanese elections and peace agreement failed or collapsed. [6]

This in fact was a clear message not intended to extinguish the fire which was devouring southern Sudan and Darfur but to psychologically prepare Sudan and the Region for war and to implement the plot designed to disintegrate Sudan.

The international community was taken by surprise by the sectarian dimension of former American president George W Bush words when he spoke about the new Crusades, and again when he made another statement saying that the United States is invited to deliver the gift of freedom granted by God to every person in every part of the world. [7]

Observers of the role of international politics in inciting sectarian strife will perfectly understand why the first fruit in General Goro's reign was the establishment of the Greater State of Lebanon and then the establishment of the Alawite State by virtue of two decrees issued on 31 August 1920. This was followed by the establishment of the State of Damascus, the State of Aleppo and later on by the State of Druze on 4 March 1921. [8]

Those observers will also not be surprised when they know that France's foreign policy contemplated the idea of assassinating a French agent or loyalist in Syria to force France to intervene in our country. [9]

This brief research will demonstrate the role of international **politics** in inciting sectarian strife and will underline Islamic consciousness toward sectarianism through the Islamic Civilization Society, which is one of the leading Islamic beacons in the Levant.

### **Point at issue of the research**

Sectarianism is a real challenge in our societies and the researcher doesn't believe that politicians, leaders of world opinion, theologians or spiritual guides can bring about any real change in their miserable societies unless they rely on a solid foundation of thought. So is there an effort that has not been yet exploited? That what the researcher is attempting to shed light upon, not through something of his own making but through a deeply-rooted Islamic experience he profoundly gained from, which will serve as a starting point for a long road ahead.

### **Significance of the research**

Since Syria is the mosaic of the world and one of its most beautiful paintings, it has always been the battleground for clashing interests, most dangerously the interests of Western powers, who see in sectarian sentiments and times of unawareness a propitious opportunity to step in. Therefore any program aimed to achieve unity is a vital one and will be addressed in this research in order to achieve our ultimate goal; a free and invincible nation.

### **Objectives of the research**

The research aims to elucidate not only the concept of tolerance but also the compassion that has always been shown by all sectarian groups to each other in the Levant and its heart; Damascus.

For so many ages now, people in this area, regardless of their religious or sectarian affiliation, always concentrated on the things that unite them and they always treated each other mercifully, thus avoiding any sectarian conflict.

The research also aims to underline the role of international politics in exploiting sectarian sentiments and the role of Islamic consciousness in preventing such exploitation through pure Islamic thought, which has always been a unique and unprecedented device that succeeded in uniting the nation, safeguarding it from the wicked international politics and preventing it from fading away in history.

### **Hypotheses of the research**

Over so many years, several tools were used by all sides to rise above sectarian barriers. Some resorted to political authority and crackdown while others resorted to military force and it is may be fair to say that

they all resorted to sectarian incitement or evoked certain historical incidents, thus drowning in the dark crypts of history.

So, one may wonder whether this was the right path to follow, and if not, what is the right path and is there a previous experience that may be an example to follow? This is what this research will discuss in the following pages.

### **Methodology of the research**

The researcher basically applied a historical and descriptive researching approach, but within a comprehensive empirical method, through which, and during more than 25 years of hard work, he managed to monitor the maturity and balance of the ideas put forward and test these ideas by conducting various personal or collective experiments in which excellent and concrete results were achieved.

### **Tools of the research**

The main reference material available to the researcher, such as historical sources, documents and magazines, were his main researching tools, in addition to formal meeting minutes and summary record, which were all referred to in this research.

The fact that the researcher spent more than twenty years in the management board of the Islamic Civilization Society, nine of which he served as chairman, did help him in this enormous task through living with the ideas of those who enriched the Islamic Civilization Society and established a construct of objective and balanced Islamic thought that can embrace all people.

### **Previous studies**

According to the researcher's best knowledge, this subject was not examined explicitly before, thus this research is a leading one on two levels:

- Straightforwardness in tackling a number of sensitive sectarian issues from an Islamic perspective relevant to Syria as a typical example
- Uncovering a rich history and an advanced thought endeavor that has been exerted by the Islamic Civilization Society to build up an umbrella under which all religious groups in our nation are brought together in an atmosphere of peace and harmony.

The researcher stresses that the thought introduced in this research is not of his own making but is the product of a deeply-rooted school which has always been underappreciated. The researcher simply presents historical facts and he is not trying to please anyone nor engage in political confrontations with any side and he did his utmost effort to be impartial and objective.

### **Difficulties faced by the research**

The only difficulty the research faced is the broad scope of the subject, which was surprising even to the researcher himself, in addition to the existence of a wide variety of creative ideas and distinctive patterns of social behavior, which ultimately required even more efforts. Surely, a topic like the deceitful nature of international politics is very wide-ranging to be tackled in a modest research such as this.

### **Methodology of the research**

The research diagram is as follows:

- Preamble.
- Preliminarily explanatory sections.
- The Islamic Civilization Society in a nutshell.
- Summary.
- Bibliography.
- Chapter one: "The sneaking claws of international politics".
- Chapter two: "Sectarian compassion and the pioneering role of Islam",
- Chapter three: "The injustice that crushed all".
- Chapter four: "Thought rising above sectarianism".
- Summary.
- References.
- Documents.
- Appendixes.

## **The Islamic Civilization Society in a nutshell**

Founded in 1932 by a number of Muslim scholars and reformists, the Islamic Civilization Society is one of the oldest civil organizations in Syria.

The purpose of this Society evolved from the notion that colonization comes with its own schools of thought, art, culture and education. So resisting this colonization by arms alone is not enough and we should equip ourselves with the necessary qualities to fight back via thought, art, culture and education.

The primary mission of Islamic Civilization Society is to show the true face of all aspects of Islam; the call to Islam, Islamic culture, noble qualities of Islam, fairness and evenhandedness in Islam and the spread of the influential Islamic civilization, and seek to revive these principles. [11]

Abdel Karim Al-Yafi says: "Part of the religious sentiments in Syria was first materialized in the Islamic Civilization Society, which as founded in 1932. After its establishment, the Society issued its first monthly magazine followed by various publications and gave some public lectures on Islam and social life [12]".

The Islamic Civilization Society Magazine continued to be issued regularly for forty nine years until it was forced to shut down.

Over the years, the Islamic Civilization Society had in its membership prominent scholars and thinkers [13] and it has always been distinguished by its openness and its abstention from being part of any political conflict, and also by its firm rejection of violence as a method of work.

The Islamic Civilization Society was never an underground organization and it still, despite of being banned from conducting any cultural activity, playing a leading role by helping the poor and providing medical care for thousands of patients every year. [14]



Some of Islamic Tamaddum's members at the beginning of fourteenth of the 20<sup>th</sup> century .

From the right: some of the main leaders: commander Rashid Bakdounes, commander A'ref Al-tawwam, Sheikh Muhammad Ali Zubian, Sheikh Muhammad Bahjat Al-Bitar, sheikh Muhammad hasan Al-shatti (chairman), sheikh Muhammad Ahmad Duhman, Sheikh Khaled Al-khani, commander Sedki Al-Kaylani, and Issam (the son of sheikh Al-shatti).

Behind: Ahmad mazhar Al-Azmeh, Dr. Kamel Shashet, Anwar Sultan, Saied Gunaim, Khaer Allah Subhi Al-Ja'afari, and others.

[1]- One of the most beautiful examples which show how religion plants mercy in our souls is an old story we heard from our forefathers.

The story goes by saying that a religious man was dining when an old man over 80 years of age passed near him. The old man asked the religious man "Could you give me so some food sir; I am very weak and hungry".

The religious looked at him and asked "Where do you come from?" The old man replied "I am from the land of hell (a virtual place where all people are unbelievers)". The religious man asked the old man "I hope that you are not a follower of the corrupt faith of those people".

The old man replied very politely "I am sorry to tell you sir that I follow the faith of my people in that land". The religious man said "If you abandoned your corrupt faith and became a believer then I can give you food". The old man refused to do that and walked away.

At night, the believer saw (in his dream) an angel telling him "This day you have drawn on yourself the wrath of Allah". The believer was astonished and he said to the angel "I ask forgiveness from Allah. Why is that, I did many good deeds this today especially?" The angel said "You refused to feed the unbeliever even a mouthful of food before he abandons his faith, even though Allah has been feeding him for eighty years."

[2]- Surah Ar-Rum, 22.

[3]- From a letter sent by the researcher to the Dutch MP K. Wilders on (april 2008 ) due to his attack on Islam. This letter was posted on many website. See the Arabic text on: <http://www.darbuna.net/word/?ID=907>.

See the Dutch text on:

<http://www.islamwijzer.nl/forums/vbnews.php?do=viewarticle&artid=94&title=Open%20brief%20aan%20Wilders>

[4]- Surah Hud, 118.

[5]- A mufti was once asked about the difference between Islam and Christianity. He replied by saying that the difference is very simple; we Muslims say Mjadarah (a traditional Arabic food), while they say burgul, lentice and rice, which are the three ingredients of this food (the mufti here pointing out to the Trinity).

*This logic is unacceptable to Muslims and Christians alike because to Muslims monotheism is the main pillar of Islam and to Christianity Trinity is a deeply-rooted religious doctrine and simplifying things by this way to win the hearts and minds of the commons leads to no way and is totally rejected on the basis of Sharia and on the basis of common sense.*

*A religious official once told an American delegation: "If Prophet Muhammad himself ordered me to kill people I will tell him that he is not a prophet!" These words were spoken in an impolite and hasty manner in an attempt by this official to impress his guests and demonstrate the tolerant nature of Islam.*

*This type of behavior is totally unacceptable to Muslims and these words should've never been uttered. This incident was commented on by the prominent Syrian theologian Al-Butti, who said that this official was only trying to feign knowledge and place himself in an intellectual status above Prophet Muhammad (God's blessing and peace be upon him). The prominent Egyptian theologian Al-Qaradawi also commented on this matter in Al Sharia wa Al Hayat TV program by saying that these words were not spoken out of courtesy but out of hypocrisy.*

[6]- See the article dated GMT 22:21, 11 April, on:

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/arabic/middleeast/2010/04/100411\\_sudan\\_elex\\_carte\\_r\\_tc2.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/arabic/middleeast/2010/04/100411_sudan_elex_carte_r_tc2.shtml)

[7]- See the New York Times, issue entitled "Bush and God" dated 11/3/2003 and the article written by Moutaz Al-Khatib published on Islam Online on:

[http://www.islamonline.net/servlet/Satellite?c=ArticleA\\_C&cid=1173695208143&pagename=Zone-Arabic-Daawa%2FDWALayout](http://www.islamonline.net/servlet/Satellite?c=ArticleA_C&cid=1173695208143&pagename=Zone-Arabic-Daawa%2FDWALayout)

[8]- Nizar Kayali: "A Study in Syria's Contemporary Political History (1920-1950)", Damascus, Dar Tlas, 1997, 47-49.

[9]- From a report issued by a French minister in Cairo, 16/11/1912, see:

- Wajih Al-Kawtharani: "The Levant in the Beginnings of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century" (a reading into the documents), Arab Development Institute, Tripoli, Libya, 1980, 175.

[10]- *The Islamic Civilization Society is still banned from issuing its well-known magazine and is also banned from staging any cultural event and it was illegally forced in the end of 2008 to restructure its management board.*

[11]- *The bylaw of the Islamic Civilization Society was declared under No 490 on 8 June 1960.*

[12]- *Abdel Karim Al-Yafi: "Religion and Spiritual Revival in the Arab World Today", Damascus, publications of the Ministry of Culture, 2004, 16.*

[13]- *Among these scholars and thinkers are: Hasan Al-Shatti, Rashid Bakdounes, Mohammed Jamil Al-Khani, Saeed Al-Afghani, Mustafa Al-Zarqa, Mohammed Bahjat Al-Bitar, Ahmad Mazhar Al-Azmeh, Abdel Fattah Al-Imam, Mohammed Ahmad Dahman, Aref Al-Tawaam, Mohammed Saeed Al-Bani, Ezeddine Alam Al-Din Al-Tanoukhi, Ahmad Hamdi Al-Khayat, Salah Eddine Al-Munajjed, Izat Al-Tarabulsi and Mohammed Bin Kamal Al-Khatib.*

[14]- *See Ahmad Mouaz Al-Khatib Al-Hasani, Journey of Islamic Modernization, on the occasion of the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the Islamic Civilization Society. A lecture given in Damascus on 2 June 2007 posted on [www.darbuna.net](http://www.darbuna.net) and was also published in French by ashreb-achrek, N 198-Hiver 2008-2009, Paris, 79-89.*

## **Role of international politics in inciting sectarian strife**

**And**

## **Islamic consciousness toward sectarianism**

### **Chapter one**

#### **The sneaking claws of international politics**

Many things cannot be understood without going back to their deeply hidden roots.

In order to figure out why some international political powers insist on interfering in our internal affairs and in order to pinpoint their mechanisms, we must, as Sataa Al-Husari once put it, dig a little bit into history. [1]

Al-Husari maintains: "The French are used to regard the Crusades as one of the great achievements of their exalted forefathers and they regard the Latin emirates that were once formed on parts of Syria soil during the Crusades as part of their glorious history. Thus, it is natural to have in their inner-selves that strong desire to fulfill the purpose of the Crusades and bring back those emirates to life again".

This yearning made the French pose themselves as the protectors of Christianity in the East as a pretext to take hold of the Levant again one day.

This policy prompted France to dispatch many Catholic missions in order to establish various religious and educational institutes in every part of the Near East in general and the Arab East in particular. [2]

The leaflets dropped by French aircrafts over all Syrian territories, as ordered by General Goro before the Day of Maysaloun, tried excessively to play the sectarian card. In these leaflets Goro address Syrians by saying: "France will not use aircrafts against Syrians but only on one condition: no French or Christian person shall be killed, otherwise any such act will incur severe retaliation." [3]

In the memorandum sent to King Faisal by General Goro on 14 July 1920 [4], the latter reiterated that massacres are being committed against Christians in Marjioun and that Christians are also being

attacked in al- Qaroun. He added that there has been an attack on Druzes in Houran's Wadi al-Qarn and said that France objects on returning Kamel Bey Al-Asaad, one of the instigators of the strife in the Shiite lands, to Syria.

General Goro also expressed his uneasiness about the big event held to salute the anti-French Aldnadshah, and he finally expressed his disquietude over the continuous support of Sheikh Saleh Al-Ali, the champion of anarchy and hatred toward France, as he put it, in Al Nasiriah Mountains.

The French attempts to fuel sectarian sentiments in Syria were pellucid and not restricted to playing the "protection of minorities" card.

France actually tried to play with fire by seeking to drive a wedge between Syrians by instigating sectarian hatred.

Hasan Al-Hakim [5] points out that during the time of the Atasi government in 1920, France insisted that Syria comprises Arabic-speaking people, but we insisted that Syria only comprises Syrians. Afterward, the Franco-Syrian Treaty of 1936 came to acknowledge the existence of Lebanese, Alawites Druzes and Syrians, in addition to the people of Alexandretta. This Treaty maintains that the peoples of these areas are totally separated from one another and that the ties which bring them together are frailer than the spider's web. [6]

French greedy ambitions in our country are still very much alive and they should be regarded as very serious. These ambitions can be best expressed by the words of one of the engineers of French politics: "France is not in France alone, it is wherever French roots exist and in every place where its army achieved glorious accomplishments and where the French flag once flew." [7]

One may easily perceive immorality in international politics, which exploits the noblest of things to achieve narrow interests.

This is evident in the restrictions imposed by the French secular establishment on clergymen inside France and the confiscation of their property; however, anti-church actions are not easily sold overseas. [8]

International politics used all possible means to consolidate its presence, including Christian missionaries.

In one incident, Dalayee (who was one of the fiercest opponents of French policies toward Syria in the French Parliament) had no choice but to praise the work of these Christian missions by saying "I don't deny the glorious work carried out in Syria, whether at the hands of Catholic missionaries or at the hands of secular figures." [9]

Therefore resorting to Marxism or nationalism, according to the German or French model, or attaching additional importance to the views of Fredrick Nietzsche for example is no longer hard to understand because dismantling the doctrinal and intellectual structures of ethnic and even religious minorities is inevitable within the French education system and the westernization policies. [10]

Syrians of all religious groups and sects had very heightened awareness toward colonial policies and their true motivations.

Fares Al-Khouri commented on General Goro's words to Saladin (We are back) at his tomb by saying to his students: "Goro wanted to cover his true intentions under the veil of religion exactly as did the Crusaders before that in order to drive a wedge between Arabs.

He intended to convince Christians that he came to Syria for them. In fact, these words had an opposite effect and instead of undermining Arab unity they undermined trust in France since its true intentions to sever Arab ties and destroy Pan-Arab aspirations were all but exposed.

Undoubtedly, averting the dangers of colonization is dependant upon our consciousness of the plots designed to separate us, upon avoiding anything that would stir up differences between us and also upon our ability to feel for one another and to think more about our country and strive for its safety and freedom." [11]

France's policy was not so successful in hiding the sectarian card it has been using relentlessly; something which was condemned by Hasan Al-Hakim by saying: "Let us remember that France waited to seize the opportunity offered by the Assyrian strife in Iraq only to claim that the Treaty has a serious flaw in terms of not providing protection for minorities. So this protection must be included for certainty and should be a guarantee in the Franco-Syrian Treaty and its annexes." [12]

Abdel Rahman Al-Shahabandar also condemned those wicked claws that are trying to inflame sectarian sentiments by writing an article in the Arab Association Magazine, Cairo, about the protection of minorities in

Syria. In this article the writer commented on the Franco-Syrian Treaty of 1936 and condemned the attitude taken by French newspapers by saying "The inspiration for those newspapers came from several official sources to incite sectarian strife and exaggerate the issue of the protection of minorities." [13]

Russian ambitions were not less greedy and the Russian policy tried to conquer the Ottoman Empire and reach Constantinople and the shores of the Mediterranean in fulfillment of the will of Peter the Great under the pretext that Russia's religion originated from Constantinople. [14]

So the world's super powers distributed the roles between themselves many centuries ago. The Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca of 1774 gave the Russians the right to protect the Orthodox Christians in the East.

French greedy ambitions on the other hand were hidden under the pretext of protecting the Catholic and Maronite communities, while Britain tried to penetrate the Druze community [15]

The British role was very deceitful and Britain used all means possible to disintegrate the Ottoman Empire by severing the deeply-rooted ties between Arabs and Turks. [16]

The allotment of shares had more profound impact than most people imagined and this fact was further consolidated by the massacres between Christians and Druzes in what was known as the 1806 strife, which was incited by France despite posing itself as the protector of Christianity in the Arab East. [17]

It became clear later on that France engineered that strife (this was verified by the reports issued by the British Consul in Damascus Richard Wood and also by the Lanos report issued by the assistant French Consul in Damascus at the time).

The facts soon surfaced that the French conspired with the Egyptians in order to force the Ottoman Sultan to make certain concessions to annex the Levant with Egypt. This was to be achieved by inciting the Ottoman wali in Lebanon and the Druzes in Mount Lebanon, Mont Hermon district and Houran to attack Maronites and other Christians. [18]

Fouad Pasha actually tried to retaliate against the Druzes but he was forced to back down as a result of British intervention. [19]

Despite its relatively limited experience, the United States tried its best to play the same game and it began its intervention through the Protestant missions. [20]

The first fruit of American efforts was the inauguration of the Syrian Protestant Institute in Beirut in 1866, which was renamed later "The American University". [21]

In 1919, France and Britain were engaged in a bitter dispute during a conference held to discuss the fate of the territories of the former Ottoman Empire and which country will be in charge of the new situation.

President Wilson deemed this a favorable opportunity to send an international inquiry committee [22] to inquire about the demands of the Syrian people and their legitimate right for self determination.

On the 9<sup>th</sup> of May 1945, the French unleashed a bloodbath against Syrians when they attacked and occupied the Parliament building after killing all its guards in a chilling massacre.

This gave the Americans the opportunity to express their support for the Syrian government when the American and British commissioned ministers were called by the Syrian Foreign Minister Jamil Mardam and were given formal protest against the French barbaric action in order to be conveyed to their respective governments. [25]

Accordingly, the American Deputy Secretary of State Grew declared in a press conference held in 31 May 1945 that the recent incidents in the Middle East caused a great concern within the American Government, which was notified about the intervention of British troops and sanctioned it in order to prevent more bloodshed in the East. [26]

Appearances may differ but the core is similar, and whether that core is French, British, Russian or American, the ultimate goal is the same; intervention, domination and supremacy and all in the name of human rights.

The facts have proven beyond any doubt that the claws of international politics are tainted and that the world's super powers are seeking, through the distribution of roles in the open and behind closed doors, to undermine the legitimate interests of the peoples of the world and trade in them by inciting sectarian sentiments, and the examples are plenty:

from Syria and the Middle East, to Sudan and Rwanda, to Iran, Iraq and Afghanistan.

[1]- *Sataa Al-Husari: Pan-Arab thinker, originally from the city of Aleppo, born in Yemen in 1882 to a father who was Sharia court judge and Al-Azhar graduate. He received his education in Turkey and when he returned to Syria he established the Ministry of Education during the rule of King Faisal I. During his lifetime he laid down comprehensive educational plans in Syria and Iraq and was appointed head of the Directorate of Antiquities and then dean of the Faculty in Law in Iraq. He established the first institute for Arabic studies and after his retirement and before his death in Baghdad he dedicated his time for writing and wrote more than fifty books.*

See a list of his translated works in:

- Abdel Qader Ayyash: "Lexicon of Syrian Writers in the Twentieth Century", Damascus, Dar Al Fikr, H 1405/AD 1985. (129), (131).

[2]- *Sataa Al-Husari (Abu Khaldoun): Day of Maysaloun (a Page in Arab Modern History), Beirut, Al Kashaaf Library, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 1984, 8.*

[3]- *Same reference: 318, translated from the French text published in the French magazine ASIA.*

[4]- *Same reference: 284-292, date of the memorandum is 14 July 1920. We can ironically see the French sympathy for the various religious groups. In fact the majority of those who were attacked and killed were thought to be associated with France regardless of their intentions, most notably Alaa Eddine Al-Droubi (The Sunni Prime Minister) and Abdel Rahman Al-Yusuf (The Sunni political figure from Houran, who was killed in what was known as the Khirbat Gazalah incident).*

[5]- *Hasan Al-Hakim: a prominent Syrian nationalist born in Damascus in 1886. He received his education in Damascus and Istanbul and was appointed secretary of the Peoples Party, which was under the leadership of Abdel Rahman Al-Shahabandar. He was arrested by the French and was sentenced to death, so he fled to Palestine before returning to Syria. During his life he occupied several official positions, most notably as the prime minister in 1941-1942, during which France declared the independence of Syria in 27 September 1941. He became*

*prime minister once more in the end of 1951 and died in Damascus in 1974.*

*For more information on this subject, see: Mohammed Sharif Al-Sawwaf: "Encyclopedia of Damascene Families", Damascus, Beit Al Hikma, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, H 1431 / AD 2010, 1 645.*

*[6]- Hasan Al-Hakim: "A Page in the Life of Al-Shahabandar", DM, Royal Scientific Society Press, 1980, 145.*

*[7]- Sataa Al-Husari: "Day of Maysaloun", previous reference, 338. These words were spoken by Aristid Pripan (one of the engineers of French politics) on 25 June 1920 in the French Parliament.*

*[8]- Same reference, 9.*

*[9]- Sataa Al-Husari: "Day of Maysaloun", previous reference, 345.*

*[10]- Adnan Mohammed Zarzour: "Mustafa Al-Sibae (the striving Muslim preacher, reformer and scholar)", Damascus, Dar Al Qalam, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, H 1424 / AD 2003, 66.*

*[11]- Fares Al-Khoury: "Fares Al-Khoury Papers", through the benefaction of Colette Khoury, Damascus, Dar Tlas, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 2001, 2-83.*

*[12]- Hasan Al-Hakim: "A Page in the Life of Al-Shahabandar", previous reference, 153.*

*[13]- Hasan Al-Hakim: "A page in the Life of Al-Shahabandar", previous reference, 151. The same article contains a critique of a commentary written by the French writer Jean Pierre Gerard published in the French Republic Newspaper on 21 November 1936, in which he says: "Lebanon, which is ruled by trustworthy men with unequivocal love, is a Christian country on the Mediterranean, whose destiny had been associated with our country's destiny for many centuries".*

*[14]- Abdel Aziz Al-Azmeh: "The Levant Mirror" (history of the Levant and its people), reportage by Najdat Fathi Safwa, Damascus, Dar Al Fikr, H 1422 / AD 2002, 294 (the quote is from the reporter's words).*

*[15]- Michael Brek Al-Dimashqi: "History of the Levant (1720-1782)", reportage and presentation by Ahmad Ghassan Sabano, study and document series of the history of Damascus, the Levant (3), Damascus, Dar Qutaiba, H 1402 / AD 1982. The author is a Damascene historian*

and priest and former head of Virgin Mary Monastery in Sidnaya in 1768. The quote is from the reporter's introduction: Ahmad Ghassan Sabano, 7.

[16]- Abdel Aziz Al-Azmeh: "The Levant Mirror", previous reference 382. In these pages the authors shows how the British deceived Husein ibn Ali, the Sharif of Mecca, and succeeded in driving a wedge between Arabs and Turks. The author also explains, from his personal experience, how the British were inciting the Arab tribes to revolt against the Turks by sending weapons and encouraging tribal followers to buy more and more weapons. In one incident, the author mentions that the British ruler in India sent rifles to the Iraqi tribe of Bani Lam with the following engraved phrase "When Arabs Will Rise". See pages 404-405.

[17]- From the interesting references on the subject of the sectarian strife of 1806, previous reference, 316-326.

[18]- Mohammed Saeed Al-Istwani: "Damascene Scenes and Events in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> Century", reportage by Asaad Al-Istwani, Damascus, Dar Al Jumhouriah, 1994, 107 (the quote is from the reporter's words).

[19]- Abdel Aziz Al-Azmeh: "The Levant Mirror", previous reference, 325.

[20]- The first Anglicans in the Levant were Jones King and Ellis Smith. The latter came to Beirut in 1827 and died there in 1857 and he spoke Arabic fluently. Smith established with his wife the first female school in Beirut In 1834, which is the year in which the Protestants moved their press from Malta to Beirut. He began translating the Old Testament from Hebrew and Greek in 1849 with the help of Butrus Al-Bustani. And after his death his colleague Cornelius Van Dick continued his work with Al-Bustani and they finished this huge task in 1860. See Fares Al-Khoury Papers, previous reference, 29, 1.

[21]- Nizar Kayali: "A Study in Syria's Contemporary Political History", previous source, 247.

[22]- Same reference, 35. This reference mentions that the King-Crane Committee of Inquiry issued its report in 1919, in which it concludes that the Syrian people demand complete independence and refuse any form of mandate and firmly reject the Zionist plan. However, if a mandate for a limited period must be imposed to please the world's super powers,

*the Syrian people primarily prefer the United States to serve as the mandatory power and Britain as a second choice, but they refuse France as the mandatory power in Syria.*

*[23]- Same reference, 34.*

*[24]- The researcher records his extreme sorrow over allowing the French Embassy in Damascus to stage its annual French National Day event in July 2010, which is the same day that commemorates the Day of Maysaloun.*

*In this day of history Syrian patriots from all religious groups were imprisoned and tortured in Damascus Citadel and many were executed at the hands of the French.*

*[25]- Same reference, 175-195.*

*[26]- Nizar Kayali: "A Study in Syria's Contemporary Political History", previous reference, 178, quoted from the U.S. Department of State Bulletin, volume 12, dated 3/6/1945, p. 1013-1014. This bulletin mentions that the United State Government sent a memorandum to the French Government dated 28 May 1945 stating: "There is a feeling in the United States and other countries that the representatives of France are threatening to use military action to force the governments of Syrian and Lebanon to grant privileges of political, cultural and military nature. Syria and Lebanon are members in the United Nations and their representatives are now taking part alongside the representatives of France and the United States to discuss ways to guarantee international security and resist aggression. Therefore the United States Government amiably calls on the government of France to carefully reconsider its policy toward Syria and Lebanon in order to find a way to show the two countries and the whole world that France, in dealing with the countries of the East, wishes to treat Syria and Lebanon as independent states enjoying full sovereignty as members in the international community".*

## Chapter two

### **Sectarian compassion and the pioneering role of Islam**

The word tolerance is often used to indicate a state of sectarian stability in society. However, the researcher found out that the situation in Syria needs a word that can convey deeper meaning to demonstrate the state in which Syrians, particularly in Damascus, have been living for centuries. So, the researcher suggests the word compassion, which indicates a real human bond that rarely exists in any other place in the world.

A shiny example of this sectarian compassion is the incident which occurred in 1777 when the ruler of Sidon, Lebanon, Ahmad Pasha (nicknamed Al-Jazzar or the butcher) looted Druze villages and Christian monasteries and enslaved Druze and Christian women and sold them in Damascus. The families of those who were enslaved came to Damascus in search of their love ones and wandered the streets and lanes of the city begging for food and many of them died of hunger and cold. The people of Damascus bought many of those who were enslaved by the soldiers and they set them free without seeking any reward but Allah's countenance. [14]

This profound humanitarian action has its deep roots in the history of Damascus and it became synonymous with Damascenes.

The well-known Arab traveler and author Ibn Batuttah wrote in his book Rihlah: "The religious endowments in Damascus are numerous to mention and they grant money to those in need. For example there are endowments for those unable to make the trip to Mecca for hajj, in which a sufficient amount of money is granted to the person who makes the trip to Mecca on behalf of the disabled person.

Other types include endowments dedicated to provide bridal trousseaus to girls from needy families [15], endowments dedicated to pay money to release captives, endowments dedicated to provide food, clothing and travel money to wayfarers, endowments dedicated to provide money for public works, such as building and paving roads, and other endowments that serve as various charitable funds". [16]

## Chapter three

### The injustice that crushed all

Some religious groups hold a firm belief that they were, more than others, the victim of injustice. This conviction has roots in the lack of awareness of the historical circumstance of Syria during the recent decades since grave injustices were done to all Syrians indiscriminately, and the long standing political oppression eventually left no feeling of stability or security.

Although some families from certain religious groups formed alliances with the ruling elite to achieve common interests, the political establishment deviously made those families [1], and other influential religious figures, work against the interests of their own people and even take part in consolidating the injustice that was engulfing all Syrians in an unprecedented way. [2]

Like every other society in the world, some social tensions were exclusive to certain religious groups (which is a very broad subject to cover), but the injustice and crackdown of basic freedoms were inclusive of all.

The following words mentioned by a Christian historian bring back memories of the repressive actions of the *tafakjiah* [3] in the old days: "Those people were used to eavesdrop on any door and if they heard any word against the ruler they storm into the house, catch the person inside and extort money from him (the commons used the *verb balasa* to signify this action, which is an informal word meaning to steal someone's money or to pinch him). [4]

The situation became very bad that people, Muslims as well as Christians [5], were afraid to speak loudly in their private homes and they used to whisper to each another whether during the day or at night".

Injustice has an ugly face regardless of its source and people remember that the year 1776, which witnessed many appalling incidents, was a drought year scarce in rain and abundant in injustices done by all sides, even by the Patriarch. [6]

This historian points out: "When the highest political authority is corrupt, its adherents and sponsors indisputably serve as the keys of corruption. Positions in the highest places in the state, such as *al wilaya* (provincial

government), *al daftardar* [7] (records keeper), *al qadaa* (judicial authorities), *al iftaa* (office of the mufti) and *naqabat al ashraf* (association of feudal nobility) and other, were not awarded based on qualification or merit but in return for bribes. Government positions were sold in auctions and ambitious bidders competed vigorously to win them." [8]

In the incidents which took place in H 1166/ AD 1752-1753, Al Badiri Al-Hallaq recalls that shrines of the companions of Prophets Muhammad were looted by thieves, who removed the window of Bilal Al-Habashi Shrine, stole the window of Abdel Jabar Bin Abdel Qadder Al-Kilani Shrine and also stole the pall of the casket of Obai, located next to Sheikh Rislun Mosque. [9]

Political and administrative corruption was a major factor in the disturbances that took place during that period. Confrontations intensified between local emirs and feudal rules on one hand, and between those emirs and rulers and provincial governors on the other, in addition to the confrontations between the deposed provincial governors and the ones who replaced them.

Damascus paid a heavy price as a result of these confrontations [10] and the presence of large number of soldiers and foreigners caused mischief to appear in the land. Soldiers and nomads looted rural and urban areas alike, particularly the mercenary soldiers known as *dalatia*, *lawand*, *sakban*, *maghariba* [11], *muwasila*, *takarta*, *baghada* and others. [12]

When Damascus forced the soldiers of Salim Pasha to leave after his death, those soldiers looted Al Mazzeh, Al Mouadamia, Al Jdaida and Artouz (towns in rural Damascus) and all the areas in their way. They stole donkeys, horses, clothes and many other personal possessions, and during the reign of Salim Pasha's successor Ibrahim Pasha Al-Dalati, his soldiers looted the villages of Gota after his return from hajj. [13]

Injustice, oppression and harsh conditions always drive people to engage in bloody confrontations, but only righteous good deeds and deep religious conscience can frustrate those confrontations and restore the ties of compassion and noble human meanings.

During the strife of 1869 between Druzes and Christians, there were widespread and indiscriminate massacres and the killers attacked those

who sought refuge in Muslim homes. Many Christians fled to Damascus Citadel hungry after their homes were looted and they were embraced by Damascenes.

During those terrible atrocities Muslim homes became the refuge for many Christian men, women and children and Muslims protected Christians from assaults and aggression. The prominent Muslim scholar Mohammed Afandi Al-Hamzawi (the mufti of Damascus) and his brother Asaad Afandi, Sheikh Salim Afandi Al-Attar, Saeed Agha Al-Wazzi, Omar Agha Al-Abed and Saleh Agha Al-Mahayni in Al Midan neighborhood all opened their private homes and took Christians under their roof as their brothers. [18]

Moreover, around five hundred Christian men, women and children were at some point hosted in the home of the prominent Muslim figure Abdel Qader Al-Jazaeri. [19]

There were real concerns about the safety of Christians in Damascus during the First World War, but the sectarian compassion shown by Damascenes toward their Christian brothers soon made those concerns diminish.

This noble stand taken by the people of Damascus prompted Monsignor Ibrahim Masabki, delegated by head of the Roman Catholic Church, to visit Sheikh Badr Eddine Al-Hasani [20] to thank him for safeguarding Christian lives.

Sheikh Al-Hasani replied by saying: "There is no need to thank me because I only did what I am supposed to do. Christians are our brothers in this country and we share everything with them, in goodness and in badness. [21]

This elevating spirit made the Patriarch of the Roman Catholic Church deliver an emotional and highly significant speech in which he said: "Our beloved country has been for a long time a battlefield for confederates and a fertile ground for enmity and hatred, but Sheikh Badr Eddine Al-Hasani worked very hard until the last minute of his life and during his honorable old age to achieve social unity and harmony.

Sheikh Al-Hasani succeeded in bringing all people together; old and young, educated and illiterates, emirs and commons.

He made the flags of love, mutual trust, respect of all religions and veneration of human beings fly high in the sky.

This country witnessed many hardships and ordeals and it has always been desired by evil greedy forces, but Sheikh Al-Hasani constituted a formidable barrier to those who tried to sow the seeds conflict and rivalry between people.

Sheikh Al-Hasani spent his life fighting greed and vengeance and advocating concord, tolerance and peace.

The atmosphere of harmony and unity we live in today, despite the different beliefs and inclinations, is mostly the fruit of the strenuous efforts made by this noble sheik and imam and the yield of the seeds of love and peace he sowed.

This eulogistic ceremony which brought Muslims and Christians side by side is a materialization of Sheikh Al-Hasani teachings and an impression of his charismatic appeal to the people.

Nations are built on the pillars of unity, sacrifice, love and peace between individuals and Sheikh Al-Hasani deserves much of the credit for building our beloved Syria, the country that all Syrians are ready to die for.

And after commending the people of Damascus, the Patriarch says: "Stormy days sometimes create electrified atmosphere and Sheikh Al-Hasani strived through his wisdom, broad knowledge, influence and followers to disperse the dark clouds and safeguard people's honor, lives and wealth." [22]

This elevating spirit mentioned by the Patriarch was the framework that brought all religious groups and sects in Syria together.

On the completely opposite side, after the martyrdom of Hasan Al-Kharrat, the French Commissioner apprehended all neighborhood leaders in Damascus and threatened to allow Senegalese soldiers to ravish their women. [23]

Syrian rebels on the other hand set up their own revolutionary court, which issued several conclusive rulings, to impose the authority of the Revolution and prevent any attack from rebels on women and ensure that the rights of the public are preserved. [24]

This court was later reconstructed and Sheikh Mohammed Hijazi Kilani was appointed mufti of the Revolution and Sheikh Toufiq Soukiah was appointed chief justice. [25]

Public consciousness at the time was genuinely astonishing and while General Goro declared himself the protector of Christianity in the East (in the land where all people believe that their land was honored by Jesus Christ, God's blessing and peace be upon him) disregarding the fact that he is a foreigner and hideous occupier.

The communication between Muslims and Christians was truly amazing and was manifested in the valuable memorandum submitted by the spiritual leaders and heads of the Christian and Jewish communities in Damascus to the Syrian Prime Minister Alaa Eddine Drouby.

This memorandum clarified the stand of the Christian and Jewish communities and underlined their deep awareness of the effective role played by Muslims in their favor and the profound compassion that exists between all religious groups and sects.

The memorandum, which is designed to substantiate the solidarity between all people and cut off the hands that instigate sectarian conflict, reads: "In recognition of the truth and in acknowledgment of the grace bestowed upon us by our Muslim kinsfolk, we, Christians and Jews living in Damascus and its suburbs, with all our sects and classes, would like to express our appreciation and gratitude to all Muslim clerics, gentry, dignitaries and individuals in Damascus and its suburbs for their efforts in keeping peace among neighborhoods and raising local troops to preserve safety and security and prevent disturbances. These noble acts will be written down in shiny letters in the history records and no men deserve more the esteem, appreciation and reward from your highness." [26]

General Goro tried since arrival to sever Syria apart and tried to drive a wedge between Syrians by inflaming sectarian tension. He initially established the Greater State of Lebanon and then the Alawite state by virtue of two decrees issued on 31 August 1920. This was followed by the establishment of the State of Damascus, the State of Aleppo and later on the State of Druze on 4 March 1921. [27]

However, Syrians from all religious groups and sects stood firm against his wicked schemes as recalled by the former Prime Minister Marouf Al-Dawalibi, who points out: "The reason behind France's failure to divide Syria into small states in 1925 was the popular uprisings that erupted in the country, particularly in Aleppo, which was separated from Damascus under the name of Aleppo government. The city witnessed

one of the largest and bloodiest demonstrations in Syria, which was a fatal blow to the French scheme. Prominent Muslim clerics and students took part in the demonstration and many demonstrators were carrying small arms but they were faced with artillery and gunfire. Newspaper began to publish news about the rebels and their concentrations on a daily basis and the French eventually recognized that their cake is dough and began to abandon their scheme to divide Syria into small states." [28]

In a wonderful gesture, Sultan Pasha Al-Atrash said the following words as a tribute to Al-Shahabandar, which were the same words spoken by the departed in one of his speeches: "Bring your hearts next to ours and embrace our hearts in your hearts, do not shut down the doors of our country in the face of those who do righteous deeds because this land has room for everyone regardless of their religion." [30]

*[1]- See examples of the collusion of Sunni, Alawite and Christian families against the interests of the unarmed poor people through the tragic story of Abi Fateh (Suleiman Al-Murshed), who was executed by the political authorities in Damascus. For more information on this subject see also:*

*- Munzer Al-Mosulli: "Searching for the Truth (Murshedi doctrine and Suleiman Al-Murshed)", Damascus, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Dar Al Marwa, H 1429/ AD 2008, 65-76.*

*[2]- In 1222, the situation became unbearable to the degree that a Damascus wali once banned famous traditional Syrian sweets, namely kunafa, qatayef, baqlawa and awwama. See the History of Hasan Agha Al-Abd: "Incidents of the Levant and the Ottoman Empire", a report by Yusuf Naeesa, Dar Dimashq, 142.*

*[3]- Tafakji: this word means a soldier armed with a rifle, but the correct word is tafankji. See History of the Levant, previous source, 76.*

*[4]- Balasa: this vulgar word means to steal or to extort money through intimidation, but in this particular context it means to deceitfully impose a fine on someone through intimidation.*

*[5]- Michael Brek Al-Dimashqi: "History of the Levant", previous source, 76.*

*[6]- Same reference, 116, the Patriarch referred to is Patriarch Daniel who was controlling the Christian community in Damascus and he was known to be a*

*tyrant, a miser and pawnbroker. Christians in Damascus became fed up with his actions that they complained to Patriarch Sophronius (the Patriarch of Constantinople who was of Arabic origin). Patriarch Sophronius eventually succeeded in bringing about reconciliation after many uproars and quarrels, but only under many conditions imposed by the disputed parties.*

*[7]- Al daftardar is a Turkish-Persian word meaning the records keeper, who is also the treasurer and the finance supervisor and he is normally the second ranking official in the state after the wali. For more information see Yusuf Jamil Naeesa: "The Damascene Society", H 1186-1256/AD 1172-1840, Damascus, Dar Tlas, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 1994, 1, 212.*

*[8]- Same reference, 2, 545.*

*[9]- Same reference, 552, 2.*

*[10]- Yusuf Jamil Naeesa: "The Damascene Society", previous reference, 2, 537.*

*[11]- The name dalatia is originally Turkish and its singular means light-headed, madman or reckless. Those people came originally from Anatolia, Croatia, Serbia and Bosnia and they lived on looting and pillaging because they were not paid any official salary. Mostly thugs or bandits, they used to wear the skin of tigers, lions and bears to terrorize their opponents and they were always engaged in endless confrontations with the other mercenaries.*

*- The lawand is a name used by the Ottomans to describe the early Ottoman sailors. This word is originally from the spoken language of the people of Venice and later on it was used to describe mutineers and mercenary knights. In Damascus, the lawand became associated with the Kurds and those people were fierce warriors and known to have no fear of death, but they were also known to be deviants and corrupt. In 1804 the Ottoman authorities banished sixteen thousands of them, only six hundred knights of which survived and took refuge in the territories ruled by Ahmad Pasha Al-Jazzar.*

*- The sakban is a name used to describe the oldest type of mercenaries. A sakban is a soldier armed with a rifle and a watchdog and his duty is to walk in front of the emir. The name was later used to describe soldiers of fortune and eventually the name was altered by the locals to become sakman, which is originally a Persian word describing an independent army division that was later integrated into the regular divisions in the Ottoman army. See Yusuf Naeesa: "The Damascene Society", previous source, 1, 244-249.*

[12]- Same reference, 2, 554.

[13]- Hasan Agha Al-Abd: "Incidents of the Levant and the Ottoman Empire", previous source, 112.

[14]- Michael Brek Al-Dimashqi: "History of the Levant", previous source, 117-118.

[15]- A linguistic error in the Arabic text.

[16]- Mohammed Bin Abdullah Al-Tanji: Ibn Batuttah (H 779/ AD 1377): "Tuhfat al-Nuzzar fi Gharaeb al-Amsar wa Ajaayeb al-Asfar" (the showpiece of spectators in the marvels of the world and the wonders of travels), Cairo, Al Azhar Press, H 1346/ AD 1928, 1, 63.

[17]- Mohammed Saeed Al-Istwani: "Damascene Scenes and Events", previous reference, 176.

[18]- Abdel Aziz Al-Azmeh: "The Levant Mirror", previous reference, 325.

[19]- Mohammed Saeed Al-Istwani: "Damascene Scenes and Events", previous reference, 176.

[20]- The leading Muslim modernizer Sheikh Badr Eddine Al-Hasani (1935) was the highest-ranking Muslim authoritative source and the most revered theologian in the Levant. For more information see Mohammed Riad Al-Maleh: "The Theologian of the Nation and the Ascetic of the Age, The leading Muslim theologian and modernizer Badr Eddine Al-Hasani", Damascus: H 1397/AD 1977.

[21]- Fata Al Arab Magazine, issue: 1543, Thursday, Shaban 15, H 1335/ February 17, AD 1917. See same reference, 230.

[22]- During a eulogistic ceremony held on Tuesday afternoon, Jumada I 14, H 1354/ August 13, AD 1935, at the University auditorium to mark the first forty days after the death of Sheikh Badr Eddine Al-Hasani, parts from this eulogy were quoted and published in Al Jazira Newspaper, issue: 326, Friday, Jumada I 17, H 1345/ August 16, AD 1935. See same reference, 120-125.

[23]- Adham Al Jundi: "History of Syrian Revolts during the French Colonial Rule", Damascus, Al Ittihad Press, 1960, 358.

[24]- Same reference, 358.

[25]- Same reference, 368.

[26]- Sataa Al-Husari: "Day of Maysaloun", previous reference, 305, the memorandum was signed by: Patriarch of the Roman Catholic Church Tqlawas, Metropolitan of Busra and Houran Michael Bakhaash, Archbishop of the Assyrian Church Astodos Kesisaan, Assistant Maronite Bishop in Damascus minister Ibrahim Masaki, Fares Al-Khoury, Naseef Abu Zeid, Asaad Abu Shaar, Qastaki Al-Humsi, Ibrahim Tawil, Michael and Elias Sahnawi, Michael Awadis, Shafiq Qudsi, Antoine Abu Hamad, Khalil Anjouri, Isber Al-Khoury and Mousa Saad Shamiah. The memorandum was published in Al Asima Newspaper on 2 August 1920.

[27]- Nizar Kayali: "A Study in Syria's Contemporary Political History", previous reference, 47-49, adapted.

[28]- Cited from:

<http://www.aawsat.com/details.asp?issueno=9706&article=307826>

See the Memoirs of Dr. Marouf Al-Dawalibi: prepared by Abdel Qaddous Abu Saleh, edited by Mohammed Ali Al-Hashimi, Riyadh, Al Obeikan Library, H 1426/ AD 2005, 14-15.

[29]- Sultan Pasha Al-Atrash (1886-1928): born in a village called Al Qarya along other heroes from the Maroouf tribe and raised on the genuine Arab traditions: magnanimity, chivalry and bravery. He ignited Jabal Al Arab Revolt against the French occupation in 1925 and inflicted sever losses on the French forces and defeated them in dozen of battles. When the revolt was extinguished in 1927, he and his family and followers were banished and they lived between Jordan and Hejaz for ten years.

After he was pardoned he refused to shake hands with the French General Catro and refused to accept his present (one thousand Syrian gold coins) and did not utter a word of gratitude. For more information see:

- Jamil Shaker Al-Khanji (1898-1976): "Rebels Who Achieved Our Independence (Shiny Pages from the History of the Syrian Revolt)", prepared and edited by Nashaat Jamil Al-Khanji, Damascus, Dar Al Sharq, H 1429/AD 2008, 259-274. The author was the general secretary of the Syrian Revolt and member of the High Committee for Publicity and Intelligence.
- Adham Al Jundi: History of Syrian Revolts, previous reference, 189-213.

*[30]- Hasan Al-Hakim: "A Page in the Life of Al-Shahabandar", previous reference, 195. The eulogistic ceremony was held on 2 September 1940, in which several eulogies were delivered by Emir Abdullah, Hashem Al-Atasi, Sultan Pasha Al-Atrash and Zaki Al-Khatib (friend and disciple of Al-Shahabandar). The eulogies were published in Al Ayam Newspaper, issue: 2234, 4 September 1940.*

## **Chapter three**

### **Thought rising above sectarianism**

Abdel Fattah Al-Imam, one of the founders and scholars of the Islamic Civilization Society says: "We should always remember that we are one nation, our God is One God and the deeds we do for the Day of Resurrection and for the life of this world originate from one source. So where do our differences and disputes come from? Undoubtedly, the tyrannical policy had a hand in our disunity". [1]

If a man is not a Muslim by religion he is a Muslim by culture, thus the components of this nation of Muslims and Christians must be united to build a safe and stable country. The following is some of the example the researcher came across concerning the relationship between the Islamic Civilization Society and all sectarian groups in Syria:

#### **i. The relationship with Christians**

Christianity has a special place in the hearts and minds of Muslim, [2] and Surah Ar-Rum and Surah Maryam in the Holy Quran surely demonstrate that, but the relationship between Muslims and Christians has been halfhearted for sometime now. [3]

However, the Islamic Civilization Society tried through many of its members to bridge the gap between the two sides.

Mr. Abu Isam [4] wrote an article entitled "Islamic activities in the eyes of Arab Christians" [5], in which he attempted to delve into the mere facts of this issue by saying: "If anything happened to cloud the fine atmosphere between Muslims and Christian in certain circumstances, then it is surely caused by the wicked schemes of the colonial powers, which always try in secret to cause separation between people.

To make things worst, some clerics from both sides try, either out of ignorance or stupidity, to put enmity and hatred amongst the commons in the name of religion, but Islam and Christianity are innocent from their crimes [6], not to mention the narrow-mindedness of some Islamic governors during the Ottoman era, who were ignorant of the most basic principles of their own religion." [7]

It is interesting to know that when the Islamic Civilization Society School was founded in 1945, it hired three Christian teachers, [8] & [Document 1] namely Remon Habra, Antoine Janawi and Joseph Al-Sabaa, not due to a shortage of Muslim teachers but to ensure that the teachers hired have the highest educational qualifications and that is for the sake of public interest.

# التمدد الإسلامي

المدير المسئول  
محمد بن كمال الخطيب  
شوال ١٣٤٦

المحرر  
محمد مظهر العظمى  
الجزء ١٧ السنة ١١

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## افتتاح مدرسة التمدن الاسلامي الثانوية ومدرسة سوها

وفق الله سبحانه جمعية التمدن الاسلامي فيما عزمتم عليه بعد العدوان الفرنسي الاخير فافتتحت مدرستها الثانوية في (زقاق المحكمة الشرعية رقم ١٨) كما أعلننا سابقاً وأقبل الطلاب يسجلون اسماءهم في جميع صفوفها من الساعة ٩ - ١٣ صباحاً ومن ١٧ - ١٩ مساءً، والاجور معتدلة جداً. اما الاساتذة فهم:

<p><b>التاريخ والجغرافيا</b> الاساتذة علاء الدين الحفاني (مدرس) و عالم في التاريخ من باريس، صلاح السعدي استاذ التاريخ والجغرافيا في تجهيز دمشق، عادل قاطنجي مجاز في الحفـوق حمدي طربين اخصائي في الجغرافيا ومؤلف فيها . الاخلاق والتربية المدنية المحامي وحيد الدين الحكيم . الرسم سعيد تميم استاذ الرسم في درر المعلمين ببغداد سابقاً . الموسيقا حمدي طربين . الرياضة محمود البحرة استاذ الرياضة في تجهيز دمشق . ومدرّب الشرطة والاطفـاء . الفتوة احمد اناره مدرّب الفتوة في تجهيز دمشق .</p>	<p>الشيخ مصطفى الزرقا استاذ معاهد الحنفوق بدمشق صبحي الصباغ قاضي المحكمة الشرعية بدمشق، الاستاذ احمد مظهر العظمى رئيس تحرير مجلة التمدن الاسلامي، الشيخ سعيد الاحمر خريج الازهر الانور .</p> <p><b>الرياضيات</b> الاساتذة رشدي بركات مدير معارف بدمشق واستاذ الرياضيات في تجهيز دمشق وجيه القدسي استاذ الرياضيات في التجهيز الاولي بدمشق فريد السكري مجاز في الرياضيات من باريس، منير البارودي مهندس واستاذ الرياضيات في تجهيز حماه سابقاً .</p>
<p><b>اللغات الاجنبية</b> الاساتذة حيدر الركابي من كبار موظفي وزارة الخارجية، جوزيف سبيغ استاذ الادب الفرنسي في تجهيز دمشق، علي الاسعد محامي وصاحب معهد سبيرس لتدريس اللغات الاجنبية، احسان القواص استاذ اللغة الفرنسية في تجهيز دمشق، ريمون هيرا استاذ اللغة الفرنسية في تجهيز دمشق .</p> <p>وقد اجل البت بشأن مدرسين آخرين قدموا من اوروية ربما يعرف من يستقرون في دمشق . والمدرسة داخلية وخارجية، تعني بالاخلاق الكريمة، والعلوم الصحيحة، وتوجه نحو العمل المثمر .</p>	<p><b>الطبيبات</b> الاساتذة انطون جنواي استاذ الطبيعة في تجهيز دمشق هاشم الفصح مدير تجهيز دمشق واستاذ الكيمياء فيها، طاهر المرادي استاذ التاريخ الطبيعي في تجهيز دمشق ومساعد استاذ في معهد الطب، شهاب الدين السعدي مدير مخبر مديرية الصحة العامة، كامل شاشيط مساعد استاذ في المعهد الطبي سابقاً، ابراهيم كركنتي استاذ الكيمياء والطبيعة في تجهيز دمشق، فريد السكري اخصائي في الفيزياء العامة من باريس .</p> <p><b>الفقه العربي</b> الاساتذة عبد الهادي هاشم استاذ الادب العربي في تجهيز دمشق، ياسين طربوش استاذ اللغة في العربية تجهيز دمشق، وعبد الفتاح غندور خريج كلية اللغة العربية ودارالعلوم، احمد مظهر العظمى استاذ اللغة العربية في معاهد بغداد وفي تجهيز حلب سابقاً .</p>

Document 1

Moreover, when the Islamic Civilization Society's dispensary was established, it hired a Christian doctor, George Kassab [9], which is a precedent not created out of need but out of openness and solidarity.

The thought of the Islamic Civilization Society provided all Syrian expatriates with excellent provisions which connected them with their country and their language, if not with their doctrine and faith.

The prominent expatriate writer Elias Qonsul sent a letter on 29 September 1975 requesting copies of a book entitled "Prophet Muhammad and Words Written by Elite Fair-minded Christian Researchers and Writers", which was published by the Islamic Civilization in 1964.

Elias Qonsul added by saying: "I would like to seize the opportunity to express my deep admiration to the enormous efforts you have been making to promote the Pan-Arabic cause and I pray to God to be with you in your momentous mission and please accept my deepest regards." [Document 2] [10].

الجاهدين الافضل الاساتذة  
رئيس واعضاء "جمعية التمدن الاسلامي" الموقرة  
تحية عريسة طيبة  
رغبة ضي في الاطلاع على بعض ما قيل في الآونة الاخيرة عن  
النبي العربي الكرم وتمهيدا لترجمة مختارات منه الى اللغة الاسبانية ونشرها في الجاهرييات  
الاميركية ارجو منكم ان تتكروا وتبعثوا الي على عنواني ادناه بنسخة من كتابه "النبي محمد صلى  
الله عليه وسلم . كلمات باقلام نخبة من الباحثين والادباء المسيحيين النصفين " الذي نشرته  
في تموز ١٩٦٤ . ولكم جزيل الشكر سلفا  
واغتنم السانحة لاسجل صدق اعجابي بما قستم به وتقومون من جهود موفقة  
حيارة لرفع شأن العربية . واسأل الله ان يديكم سفدا لها وتفضلوا بقبول فائق احترامي  
اليسار قنصل  
بوانس ايرس ١٩٧٥ / ٩ / ٢٩  
عنواني :  
ELIAS KONSOL  
AVENIDA SAN MARTIN 6918  
BUENOS AIRES  
ARGENTINA  
- بموت ان افرا -  
- ارجو ان -  
- محمد والخطوط  
- ابي محمد  
- الحرفي  
- ليد

Document 2

The Islamic Civilization Society expressed its appreciation for these words by sending a number of books as a gift, which demonstrates the open-minded approach that goes above sectarianism toward achieving the highest interests of the nation.

The Common consciousness among Muslims and Christians reached new highs when a proposal was put forward to establish a Muslim-Christian union to combat depravities forbidden by both religions, something which was welcomed by the Islamic Civilization Society and a decision was made to take part. [11]

We do hope that other civil society organizations would be allowed more breathing space to launch similar initiatives to bring the best for society as a whole.

What distinguishes Muslim consciousness in general and Islamic Civilization Society consciousness in particular is their common awareness of the national interests and their joint efforts designed to cooperate with all sectarian groups to achieve the desired goal.

This consciousness was manifested during the 1947 elections in the electoral list called the Nation's List [Document 3], which was endorsed by the Muslim Scholars Union and a large number of national figures and intellectuals.

The list included high-profile national figures such as Zaki Al-Khatib and Hasan Al-Hakim, prominent figures from the main Muslim streams such as Mohammed Al-Mubarak, Abdel Hamid Al-Tabaa, Aref Al-Tarakji and Ali Al-Tantawi, in addition to the most prominent member of the Islamic Civilization Society at the time Ahmad Mazhar Al-Azmeh. [12]

What was really remarkable is that the list also included Fares Al-Khoury for the unrepresented Christian sects, Constantine Mansi for the Roman Catholics and Farid Arsalanian for the Armenians.



Akram went to the southern gate of the Mosque to call to prayer in order not to disturb the prime minister and in the next day Fares Al-Khoury called him and asked him why he didn't call to prayer at the Mosque the day before.

Akram told him the reason and the prime minister got very upset and told him: "Don't you know that I don't go to sleep before hearing the pure sound of the call to the dawn prayer and be inspired by it to help me do my duties during the day? Tomorrow you call to prayer as usual." [13]

The Syrian society has its unique historical and social characteristics that show the high level of consciousness manifested in deeds not words.

## **ii. The relationship with Shiites**

There hasn't been a split in the history of the Muslim nation wide open like the split between Sunnis and Shiites.

However, and despite all the controversial issues that divide the two sides, the researcher believes that the sound of reason can prevail and that the enmity between Sunnis and Shiites can be ended, even if aversion remained.

The Islamic Civilization Society played a leading role in creating a channel of communication between Sunnis and Shiites when it decided to write to His Eminence Muhsen Al-Amin and Sheikh Abdel Fattah Al-Imam about the Shia preaching center in Damascus. [14]

The Islamic Civilization Magazine mentions that it proposed to His Eminence to write a piece on this subject. Indeed he wrote this article published under the heading "Unity is Bliss and Disunity is Loss" by His Eminence Muhsen Al-Amin Al-Amili [15], and in the margin of the same issue another article was published [16] under the heading "The Lesson of the Prophetic Message" by Ahmad Sandouk Principal of the Muhsini School.

In an attempt to rescue the Shiites from the pestilence that infected most of them as a result of the excessiveness of some, Ahmad Mazhar Al-Azmeh says: "Yet, the limits exceeded by those who have malicious agendas doesn't stigmatize Shia preaching as a whole but it only labels the excessiveness which caused some Shiite preachers to deviate from the Straight Way and distort the concept of moderation."

Shiites are divided into many groups; some of which went too far in exceeding the limits of Islam that they reached the level of disbelief, while other groups were less excessive and remained faithful to the pillars of Islam.

Al-Azmeh doesn't pay attention to the vilification aimed at the person of Abu Bakr and Omar, the successors of the Prophet, by some Shiite scholars since such act is condemned by Sunnis and Shiites alike. [17]

See an important article written by the researcher about the relationship with Shiites and with Iran and about western efforts to prevent Iran from possessing nuclear arms. [Appendix 1]

[1]- *Abdel Fattah Al-Imam: "Khulasat al-Dawaa" (the essence of the cure), Islamic Civilization Magazine, previous reference, 12, H 1366, 399.*

[2]- *The name Ahl al-Zimma (free non-Muslims enjoying Muslim protection) is used to describe non-Muslims (Jews and Christians) living in the Muslim society. In Arabic, the word Zimma means covenant, guarantee and protection and it has no negative implications at all.*

*However, this word became the source of unease amongst some non-Muslims, who see it as implying a type of unacceptable authority or even guardianship.*

*In our times, Sharia should be understood by the true meaning of words not by the way words and phrases are chosen or used in order for any term not be taken out of its context.*

*For that purpose, the prominent Muslim thinker Fahmi Al-Huwaidi wrote an excellent book entitled "Non-Zimma Citizens (The status of non-Muslims in the Muslim society)" published by Dar al-Shurouq, H 1420/AD 1999, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. The researcher recommends this book for any person interested in that subject. The researcher also recommends an important chapter on that subject in a book entitled "Al Jihad" by the prominent theologian Dr. Yusef Al-Qardawi, published by Wahbeh Library, Cairo, H 1430/AD 2009.*

[3]- *Many Christians are fearful about drowning in the Muslim ocean and many have already migrated as a result of this feeling. We all have a moral obligation to show more compassion to Christians and create more channels of communication in order to overcome the difficult circumstances and rise above our differences, which will throw us into destruction.*

[4]- *The name of the author was published as only (Abu Isam) without further details.*

*The researcher believes that Abu Isam is most probably the nickname of Kheirallah Subhi Al-Jaafari.*

[5]- *The Arabic word "Nasara" (Christians) is used in the Holy Quran to describe the followers of Issa (Jesus), who is the Word of Allah and the soul created by Him. The Holy Quran states: {Verily, you will find the strongest among men in enmity to the believers (Muslims) the Jews and those who are Al-Mushrikun (polytheists, pagans and disbelievers), and you will find the nearest in love to the believers (Muslims) those we say: "We are Christians." That is because amongst them are priests and monks, and they are not proud.} Surah Al-Maidah, 82.*

*The researcher noticed that some Christians are uncomfortable about the use of the word "Nasara". The researcher, according to the best of his knowledge, believes that the use of the word Christians by the people who like to call themselves that is not controversial from the Sharia point of view, bearing in mind that the word "Nasara" was used by Christians on many occasions during the course of history.*

[6]- *The sectarian and ethnic bloodshed in Iraq spared no one; Muslims (Sunnis and Shiites), Arabs, Kurds, Christians, Yazidis and other religious and ethnic groups.*

*The researcher has no doubt that those horrible incidents were instigated by certain regional and international powers, but the most dangerous thing is the ethnic cleansing carried out against small ethnic and sectarian groups, which are the oldest inhabitants of the region.*

*For example, the Syrian Orthodox sect has been the target of ethnic cleansing for sometime now amid suspicious local and international silence. None of the three major religions in the world tolerates such criminality regardless of its motives. Visit <http://www.marefa.org> to see the history of the Syrian Orthodox Church.*

[7]- *Islamic Civilization Magazine, previous reference, year 14, Shaban, H 1367/ AD 1984, 205.*

[8]- See the cover of the Islamic Civilization Magazine, previous reference, year 11, Shawwal, H 1367/ AD 1945.

[9]- See the records of the Islamic Civilization Society dispensary in its early years. It is worth mentioning that the Islamic Civilization Society had in its membership the most prominent doctors in Syria, such as Dr. Mohammed Jamil Al-Khani, Chairman of the Islamic Civilization Society, Dr. Hamdi Al-Khayat, Head of the Syrian Medical Association (both are founders of the Faculty of Medicine), Dr. Jawdat Al-Shatti, Dr. Abdel Wahab Al-Kanawati, the forefather of Syrian pharmacists and Head of the Pharmacists Union, and other.

The most prominent doctor in the Islamic Civilization Society now is Dr. Haytham Al-Khayat, Senior WHO Advisor in the Middle East and North Africa.

[10]- The document was typewritten and was signed by Mr. Qonsul. The address of Mr. Qonsul and the names of the books sent by Mr. Al-Azmeh were handwritten by the two men on the document.

[11]- Decision-book, previous reference, session 61, Shawwal 24, H 1367/ August 29, AD 1948, 166.

[12]- Ahmad Mazhar Al-Azmeh won 22254 votes, Lutfi Al-Haffar won 21672 votes, Sabri Al-Asali won 20463 votes, Hasan Al-Hakim won 18166 votes, Khaled Bakdash won 9886 votes and Michel Aflaq won 10630 votes. The United States rudely interfered as mentioned earlier and directly influenced the election results. See the election details: Barada Daily Newspaper (owned by George Fares and Muneer Al-Rayes), year 2, issue: 301, Shaban 24, H 1366/ July 13, AD 1947, front page.

[13]- I was told this story on more than one occasion by doctor and historian Shawki Abu Khalil as quoted from Hani Al-Mubarak in the presence of doctor and historian Nizar Abaza at Dar Al Fikr, Damascus. The story was put down in writing by the researcher.

[14]- Decision-book, previous reference, session 39, Dhu al-Hijjah 2, H 1357/ November 10, AD 1938, paragraph 1, 85.

[15]- His Eminence Muhsen Al-Amili, a prominent Shiite scholar and the last great authoritative source in the Levant. He wrote many books and was a

*broad-minded person, to which the Muhsini School of thought is attributed. He exerted huge efforts trying to eradicate certain negative practices and rituals.*

*The article was published in the Islamic Civilization Magazine, Jumada II, H 1367/April, AD 1948, year 6, 14.*

*[16]- Same reference, volume of the 10<sup>th</sup> year, 14.*

*[17]- Ahmad Mazhar Al-Azmeh: Our Civilization, year 12, Rajab, H 1365, 223. The last sentence was quoted from Ibn Khaldun's Muqaddamah, 164.*

### **iii. The relationship with Alawites**

Telling the truth is a huge burden and the issue of the Alawite sect is very complicated historical and political subject.

This sect suffered from marginalization [1] and misunderstanding and its isolation played a part in some of its members exceeding the limits of religion and adopting dangerous superstitions that are unacceptable even to their own scholars and intellectuals. [2]

The opponents of Alawites accused them of infidelity and regarded the Alawite sect as a schism of the Shiite branch and used this as a weapon to isolate and marginalize this sect even more without any consideration for the pain and suffering caused to them. [3]

The Shoubiyeen isolated the Alawites in the mountains and prevented them from associating with other people and they even tempted some writers to attack the Alawites (Nasirins) in a cruel and unjustifiable manner, which may not be tolerated under any circumstances. [4]

Although extremely suspicious and cautious given their painful past, the Alawites in general have many positive characteristics, which are rarely found amongst others, and if they trusted you they will become the closest people to you. [5]

Islam should've been the bond that ties all Muslims together [6], but unfortunately the immaturity of some segments in the Syrian society caused excessive bleeding in our country [7] and created an open wound which should be healed by the joint efforts of reasonable people from all sides.

The wounds of our country were further torn by Western powers, who tried their best to broaden the gap between all sects. However, while such politics failed during the occupation of our country, they succeeded after our independence.

Few people know (actually it is the first time that this subject is mentioned) that the Islamic Civilization Society has a branch or committee in the predominately Alawite village of Beit Sheikh Yunes in Safita area, northwestern Syria. [8]

There have been strong ties between the people of this village and the Islamic Civilization Society and the reasons can be known through the following article written by a local writer from that village, who says: "Foreign propaganda intensified in the Alawite Mountain during the French colonial rule causing grave harm to the people of that area and they became virtually ignorant of the teachings and rituals of their religion. However, it is fair to say that advocates of the foreign colonizers only succeeded in controlling a small minority of Alawites, mostly those with too much naivety and too little willpower".

It is known that the Alawites came from the core of Islam and that they are the heart of Pan-Arabism, which explains why the French colonizers attempted to achieve their objectives through separating Alawites from their fellow Syrians.

We do hope that those who are in authority will work to fix what is despoiled and sow the seeds of love and understanding in order for us to harvest the good fruits. [9]

In order to achieve that goal, no primary or preparatory school in the Alawite governorate should be without classes that teach the principles and maxims of Islam. Moreover, new schools should be opened because the nation's culture and direction toward noble good deeds is subject to teaching young children comprehensive moral objectives and righteous principles, which is the message of Prophet Muhammad, the one with an exalted standard of Character, and the message of Islam and its compassionate Sharia.

In response to a proposal came from Misyaf (a city in northwestern Syria), the Islamic Civilization Society Management Board decided to increase the seats dedicated for Alawite and Druze students in the Sharia College. [11]

A proposal was also put forward to give financial aid to an Alawite student (Mr.....) in order to help him complete his education. Indeed a decision was made to assign Mr. Al-Khatib to pay the tuition fees of that student and arrange board and lodging for him in a number of schools. [12]

The communication and rapprochement between the Islamic Civilization Society and the Alawite community reached unprecedented levels when the Islamic Civilization Society Management Board decided to mediate with the Sharia College on behalf of the Alawite students when they were requested to provide guarantees or face expulsion.

Mr. Al-Khatib was assigned to carry out that task and when the mediation failed the Management Board decided to speak with the Minister of Justice to prevent the expulsion of the students as a result of their parents' failure to provide the necessary guarantees, despite the fact that the dean officially expressed his willingness to exempt the students from that condition.

The Islamic Civilization Society did the same thing for Druze students driven by its aspiration to join the hearts of all Muslims together and encourage Druze and Alawite students to pursue their education in the Sharia College.

The Islamic Civilization Society was extremely worried that the French colonizers would succeed in separating the Alawite sect from Islam, so they did their utmost efforts to support their Alawite brothers and open all doors possible for them.

The Islamic Civilization Society also decided to raise awareness of the dangers of preaching in the Alawite sect by promoting the genuine Islamic teachings and principles in all towns and villages under the auspices of prominent Alawite figures in those areas. [15]

As an example of its efforts in this field, the Islamic Civilization Society sent a letter to the Governor of the Alawite District in order to take measures against preachers. [16]

This wonderful Islamic communication can be found in the stand taken by the prominent Syrian resistance leader Sheikh Saleh Al-Ali, who proudly refused the wicked calls of the Protestant Mission.

As a gesture of appreciation, the Islamic Civilization Society sent a thank you letter to Sheikh Saleh Al-Ali [17] in al-Oyoun for his stand

from the Jesuit Mission, who bestowed upon him a Gospel but he refused to take it and bestowed upon them a copy of the Holy Quran instead. [18]

Many people do not know that Sheikh Saleh Al-Ali (who is an Alawite) died in the arms of his brother [19] the prominent Sunni scholar Sheikh Mohammed Al-Majzoub, [20] May God Have mercy on their souls.

#### **iv. The Relationship with Ismailis**

The following article was published by the Islamic Civilization Magazine:

"Mr. Ali, son of His Highness Agha Khan, visited Damascus for the second time to check on the Ismaili community, who is spiritually affiliated to his father. During his visit, Mr. Ali donated money for school building and for a number of charitable organizations, and Allah will reward the good-doers. [21]. Mr. Ali pointed out that some of his people detached themselves from the maxims of Islam and that he will make them abide by these maxims.

Agha Khan is a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad, so he has the best claim to return to what God sent through Muhammad: the Holy Quran, and he has also the best claim to make Arabic, since it is the language of the Quran, the language of Islam and the language of Agha Khan's family and followers.

Agha Khan has also the best claim to defend all the sacred things in Islam and he is very keen to maintain Muslim solidarity and revive the Caliphate, which prompts me to address His Highness and address his son to strive to achieve this goal.

Muslims knew well that severance of ties between them did not profit Islam or Muslims. The greatest Jihad is when Muslims return to the Quran and the Sunna of Prophet Muhammad, put aside their differences and abandon disunity and intolerance. Muslims should put the sectarian wars and conflicts that occurred in the early ages behind them because these ugly events only benefited the enemies of Islam [22]. In this context the Islamic Civilization Society Management decided to visit Sultan Al-Bahra and discuss with him vital Muslim issues and request his help [23].

Unifying the different Muslim groups, eliminating sectarianism and restrain foreign hands were the prime concerns of the Islamic Civilization Society, which for example sent a letter to Emir Mohammed Mulhem, brother-in-law of Emir Suleiman Al-Ali, in solidification of the call sent to the latter by Agha Khan in order for Ismailis and Muslim to join forces and work towards achieving that goal [24].

#### **v. The Relationship with Druzes**

The relationship with Druzes is similar to the relationship with the other sects that are eventually affiliated to Islam.

The Islamic Civilization Society invited the public to listen to a lecture delivered by journalist and writer Rafiq Wahbeh entitled "The Children of Marouf throughout the Epochs of History" at the auditorium of the National Scientific College on Rabi I 6, H 1364/ February 17, AD 1945 [25].

It is worth noting that all these steps were taken before the evacuation of foreign troops, which demonstrates the Islamic Civilization Society keenness to bring together all children of our Muslim nation.

As mentioned earlier, the Islamic Civilization Society mediated on behalf of Alawite and Druze students in order to be admitted to the Sharia College and it met the Minister of Justice for that purpose driven by its aspiration to join the hearts of all Muslims and encourage Druze and Alawite students to pursue their education in the Sharia College [26].

This unity between all Syrian sects was manifested during the French bombardment of Damascus in 1945 when Houran and Marouf Tribes in Jabal Al Arab arose to help Damascus, but the Allied intervened and the French forces were overpowered. We wished that those forces were Arabs because this would've been more healing to our breasts [27].

Only few people know that one of the most prominent members of the Islamic Civilization Society is the last of Tanhukhi emirs who were slaughtered in Lebanon. Only one child survived that massacre and his grandson grew up to become one of the most high-profile scholars in the Levant; Ezzidine Al-Tanoukhi 1889-1966, [28], nicknamed Alam Eddine (The banner of religion), whose father was Mohammed Amin Sheikh Al Sroujjiah Al-Dimashqi, a prominent lexicologist and writer. He

pursued his education in Al Farir School in Yafa, then in Al Azhar for five years and he was close friend of Sheikh Ezzidine Al-Qassam.

Ezzidine Al-Tanoukhi studied agronomy in France from 1910 to 1913 before serving in the Ottoman army. He fled to Al Jawf and then to Al Basrah before joining the army of Sharif Faisal eventually settling in Egypt. He returned to Syria and then travelled to Palestine and Iraq before returning to Damascus at the end of 1931, where he was elected General Secretary of the Arabic Language Academy, given that he was one of its founders and later on its vice-chairman.

He was afterward appointed corresponding member in the Iraqi Academy and also served as Head of the Department of Education in Al Sweida, Syria. He studied in the Teachers College in Baghdad and Damascus and is regarded as one of the pioneers of Arabization in the field of physics. He wrote masterpieces in the field of intangible cultural heritage and literature and he translated several French books in those fields into Arabic.

#### **vi. Jews in the eyes of the Islamic Civilization Society**

Despite the historic enmity between Muslims and Jews since the early days of the Call for Islam (Al Dawa), Islam enjoins justice, piety and righteousness upon all Muslims. The Holy Quran states: {Allah does not forbid you to deal justly and kindly with those who fought not against you on account of religion and did not drive you out of your homes. Verily, Allah loves those who deal with equity} [29].

This Quranic spirit inspired the Islamic Civilization Society to write to Aloubah Pasha in Cairo putting forward several proposals deemed useful to the Palestine Cause. One of these proposals was to publish the statements of prominent Jewish figures in the Arab World, who declared that they disavow Zionism and do not support it [30].

This statement demonstrates that the Islamic Civilization Society clearly draws a clear distinction between Zionism as a cancerous movement and the Jews as the followers of a religion greatly respected in Islam.

While traditional Islamic thought merely contemplated military action as a mean to liberate Palestine, the Islamic Civilization Society was more in-depth and revolutionary, which is evident in an open letter sent to the

Arab High Committee for Palestine and published in Shaban 14, H 1367/June, AD 1948 in the Islamic Civilization Magazine.

This letter puts forward a plan that may help to liberate Palestine, which can be summarized as follows: "Palestine should be regarded as a business enterprise jointly undertaken by Arab countries, as it is the case in joint-stock companies.

When a piece of land is undertaken by only one Palestinian farmer, he will risk incurring losses alone, which doesn't reflect the spirit of the age, particularly in Palestine where the Zionist movement is now running its settlements jointly. Open-end investments stimulate fast growth and facilitate the utilization of modern technologies.

They say that Jews are scientists and they are rich people. I would say no because they became rich as a result of their unity and they became scientists by knowing how to make the most of scientists. So why can't we follow in their footsteps and adopt their approach?

O Arabs, O Muslims in every corner of the world, if you love Palestine spend on it with your money because only well-organized spending can, as a preliminary step, save it." [30]

In another article, the writer is being very realistic in terms of what should be done for Palestine: "I would like to distance my self for a while from the wide horizons of Arab mentality of (All or Nothing) and show you an actual field of work and talk about material values and economic planning.

If you see Palestine as a farmland and if you set up companies for the purpose of generating money and achieving profit, you would acquire the lands of Palestine through cooperative enterprises and joint-stock companies and you would squander the stocks of these companies all over the Arab World. We often had overwhelming emotions but very little efforts and the Palestinian cause reached this low level today as a result of our stand that lacks strength and character.

Know that actions speak louder than words and that the ending crowns the work and don't be consumed by misleading illusions." [32]

[1] - The writer is not of course talking about some corrupt elements which exist in almost every sect (who may be exploiting their sect with brutal opportunism and trade in their people's pains to achieve their own narrow interests, whether those interests are political, economic or religious), but he is talking about the Alawites as ordinary human beings who were sidelined for a very long time and never found a caring hand and a kind heart to understand them and appreciate their suffering. The writer recommends a book entitled "Alawite Muslims, Who and Where Are They?" by Muneer Al-Sharif, printed by the Omoumiah Press in Damascus, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 1960.

[2] - The researcher had positive and fruitful experiences with members of the Alawite community, most notably the honorable scholar Sheikh Mohammed Al-Hakim (May God Have mercy on his soul), the prominent thinker, poet and human rights activist Dr. Mahmoud Sarem and Brigadier General Mohammed Suleiman (May God Have mercy on his soul).

[3] - The researcher was notified by reliable sources about some chilling incidents and grave injustices done to the sons and daughters of the Alawite sect tens of years ago, which was a shameful chapter in this region's history. At the same time, it is not the fault of any sect that some corrupt people emerge and make their sect pay a heavy price as a result of their corruption and wickedness, because they corrupted in other sects as well. Some of the injustices done to those people are mentioned in a sad story entitled "Barhoum's Pants" written by female novelist Nadia Al-GHazo). It is time for our nation to redeem itself from the complexes of the past and discuss the existing problematic issues objectively and with open hearts.

[4] - Muneer Al-Sharif: "Alawite Muslims", previous reference.

[5] - Same reference, read the chapter entitled Alawite Psychology, 145-150.

[6] - A phrase quoted from the words of the prominent Muslim theologian Dr. Saeed Ramadan Al-Bouti spoken on many occasions criticizing the type of thought tearing this nation apart.

[7] - The bloody incidents of the 1980s were the culmination of mutual ignorance of the authorities and Islamist groups alike, something which began after independence as a result of the whirlpool of political immaturity and tensions which swallowed all political and sectarian currents.

[8] - Decision-book, previous reference, session 9, 1022 (Safar, H 1364/ January 5, AD 1945), paragraph 7, 136.

[9] - Originally an attachment.

[10] - Hamed Mahmoud Yasin: *The Alawite Mountain Wishes for Islamic Education*, *Islamic Civilization Magazine*, year 11(Dhu al-Hijjah, H 1364/ November, AD 1934).

[11] - Decision-book, previous reference, session 66, (Ramadan 16, H 1362/ September 15, AD 1934), 129.

[12] - Same reference, session 6 (Rabi II 6, H 1378/ November 9, AD 1958), paragraph 3, 223.

[13] - Decision-book, previous reference, session 101, (Muharram 18, H 1364/ January 1, AD 1954), paragraph 3, 135.

[14] - Same reference, session 102 (Muharram 25, H 1364/January 8, AD 1945), paragraph 1, 135.

[15] - Same reference, session 4 (Safar 13, H 1358/April 3, AD 1939), paragraph 4, 89.

[16] - Same reference, session 12 (Rabi II 9, H 1357/June 8, AD 1938), 77.

[17] - Saleh Al-Ali (1883-1950), a prominent freedom fighter and national leader born in al-Mriqeeb village in Tartous District. He led the revolt against the French forces in the Alawite Mountains for three years inflicting sever losses on them and defeating them in dozen of battles. The French succeeded in surrounding his forces in the village of Sheikh Badra and he was forced to surrender. After his death, Saleh Al-Ali was buried next to the mosque he built. For more information on this subject, see:

- Jamil Shaker Al-Khanji (1898-1976): "Rebels Who Achieved Our Independence", previous reference, 353-360.

[18] - Decision-book, previous reference, session 12, (Rabi II 9, H 1357/June 8, AD 1938), 77.

[19] - I heard this story from many people in the Coastal Region and I found an article written by Dr. Khaled Al-Ahmad in which he unequivocally mentions

that he heard that story in Medina from Sheikh Al-Majzoub. The article is posted on:

<http://www.asharqalarabi.org.uk/mushrakat/b-mushacat-207.htm>

I wasn't able to contact his grandson the honorable scholar Fidaa Al-Majzoub, so I may be able to do that soon.

[20] - Mohammed Al-Majzoub (1907-1999), a prominent Muslim scholar, preacher writer and poet. He was born in Tartous and took part in fighting the French forces and was imprisoned and tortured by the French. He was one of the high-profile Islamic figures in the Coastal Region and worked in the fields of education and higher education in Syria and Saudi Arabia. He wrote more than fifty books in the fields of thought, literature and poetry. See his translated works:

- "Itmam al-Aalam": Nizar Abaza and Mohammed Riyadh Al-Maleh, Damascus, Dar Al Fikr, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, H 1424/ AD 2003, and an article entitled " Mohammed Al-Majzoub as I Knew Him" by Mohammed Nasaan Irwani:

<http://www.odabasham.net/show.php?sid=894>

[21] - Islamic Civilization Magazine, previous reference, volume 12, p. 96, May 1948, and minutes of the meetings, previous reference, year H 1364, session 9, paragraph 4.

[22] - Islamic Civilization Magazine, previous reference, year 14, 97.

[23] - Decision-book, previous reference, session 3 (Rabi I 3, H 1356/May 12, AD 1937), 62.

[24] - Same reference, session 61 (Shaban 10, H 1362/August 11, AD 1934), paragraph 2, 128.

[25] - Invitation cards in the name of the Islamic Civilization Society.

[26] - Decision-book, previous reference, session 102 (Muharram 25, H 1364/January 8, AD 1945), paragraph 1, 135.

[27] - News of the Muslim World, Islamic Civilization Magazine, 11 (Jumada II, H 1364), 6, 75.

[28] - Kheireddine Al-Zirkly, "Al Aalaam", Beirut, Dar al Ilm Li al-Malayeen, 4<sup>th</sup> edition, 1979, 229, 4.

[29] - Surah Al-Mumtahinah, verse 8.

[30] - Decision-book, previous reference, session 22 (Rajab 5, H 1357/June 26, AD 1938), paragraph 81.

[31] - Mahmoud Mahdi Al-Istanbuli, Islamic Civilization Magazine, previous reference year 12, Jumada I, H 1365, 127.

[32] - Mohammed Bin Kamal Al-Khatib, same reference, "How to Save Palestine", year 12, Shaban, H 1365, 275-277.

## Summary of the research

The research has shown that international politics clearly have a hand in instigating and exploiting sectarian sentiments in order to achieve the interests of the world's super powers through encouraging disunity and planting enmity and hatred amongst all sects.

- One of the keys to create positive ties between sects is inter-sectarian communication and appreciation of the conditions of each sect.
- Sectarian compassion has more in-depth connotation than sectarian tolerance and this is based on fixed historical facts, thus must be revived.
- The dark chapters in the relations between sects are not an inescapable fate.
- Islam in its universal message offers a spacious ground for meeting and communication.
- The Islamic Civilization Society offers a pioneering thought and practice in the field of sectarian behavior that should be generalized and capitalized on.
- International politics cannot cause splits within sects or incite sectarian strife in the existence of profound consciousness and compassion.

The words spoken by one of the most prominent members of the Islamic Civilization Society, one of the masterminds of the Syrian economy in the 1950s and former governor of the Central Bank of Syria Dr. Izat Al-Tarabulsi (May God Have mercy on his soul) can best summarize my research:

One of the aspects of selfishness in human beings is that individuals love to monopolize the high standard of character and good qualities and hate to see them in others.

Doesn't the selfishness of individuals resemble that of the colonizing nations in the sense that these nations love to enjoy freedom and independence exclusively and deny other nations those rights?

They say that patriotism has no religion and I reply by saying: Isn't it enough to be a religion "a bond" for everyone [1].

[1] - Izat Al-Tarabulsi, *Islamic Civilization Magazine*, previous reference, year 1, issue 4, AD 1935.

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## Appendix 1

Collection of passages from an article entitled "Those Who Repent and Remember" about the relationship with Shiites and Iran's nuclear issue, written by Ahmad Mouaz Al-Khatib Al-Hasani, dated 2 November 2007.

To see the original article, go to: <http://www.darbuna.net/word/?ID=780>

Acknowledging one's own mistakes is not easy task as some believe.

It is a radical process in one's thought, concepts and principles intended to identify interests and strike a balance between the short-term objective and the long-term one.

Let's take Iran's nuclear issue as an example and shed light upon the unrelenting Western campaign against that Muslim country.

Muslims have been suffering for a long time from a large sectarian split between Sunnis and Shiites, although I concede that the sectarian tension we are witnessing today is unprecedented.

The conflict was at first political but it escalated over the years to become theological, and things may escalate even further and turn into confrontations between ordinary people, but even if this happened the flames of any such conflict will be extinguished and people from both sides will return to their natural disposition and become neighbors and mixed-blood families again despite all their differences.

The Islamic, natural and social pillar which holds Sunnis and Shiites together will remain stronger than any political mobilization, ideological differences or hostilities, and even if a conflict erupted here and there it will remain limited and will not become an all-out confrontation.

One may wonder why no one is aware of the fact that instigating sectarian sentiments is raging out of control to horrifying levels as a result of the war of words between all sides.

Why we failed to see that the reasons behind our differences are the same as they were before, but these differences have never found a battleground with sides and edges so far apart as today?

Our history books are filled to the brim with sectarian conflicts, but these conflicts, although causing occasional disturbances, remained entrapped in these books and never succeeded in contaminating the social harmony of our colorful communities.

What we have today is a wicked political mobilization not just a doctrinal or sectarian enmity since our different doctrines and sects have been in

existence together for a very long time and never created a situation such as the one we are facing now.

We should identify our own shortcomings and weaknesses that allowed Western powers to inject sectarian hatred in our societies in order to know why the talk about taking military action against Iran has become very normal.

In fact, this might just happen but what is dangerous is the impotent stand taken by Muslim countries and what is even more dangerous is the psychological stand taken by Islamist movements, which may give the impression to the public that hitting Iran is not a big deal and that it is none of our business.

The bitterness in the hearts of Sunnis caused by the alleged Iranian-sponsored Shiite invasion of the Arab World is not a sufficient reason to be silent in the face of a possible military strike on Iran. If we suppose that we have 50% doctrinal differences and 20% juristical differences with Iran, we all know that we have 90% doctrinal differences with the wicked West.

Iran's possession of nuclear capabilities poses no threat to any Sunni but it will be a formidable deterrent to the evil powers that are rushing madly upon the Muslim World.

The aggression against Iran is an upsurge of Western domination to snap at the riches of this region and deepen the cultural and social invasion of our Muslim World. In all honesty, it is genuinely logical and Islamic to refuse any action against Iran and to consider such action an aggression against the whole Muslim World.

Our refusal to take military action against Iran is a rejection of aggression itself as a mean to implement hidden agendas. However, there is another dangerous issue that we probably overlooked, which is the fact that nuclear arms are indeed a curse against humanity. From the Sharia point of view, the Quran states that we should make ready all we can of power against the enemy of Allah and against our enemy, but being beasts and exterminate human beings is not the purpose of Sharia and is against the very nature of Islam because Allah sent Prophet Muhammad not but as a mercy for mankind and all that exists.

The weapons and armies of Muslim countries were proven useless against the enemies of Islam and it seems that most regimes in the Arab and Muslim countries have never been wholehearted in combating invaders and occupiers.

These regimes were in fact a dagger in the back of their own people and they were only good at trading in slogans while turning a blind eye to the

massacres committed against their people by invaders and occupiers of the Muslim World.

The only freedom fighters who truly resisted occupation have always been the underprivileged and marginalized children of the Muslim nation, particularly Islamists, who cannot compromise their principles or sell out their country or their people and who are ready to give their lives for their country, although the only reward they received from their governments is crackdown, imprisonment, torture and gallows.

Another issue that should be taken into consideration is that the Muslim Nation would be making a grave mistake if it tried to match the brutality and barbarism of its enemy. On the contrary, our Nation should deepen the profound humanistic aspects of Islam and consolidate its leading cultural role in the "big fish, little fish" world of today.

We must realize that our genuine characteristics are the source of fascination and the envy of the whole world, particularly the so-called modern societies who went astray when they lost the spiritual values that we still have.

Unfortunately, Muslims today are in a deactivation pattern; they dived deep in the wrong side of their history and they surrendered to backward political and religious regimes and to their social product, which is the biggest hurdle facing our nation's progress.

We should give this critical moment in our history the importance it deserves and refuse any type of aggression against any Muslim country and even against any tyrannized country in the world.

We should also give the future the significance it deserves and not engage ourselves in self-consuming and self-destructive propensities or believe that possessing nuclear weapons is the key to be powerful.

Israel for example has more than 100 nuclear warheads but it cannot use them, despite its aggressive nature, when the opposing weapon is a stone in the hand of a child. The Zionist state can only deter Arab regimes and cannot deter people, and the soldiers it will eventually face are people not regimes.

Our contemporary history recalls the enormous resources and human lives consumed by war and the terror, friction and destruction caused and this teaches us that stockpiling weapons is one of the most hateful sins.

The more the Muslim nation spends on weapons the more it will sink in benightedness and ignore education, health, knowledge, research, development and psychosocial stability of their people, and the underdeveloped Arab countries are a living example of such fate