

ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVES OF RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE AND INTER-FAITH HARMONY

By

Dr. Shahzad Qaiser

Islam is essentially the law of things. The Qur'an spells out the primordial identity of Man. Man belongs to a single soul or 'nafs i wahida'. The primordial unity of mankind got ruptured in the history of man, when humanity got divided between the traditional and the profane worlds with all their respective variations. It is this great divide since times immemorial, which continues into the modern and the post- modern world.

The traditional world gives a metaphysical meaning to the word tradition, which has its roots in the Latin tradere meaning "that, which is transmitted." It can be both oral and written. In its ordinary sense, tradition stands for customs, beliefs and conventions inherited from the past. But, in its higher sense, it is attached to a doctrine belonging to an intellectual order. The doctrine may be metaphysical or religious or a combination of both. The social institutions of a traditional society are effectively attached to a traditional doctrine. The traditional world is constitutive of all the great traditions and religions of the world including Confucianism, Taoism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

It is pertinent to note that all the traditional societies are attached to the principles of the superior order. The traditional world essentially constitutes all those who accept the Reality beyond the sensible world and

avenues of mutual understanding and cooperation to achieve the happiness of mankind.

I am very much convinced that the religious leadership holds the power to set the tone for acceptance, tolerance, respect and mutual collaboration for the common good of humanity. They can play a pivotal role to promote mutual understanding, respect of sacred beliefs among the followers of different faiths and can call for dissemination of noble values of faith(s) so that peace and amicable affection will prevail across the globe.

I would like to thank all the eminent scholars, researchers, intellectuals and worthy Vice Chancellors and other participants of this conference who have spared their precious time to attend it. I hope that this dialogue would contribute towards bringing a positive change in the present critical scenario. Participation of your honor would not only be a great service to Islam and Muslim Ummah but for rest of the world as well and is of great pleasure indeed.

I would not take much time of your excellences, but would like to congratulate Prof. Dr. Khalil-ur-Rehman, Director, who always be in touch with me posted me every progress of the event and did not hesitate at any stage to seek my advice and guidance although he doesn't have requisite it but it is his graciousness. The faculty members and the whole team of SZIC working under the guidance and patronage of H.E. Dr. Ezeddin Ibrahim and their Director in organizing such marvelous International Conference and to address this need in terms of creating constructive intellectual dialogue among the various Muslim schools of thought in order to achieve the happiness of mankind as well as demonstrating the moderate vision of faiths away from extremism and controversial issues that touches the faiths.

May Allah guide us towards all that which wins His blessings and pleasure.

Prof. Dr. Pirzada Qasim Raza Siddiqui

March 26, 2007

Speech of

H.E. Prof. Dr. Pirzada Qasim Raza Siddiqui *

It is an occasion of extreme pleasure and blessings to be amongst you and it is certainly an honour to address this august gathering of renowned scholars and researchers from all over the world and worthy Vice Chancellor of universities as well, who have gathered here today to share their ideas on one of the most important and burning issues the Muslim Ummah faces at present. The purpose of this conference is to bring together different religious sects closer for enhancing Tolerance, Peace and Harmony among them and to present the true picture of Islam and Pakistan worldwide. This is indeed a sacred purpose and warrants our full attention and wholehearted and sensible endeavors to reach its practical solution.

Today, the Muslim culture/civilization is suffering from the consequences of religious conflicts. It has become plagued by certain intrinsic and extrinsic factors affecting both inter and intra-faith harmony and tolerance. The religious bigotry, extremism, the demons of suspicion, ignorance and intolerance is marring the benign image of Islam and Muslim and portraying them as despised, violent and extremist community/religion. Intolerance and extremism fly in the face of the sacredness of true religious purpose. Interfaith harmony and dialogue has become an urgent necessity to dispel and obliterate this image and misconception in these circumstances, hence warrants special attention from the scholars and intellectuals to sit together and focus on identifying the root causes and offering the possible solutions in order to explore

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Message

importance of promoting religious dialogue and cooperation and would suggest ways and means to shun these conflicts, intolerance.

In my humble view emphasis should be made that the common roots of religion and faith all come from a source that "prescribes good and encourages forgiveness and love". Interfaith dialogue has become an urgent necessity and through mutual dialogue we can fight "the demons of suspicion, ignorance and contempt for people of other cultures".

I sincerely hope that research findings, discussions are expected to generate very valuable recommendations to serve as guidelines to develop and promote religious tolerance and interfaith harmony.

MESSAGE FROM

Mr. Jahangir Bashir *

It gives me great pleasure and honour to send my message on the auspicious occasion when the Sheikh Zayed Islamic Centre, University of Karachi, is holding International Conference on "Religious Tolerance And Interfaith Harmony", March 26-27 2007 in the light of the decision of the Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) taken in the meeting held in Abu Dhabi and is sponsored by a unique coalition of the Higher Education Commission (HEC) and Ministry of Education on this topic, which in fact is order of the time globally.

These Centres were established in Pakistan by H.H. Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al' Nahayan for advancement of knowledge and research specially in the sphere of Islamic education to discover the new vistas so that wrong conceptions and theories may be eliminated and it is believed that this conference would also play an important role in this regard.

The purpose of this high level conference is sacred i.e. to bring together different religious sects closer for enhancing Tolerance, Peace and Harmony among them. We hope that this conference would certainly and positively demonstrate that there is no room for sectarianism in the Islamic Faith.

I believe that such conferences/seminars/ dialogue should be conducted at large scale as it is not only the high time for it but it is also on the top of the Agenda of the Government of Pakistan that wants to display the brighten look and true picture of Islam and Pakistan worldwide.

We are suffering from the consequences of religious conflicts and it is significant that the participants would share their perspective on the

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Foreword

The Conference addressed that tolerance is our binding spirit and forgiving and compassion are vital aspects of human society. It would be stressed that diversity exists so that we came together to learn from, not fight each other. Diversity without dialogue causes hostility and Dialogue without diversity brings distortion. We should remove all ideas, feelings, hatred and hostility that pull us apart and violets our every union and call for building a healthy, happy and peaceful life.

It was also elaborated that how that how without laying each other aside and taking separate paths that come to dead-ends, we together come up with a united path to mutual understanding. As Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) commanded us that, "INSTEAD OF COMPETING WITH OTHERS' IDEAS, EACH BELIEVER SHOULD TRY HIS BEST FOR-ADVANCEMENT".

We do not dialogue in Fiqh but in our understandings of Fiqh and understanding Fiqh roots in our cultures.

We are facing diversity; multiplicity in the position of thought and practice inside our Islamic world. Dialogue finds meaning when there is a joint search. Therefore the first step is to be sincere with ourselves. If dialogue finds tactic, we should not expect fruits. This responsibility encourages us to become closer and closer together through participation in the unease interests and hopes.

MAY ALL SHOWER HIS BLESSINGS UPON US.

(Prof. Dr. Khalilur Rehman)

Director

March 26, 2007

Foreword

Conference" being a connecting link like a bridge among the people of different believes and faith through which we can realize the lofty goal of bringing people of the faith and specialists together in order to explore avenues of mutual understanding and prospects for cooperation so that peace and amicable affection will prevail throughout the world. To achieve this goal, renowned scholars from all over the world and Pakistan and researchers from different esteemed institutions as well are invited to deliver their plenary lectures and their research papers focusing on the following main and sub-theme i.e. theme

- 1- Imperatives of Inter Muslim dialogue.
- 2- Methods of Intra Muslim dialogue.
- 3- Inter Muslim Unity and its role in world peace.
- 4- Tolerance within Muslim Societies.
- 5- Nature of Juristic differences among Islamic Schools of thought.
- 6- Place of Juristic differences in Islamic Faith.
- 7- Methodology of co-existence among Muslim Sects.
- 8- Agreed upon sources of Islam between Shias and Sunnis.
- 9- Efforts of healing among Muslim Sects.
- 10- The milestone of Inter-sectarian harmony and cooperation.

It is believed that the participants would call for exerting efforts required to convey the positive spirit of these sects/faith and dialogues to the broad grass roots of the followers with a view to bring them closer and to understand each other better. This fact does not mislead us but deepens our understanding.

The focal point/agenda of the Conference was that we, being Muslim believe in Allah, the one and only, who made man His vicar on Earth in order to establish and adopt the norms of good deed. We are all entrusted with well-defined duties and joint responsibilities and relationship, based on reciprocal respect and practical interaction, in a manner which emphasize the positive aspects of the mutual relations thus paving the way towards the achievement of the best results for humanity.

FOREWORD

Islam believes in peace, justice and harmony between the peoples of the world as the Holy Quran says in Allah's word:

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَاكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ﴾

"O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other". The Muslim culture abounds with infinite human values; Harmony and Tolerance is the mainstay amongst them and both characteristics are the binding force and social practices that serves as the foundation of the Islamic Civilization. Unfortunately today, the Muslim culture/civilization is suffering from the consequences of religious conflicts that are perforating the whole fabric of Islam and portraying it as an impractical and uncivilized religion before the world.

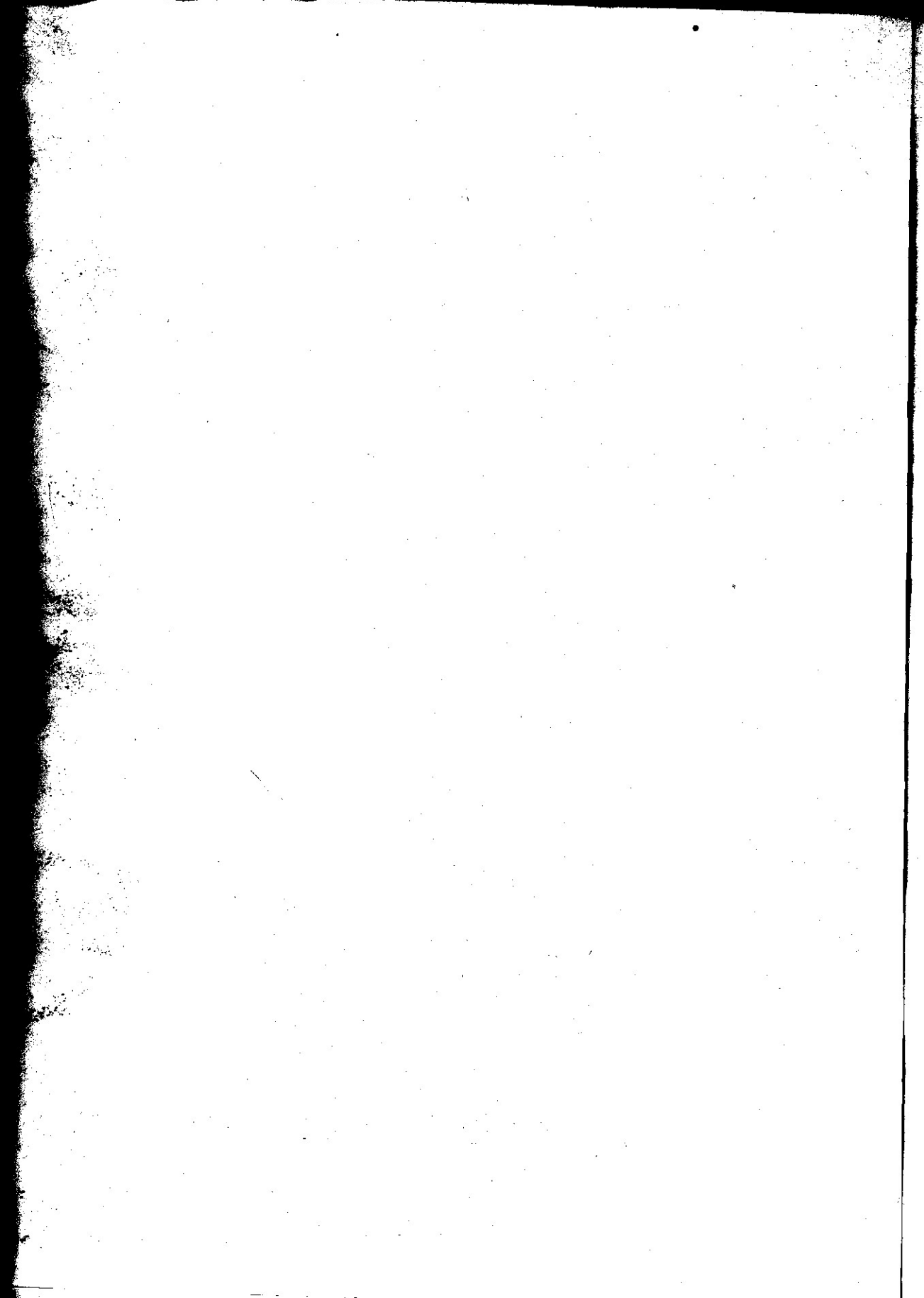
H.E. Dr. Ezzeddin Ibrahim, Advisor to the Ruler of UAE and Patron of this Centre and a true Muslim took a serious notice of it and showed his deep concern over increasing intolerance, hatred and violence and non-existence dialogue among the people of different faith. He was of the view that it is right time to emphasize that they all come from a source that "PRESCRIBES GOOD AND ENCOURAGES FORGIVENESS AND LOVE". THE REAL MESSAGE OF ALL HAS ALWAYS BEEN RAPPROCHEMENT & HARMONY. The religious scholars are very much capable to set the tone for rejection of misunderstanding and misconceptions, for the betterment of humanity. He thus floated the idea in the last meeting of Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) held in Peshawar, to hold an International conference. The task was assigned to SZIC, University of Karachi, to take initiative in this regard.

These were the circumstances, when it was decided to hold a two day conference on "Religious Tolerance and Inter-faith Dialogue

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FOR KIND ATTENTION OF AUTHORS

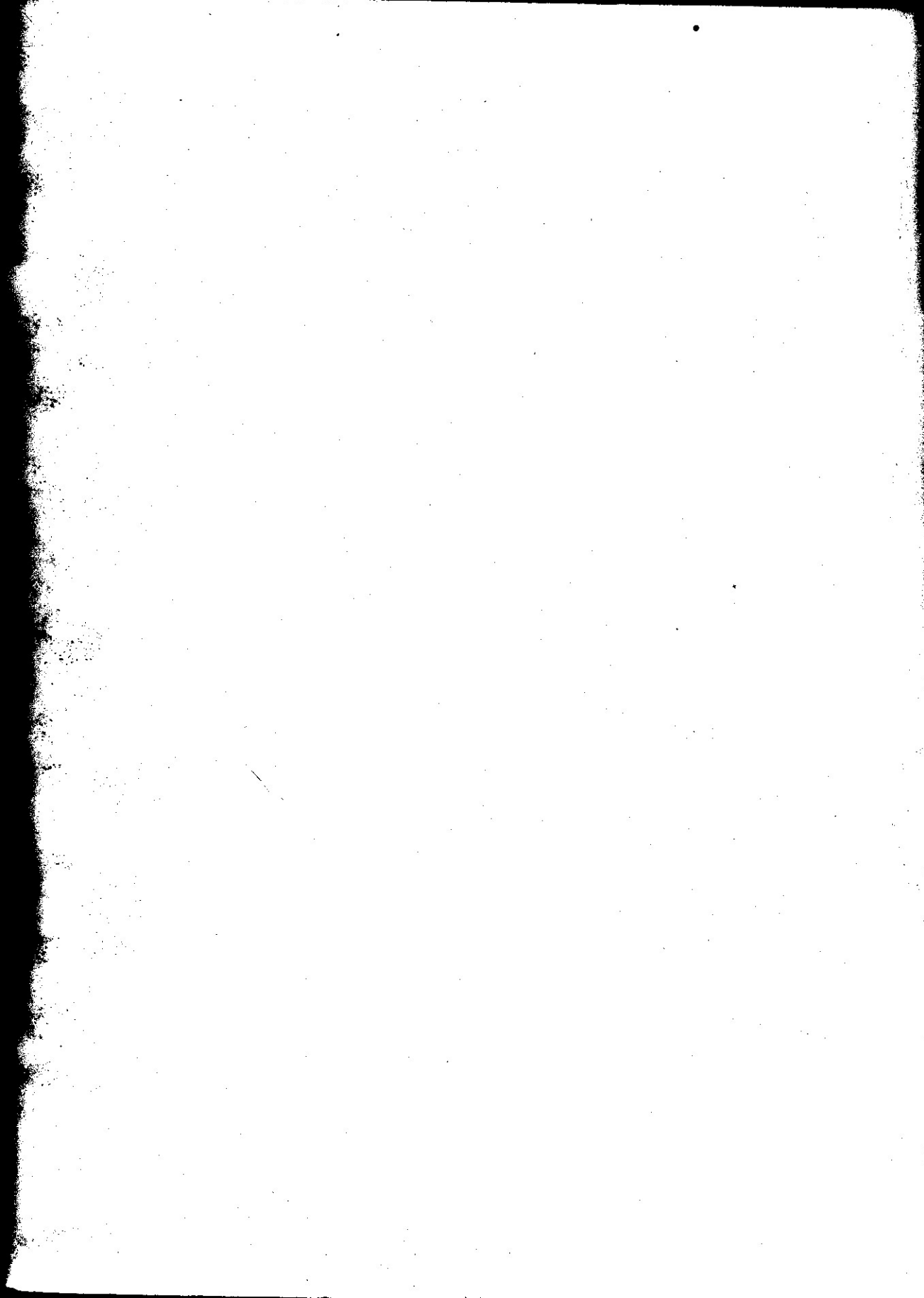
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