

Attitudes of Muslims and Christians towards the Palestinian Cause in the Doha Conferences for Interfaith Dialogue

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To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v12-i6/13928>

DOI:10.6007/IJARBSS/v12-i6/13928

Published Date: 07 June 2022

Abstract

This study aims to observe the Islamic-Christian attitudes toward the Palestinian cause in the 13 Doha conferences for Interfaith Dialogue (DICID) from 2003 to 2018. as one of the problems affecting the relations between the two parties. It was a subject of debate in the Islamic-Christian Interfaith dialogue conferences organized during the second half of the twentieth century due to the positions of some Christian and Catholic churches, particularly in their dealing with this issue. This study is based on Islamic-Christian opinions and speeches of Qatar as the host country during these conferences. Additionally, the personal interview with the President of the DICID, the organizer of these conferences. The study revealed that the Palestinian issue was not the main topic at these conferences. These conferences discussed the Palestinian issue and the repercussions of the Zionist occupation of Palestine, and its effect on the relations between Eastern and Western countries. Also, peace and coexistence in the region and the world in general. It was apparent the disagreement between the Islamic and Christian parties. The study used the descriptive-analytical method to monitor the attitudes of the two parties during conferences and the historical method to track the presence of the issue in the dialogue process during the second half of the 20th century. The comparative approach has also been used to show the extent of progress in the two parties' attitudes on this issue.

Keywords: Palestinian Cause, Doha Conferences, Muslims and Christians, Interfaith Dialogue

Introduction

Historically, occupied Palestine, and at its heart is the holy land (Al-Quds Al-Sharif), in which the three monotheistic religions intersect, was and still is the central issue for all Arabs and Muslims, as well as the subject of a historical, religious, Islamic, Christian, Jewish and political debate. On the Islamic-Christian level, it was part of confrontations between the two parties in the era of the Crusades during the eleventh and thirteenth centuries. The conflict continued between the two parties due to the continuous Western support for the Zionist occupation of Palestine to the present.

Naturally, the Palestinian issue is present in the Islamic-Christian dialogue. Any scholar of the Islamic-Christian dialogue forums, which were held following the establishment of the Occupied Zionist State (Israel) in 1984 with clear Western support, can note the presence of this issue and explore the extent to which this attended regional and international political developments in that period. The Palestinian cause had dramatic consequences during the past two decades after September 11, 2001, which had severe repercussions on the relationship of the Islamic East with the Christian West. Accordingly, the Palestinian issue with its consequences was presented to Interfaith dialogue conferences held in Doha, the Qatari capital.

Problem Statement

The interreligious dialogue during the twentieth century was an ecclesiastical act for the most part. The Arab countries did not have any active presence on the official level, but after September 11, 2001, they became the initiative and advocated for dialogue. Among its highest official institutions, it employs its political and economic influence in this path, which has become an integral part of its foreign policy. This raised a legitimate question about the success of interfaith dialogue initiatives in employing this dialogue to serve the nation's causes, especially the Palestinian cause.

In light of this, the researcher will attempt to answer part of this question by observing how the Doha Conferences for Interfaith Dialogue held from 2003 to 2018 discussed the Palestinian issue. This study investigates the attitudes of the Islamic and Christian parties towards the Palestinian cause. It assesses the extent of development or decline in dealing with this issue compared to dialogue conferences held during the second half of the twentieth century.

Research Questions

This study answers the following questions:

1. How did the Doha Conferences for Interfaith Dialogue deal with the Palestinian issue?
2. What are the attitudes of the Islamic and Christian parties towards it?
3. Has dealing with the Palestinian issue progressed or declined compared to the Islamic-Christian dialogue conferences during the second half of the twentieth century?

Research Objectives

The current study aims to:

1. To explore how the Doha Conferences for Interfaith Dialogue dealt with the Palestinian issue.
2. To observe the attitudes of the Islamic and Christian sides towards the Palestinian issue.

3. To assess the extent of development or decline in dealing with the Palestinian issue that concerns the Islamic world.
4. To encourage and urge official governments and institutions concerned with interfaith dialogue to pay attention to the nation's issues, especially the issue of Palestine.

Significance of the Research

1. The significance of the study is related to the importance of the Palestinian issue itself. This issue is considered one of the determinants that have influenced the relationship between the followers of the two largest religions in the world, Islam and Christianity. Therefore, the Islamic-Christian dialogue is trying to direct it to benefit the Islamic, Christian, and all human nations.
2. The launch of the Doha conferences dialogue meetings took place about a year and a half after September 11, 2001, and their repercussions on the Palestinian cause.
3. The launch of the conferences also coincided with the American war on Iraq in 2003 and the midst of the second Palestinian Intifada, "Al-Aqsa Intifada – as a Palestinian uprising against Israel."
4. The interfaith dialogues conferences had held in the State of Qatar, which did not witness any interfaith dialogues before 2003. In April of the same year, It hosted the first Muslim-Christian meeting in its history. In 2005, that conference turned into a tripartite conference (Muslim, Christian, Jewish). These conferences are still held every two years, and in 2018, they reached their thirteenth edition.

Literature Review

A study by Al Mulla (2010) demonstrated Qatar's experience in interfaith dialogue, focusing on the first two seminars held in 2003 and 2004. Only the Islamic and Christian parties have attended those seminars. Al-Mulla's study used the descriptive-analytical approach and aimed to clarify the role of the State of Qatar in activating the Islamic-Christian dialogue. The study revealed that Qatar was a pioneer in interfaith dialogue in the Arab Gulf region.

Another study by Alhammadi (2017) used the content analysis approach. It highlighted the efforts of the DICID by studying some of the conferences organized by the center (from the sixth to the twelfth conferences) to track the dialogue's development in terms of the concept, objectives, and indications. The study concluded with the development of the concept of dialogue in the Doha conferences and one of its most essential recommendations; expanding the participation of the followers of eastern religions, given its importance to the Arab region in general and the Gulf countries in particular.

A study by Ghanem (2011) demonstrated the development of the DICID over six conferences between (2003-2008). It focused on the topics of the six conferences, their outputs, and Jewish participation in these conferences. In contrast, the study by Mustafa (2011) presented the conflict between the religious and political in these dialogues. Specifically, the sixth conference was held in 2008. It focused on the problem of politicizing these conferences, with an apparent absence of Muslim issues. Therefore, the conference recommended that the Muslim interlocutors prepare well for these conferences to defend Arab and Islamic rights.

On the other hand, Fahy (2018a) reported the large-scale initiatives launched by the Gulf states to promote tolerance, moderation, and dialogue between religions, especially after September 11, 2001. The study concluded that the phenomenon of the spread of dialogue and tolerance initiatives comes in a Gulf political context consistent with the Western discourse to spread the so-called Moderate Islam. Another study by Fahy (2018b) highlighted the experience of Qatar in interfaith dialogue from the perspective of religious or faith-based diplomacy in the context of its interaction with the international community. Hence, it was noted that this approach became more apparent after September 11, 2001.

In contrast, Fahy and Bock (2019) briefly monitored Qatar's initiative for interfaith dialogue in a comparative analysis of three experiences: London-UK, Delhi - India, and Doha -Qatar, and focused on examining the development of the interfaith dialogue movement. Among the most prominent results of the Doha conferences were; its limited nature to the Abrahamic religions, the political motives beyond it, its focus on the religious common, the prohibition of talking about differences, the predominance of self-discussion, and the theoretical rooting of principles without delving into unhealthy religious practices and the resulting behaviours that do not serve humanity.

Methodology

This research is based on three research approaches:

- 1. The Descriptive-Analytical Approach:** This approach is concerned with studying phenomena and events, as they are in terms of their characteristics and forms and the factors affecting them, to extract solutions and identify the causes, to predict the future of these events and phenomena" (Dashley, 2016, p. 61). This approach aims to explain phenomena through data and to try to find relationships between variables, as well as the possibility of predicting the future (Al-Titi & Abu Samra, 2020, p. 130). This study will depend on this approach in describing and analyzing the contents of the Doha conferences regarding the Palestinian issue.
- 2. The historical approach:** This approach seeks to reach the general principles and laws governing social phenomena by investigating past historical events to determine the phenomenon's circumstances to know its nature and rules (Olabi, 2006, p. 22). "The historical comparison also reveals the logical relationships between phenomena (Abrash, 2009, p. 142). This approach is essential for presenting the dialogue conferences that preceded the Doha conferences during the second half of the 20th century.
- 3. The comparative approach** is defined as "a mental process that determines the similarities and differences between two or more phenomena. We can obtain more accurate knowledge by distinguishing the subject of the study or the incident in comparison and classification." (Darwish, 2017, p. 184) This method is also used to study a phenomenon in two different periods (Al-Jusoor, 2009, p. 342). This applies to the current study that explores the Palestinian issue in the Doha conferences, with a historical background on this issue in the Islamic-Christian dialogue conferences during the second half of the 20th century.

Research Plan

This study consists of three sections as follows:

The first Section: (Palestine" in the Islamic-Christian Dialogue Conferences during the second half of the twentieth century)

The contradiction regarding the Palestinian issue between the Islamic and Christian positions on several issues was clearly during the rounds of dialogue between the two parties in the second half of the 20th century due to the different priorities. The Western Christian party was eager to form a front against communism in the framework of the Cold War; While the focus of the Arab and Islamic parties was on liberation and independence from the bondage of colonialism and confronting Zionism in Palestine (Aburman, 2005, pp. 35-36 and 144-145; Elsayed, 1996).

This discrepancy was apparent in the first Islamic-Christian meeting, the "Bhamdoun Conference" in Lebanon in 1954, organized by the American Friends of the Middle East Association (AFME). It sparked a division on the Islamic side after significant Muslim scholars refused to participate in it due to the imposition of topics related to the Cold War and the absence of the Palestinian issue on the agenda meeting. Among the most prominent of those scholars; The Islamic thinker, the Egyptian Minister of Awqaf at the time, Dr. Muhammad al-Bahi (1905-1982), the Iraqi Shiite scholar and jurist Sayyid Muhammad Al-Hussein Kashif Al-Gita' (1876-1954), and the Mufti of Palestine at the time, Sheikh Amin al-Husseini (1879-1974), (Ajk, 1998, p. 144), (Aburman, 2005, p. 36). According to the Muslims, it was an unsatisfactory start who realized the imbalance was not in their favour (Elsayed, 1996).

Despite this, the Christians dealing with the Palestinian issue took several directions characterized by diversity. For example - the Islamic-Christian Conference held by the World Council of Churches in Broumana, Lebanon, in July 1972, expressed concern "of The many grievances suffered by the Palestinian people, whose great suffering falls on the whole world, and we hope that this issue will be resolved in a spirit of compassion and justice" (Haddad, 2004, p. 50). Significant development took place in the first international Islamic-Christian conference, which was organized in coordination between the Vatican and the Muslim World League in Cordoba in September 1974. The meeting represented the emphasis on the Arabism of Jerusalem, the national and human rights of the people of Palestine, and the consideration of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people and condemning the Israeli attacks on the Palestinians and their holy sites, supporting the just struggle, and calling for the liberation of the occupied Arab lands (Sulaiman, 1976, p. 157).

Despite this unsatisfied beginning, the Christians dealt with the Palestinian issue later on in different directions. For example, the Islamic-Christian Conference held by the World Council of Churches in Broumana, Lebanon, in July 1972, expressed, "of The many grievances suffered by the Palestinian people, whose great suffering falls on the whole world, and we hope that this issue will be resolved in a spirit of compassion and justice" (Haddad, 2004, p. 50).

For a significant development to take place in the first international Islamic-Christian conference, which was organized in coordination between the Vatican and the Muslim World League in Cordoba in September of the year 1974, the development represented the

emphasis on the Arabism of Jerusalem, the national and human rights of the people of Palestine, and the consideration of the Palestine Liberation Organization as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. Condemning the Israeli attacks on the Palestinians and their holy sites, supporting the just struggle, and calling for the liberation of the occupied Arab lands (Suleiman, 1976, p. 157).

However, with this development, the Cordoba Conference had a significant setback in the Libyan Tripoli Conference in 1976. The Vatican, one of the organizers of the conference in partnership with the World Islamic Call Society (WICS), made reservations on two recommendations in the final statement; The first recommendation expresses "respect for the Islamic and Christian parties of all monotheistic religions, but they differentiate between Judaism and Zionism, as Zionism is a racist, aggressive movement foreign to Palestine and the whole of the East." And rejecting the projects of Judaization and internationalization, and denouncing every violation of the sanctity of the holy places (WICS, 1976, p. 134).

On the other hand, a notably more hardline trend towards the Zionist occupation of Palestine in the Islamic-Christian conferences held in countries that belonged to the eastern camp during the Cold War may have been part of the political and ideological confrontation between the capitalist and communist parties. At an international conference held in Prague, capital of the Republic of Czechoslovakia (currently the Czech Republic), in February of 1986, on the "issue of religion and world peace," the recommendations alerted to the "Arab conflict with Zionism." They warned against "attempts by global Zionism to stain the expansion The aggressive religious character of it" (Ajk, 1998, p. 280). In September of the same year, a similar conference was held in the city of Jabłonna near the Polish capital Warsaw. The conference urged the international community to seek to rid the sanctities in Palestine of Zionist control (Ajk, 1998, pp. 280-281).

This discrepancy in the positions of the Islamic and Western Christian parties, in particular regarding the Palestinian issue, was offset by a consensus in the vision between the Islamic and Arab Christian (Naqoul, 2009), especially since the Arab Christians themselves faced an anti-Zionist stance, the hardship, and extremism of Western Christians influenced by Zionist propaganda (Sulaiman, 1976, pp. 61-62).

This consensus was manifested in many meetings that brought the two parties together, such as the Muslim-Christian meeting held in Amman, Jordanian, in May 1983. The two parties raised the issue of the "Christian-Jewish dialogue" that was launched at the time in the Vatican. Accordingly, the conferees sent a message to the Vatican warning that this Christian-Jewish dialogue serves Zionism and harms the feelings of Muslims and Christians who live together and face a common enemy (Ajk, 1998, p. 279). According to Al-Liqa Center for Religious and Heritage Studies in the Holy Land (LCRHS), this consensus was also prominent in the Islamic-Christian meetings held by the Tantur Ecumenical Institute for Theological Research in Jerusalem in 1983. It sought to affirm the Arabism of Jerusalem, its Christian-Islamic heritage, and the national dimension of Islamic-Christian relations (Al-Liqa', 2012).

In the Arab context, the "World Islamic-Christian Conference on Jerusalem" was held in Cairo, Egypt, in May 1996, organized by the Arab Action Team for Islamic-Christian Dialogue (Al-Mawla, 1996, p. 175). It was followed by a Middle East Council of Churches conference in June of the same year. The conference was under the slogan "Muslims and Christians together for Jerusalem." According to the Center for Arab Unity Studies (CAUS), this conference focused on affirming the Arabism of Jerusalem, rejecting Israeli efforts to Judaize it, and calling on the international community to support the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people and support all efforts to liberate and preserve the holy city (CAUS, 1996, pp. 489-491).

The Islamic-Christian dialogue was not far from the developments of the Palestinian cause. The peace process between the Arabs and Israel imposed itself on its agendas during the second half of the 20th century, especially after the October 1973 war between the Arabs and Israel. There were indications that the Vatican was employing dialogue to encourage a peace process between the Egyptian and Israeli. This was evident in the statement issued by the Vatican and the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs in Cairo in September 1974, which affirmed the two parties were encouraging the Arab-Israeli peace process, especially in Jerusalem (Haddad, 2004, p. 65). Later, a peace agreement was signed between Egyptian-Israeli in March of 1979. The Vatican also communicated directly with the Egyptian presidency and indirectly with Al-Azhar Al-Sharif by inviting it to dialogue conferences organized in more than one country. Thus, the issue of peace was present in some way (Huwaidi, 1994).

In the nineties of the last century, it was notable how the Islamic-Christian dialogue was employed in Western endeavours for a political settlement between Israel and the Arab countries (Al-Sammak, 1998, p. 81). One of the most important of these meetings was the "Religions for Peace in the Middle East" conference, which was organized by the "Religions for Peace" alliance in Japan in November of 1992, and its outcomes were not at the level of the aspirations of the Islamic party (Al-Qadi, 2007, p. 1419). As well as the conference "Peace for Mankind: The First International Christian-Islamic Conference," in Vienna, Austria, from March 30 to April 2, 1993, organized by the St. Gabriel Institute of Religious Theology and sponsored by the Austrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Senior religious and political leaders from the Western and Islamic parties have attended this conference. This conference discussed the Islamic and Christian conception of peace (Khoury & Bechte, 1998). Toledo city in Spain also witnessed a tripartite Islamic, Christian, and Jewish conference entitled: "Interreligious Dialogue and Peace in the Middle East" in March 1988. It might become for preparation for the Madrid Peace Conference, held four years later (Al-Qadi, 2007, p. 1198; Haddad, 2004, p. 201).

In turn, the Royal Institute for Religious Studies in Jordan held a series of conferences that tried to advance the participation of Jews in religious dialogue conferences and break the psychological barriers of Arabs and Muslims from the Jewish presence under the slogans of Abrahamic origin and the plurality of religions in the Holy Land. Among those conferences: was the "Fear of Peace Conference" in Amman in 1997. And the conference "Religion, Patriotism, and Identity.. the Middle East in the Global Framework" in 1997 focused on identity, religion and politics in the Middle East within the framework of the Abrahamic religious concept. In addition, the conference "Jerusalem and its environs in the 19th century

- Christians and Muslims in a multi-religious environment." In 1997 (Al-Qadi, 2007, pp. 1379-1381).

It concluded that the outcomes of the Islamic-Christian dialogue conferences during the second half of the twentieth century were not as significant compared to the issue that preoccupied world public opinion. Further, it does not rise to the level it deserves, regardless of the identity and affiliation of the affected party, given the occupation, killing, and displacement associated with it and the wars, conflicts, and tensions in the region and the world for half a century. The presence of "Palestinian issue" in the dialogue movement moved from talking about occupation, Zionism, and the legitimacy of the Palestinian struggle, to a talk almost confined to Jerusalem and the holy sites, to move to another stage that promotes peace during the last decade of the 20th century. This means that international and regional conditions significantly affect the angle of dealing with the Palestinian issue in the Islamic-Christian dialogue. Perhaps the international circumstance that formed after the attacks of September 11, 2001, also had its mark, which can be explored in the following two sections:

The Second Section: (Approaches of the Doha conferences to the Palestinian cause)

Since the Qatari government launched the Doha conferences, the Palestinian issue was absent-present when discussing these conferences' nature, themes, and directions. The organizers have repeatedly emphasized that the conference is not a forum for political issues, and if it is discussed during the conference, it will be fleeting. The Chairperson of the Organizing Committee Al-Mannai of the Third Conference said, "We are an integral part of the Palestinian and Iraqi issue, but we will not overturn the conference to address political issues, and if we discuss it, it will be briefly." (Al-Mannai, 2005), which is the same position that reported by a diplomatic Qatari at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Al-Rumaihi, 2005).

The organizers of the Doha conferences followed a strategy of caution against raising the Palestinian issue, believing that discussing it at the conference would provoke sharp divisions between the three religions. Dr. Ibrahim Saleh AlNaimi, Chairman of the Doha International Center for Interfaith Dialogue, claimed that when the discussion begins concerning the Palestinian cause, the dispute escalates and may lead to the failure of conferences; they seek to address misunderstanding and not aggravate the dialogue (AlNaimi, 2022). Dr. AlNaimi pointed out that the solution of the Palestinian issue is out of the conference's authority, and it cannot make decisions regarding it. This issue is intertwined, and its political and religious complexities need high-level conferences, as religious scholars will not resolve the issue. It is under the authority of political decision-makers, although it is important to involve religious leaders when talking about a solution. Despite this strategy towards the Palestinian issue in the Doha Dialogue Conferences, the cause imposed itself on the agenda of most of these conferences, even indirectly, and it was sufficient to read the opinion of the Islamic and Christian parties towards it.

In other words, the organizer of the Doha conferences did not dedicate any of its thirteen conferences between the years (2003 and 2018) to the Palestinian cause entirely and directly. Instead, the name "Palestine" or "Al-Quds" was not mentioned in any of the main titles of these conferences or the axes of the discussion sessions (DICID, 2018a), and if the organizer tried to discuss a topic related to this issue, it loose phrases or general themes that can be applied to any similar case.

However, the absence of the Palestinian issue in the main and sub-themes of the conference's agenda does not mean a complete absence from the dialogue table. In its opening speeches' conferences, the Islamic party and the host country have constantly been reminded of the Palestinian issue. Also, it was present in some working papers during the discussion sessions, which required responses and interactions from both sides of the dialogue, especially on the Islamic and Christian sides, as shown in the following Section.

On the other hand, it is noteworthy when the State of Qatar organized the first Islamic-Christian meeting in cooperation with the Church of Canterbury, the Palestinian cause was firmly present at the regional and international level as an impact of the second intifada "Al-Aqsa Intifada" (2000 -2005). The challenges imposed on this issue by September 2001 and the what was called the "global war on Terrorism", which was exploited by the West to besiege the Palestinian resistance and reformulate the features of the relationship between the two sides of the conflict to serve the interests of the occupation (Al-Hamuz, 2009).

The Third Section: (Attitudes of the Islamic and Christian parties towards the Palestinian cause in the Doha conferences)

In the first Islamic-Christian meeting in the history of the State of Qatar, and in the midst of the challenges facing the Palestinian cause referred above; The parties to the dialogue who are meeting for the first time in the Qatari capital, Doha, had to be reminded of this chronic issue. During the conference's opening held in April 2003, under the title "Building Bridges, " the former Prince of Qatar tried to link the transformations that the region was witnessing due to the first and second Palestinian Intifadas, the events of September 2001, and the cause of Palestine. The Prince blamed the absence of international legitimacy when he pointed out that Palestine suffers from insecurity, peace, and stability due to the Arab-Israeli conflict without a just solution due to the absence of international legitimacy (Al Thani, 2003). From my point of view, this reference regarding the Palestinian issue was sufficient to draw the attention of the interlocutors in their first meeting, even if it did not carry a specific directive or recommendation in this regard.

The Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, did not address the issue of the Arab-Israeli conflict in his opening speech to the symposium. However, he curtly referred to the necessity of dialogue in light of the conflicts in the region (Williams, 2003). It does not seem strange considering the nature of the symposium, its topics, and the position of Western Christianity, which usually avoids talking about this conflict in interfaith forums. While in his speech, Sheikh Al-Qaradawi was reminded of the Palestinian cause on the Islamic side in the symposium. He called on followers of the two religions to defend human rights and lift injustice against the oppressed and the oppressed. He refers to the grievances and violations that the occupied Palestinian territories witnessed by the occupation forces (Al Qardawi, 2003).

However, the Palestinian cause at the opening of the first symposium was limited to the speech of the Prince of Qatar and a quick reference from Sheikh Al-Qaradawi; It came back strongly in the second meeting, which was held in May 2004, in cooperation with the Vatican, under the title "Freedom of Religion." With the State of Qatar's announcement of participation of Jews in the Doha conferences, starting from the third edition. Thus, an intense

debate occurred during the conference sessions and media (Al Thani, 2004). This announcement was rejected by some Islamic and Christian religious leaders in the Arab region, who boycotted these conferences since that time (Ghanem, 2011, p. 189). Hosting the Jews in such conferences held in Arab countries was rejected mainly due to their occupation of Palestine. This indicates the impact of the Palestinian cause on the reality of interfaith dialogue in the region (Al-Awa, 2011, pp. 99-104).

In light of that controversy, the dialogue sessions were not without references to the Palestinian cause. Archbishop Hilarion Capucci, Metropolitan of the Roman Catholic Church in occupied Jerusalem, recorded a clear position on the Palestinian issue during the discussion of the "religions and peace" axis. He denounced the humiliation and oppression that affect the Palestinians because of the occupation, which is fueled by racist global Zionism that does not accept the other, calling for peace in the region within the framework of the discussions that took place on the issue of "Jerusalem" (Al Mulla, 2010, p. 126). This presence continued in the third conference, held in June 2005; under the title "The Role of Religions in Building Human Civilization," the host country displayed a position amid the controversy over the Jewish presence. Thus, the organizers put three tracks for dialogue, the first being mutual knowledge. The second focuses on the social and cultural issues in question between cultures and religions. The third is concerned with examining "ways of cooperation to resolve chronic conflicts whose settlement involves achieving peace and harmony" (Al Thani, 2005). Hence, the third dimension refers to the Palestinian issue.

While the speech of the Christian party in the opening session did not refer to the "Palestinian cause," they stressed the importance of dialogue to spread peace and coexistence among followers of religions in the region. The intervention of the Islamic party was included many messages that warned of the consequences of the international community's neglect of the rights of the Palestinian people, emphasizing the innocence of the Palestinian resistance from the accusation of terrorism, and holding the Western countries responsible for the occupation and instability in the Islamic world. He considered that achieving a comprehensive and just peace depends on changing the significant countries' behaviour towards Muslims in Palestine and Iraq, respect for their sovereignty, and recognition of their rights (Daghi, 2005).

Further, one of the Muslim speakers also considered that the Western-Israeli alliance is one of the most dangerous obstacles that destroy trust between human beings and impede the building of human civilization. He warned of the danger of the penetration of the Zionist reading of biblical texts related to the return of Christ in the orientations of most American Christian sects, which will reflect negatively on the issue (Sagheer, 2005). The Islamic party added, "The Jewish occupation of Palestine and the unconditional and unlimited Western support for Israel is one of the factors on the tension between the East and the West, and that the feeling of anger at Western policies will continue as long as those unfair policies remain against the Islamic world (Abidine, 2005).

On the Christian side, Eastern Christians recorded a critical position when they put "the solution to the Palestinian issue" at stake to achieve civilized coexistence and build a fair and just global human civilization, as was expressed by the head of the Evangelical community in Egypt and the head of the Middle East Council of Churches, where he emphasized that the

region's prosperity and fruitful cooperation between East and West depend on solving the Palestinian issue and achieving a just peace (Al-Bayadi, 2005). The Eastern Christians emphasized that an appropriate solution to the Palestinian issue is the key to achieving peace in the East (Al-Hajj, 2005).

One of the Eastern bishops also expressed his rejection of the Zionist practices in Palestine and the whole world and considered them a scourge for the three religions, trying to absolve Christianity of Western policies that are aligned with global Zionism (Saliba, 2005) while the head of the Middle East Council of Churches for Catholics emphasized that the issue. The first for Arabs and Muslims is the Palestinian issue, and if it is not resolved, the fire of enmity and hatred that has been burning for three decades will not be extinguished (Qelta, 2005).

Despite this position recorded by the Islamic side, and to some extent, the Eastern Christians participated in the conference in support of the Palestinian cause. However, the recommendations were not good enough to express this position. They were satisfied with a vague text at the end as follows: "Deepening the values of justice and equality and restoring rights to their owners" (Qatari Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2005). Perhaps the organizer tried to protect the developing tripartite conference from any divisions, especially since it pledged not to engage in political issues, as I mentioned earlier.

At the Fifth Doha Conference for Interfaith Dialogue in May 2007, which was held under the slogan: "Spiritual Values and World Peace," speakers discussed the Palestinian cause during the last session of the conference, trying to link the issue of peace to a solution to this issue. Interestingly, two of the American Jews participating in the conference, Jacob Bandar and Joseph Campbell, raised the issue of Arab-Israeli peace when they called on Israel to accept the Arab peace initiative put forward by the Arab countries at Beirut Summit in 2002.

Moreover, they stressed the need to hold an international conference with the participation of the United States to present the Arab Peace Initiative and benefit from the global consensus around it. They urged the two conferences to support the proposal of this conference. Also considered that the success of the conference idea is the success of the Doha Conference for Interfaith Dialogue (Al-Raya, 2007).

However, the proposal was not encouraged by the various parties. The Islamic side was satisfied during the discussions by denouncing the Israeli crimes and the American support for them and holding Israel responsible for violating international resolutions and the failure of all peace initiatives, as in the intervention of Palestine Chief Justice Tayseer al-Tamimi, while a Muslim Dr. Suad al-Hakim from Lebanon, proposing to devote the Sixth Conference to the issue of the conflict in the Middle East, and to invite political leaders, Jewish and Christian clerics, and Muslim scholars, to discuss this issue in detail. It also suggested the formation of a religious lobbying body to contribute to efforts to end the conflict (N. Al-Raya, 2007). The final statement was completely devoid of reference to the issue and ignored all the participants' proposals.

It seems that with the insistence of many participants from the Islamic side to talk about "Palestine," the organizers of the Doha International Center for Interfaith Dialogue, which started its work in 2008, went towards proposing an approach that does not seem to reflect

a political dimension in the issue of dialogue. Still, it opened encouraged some to discuss Issues at the heart of the Palestinian cause, as happened in the Sixth Conference, which was held that year, under the title: "Peaceful and Respect for Life," and included issues including "violence and self-defence," "media and violence" (Ghanem, 2011) and other topics. It was under pressure to talk about the Palestinian right to self-defence.

It occasioned the Islamic side to recall the violence practiced against the Palestinians daily without moving the international community inactive. It usually does when the violence comes from another party or when blaming the defenders of themselves and their homeland against the occupiers (Al-Jazeera, 2008). One of the participants was asked to think the Palestinian cause is taken seriously after six years of religious dialogue in Doha (Al-Raya, 2008, p. 18). Others questioned the feasibility of interfaith dialogue in light of the expansionist Zionist movement in the occupied Arab lands and raised questions to Jewish speakers about the nature of Israeli practices against the Palestinians in light of the Jewish teachings that Jews repeat in the dialogue councils (Al-Raya, 2008, pp. 18-20). Despite these interventions, The recommendations were devoid of any direct reference to the Palestinian cause and were satisfied with calling for the respect of sanctities and not offending religions (DICID, 2009).

In October 2009, the Doha conferences approached the Palestinian cause during the seventh conference. The previous conferences tried to touch the Palestinian cause without pushing the dialogue towards a political debate that may lead to counterproductive results that are not acceptable to the host country (AlNaimi, 2022). The case was attended by a topic titled "Solidarity in Defense of the Holy Places." The speech of the host country, which was dominated by the diplomatic language, contented itself with a call for people of religions to unite to preserve international peace and security (Al Mahmoud, 2009, p. 9). At the same time, the speech by Dr Ibrahim Saleh AlNaimi, the Chairman of the Doha International Center for Interfaith Dialogue, the organizer of the conference, drew the participants' attention to Al-Aqsa Mosque's events. He expressed regret that Israel prevented Jerusalemites from attending the conference and calling on the people of religions to take responsibility for such events and to feel common spiritual values (AlNaimi, 2009).

Interestingly, the conference hosted the Secretary-General of the largest international organization after the United Nations, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). OIC devoted a third of his speech to talking about the Palestinian tragedy in light of the crimes of the Israeli occupation, as he condemned the Israeli crimes in Gaza during the aggression launched by the occupation at the end of the year 2008 early 2009. He declared the Islamic party's view that the occupation is one of the most critical obstacles to dialogue and coexistence between religions and one of the factors of violence, fundamentalism, and terrorism (Oglu, 2009).

This speech encouraged the Muslim speakers to talk about this issue, whether in the conference sessions or through the comprehensive media coverage of the conference's activities. A Muslim researcher made a call to stop involving Zionist Jews in the dialogue, "there is no dialogue with an occupier or a murderer," and demanded to deter them and dismantle their Zionist regime. He saw that dialogue with them was useless and that their invitation to dialogue conferences in the countries of the Islamic world was nothing but to appease the major powers, which weakened the outcomes of the dialogue movement. He

also called for global religious and political solidarity with Palestine to end the Zionist occupation and lift the oppression of the Palestinians (Al-Shamrani, 2009, p. 12).

Despite the momentum that the Palestinian cause gained in the opening session of the Seventh Conference and the discussion sessions. However, the Doha Declaration did not reflect Muslims concerning the Palestinian issue. Precisely, the Israeli war on Gaza (between December 2008 and January 2009). It was satisfied with a general reference, saying, "The issue of the continuation of wars, violence, and injustice was discussed, and participants agreed that the weak and the innocent are the first victims of these events." The declaration also indicated that "a special concern has emerged for the need to protect places of worship and religious sanctities, whether in Al-Quds Al-Sharif or concerning (facilitations) granted to minorities in the State of Qatar" (DICID, 2009). The link between the practices of the occupation in Jerusalem and what the declaration called the facilities granted to minorities in the State of Qatar was arbitrary. The situation of a city under occupation with its Islamic and Christian holy sites cannot be compared to some of the restrictions imposed by Gulf countries on building churches and places of worship for non-Muslims.

Palestine was not absent from the deliberations of the interlocutors at the Eighth Conference in October 2010, which was concerned with the role of religions in raising generations. The first reference to this issue was from the spokesman for the Islamic side, Abdallah Mahfudh ibn Bayyah (the former deputy head of the Union of Muslim Scholars). He initially asked about the ability of the religious scholars and their willingness to perform the witnesses to be the guardians of justice in a world rife with injustice and tyranny, citing what the Palestinians suffer under the pressure of the Israeli occupation.

He was wondering: "Are we ready to alleviate the grievances that the world suffers from, especially in the Arab region, where prospects for peace in Palestine are absent in the shadows of injustice and darkness" (Bayh, 2010), while the Mufti of Palestine warned in his speech that the dialogue between the three religions is facing a severe challenge due to the dangers of destruction and Judaization that the city of Jerusalem is exposed to, stressing that the success of the dialogue depends on its protection and preservation of its position. An entire Palestinian generation does not know Al-Aqsa Mosque except through the television screen (Al-Tamimi, 2010, pp. 12-14).

The tenth conference, held in April 2013, focused on reviewing successful dialogue experiences globally. The State of Qatar demonstrated a vital position when it considered that what the occupation exposes to the Palestinians are crimes committed in the name of religion, with a clear link between the crimes committed against the Muslim minority in Myanmar and the Israeli occupation's grievances against the Palestinians "from starving and blocking the outlets for them and waging war from time to time against this oppressed people" (Al-Ghanim, 2013).

The Islamic party in this conference also reiterated its vision that successful dialogue will only be achieved through tripartite cooperation between people of religions to confront common challenges, foremost of which is the Palestinian cause, within the framework of achieving the contents of "A Common Word." The Islamic party by Al-Qara Daghi also warned that security and peace would not be achieved in light of the injustice and abuse suffered by

the Palestinians (Daghi, 2013). The Islamic party also drew the attention of the people of the three religions to the attempts of the Israeli occupation to ignite religious strife between Christians and Muslims in Palestine to strike the unique state of coexistence between them within the framework of its practices that contradict religious values and international laws. The only Israeli that sorts out visitors to places of worship by age under the pretext of security (Sabri, 2013).

As in the previous two conferences, the Christian party did not express any position during the opening session on the Palestinian issue. While the representative of the Vatican, Father Miguel Angel Ayios Goescop, was keen during his speech to the media to refer to what was happening in Jerusalem. He briefly expressed the Vatican's rejection of all forms of violence in Jerusalem, Burma, and others (Guisco, 2013, p. 18). In the end, the conference's recommendation did not refer to the Palestinian issue.

In the twelfth conference devoted to the topic "Spiritual and Intellectual Security" in February 2016 and in the thirteenth conference held in February 2018, under the title "Religions and Human Rights," the Islamic party repeated the same positions condemning the Zionist policies. They consider that the occupation and Sanctities appropriation are among the most serious threats to sensory and intellectual security (Khudair, 2016, p. 43). As well one of the worst forms of violating the sanctity of life in the modern era (Al-Hakim, 2016, p. 57) as one of the requirements of preserving peace and security "preventing and ending the occupation as it contradicts peace and security and violates rights and liberties" (Al-Sabry, 2016, p. 127).

In addition, the Arab and Islamic inaction in supporting Palestine and relieving its people from the brutal Israeli aggression contributed to creating despair in the hearts of some young people and made them prey to movements of extremism and violence (Bin Fata, 2016, p. 316). Another argued that solving the Palestinian issue would cut the way for some terrorists, considering that Zionist terrorism and its criminal practices in the occupied territories are the sources of terrorism in the Islamic world (Daghi, 2016, p. 459).

The Palestinian cause did not resonate with the Christian party, even if he spoke at length about threats to peace in the world and expressed his rejection of conflicts and wars (Touran, 2016). It stipulated: "Solidarity with the afflicted peoples and support for international efforts to maintain security and restore stability to these countries and return the occupied lands to their owners." There is no doubt that the issue of Palestine is included in this recommendation. Given the dimensions of this issue and its consequences for coexistence and peace among all religions. The recommendations of the 18th conference directly address the Palestinian issue. Still, it implicitly included in the framework of the recommendation that called for "support and solidarity with all those who are subjected to persecution and violations of human rights, whether they are countries under occupation, religious minorities subjected to ethnic cleansing, or individuals and families." They were forced to seek refuge outside her countries" (DICID, 2018b).

Results

After intensive reviewing of the Doha conferences, the following findings can be obtained: -

- The presence of the Palestinian cause was shy at the Doha conferences for interfaith dialogue, as the issue was not adopted as the main topic for any of the conferences held so far. It was not at the level that was clear in some dialogue conferences held during the second half of the 20th century, especially On the Arab-Islamic-Christian level. Perhaps this is consistent with the setback that afflicted the cause and the Palestinian right due to the intransigence of the Zionist state, Western conspiracy, and Arab-Islamic betrayal of the Palestinians in the aftermath of September 11, 2001, as well as the international political hijacking of the issue, and the isolation of its religious dimensions, with the exception of Jewish allegations.
- The host country's position for the Doha Conferences for Interfaith Dialogue, expressed in official speeches during the opening sessions, was advanced compared to those conferences' results and recommendations.
- The stability of the position of the Islamic party on the Palestinian issue was expressed by several scholars and researchers throughout the conferences' sessions. They denounced and rejected the policies of the occupation, and considered that solving the Palestinian problem by restoring rights to its people, is a key to resolving the region's crises and spreading peace and stability among followers of religions.
- Accordingly, to curb the phenomena of extremism and terrorism. Therefore, we can describe these interventions on the Palestinian issue during the Doha conferences as playing a solo, undertaken by the Islamic side, at every opportunity that allows it to express this chronic issue.
- The "Western" Christian party was almost silent concerning the Palestinian issue in the various sessions and discussion panels. Its interventions in this regard were general and talked about peace and stability in the region. In contrast, the interventions or positions of some Arab Christians were more apparent in their demand for a just and comprehensive peace that preserves the Palestinian right and protects the Islamic-Christian sanctities.
- The recommendations and statements of the Doha conferences were devoid of even an explicit condemnation of the crimes of the Zionist occupation that have been repeated over the past two decades. These Included wars, sieges, settlement expansion, and the Judaization of Jerusalem reinforced by some Western countries that decided to transfer their embassies to the city, including the United States, disregarding all relevant international resolutions and charters.
- The talk about "peace in the Middle East" and related initiatives was a general conversation in the context of demands for a just and comprehensive solution to the Palestinian issue. The Arab Peace Initiative - for example - did not have attention to the working papers and speeches of the host country and representatives of the Islamic and Christian sides during the dialogue conferences. Only what was mentioned by two representatives of the Jewish religion.
- The fact that no conference was devoted to the Palestinian issue in the Doha series of conferences is due to the organizer's caution against any disagreement between the dialogue parties that leads to the failure of these conferences. Thus, to avoid aggravating relations between religious parties because of the issue that some consider a political issue that is not related to religious dialogue conferences.

Recommendations

- Reconsideration of the Palestinian cause in the interfaith conferences in Doha and other similar conferences held in the Islamic world, based on its religious dimensions, and its centrality in the Islamic world, is one of the factors aggravating the relationship between East and West.
- Activating Arab-Islamic-Christian cooperation for Palestine and Jerusalem in the arena of interfaith dialogue, building on the efforts made during the second half of the 20th century, and mobilizing support for this cause in light of the escalating pace of implementation of Zionist plans to Judaize Jerusalem and the expansion of settlements.
- Unifying the efforts of the Arab and Islamic Interfaith Dialogue Centers to enter into an open dialogue with the Catholic Church and other Christian churches for the sake of Jerusalem and Palestine.
- Reconsideration of the religious dimension of the Palestinian cause, even when talking about peace in the Middle East, is the task of Muslim religious scholars and centers of interfaith dialogue in the Arab and Islamic world. It is an important weapon to confront the claims of the Zionist entity based on the religious factor.

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