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Religious Pluralism in the Lebanese Literary Heritage

Dr. Savo Karam
Lebanese University,
Tripoli, Lebanon

"The responsibility of tolerance lies with those who have the wider vision"

(George Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss*, Chapter 3).

"Lebanese Muslims cannot exist as Lebanese without the Christians, and Christian Lebanese cannot exist as Lebanese without the Muslims. Lebanon is not Lebanon without the Christians"

(Sheikh Mohammed Mehdi Shamseddine, Head of the Islamic Shi'a Supreme Council).

Abstract
This paper will exhibit four approaches of religious tolerance (the liberal, pragmatic, epistemological, and coexistence tolerance) on the writings of Lebanese liberal thinkers respectively: Ameen Fares Rihani, Gibran Kahlil Gibran, Jawdat Haydar, and Imam Moussa Sadr by elaborating on their views of religious tolerance throughout their oral and written discourse. Additionally, it will indicate their personal reactions and proposals concerning the dilemma of intolerance—a contemporary issue threatening national and international peace.

Keywords: Religious pluralism, tolerance, Lebanese literary heritage, Ameen Fares Rihani, Gibran Khalil Gibran, Jawdat Haydar, Imam Moussa Sadr.

Introduction

The term "tolerance" has a lengthy history—its roots are Latin: "tolerare and tolerantia." The concept dates back to Socrates who associates attaining "truth" to open-mindedness. With the Emperor Marcus Aurelius, tolerance takes on another dimension; it was linked to authority, compassion, and altruism. With the advent of Christianity, tolerance meant unlimited love, forgiveness, sacrifice, and benevolence. The Buddhist king, Ashoka, officially established religious tolerance in the third century BC in India; so did the Muslim ruler, Akhbar, in the 16t century. Up until the 17th century, religious tolerance was acutely taken into consideration by a number of intellectuals: John Milton (*Areopagitica*), Pierre Bayle (*Commentaire Philosophique*), Baruch de Spinoza (*Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*), and John Locke (*Letter Concerning Toleration*). Additionally, many 18th century scholars such as Voltaire (*Philosophical Letters* and *Treatise on Tolerance*), David Hume, Immanuel Kant (*Perpetual Peace* and *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*), Thomas Paine (*Rights of Man*), and Thomas Jefferson imparted their thoughts about tolerance in their writings. The notion of tolerance was elaborated in the 19th century by John Stuart Mill in *On Liberty* and Ralf Waldo Emerson. In the 20th century, tolerance was more explicitly expressed in the writings of William James (*Varieties of Religious Experience*), John Dewey, Isaiah Berlin, Karl Popper, Michael Walzer, Ronald Dworkin, and John Rawls (Fiala, 2004, pp. 3–6).

Not only literature employs the language of tolerance; religions had earlier espoused tolerance. The *Bible* contains hints about the term:

> Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things... for God has received him...One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind... But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ... Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother's way. (Romans 14:1–23)

In the Holy *Quran*, Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) had praised toleration:

> Verily! Those who believe and those who are Jews and Christians, and Sabians, whoever believes in God and the Last Day and do righteous good deeds shall have their reward with their Lord, on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve. (Albaqra 2:62)

In fact, the core of all religions is characterized by the overtone of universalism that resides at the premise of their spiritual truth.

Article number 18 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights provides a comprehensive definition of religious tolerance:

> Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.

The above definition is the theoretical dimension of religious tolerance that stresses liberty. In "I Heard Him Say," Abdul Baha, the eldest son of Baha'u'llah who founded the Bahai faith, adds to this definition a relevant, practical act accompanying the theoretical framework, making the concept more humanitarian:

> Let us have love and more love; a love that melts all opposition, a love that conquers all foes, a love that sweeps away all barriers, a love that aboundeth in charity, a large-heartedness, tolerance, forgiveness and noble striving, a love that triumphs over all obstacles. (as cited in Cedar-Southworth, 2004, p. 46)

By definition, epistemological tolerance is:

> ... one should tolerate the opinions and beliefs of the other because it is either impossible to coerce belief or because such coercion is not the most useful pedagogical approach. This idea can be developed into a claim about the importance of diversity, dialogue, and debate for the establishment of truth. (Fiala, 2004, p. 7)

In other words, this type of tolerance comprises open-mindedness in order to initiate a dialogue and attain ultimate truth and knowledge.

Coexistence tolerance is another concept that is "the best means toward ending or avoiding conflict" (Rawls, 1987, p. 11). In fact, religious diversity is largely responsible for separating people (as cited in Bhutto, 2008, p. 240). As its name implies, this approach requires agreement to adopt a pacifist existence and mutual respect or acceptance of others' cultural and religious beliefs in order to achieve fruitful coexistence, thus preventing social, political, and religious mishaps.

In the aftermath of the New York 9–11 disaster, the topic of religious tolerance manifestly emerged. Ever since then, it has become the primary concern of a number of influential thinkers. More specifically, in a globalized world, the debate about integrating minorities of different views or creeds into Western communities, most of which are secular and religiously diverse, has occupied the thoughts of scholars. Is pluralism a success? Is

multiculturalism effective? How could pluralism, multiculturalism, and integration be possible? Embracing tolerance is seemingly the only way.

The Lebanese community—approximately four million—is somehow unique, consisting of a melting pot of 18 officially recognized religions and ethnic communities. These myriad religious divisions should not be an obstacle for embracing religious tolerance. The majority of Lebanese, however, are enchained by their religion, unable to circumvent or loosen their strong ties to their religious communities. This is comparable to medieval times where religion was the hub of people's lives.

Justifiably or mistakenly envisaging they are in hazardous politico-social conditions, religious minorities believe that their future is unpredictable and therefore tightly adhere to their religion that shapes their identity from birth. Sticking to their sects provides members of religious confessions a sense of power and solidarity; however, it also encourages extremism and ongoing sectarian tensions that prevent true pluralism, interaction, integration, nationalism, and tolerance. If religious tolerance is adopted in Lebanon, then the freedom of the individual is highlighted; consequently, the perception of democracy is fortified.

The level of religious tolerance in Lebanon has increased recently. A special rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Heiner Bielefeldt congratulates Lebanon for embracing religious tolerance thus becoming "a ray of hope" for promoting coexistence amidst Middle Eastern conflicts, extremism and confessionalism (Howell, 2015, para. 1). As a matter of fact, the advent of the twentieth century witnessed the emergence of thinkers ready to commence a dialogue between religions and cultures. Belief in social solidarity, in mutual respect, in multiculturalism, and in the communality of cultures is a mental challenge—a transcendental, intuitive mind recognizes its dimensions and implications.

Being exposed to Western cultures and experiencing life in the Occident, several Lebanese thinkers, poets, and philosophers were ready or prompt to undergo an internal intellectual metamorphosis. Their thinking reflected a new identity, a personality that willingly embraces other religions, no matter how distinct or dissimilar they seem. Accordingly, these transformed men of letters experienced a deeper appreciation of humanity—faith in the individuality of humans—thus sharing recognizable, similar concepts to Romanticism.

Initiating interreligious dialogues—to attain intercultural understanding—was the concern of Lebanese thinkers who campaigned heatedly against various forms of religious corruption. Fearing intolerance, these thinkers spread the seeds of tolerance in their writings to augment an awareness of the positive consequences of interfaith dialogue.

Ameen Fares Rihani

Best known for his saying, "say your word and go your way," Ameen Fares Rihani (1876–1940), a Lebanese American multidimensional writer and human activist, attained a global/unparallel reputation in the East and West. Born in Freiki, a village in Mount Lebanon, Rihani travelled to America at the age of 12. Later in 1905, he returned to Lebanon to study Arabic and headed back to New York in 1911. In the same year, he published a semi-autobiographical novel entitled *The Book of Khalid*; he was the first Arab to publish a novel in English. Travelling around the Arabian Peninsula in 1922, Rihani started an inter-cultural dialogue among Arab leaders. Bluntly expressing his animosity towards fanaticism, Rihani devoted his oral and written discourse to unite religions and erect a bridge between the East and West, attempting to achieve tolerance and pluralism in his English and Arabic works.

While other philosophers and scholars emphasize the unity of religions since they reflect one God, Rihani goes further and asserts that the implicit message behind different religions is not only the oneness of God but also consists of religious tolerance, the common denominator underlying various religions and doctrines. Rihani realized that the presence of a variety of religions and their branches necessitates religious understanding and coexistence; consequently, he dedicated his literary work to religious leniency.

Christianity and Islam are not the only inspirational celestial voices; there exist other prominent spiritual philosophies, such as Baha'ism and Sufism. Rihani delineated in his fictional and non-fictional works a morally rebellious open-minded and multicultural identity, prepared to transcend materialistic existences to attain a universal entity. He himself is the model exemplar of a religiously open identity when he states in *Ar Rihaniyyaat* (*The Rihani Essays*) that his persona is a melting pot of many beliefs: "Animistic, Agnostic, Monotheistic, Christian, Islamic, and Sufi"(Rihani, 1987, pp. 279, 30). Subsequently, he respects any religion that reflects the teaching of the one and only God: "Indeed, every religion is good and true, if it serves the high purpose of its founder" (Rihani, 2009, p. 191). He alludes in versified form to religious liberalism in *A Chant of Mystics and Other Poems*: "Nor Crescent nor Cross we adore;/Nor Buddha nor Christ we implore,/Nor Muslim nor Jew we abhor/We are free" (Rihani, 1970 a, p. 106). He is stressing the notion of religious freedom by indicating a universal religion that possesses a unified spiritual truth—an innovative religion that blends all dogmas despite their differences.

The concept of Rihani's religious moderation is summarized in his rebellious Arabic speech that was translated into English, Bulgarian, Russian, and Spanish and delivered on the 9th of February in 1900 titled "Attasahulul Dini" (Religious Tolerance). He maintains that tolerance is achievable when individuals are benevolent and charitable to others in spite of considering their beliefs inconceivable or erroneous. The peak of tolerance is embracing the faith of others even if they are totally opposite to your own. Rihani (1987) adds in his speech that tolerance helps in the process of development throughout various realms such as in the field of education, philosophy, and religion; it ensures exposure and enlightenment to the other, providing an increased flexible and liberal identity that promotes personal/individual independence. He further emphasizes that tolerance is the best solution to culminate religious and political conflicts (Rihani, 1987, pp. 35–36, 43–46).

In *The Path of Vision*, Rihani (1970 b) openly states, "Tolerance has always been the despot of my conduct" (p. 65). Specifically, he declares in one of his Arabic letters: "I hate religious fanaticism because the religious sects, to me, are like careers, and I only consider man as a man" (Rihani, 1958, p. 15). It is plain he insufficiently credits a person's religious identity, prioritizing instead an individual's character or personality which defines such identity. Moreover, Rihani (2002) further explains in *The White Way and the Desert* that confessionalism is a curse because it signifies selfishness and discord: "Every sect is a little nation in itself with a barbed-wire fence of selfishness and parochialism around it. This sectarianism is indeed a stumbling block to national solidarity and cooperation" (p. 160). Consequently, he warns in *Muloukul Arab* (*Kings of Arabia)*, "Nationalism unites nations, and religion separates them" (Rihani, 1989 c, p. 132). Fanaticism threatens nationalism—the former separates while the latter unites. Rihani stresses the urgency of eradicating confessionalism in order to sustain the solidarity of nations.

Furthermore, Rihani (1986) reckons it is vital to fight sectarianism since it is paralyzing Arabs and further dividing the Arab world. Intolerance is not only a disease that infects the spiritual setup of the people but is also, as he declares in *Qalb Lubnan* (*The Heart of Lebanon*), the major cause of divisiveness among nations (p. 229).

In his motherland, Lebanon, there was considerable protest against sectarianism and a movement concerning anti-clericalism at the beginning of the twentieth century. This incited Rihani to wage a war against intolerance and diverse faiths. In *Al Qawmiyyaat* (*Nationalisms*), he urges different sects to unite in order to foster a spirit of autonomy, nationalism, and patriotism: "The Syrian, the Lebanese, the Alawite, or the Dirzi will never truly be national unless they all get rid of their sectarianism" (Rihani, 1991 a, p. 182). Adopting a critical tone, he warns Arabs in *Nourul Andalus* (*The Illumination of Andalusia*) that if they do not abandon/abolish their biases, they are unable to evolve or progress (Rihani, 1989 d, p. 670).

While in America, Rihani uncovered a similar urge to adopt and promote religious understanding, but activated it from a wider perspective. He states, "… we can never wholly

understand each other, and rise to the level of mutual esteem… if we do not invest [a]… feeling that triumphs over class and creed and race and color- that one touch of nature that makes all the world kin!" (Rihani, 2002, p. 22). From the West, he deduced that religious open-mindedness and progressiveness is a pillar of multiculturalism and modernism; it is the best means to initiate inter-cultural dialogue, allowing people from various intellectual, ethnic, scientific, and physical backgrounds to interact/communicate. Once achieved, tolerance becomes the key to peaceful living—political turmoil, oppression, and dictatorship are eliminated. Rihani (1983) deduces in *Ibn Sa'oud of Arabia*, "... a religion of love, mercy, and tolerance, is better than a religion which is imposed by the sword…." (p. 141).

Being tolerant, according to Rihani, requires serving humanity; tolerance has to be interpreted in deeds, and practicing religion is the true essence of faith: "defending the oppressed is the noblest feature of faith," says Rihani (1989 b) in *Buthouruz Zaarieen* (*Seeds for Sowers*) (p. 20). In *The Book of Khalid*, he adds, "'Tis in loving the divine in Man, in me, in you, that we rise to the love of our Maker" (Rihani, 2009, p. 41). Authentic religion exists when humans express their humanity towards God's creatures; they morally transcend the mundane to unite with the Almighty. Through unconditional love and mutual respect of the "other," humans can practice religion unconsciously. Rihani (1970 b) further clarifies: "We can be religious without being conscious of it […] we can be religious without religiosity" (p. 26). Rihani (2009) links religious tolerance to love: "Love is the new religion. It is the old religion, the eternal religion, the only Religion" (p. 192). Through loving humanity, one achieves unity with God; love reconciles man with God, humanity with divinity.

In order to attain religious tolerance, Rihani proposes several practical solutions. He inspires to meditate and feel God through their daily humanitarian conduct and this is what Oreiby (2017) also observes in his article, "The Image of Philosophy in the Writings of Ameen Rihani" (pp. 24-26). Furthermore, he recommends the closure of sectarian schools; these schools instill in the young religious prejudices—each academic institute promotes its own dogmatic approach, which eventually results in extremism (Rhani, 1991 b, p. 39). Education's rightful role, according to Rihani (1989 e), is to foster the spirit of patriotism and nationalism (p. 115). In addition, instructing themselves about other religions widens people's horizons, helping them acknowledge and understand other faiths (Rihani, 1989 a, p. 56). In this way, extremism recedes while tolerance increases.

Another manner of embracing tolerance is by exhibiting mutual respect to dogmas and creeds of others and even, at times, by practicing their faith. This occurs, for instance, when Muslims attend mass and Christians pray in a mosque, or when Christian sermons are heard in a mosque and Islamic verses in a church (Rihani, 1991 a, p. 333); people are initiating an inter-faith dialogue while praying to the one and only God. Exchanging prayers is the onset of an open Christian-Muslim dialogue and a means "to reconcile Crescent and the Cross" as he mentions in his poem "Constantinople" (Rihani, 1970 a, p. 36). A daring solution to tolerance is inter-faith marriage; Rihani (1989 c) declares, "There is nothing that deters Muslims from marrying Christians" (p. 29) if they share mutual love and understanding because this is an indication that the spouses are ethically and intellectually mature.

A liberal, universal, and humanitarian religion is the purpose of Rihani's Arabic and English works; he envisages a transnational religion, a unified faith transcending geographical boundaries expressing unconditional love for others, despite their multi-faceted religious beliefs. Since all religions and dogmas are based on one common foundation which is truth, fanaticism should be eliminated, in Rihani's opinion, in order to adopt a global and contemporary stance that identifies with the other—universal peace finally prevails.

Gibran Khalil Gibran

Who does not recall Gibran Khalil Gibran's (1968 a) eminent quote: "I have learned silence from the talkative, toleration from the intolerant, and kindness from the unkind; yet, strange, I am ungrateful to those teachers?" (pp. 42–43) Religious tolerance is generously echoed in Gibran's work (1883–1931), a pioneering Lebanese American philosopher, painter, author, and poet at times depicted as "the Dante of the twentieth century." Gibran immigrated to America in 1895; however, he returned a few years later to pursue his education. In 1902, he headed/travelled once more to the new world, where he busied for a major part of his life creating both English and Arabic works.

An obsessive booklover, Gibran included the Holy *Quran* among his readings; he displays through his writing tremendous affiliation with Islam and other religions. Besides Christ, Gibran admires the Prophet Mohammad (PBUH), Imam Ali, and Abdul Baha; Gibran personally met the latter between 1911 and 1912. Similar to Ameen Fares Rihani, Gibran was rebellious in his religious thought; his notion of religion did not depend merely on divine faiths but also stemmed from mysticism and Sufism. He additionally believed in metempsychosis, the reincarnation of the soul at death. In his prologue to *The Vision: Reflections on the Way of the Soul*, Gibran (1998) employs a dialogic tone, saying that he delved into the teachings of Confucius, Brahma, and Buddha to seek spiritual truth. He realizes that this divine truth is mirrored in all faiths; his works reflect/exhort a global and modern religion that echoes a universal religious reality.

Gibran left Lebanon and experienced a contrastive, appealing reality overseas, returning to Lebanon with a widened vision, which led to initiating a dialogue with humanity at large. America impressed him with its widespread religious freedom, resulting in frustration/discontent with the sectarianism that Lebanon and the Levant were enduring. From the democratic West, he was inspired to speak openly about tolerance, inviting his audience to engage in cultural and religious dialogues.

Gibran's (1998) notion of tolerance is crystallized in *The Vision* where he demonstrates total sympathy and adherence to humankind regardless of geographical or religious ties. He addresses humanity and considers narrow-mindedness as being religiously biased—this produces weakness and disunity:

> Human beings separate into factions and tribes and adhere to countries and regions whereas I see my essence as foreign to any one land and alien to any single people. The entire earth is my homeland and the human family is my clan. For I have found human beings to be weak, and it is small-minded for them to divide themselves up; the earth is cramped, so that only ignorance leads people to partition it into realms and principalities.

Gibran possessed a universal understanding of religion. Similar to Rihani, he distrusted the diversity of religious doctrines. According to Gibran, an assortment of creeds leads ultimately to confusion, enmity, and discord; his Disciple in *The Voice of the Master* wonders, "Are you troubled by the many faiths that Mankind professes? Are you lost in the valley of conflicting beliefs?" (Gibran, 1960, p. 33). *The Garden of the Prophet* expresses his disappointment with the presence of diverse sects—such a predicament conspires against humanity and leads to regional and national disunity: "My friends and my road-fellows, pity the nation that is full of beliefs and empty of religion" (Gibran, 1968 b, p. 10).

Religion, to Gibran, loses its divine essence in the presence of different faiths; his concept of religion has a transcendentalist dimension. Humans should deduce the spiritual message that lies beyond the religious creeds and ought to employ their perception and intuition to understand the mystical, core message of religion. God's truth is one yet heard in many voices; consequently, many doors lead to unified divine reality: "God made Truth with many doors to welcome every believer who knocks on them," explains Gibran (1963, p. 20). Searching for spiritual truth, Gibran realized that no religion was capable of satisfying

his voluminous ambition. He believes in the universality of religions that are all reflected in the Almighty. To clarify, when Almustafa, Gibran's persona, was requested to tender his opinion about God, he provides a mystical response denoting that God embraces all religious truths:

> Think now, my comrades and beloved, of a heart that contains all your hearts, a love that encompasses all your loves, a spirit that envelops all your spirits, a voice enfolding all your voices, and a silence deeper than all your silences, and timeless. (Gibran, 1968 b, p. 28)

Choosing the name of Almustafa, which is one of the names of Prophet Mohammad, as Gibran's impersonation in *The Garden of the Prophet* and *The Prophet* is a noble and tolerant gesture. It is also the voice of the Almuhtada in *The Voice of the Master* echoing the theme of uniting faiths.

The solution that resolves all differences according to Gibran is sublime love—its supremacy elevates man's soul. The love that Gibran urges is spiritual love that extends beyond materialism since it is eternal, enriching, and powerful; it further matures and morally develops man. Love, to Gibran, is a sacred fire that purifies, positioning/pressing man closer to divinity. The prophet speaks to Almitra about love in a mystical tone saying:

> Like sheaves of corn he gathers you unto himself.
>
> He threshes you to make you naked.
>
> He sifts you to free you from your husks.
>
> He grinds you to whiteness.
>
> He kneads you until you are pliant;
>
> And then he assigns you to his sacred fire, that you may become sacred bread for God's sacred feast. (Gibran, 1994, p. 12)

Harmonizing religions through embracing humanitarian love is Gibran's universal advice for the revival of a multi-sectarian country; it guarantees the oneness of humanity and its unity with divinity. This is what Almuhtada in *The Voice of the Master* openly corresponds to the Lebanese people, "Almuhtada spoke freely and without hindrance; he preached the gospel of love and brotherhood" (Gibran, 1960, p. 38). Gibran (1960) further explains that this love illuminates the spirit, so it can embrace humanity:

> I love you, my brother, whoever you are- whether you worship in your church, kneel in your temple, or pray in your mosque. You and I are all children of one faith, for the divers paths of religion are fingers of the loving hand of one Supreme Being, a hand extended to all, offering completeness of spirit to all, eager to receive all. (p. 69)

It is evident that Gibran unconditionally respects the dogmas of others, perceiving no obstacle whatsoever in religious differences; these dissimilarities are viewed positively since they make different faiths complete rather than compete with each other. Competition produces enmity that negatively reflects on both political and religious life. Gibran contends that universal love possesses a curing potency that unites humanity, establishing a mystical union among people.

The most explicit illustration of Gibran's religious tolerance is his legendary letter entitled "To Muslims from a Christian Poet." In it, he frankly acknowledges his pride in Christianity; yet he equally admires Prophet Mohammad and Islam and does not wish this glorious religion to weaken or vanish. He reveres the *Quran* and abhors any attempt to employ this holy book as a means to undermine Muslims. Finally, he proclaims that both Jesus and the Prophet Mohammad

exist in his inner self (as cited in Masoud, 1966, pp. 37–38). This letter is an undeniable manifestation of Gibran's universal belief in the coexistence of these two basic religions and his adherence to both.

What is religion according to Gibran? He believes in the unity of religious ideas and their inspiration stemming from one source, the Creator whose divinity is reflected in all creations, especially man. Religion has to serve others; Gibran's religion is practical: "Is not religion all deeds and all reflection.../ Who can separate his faith from his actions...?" (Gibran, 1994, p. 77). In other words, religion is incarnated in everyday life, in actual deeds and not in religious books; it is inseparable from life.

America was a window/opening through which Gibran discovered freedom of thought and religion. It served as a sharp contrast to Lebanon in which sectarianism was dominant. Gibran was strictly against religious oppression and feudalism; he called for an understanding between the two historically foremost religions in Lebanon: Christianity and Islam. His dream was an idealistic vision of Lebanon—a unified homeland devoid of sectarianism: "My Lebanon is a reunion" visualizes Gibran, but "Your Lebanon is parties and sects," he adds (Gibran, 1963, p. 81). Gibran does not take sides in religion; his religion encompasses all religions.

Jawdat Haydar

Born in Baalbek in 1905—he lived until 2006—Jawdat Haydar travelled to France to study agriculture after completing his first year at the American University of Beirut (AUB) in 1918. He then travelled to America to pursue his education, graduating in 1925 with a BS in education. He returned to his native country in 1928.

According to the April 12, 1992, issue of *The Jordan Times*, "For an Arab to be known for his poetry in the U.S. is an accomplishment in itself" (Wahbeh, 1992, para. 1). Jawdat Haydar attained international recognition similar to other Lebanese writers such as Gibran, Rihani, and Naimy and was viewed as "The Shakespeare of the Arabs" and "The Prince of Poets." Little is known explicitly about Jawdat Haydar's call for religious tolerance. In fact, his poetry is neither religious nor political; he was not biased towards any religion or towards any political party. He was a patriotic poet exclusively concerned with humanitarian issues.

Possessing a tolerant spirit that reaches out to various religions, Haydar (2012) displays in his poem "Fountain of Faith" that he is neither a Muslim nor a Christian. He portrays himself as a spiritual individual who embraces both religions in his cosmological character. He proclaims his affiliation with a universal spiritual religion whose divine spark is inspired by both religions: "With my hands raised toward heaven/... I heard the soothing voice of the Muezzin/ And the harmonious melody of the chiming bells" (ll. 45–47). The poet engages in an inter-faith prayer; with his hands directed upwards, he addresses the one and only God.

When Haydar turned 100, he informed Jayson Iwen, an assistant professor at the American University of Beirut, "that his greatest wish was for humanity to one day learn to be at peace with itself..." (as cited in Haydar, 2012, p. 27). Haydar is a non-belligerent poet well aware that religious divisions serve as an obstacle to tolerance. This is the crucial message that crystallizes in his poem "Brothers:"

> Hence why not unite again to stand 'gain
> Prideful of your Lebanese cultured vein
> Be brave to bear the burden of your fate
>
> And wise to quell the imposed storm of hate
> Then teach those gate-crashers to understand
> The meaning of our brotherhood and land
> The meaning of free birth and liberty
> The rights of man and his integrity. (Haydar, 2012, ll. 3–10)

Lebanon's civil war tore the country apart. This undeniably influenced Haydar who desires the Lebanese to coexist peacefully by enjoying their freedom, sustaining a sense of goodwill, shunning all forms of enmity, the unfortunate aftermath of factional struggles.

Haydar's famous saying, "He who fights another heavenly religion is no different than one who shoots a star so that darkness may prevail" (online), is a clear indication of despising intolerance. This denotes that Haydar is not fanatic but religiously tolerant; he considers that all celestial religions are interrelated since they have the same roots; extinguishing the spark of one faith is tantamount to abolishing the ones illuminating other faiths.

Through his verse, Haydar suggests proposals for embracing religious leniency. The pen, which is the "metonymy of knowledge and/or education," according to Haydar, is the sole guarantee that makes people immune to religious conflicts and tolerant; through education, an individual becomes more cultivated and cultured, shunning the concepts of fanaticism, bloodshed, cruelty, and intolerance. His poem "Mahatma Gandhi," demonstrates Haydar's reverence to this spiritual Indian leader whose writings spread the spirit of love among humanity: "By the pen that has writ and still teaching/How to water the seeds of love where grown" (Haydar, 2012, ll. 39–40). Both the power of knowledge and reason embodied in the symbol of the pen and the power of love unbolt the gate to tolerance and cultural understanding.

Other than education and love, Haydar accentuates the notion of the oneness of humankind, which in turn fosters the concept of tolerance. He explains in "And:"

Better praise God and catch your heart by hand
To shape it right to love your neighbor and
Preach love and peace to those who listen and
Explain to them what're the rights of man and
What's liberty what's equality and
What's a brotherhood what's altruism and
How to be sociable lovable and
Pleasant and friendly to all p'ople. (Haydar, 2012, ll. 3–10)

Through benevolence and belief in the sacred bond of unity, tolerance becomes a way of life, a testimony of deeds. This is the humanitarian message that underpins all other religions, and that Rihani and Gibran displayed in their works. However, "In "A Shadow of Light" Haydar adopts a menacing tone, warning that if God's "divine message" is ignored, then the world is doomed, and brutality and bloodshed will reign.

Addressing various cultures and wandering across continents, Haydar possessed a wide, spiritual vision. His words transcended time and intended to be shared by humankind. According to Iwen, Haydar "is a man from before our time... also a man far ahead of our time," and his "poetic vision is as broad and ecumenical as his life" (as cited. in Haydar, 2012, pp. 27, 25). This is amply lucid since Haydar (2012) states, "Should I win my spurs today/ I'll cross the frontiers of time/ To write my name on the walls of tomorrow" (p. 13).

Haydar delineated a futuristic, idealistic vision of Lebanon as a multi-sectarian country—a model of coexistence—where rival sects live serenely and safely. The verse that best illustrates this point exists in his poem titled "Brothers:"

Be brave to bear the burden of your fate
And wise to quell the imposed storm of hate
Then teach those gate-crashers to understand
The meaning of our brotherhood and land
The meaning of free birth and liberty
The rights of man and his integrity. (Haydar, 2012, ll. 5–10)

In the above, Haydar addresses the Lebanese; he encourages them to transcend their differences and replace the spirit of enmity with that of goodwill. Similarly, his poem, "Countrymen," creates an ambiance of love so that the Lebanese forget about their divisions whether political or religious and unite so that their country serves as a model that inspires others. The poem concerns the revival of the Lebanese democratic spirit that contributes to making his country a unique place in which creeds peacefully coexist. He attributes two global abstract notions, "love" and "democracy," assuming his homeland is the typical "village" capable of teaching a universal lesson; this shows the extent to which he has faith in his homeland. In "Countrymen," Haydar (2012) expresses his dream saying:

> Teach the people how to climb the highest slopes
> To build on top a love nest for all to dwell
> In a world of democracy full of hopes
> A paradise inside this our present hell. (ll. 17–20)

More specifically, Haydar (2012) uses Beirut as a symbol of this ideal "village" in which faiths exist side by side. The poem "Beirut" exhibits the poet's pride in a city that is a testimony and miniature of religious tolerance: this city is "The precursor of religious pride in the east," (l. 3) since it: "Opened the purdah of mind/To teach the world/The true meaning of brotherhood and love," (ll. 5–7).

Haydar's voice not only echoes in the East but also resounds in the West. Turning his face towards the West, Haydar (2012) addresses the Occident in "Super Powers" saying:

> Nip in the bud your disguised quarr'ls and be friends
> The world's waiting for your nuclear accord
> Make Irish and spit on your palm and shake hands
> To endorse your word and attain your reward. (ll. 9–12)

Through the above, Haydar communicates with the West, urging its leaders to cease promoting war and materialism, endorsing instead love, peace, and mutual understanding. This humanitarian and contemporary call is universal; it is addressed to the Orient and Occident with the same fervor—a comparable message to different poles.

In fact, Haydar's position concerning tolerance is modern and universal; he speaks across cultures, crosses boundaries between East and West, and informs his readers about religious forbearance that can be acquired through education, love, humanism, and cultural dialogue in order to maintain global peace.

Imam Moussa Sadr

Sayyid Moussa Sadr (1928–1978), a Lebanese-Iranian who was raised and educated in Iran but returned to Lebanon, received his citizenship in 1958, and achieved fame as an impartial and modern religious intellectual reformer. He gradually gained recognition as a devout Lebanese savant. Known for his endeavor in fighting sectarianism, promoting interreligious dialogues, and defending peaceful coexistence between Christians and Muslims to prevent Lebanon from dividing into religious states, Moussa Sadr was profoundly dedicated to the ideal of a secular bond tying Christians and Muslims. His actions and ideas—noble/rational/mature—were directed towards humanitarian causes.

In Lebanon, he visited schools, colleges, mosques, and participated in various religious occasions, lecturing and encouraging numerous interreligious dialogues. He encountered numerous figures from diverse religions and became the forerunner of inter-faith dialogue by delivering sermons in churches throughout Lebanon. Engaging earnestly with Christians in a fashion denoting unity, he was a distinguished moderate religious figure promoting tolerance from a wide perspective.

Religious differences, according to Sadr, is a healthy indicative that produces intellectual movements; however, when man misuses his religious beliefs, an array of conflicts emerge (as cited in Charafeddine, 1997, pp. 39–40). Sadr, convinced that differences in religions are what characterize our divine creation and social structure, called for total interaction between sects. Subsequently, initiating a dialogue between faiths is a normal issue while a refusal to interact with other sects is abnormal. Not cooperating with a man from another faith, or doubting the other's patriotism, negatively affects social interaction and leads to social disunity (as cited in Nabolsi, 2013, pp. 261, 281). At this point, sectarianism assumes the role of a disease requiring immediate treatment. After analyzing the essence of sectarianism, Sadr deduces that the Lebanese abhor sectarianism but are willing to embrace their brothers from other sects:

> Sectarianism has more than one meaning. It may be political. Often, sectarianism means attending to the affairs of a sect. Others suggest that it means piety. However, sectarianism is perilous when it turns negative. Setting up one's sect as a barrier to cooperation and interaction is baseless. This is another meaning, remedied through sound religious education, and the pure and uncompromising efforts of loyal souls. I believe that the people of Lebanon, if left to express their true nature are not sectarian in the negative sense. They wish to faithfully cooperate with their compatriots. (as cited in Charafeddine, 2017, p. 18*)*

According to Moussa Sadr, religions stem from the premise that there is only one God, and religious denominations complement each other: "All religions were once united; they anticipated one another; they validated one another" (as cited in Ajami, 1986, p. 134). To him, religion has two messages: the philosophical one which is a spiritual message (having faith in one God) and another practical message (a humanitarian message) that entails loving, respecting, helping, and sympathizing with those of different creeds for the purpose of social and religious coexistence (Kanaan, 2006, pp. 169, 171).

Imam Sadr was totally against fanaticism and extremism since both result in violence. He believes that religions have one basic core message, promoting peace, love, and mercy. He is convinced that humanity should be unified; disunity is against divine order because God created a unified existence. Threatening this unity is against man's nature and not for man's sake (as cited in Charafeddine, 1997, p. 16). He firmly believed that doctrinal discrepancies are not an invitation for rival sects to initiate a feud and that dialogue is the best solution to appreciate people of dissimilar faiths. Fanaticism leads to disunity and threatens religion and homeland; it should be peacefully avoided.

He finds that secularism is not a reliable solution in fighting sectarianism. He believes that the Lebanese democracy should undergo evolution to become more developed, and Lebanese citizens should focus on common religious values that are instrumental in social and political relations. Lebanon should not be a replica of another country since this would lead to a loss of its unique identity. Secularism should not be applied in Lebanon—it makes people lose their spirituality. Moreover, it is not suitable because traditions and religions lie at the core of Lebanon's culture.

One valid solution to establish tolerance is to issue civil laws based on shared common values that Christians and Muslims share (as cited in Nabolsi, 2013, pp. 180–182). Sadr explains that the cross-cultural dialogue between the East and West is an inter-faith one. If Christians and Muslims are unable to coexist in Lebanon, then the dialogue between the Arabs and Europeans fails too:

> Arab-European dialogue, given Europe's experience, history, and position, and the Arab World's cultural heritage, resources, and geographic location, is a source of great hope to the world today in producing political forces whose locus is Christian-Muslim dialogue. If the Lebanese experience fails, human civilization will be doomed for at

> least a half century. Hence, we assert that Lebanon is now, more than ever, a civilizational necessity. (as cited. in Charafeddine, 2017, p. 17*)*

What makes Sadr's solution unique concerning the eradication of sectarianism is his mature philosophical perspective. Undoubtedly, he was a forerunner in associating the notion of patriotism to religion. According to him, the latter is "... not simply a set of rituals but rather, a set of social concerns regarding the needs of people" (Gharbieh, 1996, p. 178). In another instance, he says, "the homeland mirrors heaven" (as cited in Nabolsi, 2013, p. 225), signifying that the Lebanese patriot should also be spiritual. Religions, with their spiritual essence, elevate the patriotic mind that must transcend beyond earthly matters. Thus, unity of religions will strengthen man's patriotic attachment to his country and to his compatriots. By stressing that the Lebanese should favor patriotism over their doctrinal affiliation, he calls for a national unity that retains a spiritual dialogue between sects, while emphasizing the Lebanese socio-political existence.

Another mode of fighting intolerance is religious coexistence—Lebanon's richness and conclusive message to the entire world. It is God's will and the will of all religions. It is Lebanon's destiny and only way of preventing the country's division into separate states; it ensures peaceful conditions and aids humanity (as cited in Nabolsi, 2013, pp. 268–269, 278, 304). He recommends that sects peacefully coexist and not involve themselves in uncontrolled competition: this triggers fear in the subconscious of religious minorities. Coexistence is utterly necessary since it generates Christian/Muslim cooperation in solving various challenges such as destitution, education, violence, political oppression, and the like. Sadr volunteers to speak on behalf of the Muslim community; he reaches out to Christians, calling for oral and physical cooperation and reconciliation:

> I am for the establishment of one united Islamic front that can allow us, from a position of strength, to extend our hands of cooperation towards our fellow Christians and that can make way for the coexistence of Muslims and Christians. (as cited in Abadhari, 2009, p. 126)

Coexistence is when Christians and Muslims appreciate and comprehend one another's teachings, concentrating on familiar points in order to attain proximity and security (as cited in Charafeddine, 1997, p. 76). In this way, obstacles are removed and humans are unified despite their differences. For religions to achieve unity, they have to possess one single goal—serving the needy and the oppressed. Sadr insists on the need to fulfill the Almighty's— sects ought to unite for the service of mankind: "Our hearts yearn for you; our minds derive light and guidance from you. … We have come to your door, we have gathered together to serve man" (as cited in Ajami, 1986, p. 134).

It is man that all religions aspire to serve and "The feuding parties must make God their arbiter, seeking reconciliation and embracing the 'path of Jerusalem' and the cause of the needy," said Sadr in one of his speeches (as cited in Abisaab, 2015, p. 140). If sects do not unite for the splendid cause of helping humankind, there will be friction/discord. The divine essence of religions will be forever lost, intensifying man's negative predicament: "Then religions diverged when each sought to serve itself, to pay excessive attention to itself to the point that each religion forgot the original purpose—the service of man" (as cited in Ajami, 1986, p. 134). This pragmatic and noble objective unifies all religions. Sadr adds the humanitarian touch to the concept of religious tolerance he shares with Rihani, Gibran, and Haydar.

Sadr's global vision makes him a unique religious and humanitarian ambassador. When lecturing or delivering a speech, it is immensely difficult to identify his complex moral-religious beliefs. For instance, when he states that the Lebanese president should be a Christian because a Christian leader is more likely to maintain a fruitful dialogue between Lebanon and Europe (Nabolsi, 2013, pp. 287, 303), Sadr demonstrates a vibrant example of religious tolerance.

What made Sadr a unique spiritual leader, imam, and ambassador of peace, is the manner in which he sympathizes with the Lebanese Christians; his speeches at times sound more Christian than Muslim. His tone tends to be impartial, and the scope of his sermons conveys no religious orientation. His enterprise was to make of Lebanon a true cosmopolitan community. He proved to be a humane/benevolent and conciliatory symbol of national harmony.

Essentially, Sadr belongs to all religions. His lectures accentuate the notion of peace, justice, love, and mutual respect and understanding. These are the common features of all religions whose message is to acknowledge God's teachings and serve humanity. He was truly convinced that his role as a religious figure was to serve society:

> ...the responsibility of an Imam of the community knows no limits: an Imam has to protect the interests of his people; he has to be generous; he has to serve his community persistently; he has to be willing to undergo martyrdom on their behalf. No leader can claim Islam who ignores the daily affairs of the community. (as cited in Gharbieh, 1996, p. 175)

His energetic spiritual sermons express the spirit of nationalism rather than religion. He envisages Lebanon as a Middle Eastern oasis, a supreme instance of religious tolerance. In order to maintain such a depiction, he demanded collective cooperation on behalf of all religious creeds. Only coexistence can prevent or end religious, political, and social problems.

He devoted his shortened political life and intellectual ambition to ending hostilities between religions; his main aim was the preservation of coexistence in Lebanon—this characterizes Lebanon's integrity and identity. Imam Sadr reminds us of Robert Frost's well-known poem, "The Road Not Taken": "I took the one less traveled,/And that has made all the difference." Indeed, Sadr was radically singular in his modern philosophy of religious tolerance.

These four thinkers searched for the universal spiritual truth that underpins all religions and realized that various religions mirror the same divine reality. They called for a liberal, global, and everlasting religion that could pacify/harmonize humanity. Their religion is based on sublime love that is aimed at benefiting and assisting humans. It entails mutual respect and understanding of diverse beliefs and welcomes an open-minded, broadened dialogue. These philosophers are the proponents of the theoretical, pragmatic, epistemological, and coexistent aspects of tolerance in their literary productions. Thus, through their modernized version of religious tolerance, they have paved the way to secular humanism. This consists of an authentic representation of religious tolerance.

Not only Rihani, Gibran, Haydar, and Sadr promote religious leniency in their oral and literary discourse but also do Eliyya Abou Madi, Ameen Maalouf, Mikhael Naimy, Elias Farhat, and Michel Chiha. They all share a similar vision concerning religion and tolerance. These Lebanese philosophers were forerunners of modern globalization, boosting universal and religious coexistence, promoting a modernized version of an ideal, flexible identity, intellectually and morally ready to embrace their fellow men.

The writings of these thinkers resonated in the East and West; their humanistic vision came to fruition at the advent of the 21st century leaving its enduring mark in our contemporary world. Religious and secular citizens are engaged in international conversations intended to reconcile different viewpoints. For instance, between 1962 and 1965, a council held in Vatican encouraged inter-faith dialogues between Christians and Muslims. Currently, the number of such conferences and national and/or international exchanges has substantially increased.

The concept of religious tolerance is fundamentally crucial. It was tackled by these thinkers not from a remote, romantic viewpoint but from a contemporary, pragmatic position; each proposed solutions to end the deepening gap between confessions. In this respect, they proved to be realistic in dealing with religious coexistence, a current issue concerning our global beliefs. Their works expressed unconditional love and enthusiasm for a secure, peaceful country. Their yearning for a civil, tolerant society serves as a positive reminder of the urgent need to end

political and religious conflicts. These writers reflected in their works a model image of an independent Lebanon, an icon of peaceful coexistence between all sects and creeds.

These liberal thinkers promoted sensitivity toward sacred beliefs by accepting other religions, demonstrating tolerance through related actions that accompanied their unbiased, flexible convictions. They were convinced that a non-judgmental, unprejudiced attitude is the only successful manner to minimize aggression and end extremism, terrorism, and insanity; thus paving the way to a well-knit social unity. Consequently, their political and literary works encouraged readers to practice religious open-mindedness as a lifestyle or way of conduct.

Undeniably, the seeds planted by these striking Lebanese humanist thinkers have germinated in the life of the Lebanese; they are presently more prone to religious interaction and acceptance. In the aftermath of the civil war, the country has extensively promoted religious tolerance—a crucial, promising step forward. Lebanon is a meeting point of all religions; a place that embraces cultural pluralism. During his 1997 memorable visit, Vatican Pope John II emphatically stated, "Lebanon is more than a country—it is a message" (as cited in Bohlen, 1997, para. 10). According to Philip A. Salem, the power of the pope's "message" is that Lebanon, unlike other Middle Eastern countries, possesses "the ability to rise above religion to humanity and bring about the miracle of Islamic-Christian integration" (as cited in Indari & Mourani, 2012, p. 124).

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