

Paris: 'Peace & Solidarity' Conference: Two Civilizations Bound by One Hope

Lyon: A Spectacular Inauguration of the New French Islamic Institute

The Age of Enlightenment: The Great Mosque of Paris that Saved Jews During Holocaust

The Arts: The Louvre Expands its Islamic Art Collection

SEPTEMBER 2019

VOL 49 | NO 9 | DUL QADAH



THE FRENCH CONNECTION:

France, Islam & La Grande Tradition



*A true Muslim is an
ambassador for Islam,
reflecting its values
and principles.*

— Secretary General of the Muslim
World League His Excellency
Sheikh Dr. Mohammad bin
Abdulkarim Al-Issa

About the MWL

The Muslim World League is a non-governmental international organization based in Makkah. Its goal is to clarify the true message of Islam.

Crown Prince Faisal, the third son of King Abdulaziz ibn Mohammad Al Saud, founded the Muslim World League during the meeting of the general Islamic Conference on May 18, 1962, in order to fulfill his dream for an Islamic Ummah. The establishment of the MWL continued the vision of the Crown Prince to enlighten and educate the international Muslim community, which began with the founding of the Islamic University of Madinah in 1961. The Muslim World League has grown into a worldwide charity to which the Saudi Royal Family remain active donors.

Ascending to the throne as King Faisal in November 1964, the Saudi leader remained steadfast in his faith, proclaiming: "I beg of you, brothers, to look upon me as both brother and servant. 'Majesty' is reserved to God alone and 'the throne' is the throne of the Heavens and Earth."

Contents

SEPTEMBER 2019 | VOLUME 49 | ISSUE 9

1. The Month in Review	
The main events and activities of H.E. Sheikh Dr. Mohammad bin Abdulkarim Al-Hssa for September 2019.	5
2. Letter from the Editor	
Peace and Solidarity: A Conference Theme, A Global Goal.....	10
3. Editorial Leaders	
La Grande Tradition: France & Islam—A Great Tradition of Great Understanding. . .	12
The Age of Enlightenment: Islam, the West and the Power of Ideas.	16
Special Feature: La Philosophie d’Islam: Famous French Writers and their Appreciation of the Faith.	20
The Power of Culture: Appreciating Art as Diplomacy	22
4. Feature Essays	
Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité: The City’s First-Ever Conference of the Abrahamic Faiths.....	24
Ideas Without Borders: The Inauguration of the New French Islamic Institute at Lyon.	26
Meeting of the Minds: The Evangelical Conference.	28
The Saudi-French Council: Behind the Scenes Leading the Way	30
5. Arts & Culture	
L’Art Pour l’Art: The Louvre Expands its Islamic Art Division.....	32
6. Historic Essay	
On the Great Mosque of Paris that Saved Jews During the Holocaust.	34



Editorial Department:

Secretary General
H.E. Dr. Muhammad bin Abdulkarim Al-Hssa

Supervisor General
Media Affairs Dept.
Abdulwahab Alshehri

Editor Responsible
Marcia A. Christoff

P.O. Box 537
Makkah, Saudi Arabia

Tel: 0096 66 (012)560 0919
Email: mwljournal@themwl.org

Follow Us on Social Media:

@mwlorg_en | @mwlorg | @mwlorg_fr | @mwlorg_ur

/mwlorg.en | /mwlorg

@mwlorg

/themwlog

mwlorg

L'Air du Temps: The Spirit of the Times:



"I, too, look forward to the successful implementation of this agreement. We hope to be able to live in peace and solidarity in an atmosphere of love."

—The Grand Mufti of Lebanon, on the signing of the "MOU of the Abrahamic Faiths", September 17, 2019



"Our strength comes from calm and confidence. It is not aggressive. It is not a threat. Dear friends, let us work together so that our promise for peace may come true."

—M. Francois Clavaroily, President of the Protestant Federation of France, September 17, 2019



"My home will be a home of prayer for all peoples. Despite the differences between places of worship, we have hope for peace and harmony."

—Rabbi Haim Korsia, Chief Rabbi of the Great Synagogue of Paris, September 17, 2019

MWL in September

Highlights of the Month in Review

SEPTEMBER 4

Secretary General of the Muslim World League His Excellency Mohammad bin Abdulkarim Al-Issa received the Grand Mufti of the Republic of Ethiopia, Omar Idris, in Jeddah, the world headquarters of the MWL. Islam is the second largest religion in Ethiopia, accounting for around 34% of the population.

SEPTEMBER 5

This day marks the “International Day of Charity,” a celebration of particular importance for the MWL. Charitable projects are the mainstay of the ethos of the MWL and its affiliate, Islamic Organization for Relief, Welfare and Development, and the personal passion of H.E. Sheikh Dr. Al-Issa, in accordance with Islamic principles. Recent activities in this arena include relief for orphans in Jordan, Pakistan, Ghana and throughout the African continent; \$5 million in charitable aid donated to the Republic of Sri Lanka in response to the “Easter Massacre” in April



H.E. Dr. Al-Issa sets out from the Luxemburg Palace with Chairman of the Saudi-Arab Parliamentary Friendship Committee.

of this year and \$1 million for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

SEPTEMBER 5

His Excellency Allahshukar Pashazadeh, Grand Mufti of the Republic of Azerbaijan and head of the Religious Council of

the Caucasus, met with H.E. Dr. Al-Issa in Jeddah during a meeting between the two leaders on strengthening the religious and cultural ties of national states throughout the Muslim world.

“ Dr. Al-Issa has offered us the very best of Islam. Today in France we have shared our best values—friendship, love and togetherness. Let this open door, which leads to a brighter path for France toward fraternity.”

— Rabbi Michel Serfaty, at the closing reception of the Peace and Solidarity Conference, Paris, September 16-18, 2019

” Religious and cultural diversity never justifies conflict. Humanity needs positive, civilized partnerships and effective interaction.

— H.E. Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Al-Issa

SEPTEMBER 7

H.E. Dr. Al-Issa received Joseph Francescon, the White House National Security Council Director for Counterterrorism, in Riyadh to discuss a number of issues related to the ideology of terrorism. In addition, the MWL Assistant Secretary General for

Political Affairs and Negotiations, Dr. Abdulaziz Hamad Al-Owaishek, met Mr. Francescon at the GCC headquarters in Riyadh, along with Mr. Joseph Rosenstein, State Department Counterterrorism Policy Advisor, and their accompanying delegation.

Jews have been murdered in synagogues, Muslims have been gunned down in mosques and Christians killed at prayer. This is why we have launched a plan to safeguard religious sites and protect worshippers.”



H.E Dr. Al-Issa meeting with the Grand Mufti of Ethiopia, Omar Idris, in Jeddah, early September.

Meeting with the Grand Mufti of Azerbaijan, Haji Allahshukur Pashazadeh to discuss the common cause of religious community and tolerance.

SEPTEMBER 10

Sheikh Dr. Al-Issa met with representatives of the U.S. evangelical community, led by Mr. Joel C. Rosenberg, underscoring values of harmony and cooperation among faiths in their discussion in Jeddah. A statement from that meeting, featured further on in this issue, reaffirms the imperative of rejecting all forms of extremism and hatred. “Personal freedom does not extend to the abuse of others, especially based on religion, culture or race,” read in part from the statement from the meeting.

SEPTEMBER 17

The 74th session of the United Nations General Assembly opened this day in New York City, representing 193 member states and 2 observer states. Addressing the Assembly on 24 September, UN Secretary General Antônio Manuel de Oliveira Guterres outlined a plan for the international protection of religious sites, stating: “To my horror, in recent months,

SEPTEMBER 17

Bonjour, Paris! H.E. Dr. Al-Issa led a delegation of the Muslim World League to attend the “Paris International Conference for Peace and Solidarity,” co-sponsored by Fond-Islam France at the beautiful Palais Brongniart, the former stock exchange, in central Paris. The meeting was attended by high-level delegates representing the Abrahamic faiths—Jewish, Muslim and Christian (Roman Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox Christian)—as well as noted French diplomats, scholars, journalists and NGO leaders. It commenced with a moment of silence in honor of victims of terrorism, and the highlight of the Conference was a Memorandum of Understanding aimed at a concerted effort for inter-faith toleration throughout all levels of society and culture.

SEPTEMBER 17

Addressing a well-attended gathering at the historic stock exchange in the heart of the French capital, a captivating array of speakers underscored the need for honest

dialogue at a time of seemingly insurmountable mythologies, misconceptions and outright lies about the major religions—and pitting one against the other in the process. Among other featured speakers, the **Grand Mufti of Lebanon, Sheikh Abdellatif Deriane**, recalled the Charter of Makkah as the key document for the Muslim world as an outline of the approach to peace; **Ghaleb Benchiekh, President of Fond-Islam France**, referred to the Conference as marking the beginning of a new era, while **Francois Clavairoly, President of the Protestant Federation of France**, noted that aggression and threats advance only barbarism, ignorance, chaos and the loss of human freedom—never advancement, progress or the happiness of societies.

SEPTEMBER 17

On the theme of “Spiritual Elevation in the 21st century,” the **Grand Imam of Bordeaux, Tareq Oubrou**, joined the panel along with **Rabbi Philippe Haddad and Monseigneur Gerard Défois**, as well as **Sophie Gherardi**, former editor of *Le Monde*, and M. **Philippe Gaudin** of the European Institute for the Science of Religions. **Chihab Nasser**, the Director General of FondIslam France, closed the session with a passionate discussion on “Identity and Otherness in Faith.”



Meeting with the delegation of the U.S. evangelical community.



H.E. Dr. Al-Issa with Mr. Joseph Francescon of the U.S. National Security Council in Riyadh early September during GCC week.



French Senate Foreign Relations and Defense chief M. Christian Cambon at the Paris Senate welcomes H.E. Dr. Al-Issa.

SEPTEMBER 17

At the conclusion of the Conference, Muslim, Jewish, Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox leaders gathered at a reception in Paris to sign a historic Memorandum of Understanding and Friendship that outlines their intent to continue meaningful faith dialogue. “The Memorandum of the Abrahamic Family” is the first agreement endorsed by high-level Muslims, Jews and Christian leaders in France.

SEPTEMBER 19

H.E. Sheikh Dr. Al-Issa met with the Saudi-French Parliamentary Friendship Committee in Paris, with the Committee sharing its support for the historic MOU resulting from the International Conference for Peace and Solidar-



“ Any form of hatred, violence or racism in our society reflects that those who call for these things are not aligned with reality. These values go against common sense.

—Grand Mufti of Lebanon, Abdellatif Deriane

ity. A discussion followed focusing on the successful messages that resulted from that event.

SEPTEMBER 21

This day was the International Day of Peace, and the Muslim World League observed it by reaffirming

its commitment to using dialogue to build bridges of understanding and tolerance across cultures and societies.

SEPTEMBER 22

The Inauguration of the French Institute for Islamic Civilization in

“The culture that emanates from religions, their symbolic treasures and their works of art must be better known and better transmitted.”

— Philippe Gaudin, Director of the European Institute for the Science of Religions

Lyon took place with H.E. Sheikh Dr. Al-Issa in attendance alongside the mayor of Lyon, the President of the Municipality of Lyon and the French Minister of the Interior.

SEPTEMBER 23

The Chairman of the Central Council of Muslims in Germany, Aiman Mazyek, shared his support for the Paris International Conference for Peace and Solidarity and for the Charter of Makkah, stating: “This is the dialogue of civilization and religion, the dialogue of the future.”

SEPTEMBER 27

His Excellency M. Christian Cambon, the Chairman of the French Senate Foreign Relations and Defense Committee (La Commission des affaires étrangères, de la défense et l’armée) met with H.E. Dr. Al-Issa, praising the Secretary General of the MWL for promoting peace and coexistence and creating “an enlightened discourse.”

SEPTEMBER 30

H.E. Sheikh Dr. Al-Issa was awarded a medal from the Collège des Bernardins in Paris for his efforts in promoting peace and solidarity among world religions. The Collège des Bernardins is one of the oldest Catholic universities in France.



Audience listening to speakers discuss the importance of interfaith dialogue and cooperation.



The Collège of Bernardins, one of the oldest Catholic universities in France, awarded this medal to H.E. Dr. Al-Issa for his work promoting peace and solidarity among the world’s religions.



A PARIS OF PEACE & SOLIDARITY

Editorial Staff of the Journal of the Muslim World League | September 2019

“ The Muslim World League’s Conferences are those of peace and understanding, making goodness in humanity a reality through the initiative the MWL has launched around the world.

– The Grand Mufti of Lebanon, Abdellatif Deriane, Paris, September 17, 2019



H.E. Dr. Al-Issa with his fellow dignitaries at the conclusion of the signing of the historic Paris Memorandum of the Abrahamic Faith.

Spearheaded by the Foundation for Islam in France and the Muslim World League, the conference, centered around peace and solidarity, attracted high-ranking participation. At a time where the world seems to be overrun with a lack of understanding, the International Conference on Peace and Soli-

darity was a necessary step. The forum served to plainly remind the world that all Muslims, Jews and Christians descend from the same spiritual and theological source and that a crime against one group is ultimately a crime against oneself. It is certainly a setting in which our Secretary General, H.E.

Dr. Mohammad bin Abdulkarim Al-Issa, would feel at home. Dr. Al-Issa stressed the need to build bridges across religions through dialogue in pursuance of a more peaceful future. The conference consisted of debate, discussion, and idea sharing, all of which are essential in the road to advancement.

We celebrate France in this issue for its shared geopolitical and cultural connections to the Islamic world. According to recent polling France has the most favorable view of Islam out of all other EU countries. This is not limited to the cosmopolitan atmosphere of Paris, where Islamic culture has long had a strong cultural presence. It also enlivens such places as Bordeaux and Lyon, where Dr. Al-Issa attended the opening of a new French Institute for Islamic Culture, detailed further on in this issue.

Farther south, the Mediterranean port of Marseille profits from a diverse Muslim presence. When traveling through France, they encounter Muslim individuals that lead productive and happy lives. This is due in no small part to the tireless efforts of interfaith conferences such as that led by the MWL and its partner, La Fondation de L'Islam de France, which show that acceptance is achievable.

On the heels of this event, H.E. Dr. Al-Issa met with the Saudi-French Committee for Friendship. This is a key organization in relations between France and the Islamic world, chaired by His Excellency Dr. Fahd bin Hamoud Al-Enezi. The talks focus on ways to enhance cooperation between the Saudi Shura Council and the French National Assembly. It has long been a successful dialogue, as France ranks third among countries investing in the Kingdom.

The pragmatism of such cooperation as the Friendship Committee also extended to Dr. Al-Issa's Riyadh meeting earlier in the month with Mr. Joseph Francescon, the White House National Security Council Director for Counterterrorism. The MWL and NSC delegation discussed the best ways to combat

🗨️ *Seek peace in your community, and you will find it within yourself.*

— Rabbi Philippe Haddad of the Great Synagogue of Paris, the first International Conference on Peace and Solidarity, Paris, September 17, 2019

extremist ideology. The MWL campaigns to bring a light to this psychology of terror, and strives to communicate to all nations that it takes authentic religion and comprehensive dialogue among all faiths to eradicate it from the world.

During the age of Enlightenment, many Parisians were not tolerant of Islam, owing to a sheer lack of information and education. Islam was largely distant and foreign. Yet many influential thinkers — as will be seen later on in the pages — were champions of the Islamic faith and sought to spread proper understanding of its principles and its alignment with universal, "Abrahamic" principles. Since then, such desire to understand has only rapidly advanced and what joy that we at the MWL in 2019 can experience the fruit of its steady bloom and take part in continuing to cultivate its growth.

It is in this spirit of *éclaircissement* that we invite you to peruse this issue rich with events and ideas, in full appreciation of what can be accomplished when enlightened societies and civilizations work together.

Que la Paix de Dieu Soit avec Vous,

The Editors. ❖



LA GRANDE TRADITION: FRANCE & ISLAM

A Great Tradition of Great Understanding

Editorial Staff of the Journal of the Muslim World League | September 2019



Front entrance of the stunning La Grande Mosque of Paris, completed in 1926 in honor of Muslim soldiers from colonial territories who served the French Army.

First, the basics: Islam is the second largest religion in France behind Catholicism, with the country home to the largest number of Muslims in the Western world due mainly to migration from North Africa and the Middle East. Pew Research, with data from 2018, reports a Muslim population of about 5,750,000, or almost 9% of the population. The vast majority are of immigrant origin, with approximately 100,000 converts counted from among the ethnic French. The French overseas region of Mayotte, an island near Madagascar, has a majority Muslim population.

But a Wikipedia statistical summary of the history of Islam in France and, one may say, “France in Islam” (this in terms of a distinct cultural charm), hardly does justice to the complex relationship between these two civilizations—one that has given birth to a staggering treasure of aesthetic and intellectual riches but also less dazzling periods of strained geopolitical and domestic social challenges.

Due to a law dating from 1872, the French Republic prohibits identifying its citizens by race or religion in the official census. (However, that law does not concern surveys and polls, which are free to ask those questions if they wish). That 19th century decree is as progressive today as it was at the time. It is this great tradition of *Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité*, which has inspired Muslims to flock to the country for centuries, seeking freedom of faith, a consistent climate of tolerance, and acceptance into a culture that has continuously sought to enrich itself through intellectual and spiritual diversity.

When Spanish Muslims, or *Moriscos*, were expelled from Spain between 1609 and 1614, the great Cardinal Richlieu, the principal advisor to King Louis XIII, denounced the event as “the most rash and barbarous that the history of all previous centuries has recorded” and compared the event to the exodus of the Jews from Egypt. Fifty



Garden of the Great Mosque of Paris. Credit: WikiCommons

thousand of the Moriscos were welcomed into France, which offered to facilitate passage to Islamic lands for those who wished to be in the lands of their ancestors.

When the Great Mosque of Paris was built in 1922, it was as a sign of recognition from the French Republic to the fallen Muslim tirailleurs, a light infantry dating from the Imperial Guard of the Napoleonic era, mainly coming from Algeria, particularly at the battle of Verdun and the takeover of the Douaumont fort, but also Algeria, Senegal, Tunisia, Madagascar and French Indochina. The tirailleurs from Algeria had served in the Crimean War (1853-56), the Second Italian War of Independence (1859), the French intervention in Mexico (1852-70) and the Franco-Prussian war (1870). In 1914, the 1st Regiment of Moroccan Tirailleurs was created for service in World War I, and at the end of the period of French rule in 1956, six Moroccan regiments were still in existence. Recruitment was mainly voluntary.

It goes without saying that there have been eras in French history, as with any country, when tensions mounted over the concept of “integration.” Just as leaders such as General Charles de Gaulle, much like British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, were uncertain that Muslims would feel fully at home within the cultural matrices of Western nations, ironically, one could argue that such views became the springboard of movements to finally liberate colonial lands (in the case of France, Algeria)—all to the betterment of Muslim identity and national destiny. What’s more, those epochs, and the extreme nationalist trends since then, have never grown into permanent obstacles to interaction with new generations of Muslim citizens in European countries. There can only be a “clash of civilizations” when ignorance goes about blindly slamming into itself. La Belle France is far too elegant and civilized for that. ❖



A Muslim lieutenant and Muslim tirailleur from a Tunisian regiment that served the 4th RTA of the French Army during World War I. Both men are highly decorated, their honors including the Legion d'honneur, Medaille militaire, and the Croix de Guerre with palm. Photo dated 1917. Image credit: WikiCommons.

The Most Important Political Institution of Islam in France

The most important national institution is the CFCM (Conseil Français du Culte Musulman) and was designed on the model of the “Consistoire Juif de France” and of the “consistoire Protestant de France,” both Napoleonic creations. The aim of the CFCM (like its Jewish and Protestant counterparts) is to discuss religious problems with the state, participate in certain public institutions, and organize the religious life of French Muslims. The CFCM is elected by the French Muslims through local election. It is the only official instance of the French Muslims.

Though the French State is secular, in 2002, the then Interior Minister M Nicolas Sarkozy initiated the creation of the CFCM. As of 2004, it is headed by the rector of the Great Mosque of Paris, Dalil Boubakeur.

🗨️ *Comme l'a expliqué le Prophète (paix et bénédiction sur lui), 'Chacun de vous est un berger responsable de son troupeau.'*

In the words of the Prophet (may Peace be Upon Him) 'Each of you is a shepherd and is responsible for his flock.'

—Hadith, from the Book of Government

Laïcité and the Challenge of Separating Mosque and State

The great majority of Muslims practice their religion in the French framework of laïcité—literally, “secularity” as a French tradition of non-religious involvement in government or public institutions religious code. By laws thereof derived, any religious of conduct must not infringe the public area.

The wearing of hijab in France has been controversial for a few decades. In December 2003, the late President Chirac decided that the law should prohibit the wearing of visible religious signs in schools. Items prohibited by this law include hijabs, Jewish yarmulkes or large Christian crosses. It is still permissible to wear discreet symbols of faith. With this law contested on and off over the years, on 25 January 2010 it was announced by a committee of the National Assembly (L'Assemblée nationale) that a ban on veils covering the face in public locations such as hospitals and schools be enacted, but not in private buildings or on the street.

Taming Terror

In the 2015–2018 timespan in France, 249 people had been killed in terrorist attacks and 928 wounded in a total of 22 terrorist attacks, not including those abroad in which French nationals were victims, primarily North Africa. The majority of these were motivated by religious radicalism. France saw a tremendous decline in tourism, which has since bounced back strongly. Counter-terrorism technology is today especially refined: Using mobile labs for genetic identification, police experts play a key role in counter-terrorism. The French Gendarmerie's Institute of Criminal Research houses 250 specialists who are often the first to intervene after a terrorist attack to secure the crime scene and gather the first clues that will guide the investigation. Finally, there is the committed role of Paris to promote inter-faith dialogue, education, the involvement of universities and think-tanks to promote tolerance.



The famous and fabled Cardinal Richelieu, advisor to King Louis XIII, deft foreign policy advisor against Austro-Habsburg expansion, patron of the arts and founder of the prestigious L'Academie Française, denounced the expulsion of Muslims from Spain between 1609 and 1614 as "rash and barbarous" and invited some 50,000 to come to France and/or to help facilitate their passage back to the Islamic world. Image Credit: WikiCommons



To symbolize the eternal Friendship Between France and Islam

The Building of the Great Mosque of Paris

In 1920, the Society of Habous and Holy Places of Islam established the Algiers prefecture. It intended to apply for authorization to construct an Institute and a Mosque in Paris to have a structure "to symbolize the eternal friendship of France and Islam," and memorialize the sacrifice of the tens of thousands of Muslim soldiers who died fighting in support of France during World War I—including

at the Battle of Verdun, the longest battle of that war. The Great Mosque of Paris was built in the 5th arrondissement of the City of Light, completed in 1926. A liaison between Algeria and the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Si Kaddour Benghabrit the "most sophisticated Parisian Muslim" organized the project. Read more on this fascinating man and his adventure for the cause of humanity in the History section of this issue.



THE AGE OF ENLIGHTENMENT

A French-Islamic Appreciation of the Power of Ideas

Editorial Staff of the Journal of the Muslim World League | September 2019



An English-language translation of Henri de Boulainvilliers's classic *La Vie de Mahomed*, 1731.

Tolerance is bred in an atmosphere of tolerance. Understanding is bred in an environment of high-level learning and ceaseless cultural exchange. How many times has one been inundated with stereotypes, clichés, prejudiced testimonies, biases, political agendas and per-

haps the most notorious of all—"fake news"—about a particular personality, place or religion only to have later first-hand experience of one or all of these and come back with a totally different impression? This level of wisdom is the most demanding of all to achieve. It does not take place overnight and can even take centuries—in the case of "East meeting West." In this regard, the history of Western philosophy, and, for our purposes here and now, that of French Enlightenment philosophy, has struggled—and at times stumbled—to comprehend Islam and its principles, and to see how these may naturally relate to the Greek-Roman-Christian roots of European and American societies, what areas must be subject to discussion, and what beliefs are most at risk of misinterpretation. It is this latter—the radicalization of religion—that has become a weaponized tool of latter-day ideological warfare, a phenomenon the Muslim World League has dedicated its spiritual calling and material resources to combatting. "No one said it would be easy," we are constant-



Our sacred texts are the way in which we pass down the wisdom of our forefathers, but we must constantly update our understanding of them.

— Monseigneur Gerard Defois, at the Paris International Conference on Peace and Solidarity, September 17, 2019.

ly warned when undertaking a passion project and noble cause. But such efforts mustn't be considered abstract idealism, and our Secretary General, Dr Mohammad Al-Issa, certainly is the living embodiment of words and actions being as one.

"Ideas have consequences," warned a 20th century British philosopher, and "Thoughts are things," a 19th century American thinker reminded us. Throughout the early modern history of France, the philosophical attempt to "come to terms with" the fact of Islam as part of European culture produced a level of awareness that planted the seeds of what we today regard as a basic standard of humanistic education. It is well known that the Middle Ages were not so "dark" as supposed, when Muslim scientists and doctors served the courts of Kings and the great Muslim Aristotelian Ibn Rushd or Averroes of Andalusia was one of the greatest thinkers in world history. But 18th century France offered yet more by way of this East-West dialogue, a spirit mirrored in this month's International Conference on the Abrahamic faiths—an occasion as lively with intellectual exchange as only the standard of Paris could come to expect.

Among the great French thinkers who came to admire Islam are Jean Jacques Rousseau (Franco-Swiss), Jean-Claude Pastoret, and Henri de Boulainvilliers. The scholar Hassam Munir wrote a lively summary of these three thinkers in 2015 (Voltaire, Rousseau, Napoleon and the Prophet Mohammad) (Peace by Upon Him) bringing to light an aspect of Enlightenment thought known to few.

Henri de Boulainvilliers (1658-1722) was a French nobleman and historian, inspired by the famous philosophers René Descartes and John Locke, and an Enlightenment-era intellectual who wrote on physics, philosophy, theology and, of course, on history. In one of his more famous works, titled *Vie de Mahomed* ("Life of Mohammad"), he defended



Le grand philosophe Voltaire

the Prophet against the usual allegations that his doctrine was "irrational," and that he was an "imposter." Instead, Henri de Boulainvilliers argued, Mohammad was a divinely inspired messenger whom God had sent to liberate the Near East from the despotic rule of the Romans and Persians and to spread the message of tawhīd, or God's indivisible unity, from India to Spain. Mohammad's success, said Henri, was such that it "could only be from God."

Henri de Boulainvilliers' representation of Islam had an effect on other thinkers of the era, particularly the French philosopher Voltaire (1694-1778). Voltaire, a renowned poet, essayist and also a historian, is most famous for his attacks on the established Roman Catholic Church, but his opposition to Islam was yet more fanatical. However, it was de Boulainvilliers who essentially "converted" Voltaire to a more open-minded appreciation of the Islamic faith. Sometime after 1745, however, he read Boulainvilliers' *Vie de Mahomed*, and it seems to have had a lasting impact on his perception of Islam.

Francois Marie Arouet, known better by the nom de plume “Voltaire” (1694-1778), was a fierce critic of Islam and attacked the faith in many of his early writings. However, upon encountering the writings of other French Enlightenment thinkers he came to change his views and praise the Prophet Mohammad (Peace Be Upon Him), comparing “the genius of the Arab people” with “the genius of the ancient Romans.”

Later in life, particularly in his historical writings such as the *Essay on the Customs and the Spirit of the Nations* (1756), Voltaire praised the Prophet as an effective and tolerant leader and a successful conqueror, though he still maintained that Prophet Muhammad was not divinely inspired but was “so carried away [by his success as a leader] that he believed himself inspired by God.”

Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) was yet another Enlightenment-era French philosopher who commented on Islam in his magnum opus, *The Social Contract* (1762). The Prophet he said was a great legislator who successfully combined spiritual and worldly power. In 1787, Claude-Emmanuel Pastoret (1755-c. 1830), a French author and politician, published his *Zoroaster, Confucius and Mohammad*, in which he compared and contrasted the careers of the three Eastern religious “great men,” “the greatest legislators of the universe.” He defended Islam against the attacks commonly made upon it and praised the Qur’an for the manner in which it professes the unity of God. ❖



The Marquis de Pastoret Image Credit: WikiCommons

The great French jurist and philosopher of jurisprudence, Claude-Emmanuel, Marquis de Pastoret (1755-1840), served as President of the Chamber of Peers and Lord Chancellor of France. He wrote that the Prophet Mohammad (peace be upon him) was one of the world’s “great legislators and moralists.” His writing on Islam, Zoroastrianism and Confucianism was given highest honors by the Academie Francaise.

From the Memoirs (1823) of Napoleon Bonaparte, an excerpt on admiration for the Prophet Mohammad (Peace Be Upon him) by the Emperor of France:

“He addressed savage, poor peoples, who lacked everything and were very ignorant; had he spoken to their spirit, they would not have listened to him. In the midst of abundance in Greece, the spiritual pleasures of contemplation were a necessity; but in the midst of the deserts, where the Arab ceaselessly sighed for a spring of water, for the shade of a palm where he could take refuge from the rays of the burning tropical sun, it was necessary to promise to the chosen, as a reward, inexhaustible rivers of milk, sweet-smelling woods where they could relax in eternal shade, in the arms of divine hūrīs with white skin and black eyes. The Bedouins were impassioned by the promise of such an enchanting abode; they exposed themselves to every danger to reach it; they became heroes. Mohammad was a prince; he rallied his compatriots around him. In a few years, his Muslims conquered half the world. They plucked more souls from the false gods, knocked down more idols, razed more pagan temples in fifteen years, than the followers of Moses and Jesus Christ did in fifteen centuries. Mohammad was a great man.”



The young Napoleon. Image credit: WikiCommons

To symbolize the eternal Friendship Between France and Islam

The Building of the Great Mosque of Paris

In 1920, the Society of Habous and Holy Places of Islam established the Algiers prefecture. It intended to apply for authorization to construct an Institute and a Mosque in Paris to have a structure “to symbolize the eternal friendship of France and Islam,” and memorialize the sacrifice of the tens of thousands of Muslim soldiers who died fighting in support of France during World War I—including

at the Battle of Verdun, the longest battle of that war. The Great Mosque of Paris was built in the 5th arrondissement of the City of Light, completed in 1926. A liaison between Algeria and the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Si Kaddour Benghabrit the “most sophisticated Parisian Muslim” organized the project. Read more on this fascinating man and his adventure for the cause of humanity in the History section of this issue.



SPECIAL SECTION



Rabbi Haim Korsia speaking on the harmony and peace that exist within all faith, religions and creeds.

🗨️ *Religious and cultural diversity never justifies conflict. Humanity needs positive, civilized partnerships and effective interaction.*

diversity never justifies conflict. Humanity needs positive, civilized partnerships and effective interaction.

— H.E. Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Al-Hssa



Listeners watching on as faith leaders speak on the commonalities that bind together humans.

OUTSTANDING SAYINGS ON ISLAM AND THE PROPHET MOHAMMAD (PEACE BE UPON HIM) BY THREE NOTED FRENCH PHILOSOPHERS AND THINKERS

Jean-Jacques Rousseau (d. 1778)

"[The Prophet] Muhammad had very sound views; he thoroughly unified his political system; and so long as his form of government survived under his successors, the caliphs, the government was quite unified and in that respect a good one."

Alphonse de Lamartine (d.1869), on the Prophet Mohammad

"Never has a man accomplished in such a short time such an immense and long lasting revolution in the world, since less than two centuries after his predication, Islam, preaching and armed, ruled over three Arabias, and conquered to God's unity Persia, the Khorasan, Transoxania, Western India, Syria, Egypt, Ethiopia, and all the known continent of Southern Africa, many islands of the Mediterranean, Spain and part of Gaul."

Alphonse de Lamartine

"If the grandeur of the aim, the smallness of the means, the immensity of the results are the three measures of a man's genius, who would dare humanly compare a great man of modern history with Muhammad?"

Michel Foucault (1926-1984)

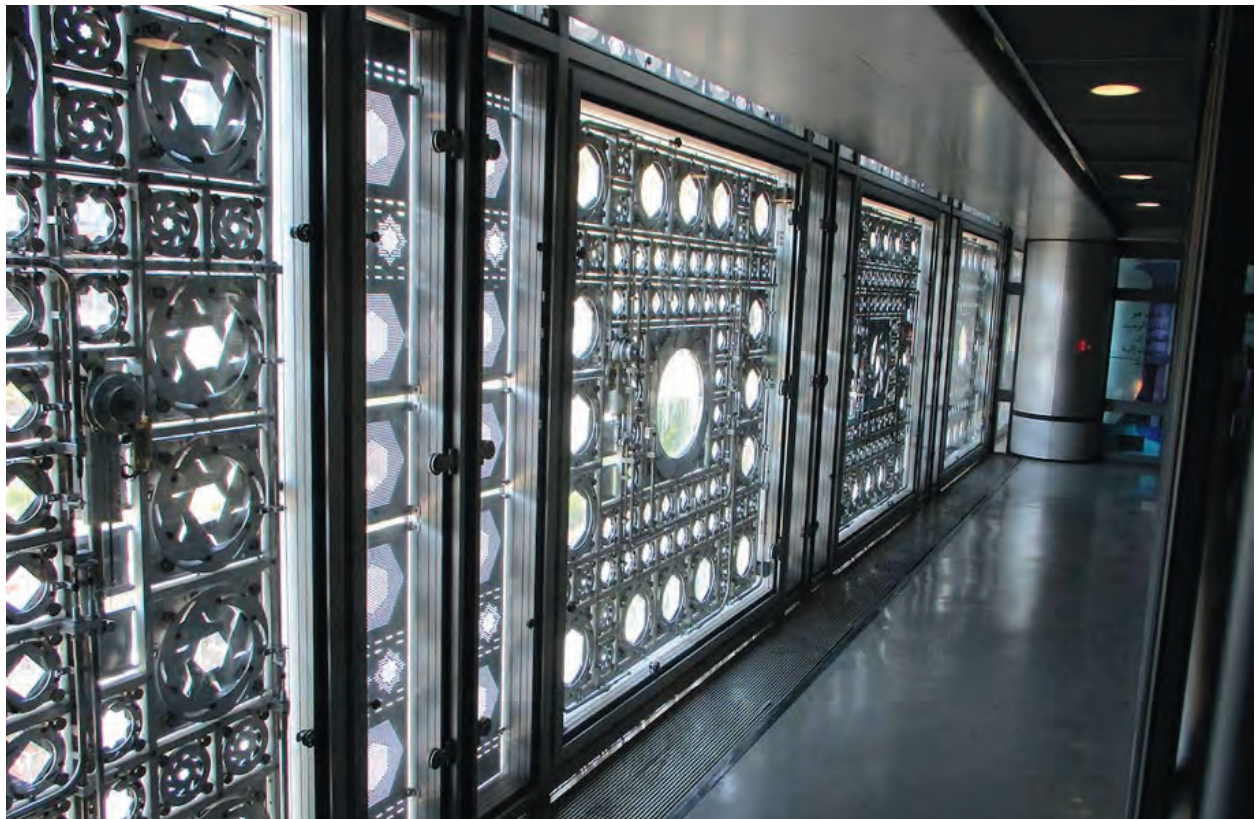
"The problem of Islam as a political force is an essential one for our time and for the years to come, and we cannot approach it with a modicum of intelligence if we start out from a position of hatred."



THE POWER OF CULTURE

The French Arab World Institute and the Art of Art as Diplomacy

Editorial Staff of the Journal of the Muslim World League | September 2019



Inside the stunning Institut du Monde Arab, designed by acclaimed architect Jean Nouvel in 1987. It is an example of the French emphasis on culture as a diplomatic tool.

The opening of the Louvre Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates in 2017 was an example of how traditional French cultural diplomacy was supplanted by brand politics: Abu Dhabi bought the rights to use the

Paris museum's famous name at a price tag of more than \$500 million over three decades. No longer military conquest, no longer Napoleonic giants striding the earth—it is high culture, much like intellectual dialogue

promoted by the Muslim World League that brings diverse nations and civilizations together. Force, one continues to hope, will be a thing of the past.

The Institute du Monde Arab (The Arab World Institute) in Paris is an exemplary symbol of this ethos—not to mention a rather beautiful one. Founded much in the same spirit as the Muslim World League—only with French flair and style to add to the mix—the Institute’s aim when it was organized in Paris 1987 by eighteen Arab countries and France was to research and disseminate proper information about the Arab-Muslim world and its cultural and spiritual values. This, especially, was a result of a perceived lack of representation for the Arab world in France, and it is not by accident that the location of its stunning modern building is across from the Cathedral of Notre Dame de Paris. The “cause” of the Institute has long been one cherished to France: His Excellency M. Jack Lang, an influential former French culture minister who now heads the Institute, is a French diplomat who is a strong proponent of “Art as Diplomacy,” and this approach has positively influenced French-Arab relations. Apart from providing an ambitious program of artistic events, the Arab World Institute has strengthened its role as a think tank on the contemporary Arab world and as a place where all the players — particularly the economic players — in France and the Arab world can meet and exchange ideas.

The striking IMA was produced through careful, diplomatic collaboration among the countries of the Arab League and the French government, with the aim of creating a destination devoted to studying and teaching about the relationship of Arab culture with France. The caution involved was a matter of combining a “thing of beauty” with the very functional purpose of being the top Paris locale for matters pertaining to controversy in French-Muslim relations. It is not by accident that it is located in the famous Latin Quarter at the threshold of the historical peripheries of Paris along the River Seine facing the L’île Saint Louis, a setting that underscores its cultural significance in relation to other great works of architectural art in a city so replete with them. The interiors of the Institute are just as dazzling, owing to its architectural quality and the richness of its design, and the Arab World Institute is hands-down one of the most prestigious Parisian monuments.

“ It is a religion of peace and of enlightenment, which has counted amongst its thinkers men of liberal spirit, and it is this is what we have to teach and promote, never allowing ourselves to be intimidated by violence and terror. Things are moving in the Muslim world—societies are advancing, including the rights of women. We want to show that the Arab world is not about violence and bloodshed, but about positive change all over Muslim culture.

— Jack Lang, former French cultural minister and current President of the Institute du Monde Arabe, in *Le Figaro*, January 2015



Jack Lang, noted French politician and defender of Islam with H.E. Dr. Al-Issa.

Yet aside from the physical aspect of its architecture and the elite role the Institute plays in French political and intellectual society, the great value of its concept is—like the “export” of the Louvre to Abu Dhabi—the idea that efforts between civilizations for proper values and understanding of each other can really only take place on a high level of culture. For such is the ultimate demonstration of the respect and appreciation all societies, like all individuals, desire for themselves. ❖

LIBERTÉ, ÉGALITÉ, FRATERNITÉ

The City's First-Ever Conference of the Abrahamic Faiths

Editorial Staff of the Journal of the Muslim World League | September 2019

A light rain cast a slight gray pall on the City of Lights on September 17, but that was no match for the optimistic spirit inside the old Stock Exchange building in central Paris where religious leaders from more than 40 countries took part in an international “Peace and Solidarity” conference hosted by the Muslim World League (MWL) and the Foundation for Islam in France. The event, the first of its kind, brought together Muslim, Christian and Jewish religious leaders from around the world. Speakers at the forum emphasized the need to challenge ideologies that threaten peace by provoking racial and discriminatory strife. MWL Secretary-General Dr. Al-Issa spearheaded the conference, underscoring in an impassioned speech that extremists “hold on to imaginary ideas stemming from a misunderstanding of the past and present.” He was in excellent company.

His Excellency highlighted the importance of protecting religion from political exploitation and the perennial need to protect youth against extremist groups and the violence-themed caverns and black holes of social media. It, of course, goes without saying that the organization is keen to raise awareness inside and outside the Islamic world, including urging Muslims in Europe to respect the laws of the countries in which they live. For this reason, the Paris Conference—the first of its kind on this scale and with such high-level



Philippe Gaudin, Director of the European Institute for the Science of Religions speaking at international interfaith



A grand entrance for a grand event. The facade of the former Stock Exchange

attendance by religious leaders and scholars— became the first Islamic sponsored event to bring together followers of the Biblical religions under a single cooperation document. Under the historic agreement, the parties will work to promote peace and harmony in the face of extremism, hatred and racism and the

three sides will also “encourage mutual understanding between Jews, Christians and Muslims in France.” The four organizations, in partnership with the Foundation for Islam in France, declared their commitment to the principle of freedom and to educating young people. Nous vous remercions, notre cher Dr. AHssa! ❖



About the Fondation d’Islam en France, the co-sponsor of the Paris Conference along with the Muslim World League.

In 2015-2016 H.E. Bernard Cazeneuve, the former French Minister of the Interior, sought to re-launch a process begun about a decade earlier to organize a proper government-sponsored Foundation dedicated to the integration and understanding of growing Muslim communities in France. Prompt-

ed by a wave of terrorist attacks that began in 2015, the reinvigoration of the Foundation has occasioned its status as the primary “go-to” center for all matters relating to the most vital issues of interest to the Muslim community in the country.



IDEAS WITHOUT BORDERS

The Inauguration of the New French Islamic Institute at Lyon

Editorial Staff of the Journal of the Muslim World League | September 2019



His Excellency cuts the ribbon to inaugurate a future of promise at the French Institute of Islamic Civilization.

It has long been an insider bit of knowledge that the cuisine of Lyon is superior to that of Paris, and in fact akin to a culinary “Mecca” of the world. Now, it may seem as if beautiful Lyon is about to rival the French capital in terms of another kind of cosmopolitan sophistication, as host of a major Institute dedicated to the study and promotion of Islamic civilization. On September 18, the head of the Muslim World League lauded this substantial effort to promote religious

and cultural tolerance speaking at the opening of this latest—and possibly greatest—new Islamic center in France, the French Institute of Islamic Civilization in Lyon, Sheikh Dr. Al-Issa stressed the importance of dialogue and cultural exchange in breaking down barriers and fighting extremism. One can certainly not have too many such institutions, even in a profoundly intellectual society as France.



With the civilized transcendence of Islam, there is a need to respect the constitutions and regulations of the countries in which we reside.

— H.E. Sheikh Mohammad bin Abdulkarim Al Issa, Lyon

He highlighted, of course, the crucial aspect of strengthening links of human brotherhood, which is the main calling of any educational institute at its most fundamental level. “With the civilized transcendence of Islam,” he stated, “there is a need to respect the constitutions and regulations of the countries in which we reside.” As reported by Arab News on the scene of the inauguration, he appealed for tolerance, positive coexistence and the building of bridges of friendship between people and warned of “the dangers of political groups that used religion as a cover to achieve authoritarian goals, especially through the use of disinformation to recruit young people.”

“These groups seek to use Islam and its symbol of mercy, morals, peace, values and civilizational principles in their highest form, to achieve their political ambitions and narrow views, loaded with violent extremism or terrorism,” he added. The Secretary General pointed out that Islam respected human rights and freedoms in accordance with its principles—a fact known to true Muslims and those who seek to understand Islam, no matter the ignorance and bigotry of those who abuse its name and attempt to corrupt its image.

Also in attendance at the opening ceremony was French Minister of the Interior Christophe Castaner, who warmly thanked Dr. Al-Issa for his comments and profound description of France as “a country that promoted integration, stability and mutual respect.” His Excellency M. Castaner said that the Institute “represented a challenge to understanding and respect and reflected an accurate vision of Islam” as a religion that accepted other cultures and supported dialogue and tolerance. Quoting Arab News, he also expressed pride at the strong lines of communication between Muslims and the French

government and said the city of Lyon was a symbol of dialogue in the country.

Later, Dr. Al-Issa, M.Castaner and the Mayor of Lyon M. Gerard Collomb toured the Institute, one that happens to be beautifully equipped with the latest technology. It consists of five floors and a large conference hall and will offer courses in Islamic civilization in various languages, including Arabic and French. M. Collomb announced during the press conference at the inaugural ceremony that the Institute would help “to educate non-Muslims about Islamic cultural heritage.” And just as Lyon is replete with its gastronomic delights, so is the city rich with historic and intellectual heritage to complement the new Institute. Earlier, Al-Issa met with the president of the Institute of Islamic Civilization at the local university, Dr. Kamel Kabtan, further pursuing the inexhaustible discussion of ways to promote a culture of tolerance and dialogue, and combat hatred and violence.



Inauguration of the French Institute of Islamic Civilization.

H.E. Dr. Al-Issa tours the French Institute of Islamic Civilization.



A MEETING OF THE MINDS

Edited by the editorial staff of the Journal of the Muslim World League | August 2019

It is a sure sign that an enlightened approach is indeed the modus operandi of the Muslim World League, when, just prior to the International Conference on Peace and Solidarity in Paris, H.E. Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Al-Issa met with members of the United States evangelical community in Jeddah, the long-time self-organized mediating body between Muslim and Jewish religious groups in the Middle East. To the general public, the notion of “evangelical” conjures up an unfortunate image of an assertive approach to spreading doctrines of faith. It is not and has never been the style of the Muslim World League or the faith of Islam for that matter to impose its values, just as the Qu’ran states one should not. Nor was such an approach the framework in which the distinguished delegation was received at Jeddah. Rather, it was in harmonious conformity with the principles of Dr. Al-Issa’s own world mission, as reflected in the Paris Conference that took place about a week after the Jeddah meeting. The Committee also met with HRH Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman.

Essentially, the evangelical community seeks to stress the Biblical roots of the Christian faith and to act as mediator and conciliator between religions in the Middle East, bridging the gaps between Jewish, Muslim and Christian believers within the complex framework of the Middle East. To its credit, the

National Association of Evangelicals has expressed its concern for the cause of peace and justice in the Mideast since the 1970s, seeking to address the great human and spiritual needs of all the people of that region in a constructive way.

Like the MWL, the evangelical community has reaffirmed its belief in the rights of all nations in the Middle East, both Israeli and Arab, to exist as sovereign nations “from the

perspective of biblical and historical positions.”

In this regard, Dr. Al-Issa met with a delegation of the evangelical community from the United States in Jeddah in early September with the goal of discussing ways to promote “coexistence and harmony around the world.”



Dr. Al-Issa has offered us the very best of Islam. Today in France, we have shared our best values—friendship, love and togetherness. Let this open door lead to a brighter path for France toward fraternity.

— Rabbi Michel Serfaty of the Grand Synagogue of Paris.



A distinguished group of evangelical leaders meet with H.E. Dr. Al-Issa in Saudi Arabia for second meeting.

As reported by Saudi News, in a joint statement, the two sides "reaffirmed their common values and pledged to strengthen cooperation" in achieving them. They also stressed the need to renounce all forms of extremism and hatred and work together "to build bridges of cooperation."

Stressing the "spirit of Makkah," the two sides also praised the contents of the historic "Makkah Document" of this past May at an international conference organized by MWL that brought together more than 1,200 prominent Islamic scholars from around the world. A press release further stated that: "Both sides also agreed to promote respect for religions and mutual trust, and pledged to seek to overcome the obstacles of coexistence between human beings through the power of education and the promotion of religious harmony and cultural, integration." Key representatives of the U.S. evangelical community met with HRH and H.E. Dr. Al-Issa in Jeddah

Family is always the center point of common ground, and here both Muslims and Christians expressed perhaps their most adamant convictions regarding the strong social bonds that make for peaceful communities. At this meeting, the two sides recognized that the family is the nucleus of building

communities and nations, and that it is entrusted to nurture "the future of new generations to emerge on the values of moderation, love and respect for others."



Key representatives of the U.S. evangelical community met senior Saudi H.E. Dr. Al-Issa in Jeddah

In a pragmatic comment regarding the right to personal freedom, the statement stressed the importance of recognizing the fact that such freedom does not extend to the right of abusing other individuals on the basis of their religion, culture or ethnicity. With such a sophisticated approach to its cause, the evangelical community won over Dr. Al-Issa and the MWL in this need to "spread the gospel" of religious harmony and mutual respect.



THE SAUDI-FRENCH PARLIAMENTARY FRIENDSHIP COUNCIL

Behind the Scenes Leading the Way

Editorial Staff of the Journal of the Muslim World League | September 2019

With such a tightly packed schedule, one cannot imagine that H.E. Sheikh Dr. Al-Issa had much time to take a leisurely stroll through the circuitous, tree-lined boulevards and backstreets of Paris, let alone take a break at one of the city's famous—or better yet, less famous—cafes for a coffee break. But the cause of peace is a demanding one, and certainly the photo-history of his trip in the French capital and beyond did not betray any signs of slowing down. To wit, on the sidelines of the International Conference on Peace and Solidarity, he was able to meet with the Saudi-French Parliamentary Friendship Committee, a historic group dating back about two decades that is the diplomatic caretaker of Saudi-French relations in terms of education and culture, as well as investment and trade. The Committee shared their support for the historic Memorandum of Understanding that resulted from the Conference.

Ties with France have been growing ever stronger for the home country of the Muslim World League, and perhaps here a quick summary is in order: An official visit in May 2015 by French president Francois Hollande was particularly historic as he met Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques His Majesty HRH King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud and he was the guest of honor at the Gulf Cooperation Council summit. In March 2015 HRH Crown Prince Mohamed bin Nayef, then Deputy Premier and Interior Minister, visited France, where he received the Legion d' Honneur (the highest honor in France, whose recipients are designated by the French president). On 6 March 2016, a joint communiqué was signed between Saudi Arabia and France, and then on May 2016, a delegation of the Saudi French Parliamentary Friendship Committee of the Shura Council (in Riyadh) had a meeting with French Foreign Ministry. And just a few years prior, a committee was established for Saudi-French expanding trade known as the "Saudi French Business Opportunities Forum." As reported to Al Arabiya these contracts, highlighting growing ties between Paris and Riyadh, are "the first signs of a much stronger Saudi-French alliance, and the next few months are going to demonstrate exactly just how close these two allies have now become." Thankfully, Dr. Al-Issa is able to cultivate these ties further with his sustained dialogue of civilized values between the two countries and long-term friends.



H.E. Dr. Al-Issa with members of the Saudi-French Committee, September 2019.



Saudi-French Business Relations at a Glance Press Statement of

- Saudi Arabia and France enjoy outstanding ties on business as well as cultural and historic levels. His Royal Highness Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud visited France in 2018, and this trip became the cornerstone of investments amounting to \$18 billion. The bilateral trade between the two countries exceeds \$9.22 billion.
 - Saudi investments in France amount to about \$900 million, mostly in the real estate sector, according to French statistics.
 - The Saudi-French CEO Forum in Paris in April in 2018 resulted in the signing of 20 Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) amounting to \$18 billion.
 - France ranks third among countries investing in Saudi Arabia, and has 80 companies operating in the Kingdom.
- Investment data compiled from Arab News

Press Statement of the Memorandum of Understanding Signed at Paris, September 17, 2019

The Muslim World League (MWL) signed the Paris Agreement for the Abrahamic Family with all the French Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant religious groups, and thus becoming the first Islamic organization to bring together representatives of the followers of Biblical religions in a single cooperation document in order to work to foster the commonalities.

This aimed at promoting peace and harmony in the face of extremist discourse, hatred, racism and incitement.

The historic pact was signed on the sidelines of the international conference titled "Peace and Solidarity," organized by MWL in Paris, in cooperation with the official Foundation for Islam in France.

Prominent religious figures from 40 countries, in addition to Muslim, Christian and Jewish religious leaders of France, attended the conference. In his keynote speech, Muhammad Al-Issa, secretary general of

MWL, underscored the need to protect religion from political exploitation, and the need to safeguard young people of all religions from the menace of extremist outfits.



H.E. Dr. Al-Issa signing the MoU for the Abrahamic Family alongside French Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant religious groups.



YET MORE GEMS FOR THE ISLAMIC TREASURES OF THE LOUVRE

Edited by the editorial staff of the Journal of the Muslim World League | September 2019



It would not have seemed likely that the Louvre Museum of Paris, already in possession of one of the greatest collections of Islamic art in the world, could possibly find more treasures on this earth from that civilization to showcase to the world—but, as of this September—it happened yet again. The world-renowned Musée du Louvre officially opened new and expanded spaces on the 11th of the month in the museum’s Department of Islamic Art, with the support of a major global philanthropic foundation. The announcement builds on the two organizations’—the Louvre and the Riyadh-based foundation—longstanding partnership, which aims to strengthen understanding across societies through arts and culture—here again the “art of the diplomatic imperative of art.” The new and expanded

spaces boast of “an immersive introduction to Islamic art” and aims to make one of the world’s most distinguished collections of its type more accessible to visitors, helping to build bridges between different faiths, cultures and countries.

There is an interactive display area that puts the history of this art in context—a very visitor-friendly move given the immense complexity of the various national Islamic artistic characteristics. This includes of course a diverse range of art and artifacts stretching from Spain to India, and sets out to explain the evolution of Islamic art in style, form and medium as it interacted with other artistic traditions through time.

“ We believe that art has a special ability to unite people of different cultures and faiths. The new and expanded spaces allow visitors to enjoy world-class Islamic art and appreciate the shared human values expressed in its creativity. Importantly, this space has also been designed to be inclusive of everyone, with interactive features to ensure the art can be experienced by all.

— HRH Princess Lamia Bint Majed Al Saud, global philanthropic leader

Paris has much to boast about in this arena. Together with the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Louvre is home to the largest collection of Islamic works of art in the world. The first Islamic objects exhibited at the Paris-based legend came from royal collections, following the creation of the Museum Central des Arts in the wake of the French Revolution, in 1793. Notable works include an inlaid metal basin known as the Baptistère de Saint Louis, made in Syria in the 14th century, as well as Ottoman jade bowls that had belonged to Louis XIV. There are also works from the royal Abbey of Saint Denis, including a rock crystal ewer made in Egypt in the early 11th century.

Then, from the final decade of the 19th century to World War I, Paris was a locus for the creation of Islamic art collections.

It's been a long, slow road building up the museum to accommodate what began to seem like an infinite number of precious works—from painting, to ceramics, to tiles to sculpture. Starting around 1893, a “Muslim art” section was created at the Musée, and in 1905 the first room dedicated to the Islamic collection was opened. The collection was expanded considerably under two curators (notably the famous Gaston Migeon). French nobles and aristocrats—not the type to too easily part ways with the grandest in life—enriched the section with prestigious objects leading to the creation of one of the best-known sections of the monumental museum, the Salle Delort de Gléon in 1922 in the Pavillon de l'Horloge.

In 1932, the Department of Asian Arts was created and housed the Islamic collections. After



An Islamic tile at the Louvre

World War II, in 1945, the Far Eastern works were transferred to another museum (the Musée Guimet), and the Islamic section was incorporated into the Department of Near Eastern Antiquities. In 1993, the creation of the Grand Louvre and the departure of the Ministry of Finance from the Richelieu Wing made room for the Islamic collections in 1,000 sq.m of exhibition space.

Then, in 2003, the Louvre created its eighth department dedicated to Islamic art, boasting 14,000 objects and admirably complemented by 3,500 works from the Musée des Arts Décoratifs — many of which are now being exhibited for the first time — reflecting the wealth and breadth of artistic creation from Islamic lands. As the Louvre says of itself: “The history of the collections reflects both history in the broadest sense and the history of artistic taste.” Bienvenue to the very best advanced civilization has to offer.



HISTORICAL ESSAY

HOW THE GREAT MOSQUE OF PARIS RESCUED JEWS FROM HOLOCAUST PERSECUTION

Edited by the editorial staff of the Journal of the Muslim World League | September 2019



It is going to take leadership at all levels to change the world. No one of us has all the solutions. But together, we just might find one.

— H.E. Sheikh Dr, Mohammad bin Abdulkarim Al-Issa

Just when you think you've heard it all, an untold tale of heroism and idealism emerges to restore faith in faithless times. In this case, it is the story of the Grand Mosque of Paris that acted as a refuge to Jews during the German occupation of France. The head of that mosque kept the Nazis from seizing those hidden Jewish individuals.

Four years ago, the French film "Free Men" portrayed a tale of courage. According to the story, Si Kaddour Benghabrit, the founder and head of the Grand Mosque of Paris, provided refuge and certificates of Muslim identity to a small number of Jews to allow them to evade arrest and deportation.

As The New York Times recounted, France was home to a large population of North Africans, including Sephardic Jews, in the 1940s. The Jews and Arabs spoke Arabic and shared many of the same traditions. The mosque was not only a place to pray, but also an oasis for visitors to be fed and clothed, and could bathe and talk freely.

In his 2006 book "Among the Righteous," Robert Satloff, director of the Washington Institute, uncovered stories of Arabs who saved Jews during the Holocaust. Dalil Boubakeur, the current rector, confirmed that some Jews — up to 100 — were given Muslim identity papers by the mosque. Mr. Boubakeur said Muslims brought Jews to the mosque for help.

The Women Builders of Peace, an association of Jewish and Muslim women, submitted a petition in 2005 to the International Holocaust Memorial Foundation to recognize that the Mosque of Paris saved many Jews between 1942 and 1944, and that the organization should recognize Mr. Benghabrit as one of the "Righteous Among the Nations," an award given by the State of Israel to non-Jews for acts of great charity to Jews. While this request remains unfulfilled, Benghabrit was awarded the Grand Cross of the Legion d'Honneur for his contributions.

THE
**MUSLIM
WORLD
LEAGUE**
JOURNAL