

A group of women wearing hijabs are seated around a long table covered with a white plastic sheet. The table is laden with various dishes, including what appears to be fried chicken, rice, and vegetables. The women are engaged in conversation and eating. The background is slightly blurred, showing more people and an indoor setting. The overall atmosphere is one of communal dining and social interaction.

Journeying with Muslims The Ignatian Way

Jesuits Among Muslims In Asia

Journeying with Muslims: The Ignatian Way

Jesuits Among Muslims in Asia Network

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FOREWORD I

In the 21st century, Christianity and Islam continue to be the two fastest-growing religions in Asia (Pew Research 2017). In a predominantly Muslim populated Asia-Pacific, Christians work with Muslims to proclaim their shared faith in One God to people who have not received God or deny the existence of God. Muslims and Christians cannot be indifferent. We cannot keep the faith and gift of God to ourselves. We are compelled by the Holy Spirit (*Ruh al-Qudus*) to share God to others.

Muslims witness to *la ilaha illAllah* (There is no god but God), and Catholics profess *Credo in unum Deum* (I believe in One God). *Nostra Aetate* affirms this commonality stating that the Catholic Church regards with esteem the Muslims because, like Christianity, “they adore the one God.” Muslims experience and understand God, not in the Trinitarian sense, but through His Oneness (*Tawhid*). The *Tawhid*, the doctrine of the unity of God in Islam, is their path to wholeness (holiness). It is when Muslims immerse themselves in the immensity of Allah’s Oneness that they are most intimate with Allah. To contemplate on Allah’s Oneness is to experience His intimacy.

The Jesuits and Muslims in Asia (JAMIA), and their companions have found in the pandemic an opportune time to write about their lives with the Muslims. It is their way of commemorating the 500th (1521-2021) year of the conversion of St. Ignatius of Loyola whose Spiritual Exercises have inspired their dialogue and discernment with Muslims. “To show the way to God through the Spiritual Exercises and discernment” is one of the Universal Apostolic Preferences of the Society of Jesus for 2019-

2029. Jesuits are called to immerse themselves more deeply in experiencing Ignatian Spirituality out of a living and concrete faith. In the Asian context this solid faith comes from a life of prayer that enters into dialogue with Muslims who, too, are directed by their life of prayer and inspired by the Spirit in the Qur'ān.

The Spiritual Exercises have shaped an Ignatian Spirituality that is open to dialogue with Muslims in (1) Life, (2) Action, (3) Theological Exchange, and (4) Prayer and Spirituality. The 1984 Mission and Dialogue, and 1991 Dialogue and Proclamation recommend these four types of interreligious dialogue, which must be grounded in experience, prayer and discernment. The papers in each of these four types of interreligious dialogue explore ways of shaping a profound spiritual bond with Muslims. Muslims, like Christians, are searching for God and ways to develop their interior life. It is in realizing this shared spirituality and longing for God that theological and cultural boundaries are overcome.

Ignatian contemplation on the Virgin Birth, the Incarnation, *Ruh al Qudus* (Spirit of Holiness) and *Eisa al-Masih* (Jesus the Christ) are revelations not found only in the Gospels but are recited as Muslim prayers drawn from the Qur'an. It is in them that God is experienced as compassionate and merciful. Central to Pope Francis' papacy is God's mercy and compassion, which mirrors the 113 *Suwaras* (Chapters) in the Qur'an that begin with *Bismillah ah-Rahman ah-Rahim*, in the name of Allah who is most Compassionate, most Merciful.

Pope Francis has stated that his February 2019 signing of the *Document on Human Fraternity* with Ahmad Al-Tayyeb, grand imam of Al-Azhar, was an inspiration for the 2020 encyclical *Fratelli tutti*. In both documents, dialogue is raised to the level of a relationship as “brothers and sisters.” It is when a Christian relates with a Muslim as a sibling in faith that trust is established. Conversations no longer revolve around the latest data, knowledge and praxis, but become conversations that are life and spiritually enhancing.

As brothers and sisters in God, may we be reminded of what the Muslims’ holiest book says:

“For each [community], we have decreed laws and a different path. Had Allah willed it, He could have made you one community, but He [purposely] put you to the test through what He has given each of you [revelation]. Thus, you shall compete in righteousness (good works). To GOD is your final destiny - all of you - and He will then inform you of that wherein you disputed.”
(Qur’an 5:48)

Most Reverend Antonio J. Ledesma, S.J.
Archbishop Emeritus of the Archdiocese of Cagayan de Oro
16 March 2022

FOREWORD II

Interreligious dialogue is a welcome phenomenon of our time. In the context of religious plurality, interreligious dialogue is the way to give witness to our faith and remain respectful towards the faith of our neighbors. Saint Pope John Paul II, while addressing the bishops of India (1 February 1986), encouraged them to “be open to the whole world, in order to listen and to offer friendship and service.” He also encouraged the Indian bishops, while they were on their *ad limina* visit to Rome (13 December 1995), in the following words: “[The] Church in your region is called to realize her role in a multicultural, multireligious environment by joining hands with all people of goodwill in an honest interreligious dialogue, in an effort to raise the social and cultural levels and to improve the conditions of those in need.”

We must keep in mind that interreligious dialogue becomes fruitful and enriching if the dialogue partners are committed to their faith convictions while walking towards peace and justice in truth and charity. I am delighted to offer a foreword for the collection of papers presented at a symposium on dialogue with Muslims in Asia organized by the Jesuits Among Muslims in Asia (JAMIA).

God is the source of dialogue

God is the source and foundation of dialogue. “God loved us first” (1 John 4:1) and opened the dialogue of salvation with humanity. It is the responsibility of every baptized Christian to extend the same dialogue to all men and women. This dialogue of salvation that God opened began with charity: “God so loved the

world as to give his only-begotten Son" (John 3:16). Through the only-begotten Son, God made the dialogue of salvation accessible to all (cf. Colossians 3:11). The Gospel teaches us that dialogue should be universal, all embracing and capable of including all, excepting those who reject it or insincerely pretend to accept it. In short, we enter into dialogue with all men and women of goodwill fervently and unselfishly (cf. Pope Paul VI, *Ecclesiam Suam*, n. 72-77).

Christian Muslim Dialogue

The Vatican II declaration on the relation of the Church to non-Christian religions, *Nostra Aetate*, proclaimed by Pope Paul VI on 28 October 1965 opened a new era of Christian approach towards other religions. *Nostra Aetate* affirmed: "The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions. She regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men (and women)" (No.2).

With regard to Islam, *Nostra Aetate* continues to remain an inspirational document. It affirms that the Church regards Muslims with esteem for their faith in one God, for their devotion to Mary, and for their faith in the Day of Judgment and faith-life after death. *Nostra Aetate* beautifully confirms that Christians and Muslims worship God, who is our creator and judge. The affirmation that we worship one God opens up the possibility of collaboration between the two religions. In the last 55 plus years, scholars and practitioners of dialogue have drawn inspiration

from the document and carried forward dialogue in all its spiritual, scholarly and pastoral dimensions.

We have learnt over the years that Christian theological engagement with Islam requires knowledge of both Christianity and Islam. Some Christian scholars on Islam have gained competence in Christian theology of Islam and others in Islamic Studies. The Church, for her engagement with Muslims, needs both types of expertise (cf. David Marshall, “Christian Theological Engagement with Islam: A Survey of Recent Publications”, *The Ecumenical Review* 73, no. 5 [December 2021]).

A forum like JAMIA gives space for Christian scholars on Islam to come together, exchange reflections with one another and meet their Muslim colleagues for further deepening and mutual enrichment.

I wish for the members of JAMIA, through sincere and patient dialogue, not only to learn of the riches which a generous God has distributed among the nations, but also to endeavor to illuminate the riches of other religions with the light of the Gospel (*Ad Gentes*, no. 11 and 13).

Most Reverend Anil J.T. Couto
Metropolitan Archbishop of Delhi
14 March 2022

PREFACE

Jihad became synonymous to terrorism after 9/11. With ISIS, the global jihadist movement reached its peak in 2014, but its influence steadily declined by 2017. The good about Islam as a peaceful religion, for a time hijacked by a few radical Islamist groups, is now redeemed by a younger generation of Muslims who reject extremism. They are a generation driven by digital technology and social media where a cellular phone is a powerful tool for information and communication. Modern means of communication have shaped a generation of Muslims open to dialogue with the rest of the world. Islam today projects an image of progress and tolerance, with Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar leading by example. A similar phenomenon is seen in Southeast Asia, where young Muslims in Malaysia, Indonesia and Brunei discern an Islam that is contextualized in the 21st century.

Since 2020 the spectrum of theological discourse has broadened and become accessible online to dialogue practitioners who embraced various media platforms. Yet prejudice against Muslims remains in countries where Muslims are a minority. They are being persecuted in southern China, Myanmar and India where Buddhist and Hindu nationalism are on the rise. In places where Muslim minorities are persecuted, Christians minorities suffer the same fate. Their shared faith in the one God (*Nostra Aetate* 1965) is the strongest bond they have. The absolute reality of the oneness of God and the vow to fully submit to God's will is the spiritual link between Islam and Ignatian Spirituality.

The shared faith in the oneness of God, to discern His will, and subsequently submit to it is a consistent thread in JAMIA's book: *Journeying with Muslims the Ignatian Way*. Jesuits and Muslims in Asia (JAMIA) is a network of Jesuits active in the study of Islam and engaged in solidarity actions with Muslims. It is inclusive of Ignatian lay companions of Jesuits in the region that stretches to South Asia, where Christianity is India's third-largest religion after Hinduism and Islam. Conceived in November 2020, this book is a well discerned response to the challenges to Muslim-Catholic relations in Asia. It documents how Ignatian Spirituality is lived and shared by Jesuits and their companions with their Muslim friends.

The Jesuit Conference of Asia Pacific (JCAP) Coordinator for Dialogue with Islam, Fr. Greg Soetomo SJ, articulated clearly the project's goal "as a long term, methodical preparation for dialogue with Islam in Asia, and to assist and collaborate with other sectors (Jesuit Refugee Service, Jesuit Basic Education, Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities, Asian Theology Program, Youth Apostolate, Buddhist Studies and Dialogue, Asian Muslim Action Network)" who might also be seeking "guidance and enlightenment" in this area. The God-given spiritualities of St. Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556) and Prophet Muhammad (c. 570 – 8 June 632 CE) are both rooted in prayer. A Muslim's fidelity to the five daily prayers (*al-salat*) is in sync with the Ignatian fidelity to the "examen of consciousness" that St. Ignatius required of his companions.

This humble contribution to Jesuit-Muslim relations in Asia is indebted with gratitude to JCAP through its president, Fr. Antonio Moreno SJ, and Vanessa Gorra who conscientiously proofread the manuscripts.

Renato T. Oliveros
Editor

INTRODUCTION

Christians and Muslims have lived as neighbors for the last 14 centuries in different regions of the world. The 14-century history of contacts between them is marked at times by fruitful collaboration at social, cultural and theological levels, but frequently filled with hostility. Christian perception of Islam and Muslims as well as Muslim perception of Christianity and Christians are influenced largely by ignorance of one another and prejudice against the other. The social, cultural and political situations influenced adversely these relations. Polemics played a crucial role in religious conversations. However, there were streaks of lights whenever there was informed conversation born out of personal relationships between Christians and Muslims.

The Vatican Council II broke new grounds. The Council document, *Nostra Aetate*, said: (1) the Church looks on Muslims with esteem...and (2) Muslims worship with us one God. These statements are significant as they reversed many negative attitudes. They gave a tremendous push for new exploration and sharing of knowledge and experience. God is the driving force for Muslim identity, and their commitment to God and surrender to God's revelation provides an open field for Christians to explore more deeply into the nature and object of Muslim faith. Similarly, Christian commitment to God in Jesus as reflected in their commitment to build God's kingdom on earth that is an inclusive community of all as one family continues to challenge Muslims and invite them for deeper entry into the process of dialogue.

The post-councilar Catholic writings on Christian Muslim relations have critically reflected on the councilar teachings in the

light of the past and given rise to a number of new initiatives for improving relationships between Christians and Muslims. In the recent past, a few initiatives, such as, *A Common Word between Us and You* from the Muslim side, created opportunities for deep discussions. Pope Francis brought a new impetus into Christian Muslim Relations. Journalist Andrea Torielli, reflecting on Pope Francis' speeches in Baku (Azerbaijan, 2015), Cairo (Egypt, 2017), and Ur (Iraq, 2021), pointed out that there is a common thread linking three important interventions of Pope Francis regarding interreligious dialogue and Islam, in particular. Torielli wrote: "It is a Magisterium that indicates a road map with three fundamental points of reference: the role of religion in our societies, the criterion of authentic religiosity, and the concrete way to walk as brothers and sisters to build peace." Authentic religiosity is at the heart of Pope Francis' approach to people of diverse religions, cultures and histories. Authentic religiosity is founded on Truth and Love and enlivened by concern for each and every human person.

One of the key moments in Pope Francis' sustained efforts in dialogue with Muslims is the signing of the document on "Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together" with the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Ahmad al-Tayyib, in Abu Dhabi on 4 February 2019. Both the Grand Imam and the Pope appeal to all people of good will in the name of God to consider the road map that they present for world peace and living together. The document is sealed by their commitment to obey God and to work for peace and reconciliation.

The Jesuits among Muslims in Asia find the presence and teachings of Pope Francis as an "interreligious kairós moment"

in Christian-Muslim relations. Especially in the context of the Ignatian year of Jubilee, we want to walk in a journey of conversion from our many prejudices and commit ourselves to the call of reconciliation between all peoples with God and with one another, and to work for the healing of our mother earth in Asia. We seek to collaborate especially with the youth, with the Church, with other faiths and with those in civil society engaged in similar concerns. In the JCSA and JCAP Apostolic Plans, we recognize a deep desire “to share our charism of Ignatian Spirituality” with our Muslim brothers and sisters while we sincerely listen to their spiritual riches. One such effort fructified in the symposium on “Journeying with Muslims: The Ignatian Way.” We are happy to make available the papers presented at the symposium for Jesuits and their collaborators in both Jesuit Conferences.

Greg Soetomo, S.J. (Manila)
and Joseph Victor Edwin, S.J. (Delhi)
JAMIA coordinators in Asia Pacific and South Asia

CHAPTER 1
DIALOGUE OF LIFE

Exploring an Ignatian Way in Christian-Muslim Relations

Joseph Victor Edwin, S.J.

Abstract

This article presents some of the key learnings in Christian-Muslim Relations in India from the perspective of a Jesuit missioned to dialogue with Muslims. Ignorance and prejudices plague the relations between Christians and Muslims. What's the antidote for this spiritual malice? This article proposes that meeting and listening to Muslims and familiarizing oneself with the teachings of the Church with regard to Islam and Muslims will dispel prejudices and will open oneself to the Spirit of God for new learnings. The positive relations are further deepened in discerning love for one another and widened through spiritual conversations.

Introduction

This essay is a personal reflection on my journey into the lives of Muslims as a Jesuit missioned by the Church through the channels of the Society of Jesus and her major superiors. In the first section, I share some of the glimpses of my personal preparation for the journey. In the second section, I present two key elements for a serious discernment and spiritual conversation between Christians and Muslims.

Section 1

Children of Abraham *Living Together Separately*

Muslims and Christians have been living *side by side* in the sub-continent for several centuries, mostly in peace. Though both sets of believers engage socially in their schools, places of works, in markets and in business, they remain vastly unaware of what sustains the lives of one another and what their faith convictions are. Many Christians seem to reflect a view that was held by St. John Damascene (d. 749) several centuries ago. John Damascene was a theologian and historiographer who held that Islam was one of the Christian heresies and classified Islam under the name of “Haeresia Ismaelitica.” He taught that Muhammad, the prophet of Islam, led his people from idolatry to monotheistic religion though Muhammad’s teaching was riddled with errors. Many other Christians, in their approach to Islam and Muslims, reflect some of the Byzantine polemics of the 9th and 10th centuries. In the Byzantine polemical literature one would find a satirical tone in the critique of Islam. Moreover, many of the Byzantine polemicists, like Monk George called Hammertolos (d. 868), the Melkite Patriarch of Egypt, Constantine Porphyrogenitus (d. 959), and Bartholomew of Edessa (Unknown; late 12th or early 13th century), used in their polemics the critical apologetic apparatus used in the early Christian controversies on Islam. Some polemicists also argued that though Christians and Muslims believe in the same God, Muslims were considered to be inferior in dignity because they were children of Hagar the slave girl. In their writings, even the basic beliefs of Muslims were distorted with insults and irreverence. I find it hard, now, to feel why many Christians con-

struct their understanding of Muslims, who are their neighbors, with strange polemical ideas that emerged in the past in those distant places! Somehow these old prejudices continue to keep seeping into the hearts and minds of many Christians through literature even unto our times. We are children of Abraham *living together separately!*

Muslim views on Christianity and Christians are restricted to the way in which the Holy Qur'an portrays Christians. In the Islamic religious vision, Christians have failed to preserve the revelation given to Jesus. Consequently, Muslims believe that Christians have developed religious doctrines which are either irrational or incompatible with faith in the One God. Christian doctrines, such as the Trinity, the divinity of Jesus Christ, crucifixion and redemption are dismissed as corruption.

I must confess that I too had many prejudices against Muslims until I had an exciting encounter with a Jesuit scholar of Islam, Paul Jackson. In 1993, I was in Patna for my initial training in the Society of Jesus. Fr. Paul Jackson came to our Formation House to give a course on Islam. I did not realize the importance of studying other religions while I was being trained to become a Catholic priest, but I was open. I can very well remember how I longed to listen to Fr. Paul. That was very clear because a few months before that, in December 1992, the Babri Masjid was demolished, and afterwards, violence erupted on a massive scale. Somehow, I began to feel with and for our Muslim brothers and sisters and all who had suffered in the riots. I felt concern for them. And so, although I did not feel convinced about knowing Islam as a religion, I had a certain openness. That was the context in which I was looking forward to being part of Fr. Paul's course.

It was a five-day course. On the first day, Fr. Paul asked us simply to state how we felt about Muslims. He told us to say anything and everything, positive or negative, whatever it was. He said he would be writing our responses out on the blackboard.

Fr. Paul wrote down everything. The board was full. Except for a few positive things, a lot of negative things were said, unfortunately. Then, Fr. Paul asked us to take a moment of silence and look at all that was written on the blackboard. He asked us where the positive comments and the negative comments came from.

To our surprise, the positive things came from our personal experience with Muslims, from the personal contacts we had had with them. On the other hand, most of the negative views came from the media or hearsay, reflecting prejudices and biases.

From there, Fr. Paul began to reflect with us on our first lesson in Christian-Muslim relations. The first lesson was that there is no substitute for personal experience. If I need to learn about Islam, I must turn to Muslims.

In this way, Fr. Paul made us focus on a human person, a flesh and blood, a brother and a sister, to seek to understand Muslims as persons. Then, he introduced us to the essentials of the Islamic faith and Muslim festivals. He used a lot of photos, slides and pictures to explain things, and the classes were very engaging.

Fr. Paul capped it all with very important expectations from the Church and Christians with regard to Muslims, and shared his own personal experiences with Muslims. The first thing he said was to have esteem for a Muslim's faith, but how? I remember answering that one could do so while personally meeting our Muslim brothers and sisters. I was very happy to give this answer, and Fr. Paul appreciated it.

Why did Fr. Paul stress the need to esteem the faith of Muslims? He said that because through much of history, Christians have had a very negative approach towards Muslims and their faith, and now we needed to change. We needed to respect the faith of the other, including Muslims. Also, he said the Church expects Christians to forget the past. He qualified this by saying that forgetting the past is not simply burying everything raw, but learning from the past, including from the history of hostile relations, learning that we need to be respectful towards one another. Hostility should go and generosity should enter. We must learn lessons from the past. If we don't, we will repeat the same mistakes as before. So, the antagonistic and hostile attitude must be consigned to the past and buried. Healing should happen. We should look forward to working together with Muslims for the common good, Fr. Paul emphasized. That is another important demand the Church puts on Christians, especially on Jesuits, with regard to Muslims.

Fr. Paul said that at the heart of everything, we Christians and Muslims worship the One God. Although in different ways, we worship the same God. We adore One God, with Muslims. We must behave as brothers and sisters with one another, without excluding people of other faiths. If we do not behave as brothers and sisters, we cannot adore the One God. Our worship will then not be born of truth. Back then, I did not understand those words, but over the years, I have understood.

After a few weeks, I approached Fr. Paul, expressing my desire to meet Muslims, to learn about Islam and to discern whether the Lord was calling me to dedicate my life for the ministry of Christian-Muslim relations. He told me to pray and ask for God's guidance.

After a few weeks, before I left Patna for my studies in Philosophy, Fr. Paul sent me a small note in which he mentioned two things very clearly. First, to enter into the apostolate of Christian-Muslim relations fulltime would be very difficult, like swimming against the current, he said. He advised me to pray and discern whether God wanted me to enter into this ministry. Second, he said, our life should be worthy of this ministry. It is not just a ministry of the intellect. Rather, the mind and the heart should work together, and this should be expressed in our life. Our way of life must be in coherence with this ministry. He emphasized that it was a very important journey.

Fr. Paul, in a very beautiful way, gave me certain important lessons right at the beginning. He challenged me and asked me to discern the will of God for my life. Along with that, he sent me a little book on personal vocation. It was written by Herbert Alphonso, an expert in Ignatian Spirituality. Fr. Paul Jackson sent a small note along with the book, saying that a personal vocation is something unrepeatable and unique to oneself, something that gives peace to one's heart and soul. He said that he prayed for me and also asked me to pray to God, asking Him to open a way for me to enter into the apostolate of Christian-Muslim relations if indeed God wanted me to take up this ministry.

During my diaconate ordination and priestly ordination, I deeply felt that I was sent "among" Muslims to give witness to the Christian faith. As a student of Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations, I was struck by a "letter" and an "event." The letter was written by Pope Gregory VII (d. 1085) to the Andalusian Monarch, Al-Nasir, in 1076 AD. The letter was sent in gratitude to

Al-Nasir who had freed some Christian prisoners and sent gifts to the Pope. A portion of the letter reads:

The good God, creator of all things, without whom we can do nothing or even imagine it, inspired this in your heart; he who illuminates every man coming into this world illuminated your mind in this. For almighty God, who wishes that all men should be saved and none lost, approves nothing in us so much as that man after loving himself should love his fellow, and that what he does not want done to himself he should not do to others. You and we owe this charity to ourselves especially because we believe in and confess one God, admittedly in a different way, and daily praise and venerate him, the creator of the worlds and ruler of this world.

The “event” was the visit of St Francis of Assisi (1219 AD) to the Sultan, Malik al Kamil, at the height of the fifth Crusade. They met as men of peace and men of God. In 1221, Francis wrote to the friars sent among Muslims: “The brothers can conduct themselves among them spiritually in two ways. One way is to avoid quarrels or disputes and be subject to every human creature for God’s sake, so bearing witness to the fact that they are Christians. Another way is to proclaim the word of God openly, when they see that it is God’s will.”

I deeply felt that the primary witness that I am a Christian is shown in my peaceful presence among Muslims and an open rejection to any temptation for domination and polemics. The invitation to “peaceful presence among Muslims,” I feel, is in tune with what we believe as our common ground with Muslims, that is: “We believe in and confess one God, admittedly in a different way, and daily praise and venerate him, the creator of the worlds

and ruler of this world.” This common ground is a grace given, and is also a task. The task is that we must be charitable to one another. This peaceful presence does not preclude “proclamation,” which takes the shape for me as a Christian in “always be[ing] prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a *reason* for the *hope* that is in you” (1 Peter 3:15).

Section 2

From Talking to Each Other to Listening to One Another

Discerning Conversation

It has been more than 25 years since I began my pilgrimage among Muslims as their Christian brother. I had engaging conversations with Muslims. I met them in their mosques, madrasas and in their homes. In my conversations, I have noticed two major elements: one, Muslims see religion (*din*) as, above all, true Guidance (*huda*) and all-embracing Law (*Sharia*) shaping the individual and corporate life of men and women. In the perspective of the Qur’an and Sunna of the Prophet, the conveyance of the truth (*Tabligh*) by word of mouth and the invitation to the Straight Path by persuasion and explanation go together with the effort to establish religion (*iqamat-e-din*), that is, to persist in the definitively revealed, God-willed ideal relationship between the human person (individually and corporately) and God and with one another.¹

Furthermore, I recognized in my conversation that many Muslims do speak about the origin and evolution of the Muslim community under the leadership of Prophet Muhammad as a

¹Reflecting on several experiences with Muslims, in conversation with Christian W. Troll, S.J. I came to recognize the underlying element of the Muslim understanding of religion and their mission in the world.

religio-political community of believers (*umma*) in Medina. This evolution of the Muslim community in Medina is interwoven with the content of the Qur'anic revelation. The Prophetic model is a normative and revered model. The *umma* of Medina of the times of the Prophet and his companions is considered by many Muslims the ideal time.²

Let me explain this further. In my conversations with many Muslims, I have grasped that they affirm that, first and foremost, sovereignty belongs to God and God is the law giver. The whole of nature conforms to that Law. Natural order respects Divine will and nature submits itself over to the lordship of God. Human person is endowed with free will. The Divine will has laid down *Sharia* for human conduct. Submission to *Sharia* brings blessings, while rebellion against the Divine brings eternal punishment, evil and unhappiness. The Law that God prescribes for human beings is easily accessible to all through the Qur'an and in the lives of the prophets, especially in the life of the last prophet, Muhammad. Prophecy is the agency chosen by God to give concrete expression and exemplification of His will. The Qur'an and the *Sunna* are the ultimate authority for all true Muslims.

The duty of Muslims is to obey God by submitting their will to the will of God. Submission, as they understand it, is not mere passivity or acceptance of a set of dogma or rituals, but submission is to strive to actively realize God's will in space and time within history. The Qur'an affirms that man is the vicegerent of God on earth (Q. 5: 55/6: 166). God has given creation to man

²Ibid.

as a Divine trust (Q. 33:72/31: 20-29). I am told that how man carries his viceregency decides whether he will be rewarded or punished.

Moreover, Muslim obligation to realize God's will is communal as well as individual. God is one (*tawhid*) and all creation has an underlying unity and is subject to God's rule. God, as noted earlier, is a sovereign ruler, and man, his vicegerent, must implement His rule on earth. Religion is not separate but integral to every aspect of life: prayer, fasting, law and society.

To sum it up, Muslims believe that they must strive to implement the will of God in their private and public lives. Many Muslims consider Islam to be a total way of life since they believe that religion cannot be separated from one's social and political life. Thus, religion informs every action that a person takes. Such position is not conducive to a multipolar world, which is blessed with diversity of religious convictions and ways of life. Readers must note that there is also a minority of Muslims who believe that modernity requires the separation of religion and state. There is no clear agreement among Muslims on this question as one would find considerable differences of opinion among them on this subject. A Christian scholar of Islam must engage in conversations with people who hold different shades of opinions in a discerning way, highlighting what would suit our modern world, emphasizing freedom of religion, human rights and dignity of all people.

From my engagement with Muslims as a disciple of Christ and a servant of the Church, drawing spiritual nourishment from shared dialogues with Muslims for the work of reconciliation, I see the need to add more prayer and discernment in recognizing areas where the Spirit of God is leading us to bend our will

to His, and in areas that are not conducive to the values of the Gospel present in my life and in the lives of my interlocutors in India, where democracy is the uniting principle of our nation blessed with huge diversity but united in the spirit of our Constitutions. I have learnt that ongoing discernment is at the heart of any widow.

Spiritual Conversation

The second aspect of engagement with Muslims is a desire to enter into a spiritual conversation with them. We must note here that interreligious conversation is an open conversation between people holding significant differences. A sincere conversation would keep us safe from polemics and debates, and affirm and appreciate differences and plurality. In spiritual conversation, we presuppose this fundamental attitude of listening and speaking – God communicates with me; I do not disturb another when he is talking; as far as possible I see positive points in what others are saying. Spiritual conversation is not a debate. There is no argument. It is not putting forward our ideas forcefully or in a convincing manner. It is sharing what we experienced in prayer, what resonates with us during the sharing of others and the insights we gain as to the direction of our conversations.

It goes without saying that partners in dialogue must shed exclusivist and supremacist tendencies. Mutual enrichment is the fruit of such deep conversations. It took some time for me to realize that learning about Muslims and Islam from them was opening a way for me to become a better Christian. I asked myself, how is it that that happens? I realized that when I begin to

view closely the faith responses of Muslims, I begin to review my convictions in the light of my new learning about the other and about myself.

I deeply felt on several occasions how God works in the devout souls of my Muslim brothers and sisters. In the Spiritual Exercises we find such an affirmation: "When a person is seeking God's will, it is more appropriate and far better that the Creator and Lord should communicate himself to the devout soul, Embracing it in love and praise" (Sp.Ex. 15). Moreover, I am aware of what is demanded of me in the Spiritual Exercises: "Every good Christian ought to be more eager to put a good interpretation on a neighbor's statement than to condemn it" (Sp.Ex. 22).

For a spiritual conversation to be genuine, we must hold two spiritual principles together. The first is, if God works and speaks through me, I speak what I feel with confidence and responsibility. In a spiritual conversation, I share my faith experience and felt knowledge. If spiritual direction is the ambience, I must speak with confidence and trust that others will take seriously what I say. If silence is the setting, I speak from my heart what I deeply feel and value. If a spiritual conversation is not a debate, I do not need to make my points forcefully to convince others, the genuineness of my experience will suffice.

The second principle is, if God works and speaks through each person, I must put all my faculties at the service of actively listening to each person. The spirit of God is present when another person is speaking. If a spiritual conversation is taking place in the setting of spiritual direction, I must listen keenly to where the spirit is leading me. If silence is the setting, I must listen to another within the confines of the feeling of my heart, and feel with

the others in the group. If the rule of the spiritual conversation is respect for one another, I must actively listen with respect when others are speaking. This requires inner freedom.³

Spiritual conversations allow the Spirit of the Lord to work in our hearts and move us to find the common threads and different Widow.

Conclusion

It must be said that Catholics are not exposed sufficiently to the teachings of the Catholic Church on her relations with Muslims. As a result, ignorance plagues the hearts of Christians with regard to their relations with Muslims. Efforts should be made to help Christian churches encourage engagements with people of other faiths, especially with Muslims through collaboration and networking. Our common concerns give us a deeper understanding of our faith-roots, which can serve as the primary motivation for knowing and working with the other for the dignity of all persons. In a peaceful, serious engagement, we give witness to our faith. Our actions proclaim loudly our faith response to God's revelation in Christ.

Further, it must be noted that discernment and spiritual conversations are powerful keys that can unlock deep and genuine conversations with Muslims, where both parties are mutually enriched while discovering common grounds and differences that are equally important for ongoing conversations.

³I have gleaned the material on spiritual conversation from a conversation with Fr. Shajumon, S.J., the Socius to the President of the South Asian Jesuit Conference.

Muslim-Catholic Annotations on Maryam¹ (Spiritual Exercises 2nd Week 102-108)

Renato T. Oliveros

Abstract

About two-thirds of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius use contemplation as a method of prayer, where creative imagination is applied to experience God in Scriptures and in the community. In Islam, the use of creative imagination² can be traced back to the Sufi mystic Ibn Arabi (1165 -1240). Although Abrahamic religions trace their beginnings in the Middle East, contextualized interpretations of Scriptures can be found from culture to culture, and as influenced by Sufism. For Muslim-Filipinos in the Sulu Zone, contemplation of the “Virgin Birth” is realized by an oral tradition of miracle stories of Maryam during the powerful earthquakes of 1897 and 1976. They witnessed Maryam hover on the horizon of Basilan Strait with arms outstretched to stop the tsunami that was about to destroy their Moro communities. The act of remembering (*dkhr*) is similar to the practice of Ignatian contemplation where believers imagine the scene as it happened. With Maryam as the subject of contemplation, shared annotations on Maryam as Pure (Immaculate) and Chosen (Q. 3:42), Maryam’s Submission to God’s will (Q. 3:43a) and her courage (Luke 1:38) can help shape a shared Marian religious experience in Islam and Catholicism.

¹Mary (Maryām, Hebrew Miriam, Greek Μαρταμ or Μαρτα, Arabic Maryam).

²Henry Corbin, *Alone with the Alone; Creative Imagination in the Sūfism of Ibn Arabī*, Bollingen, Princeton 1969, (reissued in 1997 with a new preface by Harold Bloom).

Contemplation

Muslims and Catholics can enter into a profound peaceful relationship with one another through the “Dialogue of Religious Experience.” At this deeper level of dialogue, prayer, contemplation and faith are shared. The Spiritual Exercises (SPEX), the cornerstone of Ignatian Spirituality, has mastered contemplation as a method of prayer, where the use of creative imagination and the senses are applied to enhance the experience of God in prayer. About two-thirds of the SPEX apply imaginative contemplation. In Islam, contemplation or the use of creative imagination³ can be traced back to the Sufi mystic Ibn Arabi (1165–1240), who contemplated on the life of Moses. There is no reason why it cannot be extended to the prophet Muhammad, to Eisa (Jesus), Maryam and Biblical characters present in the Qur’ān. Ignatian contemplation is not just about meditating or imagining events narrated in Sacred Scripture; it is to invite the retreatant to place oneself inside the Qur’ānic and Gospel event as a participant. If Ignatian contemplation is ever adapted by Muslims, it must not disrupt *salat*, a Pillar of Islam, but should augment and enrich a Muslim’s prayer life. At the end of every *salat* some Muslims stay seated in silence. In this instance, to contemplate is inviting.

Context

Encounter with God in prayer is always contextual for it takes into consideration the person’s setting and situation. For instance, the prophet Muhammad heard the Qur’ān in Arabic in 7th century Arabia; while Jesus the Word pitched his tent amongst humanity in 1st century Palestine. Although Islam and Christian-

³Ibid.

ity trace their beginnings in the Middle East, unique expressions and interpretations of both traditions can be found from culture to culture. For contemplation to be apt to Muslim-Filipinos, context and inculturated expressions of Islam in their locale should be explored to augment their contemplation of a Qur'ānic narrative, e.g. the "Virgin Birth."

The influences of (1) Sufism and (2) life-saving miracles in Moro⁴ communities contributed to the predisposition of some Moros to contemplation and contemplative prayer. Sufism, the mystical dimension in Islam, is not foreign to Muslim-Filipinos. At least three known Sufi orders have spread to Southeast Asia, notably to Sumatra, Java and to the Malay Archipelago⁵. It was by trade from Sumatra and Java that Sufi missionaries reached Sulu with the spread of Islam in the 13th century before the establishment of the Sulu sultanate in the 15th century. Sufism's creativity, tolerance and openness are credited for the inculturation of Islam into the Moro culture in Mindanao. Sufism encouraged the Moros to work out a satisfying synthesis of local tradition and Islamic religious practices. Sufism managed to introduce an Islam in the Philippines that was universal and open to traditions and cultures indigenous to the various tribes. It was an Islam that was not rigid and had the flexibility to transform indigenous practices into Islamic religious expression.

⁴Muslim-Filipino.

⁵Carmen Abubakar, *Islamization of Southern Philippines: An Overview in Filipino Muslims: Their Social Institutions and Cultural Achievements*, ed. F. Landa Jocano (Quezon City: Asian Center, 1983), 8.

Case 1: Rahma⁶, the Sufi, Contemplated the *Tuhan*

Rahma lived a life of a Sufi even though she did not articulate that she was one. I first heard of *Tuhan* (Tausug⁷ for God) from her. *Tuhan* is Lord in Malay. In Tausog, there is no concept of lordship as *Tuhan* is reserved or synonymous with *Allāh* who is Lord and God. Growing up in Jolo in the 1930s, mamang⁸ Rahma affectionately called Allah *Tuhan* and *Tuhanku* (my God), which is the equivalent of *Adonai* (my Lord) in Hebrew. She whispered *Tuhan* to me as a child, yet to her disappointment, I followed the religion of my father and was baptized a Catholic at the age of 10. It was not a difficult transition for me to embrace Jesus Christ as my Lord and God, thanks to my mother who prepared me for that. I witnessed her openness and tolerance. Christ as Lord (*rabb*) mirrors the *Tuhan* I had heard from Rahma. At Rahma's deathbed, I whispered to her *Fatiha's 'al ḥamdu lil-lāhi rabbi l-'ālamīn* (All the praise and thanks be to Allah, who is the Lord, *rabb*--of the universe). It is the same *Fatiha* that is recited and heard often in Indonesia, south of Mindanao, the home to most Muslims in the world; the same *Fatiha* I recited in Arabic before Catholics at her funeral. I watched as a Muslim and her Catholic friends carried her coffin to her final resting place beside her husband, Pedro.

Rahma, born in Tawi-Tawi in 1925, was raised by an Imam⁹ father¹⁰, and an Imam uncle¹¹. She fell in love with a Catholic and eloped with him as it was and still is considered *haram* (prohibit-

⁶Rahma Taib Oliveros was my Muslim mother.

⁷Tausug is the language spoken by the Taosug, a Moro tribe in the Sulu Zone.

⁸A Taosug term of endearment for one's mother.

⁹Imam is a prayer (salat) leader in Islam. In the Philippines, however, an Imam is an equivalent of a "priest" in Catholicism.

¹⁰Army Muslim Chaplain Lt. Col. Abdul Rajick Taib.

¹¹Imam Abdul Halik Taib.

ed) in the Philippines for a Muslim woman to marry a non-Muslim. Accompanying her Catholic husband, she lived most of her life in Catholic-dominated cities in Mindanao. She bore five sons whom she raised Catholic without imposing her religion on them. All her life her close friends were Catholics who accepted her wholeheartedly to the extent that she was regularly chosen as *ninang* (Godmother) in weddings and baptisms. She wore the compulsory veil as she attended Masses, knelt during consecration and performed other gestures save for receiving communion. She easily passed as a Catholic given her Oliveros surname—so priests did not suspect her of being a Muslim. Family and friends mattered to her so much so that she suspended Muslim prohibitions so she could integrate herself into the Catholic community. Yet, she searched for the Muslim women amongst the vendors in the marketplace. It was with them that she shared her Muslim friendship and identity.

Rahma lived most of her life in Salcedo Village in Cagayan de Oro City. From Loyola House in Quezon City, I flew to Mindanao to attend to her funeral. I visited her neighbors as they consoled with me. One of the ladies said something about my mother that still makes me humble and grateful to God. She said that my mother used to stroll around the neighborhood, greet everyone she met in English and give them her warm and compassionate (Rahma) smile. The neighbor said it was something they seldom saw these days; my mother's smile brought them peace and joy. They will miss Rahma, she said. This reminds me of a *Sunnah* of the prophet Muhammad, where he said: "Your smiling in the face of your brother is charity" (reported by Abu Dharr al-Ghifari).

I experienced shades of Sufism in Rahma's prayer life. Her *salat* (prayer) was not determined by the five-times-a-day prayer structure. Her whole day was prayer in full consciousness and awareness of Allāh's presence everywhere and in every moment. The Oliveros home was her Mosque where she prayed and lived the life of a good Muslim. It was in her home that Rahma cooked pork for her Christian family, although she never tasted it. She knew that as a Muslim it is prohibited (*haram*), Yet she cooked it out of love for her children. She knew that the pork chop was done simply by the look and smell of it. When the plates of her husband and sons were squeaky clean, she knew that her pork cuisine had been perfect.

Her solemn request to her sons was that she remain a Muslim for she believed that Allah called her to be one. She taught us that her God and the God of Catholics are one and the same. She identified with Catholic saints, particularly Teresa of Calcutta and Pope John Paul II. She cried when they died and thanked God that by their holy lives we are reminded of the existence of a God.

Case 2: Samal, Bajao, Balanguingui and Yakan¹²

Contemplate Maryam¹³

In the late '70s, Rahma brought me to Zamboanga, north of Sulu. There I witnessed Moros devoutly praying at the shrine of the *Nuestra Señora* (Our Lady) in Zamboanga. She is Maryam to them. Her bas-relief image is raised on the eastern wall of the 17th century Jesuit-built Fort Pilar. The biggest Muslim-Catholic

¹²Four of the eighteen Moro tribes, the three biggest are the Maranaos of Lanao, the Maguin-danaons of Cotabato and the Taosugs of Sulu.

¹³Malay for Lady Maryam in Tausog.

get-together occurs during the annual Fiesta Pilar (12 October) when Muslims join the procession in honor of Our Lady of the Pillar (*Nuestra Señora del Pilar*). Moro women wear the *hijab* while the Catholic lay women wear their *belo* (veil). With the Catholics, Muslims also light candles as they offer prayers to Maryam that she protect them from the treacherous Sulu Sea.

The shaping of this popular devotion to Maryam can be attributed to two miracle stories experienced by four¹⁴ of the 18 Moro tribes. The Zamboanga shoreline has been a natural mooring place for boat-fairing tribes that became home to the Samal, Bajao, Yakan and Balanguingui tribes. Their ancestors narrated the story of Maryam whom they witnessed during the powerful earthquakes of 1897 and 1976. They claimed they saw Maryam on the horizon of Basilan Strait with arms outstretched to stop the tsunami that was about to destroy their communities. Being saved miraculously left a lasting imprint in their collective memory and has now become a part of their oral tradition. Not even attempts by local Saudi-Wahabi Muslims could influence them to cease their devotion to Maryam. Answered prayers for survival from calamities from the desperate and poor Muslims cannot be easily erased.

Remembering (*dkhr*) for them is similar to Ignatian contemplation where believers not just imagine the scene as it happens, but imagine that *they are there* as it happens. Maryam as the subject of contemplation can enrich, promote and preserve the shared values and spiritual ideals found in Islam and Catholicism.

¹⁴Samal, Bajao, Balanguingui and Yakan Muslims.

SPEX 2nd Week: Annotations on the Annunciation

(Qur'ān 3:42-47/19:17b and Luke 1: 26-31, 34, 37-38)

An annotation is a note of explanation or comment on a Gospel event to enrich the contemplation. Four annotations here serve as supplements to the SPEX with consideration given to Muslims. Given that it is a shared Muslim-Catholic annotation, the Islamic perspective is explained at length for the sake of Catholic retreatants. The shared Muslim-Catholic annotations serve as a bridge to the dialogue of contemplation on Maryam.

The Christian Annunciation is an event within the same tradition as the “Virgin Birth” tradition understood by Muslims. The Qur'ānic version of the announcement of Gabriel¹⁵ (*Jibreel*) to Maryam is identical to that of Luke's Gospel. The 2nd Prelude of the 2nd Week of the SPEX is to contemplate how God sent the Angel Gabriel (*Jibreel*) to a virgin (*batul*) in her room in a house in the obscure village of Nazareth, a fishing and farming region of Galilee stricken by poverty under the Roman rule. Scripture states that, “In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the House of David; and the virgin's name was Mary” (Lk. 1:26-27). While the Qur'ānic version states: “Then we sent to her Our Spirit (Gabriel), and he appeared before her as a faultless man” (Q.19:17b). In the 2nd Week of the SPEX, a retreatant contemplates the Incarnation known in Islam as the “Virgin Birth.” Islam and Christianity share this Scriptural tradition in Luke 1: 26-38 and Qur'ān 3:42-47.

¹⁵The angel Jibreel (Gabriel) is not mentioned in the Annunciation scenes in Surah 3 and Surah 9, although it is presumed to be Gabriel following the Christian tradition as written in the Gospel of Luke. Given that Gabriel as the Angel of Revelation to the Prophet Muhammad, he then is the revealer mes-senger sent to Maryam.

Annotation 1: Maryam Made Pure and Chosen (Q. 3:42)

Maryam is the most prominent female figure in the Qur'ān as the only one identified by name. Surah 19 is titled *MARYAM*. Overall, there are 70 verses that refer to her and she is named specifically in 34 verses. One of the titles given to Maryam is *Tāhīrah*, which means “She who was made pure.” Allah making Maryam pure is the “fullness of grace” in Christianity. In Luke, Gabriel announces to Mary that she has found favor with God. The first part of the “Hail Mary” Catholic prayer is a concise Islamic Mariology. It is based on the greeting of the angel Gabriel: “Hail Mary, full of grace” (Lk 1.28), while “Blessed are you among women” is the greeting of Elizabeth (*Ilisabat*), the mother of John (*Yayah*). Mary affirms Elizabeth’s greeting in her song, the Magnificat: “For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed” (Lk. 1:48b).

Six centuries later, the Prophet Muhammad received a revelation known by Muslims as the “Virgin Birth.” In the Qur'ān the angels greeted Maryam: “*Yaa-Maryamu innal Allāha istafaaki wa tahharaki wastafaaki 'alaa 'il-'aalamiin*” [O Mary, God has chosen you and made you pure, and chosen you above all women of the world] (Qur'ān 3:42). Tabarsi reports that by “the angels” is meant, as some have said, Gabriel only.¹⁶ Gabriel, being the agent of revelation, was the one who announced the message to Maryam that she has been chosen to be the mother of *Eisa*.

Maryam’s chosenness is exemplified by her immaculateness as she was conceived by her mother, Anna (Hannah). Tabari begins with a general interpretation that Mary’s chosenness relates to the earlier vow of Hannah to dedicate the child in her womb to

¹⁶Mahmoud Ayoub, *The House of Imran*, New York, 1992, 128.

the service of God. Maryam's purity was there from the very moment of her conception in the womb of her mother Hannah who prayed, "Lord, I have dedicated what is growing in my womb entirely to You; so accept this from me. You are the One who hears and knows all." But when she gave birth, she said, "My Lord! I have given birth to a girl." God knew best what she had given birth to: the male is not like the female. "I name her Mary and I commend her and her offspring to Your protection from the rejected Satan.... Her Lord accepted her and made her grow in goodness" (Q. 3: 35-37a) by protecting her from stain and keeping her inviolable without sin.

Integral to God's act of choosing Maryam is the act of making her pure (made pure). They are not two separate acts—but instantaneous, not one act preceding the other. *Mustafīa* means, "She who was chosen," and *Tāhīrah* means, "She who was made pure." Qurtubi's¹⁷ exegesis (*tafsir*) explains that God repeated twice the election (chosen) of Mary—"the first for her devotion and the second for giving birth to Jesus."¹⁸ This was seconded by Zamakhsharī¹⁹ who interprets Mary's election as thus: "God chose you first when He accepted you from your mother (*Hannah*), nurtured you, and bestowed upon you great favors. ... (secondly,) God chose you finally in that He granted you Jesus without a father. This favor was not attained by any other woman."²⁰ Like Zamakhsharī, Razi²¹ interprets the second election: "that

¹⁷ Abu 'Abd Allah Muhammad b. Ahmad al-Ansari al-Qurtubi. *A-Jami' li-Ahkam al-Qur'an*. 20 volumes. Cairo: Al-Matba'ah al-Bahiyah, n.d., 1967.

¹⁸ Ayoub, 124.

¹⁹ Abu al-Qasim Jar Allah Mahmud ibn 'Umar al-Zamakhshari. *Al-Kashaf'an Haqa'iq al-Tanzil wa 'Uyun al-Aqawil fi Wujuh al-Tawil*. 4 volumes. Cairo, 1966.

²⁰ Zamakhshari, I, pp. 361-62.

²¹ Fakhr al-Din al-Razi, *Al-Tafsir al-Kabir*, 32 volumes. Cairo.

God granted her Jesus without a father.”²² One can observe that the early Muslim commentators were consistent in their interpretation that the miracle of the “Virgin Birth” rests in Maryam being chosen to be the mother of *Eisa*—a privilege granted unto her, raising her above all women of all nations of the world.

This Qur’ānic revelation encapsulates a Catholic dogma that Maryam was immaculately conceived and chosen amongst all women to be the mother of *Eisa (Jesus)*, the Word and the Messiah (Q. 3:45, Q. 19:19), just as the angel Gabriel announced in the Gospel of Luke. Maryam must be sinless and immaculate (Latin: *macula*, without stain or sin) to be the perfect receptacle as mother of *Eisa al-Masih* who is the “Word” that the Qur’ān names as *Kalimat-ullah*—“a Word (kalima) from Allah” (Q. 3:45).²³

Annotation 2: Maryam’s Purity as Faith

Underlying Maryam’s obedience is submission to the will of God—an act of faith. According to the eloquent 12th-century scholar, Tabarsi (1073-1153), God purified Mary “with faith from rejection of faith and with obedience from disobedience, as related on the authority of Hasan al-Basri and Sa’id ibn Jubayr.”²⁴ This is supported by Razi (1150-1210), named as Sultan of Theologians, who wrote, “The first is that God purified her from the rejection of faith and disobedience.”²⁵ Tabari interprets the meaning “and purified you” as “He (Allah) purified your faith from all doubts and impurities which are in the faith of all women....” Tabari reports this tradition on the authority of ‘Ali.²⁶

²² Ayoub, 126.

²³ Shorter Encyclopedia of Islam, Gibb and Kramers, E.J. Brill, Leiden, 1991, p. 173.

²⁴ Ayoub, 128.

²⁵ Ibid, 126.

²⁶ Ibid, 123.

Muslims translate the word “*iman*” as faith and belief. However, faith or *iman* in Islam is different from that in Christianity. The Arabic *iman* is generally translated as faith or belief that consists of their Six Articles of Faith in Islam.²⁷ Christianity, on the other hand, distinguishes beliefs from faith. Beliefs refer to the Nicene Creed, and faith is defined by St. Paul in Hebrews 11:1: “Faith is the substance of things to be hoped for, the evidence of things that appear not.” It is an assent with one’s whole being to what is non-apparent or cannot be seen. The act of faith in this instance is an act, personal or communal, in relation to God. The act of faith contributes to the deepening of a person’s personal relationship with God in Christ. So, every time a Christian prays in faith, s/he believes that God has heard his/her prayers and will be answered in accordance to God’s will.

Annotation 3: Maryam’s Obedience as Submission to God’s Will

Integral to God’s act of making her pure (made pure) is the command, “O Mary be obedient to your Lord” [Ya Maryamu uq-nutii li-Rabbiki] (Q. 3: 43a). In Islam, Maryam’s purity symbolizes her obedience. It is the effect of her being made pure. Mary is called *Qānitah*, which means “devoutly obedient” (Q. 66:12). This Arabic term implies not only constant submission to God, but also absorption in prayer. This is consistent with Islamic tradition that Maryam spent her childhood in the temple as she grew in a contemplative prayer life. This coincides perfectly with the command of Gabriel in the Annunciation: “Maryam, be devoutly

²⁷ (1) Belief in Allah, (2) Belief in the Angels, (3) Belief in Sacred Scriptures (Torah, Gospel and Quran), (4) Belief in the Prophets, (5) Belief in the Day of Judgement, and (6) Belief in God’s predestination.

obedient to your Lord... (Q. 3:43a).” Islamic tradition explains why Maryam has been pure from birth because of the prayer of her mother Hannah: “Lord, I have dedicated what is growing in my womb entirely to You; so accept this from me. You are the One who hears and knows all” (Qur’ān 3:35). The appropriate response of Maryam in Christianity is seen in Luke: “Let it be done unto me according to His will” (Luke 1:38). This exemplifies her total submission to God’s will.

Islamic tradition asserts man’s predisposition to surrender to the will of God. The Prophet Muhammad said, “No babe is born but upon *fitrah*.”²⁸ Every child is born a “Muslim.” The Arabic word *fitrah* means “primordial human nature” or predisposition. The Arabic word for Muslim literally means “someone who submits” as the Qur’ān ascertains that the ideal Muslim is someone who submits totally to God. “Muslim” here does not mean that the child will end up belonging to a religion. It means that every child born into the world, regardless of religion, has a predisposition to submit to God.

The etymology of the word “religion” is *religare*, a Latin word that refers to a relationship that binds together. Islam teaches that the path to Allah is based on a right relationship, which is submission to Allah’s will. The Prophet Muhammad wanted to restore that right relationship in Mecca because Mecca had become polygamous. Qur’ān 4:136 states, “O you who believe (*amanu*)!” The root word of Islam is “*al-silm*,” which means “submission” or “surrender.” The verbal noun (*islām*) literally means “submission,” and the active participle (*aslama*) is “he submitted.” Perhaps a more appropriate English translation of

²⁸Sahih Muslim, Book 033, Number 6426.

Qur'ān 5:3 is: "This day I have perfected for you your path ... and chosen for you submission (to Allah 's will) as the path." When the Prophet Muhammad proclaimed Islam, his proclamation demanded submission to the one God that every Muslim witnesses to.

Paragraph #234 of the Spiritual Exercises is a prayer entitled *Suscipe* (receive) popularly known as "Take and Receive." Note the moving simplicity that underlies this "surrender" to God of St. Ignatius of Loyola: "Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding and my entire will, all that I have and possess. Thou hast given all to me. To Thee, O Lord, I return it. All is Thine, dispose of it wholly according to Thy will. Give me Thy love and Thy grace, for this is sufficient for me." The person praying the *Suscipe* is aware of one's free will yet prays to God to take and receive one's freedom and align this with God's will. One's personal freedom is no longer important – what is important is that the will of God reigns in one's life, and ideally, in the Church as well.

Annotation 4: Her Courage

If one reflects on God's unique intervention in human history, a question one might ask could be: Why did God choose Mary and for what purpose? The virgin birth certainly has changed the life of a lowly maiden named Mary. It was not just that she was chosen by Allah, but she was chosen for something bigger than herself. Gabriel greeted Maryam with God's strange plan that baffled the young virgin from Nazareth.

Catholic and Islamic traditions highlight her immaculateness and fullness of grace that made her will perfectly aligned with the

will of God. Yet it was not a passive submission—but an act of faith to actively cooperate in God’s plan. One must take into account the courage of the young maiden. Her courage to say “yes” to Allāh’s will despite the risk of being judged as an adulteress, which was punishable by stoning. She asked Allāh’s messenger, Gabriel: “How can I have a son when no man has ever touched me? I have not been unchaste” (Q. 19:21). Her total submission to God’s will is exemplified in the Gospel of Luke when she said: “Let it be done unto me according to His will” (Luke 1:38). Mary complied single-heartedly as Blessed Pope Pius IX defined in his 1854 declaration on the Immaculate Conception (*Ineffabilis Deus*).

Conclusion

Maryam submitted with her whole being to Allāh’s plan, but not to draw attention to herself. The early Muslim commentators were consistent in their interpretation that the miracle of the “Virgin Birth” rests in Maryam being chosen to be the mother of *Eisa*, a great prophet in Islam, a privilege granted unto her. Tabarsi²⁹ argues that God chose her for the honor of giving birth to Christ³⁰ as she was chosen by Allah to be the mother of *Eisa* (Jesus). Thus Maryam must be pure, meaning sinless and immaculate (Latin: *macula*, without stain or sin), because her womb must be a fitting vessel to the child that the Qur’ān names as *Kalimat-ullah* – “a Word (*kalima*) by Allah” (3:45).³¹ She was “made pure” by Allāh (3.42) to be the perfect receptacle of the “Word” who is Jesus, the Christ (3.42). Consistent with the Christian tradition of the Annunciation of Gabriel to Mary in the Gospel according to Luke

²⁹ Abu ‘Ali al-Fadl b. al-Hasan al-Tabarsi. *Majma’ al Bayan fir Tafsir al-Qur’ān*. Six volumes. Beirut, 1961.

³⁰ Ayoub, 128.

³¹ Shorter Encyclopedia of Islam, Gibb and Kramers, E.J. Brill, Leiden, 1991, p. 173.

(Lk 1: 26-38), Jibreel in the Qur'ān announced that Mary shall be the Mother of *Eisa (Jesus)*, the Word and the Messiah (Q. 3:45, Q. 19:19).

For nine months the womb of Maryam was the first earth of Jesus. It was her womb that nourished the unborn Jesus Christ (*Eisa al-Masih*). And it was the most fitting womb to be Jesus' "1st home-1st earth" because Maryam is all-pure and without sin. Her womb was a perfect home for the *kalimatul-allah*, the Word of God enfleshed. "In the beginning the Word already was. The Word was in God's presence, and what God was, the Word was. He was with God at the beginning, and through him all things came to be; without him no created thing came into being" (Jn 1:1-3, NEB). In Christianity, Jesus is the "Word," "the eternal creative *fiat* for all things created."³² It is through the "Word" that all things were made. And it is the Word that would restore what had been lost through the destruction of the first creation.

May Maryam's courage inspire today's generation of Muslims and Catholics to be God's *khalifah* (steward) of the Earth. This is consistent with Qur'ān 33:72: "We (God) offered the trust (stewardship) to the heavens and the earth and the mountains; but they (the angels) refused to undertake it and were afraid. But man said, "Yes," to be stewards of God's creation. This despite man "being inept and foolish." Allah knows best, He is Most Compassionate to all, and Most Merciful to each (*ar-Rahman ar-Rahim*).

The Nuestra Señora icon is consistent with the depiction in the Qur'ān wherein Maryam is inseparably identified with her son, thus the title *Eisa ibn Maryam*. In the icon of Mary and the Child Jesus, we hear the voice of the mother, "*Do whatever he (Jesus) tells*

³²Rev. A. Biskupek, S.V.D., *Our Lady's Litany*, The Bruce Publishing Company, Milwaukee, 1954, p. 45.

you" (John 2:5). Maryam is the *Mother*, not only of Jesus, but of all humanity that guides her children to God.

CHAPTER 2
DIALOGUE OF ACTION

Ecologizing the First Principle and Foundation of the Spiritual Exercises

Gil Donayre, S.J.

Abstract

The ecological crisis threatening humanity stems from the broken link between human beings and nature. This severed connection is the consequence of man's exploitative attitude towards the environment born out of the worldview that nature is simply dead matter to be controlled to serve human needs. This anthropocentric attitude has led to an unparalleled assault of the earth resulting in the current destitution of the planet. With the prognosis that behind the ecological crisis lies a spiritual crisis, i.e., man's loss of orientation in the greater scheme of reality, this essay proposes to expand the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola to include an environmental reading. Particularly, this it draws from the First Principle and Foundation of the Spiritual Exercises an ecological-spiritual framework that can help man integrate his broken relationship with nature, God and his fellow men.

Introduction

As I key in words to begin this essay, the number of coronavirus infections is once again on the rise. Here in Germany, everyone is bracing for the third wave, no thanks to the virus variants whose mutations continue to keep schools, restaurants, shops, movie theaters, sports clubs, etc. shut. With the EU vaccination program gaining a bit of needed momentum, a good number raise their hopes for a return to normality this year. The eagerness to go back to work, share coffee with friends, visit relatives, spend holidays,

see a movie, shop, etc., is palpably tangible in people's faces wearied from the seemingly endless lockdown. While others see light at the end of the tunnel, a few others downplay the enthusiasm, suggesting that social distancing, sanitizers, and face shields are now the new normal. With waves of infection indicating no signs of ebbing, such an appraisal, pessimistic as it seems, cannot simply be written off. But no matter how the future unfolds – whether we will soon get the green light to freely hug our friends – one thing is clear. The coronavirus – which has led countries to lock their borders, crippled economies, limited people's mobility, and exposed our vulnerability as it continues to claim lives as of this writing – has not only disrupted and changed our lives but revealed to us an undeniable reality that is emerging in our times: we, human beings, are intricately linked to each other. Sadly, the pandemic, whose original Greek roots *pan* (all) + *demos* (district, country, people), had to hit us hard to remind us of this fundamental truth.

The dreaded Covid-19 unveiled this reality, albeit painfully, before our eyes. Amateur videos documenting disturbing deaths of patients infected with flu-like symptoms surfaced online in December 2019 as the highly contagious virus claimed its first victims in Wuhan, China. A month later, the World Health Organization declared the outbreak a public emergency of international concern before acknowledging it as a pandemic in March 2020. Since then, the count of coronavirus infections has steadily risen as it indiscriminately hops from one human host to another, regardless of social status, sex, age, color or religion. Although majority of those who are infected eventually recover, many unfortunately succumb to the deadly virus. Who can forget the gut-wrenching

sight of a column of 15 army trucks bringing hundreds of dead bodies out of Bergamo in Lombardy, Italy, or the chilling aerial shot of dug mass graves waiting to be filled in the outskirts of Sao Paulo, Brazil? And with experts attributing its possible origins to bats or pangolins, the coronavirus seems determined to compel us to admit not only to our interconnectedness with fellow human beings but, more importantly, to an intricate link that pervades all of reality. It is quite remarkable that a virus had to threaten our existence to awaken us to the truth perceived long ago by sages and philosophers, as when the Roman Cicero once exclaimed: “*Omnia inter se conexa*” (Everything is connected).

The Science of Interconnectedness

The reality of our interconnectedness, long been discredited as sheer sentiment without rational basis, is finally coming to our consciousness, thanks to the empirical sciences which now acknowledge and validate this truth. In this regard, ecology, originally coined by Ernst Haeckel in 1866, pioneers in recognizing this connection as it takes primarily as object of its study the relationship between living organisms (including humans) and their physical environment. Ecology maintains that the development of organisms (protein, nucleic acids, cells, microbes, plants, animals, humans) does not happen in a vacuum but largely is a product of its ecosystem. The macadamia nut, for example, depends on a myriad of factors for its growth, such as air quality, soil condition, humidity, temperature, amount of sunlight, and the presence of pests, insects, birds, animals, human settlement, to name a few. These external factors in turn are influenced by other determinants—carbon dioxide emissions affecting the air

quality, inorganic fertilizer use leading to deteriorating soil conditions, existence of bats feeding on pests and bugs, presence of trees that block light, etc. A deeper probe of these links unveils how each factor forms a node of a further set of interrelationships, revealing a vast web of intricate interconnectedness that characterizes reality. This complex net of intertwining connections reinforces ecology's thesis that living and non-living systems are vitally linked to each other, providing us a key insight regarding how the world is ordered.

The British scientist James Lovelock likewise endorses this notion of interconnectedness, which is at the heart of the Gaia hypothesis he proposed in the 1960s. According to him, Gaia (the goddess who personified the Earth in Greek mythology) is a self-regulating system made up of numerous interconnecting parts (including the biosphere, atmosphere, oceans and soil) that work together to bring about suitable living conditions on the planet. As a complex macroorganism, Gaia constantly adapts to the cataclysms that go with evolution, actively calibrating chemical and physical elements until the conditions necessary for the emergence of life in all its forms comes about. In support of this thesis, Lovelock studied the chemical composition of the atmospheres of Earth, Venus and Mars. From his study, he discovered that the Earth's carbon dioxide content is 0.03% compared to the toxic concentration level in Venus (96.5%) and Mars (98%). Oxygen, which is indispensable for life, makes up 21% of the Earth's atmosphere, while Venus and Mars have none. Nitrogen, which is necessary for the nutrition of beings, accounts for 78% of the Earth's atmosphere, compare that with Venus' 3.5% and Mars' 2.7%. The comparison of these data led Lovelock to conclude

that with the Earth's current chemical composition—in itself a product of a long evolutionary process—the right combination of elements is reached occasioning the emergence of life. The implication of Lovelock's hypothesis is that Gaia does not simply support life but is the "giver" of life. She is a mother who, after a protracted labor, finally gives birth to her child—life itself. In this regard, the Gaia hypothesis illustrates the intimate link between the Earth and all her children, which she brought forth—microbes, bacteria, plants, animals, the human being. The affinity of this kinship is irrefutable as has been elegantly shown in the study of Watson and Crick that proved how living organisms share the same genetic code present in the DNA of human cells.

The idea of interconnectedness, which ecology and the Gaia hypothesis infer on the level of seen phenomenon, parallels the findings of modern physics. Quantum mechanics, which studies the behavior of energy and matter at their most fundamental level (energy quanta, elementary particles and quantum fields), attests to an interconnectedness that pervades all reality on the sub-atomic plane. For quantum physicists, the fundamental reality is not *matter*—fixed and occupying a definite location—but rather *tendency* or *potentiality* whose realization is yet to be determined. With experiments over the past few decades, they discovered how matter is completely mutable into particles or energy and vice-versa, suggesting that on the sub-atomic level, matter does not exist with certainty in definite places. Rather, matter seems to have "tendencies" or "potentialities" to exist. This tendency or potentiality depends on various factors influencing its coming to be. With this discovery, quantum physics' universe

appears to be a “dynamic web of inseparable energy patterns.”¹ This led the American physicist Barbara Brennan to draw the conclusion that: “If the universe is indeed composed of such a web, there is logically no such thing as a part. This implies we are not separated parts of a whole but rather we are the Whole.”²

The Environmental Crisis: A Symptom of Broken Links

Although modern sciences have finally joined the chorus of sages in speaking of this intricate link that connects all elements in the universe, humanity as a collective whole has never been compelled to consider this reality as seriously as in the latter half of the 20th century when the threat of the environmental crisis became harder to ignore. With climate change resulting not only in melting ice sheets but increasing frequency of superstorms and hurricanes, and intensifying heat waves devastating peoples’ lives, the environmental crisis not only underscores the fundamental reality of man’s connection with nature but, more importantly, it warns us that the system of networked connections is unraveling. In this sense, the environmental crisis is a distress call that summons us to act with urgency if we wish to save from disintegration the one network upon which our existence depends.

The Broken Human-Nature Relationship

Addressing the environmental crisis requires probing deep into the radical causes of its emergence. This is what the American medieval historian Lynn Townsend White Jr. explored in his

¹Barbara Brennan. *The Hands of Light: A Guide to Healing Through the Human Energy Field*. (Bantam, :1990), p.25.

²Ibid.

well-known essay, "The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis," published in 1966. In this article, White attributes the beginnings of the crisis to an emerging attitude in the West, which germinated in medieval times but fully bloomed in modernity. He refers to the changed attitude of human beings toward nature embodied in the introduction of a new ploughing technique in Europe. According to White, the ancient agricultural ploughing practice³ – in itself crude and ineffective – eventually gave way to a new method of tilling which was more efficient as it "attacked the land with such violence" that cross-plowing was not needed."⁴ This development left a profound change in man's relation to the soil.

"Formerly man had been part of nature; now he was the exploiter of nature."⁵ In ecological discourse, this attitude is referred to as anthropocentrism – a term that sees the human species as the central and most important entity in the world. In this way of viewing reality, the homo sapiens become the measure of all things, while nature is reduced to mere supplier of raw resources. This exploitative mindset developed even more as human beings discovered far effective ways of controlling nature. With the advance of science and technology, the human being grew more audacious in assuming a superior role in this web of interdependent relationships, disrupting the system that is now slowly disintegrating.

³This archaic art is what White refers to as scratch-plow, a method which requires two oxen to operate but which merely scratches the soil, thus, the needed cross-ploughing. The new technique, requiring eight oxen, involves a vertical knife to cut the line of the furrow, a horizontal share to slice under the sod, and a moldboard to turn it over. See Lynn White, Jr., "The Root of Our Ecological Crisis," *Science* 155 (3757) (March 1967), 1203-1207.

⁴Lynn White, Jr., "The Root of Our Ecological Crisis," p.1205.

⁵Lynn White Jr., "The Root of Our Ecological Crisis," p.1205.

The Broken Human-God Relationship

The Iranian Islamic philosopher Seyyed Hossein Nasr, another pioneer in environmental discussion, concurs with White. He likewise sees as problematic the exploitative attitude of humans toward nature. But if White charges Christianity for this anthropocentric attitude,⁶ Nasr traces this domineering attitude to the emergence of modern science in the late Renaissance. Nasr maintains that the birth of empirical science in Europe contributed to the *eclipse of Metaphysics*,⁷ which saw Western man distancing from and eventually rejecting religious truths. With this denial, he became oblivious to the reason for his creation, a forgetting whose consequence was his aggressive attitude toward nature.

To Nasr, modern science's emergence—a consequence of a lengthy and convoluted process of shifting intellectual, philosophical and theological tides in Western Europe—resulted in the gradual weakening of religion, causing the denial of divine, absolute truths. In this regard, the victory of science's heliocentrism over the Church's geocentrism is significant as it blunted the latter's truth claims concerning knowledge of absolute realities. The triumph of science led not only to the destruction of the Ptolemaic-Aristotelian worldview but, more importantly, to the demolition of medieval theology, which adapted and eagerly embraced the geocentric model as visible representation of the

⁶White maintains that attitudes result from a people's worldview about themselves in relation to things around them. Pursuing this logic, he proposed the controversial thesis that since the medieval worldview is very much steeped in Christian thought, "Christianity bears a huge burden of guilt" for bringing about human being's exploitative attitude. He points the finger to the Genesis' mandate to subdue the earth as promoting domination over nature, leading to an anthropocentrism that puts premium on man's power over creation.

⁷Nasr belongs to the Traditionalist school, a group of 20th–21st century thinkers who believe that all the world's major religions are recipients of universal, metaphysical truths. These include the distinction between the Absolute Reality (God) and the relative (the world), the hierarchy of beings, etc.

cosmos. As belief in transcendent truths tapered off, confidence in the new science grew paving the way for the secularization of knowledge.⁸

In a world that is gradually easing God out of the picture, immutable Principles, which escape the rigor of reason, receded into the background. To Nasr, this includes disregarding the theomorphic aspect of man as bearer of God's image. In forgetting his fundamental identity as "half-man," "half-angel" tasked to be the caretaker of God's creation, man is easily led to the illusion that the earth is for him to possess, lording it over nature as conqueror and master as if he had created it. By neglecting his role as steward of the earth, man fell to the lure of riches and power, ignoring the responsibility that comes with his custodianship. Brushing aside his being a bearer of *imago Dei*, he established himself as the center of creation, and began the aggressive exploitation of nature. It is this forgetfulness of man's transcendent dimension that Nasr identifies as the deeper cause of the environmental crisis. In this sense, the ecological crisis, as it were, is an "externalization of the destitution of the inner state of the soul,"⁹ a symptom of an inner malaise, a spiritual crisis,¹⁰ which was the logical outcome of the severed vertical link between man and the divine.

⁸Nasr maintains that the emergence of modern science is a particularly Western invention, which is a deviation from the traditional sciences. Not against science per se, Nasr argues that prior to the birth of the new science, all ancient sciences' quest for knowledge are never separate from the pursuit of divine knowledge. But modern science, whose method involves systematic observation and deductive reasoning, refuses to be integrated by a higher metaphysical knowledge. With this dissociation from the discovery of divine realities, modern science not only ceased to be a sacred activity. Gradually, the cosmos, its object of study, is likewise stripped of its sacred dimension.

⁹See Nasr, *Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man* (London: Unwin Paperback, 1990), p.3.

¹⁰The Passionist priest Thomas Berry CP, a leading Christian voice in the ecological discussion, shares the same idea declaring that the environmental crisis is fundamentally a spiritual crisis.

The Broken Human-Human Relationship

As science makes significant inroads in discovering the laws that govern nature, the world is stripped of its sacred dimension and becomes simply a machine to be studied to serve human needs. This development proves significant as the mechanistic view of nature is seen as the basis for the demand for progress, the obsession of which has led nation-states to incessantly plunder the earth's resources. By regarding nature as lifeless matter whose parameters can be controlled to yield ever-increasing economic growth, countries race in marauding mercilessly the earth, consuming ceaselessly its resources, which required millions of years to produce, all in the name of progress.¹¹

But the obsession for progress and development has caused not only unimaginable damage to the environment but also resulted in social injustice, evident in the growing poverty and inequality in the distribution of the world's wealth. As the ruling elite's possession of science and technology enables them to systematically and efficiently plunder the earth, they turn a blind eye to the plight of ordinary men and women whose livelihoods are severely affected by such pillage. (How many times have we been witnesses to irresponsible mining that lays waste the earth and leaves the lives of many up in the air?) Moreover, the promised progress that would trickle down to everyone proved to be illusory as the gap between the rich and the poor continues to

¹¹Crucial in this discussion is the North-South divide in which industrialized countries rely on the raw resources of developing countries to run their economies. With this set-up, rich nations suck up the earth's resources while the poorer nations are forced to sell their raw materials to pay for their loans. This is what prompted Pope Francis to call for the cancellation of the debts of poor countries to put a stop to the vicious cycle of resource depletion and poverty.

widen. While a tiny percentage of the world's population live luxuriously in abundance, a major chunk of humanity is stuck in abject poverty.

More grave is how this model of progress stifles the human spirit as men and women are easily reduced to mere factors of production. With capitalism driving this model of progress, everything, including the human being, is reduced to a commodity to be exchanged in the market. Fueled by profit inclined towards optimizing factors of production, this economic system renders the human being, whose worth depends on unstable economic factors, expendable. In other words, this model of progress causes not only environmental devastation and social exclusion but also dehumanization. And with greed that blinds, the man with wealth and power turns a blind eye to the plight of his neighbor. Drowned in his pursuit of progress, he plunders the earth oblivious to the fatal consequences his exploitation brings to his fellow men.

Ecologizing the First Principle and Foundation

The environmental crisis reveals how man's exploitative attitude towards nature imperiled the web of intertwining connections that binds all reality. The rise of anthropocentrism, which resulted in man's forgetfulness of his God-assigned role as steward, led to the assault of the earth that not only severed man's connection with nature but also his estrangement with his neighbor.

Taking the lead from Seyyed Nasr and Thomas Berry, who both see the root of the crisis as spiritual in nature, I propose ecologizing the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius as aid in providing an ecological-spiritual framework to address the broken re-

relationships laid bare by the environmental crisis. Particularly, I suggest “greening” the First Principle and Foundation—known as the blueprint of the Spiritual Exercises—giving it an environmental slant that integrates man’s relationship with nature, God and his fellow human beings. By lending the First Principle and Foundation an eco-friendly dimension, I hope to ignite in us a profound care for the environment, which is an integral part of our response of love to this God who created us.

Mending the Link with Nature

The First Principle and Foundation starts with an affirmation that all beings are created by God, a key theological assertion that inadvertently opens up the Spiritual Exercises to a particularly ecological reading. With this declaration, the Spiritual Exercises anchors itself in the monotheistic belief that posits a magnanimous Creator as Source of all being, endowing all of creation a sacred dimension. Maintaining God as fount of all existence fundamentally acknowledges that all realities are not merely random objects that emerged out of nowhere. Rather, belief in creation is a recognition that everything is willed by God to existence, granting all created realities immense value before God’s eyes. Because the Lord is pleased with his works (Genesis 1, Psa 104), everything, including nature, is sacred. In this sense, the First Principle and Foundation, which begins with creation, fortuitously affirms in an implicit manner the intrinsic value of nature rendering unjustifiable, as consequence, an anthropocentric understanding of the world.

The succeeding lines of the First Principle and Foundation, which identify the purpose of created realities as “gifts of God

presented to us so we can know Him more easily and make a return of love more readily,"¹² offer a more compelling environmental reading of the Spiritual Exercises. Maintaining that each object is sacred means that everything in creation bears the Transcendent's trace,¹³ rendering every object in the natural world as gateways of knowing God. By bearing the vestiges of the Divine, creatures mirror in their own unique way rays of God's infinite wisdom and goodness.¹⁴ In the language of our Muslim brethren, which echoes basically the same idea, nature is God's other book, the scrutiny of which reveals His names and attributes. In this regard, the decimation of plant and animal species is abominable as their extinction spells not only the elimination of witnesses proclaiming God's wisdom and goodness but a gradual effacement of God's trace in creation. Therefore, in specifying the purpose of creation as means of knowing God, the First Principle and Foundation carries the admonition against an attitude of exploitation that destroys nature as it regards each creature, whose sheer existence blesses and gives God glory,¹⁵ as a sacred vessel reflecting the Divine.

Key to perceiving the sacramentality and intrinsic value of nature is seeing one's self not as above but alongside nature. In this regard, the Genesis narrative that details the creation of man is of immense value as it underscores the intimate link between the first human being (Adam) and the Earth (adamah). The play

¹²See David Flemming's adaptation of the First Principle and Foundation.

¹³The French Jesuit Teilhard de Chardin refers to this as the Divine love's *shining through* everything in creation. It is a term used to distinguish it from pantheism, i.e., the idea that God is all and all is God. It maintains the fundamental difference between God and the world but not to the extent that the latter is devoid of the former's presence. The liberation theologian Leonardo Boff refers to this as panentheism, i.e. God is in all—a term that distinguishes the Creator from the creature but maintains their intertwining relationship.

¹⁴See Catechism of the Catholic Church, 339.

¹⁵See Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2416 and Qur'an 13:13.

on words carries the theological insight that the human being is of the earth, an idea that the Gaia hypothesis echoes and which profoundly captures the reality of things: Adam, the earthling, belongs to the ever-evolving earth. This fundamental oneness of the human being and the earth can never be more exemplified than in the description of man's origin and destiny as integrated unequivocally with the earth: For you are dust, and to dust you shall return (Gen 3:19).

Reestablishing the Link with God

Man is created to “praise, reverence and serve God.” This central idea identified at the beginning of the First Principle and Foundation is reechoed in the conclusion as Ignatius exhorts exercitants to “choose only what is most conducive for us to the end for which God created us.”¹⁶ This frame led the spiritual writer Kevin O'Brien SJ to conclude that the best way to praise, reverence and serve God is “to be who God made me to be.” Thus, at the heart of the First Principle and Foundation lies a fundamental question, “Who did God make us to be?” – a question of identity that has significant repercussions in the environmental crisis discussion.

The basic answer to this question is found in the anthropology of monotheistic religions that views the human being as bearer of the divine image (*imago dei*) tasked to be God's trusted stewards of creation, or in the language of the Qur'an, as *khalifatul-ard*, God's vicegerent of the Earth (Qur'an 2:31). This view highlights the unique role human beings play in God's design—his being endowed with a divine aspect grants man the right to rule over creation. As carrier of the divine spirit, the human being is en-

¹⁶See Ed Mullan SJ's translation of the First Principle and Foundation.

trusted with the care of the material world. This is why the mandate to rule is never read as domination of man over the earth that accords man the license to deal with nature as he pleases. Rather, the task to have dominion over the earth is linked to the God-sanctioned attitude of cultivating, preserving, protecting and shaping creation with care and responsibility. And with the findings of the natural sciences pointing to an interconnectedness linking us all, this stewardship expands to include care for the web of interrelationships to ensure the sound functioning of the whole of creation.

This train of thought providentially renders the First Principle and Foundation to be an ecological litmus test in the Spiritual Exercises. On the one hand, our embrace of stewardship signals a deepening of God's life in us as we view the wanton destruction of the earth as irreconcilable with our fundamental identity as its caretakers. On the other hand, our refusal to embrace our role as custodians by continuing to plunder the earth, turning a blind eye to its sorry state, leaving it defiled and in disarray, corresponds to a rebellion against God's design—a dissent that, in Ignatian terms, is considered a "disordered attachment" as our mortal hands wish to possess that which belongs to God. In this regard, the First Principle and Foundation presents to the exercitant two choices: Be the responsible steward, take to heart that "the earth is the Lord's (Ps 24:1, see also Qur'an 2:107) and "share God's goodness in creaturely response,"¹⁷ or, deny this task, take the place of God and live miserably.

By pointing to the embrace of our creaturehood and acknowledgment of our stewardship as the fundamental right response to

¹⁷C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (Quebec: Samizdat Univ. Press, 2016), 30.

God who gave us life, the First Principle and Foundation thus demands “an attitude of radical God-centeredness, a desire simply that God be God and that His purposes be realized.”¹⁸ Cultivating this attitude entails constant awareness that our existence is owed to the Source who breathed His life into us. Without the awareness that we are simply a recipient of this grace, our creaturehood will always be seen as a lack, a void that we will, time and again, unsuccessfully fill. Only when we perceive life as a gift will our creaturely response be beautiful.

Reestablishing the Link with Fellow Human Beings

Creaturehood implies conforming to God’s will, which includes the recognition that I, together with others, am tasked with the same role to be stewards of God’s creation. Although not expressly emphasized, this inclusive dimension of stewardship is evident in Ignatius’ use of the first-person plural in detailing the creatures’ right response to the author of creation. This implies that the First Principle and Foundation’s notion of stewardship is in essence co-stewardship. Because we all issue from the one God, we all belong to the brotherhood of humanity called to respond rightly as custodians of God’s gift of creation.¹⁹

In this regard, indifference²⁰—a key Ignatian concept in the First Principle and Foundation—in its original formulation connotes collectivity. Ignatius’ exhortation “to make *ourselves indif-*

¹⁸Michael Ivens, *Understanding the Spiritual Exercises* (Leominster: Grace-wing, 1998), 29.

¹⁹Pope Francis’ 2015 encyclical *Laudato Si’* echoes this idea of common stewardship as he encourages all people to dialogue regarding the care of our common home. As caretakers of one threatened world, the Roman Pontiff encourages all human beings to adopt a global approach in which the entire human family unites to protect our one and only planet.

²⁰Indifference in the language of the Spiritual Exercises does not mean “apathy” or “lacking concern” but the inner freedom to be free from any kind of inclination or desire that hinders one from conforming one’s will to God’s, or stated differently, from loving God.

ferent to all created realities,” i.e., to possess the internal freedom to be detached from anything that leads one astray from the goal, becomes a shared ideal of collective humanity to resolutely choose “who God made *us* to be.” Thus, in the context of the environmental crisis, indifference translates to the inner freedom called of humanity to choose freely that which conforms us to God’s design, that is, to endeavor concertedly to be God’s faithful stewards of creation.

Adopting indifference, that is, the proper posture we ought to cultivate as co-stewards, is crucial in seeing through modern society’s structures, whose subtle mechanisms²¹ steer us away from our common custodianship. Taking the dominant consumeristic culture as example, indifference emends our spiritual compass when we consider how the fleeting satisfaction derived from the insatiable consumption of goods betrays our common stewardship. This betrayal becomes evident upon realizing that our (unconscious!) continued patronage of consumer products, fueled by our insatiable drive to possess, has the end effect of a dilapidated earth coerced to produce the raw resources needed to manufacture goods that captivate our senses. How many mountains and hills must we flatten to extract the precious metals needed to manufacture the latest (yet soon-to-be outdated) gadget we are obsessed with? Likewise, indifference allows us to see how our throw-away culture that prizes convenience leads us away from our common call to be guardians of the earth. How many more disposable products, which end up polluting our oceans because

²¹ Modern society is an expert in this regard. These mechanisms appear to be morally neutral but upon close scrutiny reveal its ugly head as they lead one way or another to an assault of the earth. For a critique on modernity’s creation of money and the financial system and their impact on the environment, see Fazlun Khalid, *Signs on the Earth: Islam, Modernity and the Climate Change*. (Leicestershire, Kube Publishing Ltd, 2019), 111-141.

the earth is not able to absorb these residual substances and neutralize them, must we continue to “use and discard” to realize that we are harming marine creatures that play a key part for a properly functioning earth?

More importantly, indifference affords us the vision that the current capitalist-driven model of progress, which we have conveniently embraced, proves to be irreconcilable with our call to stewardship on two grounds. First, the current model of progress – voracious, profit-oriented, short-sighted, and based on the misconception of unlimited economic growth – leaves a ravaged earth as it advocates the production of goods at the shortest possible time without considering the earth’s regenerative processes. This blatant disregard for the earth’s rhythms results in a ruined environment compromising the future of our children’s children, who will be the earth’s future stewards. Second, this model of progress, whose sole goal of profit maximization prizes economization and efficiency, tends to disregard the welfare of the human being as it considers human labor to be an expendable factor of production. For centuries, this model of progress, which favors the elite and disadvantages the masses, has resulted in an asymmetry so extreme that sees a privileged few living in opulence while the rest of humanity languishes in poverty – a condition that mirrors in no way God’s original design when He tasked us to be stewards of creation, to “take care of it and harness it for the benefit of all...”²²

²²Pope Francis, *Our Mother Earth: A Christian Reading of the Challenge of the Environment*. (Indiana, Our Sunday Visitor, 2019), 44.

Conclusion

As I end this essay, India's spike in coronavirus infections and deaths hugs the headlines. The sight of parking lots turned into makeshift crematoriums depicts the dire situation of a country whose surging cases have overwhelmed not only its health care institutions but its morgues as well. As New Delhi's hospitals turn away sick people due to the lack of beds and oxygen supplies, medical experts raise alarm, warning that India's spike of infections translates to more mutations and virus variants which could eventually resist current vaccines, thus undermining the program of other countries in containing the pandemic. In demanding a coordinated response to India's outbreak, these physicians perceive that the solution to the pandemic lies in a global response to combat the virus—a growing recognition that dealing with Covid-19 requires addressing not only a part but the entire whole. This is the conviction of Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the United States' National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases who demanded an equitable distribution of vaccines exclaiming, "We are all in this together. It's an interconnected world."

The idea of our interconnection, long perceived by wise women and men, is now becoming harder to ignore. It remains no longer the utterance of philosophers and romantic poets. Pre-pandemic scientists have confirmed the interrelatedness that pervades all reality. Their affirmation of our interconnectedness was occasioned by the environmental crisis, which compelled us to see that our dealings with nature have consequences, direct or otherwise, for us. It forced us to admit that we are intricately networked.

Although the vast web of interconnections renders it impossible to get a bird's eye view, a consensus among experts identi-

fies the exploitative attitude of human beings as the immediate cause of the current crisis. This is White's thesis in tracing the beginnings of the attitude of dominance in the West to the time when men discovered ways of coercing nature to yield her bounty. In regarding nature as sheer supplier of resources, man began to assault the earth—an onslaught that has intensified through the years.

Nasr, on the other hand, sees in the current crisis a deeper cause—a spiritual one. He attributes the anthropocentric attitude of man to his forgetfulness of his role as steward of God's creation—a forgetting occasioned by the rise of secular science that led to Western man's rejection of metaphysical truths. With this denial, man cut off his link with the divine. And with the vertical line severed, everything else came crumbling down. Anchorless, man slowly sank in apprehension and uncertainty despite his futile attempts to clamber up and seek solid footing. Perplexed, he turned his gaze to the world as his search for security became more restless. Thus, began the attitude of domination that severed his link with nature. In his brutal assault, he wreaked havoc on the planet, laying waste ecosystems, wrecking webs of interrelationships and encroaching environs of animal species. (Bats and pangolins!) In this melee, his link with fellow men likewise caved in as his pride and ambition rendered others as rivals to be extinguished. Indeed, the refusal to be a creature has dire consequences—a dilapidated earth and a broken humanity, an ecological crisis that threatens all existence.

In this essay, I have illustrated how an ecological reading of the Spiritual Exercises can help us recover a wholistic view of reality that respects our interconnectedness. Highlighting creation,

which is central in the First Principle and Foundation, I have illustrated how this blueprint of the Exercises exhorts care for nature – sacred due to its divine origins, and valuable as mirror of the divine. Furthermore, I pointed out that at the heart of the First Principle and Foundation lies the identification of stewardship as the ideal way to praise God. This is eminent for Ignatius as he exhorts us to maintain the attitude of indifference – the inner freedom to be free from anything that hinders us from fulfilling our creaturely response. Embracing this fundamental identity as stewards allows us to view everything as gift, guarding us against our pride. This vision of “being given” allows us to see that we are simply a creature among creatures tasked to be a steward who share a common stewardship – an idea implied in the First Principle and Foundation. Co-stewardship allows us to acknowledge that others are not rivals to be humiliated and depressed but as partners called likewise by God to care responsibly for the web of interrelationships that make up God’s creation for the good of the current and future generations.

“A human being is a part of the whole called by us universe; a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts, and his feelings as something separated from the rest, a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty.” - *Albert Einstein*

In Mindanao, Allah is al-Salaam

Mona Lisa D. Pangan

Islam is popularly defined as “the religion of peace” because the Arabic word, Islam, as they say, is derived from the Arabic word, “*al-salaam*,” which means peace. But the root of the word Islam is not actually *al-salaam* but “*al-silm*,” which means “submission” or “surrender.” The verbal noun *’islām* literally means “submission,” and the active participle *’aslama* means “he submitted.” So the Arabic word “muslim” literally means “someone who submits,” as the Qur’an ascertains that the ideal Muslim is someone who submits totally to God. Peace is a consequence and result of that total submission to God’s will. Most religious traditions share in this general meaning of Islam that the one who strives to submit to the will of God at the deeper levels of faith and virtue achieves inner peace.

I Am their First Christian Friend

When I worked at the Catholic Center Campus Ministry in Iligan City, Lanao del Norte from 1997-2000, one thing that challenged me was how to recruit Muslim students to be part of my Dialogue Committee. My committee would not be faithful to its truest essence if I did not have Muslim members. It was quite challenging to do a recruitment drive in the university there since the school is non-secular. Instead of waiting for interested Muslim students to join my committee, I decided to visit boarding houses near the center and ask whether there were Muslim student occupants. I found one boarding house where four first year college Taosug students billeted. I talked to them and started to befriend them.

In the course of our conversations, I discovered that they were from Jolo, Sulu in the southwestern part of the Philippines, and it was their first time to stay in Iligan City. Their aunt had sent them to study at the Mindanao State University-Iligan Institute of Technology so they would not be recruited by belligerent groups in Sulu, such as the Moro National Liberation Front and the Abu Sayyaf. Like the story of the fox and the little prince, I tried to befriend my newly found Taosug friends. I made regular visits to their boarding house, joined them for dinner and played indoor games, such as truth or consequence, with them.

They eventually joined my committee months later. I was so happy because they were very participative in all our activities and formation sessions. Together we learned how important dialogue is between people of different living faith traditions and cultures. However, there was one instance when they got into trouble with a group of young Muslim Meranao and Christians. It was already past nine in the evening when one of my student leaders informed me that my Taosug friends were having a clash with some bystanders. Immediately, I went to the site where the two parties were fighting. To get to them, I had to cross the national highway by foot. My friend told me that they did not begin the fight. They wanted to visit me since two of them had just come from Jolo for a short vacation, but unfortunately I was not around when they came. On their way back, a group of young men started throwing stones at them. They fought back to defend themselves. While we were talking, I noticed that one of them had a .38-caliber gun tucked in his hip. I almost panicked thinking that the situation could get worse. I had to cross the national highway several times, going back and forth to talk to my friends

and the other party to settle the conflict. I was not conscious that in mediating the conflict, I had risked my safety. My only concern at that moment was to settle the conflict and to bring my Taosug friends to their boarding house safe and sound. I still remember what my friends, Ahmad and Marganie, said to me, "*Ate Mona, Taosug kami at sa kultura namin hindi pwede na matalo kami o hindi kami maka pag resbak; nakakahiya na hindi kami lalaban, matapang kami!*" (Sister Mona, we are Taosug and it is not in our culture to accept defeat and surrender; it is embarrassing if we do not fight back because we are known to be brave!) As I listened, I knew it was hard for them not to fight back because it was a matter of cultural pride. Nevertheless, I convinced them not to resort to violence. I also remembered what I said to Ahmad in response: "*Hindi naman kailangang gumanti para tawagin kang matapang; ang matapang ay yung hindi gumaganti...akala ko may natutunan tayo sa dialogue (You don't have to hit back to be called brave; the brave ones are those who don't retaliate... I thought we had learned something from dialogue.*" Further, I said: "If you still consider me your *Ate* (older sister), please do not resort to violence." By God's grace, the conflict was peacefully settled through dialogue. It was past midnight when I was able to bring them back safely to their boarding house. The next day they brought me an Arab desert scarf head wrap. They told me: "We give you this *Ate Mona* as our present for you from Jolo. We were supposed to give you this last night but an unexpected incident happened. We give you this because you are our first Christian friend. You are the one who found us first, befriended and defended us even if we are Muslim Taosug."

A Conversion of Cultures

Like Catholics, Muslims also desire righteousness. Occasionally, it can be confusing for them when the custom of their tribe tells them, for example, that to be Taosug means being brave, not showing fear nor accepting defeat. This is contrary to the Ignatian Three Degrees of Humility. Ignatian humility means being ready for honor or dishonor or anything else for God. This exhortation to humility is foreign to their notion of Islam. Rather, they interpret their Taosug culture of retaliation and fighting for one's honor as Islamic. Perhaps my Taosug friends were not yet ready to accept Allāh as a God of Peace. In fact, one of His attributes is "*As-Salam*" (The Peace), for Allāh is a God of Peace. All cultures ought to be converted to a higher value system – the standard of Christ for Christians and the standard of Allāh for Muslims. This reflects the Two Standards in the Spiritual Exercises. A good Muslim and Christian must adhere to the standards of their God – and never the standard of the evil one or *shaytan* to Muslims. Religion plays an important function in converting all cultures to the rightful higher moral standard of God. It is when a society and its culture is purified and sanctified in mirroring the values of God as revealed in Sacred Scriptures that Muslims and Christians are helped to fulfill their purpose in life, which is "to praise, reverence and serve God, and by doing this, to save their souls" (The Principle and Foundation).

Amidst the Rubbles and Ashes, a Friendship is Born (My Marawi Siege Experience)

Can God be a Merciful and Compassionate God (ar-Rahman ar-Rahim) while at the same time condone violence? As I have said,

Allāh is the God of Peace. In fact, Peace (*Salaam*) is one of His names — *as-Salam*. If He is the God of Peace, is He contradicting Himself when verses revealed in the Qur'an seem contrary to peace? But God does not contradict himself.

As Christians, we respond with compassion to the situation of many Muslims today. Without evading the truth, we seek answers to the violence in Islam rightly because God abhors violence, and is never the author of violence. In situations of conflict, the Church is exhorted by Jesus: “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God” (Mt. 5:9). These words of Christ are enough to move every missionary to persevere, respect and understand Muslims and their religion, Islam. For it is the nature of the Catholic Church to work for peace, even willing to subsume a humbled position, so that peace and understanding can reign between Islam and Christianity.

Twenty years after getting my start in interreligious dialogue, I found myself inside Marawi City's ground zero. In 2017, Marawi,¹ which is situated on the southern island of Mindanao in the Philippines, was captured by an ISIS-inspired local terrorist group. This turned into a bloody war between the terrorists and government forces that would last five months, leaving in its wake at least 1,000 people dead and at least 300,000 individuals homeless. On the night of 23 May 2017, I received a text message from Fr. Paul Glynn, the Regional Director of the Missionary Society of St. Columban, that Fr. Teresito “Chito” Sukanob, the vicar-general of the Prelature of St. Mary in Marawi City, had been abducted, together with five other church workers, by the terrorists. I was

¹Marawi City is the Islamic capital city of Lanao del Sur province, northwest-central Mindanao, Philippines. It is located on the northern shore of Lake Lanao, 3,500 feet (1,100 metres) above sea level (Britannica.com). Thus, one of the country's largest cities inhabited by Muslims.

deeply disturbed by the news, and immediately called and texted my fellow interreligious dialogue practitioners, including Archbishop Tony Ledesma, S.J.

As coordinator of the Interfaith Forum for Peace, Harmony and Solidarity in Cagayan de Oro City, I felt compelled to gather and initiate a meeting with other religious leaders and institutions in partnership with the Archdiocese to respond to the crisis. There and then we held an interfaith prayer to appeal to the national government not to conduct an air strike attack in Marawi City, to pray earnestly for peace to prevail and to choose dialogue instead of war. But two days after our interfaith prayer, an air strike assault commenced. I was greatly disturbed when I saw on television the exodus of thousands of people out of Marawi. I remembered my Muslim friends and former students who lived in Marawi and Lanao del Sur. I could just imagine the suffering, discomfort and fear they were going through.

The grim picture I saw on TV and the feelings I had for my Muslim friends and students led me to volunteer to go to Saguiaran, the first municipality in the province of Lanao del Sur, to conduct a rapid appraisal assessment of their situation since they hosted the biggest number of evacuees in Lanao del Sur. The war had turned the whole place and its neighboring municipalities into a ghost town. All one could see were convoys of military vehicles and armored cars filled with heavily armed soldiers with all sorts of specializations. At about every kilometer there was a military or police checkpoint. We would be asked where we were headed and our purpose for entering Marawi City. I would always be the one to answer, and then we would give them a bucket of fried chicken. It was during this time that I first saw

with my naked eyes how war planes, jet planes and helicopters dropped bombs on Marawi City. I was teary-eyed when a heavy black smoke arose from the ground because I knew that innocent people had been hit. I felt so much pity for those who were trapped, including the hundreds of hostages.

Since that first trip, I started going to Marawi every Sunday for more than a year to bring relief goods from Xavier University-Ateneo de Cagayan, Archdiocese of Cagayan de Oro, Columban Fathers and from various generous institutions/communities. What moved me to do such a thing was our search for evacuation centers beyond Saguiaran. We found evacuation centers in the villages of Bito Buadi Itowa and Bito Buadi Parba,² which were very close to the main battle area. My heart was crushed when the people there shared how they had to dig in several places hoping to find crops or yams to eat.

My heart was moved with compassion for them, but more so when I talked to the *sultan* (chieftain) of Bito Buadi Parba. I could not describe how I felt when Sultan Darimbang, with tears in his eyes, begged me for relief assistance for his people. He said to me: "If only I were a rich man, I would not dare to beg for assistance." I was deeply disturbed by my encounter with him because in the Maranao or Muslim culture, it is unheard of for a renowned person, such as a *sultan*, to ask for assistance especially from a Christian woman. My conversation with him humbled me. Immediately that night, I texted Archbishop Tony asking for relief goods. The Archdiocese responded right away. The Archbishop and Fr.

²Barangay Bito Buadi Itowa and Bito Buadi Parba are adjacent *barangays* (villages) upon entry to Marawi City proper and just five kilometers away from the main battle area during the siege. The city's largest evacuation center for the internally displaced people (IDP) of Marawi was in Barangay Bito Buadi. A large number of IDPs who were no longer accommodated in the evacuation center either stayed with their relatives, in the house of Sultan Darimbang in Barangay Bito Buadi Parba, or in nearby *barangays*.

Manoling Francisco, S.J. went to Bito Buadi Parba to help distribute the relief goods to 420 families, while some religious sisters who went with us conducted psycho-social processing among the children and mothers in the community.

The bravest thing I ever did in my work of mercy and compassion for the internally displaced people of Marawi was when Mohamad Gondarangin, his wife, Dr. Don Kosuanco, and I went to a barangay located at the back of the main battle area during the 75th day of the siege. We brought relief goods and medicines for 150 families who were trapped and had nothing to eat. We drove through the air strikes, mortar attacks, rocket-propelled grenades and .50-caliber bullets. The military had forbidden civilians from going to that area, but since there were people trapped inside who were in great need, the military allowed us to get through with very strict instructions. They warned us to drive fast without stopping and to stay in the middle of the road to avoid getting hit by stray bullets or improvised explosive device (IED). We made it through to the community, who cried tears of joy because God or Allāh had answered their prayer.

My encounter with the internally displaced people of these two barangays in Marawi City opened an opportunity for them to become recipients of many interventions beyond emergency assistance. Xavier University adopted them as partner communities and we were able to conduct psychosocial interventions, and engage them in agriculture through vegetable gardening for livelihood and subsistence. The sacrifice I made to help them get back on their feet had blossomed into a deep friendship and a sense of oneness, regardless of our creed, culture and beliefs. I

never expected that out of the rubbles and ashes of the siege, a flower of friendship and trust would bloom.

Though the siege brought so much misery to the lives of many Maranao people, with many of them still suffering from the effects of the war until today, good relationships have also flourished between Muslims and Christians. It took a painful event to break through our differences so we could realize that, indeed, we are brothers and sisters not only in humanity but in faith.

Led into a Wasteland

Immersion is an integral part of the formation of young men who aspire to become priests. Usually seminarians are sent to various areas, sometimes even far flung places, for pastoral work. In 2017, the St. John Marie Vianney Theological Seminary (SJVTS), a Jesuit-run seminary for the formation of young men for priestly ordination in the ecclesiastical province of the Archdiocese of Cagayan de Oro, explored the possibility of immersion in a Muslim community. The rector, Fr. Norlan Julia, S.J., had invited me to share about my personal experience of IRD and of being with Muslims during the week-long celebration of Peace in Mindanao. After my sharing, Fr. Norlan and I had a little chat. He asked me what other IRD formation activities I could suggest for their seminarians who were already taking classes in Islam and Interreligious Dialogue. Immediately, I said to him: "Why not try to have an immersion program in a Muslim community? I guess that would be exciting!" I told him I could help him if he decides to do it.

Some weeks later, Ms. Venus Guibone, one of the formators of the seminarians, called me for an appointment to discuss the

possibility of having the seminarians' immersion in a Muslim community, particularly in Marawi City. Suddenly, I felt nervous because I knew it would be a risky endeavor. At the time, Marawi City had just been liberated from the terrorists. Silently, I told myself: "How I wish I had never suggested it!" Even if I was a bit scared and reluctant, I had to honor my suggestion to Fr. Norlan. Besides, it has always been my heart's desire to have someone continue this tough IRD ministry of the Church with the same passion and conviction that I have. I have waited long for this desire to come true, but I never expected that God would answer me through the seminarians.

As a consequence, I started doubting my capacity to handle such a big responsibility and the risk it entailed. Will I make it? Will the people in the community accept them? What about their safety? Will the people protect them if they are ever in danger? What if their presence causes chaos in the community because of their Catholic faith and beliefs? Thinking about all these concerns caused me so many sleepless nights. I prayed so hard that God may guide me in this new challenge in my advocacy and ministry. Who am I to be entrusted with the lives of the seminarians? What gift and capacity do they see in me that I do not see? In my prayer, it seemed like God was testing my capacity by commissioning me to help accompany future priests. A tangible and experiential IRD formation would enable them to see how God manifests His great love and mercy for Muslims who have been afflicted, neglected and are living in misery caused by the war.

I had to do all the necessary preparations, especially with the people in the community. I consulted and asked permission from the Barangay Captain, Solaiman Ali, their chieftain, Sultan Da-

timbang, and other people in the community for them to welcome young Catholic seminarians for a few days or weeks. Given the long history of prejudices and biases between Muslims and Christians, they had previously never experienced having a group of young seminarians live with them. Providentially, the people in the community had become my friends because of our weekly humanitarian interventions and support during the siege of Marawi City. I did not have so much difficulty. Friendship and trust became my social capital. I found it reassuring when the barangay captain and Sultan Darimbang told me that it was I who found them first when nobody cared for them during the early weeks of the siege, when they were living in misery unsure of their survival. Deep within, I thanked God for giving me the courage to search for an unattended evacuation center despite the danger of being hit by stray bullets. *Alhamdulillah!* All my anxieties, doubts, fears and restlessness disappeared when the entire community said “yes!” to my request. Immediately, I informed Fr. Norlan and Ms. Venus about the positive response of Barangay Bito Buadi Itowa and Barangay Bito Buadi Parba.

Never in my wildest dreams did I imagine that one day I would be conducting an immersion activity for seminarians in a Muslim community. God had paved the way to make the impossible possible. Aside from the preparation in the community, I had to do a little research and interview some of my Muslim friends about the way of life of the Meranaos.³ I needed basic information for my orientation to the seminarians. The way of life of the Meranaos is patterned after these three codes:

³Meranao literally means “people of the lake” referring to one of the 13 ethnic population of the Muslims in Mindanao and inhabitants of the second largest and deepest lake habitat in the country.

1. Islam – *Qur'an, Hadith, Fatwa*
2. Local Codes – *Taritib ago Igma*, an Arabic term which means order and consensus; it consists of the Meranao's customary laws or system of governance before colonialization but Islamically influenced to some extent.
3. *Maratabat* – inner code of maintaining and defending family pride.

I also had to prepare the seminarians to be culturally and religiously sensitive. For example, Muslims are usually gender-sensitive. Generally, men are expected to interact with men only, and women with women only. Muslim men usually avoid wearing shorts and sleeveless shirts while Muslim women wear long garments and a hijab. Elderly women are addressed as “*Babu*” (aunt) and elderly men are referred to as “*Bapa*” (uncle). Suffixing “*-kulay*” (endearment) is highly recommended. Muslims address royalty with their titles, for example, *Datu, Sultan, Ustadz*, etc. I cautioned the seminarians against labeling and asking questions about family feud and genealogy out of respect for their *Maratabat*. Lastly, I provided them with a list of simple local terms, such as greetings, that could help them in their daily conversations.

The first batch of seminarians (four of them) arrived on 24 January 2008. They stayed for eight days in the evacuation center, helping the camp managers account and profile the massive but gradual influx of IDPs to the evacuation center. At the same time, the seminarians helped in the vegetable garden, taught the children reading, writing and arithmetic, and performed psycho-social interventions. When it came time for them to leave, they had grown close to the people in the community, especially the children, and had developed a good relationship with them. During

their processing and theological reflection, I felt deeply moved and inspired by their life giving experience. I was overwhelmed by the kind of impact they had gained from their immersion experience.

In the end, our genuine presence in the lives of Muslims in Marawi was enough to balance our religious and cultural differences. I believe that from presence can flourish a beautiful relationship characterized by trust, respect, understanding and acceptance. Sharing the life and works of Jesus is my motivation to do as he did to the least of our brothers and sisters, especially the marginalized. If not for the grace and love of Jesus, I would not have lasted in this kind of ministry. It is humbling to know that Muslim-Catholic dialogue is not really my work but God's work. I am just one of His chosen instruments to continue to labor in the work He had started, for all things are at His disposal.

Taking a Greater Risk for Christ

I thought that would be the first and the last time I would be bringing seminarians to Marawi, but I was wrong! Two months later, Fr. Chris Dumadag SJ, the Novice Master of the Jesuit Novitiate in Novaliches, Quezon City, emailed me through Fr. Roberto Yap, S.J., then president of Xavier University-Ateneo de Cagayan, about the possibility of facilitating a three-day immersion activity in Marawi City for some novices. Again, I gave my big "yes" to Fr. Chris presuming that Fr. Norlan had shared to him the experiences of the seminarians.

This time there were eight of them: two Filipino Columban aspirants and six Jesuit novices. I thought they would all be Filipinos, but Fr. Chris informed me a few weeks before their arrival

in Cagayan de Oro that the group was composed of two Chinese, two Japanese, two Malaysians and two Filipinos. I was deeply troubled. Before the siege, all the Roman Catholic foreign missionaries had left Marawi City and Lanao del Sur due to rampant kidnap-for-ransom incidents. In fact, my mentor, Fr. Michel de Gigord, M.E.P., who had been a missionary in Marawi, was kidnapped twice by Meranao bandits. The late Msgr. Desmond Hartford, an Irish Columban priest who served as the apostolic administrator of the Prelature of St. Mary in Marawi City, was kidnapped, too. I remembered an incident after a *kanduri* (thanksgiving celebration) for Msgr. Des' release in November 1997, when a Belgian priest, Fr. Ben Maes, C.I.C.M., was abducted on his way home to Balabagan, Lanao del Sur. He was eventually released after three days. The most brutal killing happened on 28 August 2001 to Fr. Rufus Halley or Fr. Popong as we affectionately called him. He was an Irish Columban priest who had lived with the Muslim communities in Malabang and Balabagan, Lanao del Sur for more than two decades. Despite the many efforts of the foreign missionaries to bring peace and reconciliation between Muslims and Christians, Fr. Rufus was shot dead during a foiled kidnapping attempt. The parishioners believe that the gunman was a member of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), one of the Muslim groups who fought for independence in Mindanao. These memories made me so afraid of what could happen to the Jesuit novices in the community. But God consoled me through the assurance of the people in the evacuation center, especially the barangay captain and the *sultan* that they would ensure the safety of the novices.

There was one thing I did that I regretted. It happened when I was about to fetch the novices from the immersion area. They told me that they had been invited by one of the evacuees to visit the main battle area. The government had released a statement allowing the IDPs to visit their house for things they could salvage from the bombing. Together with the novices, I talked to the person, who assured us that he would guide us to the area and that transportation would be available to take us there. After we expressed our gratitude and bid farewell to the community, we headed to the battle zone. I was disappointed when we arrived at the checkpoint because there was no transportation waiting for us as promised. Our own vehicle did not have the pass that would allow us entry into the battle area. We decided to split into four groups to be able to hitch a ride and then meet up at the Pacasum Square inside the battle zone. It was a tremendously risky adventure. Some of the novices were able to ride a dump truck and a private car. I secured with me the Japanese novice and we were able to hitch a ride in a small truck called a multicab. As agreed we met as a group at the Pacasum Square, which had been reduced to rubble and ash. After several hours of exploring the battle zone, we were again faced with the challenge of finding a ride back. We had to split into groups for a second time. No one was allowed to get out of the area without a vehicle. I was the last from the group together with a Filipino novice to leave because I had to ensure that everyone got out safely. Thanks be to God some officers allowed us to ride with them in the vehicle used for transporting cadavers. The whole ride reeked with the stench of dead bodies, but God brought us back safely. What a risk I put myself and the novices through! Indeed, it was a test of faith and

trust. Before returning to Cagayan de Oro, we dropped by the temporary house of Bishop Edwin de la Peña of the Prelature of St. Mary of Marawi. I introduced him to the Columban aspirants and the Jesuit novices. Bishop Edwin was also an IDP because the cathedral and the Bishop's House were destroyed by the war. I asked him if he had food available because we had not yet taken our lunch. He gave us enough food to fill our hungry stomachs.

A Jesuit Novice's Marawi Experience⁴

After two years, memories of the siege in Marawi remain fresh both to those who experienced it directly, and to most of us who only witnessed such events from the broadsheet, television, social and other media. I remember how people in our office reacted when the news broke of ISIS-inspired men occupying communities in Lanao del Sur, and how, somehow, I feared the possibility of such invasion reaching even the city where I was. In retrospect, I can only imagine the horror it brought to those who experienced it firsthand.

When I learned about the possibility of going to Marawi as part of our mission experiment, a certain sense of excitement took over. As one brother exclaimed, it felt like a little adventure to be in a place everyone thought dangerous and volatile. Yet, my curiosity was tempered by a sense of anxiety. With Martial Law still in effect, I imagined Marawi to have an eerie atmosphere, with rubbles and ruins lining up the empty streets. I imagined stoic expressions from people especially after we were reminded to exercise caution in asking about the siege. I imagined being frowned upon in a predominantly Muslim community.

⁴Rex Francis Coz, S.J. After Novitiate he took his perpetual vows in the Society of Jesus. Currently in First Studies taking up Philosophy in Ateneo de Manila University.

Given the elaborate picture I had of Marawi, my expectations were shattered the moment we stepped in the confines of the chapel of the Blessed Virgin Mary. It was there where Fr. Dodong, the parish priest from Cagayan de Oro, said Mass for a small group of Christians who were mostly students from Mindanao State University. “*Maayong* Good Morning!” he greeted, to which the assembly responded with the same amount of enthusiasm. The whole room was charged with a Spirit so alive it felt like home.

In the days that followed, we were privileged to get to know the Catholic Students’ Organization comprised of students originally from other neighboring provinces, and residents within the campus. It was difficult to match the energy of the youth, but their overwhelming generosity and vibrant faces inspired openness during our few days of encounter.

During the first night, after being ushered into prayer by the community, the brothers willingly obliged to share their vocation stories. From behind, I could see how invested the youth were in listening, as they quickly burst into laughter when someone cracked a joke, or nodded when they could perhaps resonate with the brothers’ stories. There were giggles here and there when the stories included past relationships that budded but never fully bloomed. In the end, it was enriching to listen to each one’s encounter with the different faces of God and how He has touched the hearts of everyone in the room.

The next day, the group accompanied us on a tour around the campus. The walk allowed for exchange of stories about family, dreams, culture, and common life from both sides. In between, meals were shared among families. I am edified by how the elders of the community supported the group and welcomed us

like their own children.

In the evening, the youth recounted their experiences of the siege. A candle was lit and passed on to whoever was ready to share. The flame flickered and memories burned fresh as they spoke about the siege. One girl was brought to tears as she shared her deep concern for a friend who had lost her father. Several shared that during the siege, it was their Muslim friends who tipped them of the situation, and taught them how to respond in case they were stopped at the checkpoint. There was the story of a mother who witnessed her child shot while next to her. When it was a little girl's turn, tears just flowed from her cheeks, and it was the richest of stories that evening. As they revealed the depths of their souls, I got in touch with my own brokenness. I felt we were there to attend to each other's wounds. The stories were real and human. The stories were sacred and brought us close to the Divine. Theirs were stories of fidelity and trust in God, of the wounded and suffering Christ, of passion and resurrection, of pain, perseverance and hope. Theirs were stories weaved into the narrative of a community embraced by God.

Before we parted ways, we had an emotional exchange of songs and messages with the youth. As a token for all the novice brothers, the group prepared bookmarks with all their names written on one side. Filled with gratitude, one brother later on explained what such gesture meant for him. "Like St. Francis Xavier, before he went away for mission, he cut out the names of his companions and placed them in a pocket near his heart. He never knew it would be the last time for him to see them, but despite being miles apart, he remained always connected and in communion with his brothers through God." For my part, the experience nat-

urally led to the climax of my mission experiment where I sought to understand what it means to be men sent on mission. “You are the true missionaries,” as I shared with them. It may take time before I am able to visit the place again, but it consoles me to know that we can always pray for each other.

Coming back from mission, Marawi now holds a special place in my heart. The days were short, but they were enough to move and transform me, and convince me of how God will always find a way even amidst the havoc wrought by the siege. Being with the Christian community in Marawi depicted for me a picture of a broken Church, of a Church wounded and beset with many challenges, of a Church that suffers, of a Church that is found on the margins. The same Church is where brokenness and wounds are healed, where one is able to find refuge, where members of the community help build each other up. The same Church is where we experience the suffering Christ, and become inspired by the hope His resurrection brings. Like the greeting they give each other at any time of the day, “*Maayong Good Morning*” holds the promise of the sun eternally rising – maybe in another part of the world, but always as true and as constant as the Father’s love for mankind.

Conclusion: Peace as a Consequence of Submission

For three years before the Covid-19 pandemic, I brought seminar-ians and Jesuit novices to Marawi City for their immersion program not only with a Muslim community but also with a Catholic community. In 2019, I assisted Fr. Jojo Fung, S.J. in finding both an Indigenous People’s community and a Muslim community for the Asia Pacific Contextual Theology Engagement Program.

When I brought Fr. Greg Soetomo, S.J. and some Jesuit scholastics to Marawi City for several days, we also visited the ground zero but this time with a military escort.

Looking back at what I had gone through with the seminarians and novices during their immersion, I realize that God has been using me as his instrument to send his future priests to the desert (Marawi City) to test their faith, to clarify their values, motivations and vocation. Whatever interior movement that happened to them through their encounter with the Muslims, may it reshape or redirect their way of loving and serving the Lord, may they choose what better leads them to a deepening of their life with God.

A Catholic spirituality that resonates with Islam is necessary in forming future Catholic missionaries sent to Muslim populated areas. Ignatian Spirituality, a spirituality familiar to many priests and religious, mirrors Islamic spirituality. In Islam, if one desires peace in one's life, one must learn how to submit to Allāh's will. A true Muslim is one who submits to Allāh. As Muslims witness that "there is no god but God" (*lâ ilâha illallâh*), the logical consequence is to surrender to the all-powerful living God. Ignatian Spirituality shares in this general meaning of Islam. Paragraph #234 of the Spiritual Exercises is a prayer entitled *Suscipe* (receive), popularly known as "Take and Receive." The person praying the *Suscipe* is aware of one's free will yet prays to God to take and receive one's freedom and align it with God's will. One's personal freedom is no longer important. What is important is that the will of God reigns in one's life, and ideally, in the Church as well.

Like Muslims, I show my total trust in God's calling for me, inspired by Mary of Nazareth, in surrendering to God's will in my

vocation as a lay woman. At the deeper level of submission are much deeper levels of faith and virtue that bring about peace in the various aspects of my life. Raising it to the level of spirituality is to subject Islam to its original intent as a path to peace when the Prophet Muhammad (c. 570 CE - 8 June 632 CE) received it as revelation.

Sharing Gratitude: Spiritual Conversation for Interreligious Dialogue based on the Contemplation to Attain Love

Heri Setyawan, S.J.

Abstract

This article proposes the Contemplation to Attain Love of St. Ignatius' Spiritual Exercises as a basic model for conducting spiritual conversations among people of diverse religious backgrounds. The Contemplation to Attain Love in the Spiritual Exercises invites retreatants to ask for the grace of a deep understanding of the goodness of God, and with that awareness, a desire to serve God more actively. Through its steps, processes and purpose, this contemplation can be a model for spiritual conversations in apostolic communities where members come from different religious backgrounds. Through spiritual conversations, they can work together and grow in their spiritual experiences together. More importantly, through this model, people can come to the heart of the Spiritual Exercises, that is, an awareness of being loved by God and in response to love and serve others. This article also shares a brief experience from the practice of spiritual conversations among educators at Sanata Dharma University in Indonesia.

Introduction

Being in a community with members from various religious backgrounds is an opportunity for people to work together and enrich one another's spiritual experiences. By working together, they are able to put their spirituality into action and understand their

activities as spiritual experiences on different levels. Moreover, it creates space for spiritual conversations where each can listen to and learn from one another on finding meaning in their daily experiences based on a multi-religious understanding.

I propose one of the prayers in the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola, namely, the Contemplation to Attain Love or *Contemplatio ad Amorem* (SE 230-237), as a basic model for reflecting on one's daily experiences and in making spiritual conversations.¹ The Contemplation to Attain Love is a prayer after the Fourth Week of the Spiritual Exercises. In contemplating this prayer, the retreatant asks for the grace of "interior knowledge of all the good" they received from God, and through this disposition, they "may become able to love and serve the Divine Majesty in all things" (SE 233).

As a reflection and spiritual conversation method, the Contemplation to Attain Love can help especially members of interfaith communities to grow in their spiritual life, community building and mission. Spiritual conversations can draw them closer to God and to each other, enabling them to love and serve God in every aspect of their lives.

This article consists of three parts, namely, the significance of collaboration and spiritual conversation, the Contemplation to Attain Love as a basic model of spiritual reflection and conversation, and a brief sharing of my personal experience of spiritual conversation at Sanata Dharma University, a Jesuit institution in Indonesia.

¹All quotations of the Spiritual Exercises here are based on the translation of George E. Ganns, *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius* (Saint Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1992).

The Need for Collaboration and Spiritual Conversation

Now more than ever, the Church invites all people to grow in collaboration and spiritual conversation. These two are consistently conveyed and pursued by Pope Francis and the Society of Jesus.

Journeying Together

On many different occasions since the beginning of his Petrine ministry, Pope Francis has shown that working together for the common good is at the heart of any dialogue, particularly inter-religious dialogue. For Pope Francis, the world's cries should be the primary concern of all people regardless of background. In his exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013), he emphasizes that the agent of change is not particular groups, elites or classes, but all nations. Talking about interreligious dialogue, he states, "We can then join one another in taking up the duty of serving justice and peace, which should become a basic principle of all our exchange" (EG, 250). Interreligious dialogue, in *Evangelii Gaudium*, based on trust and acceptance of others, is foundational to a fruitful ministry of working together for the common good. This consideration is also obvious in *Laudato Sí* (2015), where Pope Francis urges us to undergo an ecological conversion. Believers from all religions are called to work together "for the sake of protecting nature, defending the poor, and building networks of respect and fraternity" (*Laudato Si*, n. 201).

Moreover, the two documents on fraternity, The Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together, signed by Pope Francis and Grand Imam Ahmad al-Tayyeb (2019), and the encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti* (2020), also stress a similar point. Building a culture of encounter, Pope Francis invites people to

build universal fraternity and friendship “as a single human family, as fellow travelers sharing the same flesh, as children of the same earth” (*Fratelli Tutti*, 8). On interreligious dialogue, Pope Francis writes:

“The different religions, based on their respect for each human person as a creature called to be a child of God, contribute significantly to building fraternity and defending justice in society. Dialogue between the followers of different religions does not take place simply for the sake of diplomacy, consideration or tolerance. In the words of the Bishops of India, ‘the goal of dialogue is to establish friendship, peace and harmony, and to share spiritual and moral values and experiences in a spirit of truth and love’ (*Fratelli Tutti*, 271).

Looking at how Pope Francis governs the Church, we can see that collaboration is also significantly the spirit of his leadership. His vision of a “synodal” Church is one of a “listening Church” where “laity, pastors, the Bishop of Rome” journey together. This vision evokes a Church that is decentralized and collaborative. Towards this, the Synod of Bishops in October 2023 will be celebrated on three levels, namely, diocesan, continental and universal. The Church desires to listen to and learn from her members. Through this process, the Church discerns together. A discerning Church is fundamental in putting service at the heart of its governance.

In line with this vision, General Congregation (GC) 36 of the Society of Jesus, particularly Decree 2 on Renewed Governance for a Renewed Mission, puts collaboration together with discernment and networking as a key feature of the Society’s way of proceeding (GC 36, d. 2, 3). Today is not a time to work alone but to build partnerships with good people. Citing General Congrega-

tion (GC) 35, GC 36 emphasizes the “desire to join people of good will in the service of the human family” (GC 36, d. 2, 6). In this regard, collaboration and networking place people on a similar level. Moreover, GC 36 calls for a return to the root of the Society of Jesus as a discerning community. Through the process of discernment in common, people of goodwill will be able to come together in finding better ways of serving the common good.

Discerning Community

Both the visionary governance of Pope Francis and GC 36 emphasize collaboration in moving forward as a discerning Church and a discerning community. This shared understanding shows the richness of collaboration and discernment in helping people of different faiths come to a mutual understanding.

GC 36 mentions several characteristics and attitudes required in the process of communal discernment:

“... availability, mobility, humility, freedom, the ability to accompany others, patience, and a willingness to listen respectfully so that we may speak the truth to each other” (GC 36, d. 1, n. 11).

Likewise, GC 36 points out how spiritual conversation is instrumental in the practice of discernment in common:

“An essential tool that can animate apostolic communal discernment is spiritual conversation. Spiritual conversation involves an exchange marked by active and receptive listening and a desire to speak of that which touches us most deeply. It tries to take account of spiritual movements, individual and communal, with the objective of choosing the path of consolation that fortifies our faith, hope and love...” (GC 36, d.1, no. 12).

Spiritual conversation follows three rounds of sharing. In the first round, each one is asked to share the fruit of one's personal prayer, while others listen attentively. This attentive listening becomes a moment to listen to God's voice in the experience of others. In the second round, participants share what for them were the most touching and inspiring points that were shared by the group. In the third and final round, everyone ponders on the fruit of the exercise. They may share their desires and insights, or pray aloud thanking God for the graces received. The *Suscipe* (Take and Receive) prayer from the Spiritual Exercises concludes the process. It is a moment to give all that one has and all that one is, *dilectus meus mihi et ego illi*.

Spiritual conversation is important because it helps people to find God whilst building apostolic community. It is conducted in an atmosphere of attentive listening and sharing. It is not a debate or Argument, rather it is about being attentive to communal spiritual movements, desolation and consolation, and the will of God.² It also requires the understanding of daily activity as a space and time to find God. Daily experiences are understood as encounters with God and opportunities for understanding His will. Seen from this view, experiences in the mission become like fertile soil where a discerning community can grow. In this respect, spiritual conversation is transformative. It transforms the characters of the people involved and helps them to discern God's will by listening both to their own hearts and to the sharing of others.³

²See Peter Bisson, "Spiritual Conversation: A Fundamental Tool for the Ignatian Apostle", *Ignis*, No. 2019.3, Vol. XLX, No. III, p. 41.

³See Peter Bisson, "Spiritual Conversation", p. 38-56.

Contemplation to Attain Love: A Model for Spiritual Conversation

Placed right after the Contemplation of the Resurrection of Christ as part of the Fourth Week of the Spiritual Exercises, the Contemplation to Attain Love (SE 230-237) has an essential role in the Spiritual Exercises. The classical commentator Aloysius Ambrozzi, S.J. (1938) describes it as “the crowning point” of the Spiritual Exercises. George E. Ganss, S.J. (1992) calls it “the conclusion and apt climax” of the Spiritual Exercises. It has a unique position because in this contemplation retreatants have improved in loving God and in their awareness of God’s love for them. We see the characteristics of Ignatian Spirituality shine forth: finding God in all things as contemplatives in action in close familiarity with God.⁴ The human desire to love God mingles with God’s love.

Contemplation to Attain Love in the Spiritual Exercises

The Contemplation to Attain Love is preceded by two preliminaries. First, “love ought to manifest itself more in deeds than in words” (SE 230). Second, “love consists in a mutual communication between the two persons. That is, the one who loves gives and communicates to the beloved what he or she has, or a part of what one has or can have; and the beloved in return does the same to the lover. Thus, if the one has knowledge, one gives it to the other who does not; and similarly in regard to honors or riches. Each shares with the other” (SE 231).

⁴Dean Brackley, *The Call to Discernment in Troubled Times: New Perspectives on the Transformative Wisdom of Ignatius of Loyola* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2004), p. 212.

The first is a disposition to see God through His actions. When we try to understand God's love, it means understanding God's deeds. God's love is manifested in His deeds. When we want to understand God's love, we see His love in His action in our lives. Moreover, the awareness of being loved by God also "stir[s] up love in us."⁵ Love is not only about feeling, but it leads to action, even self-sacrifice.⁶ In other words, it is both affective love and effective love.⁷ Affective love is about a feeling to love and to be loved, while effective love is an action coming out of the feeling of being loved. The second preliminary reveals the mutual sharing of love. The lover gives what he has to the beloved, and the beloved feels gratitude for being loved. The feeling of gratitude for being loved increases one's love for the lover.⁸ Love, therefore, shares gratitude. George E. Ganss writes that through sharing love, "their friendship is deepened".⁹

These preliminaries are followed by two preludes and four points. The first prelude is composition and the second is asking for grace. Composition involves seeing ourselves before the Lord, angels and saints. The grace asked here is "interior knowledge of all the great good I have received, in order that, stirred to profound gratitude, I may become able to love and serve the Divine Majesty in all things" (SE 233). This is almost similar to other forms of contemplation in which we present ourselves to God. Being aware before the Lord at the start of prayer is the first

⁵Dean Brackley, *The Call to Discernment*, p. 213. George E. Ganss gives a note about the title of this prayer. The Vulgate edition of the Spiritual Exercises translated this prayer as "Contemplation to Stir Up Spiritual Love of God in Ourselves," see George E. Ganss, *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius*, note no. 117, p. 149.

⁶Aloysius Ambrozzi, SJ, *A Companion to the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius* (Bangalore: St. Joseph's College, 1938), p. 275.

⁷George E. Ganss, *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius*, p. 150.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid.

step in the Spiritual Exercises. Asking for grace in the second prelude shows the significance of the contemplation. Because of the awareness of God's grace, we generously love and serve God. It is through gratitude that the spirit of loving and serving God comes forth. Moreover, the grace to love and serve in this contemplation has a particular meaning. It is to love and serve "in all things." It is in daily life, in everything, in everyone and in any situation.¹⁰

The four points in the prayer contemplate other graces. The first is to "call back into my memory the gifts I have received – my creation, redemption, and other gifts particular to myself..." (SE 234). Then, "I will ponder with deep affection how much God our Lord has done for me, and how much He has given me of what He possesses, and consequently how He, the same Lord, desires to give me even His very self, in accordance with His divine design" (SE 234). This part shows that God is love.¹¹ His love is manifested in "creation, redemption and personal gifts." By recalling the past and seeing how God has guided and helped us through our personal life, we are filled with gratitude. God's love is infinite.¹² His love gives life to us in many different ways. God does not only provide our material needs, but He gives Himself to us through Christ. This awareness enables us to give everything back to God. Everything is from God and it is returned to God. This is expressed in what is perhaps St Ignatius' most famous prayer, *Suscipe* (Take Lord and Receive):

¹⁰ Dean Brackley, *The Call to Discernment in Troubled Times*, p. 213.

¹¹ *Ibid*

¹² Aloysius Ambrozzi, SJ, *A Companion to the Spiritual Exercise*, p. 276.

Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and all my will – all that I have and possess. You Lord, have given all that to me. I now give it back to you, O Lord. All of it is yours. Dispose of it according to your will. Give me love of yourself along with your grace, for that is enough for me (SE 234).

The second point considers “how God dwells in creatures; in the elements, giving them existence; in the plants, giving them life; in the animals, giving them sensation; in human beings, giving them intelligence; and finally how in this way he dwells also in myself, giving me existence, life, sensation, and intelligence; and even further, making me his temple, since I am created as a likeness and image of the Divine Majesty...” (SE 235). God shows His love through His deeds in a very natural way. His passion is manifested in every creature, such as the trees, animals, the wind, the shining sun, etc. Creatures are the ultimate expression of God’s love.

The third point is considering “how God labors and works for me in all the creatures on the face of the earth; that is, he acts in the manner of one who is laboring” (SE 235). This point teaches us how the love of God is constantly working in us through his creatures. God’s works are manifested in the process of creation. God takes care of and gives passionate love to his creatures. God, according to Ambruzzi, is an “indefatigable lover” who continuously works for his creatures.¹³

The fourth point considers “how all good things and gifts descend from above...” (SE 237). This point reflects an awareness that all things are the fruit of God’s love. All items can be understood as signs of God’s love and coming from God. In this regard,

¹³ Aloysius Ambruzzi, SJ, *A Companion to the Spiritual Exercise*, p. 283.

we come to realize the manifestation of God in everything. Even the small things and simple experiences are God's manifestation. Everything is a gift from God, and supports our desire to love God more intensely. Ambruzzi states, "Every gift of God, as a mirror reflecting God's perfection and love, should contribute to increase my knowledge and my love of Him."¹⁴ However, this part is not merely about gifts from God. It is about who God is. God is understood as a loving God.¹⁵ We begin to acknowledge God in everything. Wherever we turn, our eyes find God. We come to the interior feeling of loving God in all things and all things in God. This disposition makes all things new.¹⁶ As Ambruzzi concludes:

"And thus has St. Ignatius shown us how we can make our life an uninterrupted vision and love of God, and how we can reach to the highest of God's love by thankfully praising Him, by reverently adoring Him, by working for Him, and by longing to be united with Him—always out of love and ever asking for a greater outpouring of it."¹⁷

The Contemplation to Attain Love is concluded by a conversation with God the Father (SE 237). In this section, we dialogue with God concerning our feelings, inspirations, desires, intention, practical plans, eagerness, etc.

Contemplation to Attain Love as a Methodology

The Contemplation to Attain Love provides a methodology for practicing reflection and spiritual conversation. Finding God's

¹⁴ Aloysius Ambruzzi, SJ, *A Companion to the Spiritual Exercise*, p. 285.

¹⁵ Dean Brackley, *The Call to Discernment in Troubled Times*, p. 216.

¹⁶ Dean Brackley, *The Call to Discernment in Troubled Times*, p. 217.

¹⁷ Aloysius Ambruzzi, SJ, *A Companion to the Spiritual Exercise*, p. 286.

love in all things and in return serving Him is an inclusive concept acceptable to people regardless of religious background. Moreover, the Contemplation to Attain Love does not reflect particularly on Jesus' life or teaching but more broadly on God's love. In this regard, people are directed to reflect God's love in daily life. The Contemplation to Attain Love also provides several steps that could easily be followed and practiced by those who are not familiar with Ignatian Spirituality. As explained earlier, the Contemplation to Attain Love consists of two preliminaries, two preludes, and four points. For the sake of emphasis, here they are again, briefly:

The two preliminaries are love manifests in deeds and love as a form of mutual sharing. They serve somewhat like a horizon whereby we can reflect on the day's activities and experiences.

The first prelude is composition in which we present ourselves before the Lord. Here we realize that the process of reflection is not only a human effort or the task of the intellect but a grace from God.

The second prelude is to ask for the grace of "...interior knowledge of all the great good I have received, in order that, stirred to profound gratitude, I may become able to love and serve the Divine Majesty in all things." The grace being asked for is specific and intentional before the Lord in the beginning of the reflection. It is also a desire to be achieved during the reflection. As the grace is already stated, the focus of the reflection is to achieve this grace.

The first point is to "call back into my memory the gifts I have received – my creation, redemption and other gifts particular to myself..." (SE, 234). In so doing we realize that God has done so many things in our lives. God gives Himself out of love.

The second point is to “consider how God dwells in creatures...” (SE, 235). Here, we come to the understanding that the universe is sacred; it is God’s manifestation. Reflecting on the creatures surrounding us brings us to the awareness of God’s love.

The third point is to “consider how God labors and works for me in all the creatures on the face of the earth...” (SE 236). Here, we realize that God’s work is in the details, in everything.

The fourth point is to “consider how all good things and gifts descend from above...” (SE 237). Here, we realize all things are from God. God pours out His love for us.

The closing part is a dialogue with the Lord on our feelings, wills, desires, plans or other fruit of our prayer.

Spiritual Conversation among Educators

The practice of reflection and spiritual conversation has been helping educators at Sanata Dharma University in Indonesia to understand and appreciate their work, including their day-to-day tasks, as mission. In fact, reflection and spiritual conversation have become a yearly program for all lecturers and administrators of the university usually practiced at the end of the year, specifically after the year-end evaluation. Evaluation and reflection serve two different purposes. During evaluation, programs are assessed objectively, while during reflection, the staff are invited to ponder on their experiences in the past year. In this manner, the exercise of reflection and spiritual conversation is framed as reflective moments to be aware of God’s graces.

Rather than impede reflection, the diverse religions, ethnicities and cultures of the educators help to enrich the entire process. As

the Contemplation to Attain Love suggests, the reflection process is based on the perspective of God's love. It is from this perspective that daily activities are understood and find their meaning.

Generally, the process of reflection is designed and led by the university's Center of Mission and Identity. They train facilitators to lead the process of reflection and spiritual conversation in each department. The topic for reflection differs from year to year following the priorities of the university or the wider Society of Jesus. For instance, in 2020, the focus of the reflection was their experience of the Universal Apostolic Preferences (UAP) in the context of their daily activities in the university.

The recollection begins with a short prayer followed by a presentation on the topic. The prayer sets the tone of the entire activity as a continuous moment of prayer. After listening to the presentation, the participants begin to reflect on their own experiences. Using a set of guide questions, they are encouraged to reflect on their personal experience of God's love. After the time for individual reflection, the participants are divided into small groups for spiritual conversation. Each person gets a chance to share his or her personal reflection. It is a moment of deep listening and sharing. During the closing prayer, all are invited to present their consolations and desolations to God with hearts full of gratitude.

The whole process is an adaptation of the Contemplation to Attain Love. The invocation and presentation constitute the moment of presenting one's self before God and asking for the grace to have interior knowledge of His love in one's daily activities. By looking back on one's experiences, finding meaning in them as God's creative presence in one's daily life, and being more aware

of the desire to do better every day, one is able to listen to and discern God's voice and His calling for one's life. From this point of view, the joy and the pain of being an educator become transformative experiences.

Conclusion

The process of reflection and spiritual conversation is an effort at collaboration. Since collaboration presupposes the readiness to work with others regardless of religious background, steps must be made to find common understanding. Reflection and spiritual conversation create moments of deep listening and sharing with others and with God. It is a communal process of finding God in everything and everything in God. This process of communal discernment enriches mission. Moreover, the Contemplation to Attain Love provides an inclusive approach to reflection and spiritual conversation. It paves a path for people of different backgrounds to journey together in mission.

The Practice of Transformative Dialogue in Fostering Spiritual Conversations with Muslims

Maria Teresa Guingona-Africa

Abstract

Violent extremism has come to the fore of global awareness in recent years. It is motivated by ideologies that encourage the use of violent acts by individuals and groups in carrying out political, religious or social goals. Countering violent extremism is possible when transcendent values and principles in the hearts and minds of human beings are brought to bear, and mutually respectful spiritual conversations are made possible through dialogue. Pope Francis, in his encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti*, recognizes the need for peoples of all religions and faith traditions to respond to the challenges that humankind is facing today and mentions the important role of dialogue. This paper highlights lessons learned about transformative dialogue from the grassroots. When practiced with PACT (Presence, Awareness, the sense of Connection, and commitment to Truth), dialogue can be a powerful transformative force that brings to the forefront the highest ideals and teachings of the faith in ways that inspire spiritual conversations and create a counter-cultural force to violent extremism.

Introduction

In early 2020, before the Covid-19 pandemic disrupted our daily “normal” lives, I received news of the approval of our funding request for *Creating Safe Spaces for Muslim-Christian Dialogue in Colleges and Universities*. This was the youth leadership train-

ing project of The Peacemakers' Circle Foundation, Inc. (TPCFI), the Manila-based non-profit NGO that I co-founded in 2001. The good news gave us new hope and energy for the work ahead.

After two decades of engagement in the field, my colleagues and I know that times have changed. We now must face the phenomenon of violent extremism if we are to hope for success in our efforts and explore other viable approaches to educating the youth on the ways of peace.

Violent extremism is motivated by ideologies that encourage the use of violent acts by individuals and groups in carrying out political, religious or social goals. Terrorist groups, such as ISIS, Al-Qaida and Boko Haram, have been spreading the message of intolerance around many regions of the world through acts of violence. In the Philippines, recruitment to ISIS-inspired local militant groups has been reported by peace activists in the southern region of Mindanao. Urban areas outside Mindanao, especially those with diaspora communities, are now feared to also be vulnerable targets of this operation.¹ In Metro Manila, where ignorance of Islam fuels anti-Islamic sentiments and fear, those ideologies are easily accessed on social media, making young Muslims in the metropolis just as vulnerable to extremist views as Muslims in Mindanao.

In response to this challenge, TPCFI is now focusing its efforts on educating and training Muslim and Christian youth leaders on the ways of peace through transformative dialogue. When understood rightly in the context of relationship-building, dialogue can be a powerful inwardly transformative force that can bring to

¹Idris, I. *Youth vulnerability to violent extremist groups in the Indo-Pacific*. Helpdesk Research Report. September 2018. GSDRC Applied Knowledge Services. 1438-Youth-Vulnerability-to-Violent-Extremist-Groups-in-the-Indo-Pacific.

the fore the highest ideals and teachings of the faith. Conversion of the heart and mind to dialogue inspires self-transformation in ways necessary to the endeavor of creating a counter-cultural force to violent extremism.

Pope Francis' Call to Dialogue in *Fratelli Tutti*

Practitioners of interfaith peacebuilding at TPCFI find in Pope Francis' call for transformative dialogue in his encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* an affirmation of their efforts. In it he addressed the challenge to peace by stating that:

“...the commandment of peace is inscribed in the depths of the religious traditions that we represent... As religious leaders, we are called to be true ‘people of dialogue,’ to cooperate in building peace not as intermediaries but as authentic mediators.... Each one of us is called to be an artisan of peace, by uniting and not dividing, by extinguishing hatred and not holding on to it, by opening paths of dialogue and not by constructing new walls.”²

Pope Francis also acknowledged that “among the most important causes of the crises of the modern world are a desensitized human conscience, a distancing from religious values...” that have replaced “supreme and transcendental principles.”³ Restoring transcendent values and principles in the hearts and minds of human beings today is essential to dialogue among peoples. But, in this pluralistic world where religion has largely been a source of conflict and a divisive force rather than a resource for peace,

²Pope Francis. *Fratelli Tutti*, accessed January 5, 2021, Vatican.va, 283.

³Ibid. 264.

restoring transcendent values and principles is no mean feat. There is a need for creating “safe spaces” and “common grounds” of mutual respect and understanding that must first be addressed.

Creating Safe Spaces through Intra-faith and Interreligious Dialogue

Practitioners of interreligious peace- and relationship-building at TPCFI have learned from experience that addressing the need for creating “safe spaces” and “common grounds” for peoples of diverse cultures and beliefs is primary to the process. Essential to the process is both the practice of intra-faith and interreligious dialogue.

Intra-faith dialogue brings together adherents of the same religion or faith tradition in conversation with one another for the purpose of gaining deeper insights and better understanding of the teachings and ideals of their shared faith. Under the guidance of a religious/faith leader, burning questions can be asked, and answers can be had that can help the would-be interreligious dialogue practitioner to gain a sense of freedom from their fears and enable them to relate with non-believers with confidence and sincerity. The exercise of self-examination ideally accompanies this practice.

Muslims have a term for this exercise of self-examination: *Jihad al-nafs*. *Jihad* is an Arabic term in Islam that literally means “striving” or “struggle.” *Nafs* is an Arabic word in the Qur’an that literally means “self,” and has been translated as “psyche,” “ego” or “soul.” In one of the simplest interpretations of the term, *jihad al-nafs* refers to the struggle against one’s lower self or base in-

instincts – against all evil, anger, lust and other negative propensities in humans – in order to become a better Muslim.⁴

Christians, too, have terms for the exercise of self-examination: self-reflection and contemplation. They are similar in meaning. When one engages in self-reflection, one makes time to be silent and focus one's awareness inward onto oneself. Gifts of insight can then surface from within and shared with dialogue partners.

Like reflection, contemplation is also done in silence. For Christians, it is an experience of prayer that sets our imagination free from anything that limits it. In the Ignatian practice, contemplation is letting God guide our imagination so it reveals something to us through the Holy Spirit, making present to us the mystery of Jesus' life in ways meaningful. This deepens the sense of connection to God, and helps the practitioner become a better Christian.

Intra-faith dialogue, by its very nature, contains the wellspring from which faith experiences (that have come forth from reflection and contemplation) are shared with "other believers" in the practice of interreligious dialogue.

Interreligious dialogue is the dialogue between adherents of religions. It calls for the shift of one's awareness from oneself to the "other." While intra-faith dialogue brings together adherents of the same religion or faith tradition, interreligious dialogue brings together adherents of different religions to the "safe space" or "common ground" they have created (in their minds and hearts) from their practice of intra-faith dialogue. These safe spaces are where they can meet and speak, learn from one another and become comfortable in each other's presence, and where not only will they be able to recognize and appreciate their similari-

⁴Bakircioglu, Onder. 2010. *A Socio-Legal Analysis of the Concept of Jihad*. *International and Comparative Law Quarterly* 59: 413–40.

ties but also respect and accept their differences. Here, bonds of Muslim-Christian friendships are created, nourished and deepened, and spiritual conversations can be had in ways that inspire co-creative action for the common good.

Spiritual Conversation: The Litmus Test of Transformative Dialogue

Conversation is one of the basic ways human beings relate with one another. In Scripture, for example, we read of how Jesus engaged in deep conversations with his disciples, how he responded to the challenges of the Pharisees and dealt with sinners and gentiles like the way he dealt with the woman at the well. St. Ignatius regarded those moments of encounter as spiritual conversations and deemed them valuable to the mission of the Society of Jesus. Spiritual conversations are specifically stated in the Jesuit Constitutions as “one of the apostolic works of the Society.”⁵

In the two decades of engagement in the work of TPCFI, I have learned to value the transformative power of spiritual conversations in dialogue. I have seen how two people, despite their differences in culture and beliefs, can create safe spaces for deepening and nurturing relationships through respectful spiritual conversations that come from the heart of their faith. Spiritual conversation is, to me, the litmus test of interreligious dialogue. It has become my measure of success in it.

When Muslims and Christians can freely share with one another their beliefs and the core teachings and ideals of their faith without fear of rejection, then they have succeeded in creating

⁵Otto, A., *Spiritual Conversation*, IgnatianSpirituality.Com, accessed 12 August 2021, <<https://www.ignatianspirituality.com>>.

safe spaces for relationship-building. Their spiritual conversations become the highest form of interreligious dialogue.

But to develop capacities for this, one must have a deeper understanding of the meaning of the word “dialogue” if one is to experience it not merely as the exchange of words, but as a transformative way of being in relationship with oneself, with God and “others” in the world.

In *Fratelli Tutti*, fostering human fraternity and social friendships among peoples of diverse religions and faith traditions has been highlighted as the call of our times. Chapter 8 states clearly that the different religions, based on their respect for each human person as a creature called to be a child of God, “contribute significantly to building fraternity and defending justice in society.” It recognizes that “dialogue between the followers of different religions does not take place simply for the sake of diplomacy, consideration or tolerance.”⁶

In this light we see that there is more to dialogue than many of us are making of it!

The Art and Soul of Creating Safe Spaces for Dialogue

I first awakened to the value of spiritual conversation in the late 90s when I was new to the practice. One day, while I was facilitating a dialogue session with participants of different religions and faith traditions, a Muslim man and woman came in. He was wearing a *thawb* (a long white traditional Arab garb) and *kafiya* (head scarf), and the woman with him was wearing a black *burqa* that covered everything about her but her eyes. As they entered the room, the man seemed very agitated. He held a copy of the

⁶Pope Francis. *Fratelli Tutti*, accessed January 5, 2021, Vatican.va, 271.

Holy Bible in one hand and loudly exclaimed for all to hear, "*Jesus Christ is the reason for all the violence in the world!*" Shocked reactions could be heard around the circle. I swiftly intervened with gentle reminders before my devout Christian friend who was hyperventilating beside me could angrily react. By God's grace, I was able to calm everyone down and steer the circle back to its quiet and respectful "safe space."

There were many such challenging incidents in the years that followed. I saw them as opportunities for me to practice the art and soul of facilitating dialogue. I learned to navigate my way around the angry pitfalls of people's beliefs while maintaining the "safe spaces" we have created around the circle. The experience made me realize that interreligious dialogue is not for the faint hearted. Those who choose to engage in it will have to constantly examine their motives and question the sincerity of their intentions if they are to survive its challenges unscathed.

To succeed in it, one must create safe spaces within, and between, oneself and "others" by learning the art and soul of dialogue. This cannot be learned overnight, or by merely reading about it. Facilitating and engaging in interreligious dialogue may be likened to the work of an orchestra conductor. One must learn to hear the silences between the words in much the same way as the conductor hears the music between the notes. This sensitivity practice awakens one to an awareness of the spirit moving through the self and towards others as it embraces all in oneness. It is this spirit that makes dialogue more than just the exchange of words.

Understanding the Different Motivations for Dialogue

While the term “interreligious dialogue” has become familiar to many, not all who practice it understand it enough to have their efforts yield spiritually transformative and enriching interreligious relationships.

I remember attending a conference years ago in Mindanao where a respected religious leader expressed his frustration before a huge gathering of interfaith peacebuilders. Exasperated, he asked, “*When will our dialoguing end and our actions begin?*” It provoked long and winded discussions that seemed never ending. I realized then that what I had taken for granted about interreligious dialogue was not familiar to others. I have, by then, already been practicing different forms of dialogue, such as dialogue of life, action, worship and theological discourse. In most of those forms, words were not the primary means of communication. That experience made me realize that we can only go so far in the practice of interreligious dialogue as our understanding of it would take us.

While we see representatives of different religions gathered in solidarity during international events, the hard work of building sustainable interreligious relationships calls for motivations that go beyond political or religious diplomacy. Sensitivity to where the participants in dialogue are coming from needs to be developed so that one can relate to the “other” in ways that honor and uphold the “safe spaces” that are created in the process. From this “sensitivity” practice, I learned to recognize that there are different kinds of people who come to the dialogue circle, all with their

personal intentions and motivations. They are either proselytizers, analyzers, synthesizers, seekers or philosophers.

Proselytizers. They engage in it with the agenda of converting people to their religion. They take advantage of every opportunity to do so whenever and wherever it comes. They appear to lack sensitivity or respect for the “other,” or the listening capacity for responding with some sense of openness and appreciation for the person whom they have chosen to convert to their faith. They are usually extremist in their views and respond only to “black-and-white” answers of linear logic and reason.

Analyzers. Their sense of confidence is rooted in their intelligence and capacities for studying religion and understanding the teachings and ideals that make sense to them. While they are moved by their heart forces to engage in interfaith dialogue and are appreciative of the value of the experience, they are more intellectually inclined to evaluate the merits of the endeavor and examine the religion of interest than to engage in it for relationship-building. They are usually drawn to forms of dialogue that stimulate critical thinking than to forms that encourage them to engage in community dialogue.

Synthesizers. They have gone through the experience of brokenness and fragmentation in life – much like the “cannonball experience” of St. Ignatius – that compelled them to seek answers to existential questions that give life deeper meaning and direction. In the process of seeking, they find the broken fragments of their lives and piece them together in ways that enable them to see and appreciate the whole. In their ability to see the whole, they are also able to appreciate the parts. In seeing both parts and whole, they readily respond with the integrity of co-creative actions to the need for healing brokenness so that wholeness may be restored in their midst. For them, interreligious dialogue is not only

an experience of being one with the whole, but also an opportunity to make whole again that which they perceive to be fragmented in human relationships.

Seekers. They sense that there is something deep within them that needs to break away and die so that the “old self” can give way to the “new self.” They are usually drawn to interreligious dialogue because of the nurturing and non-judgmental environment that they perceive it provides, and the diversity of views that it offers which mirror back to them who they are, and who they are not. They are eager to grasp the truths in their experiences of the “other,” and find consolation in the thought that despite their human frailties, limitations, pain and difficulties in life, they are embraced--like everyone else--in the Oneness of God.

Philosophers. Their sense of the numinous in their lives makes them naturally able to relate with followers of other religions without the fear of losing their own. While they are comfortable in interreligious dialogue circles, they are mostly able to relate in the realm of beautiful ideas on how the world is and “should be.” They are quick to spot imperfections in people and the world and can articulate them with eloquence. But they are not initiators of action for change. They need the motivation of others to engage in it with the integrity of co-creative transformative interfaith action.⁷

In my experience, it is the *synthesizers* – especially those who have been immersed in the difficult realities of people’s lives in a culturally and religiously diverse community--who seem to be most able to appreciate the richness that their differences bring to their relationships with one another. They are humbled by their experience of the difficulties both in themselves and in others,

⁷Africa, Marites. *Breath of a Stone God: A Journey of Awakening in Faith to Interfaith Dialogue*. Quezon City: Claretian Communications Foundation, Inc. 2017.

aware as they have become that they are not complete in themselves but are part of a bigger whole in the Oneness of God. In dialogue with “others” they have the capacity to listen more deeply for answers to questions about their faith that may arise from the faith experience shared with them. This restores the sense of wholeness to their experience of fragmentation and awakens in them a deeper sense of gratitude and appreciation for the richness of insights into the greatness of God’s love that they receive from their relationships with others.

Those who have gone through this forging and are humbled by the experience are usually the most able to transcend the boundaries of fear and reach out beyond their comfort zones to the “other.” They are the most able to love truly as Christ loves, and manifest this through dialogue in various forms. In this light, interreligious dialogue is not merely an exchange of words, but a *way of Being* and *Becoming*, the embodiment and expression of one’s faith.

“Demonizing” in Fear, “Humanizing” in Love

True interreligious dialogue, in whatever form, is love in stillness and motion. Love enables us to transcend the boundaries of fear for fear dwells not in the heart but in the mind. Fear thrives in the linear logic and reason of what we “know” that gives us a sense of control over it. What the mind cannot fully grasp and understand, it fears. What we do not know we fear.

But love is an attitude of heart that sees the goodness of God in the “other” even when goodness may not be readily apparent. Fear and love are two opposing forces that cannot co-exist in time and space. Fear contracts. Love expands. For us Christians who

follow Christ's way, truth and life, we believe that perfect love casts out fear (1 John 4:18). It is in the heart of faith where dialogue can thrive even in fear and uncertainty, and where building mutually respectful and harmonious relationships can be possible.

In the book I authored in 2017, I wrote about fear in interreligious dialogue. Fear within the self is often unrecognized, ignored or unacknowledged in the experience, especially among followers of Abrahamic faith traditions. Those of us, like myself, who have been raised in a predominantly Christian environment and have little or no close encounters with Muslims or followers of non-Christian faith traditions tend to be wary or fearful of them. It is part of human nature to be fearful of the unknown. We fear those who are different from ourselves. In the prospect of relating with them, our fears tend to get in the way. They become obstacles to our ability to reach out beyond ourselves and our comfort zones. Those obstacles tend to disable us from seeing the "other" as friends and "humanize" them. Instead, we see them as enemies that we are wont to "demonize."

But is spiritual conversation even possible with Muslims?

I found my answer many years after my difficult experience in the dialogue circle with the agitated Muslim participant. It happened when Abdulhusin, a Muslim colleague at TPCFI, approached me one day asking about my Christian faith and my belief in the Holy Trinity. "*Does this mean that Christians really believe in three gods?*" he asked. I looked at him to see if he was taunting me. I saw that he was not. There was no hint of challenge in his voice and demeanor as he waited patiently for my answer. I could tell that he was genuinely interested in what I had to say.

It made me feel comfortable conversing with him, and it pleased me that he was interested in my faith experience.

In my desire to honor his sincerity, I took a moment to reflect on his questions and respond to him with equal sincerity from the truth of my own faith experience. I spoke about what the Holy Trinity means to me and how my experience of the Triune God in my life continues to shape my convictions and give my life meaning and direction. I did not merely repeat what I had read in my theological studies about the doctrine or recite words from memory about the teachings in class. My responses issued from the heart of my personal faith experience as a Catholic Christian. He listened to my words intently and he seemed fascinated by what he was hearing. I felt as though I had reached him, as though I was able to connect with his mind and touch his heart in a way that made him respect and even appreciate my beliefs!

It was not my intention to convert him to my religion, although that might have been possible, too. For me, it was enough that he was listening, and that despite our differences, he opened himself to receive with kind interest and attention what I was sharing. It felt good to be present, to feel respectfully connected and attuned to each other. Our friendship deepened from then on. I can say that that moment of spiritual conversation occasioned the conversion of our hearts to the goodness of God in each other as we began to listen to and appreciate the richness that our differences brought to our friendship. Because I felt safe in it I, too, began to ask questions about his Islamic faith and, in the process, I found many things about Islam that I admired. They inspired me to reflect more deeply on my own Christian faith, to question my be-

liefs and to find answers that gave deeper meaning and direction to my being Christian and Catholic.

The experience proved to me that spiritual conversation with Muslims is possible, especially when we get to that level of trust in our relationship where we can see Muslims as friends and fellow human beings, and not as enemies to be feared and demonized.

To this day, I remain deeply appreciative of the power of spiritual conversation. When practiced with sincerity and humility, it can be a transformative force in human relationships that can make interreligious dialogue spiritually enriching and uplifting.

The PACT of Transformative Dialogue: A Response to the Call of Faith

Pope Francis has been exhorting us, followers of Christ, to reach out to each other beyond our comfort zones, no matter our differences in culture and beliefs, and to love as Christ loves. In Chapter 8 of *Fratelli Tutti*, he issues an urgent call for peace among religions. To respond to this call, we must learn to see things as God sees “*not with his eyes,*” but “*with his heart.*”⁸ Because “*God’s love is the same for everyone, regardless of religion,*” then dialogue is a way of seeing, hearing and speaking with the heart rightly. But, in our world today, where advances in science and technology have created gadgets and things that give us easy access to information and offer answers to our questions in an instant, it is not easy to see, listen or speak rightly with the silence of our hearts.

Human beings have become impatient with silence and averse to empty spaces. If one is to hope to train our young generation

⁸Pope Francis. *Fratelli Tutti*, accessed January 5, 2021, Vatican.va, 281.

of Muslims and Christians in the ways of human relations that inspire spiritual conversations, then the need for developing in them capacities for transformative dialogue must be addressed.

I have been teaching a course on *Muslim-Christian Dialogue for Nation-Building* to college students at the Ateneo de Manila University for six years. Being a Jesuit-run university, most of my students are Catholics who have hardly ever had any significant encounter with Muslims. Educating them on Muslim-Christian dialogue includes not only courses on the history of Islam in the Philippines and the beliefs and practices of Muslims but also on the practice of transformative dialogue. I would pair my Ateneo students with Muslim students from the neighboring Institute of Islamic Studies (IIS) at the University of the Philippines and encourage them to practice the modules of PACT that I designed for TPCFI.

PACT is an acronym for the four essentials of what I call “transformative dialogue.” It stands for Presence, Awareness, Connection, and Truth-sharing.

P is for Presence that bears the PEACE of Christ Jesus in its silence. God’s peace is present both in myself, and in and to the “other.” Jesus is in my presence as I dialogue with the other, and in the other as s/he dialogues with me.

A is for Awareness of and Appreciation for God in me and in the “other” despite our differences. This awareness develops in me a sense of appreciation for our common humanity amid our diversity, and a sensitivity to and compassion for the difficulties we all experience in our shared human condition.

C is for Connection to the whole of which we are a part. It also stands for Communion of the parts with the whole, for no matter

what our differences in race, culture or creed may be, we are all human beings created in the image and likeness of God.

T is for Truth from the heart of faith mutually shared. Truth-sharing comes in ways of being and becoming in relationship that go beyond words and create “safe spaces” in which TRUST can thrive. When we share from the truth of our faith experience, we honor and glorify the goodness of God present in oneself for and in the other.

I discovered that one of the best ways students learn the essentials of transformative dialogue is through practice. The 1-Day Pact Challenge that I used to give them in class yielded various creative ways through which they engaged in the experience of the PACT essentials. The reflections they shared showed deep insights into the experience.

One student’s work particularly stands out in my memory. Ana was in my class in 2016. She wanted to know what it would feel like to be a Muslim, so she decided to wear the *hijab* to school the whole day. She wore it while riding the jeepney from home to school. She wore it even when no tricycle driver would shuttle her to Ateneo when they thought she was a Muslim, so she walked the distance all the way from the highway to the campus. She wore it in school even when it hurt that her schoolmates teased her by asking her where her “hand grenade” was. And she wore the *hijab* to her last class where she was seated beside Nahda, a Muslim exchange student from Indonesia. Ana wrote this of the experience:

“When she saw me her eyes widened and she smiled. I greeted her in her Muslim language; she greeted me back giving me a look of disbelief. She asked me why, and I told her. She was fascinated at

what just happened. Somehow that was the day she started to be sociable to me. She did not talk much before that happened. She asked me how the experience was for me so far. I told her about how people would look at me, and the comments that my friends gave me (except that horrible joke). She totally agreed with what I said as she referred to her experience here in the Philippines.”⁹

I have received many such heartwarming stories of students’ encounters with Muslims. Through the PACT Challenge, they were able to experience PRESENCE, AWARENESS, CONNECTION as they endeavored to remain centered on the TRUTH of who they are as Christians. Ana’s experience is descriptive of the experiences shared by many other students. Her reflection below is a heartwarming example of how transformative dialogue can inspire and create a safe space for spiritual conversations:

“Nadha kept on agreeing with what I said as though she had met someone (not a Muslim) who understood her. Soon after that, we started talking about other things that we should have talked about back then. It was like a wall between us had finally broken down and we were able to communicate with each other.”¹⁰

We at The Peacemakers’ Circle are inspired by the responses of Christian and Muslim youth to the practice of PACT in transformative dialogue. It has proven to be helpful in developing in them capacities for “humanizing” and not “demonizing” each other in ways that make spiritual conversations between them possible. We are hopeful that our efforts at creating safe spaces for Muslim-Christian relationship-building—through the practice

⁹ Africa, Marites. *Breath of a Stone God: A Journey of Awakening in Faith to Interfaith Dialogue*. Quezon City: Claretian Communications Foundation, Inc. 2017, p. 137.

¹⁰ Ibid.

of PACT in Transformative Dialogue—can be a helpful contribution to efforts at countering violent extremism in our parts of the world. *Inshallah!*

CHAPTER 3
DIALOGUE OF
THEOLOGICAL EXCHANGE

Jacques Dupuis' Humanistic Christology and an Attempt to Make the Spiritual Exercises Known to Muslim Communities

Greg Soetomo, S.J.

Abstract

How do we explain the Christ-centered Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola to Muslims who do not accept Christ as divine? A helpful approach is through Jacques Dupuis' Christology, which holds that it is the humanity of Jesus Christ that creates the condition for the possibility of all people's participation in God's salvific kingdom. This humanistic approach to Christology allows Christians to relate the truth of Christianity to the truths offered by other religious traditions, including Islam, while at the same time remaining doctrinally orthodox.

Introduction

We cannot introduce Ignatian Spirituality fully to Muslims without explaining the Spiritual Exercises, but how do we explain the Christ-centric Spiritual Exercises to them who do not recognize the divinity of Christ? Do we have a good way of explaining Jesus so he can be understood correctly and accepted by Muslims? The question of the divinity of Jesus Christ will continue to be a great test for introducing the Spiritual Exercises to Muslims. This essay offers an approach to spiritual theology in the hope of shedding light on the dark spaces that envelop this area of encounter. It will do so through these stages of discussion:

1. Islamic Reactions with Regard to Christological Tenets
2. Dupuis' Humanistic Christology

3. A New Spiritual Theology as a Bridge to Introduce the Spiritual Exercises to Muslims
 - a. The Humanity of the Trinity in the Spiritual Exercises
 - b. The Humanity of Christ-Centered Mysticism, which Connects Itself to Universal Humanity
 - c. The Theological Challenges of the Third and Fourth Weeks of the Spiritual Exercises
4. Some Critical Notes

1. Islamic Reactions with Regard to Christological Tenets

Among several fundamental questions, two are frequently posed by Muslims to Christians: How can a human being be God at the same time? How can God allow the Prophet and His Son to die on the Cross?

God the Most High, the transcendence of Allāh, gives the understanding that He is different from everything He has created. This is deeply penetrated into the psycho-religious realm of every Muslim heart and mind. Hearing people equate humans with God, for example, Jesus as the Son of God, or Mary as the Mother of God, is to them an outrageous insult to God.

The Qur'an does place Jesus in an honorable position. The following verses confirm this:

1. "And we gave Jesus, the Son of Mary, clear proofs, and we supported him with the Pure Spirit" (Q 2:253).
2. "And peace is on me the day I was born and the day I will die and the day I am raised alive" (Q 19:33).
3. "O children of Israel, indeed I am the messenger of Allāh to you confirming what came before me of the Torah and bring-

ing good tidings of a messenger to come after me, whose name is Ahmad" (Q 61:6).

However, we should not assume that Jesus has such a high place and position in the Qur'an. Some scholars consider Abraham and Moses as having a more significant theological place in Islamic teachings. For certain Muslim communities, the warm devotion Christians have to Siti Maryam (Lady Mary) gives the impression that the Mother of Jesus is more respectable than Jesus Himself.

One essential element in the theology of Christian faith is the Trinitarian concept inherently preserved. However, this theme has scandalized Muslims who uphold monotheism (*muwahhidūn*). "Say, 'He is God, the One. God, the Absolute. He begets not, nor was He begotten. And there is none comparable to Him'" (Q 112).

What we accept as the Trinity, the Most Holy Trinity, is actually misunderstood in the Qur'an as tritheism. The tritheism in the Qur'an does not refer to God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit but to God, Jesus and the Virgin Mary. The Qur'an does not mention the Holy Spirit. This is a fatal misunderstanding according to Christian theology.

"And [beware the Day] when Allāh will say, 'O Jesus, Son of Mary, did you say to the people, "Take me and my mother as deities besides Allah?"' He will say, 'Exalted are You! It was not for me to say that to which I have no right. If I had said it, You would have known it. You know what is within myself, and I do not know what is within Yourself. Indeed, it is You who is Knower of the unseen'" (Q 5:116).

Christians accept Jesus as Lord. Christians also accept the belief that Jesus died on the Cross. These two theological claims are essentially confusing for Muslims. More than that, they consider

this belief offensive to God. The Qur'an rejects the death of Jesus on the cross: "Indeed, we have killed the Messiah, Jesus, the son of Mary, the messenger of Allāh.' And they did not kill him, nor did they crucify him; but [another] was made to resemble him to them." (Q. 4: 157). In the Islamic tradition, Jesus was not crucified. God protected Jesus from the attacks of his enemies, and later took him to heaven. Jesus will return again in the reckoning day, and judge at the Last Day.

The Cross has also become a very problematic symbol for Muslims. Since the time of the Crusades and later colonialism, the Cross has been in their eyes an expression of violence and war, making them view Christianity as an aggressive religion.

The incident of the Cross conveys a theological meaning that is not understood by Muslims. They wonder: "How can an innocent person die for someone else's sins?" Islamic teachings say that each person is responsible for his mistakes and, likewise, for his prayers that he makes himself. He is also rewarded for his own good deeds. "So whoever does an atom's weight of good will see it, and whoever does an atom's weight of evil will see it" (Q. 99:7-8).

Islam has the concept of the forgiveness of sins given by God himself directly. God is forgiving and sinners will receive forgiveness from God. God's forgiveness is even considered to have existed even before man repented. "Then He turned to them so they could repent. Indeed, Allah is the accepting of repentance, the Merciful" (Q. 9:118).

This essay does not provide sufficient space to respond to all the problems mentioned above. It is not meant to. There are

enough available references to answer these questions.¹ What this essay focuses on is the methodology and content offered by Jacques Dupuis in his pluralism Christology as a possible bridge between the Spiritual Exercises and Islamic teachings to facilitate dialogue.

2. Dupuis' Humanistic Christology

Jacques Dupuis did not write his theological and Christological thoughts to respond to the questions about Jesus in the Qur'an and Islam. However, he wrote a treaty that can function as a methodological contribution to Muslim-Christian dialogue. This paper draws Dupuis' ideas into a more specific area: dialogue for harmony between the Spiritual Exercises and the Islamic Jesus.

Dupuis' notion of religious pluralism is based on his theological approach and method. However, his theological position will only become clear if his Christological tenets are fully grasped. Mara Brecht, regarding Dupuis' Christology, gave this explanation: "His Christology, which holds that it is the humanity of Jesus Christ who creates the condition for the possibility of all people's participation in God's salvific kingdom, allows Dupuis to relate the truth of Christianity in an innovative way to the truths offered by other religious traditions, while at the same time remaining doctrinally orthodox."²

Dupuis creatively took new paths in the form of a two-dimensional anthropological approach: on the one hand, with the concept of the Holy Trinity, Jesus is an expression of finite humanity; on the other hand, Jesus in human form made it possible for all humans to participate in the divine project of salvation. In the light of God manifested in human form, Dupuis understood that

all humanity is brought to the realm of practical salvation. The responsibility for presenting the kingdom of God is no longer placed on "one" but on "many."

Dupuis built his Christology in the context of religious pluralism. Peter Phan argues that the point of departure of Dupuis' Christology is the praxis of real dialogue with non-Christian religions. The practice of dialogue is very important in his Christology, but praxis is not the source of his Christology and theology. Dupuis does not simply equate and equalize the practice of interfaith dialogue with the Council documents by the Church Fathers or Bible verses as the sources of Christology. However, it must be admitted that the experience of involvement is the impetus for his pluralism project and serves as a measuring tool for evaluating Christianity in dealing with non-Christian traditions.³

God is infinite. Therefore, he cannot be fully understood by human beings. No finite form is capable of representing the full manifestation of God. God who became human is also not His full manifestation.

Dupuis' explanations of "history" and "metaphysics" have created tension. On the one hand, Dupuis affirmed the metaphysical meaning of Christ. On the other hand, he also emphasized the historicity of Jesus as something partial, contingent and particular. In this sense, Dupuis did not see Christ as the total and absolute embodiment of the Divine. For him, it was impossible for God in Himself to be fully revealed in man, the finite being of Christ.

In Jesus we understand one important thing. We participate in salvation, not through the abstract knowledge of our actions, but

³Jacques Dupuis, S.J, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, pp. 358 -360.

in the actual execution of those actions. This surely does not mean that rational recognition of the explicit Christian faith becomes unnecessary. Rather, human constructs that emphasize too much on rational subjects are challenged very seriously in the incarnation event, “the Word became flesh.” Human salvation, which is the bond between man and God, is definitively embodied in the humanity of Jesus Christ.⁴

This Dupuis Christological approach is used as a methodological umbrella that provides norms for existing data. The problems Islam has with Jesus and the position of Jesus in the Spiritual Exercises need to be reconciled. Apart from harmony, though, there are more issues that cannot be easily reconciled between the two as we will see in the next part.

3. A New Spiritual Theology as a Bridge to Introduce the Spiritual Exercises to Muslims

a. The Humanity of the Trinity in the Spiritual Exercises

The mysticism of Ignatius of Loyola is deeply Trinitarian. This is recorded in the *Autobiography of Ignatius Loyola*. Harvey D. Egan notes that Ignatius mentioned explicitly the Most Holy Trinity 170 times, and that almost every page lists a phrase that directly or indirectly refers to this Trinitarian character. However, Egan argues that the Spiritual Exercises have never revealed the explicit Trinitarian tone.⁵

One essential element in the theology of Christian faith is the Trinitarian concept that is inherently preserved in it. However, this fundamental teaching has filled Muslims with horror as Is-

⁴Jacques Dupuis, S.J, *Toward a Christian*, pp. 294 – 295, 301.

⁵Harvey D. Egan, *The Mysticism of St. Ignatius Loyola*, p. 76.

lamic teachings strongly uphold monotheism (*muwahhidūn*). "Say, 'He is God, the One. God, the Absolute. He begets not, nor was He begotten. And there is none comparable to Him'" (Q 112).

In the contemplation of the Incarnation, in the Second Week of the Spiritual Exercises, the retreatant contemplates for no less than five times how the Three Divine Persons gazed at the earth and decided to send the Second Person (Ex. 102, 106-109, 118-126, 128). Even though the Long Retreat (LR) contains clearly the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, there is still a Father who is eternally present (Ex. 135, 272). The retreatant does pray to Christ the Eternal King, but this prayer must be put in order to "enter into my Father's glory" (Ex. 95). Likewise, the supplications for grace and consolation in the First Week can only be obtained from the Father. In general, retreatants of LR experience God as Father (Ex. 273, 277, 278, 297, 307).

In the horizon of thinking and feeling among Muslims, the terms Father and Son sound very biological and human. Understanding Allāh using biological and human attributes does not fall into the category of their way of religious thinking. Worse, this is considered to them an insult and a blasphemy. Herein lies the discrepancy because Christians have from the very beginning been accustomed to referring to the Father and the Son in a spiritual sense. They may never even have imagined this to be an issue for Muslims.

If we are to introduce the Spiritual Exercises to the Muslim community, this tension must be overcome or relaxed. Dupuis gave us the concept of a Christology that will hopefully soften the conflict.

Dupuis took the knowledge of the risen Lord from the Bible as a theological essential. With this knowledge, the Bible is read in the Trinitarian perspective. Jesus is the second person in the metaphysical reality. The Incarnation has no meaning if it is placed outside of this framework. Understanding Jesus in a Trinitarian approach is a non-negotiable for Christians.

However, this does not mean that the historical Jesus is excluded from the Christological concept. Christocentrism is not meant to exclude the uniqueness of Jesus of Nazareth. Dupuis reconciled this tension by asserting Jesus as “the Word of God who became flesh.” Starting with the “metaphysical,” Dupuis’ Christology moves toward the fully human. Jesus, in Dupuis’ descriptions and terms, is able to humanize the Trinity. He is the real bridge between humanity and divinity.⁶

Jesus becoming the Christ is the culmination of the history of salvation that comes from God. However, God the savior is Trinitarian.⁷ The Trinitarian view offered by Dupuis actually bridges the dialogue between the Spiritual Exercises and Islamic Teachings on monotheism, although at this point they are not fully reconciled yet.

b. The Humanity of Christ-Centered Mysticism, which Connects Itself to Universal Humanity

Two goals are to be pursued in the Spiritual Exercises, which Ignatius specified in the beginning: “removing ‘inordinate attach-

⁶Jacques Dupuis, S.J., *Toward a Christian*, pp. 264 - 266.

⁷Jacques Dupuis, S.J., *Christianity and the Religions: From Confrontation to Dialogue* (Orbis, 2002), pp. 91 - 92.

ments'" and "seeking and discovering the Divine Will" (Ex 15).⁸ According to Egan, to achieve these two intentions, a retreatant must meditate and contemplate on the mysteries of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The essence and substance of the Spiritual Exercises' mysticism, according to him, lies in prayer and reflection on those three events.

The contemplation of human sins in the First Week of the Spiritual Exercises is carried out before Christ crucified, Mother Mary and the Father. The retreatant looks at Christ crucified and asks, "What have I done for Christ? What am I now doing for Christ? What ought I do for Christ?" (Ex 53). This Christ-centric First Week culminates in "the great kindness and mercy He has always shown me until this present moment" (Ex 71). This week is marked by the human experience of man as a sinner, however, at the same time, he is redeemed and saved. Both sin and salvation are put in a relationship with Christ. This theology of spiritual life becomes evident in the prayers and meditations in the Second Week.

Islamic teachings argue that everyone is responsible for the mistakes and sins he commits. He is also rewarded for his own good deeds. "So whoever does an atom's weight of good will see it; and whoever does an atom's weight of evil will see it" (Q. 99: 7-8). Islam has the concept of forgiveness of sins given by God directly, without mediation. God is forgiving. Sinners will receive forgiveness from God. God's forgiveness is even considered to exist before man repented. "Then He turned to them so they could repent. Indeed, Allāh is the accepting of repentance, the Merciful" (Q. 9: 118).

⁸Harvey D. Egan, *The Mysticism of St. Ignatius Loyola*, p. 95

As mentioned earlier, Dupuis' did not write theological and Christological treatises which aimed to respond directly to theological issues that exist in the relationship between Islam and Christianity. Instead, Dupuis presents a thesis explaining the position of Christ in religious traditions in general.

The distinctive flavor of Dupuis Christology is "the humanity of Christ which connects itself to universal humanity." His Christocentric theology brings Dupuis to explain that the history of salvation culminated in Christ. The salvation which the Christian faith understands and believes in is, of course, mediated through the Church. However, the effect that Christ emanates on humanity cannot be confined by any institution that exists on earth. Thus, other religious traditions also have a salvation that is unique and accepted by their respective followers. That universal humanity shares with the humanity of Christ.⁹

In the Second Week, the prayers of the retreatant focus on the mystery of the incarnation, the birth of Christ, the childhood of Jesus, or in short, the meditation on "the life of our Lord Jesus Christ up to and including Palm Sunday" (Ex. no 4). In this Week, we discover the peculiarities of Ignatius' Christ-centric mysticism. He has a unique way of portraying Jesus.

Overall, the most important grace to ask for in the Second Week is "interior knowledge of the Lord, Who for me has become man, that I may love him more intensely and follow him more closely" (Ex. no 104). This can be obtained primarily by contemplating on the Two Standards and the Three Degrees of Humility.

Jesus is human, and human beings have an orientation toward God, regardless of how God is understood and perceived. Du-

⁹Jacques Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, pp. 176 - 177.

puis understood the meaning and purpose of the humanity of Jesus in the Word made flesh. God made a commitment to man in Jesus, who became a central event for all humanity. It is universal because the humanity of Jesus permeates all humanity. However, this reality is not exclusive because God cannot be absorbed by just one expression and manifestation.

c. The Theological Challenges of the Third and Fourth Weeks of the Spiritual Exercises

The most crucial and critical challenge in explaining the Spiritual Exercises to Muslims is in making sense of the spiritual journey in the Third and Fourth Weeks. The Third Week of the Spiritual Exercises focuses on reflections on the Last Supper, which is followed by the story of the passion, crucifixion, death and burial of the Lord Jesus. Perhaps it will be even more disturbing for Muslims because we are asked to consider, "What Christ our Lord suffers in His humanity, or wills to suffer" (Ex. No. 195), and "that He suffers all these things for my sins, etc.; and what I ought to do and suffer for Him?" (Ex. No. 197). These reflections are very foreign concepts, even blasphemous, to Islamic teachings.

The Fourth Week of the Spiritual Exercises covers the mystery of Christ's resurrection. The grace requested this week is "to be intensely glad and to rejoice in such great glory and joy of Christ our Lord" (Ex. No. 221). By conquering suffering and death, the divine nature of Christ appears this Week. The Contemplation to Obtain Love is finding God in everything in a Trinitarian sense.

To enter into the glory and joy of the Fourth Week, the retreatant is reminded of the essential meaning of Christ's suffering: "To consider how the Divinity, which seemed to hide Itself in the Pas-

sion, now appears and shows Itself so marvelously in the most holy Resurrection by Its true and most holy effects" (Ex. 223). Ignatius asked, "Was it not necessary that Christ should suffer and so enter into His glory? (Ex. 303)

Here we return to the fundamental questions of Muslims to Christians we had asked earlier: How can a human being at the same time be Allāh? How can Allāh allow the Prophet and His Son to die on the cross? They wonder, "How can an innocent person die for another sinner?" They quote this verse to reject this Christian doctrine: "And every soul earns not [blame] except against itself, and no bearer of burdens will bear the burden of another" (Q. 6:164).

In his *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, Dupuis wrote, "The truth to which Christianity witnesses is neither exclusive nor inclusive of all other truths; it is related to all that is true in other religions."¹⁰

Jesus for Dupuis would not be understood correctly if confined by the question, "Is Jesus absolute or relative"? Dupuis writes that the uniqueness and universality of Jesus Christ is not absolute nor relative, but "constitutive and relational." Jesus is "relational" in two senses: first, he is in the structure of intra-trinitarian relations; second, he is also in the structure of a relationship with humanity. Dupuis further explained that Jesus became constitutive when Jesus and his humanity were described in his life, death and resurrection. Because of his resurrection, Jesus is perpetually alive and present around us.¹¹

¹⁰ Jacques Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1997), 388.

¹¹ Jacques Dupuis, S.J., *Toward a Christian*, p. 303.

All humanity on earth has a relationship with God because of the humanity of Jesus. This is what Dupuis called constitutive and relational. As human beings, thanks to the humanity of Christ, we are all appointed to be God's working partners in the labor of salvation proclaiming the Kingdom of God.

The constitutive and relational aspects of Jesus Christ refer to three elements. First, the mysterious presence of Jesus Christ that is inclusive in history; second, the universal power of the *Logos*; third, the infinite action and reach of the Spirit. Dupuis concluded that religions articulate values that complement each other. Religions are a reflection of the various human paths for authentic salvation.

4. Some Critical Notes

Interfaith dialogue for Dupuis should be a genuine engagement. For some, his creative theology has remained balanced and orthodox. However, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) (2001) did a comprehensive investigation of his book, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (Orbis Books: Maryknoll, New York 1997).¹² One thing the CDF saw as disturbing is the claim "that non-Christian religious traditions within itself are able to transmit divine salvation." The CDF considers this to be a theological fallacy because the history of revelation in Jesus

¹²Notification on the book *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (Orbis Books: Maryknoll, New York 1997) by Father Jacques Dupuis, S.J. http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20010124_dupuis_en.html

Christ offers the utmost for human salvation and is not fulfilled in other religions. To place the activity of the *Logos* and Spirit outside the Church is against the Catholic faith.¹³

The above criticism and correction show a failure in the understanding of the human-centeredness of Dupuis' Christology. For Dupuis, it is not religious traditions that complete what Christ had begun, but humans, like Muslims, themselves who do good deeds through and in their respective religions. Thus, the positive meaning of salvation in other religions, Islam among them, takes place when the human community participates in the Kingdom of God at work, through Christ, wherever and whenever. Here Dupuis wished to convey the meaning of Christ for humanity, not for other religions.

Dupuis never considered all religions to be equal and the same. Religious practice and the teachings of the religions do not have the same degree as the sacraments administered by Jesus Christ in the Catholic teachings. Other religions, Islam included, are authentic paths to salvation indeed. However, Christianity is unique.

In fact, Dupuis' Christology remains traditional and orthodox because Dupuis still put emphasis on God who communicates himself in Jesus. God will incarnate and not go beyond identifying who God Himself is. God still cannot be fully known by His people. God is identified concretely in Christ. However, the status of the historical Jesus of Nazareth is relative and not an absolute manifestation of God.

¹³ It is therefore contrary to the Catholic faith not only to posit a separation between the Word and Jesus, or between the Word's salvific activity and that of Jesus, but also to maintain that there is a salvific activity of the Word as such in his divinity, independent of the humanity of the Incarnate Word. (Notification, 2)

To Catholics, Jesus Christ is Savior in a unique, irreplaceable way. On the one hand, Jesus Christ becomes an identity because in Him salvation is fulfilled. On the other hand, the manifestation of the Word of Salvation is not only in Jesus Christ. We may say the Word that had been given as a revelation to the Prophet Muhammad is the same Word that became flesh in Jesus Christ.

On the one hand, Christianity is historical. It is a historical religion. On the other hand, the mystery of Jesus Christ has transcended history, and cultural and religious expressions. Here Dupuis referred to Christianity as the encounter between religious tradition and the mystery of Jesus Christ. He maintained the doctrine that all religious traditions, including Islam, are moving and directing their orientation towards the mystery of Jesus Christ. Jesus has brought the history of salvation to its climax.

Christianity mediates the mystery of salvation in a fuller sense. However, other religions, like Islam, may also serve as a special and unique mediation, which is absent in Christianity. Islam, then, may find fulfillment precisely when having dialogue with Christian teachings. Likewise, Christianity will find its fulfillment in dialogue with Islam.

Ignatian Prayer: Monotheistic and Christological

Hartono Budi, S.J.

Abstract

What is distinct about Ignatian prayer? Why did Ignatius of Loyola call it Spiritual Exercises? What is its structure and aim? Is it composed to convey a special theological doctrine? Ignatius proposes his Spiritual Exercises to help one grow in familiarity with God and God's good work particularly embodied in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. God, as understood and experienced by Ignatius, is fundamentally the Trinitarian God professed in the Christian Creed. Question and refutation against the Trinity or Christology, such as from Abu Isa Al-Waraq, an important Muslim scholar, are reminders of the need for theology to make sense in the language of the people. Somehow, more than a theological knowledge or discourse, Ignatius of Loyola shared of a grace-filled relationship with God.

Introduction

This article is an in-depth study of a prayer method as taught systematically by St. Ignatius of Loyola in his Spiritual Exercises (SPEX). The sole goal of the SPEX is to seek and find God's will and live accordingly for the salvation of all. A brief presentation of the theological refutations of an important Muslim scholar Abu Isa Al-Waraq is meant to open a possible creative dialogue, as theological discourse is not the primary intent of the SPEX, and Ignatian prayer is not meant for teaching doctrinal theology. A sincere dialogue between Christian and Muslim theologians

on Christian monotheism and Christology after an experience of the SPEX, particularly on the meditation on God's mercy and benevolence (SPEX, Week 1), can be spiritually beneficial and fruitful considering the goal of the SPEX. Indeed, the SPEX are given mainly to help a person establish and deepen one's grace-filled relationship with God.

Ignatian Prayer

What is prayer? Can it be understood as an act of worship, of opening oneself to God or submitting oneself to God? To be sure, there are other explanations, yet what is fundamental of prayer is a conscious act of going out of oneself. So, what is distinct about Ignatian prayer?

St. Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556) in his *Spiritual Exercises*¹ makes the dynamic aspect of prayer more explicit. He defines prayer as, "Every way of preparing and disposing the soul to rid itself of all inordinate attachments...." He adds that the single goal of prayer is: "seeking and finding the will of God in the disposition of our life for the salvation of our souls" (SPEX 1). Accordingly, Ignatius points out that prayer is also a space where "the Creator and Lord in person should communicate Himself to the devout soul in quest of the divine will, that He inflame it with His love and praise, and dispose it for the way in which it could better serve God in the future" (SPEX 15). So, prayer is what I do as well as what is done to me, what goes under my control as well as what goes beyond it.

¹St. Ignatius explains, "By the term 'Spiritual Exercises' is meant every method of examination of conscience, of meditation, of contemplation, of vocal and mental prayer, and of other spiritual activities..." (SPEX 1). *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius. A new translation based on studies in the language of the autograph by Louis J. Puhl*. St. Paul publications. Makati, Philippines, 1990, 14. For this paper, we will use just one term: Ignatian prayer, and SPEX for the reference to the Spiritual Exercises, with particular number.

An Ignatian prayer is also called the Spiritual Exercises. Because its aim is to find the will of God for the salvation of all people, it is therefore to be done unceasingly for the completion of God's will (1 Thessalonians 5:16), with discernment as well as self-discipline. Fidelity to prayer, including meeting its length as promised when prayer seems dry and barren, is crucial. This fidelity, as Ignatius notes, is often blessed with sudden and surprising grace. Further, Ignatius demonstrates that prayer is foundationally a dynamic personal relationship. All of the proposed meditations and contemplations are always pointed towards that grace of a growing relationship with the Lord and eventually strengthened by concluding each prayer with a "colloquy" or personal conversation with the Lord, and a personal concluding prayer, such as the "Our Father" or other familiar prayer.

An Ignatian prayer is not merely for one's own sake but with a "social" reason or concern. It is not mainly an intellectual exercise or an exercise of asceticism but a structured form of "spiritual discernment" to seek and find the salvific will of God for all. It is not a kind of spiritual acrobat or a method for physical wellness but a spiritual self-discipline to "rid itself of all inordinate attachments" to come to freedom to be and to choose "God's will" at all cost, including a total witness-giving or martyrdom. In the mind of Ignatius, the model of a prayerful person is Jesus Christ with his complete obedience to God the Father and total availability to do the mission of God the Father. All is for the mission of God who wills that all be saved.

God-centeredness

God's wisdom, God's power, God's justice and God's goodness are directly to be reconsidered and reflected before the reality of one's ignorance, weakness, iniquity and wickedness (SPEX 59). This will yield a deeper impact in one's prayerful consciousness, that is, to be profoundly grateful and in turn to be more generous to share (or to serve others). This becomes more intense in the prayerful awareness of "being favored and mysteriously nurtured to live here and now." "And the heavens, sun, moon, stars and the elements; the fruits, birds, fishes and other animals-why have they all been at my service!" wrote Ignatius, inspiring one's prayer of God's mysterious as well as loving providence (SPEX 60).

Self-awareness and self-knowledge are important starting points in an Ignatian prayer. Ignatius gives a detailed guide for a particular self-examination (SPEX 24-31), as well as a general examination of conscience (SPEX 32-44). Both will help one to rediscover who one is, particularly as a creature, by the help of God, here and now. Ignatius even suggests for Catholics the importance of making the examination of conscience explicit in a "confession" to a Catholic priest followed by a "reception" of the Blessed Sacrament of the Eucharist.

The first part of Ignatius' SPEX (named First Week), contains five meditations on sin. These exercises bring one to an experience of creatureliness, of being constantly related to God the creator, who is of infinite goodness and full of mercy to the point of "stooping to become human and to pass from eternal life to death here in time, thus God might die for our sins" in Jesus Christ (SPEX 53, Psalm 40:1). Indeed, the Gospel, which is the

center of Ignatius' SPEX, is a proclamation of God's faithfulness and kindness through the life, ministry and death of Jesus. Early Christians called Jesus, "Immanuel," which means "God with us" (Matthew 1:23), evoking God's promise of salvation spoken to the prophet Isaiah (7:14). In the end, all is for the praise and service of God (SPEX 46).

God as understood and experienced by Ignatius is fundamentally the God professed in the Creed. The first part of the Christian Creed or Apostles' Creed speaks of God as "Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth." More than just professing the formula, this article of faith calls for a personal relationship, an openness to the mystery of God as Father, the almighty, as well as the creator of all.

Ignatius had a very personal experience particularly during his prolonged stay in a cave at Manresa. Ignatius explains that during those months, God behaved towards him in the same way that a school-master conducts himself with a child: he was teaching him (Autobiography of St. Ignatius of Loyola no. 27). More than a theological knowledge or discourse, Ignatius speaks of a grace-filled relationship with God. He had lived a privileged relationship with God, a relationship of teaching that led to a self-transformation, along with the development of his understanding of the mystery of God.² The experience of that "method of teaching" added personally to the gained knowledge. At this point we may say that it was a sort of personalization of the Creed, particularly on God as Father (and teacher) almighty, creator of heaven and earth. Ignatius indicates that it happened by the grace of God and not primarily of his spiritual effort.

²Simon Decloux, "How God accompanied Ignatius: A paradigm for us in 'helping souls'" in *Review of Ignatian Spirituality*. XXXVI: 1, number 108, 2005, 7.

The God revealed in our history is Trinitarian: Father, Son and Holy Spirit as explicitly professed in the Christian Creed. God's centeredness in the SPEX and in the life of Ignatius is an expression of a Trinitarian faith, as well as an implicit monotheism. But, again, Ignatian prayer is not meant for teaching doctrinal theology.³ More on this in the Afterword.

Who is Praying? How Should One Pray?

According to Ignatius, a person who prays is perceived not just as a rational or intellectual being who communicates only through understanding but also as a relational being. Furthermore, one who prays is to be himself or herself before uttering words of grace, thanksgiving, petition, etc. The one who prays, particularly the one who makes the SPEX (also called a "retreatant"), is presumed to commit to a greater intensity in prayer, greater awareness of God's presence and greater fidelity. Here, the one who prays comes to a deeper self-awareness of being a creature, which does not only mean a limited being conditioned by its surroundings but also a radically different being from our creator even in the Incarnation. This points to a root meaning of sinfulness as a condition of separation and as an act that separates oneself from the Creator. In relation to this, it is important to remember the teaching on human conscience as articulated in the document on the Church in the Modern World: "Conscience is the most secret core and sanctuary of a person. There he or she is alone

³John W. O'Malley noted that "Although it is of course important to examine the text of the *Exercises* to understand the presuppositions that undergird it, in itself it was not meant to convey any special theological viewpoint. Its origins lay not in a scholar's study, an academic disputation, an inquisitorial courtroom, or an ecclesiastical council. It was not a counterstatement to Luther, Erasmus, or the *alumbrados*. It originated in religious experience, first the author's and the other's. Its basic elements were well in place before the author had any theological education." *The First Jesuits*. Cambridge, etc.: Harvard University Press, 1993, 42.

with God, Whose voice echoes in his or her depths. In a wonderful manner conscience reveals that law which is fulfilled by the love of God and neighbor" (*Gaudium et Spes* 16). Each human being is perceived as a hearer of God's loving communication. How then should one respond?

Preparation for prayer is deemed important. One maintains the attitude of reverence, acknowledging God's presence with one's entire being and doing, past and present, as well as future. In prayer, one does the act of disposing one's whole being to God and at the same time opening himself or herself to God's self-communication. In Jesus Christ, God is with us in a very personal and human way. Ignatius' idea of God is deeply rooted in the foundation of the Christian faith in the Incarnation.

Translating SPEX 77 for contemporary readers, David Fleming wrote: "After a formal prayer period is finished, I should review what has happened during the past hour – not so much what ideas I did have, but more the movements of consolation, desolation, fear, anxiety, boredom and so on, and perhaps something about my distractions, especially if they were deep and disturbing. I thank God for His favors and ask pardon for my own negligence of the time of prayer."⁴

Ignatian prayer focuses on the whole person, who prays with his or her interiority as well as exteriority. Through such reflection one can improve and pray with less distractions, misunderstandings or false expectations, and engage more the discernment of spirits to welcome "true happiness and spiritual joy" from God's presence and "to banish all the sadness and disturbances which are caused by the enemy" (SPEX 329). At last, one who prays will

⁴David L. Fleming, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius. A literal translation and a Contemporary reading*. St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit sources, 1980

be in a state of consolation, which is not only a state of spiritual joy but more importantly a state of being able to “find God at present.” Ignatius points out that this state of consolation needs to be one’s continuous state of being; therefore, one should be an active hearer of God’s self-communication.

Questions on the Trinitarian God

Seven centuries before Ignatius, Abu Isa al-Warraq, a well-respected Muslim scholar from the ninth century, wrote on the generation of the Son from the Father: “Say to them: Tell us about the substance of the Father. Is it a progenitive substance or not? If they claim that it is progenitive substance, we reply: Then since the substance of the Son and the Spirit is that of the Father they must be progenitive. This means they must claim that the Son has generated another son and likewise the Spirit has generated a son other than the Son of the Father and the son of the son. This will lead them to affirm countless numbers of sons. If they claim that the substance of the Father is not a progenitive substance, we say: Then he must produce offspring without his substance....”⁵

Rationalists, such as Abu Isa al-Warraq, pursued an intelligible theology in terms of concept and language. Adding to the difficulty of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity were various theological teachings from different schools of thought and Christian sects that were not necessarily in agreement with one another in their

⁵David Thomas (Ed. and trans.), *Anti-Christian Polemic in Early Islam. Abu Isa Al-Warraq’s “Against the Trinity”*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992, 163. “By the time Abu Isa Al-Warraq wrote in the middle of 9th century, anti-Christian polemical writing had become an integral part of theological discourse in Islam. Nearly all of the major theologians participated in debates. Yet Abu Isa Al-Warraq had more depth of his knowledge about Christian teachings or in skill with which he was able to refute them. Focus on what was thought to be the contradiction within the Godhead between Persons who are both distinct from one another and also equal and identical. This fundamental inconsistency served as the main target in the different attacks they leveled against the doctrine.” See also p.31.

understanding of the Trinity. The doctrine of the Trinitarian God itself came into being gradually in the first ecumenical councils: Nicaea (325), Constantinople (381), Ephesus (431) and Chalcedon (451). All affirmed the divinity of Jesus Christ and Holy Spirit, equal in being with God the Father, fundamentally echoing the faith of the people that is rooted in the Gospels.

The councils themselves were called mainly to answer to heresies, such as Arianism, which taught that Jesus, Son of God, is not co-eternal with God the Father and is distinct from the Father (therefore subordinate to him). This kind of teaching questioned radically the foundational Christian experience with Jesus Christ and the belief of the real presence of God throughout the entire life of Jesus of Nazareth and therefore his name as “Immanuel” or “God with us” (Matthew 1:23, Isaiah 7:14).

The councils were also answering the teaching of the Pneumatomachians who denied the divinity of the Holy Spirit and taught that the Holy Spirit was a creation of the Son and a servant of the Father and the Son. During the Easter season, it is meditated: “And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you” (Romans 8:11).

Early Christians celebrated the resurrection of Jesus as a creative and good work of God. Already in the second century, Irenaeus, bishop of Lyon, imagined creation as the work of God with God’s two hands, Son and the Spirit. Holy Spirit is of God truly. Therefore, the Nicene Creed ends with: We believe in the Holy Spirit. Arianism and pneumatomachianism had caused confusion, division and disunity within the early Christian communi-

ties, therefore, the councils were called and produced necessary doctrines to preserve the orthodox faith and secure unity.

Unfortunately, this “new theological formula” from the Councils or the initial doctrine of the Trinity did not present a comprehensive teaching. The refutation from Abu Isa al-Warraaq is understandable and valuable. The councils were mainly addressing doctrinal disagreements that caused confusion and ecclesial divisions without claiming to produce a “*clara et distincta*” teaching.

Still, in continuing our theological endeavor, we need to remind ourselves that theology primarily deals with a divine revelation and therefore the mystery of God. Reason and faith go hand in hand as they have an organic connection. They are both sources of authority upon which beliefs can rest.⁶ St. Ignatius and his SPEX aim more at discerning God’s will by a lively relationship with Jesus who came to do God’s will (John 6:38).

Christ-centeredness

Jesus of Nazareth occupies a special and central place in the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius. Prayers in the Second Week of the SPEX focus on the life and ministry of Jesus, the Third Week on Jesus’ suffering and death, and the Fourth Week on his resurrection. Yet already in the First Week, one is invited to reflect and ask: “How is it that though He is the Creator, He has stooped to become man and to pass from eternal life to death here in time, that He might die for our sins?” (SPEX 53) Ignatius recommends that every prayer shall end with a colloquy or personal conversa-

⁶The religious beliefs that are the objects of faith can thus be divided into those that are in fact strictly demonstrable (*scientia*) and those that inform a believer’s virtuous practices (*sapientia*). Religious faith involves a belief that makes some kind of either an implicit or explicit reference to a transcendent source, a revelation.

tion. Ignatius' practical suggestion is that, "the colloquy is made by speaking exactly as one friend speaks to another..." (SPEX 54).

From the very beginning, the SPEX provides meditation with its foundational biblical faith that God has saved us. For Ignatius, God's salvation has a face, Jesus Christ, who gave his life for us. Ignatius himself owed his life to Christ. What have I done for Christ? What am I doing for Christ? What ought I do for Christ? He wrote in the SPEX 53: "As I behold Christ in this plight, nailed to the cross, I shall ponder upon what presents itself to my mind."

Ignatian prayer based on the life of Christ begins in the Second Week of the SPEX (SPEX 101-189). It covers the whole life and ministry of Jesus. Here Ignatius asks us to apply our five senses: seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching as a way to enter deeply into the ordinary life of Jesus of Nazareth (SPEX 121-126). The life of Jesus as narrated in the Gospels continuously makes an impact. Giving him serious hearing, we find Jesus stirring our feelings and inviting us to a response. People who have pondered the Gospels continue to find surprises. Jesus calls friends to be with him and to labor with him. He is our role model and mentor (Matthew 23:8-10).⁷

The life of Jesus in the SPEX is presented as a life with and on a mission: to save the human race (SPEX 102). The source of this mission is God the Trinity who "look down upon the whole expanse or circuit of all the earth, filled with human beings. Since They see all are going down to hell, They decree in Their eternity that the Second Person should become man to save the human race. So when the fullness of time had come, They sent the Angel Gabriel to our Lady" (Luke 1:26-38). This is interesting to note.

⁷Dean Brackley, *The Call to Discernment in Troubled Times. New Perspectives on the Transformative Wisdom of Ignatius Loyola*. New York: Crossroad, 2004, 73

First, Ignatius dramatizes the Trinitarian faith for a prayerful contemplation. Second, he introduces the origin of Jesus and his mission in the dynamic life of the Trinitarian God. This is doctrinally sound and understandable by ordinary Christians. Third, Ignatius brings forth the interrelation between Christology and Trinity especially into prayer (John 14:31).

Ignatius proposes a contemplation on the life of Jesus as an imaginative exercise, not a fantasy. For those who pray the SPEX, Christ is present and lives among us through his Spirit. This is rooted in the Christian faith started in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:32). The SPEX work through our contemplation or imagination where the Spirit communicates interior knowledge of Christ and sparks love for him and his way of life.⁸

Suffering and Death of Jesus: The God of Silence is With Us

The way of the cross has a special place in Ignatian prayer. Week Three of Ignatius' SPEX is dedicated solely to the contemplation of the suffering and death of Jesus crucified. The prayer material is taken from the Gospels of Matthew, Luke, Mark and John. Ignatius invites us to pray over the life of Jesus in unity with his passion and death on the cross. In turn, this prayer intensifies our union with Jesus. Ignatius shows that this is another form of consolation in solidarity, "when one sheds tears which move to love the Lord, either out of sorrow for sins, or for the passion of Christ our Lord" (SPEX 316). Contemplating Christ's passion helps us to know him better, love him more deeply and follow him more closely (SPEX 104).

⁸Ibidem, 77

Ignatius' starting point is the common Christian faith that "Christ proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). In contemplation, he recommends us to seek deeper understanding, as well as personal relationship and solidarity with Christ: "Sorrow with Christ in sorrow, a broken heart with Christ brokenhearted, tears and interior suffering on account of the great suffering that Christ endured for me" (SPEX 203). Ignatius introduces a "*compositio loci*" or a dramatic composition of place to facilitate a personal encounter. Contemplating Christ's life, we 1) pay attention to the participants in the story, 2) listen to what they are saying and 3) observe their action. On Christ's passion, Ignatius adds that we 1) consider what Christ suffers, 2) how divinity hides itself and 3) all this for my sins (SPEX 192-197). These six points have to operate more naturally. The goal is to allow them to move us from within, generate an empathy with Christ and eventually have a practical effect in our life.

The New Testament presupposes a universal human burden when giving witness that Jesus chose to suffer the consequences of sin. It inverts our expectations. While Jews demanded miracles and Greeks demanded convincing proof, early Christians, such as Paul of Tarsus, announced only the suffering Christ who, crucified, proclaimed the power and true wisdom of God (1 Corinthians 1:22-24). Jesus' suffering reveals God's complete solidarity with our weaknesses and suffering. Indeed, Christians confess that Jesus is Emmanuel, God with us (Matthew 1:23). Here, deep in contemplation, we encounter a God who suffers, with us and for us, extremely different from an impassible God. Ignatian prayer teaches us to find God in all things even in suffering and

death. Christ's passion teaches us where to find God "hiding" today (SPEX 196). Contemplating the passion draws us closer to Christ and deeper into the historic suffering of humanity.

Questions on the Incarnation

In "Against the Incarnation," Abu Isa al-Warraq wrote: "Tell us about the uniting of the Word with the human being with whom it united. Was this action of the Word and not of the Father or the Spirit, or was it an action of the three hypostases? If they claim that the uniting was an action of the three hypostases, we say: Then why was it the uniting of the Word and not of the Father or the Spirit? And why was it the Word that united and not either of the others, although it had no part in the action of uniting that they did not have? And if they claim that the uniting was an action of the Word and not of the Father or the Spirit, they acknowledge an action of the Son which is other than the action of the Father or the Spirit. And they single him out in carrying out an act which the Father and Spirit did not. But if it is possible for one of them to act alone without the others, this is possible for each of the other two hypostases. And if it is possible, it is possible for each of them alone to control a world without its two companions, and to create without its two companions. This is a departure from their teachings."⁹

Rethinking our dogmatic Christology as expressed in the

⁹David Thomas (Ed. And trans.), *Early Muslim Polemic against Christianity. Abu Isa Al-Warraq's "Against the Incarnation"*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, 97. "In late 8th century, there was a complicated relationship between Christian and Muslim theologians. On the level of method, they influenced and stimulated one another. Some Christian theologians would make use of concepts from their Muslim counterparts to explain the Trinity. Yet on the level of actual ideas and doctrines there was little progress in understanding. In the 9th century accepting one another was not easy and this was mainly because the elements of the respective beliefs were irreconcilable. Confrontation became the remaining approach to engage one another which include refutations and demonstrations of the deficiencies in the other's position". See also p. 37.

Creed and the teaching of the ecumenical councils, such as Nicaea and Chalcedon, one needs to go back to the sources, such as the Gospel and its originating experience with Jesus. Christian faith and subsequently theology emerged from the testimonies and “narratives” of the early Christians who experienced God’s salvation in their experience of Jesus raised up from the dead and present among them. The earliest Christian theological language, the language of the New Testament, is mostly an undifferentiated mixture of narrative, metaphor, mythological imagery and theological construction.¹⁰ Among Christians, we need to admit that quite often, we do not differentiate the mythological, historical and metaphysical dimensions of our faith even in our theological discourse as reflected in discussions about the Creed from the ecumenical councils or theologies influenced by premodern, modern and postmodern modes of thought. Here, at the least, theology constantly requires an intellectual humility in dealing with religious language in our life of faith, worship and prayer, as well as dialogue.

Contemporary theologians, such as Roger Haight, propose other criteria of Christology to measure its adequacy due to different understandings of Jesus Christ. Three criteria that are central though not exhaustive are 1) fidelity to Scripture and the landmark interpretations of Jesus Christ from the history of the community, such as the Councils of Nicaea and Chalcedon; 2) intelligibility to a present-day community. Christology needs to

¹⁰Thomas Rausch, *Who is Jesus. An introduction to Christology*. Manila: Claretian publications, 2005, 183.

make sense in the language of today's world; 3) an ability to empower a Christian life in the contemporary world. A Christology unable to do this is irrelevant and lacks moral credibility.¹¹

Mission-oriented

The Ignatian prayer on the suffering of Jesus is followed by contemplation on the risen Christ (Fourth Week, SPEX 218-237). Ignatius shares a common Christian faith that in Jesus' resurrection good triumphed over evil and death, and that we share in that victory even today. Like the contemplation on the suffering of Jesus, our contemplation on the risen Christ also seeks to foster union with him, and here particularly "to rejoice and be intensely glad because of the great glory and joy of Christ our Lord" (SPEX 221). Resurrection reverses death and Jesus' vindication reverses condemnation. Early Christians believed that God has raised up precisely the condemned and crucified one (Acts 2:36) or in a Scriptural prophecy, "This is the stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the corner stone" (Acts 4:11, Psalm 118:22). Here, early Christians, like Paul, also believed that Jesus is the "first born of many brothers and sisters" (Romans 8:29). Jesus' resurrection is the beginning of a more general resurrection, which points more to the final revelation of the justice of God on behalf of innocent victims like Jesus, than only about personal immortality.¹²

Ignatius invites us to vividly imagine and "be part" of the mystery of God's "reversal action," the resurrection by, 1) observing the people involved, 2) listening to their words, and 3) noting

¹¹Roger Haight, "The logic of Christology from below", *Boston Theological Institute*. www.feranil.com/cms/links/haight04.htm (accessed in May 11, 2021)

¹²Dean Brackley, *The Call to Discernment in Troubled Times*, 196

their actions. All these are to allow the story to move us to reflect in whatever way is fruitful. Then he adds two considerations: 1) how the divinity, hidden during the passion, now manifests itself to those who believe in Christ, and 2) how Christ consoles the disciples “as friends are accustomed to console each other” (SPEX 222-224).

The risen Christ sends the women who first encounter him to tell the others that he is alive (Matthew 28:10). He commissions the disciples: “You are witnesses of these things” (Luke 24:48). Peter is called to “Feed my lambs... Take care of my sheep... Feed my sheep” (John 21:15-17). “Go make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19), and then Jesus makes a consoling promise: “I am with you till the end of age” (Matthew 28:20). This is the heart of the mystery of Jesus’ resurrection. Ignatius, without alteration, goes deeper into the Gospel by way of contemplation with exercises like the “triple colloquy” for a deeper personal relationship with Christ as well as to take seriously the life of Jesus. This is the very basic meaning of mission in the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius.

Postscript

An Ignatian prayer aims to find the will of God for salvation of all people, and not to disseminate theological or Christological doctrine. Ignatius proposes his Spiritual Exercises to help one grow in familiarity with God and God’s good work particularly embodied in the life of Jesus Christ. Through the SPEX, a person’s self-love, self-will and self-interest gradually merge into the will and the interest and the love of Jesus Christ.

On one hand, questions and refutations against the underlying doctrine of the Trinity and Christology are permanent reminders that our theology and Christology need to make sense in the language of the people and demand “clarity and precision.” Such possible polemics are indicative of a Trinitarian theology and Christology that are not understood in the language of the people, Christian or particularly non-Christian. On the other hand, the SPEX’s main goal for the salvation of all serves to be a spiritually creative method of prayer that can be shared even with Muslims to help deepen their relationship with Allah. In any case, the theological ground of an Ignatian prayer as well as the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola is Christian monotheism. Its rootedness in Jesus Christ as a supreme embodiment of total human submission to God (SPEX, Weeks 2,3,4) can also be an important topic for a comparative study, for example, about Jesus Christ in the Gospels and Christian living, and Isa Al-Masih in Al-Qur’an and the life of Muslims, while keeping in mind the particular goal, which is to deepen one’s relationship with God/Allah and to submit oneself to God’s will for the salvation of all people.

**For the Greater Glory of God
God-Centeredness in Ignatian Spirituality
and Islam: Finding Common Ground
for Building Dialogue**
Sigit Setyo Wibowo, S.J.

Abstract

Dialogue among believers of different religions is an important aspect in building a better world. Believers of different faith traditions have given much effort in finding common ground for mutual understanding and collective action. God-centeredness can offer a common ground for this dialogue to take place, especially between Muslims and those who follow Ignatian Spirituality in their way of life. There are certain aspects in Ignatian Spirituality and Islamic teachings that can support this dialogue, which may lead people to common actions for the greater glory of God.

Introduction

Many people have tried to foster dialogue between believers of different religions. Differences in beliefs or teachings of religions have been a cause of conflicts, including between Catholics and Muslims, for centuries. For this reason, many Catholics and Muslims have been trying to find something to serve as basis for build-

ing dialogue. Some people call this basis as common ground.¹ This essay aims to support this search for common ground by examining God-centeredness in Ignatian Spirituality² and Islam as a possible answer. Catholics – especially those who practice Ignatian Spirituality as their way of life – and Muslims can consider God-centeredness in their teachings and practices as something they have in common, which could become a basis for building dialogue among themselves. This does not mean that believers should abandon their differences because it is in understanding and embracing their differences that real dialogue can begin. However, similarities, as common ground, can help in building better dialogue. It can lead not only to better understanding but also to better actions together for the greater glory of God.

For easier and better understanding, this essay is divided into sections. It starts with a consideration of the general meaning or understanding of God-centeredness, and then proceeds to define God-centeredness in the context of Ignatian Spirituality, followed by an examination of fundamental expressions in Islam that show-

¹Some people prefer to use the term, “a common word.” A common word is an expression used by some people to promote interreligious dialogue. The origin of this expression is derived from the Qur’anic verse, “Say: ‘O People of the Scripture! Come to a common word as between us and you: that we worship none but God.’” (*Aal’Imran* 3: 64) This expression became a title of an open letter, “A Common Word between Us and You” from 138 Muslim leaders to Christian leaders. This letter was written in 2007 as a response to a lecture given by Pope Benedict XVI at the University of Regensburg on 12 September 2006. This lecture became a source of some misunderstandings among Christians and Muslims. This letter invites Christian and Muslim leaders to build dialogue based on the love of one God and the love of neighbor. Some information about this letter – and movement – and its development can be accessed from its website <https://www.acommonword.com>.

²Ignatian Spirituality is a spirituality based on the mystical experiences of St. Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556). St. Ignatius of Loyola was a brave Spanish soldier. His experience of being wounded during a war became a turning point for him to become a mystic. He wrote down his mystical experiences mostly in a book called the *Spiritual Exercises*. He, together with his friends, founded a Catholic religious group called the Society of Jesus. It is why some people call Ignatian Spirituality as Jesuit spirituality. However, this spirituality is not only for Jesuits, but also for other people. This spirituality has become one of the prominent spiritualities in Catholicism.

case God-centeredness. Lastly, it concludes by stressing how both Ignatian Spirituality and Islam give greater glory to God.

God-Centeredness

God-centeredness means that the center of everything is God. God becomes the central interest and the ultimate goal of human life. All human beings, basically, initially and ultimately, focus on the transcendent God and find in God their *raison d'être*.³ God-centeredness is based on the awareness that God is the Creator of everything, including human beings. From God, all come, and to God, all go. A God-centered person will base one's life, activities, decisions, attitudes and thoughts on God. That person lives in constant communion with God, offering everything and surrendering all of one's life to God. This God-centeredness is the foundation, the core belief and the goal of all monotheistic religions, and it is manifested in their teachings and daily practices.

Catholicism and Islam are God-centered religions. It is clear that God-centeredness as an expression of monotheism is a core concern of Islam as Hans Küng says.⁴ The core tenet of Islam is that there is no god but God or Allah. Principally, this is also clear in Catholicism. Nevertheless, Catholicism emphasizes God as Trinity,⁵ in which Jesus' life and mission is emphasized greatly. This is why most Catholics are Christ-centered in their lives in dealing with many things, including dialogue with believers of other religions. However, there are different approaches

³<https://www.encyclopedia.com/religion/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/theocentrism> (accessed February 10, 2021).

⁴Hans Küng, *Islam, Past, Present, and Future* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2004), 80.

⁵Trinity is the Catholic doctrine that teaches that God is one, but three consubstantial Persons: the Father, the Son—Christ—, and the Holy Spirit. This paper will not talk about this doctrine because it is a very complex doctrine. However, the use the word 'God' in this paper refers to God as one God, the Almighty and Eternal, without undermining the Trinity.

or emphases in Catholicism, such as Christ-centered approach, God-centered approach and Kingdom-centered approach, that can be used in dealing with believers of other religions.⁶ Even though most Catholics are in favor of a Christ-centered approach, a God-centered approach appears to be crucial in the matter of dialogue with believers of other religions, especially with monotheistic religions. This is not meant to undermine Christ's role, but to proclaim what Christ proclaims, which is God's love to human beings. This approach is based on the mystery of God, who is love and who wills the salvation of all people.⁷ God's love is operative always and everywhere. This means that God's salvation is universal because the grace of salvation is not exclusively for Catholics. It is God's desire to save all human beings. This approach becomes a crucial perspective for dialogue with believers of other religions, especially between Catholics and Muslims.

God-Centeredness in Ignatian Spirituality

Ignatian Spirituality is a spirituality based on the religious and mystical experiences of St. Ignatius of Loyola. It is manifested in many of his writings but nowhere more clearly than in the Spirituality

⁶Some conservative Catholics still hold Church-centeredness. There is an old axiom *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*—there is no salvation outside the Church. It is old tenet of Catholicism, which is Church-centeredness. Only those who join the Catholic Church will be saved. Only few people hold this tenet nowadays. Anne Dunn, *Trinity* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2005), 141. The majority of Catholics hold Christ-centeredness. Christ-centeredness is an approach to the teaching of the Catholic Church, which believes that the person and the work of Christ play a central role in Catholic faith. It is only through Christ that people can be saved. Pan-Chiu Lai, *Towards a Trinitarian Theology of Religions: A Study of Paul Tillich's Thought* (Kampen: Kok Pharos Publishing House, 1994), 37. Some people, especially those who are involved in dialogue with believers of monotheistic religions, hold God-centeredness as their approach. Many Catholics are not in favor with this approach because they think that this approach will make Catholics lose their identity as Christians. It is not worth sacrificing this basic tenet in Catholicism for the sake of dialogue. Pan-Chiu Lai, *Towards a Trinitarian Theology*, 35. Some people who want to include other religions—not only monotheistic—into God's salvation plan, hold Kingdom-centeredness. The reign of God is the decisive point of reference for the God's salvific will. Anne Dunn, *Trinity*, 161.

⁷Anne Dunn, *Trinity*, 162.

tual Exercises. Ignatius himself defines the Spiritual Exercises as every way of preparing oneself to seek and find God in one's life for one's salvation (Spiritual Exercises 1).⁸ From this meaning, the Spiritual Exercises are universal – not only for Catholics,⁹ but everyone who believes in God and wants to search for God in one's life will find it useful. For Ignatius, this God is the Trinitarian God. This is why some people call Ignatius' mysticism in the Spiritual Exercises primarily Trinitarian, and especially Christ-centered.¹⁰ However, as James W. Skehan says, even though Christ is the center, the Eternal God (Father) is still the all-embracing horizon of the Spiritual Exercises.¹¹ God is the center of Jesus' mission. The Spiritual Exercises are indeed Trinitarian or Christ-centered, but viewed from a bigger perspective, God is the focal point of reference for everything,¹² so the Spiritual Exercises are also God-centered. This God-centeredness can be seen clearly in the beginning, the Principle and Foundation, and at the end, the Contemplation to Attain Love, of the Spiritual Exercises¹³ as expounded in the following sections.

⁸George E. Ganss (trans.), *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius* (Gujarat: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 1993), 21. The quotes from the Spiritual Exercises are taken from the book translated by George E. Ganss.

⁹Jesuits in the Middle East Province have developed Spiritual Exercises for all, not only for Catholics. They use Ignatian methods in prayers. However, when they do the meditations or contemplations, mostly they do not use the life and mission of Jesus. They use some other more universal texts, so that any believer of any religion can meditate or contemplate on them. Yet, the purpose is still the same, to bring people close to God.

¹⁰James W. Skehan, *Place Me with Your Son, Director's Guide to Ignatian Spirituality in Everyday Life* (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 1994), 16.

¹¹James W. Skehan, *Place Me with Your Son*, 17.

¹²Hedwig Lewis, *At Home with God, A Spiritual Resource Development Programme Based on the Spiritual Exercises* (Gujarat: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 1991), 3.

¹³The Spiritual Exercises are divided into four "weeks." Each "week" may take more or less a week (seven days) of prayers. Each "week" – from the second to the fourth "week" – people are invited to contemplate on the life and mission of Jesus. Yet, before the first "week," there is a presupposition called the Principle and Foundation. Moreover, after the fourth "week," there is a section called Contemplation to Attain Love, which is a bridge linking the Spiritual Exercises to one's everyday life. James W. Skehan, *Place Me with Your Son*, 76.

Principle and Foundation

Ignatius writes at the beginning of the Principle and Foundation in the Spiritual Exercises:

“Human beings are created to praise, reverence, and serve God our Lord, and by means of doing this to save their souls.

The other things on the face of the earth are created for human beings, to help them in the pursuit of the end for which they are created.

From this it follows that we ought to use these things to the extent that they help us toward the end, and free ourselves from them to the extent that they hinder us from it” (Spiritual Exercises 23).¹⁴

This statement is not merely a theological one. It is based on Ignatius’ spiritual experience. Ignatius, during his recovery from his sickness, experienced a deep longing for Something in his heart. It was a desire towards Something bigger than himself, a desire for union with that Something.¹⁵ This longing or desire lifted Ignatius up to a different level of experience and life. This experience made him understand many things more than before. Moreover, it changed his life totally. Most people, if not all, experience what Ignatius experienced. This spiritual experience is univer-

¹⁴This is the first part of the Principle and Foundation. The second part: “To attain this it is necessary to make ourselves indifferent to all created things, in regard to everything which is left to our free will and is not forbidden.” Consequently, on our own part we ought not to seek health rather than sickness, wealth rather than poverty, honor rather than dishonor, a long life rather than a short one, and so on in all other matters. Rather, we ought to desire and choose only that which is more conducive to the end for which we are created” (Spiritual Exercises 23). This paper will not talk about all aspects of this statement, but it will focus on some aspects that are related to God-centeredness.

¹⁵William A. Barry, *Finding God in All Things, A Companion to the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius* (Notre Dame, Indiana: Ave Maria Press, 1991), 37.

sal—it does not depend on any religion.¹⁶ Yet, many people are not aware of this experience. Ignatius uses the word “God” —not Christ— to indicate this universal experience. For Ignatius, this is an experience of being in touch with God, a fundamental experience of God. For other people, this is an experience of desire for the One, the Absolute, the Almighty, or the Self. This experience leads people to be aware of human creature-hood. This means that human beings are creatures created by the Absolute, God. For this reason, human beings are totally dependent on God.¹⁷ Furthermore, this creation is because of love. God creates human beings in order to love them. Ignatius says that to respond to that love, human beings ought to love God by praising, reverencing and serving Him. This experience led Ignatius to write the statement previous, which describes the purpose of creation. Other things—which sometimes are worshiped as gods by human beings—are created for human beings to help them reach that purpose of creation.

The Principle and Foundation is a fundamental experience of human beings. Before entering into the Spiritual Exercises, Ignatius requires the person to have this fundamental experience, or at least to accept this truth. This is meant to ensure that the person is really a God-centered person, that God—who is love—is the center of that person’s life. This God-centeredness is the presupposition and basis of the Spiritual Exercises. Nevertheless, the Principle and Foundation is not only held when one does the

¹⁶William A. Barry, *Allowing the Creator to Deal with the Creature, An Approach to the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius Loyola* (New York: Paulist Press, 1994), 40. In his book, *Finding God in All Things*, William Barry gives some concrete examples of this experience. William A. Barry, *Finding God in All Things*, 34-35.

¹⁷Randolph Lumabao (trans.), *Lights Days of the Spiritual Exercises* (Manila: Jesuit Communications Foundation, 2005), 15.

Spiritual Exercises; it can be practiced in all human affairs.¹⁸ But the question is how to put God in the center of one's life. Tim Muldoon has this for an answer: "To praise, reverence, and serve God our Lord means to work with God at each moment, constructing our lives in such a way that all our choices, all our desires, all our hopes are oriented toward the love of God."¹⁹ It is a manifestation of one's faith in one's daily life. Thus, Ignatius' statement becomes a framework for how one lives life, the principle and foundation for each activity or action in one's life. By this, God becomes the center. God is the orientation of one's life. This is why the Principle and Foundation is God-centered.

Contemplation to Attain Love

At the end of the Spiritual Exercises, the person is invited to contemplate on the love of God for all beings. This contemplation²⁰ is called Contemplation to Attain Love (*Contemplatio ad Amorem*).

"I will consider how all good things and gifts descend from above; for example, my limited power from the Supreme and Infinite Power above; and so of justice, goodness, piety, mercy, and so

¹⁸ Jim Harbaugh, *A 12-Step Approach to the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius* (Lanham: Sheed & Ward, 1997), 8.

¹⁹ Tim Muldoon, *The Ignatian Workout, Daily Spiritual Exercises for a Healthy Faith* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2004), 72.

²⁰ For Ignatius, contemplation is a form of prayer, in which a person uses one's imagination—to see with eyes of imagination, to listen with ears of imagination, to feel with senses of imagination—to enter into a certain text or story and to gain fruits from that imagination what God wants to communicate to that person. Ignatius gives some details of contemplation in the Spiritual Exercises, for example in the Spiritual Exercises from numbers 91 to 94. George E. Ganss (trans.), *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius*, 53-54.

forth—just as the rays come down from the sun, or the rains from their source” (Spiritual Exercises 237).²¹

Just as in the Principle and Foundation, Ignatius uses a more universal word for this Contemplation to Attain Love. In this contemplation, the person is again invited to be aware of human creature-hood.²² God’s creation is not limited to human beings alone, but all things in this world are created by God. Everything is because of God and come from God. Thus, human beings are totally dependent on God. Everything created by God is a gift from God because of God’s love for human beings. The important idea in this contemplation is that because of God’s love, God gives and does everything for human beings by dwelling and still working in all things for their sake. God continually acts in God’s creation. This means that God is always in relation with human beings. God always manifests God-self to human beings in all things. For that, God can be found and encountered in every aspect of human life. When someone accepts the Principle and Foundation, that human beings are created to praise, reverence and serve God, and accepts that God can be found and encountered in everything, the person will have a desire to find God in all things in one’s daily life. This is the purpose of the Contemplation to Attain Love.²³ By finding God in all things or finding God’s gifts in one’s daily life, the person can always praise, reverence, and serve God, as the purpose of one’s creation. This contempla-

²¹Other points in the Contemplation to Attain Love are also important, such as: “I will consider how God labors and works for me in all the creatures on the face of the earth; that is, he acts in the manner of one who is laboring. For example, he is working in the heavens, elements, plants, fruits, cattle, and all the rest—giving them their existence, conserving them, concurring with their vegetative and sensitive activities, and so forth.” (Spiritual Exercises 236)

²²James W. Skehan, *Place Me with Your Son*, 75.

²³William A. Barry, *Finding God in All Things*, 20, 138.

tion always returns to the spirit of the Principle and Foundation. This helps people to be always aware of God's presence and of God's gifts in their lives, and to be more God-centered.

So the purpose of the Contemplation to Attain Love is clear: to find God in all things, to thank and praise God in one's daily life and to be more God-centered. The question now is how to apply or manifest this contemplation in one's daily life. By an awareness that God dwells and works in all things at all time, one can believe that God is involved in every event of one's life. Whether, for that person, that event is good or bad, God, together with God's will and gifts, can still be found. This is an integration and manifestation of one's faith with one's ordinary life.²⁴ However, it is easier to find God and thank Him in good things or events; it is more difficult to see and thank Him in the bad. Yet, God can still be found in bad events. For example, the pandemic has caused suffering to many people. Some blame God for this. However, one should believe that God and God's will can be found in this situation. God is still working in this difficult situation and wants all to work together with Him for a better situation. By this pandemic, one is made more aware of the importance of health. This is a gift from God that one should take care of. One can also see how people are very generous in solidarity, helping other people who are suffering. God teaches people to be generous to others. This pandemic has also opened people's eyes to the environmental crisis. One can see the importance of the environment as a gift from God, and to care and respect the environment because God also dwells and works in it. Thus, even in this difficult situation, one can still see and find God and God's will, and thank and

²⁴Juan Antonio Goyoaga, *An Experience of the Spiritual Exercises* (Manila: Cardinal Bea Institute, 1984), 140.

praise Him. God can be found in all things because God wants to manifest God-self, to communicate God's love and to engage in dialogue with human beings in every moment of human life.²⁵ By the examples above, one can see that this contemplation leads people to orient their lives to God, to find, see, praise and thank God in everything. It is because of this that the Contemplation to Attain Love is God-centered.

So both the Principle and Foundation, and the Contemplation to Attain Love are God-centered. Ignatius wrote these statements based on his spiritual experience that is universal. Moreover, he also uses more universal language to express his experience. These two parts of the Spiritual Exercises help people to be more God-centered in their lives as they are brought into awareness of their human creature-hood and human dependency on God. God, as the foundation and the giver of everything, can be found in everything, that people can always praise, reverence and serve God in their lives. For this reason, human life and actions should always be oriented to God for the greater glory of God (*Ad Maiorem Dei Gloriam*).

God-Centeredness in Islam

There is no doubt that Islam is an absolute monotheistic religion. For this matter, God or Allah is the center of everything in Islam. This is not only manifested in their teachings, but also in the daily activities and practices of the believers. Some common Arabic expressions used by Muslims that show God-centeredness or Allah-centeredness in Islam are *Bismillah* (In the name of Allah), *Allahu Akbar* (Allah is greater or Allah is the greatest), *Alhamdulillah*

²⁵William A. Barry, *Finding God in All Things*, 14.

(Praise be to Allah), *Masha Allah* (What Allah wills), *Insha Allah* (If Allah wills) and *Astaghfirullah* (I seek forgiveness in Allah). All these expressions are the manifestation of Muslims' faith—Allah-centeredness—in their daily lives. On God-centeredness in Islam, this essay will discuss only two expressions: *Bismillah* and *Alhamdulillah*. The discussion will focus on the *tafsir* or interpretation of these expressions that includes the meaning and the importance of these two expressions.

Bismillah

Bismillah is a profound expression in Islam. Shortened from the expression, *Bismillah al-Rahman al-Rahim*, it is often translated as in the name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate.²⁶ The whole expression is often called *Basmalah*.²⁷ This essay only analyzes the shortened expression, *Bismillah*. From its structure, *Bismillah* is derived from three words, *bi* (بِ), *ism* (مِسْمًا) and Allah (اللَّهِ). *Bi* means in, at, on, with, for, through or by (introducing an oath). *Ism* means name, appellation, reputation or prestige. Final-

²⁶ This essay will not talk about the meaning of *al-Rahman* and *al-Rahim* because these words are really complex and profound. Shortly, Al-Tabari explains the differences of these two. Both are Allah's names, and have a similar sense of meaning, which is someone who has mercy. However, the meaning of *al-Rahman* is more universal and deeper than *al-Rahim*. *Al-Rahman* is mercy and blessing for all creatures in this world and the next world. *Al-Rahim* can be attributed only to Allah. *Al-Rahim* is mercy and blessing for specific people in this world. *Rahim* can be attributed to human beings. W. F. Madelung (ed.), *The Commentary on the Qur'an*, Abu Ja'far Muhammad B. Jarir al-Tabari (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 55.

²⁷ In the Qur'an, *Basmalah* appears in the beginning of all *Suras*, except *Sura al-Tawbat* (*Sura* 9). Nevertheless, there are debates about the status of *Basmalah* in the Qur'an, whether it is part of the verses of the Qur'an or just an indication of the beginning of the *Sura*, and whether it should be recited loudly during prayer. Seyyed Hossein Nasr (ed.), *The Study Quran, A New Translation and Commentary* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2015), 125. *Basmalah* that is not in the beginning of the *Sura* appears only once in the Qur'an, in the *Sura al-Naml* (*Sura* 27: 30), when King Solomon sent a letter to the Queen of Saba. His letter begins with *Basmallah*. However, many people believe that *Basmallah* is part of the verses of the Qur'an, especially for the *Sura al-Fatiha* (*Sura* 1). Some people consider it the greatest verse of the Qur'an. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an, Volume One* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 210. Some claim that as *Basmalah* marks the beginning of the Qur'an, it marks the beginning of creation. Seyyed Hossein Nasr (ed.), *The Study Quran*, 124.

ly, Allah means God. Al-Tabari explains that the word *bi* usually needs a verb to indicate that an act imparts the significance of the saying. By prefacing his action with *Bismillah*, the speaker is reciting implicitly what he intends to do even without having to say it.²⁸ For example, when someone says *Bismillah* before eating, it means that one begins to eat in the name of Allah. The intention is that that person begins eating by naming Allah before anything else. By saying this, one calls down the divine blessing and consecrates the eating – or any act.²⁹ *Bismillah* is to consecrate all licit actions, which means that everything should be performed in the name of Allah and for Allah's sake.³⁰ It is very clear that *Bismillah* is Allah-centered.

Every Muslim should begin every activity in the name of Allah. Al-Tabari says that saying *Bismillah* is a *Sunna*. This means that it is a tradition of the Messenger that should be followed by Muslims and that will gain for them graces from Allah. Since Allah taught Muhammad, peace be upon him, to begin every important action by invoking the name of Allah by saying *Bismillah*, all Muslims should follow this tradition.³¹ Thus, everything they do, not only the important ones but also the simple ones, such as in their letters, speeches, ablution, prayers, meals, sexual intercourse,³² should begin with *Bismillah*. If an action does not begin with *Bismillah*, it means that that certain action is not important

²⁸W. F. Madelung (ed.), *The Commentary on the Qur'an*, 53.

²⁹B. Carra de Vaux, "Basmala", in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 1986), 1084.

³⁰Seyyed Hossein Nasr (ed.), *The Study Quran*, 126.

³¹W. F. Madelung (ed.), *The Commentary on the Qur'an*, 53.

³²"If anyone of you on having sexual relations with his wife said (and he must say it before starting) 'In the Name of Allah. O Allah! Protect us from Satan and also protect what You bestow upon us (i.e. the coming offspring) from Satan', and if it is destined that they should have a child then, Satan will never be able to harm that offspring." Muhammad Muhsin Khan (trans.), *The Translation of the Meanings of Sahih Al-Bukhari*, Vol. 1 (Riyadh: Darussalam, 1997), 139.

and will be cut off because it will not be blessed by Allah and will be spiritually incomplete.³³ When one says *Bismillah*, one not only offers one's action to Allah, but also shows how the human being is totally dependent on Allah, because if Allah does not bless that certain action, that action has no meaning. Everything depends on Allah. Furthermore, naming Allah in every action means that Allah is the principle and foundation of every human action. Allah is the center and orientation of everything. Thus, everything or every human action is oriented towards Allah. Moreover, for Mawdudi, there are three beneficial results for those who say *Bismillah*. First, it will restrain the person from committing a misdeed. Second, it ensures that one's starting point and one's mental orientation are good. Lastly, saying *Bismillah* before an activity ensures that Allah will bless and support that activity.³⁴ Thus, the expression of *Bismillah* is very important for Muslims. It is not only a manifestation of one's faith, but also a supplication for Allah's blessing for one's activity and life.

Alhamdulillah

Alhamdulillah is another Allah-centered or God-centered expression in Islam. Similar to *Bismillah*, Muslims say this in their daily lives to express their thankfulness to Allah. *Alhamdulillah* is a shortened expression of *Alhamdulillah Rabbilalamin*,³⁵ which is usually

³³B. Carra de Vaux, "Basmala", 1084.

³⁴Zafar Ishaq Ansari (trans.), *Towards Understanding the Qur'an*, Sayyid Abul A'la Mawdudi (London: The Islamic Foundation, 1988), 35.

³⁵*Rabb* is usually translated as Lord or Master. Al-Tabari explains that *Rabb* here is, "Master without peer: nothing is equal to His dominion. He is the One who arranges the affairs of His creatures through the bounties which He liberally bestows on them. He is the Owner to whom the creation and the command belong." W. F. Madelung (ed.), *The Commentary on the Qur'an*, 64. *Alam* means the worlds. "The worlds refer to various levels of cosmic existence and the communities of beings within each level. Some say it refers to four communities: human beings, jinn, angels and Satan, while others say it refers only to human beings and jinn." Seyyed Hossein Nasr (ed.), *The Study Quran*, 130.

called *Hamdalah*. Again, this essay will only treat the shortened expression, which is taken from two words, *hamd* (حَمْد) and Allah (اللَّهُ). In general, *hamd* means praise, thanks, commendation or laudation. Thus, *Alhamdulillah* is usually translated as praise be to Allah or thanks be to Allah. Al-Qurtubi, quoting Ja'far al-Sadiq, adds a further explanation on *hamd*. He says that *hamd* is from three letters, *ha* (ح), *mim* (م) and *dal* (د). *Ha* here means oneness (*wahdaniyya*), while *mim* means dominion (*mulk*) and *dal* means everlasting (*daymumiya*). All of these are Allah's attributes.³⁶ This means that intrinsically, *Alhamdulillah* is Allah-centered. Nevertheless, the *Al-* (*alif* and *lam*) before *hamd* has a special meaning. It indicates a comprehensive praise and includes all kinds and types of praise and thanks.³⁷ Therefore all kinds of praise and complete gratitude are oriented and belong to Allah alone. This *Al-hamd* is due to Allah, first and last.³⁸ *Al-hamd* is superior and more universal than other expressions for thanks or praise.³⁹

Every Muslim usually ends an activity with *Alhamdulillah*. This is not only to express that one finds God in a certain event, but also to express the belief that all that happened is because of Allah and from Allah. It is an awareness of human creature-hood

³⁶ Aisha Bewley (trans.), *Tafsir al-Qurtubi, Classical Commentary of the Holy Qur'an, Volume 1* (London: Dar Al Taqwa, 2003), 115.

³⁷ Aisha Bewley (trans.), *Tafsir al-Qurtubi*, 114.

³⁸ W. F. Madelung (ed.), *The Commentary on the Qur'an*, 61-62.

³⁹ Some scholars have debated on the difference between *hamd* and *shukr*—which is usually translated as thanks. *Shukr* or thanks is for something already received, but *Hamd* or praise can be for something either already received or to be received in the future. Seyyed Hossein Nasr (ed.), *The Study Quran*, 128. Al-Qurtubi says that *hamd* is used for the qualities of a person, even if that person has not done any prior action; while *shukr* is used for someone who has done something for that person. *Hamd* contains thanks and praise, while *shukr* is only thanks. Aisha Bewley (trans.), *Tafsir al-Qurtubi*, 115. Another debate is on which one is better to say, *Alhamdulillah* or *La ilaha illallah*—there is no god but God. Some people say that *Alhamdulillah* is better because it contains the oneness of Allah (*tawhid*) and also the praise to Allah, while *La ilaha illallah* contains only *tawhid*. Some people say the opposite, that *La ilaha illallah* is better. Aisha Bewley (trans.), *Tafsir al-Qurtubi*, 114. Some people even say that *Alhamdulillah* is better than the whole world. The whole world will disappear, but the praise to Allah will remain. Aisha Bewley (trans.), *Tafsir al-Qurtubi*, 113.

and total human dependency on God. Without Allah, one cannot do anything, not even to praise or say *Alhamdulillah*. One is able to praise Allah because Allah gives the ability to praise. Without the help of Allah, one is not able to give praise and thanks to Allah. Al-Qurtubi mentions three aspects of this praise or *Alhamdulillah*. The first aspect is that one accepts and acknowledges Allah as the giver, which means that one acknowledges that everything is a gift from Allah. The second is that one shows that one is pleased with what the One has given to that person. It means that everything Allah has given to that person is good. Lastly, one will not disobey Allah as long as that person has strength. Because Allah loves a person by giving everything that is good, that person should always obey Allah.⁴⁰ Furthermore, *Alhamdulillah* is not only an expression of praise and gratitude for what one has received, but as mentioned above, it is also for the things that one will receive in the future. Al-Tabari says that by saying *Alhamdulillah*, Allah will increase the bounty of that person.⁴¹ Again, like *Bismillah*, *Alhamdulillah* is not only a manifestation of one's faith that Allah is the Creator of everything—including human beings—and that Allah loves that person by giving everything which is good, but it is also a supplication for Allah's love and bounty for one's life. Thus, one totally depends on Allah in one's life, and should orient oneself only to Allah. This is why *Alhamdulillah* is a human expression of Allah-centeredness.

Bismillah and *Alhamdulillah* are expressions and manifestations of Muslims' faith in Allah or God in their daily lives. By saying these expressions, one is and can be more Allah-centered or God-centered. *Bismillah* is to begin any activity, to make one

⁴⁰ Aisha Bewley (trans.), *Tafsir al-Qurtubi*, 116.

⁴¹ W. F. Madelung (ed.), *The Commentary on the Qur'an*, 61.

aware that everything one does is in the name of Allah and for Allah. Everything is oriented towards Allah. *Alhamdulillah* is to end any activity, to make one aware of one's creature-hood, and that everything given by Allah is good, so one should praise and thank Allah for Allah's bounty and love. Thus, human life is to praise and glorify Allah who is the greater or the greatest (*Allahu Akbar*).

Conclusion

God-centeredness can serve as common ground for Catholics—especially those who hold Ignatian Spirituality as their way of life—and Muslims in building dialogue. There are some principles in Ignatian Spirituality—the Principle and Foundation, and the Contemplation to Attain Love—that are God-centered. In the same way, there are some expressions of faith in Islam—*Bismillah* and *Alhamdulillah*—that are also God-centered. These principles and expressions not only share the characteristic of being God-centered, they also have other similar elements. They both lead human beings to orient themselves towards God, with the same awareness of human creature-hood, total human dependency on God and God's love for human beings. This awareness leads human beings to actions, which are based and oriented towards God, as manifestation of faith in their daily lives. By thinking of these principles and expressions, human beings become aware that God is the foundation and goal of everything. Thus, every human action should be in the name of God and for God. This is expressed in the Principle and Foundation, and in *Bismillah*. Furthermore, because of God's love for human beings that he created them and the whole world for their sake, and gave them

everything as gifts, human beings should praise and thank God. This praise and thanksgiving are expressed in the Contemplation to Attain Love and in *Alhamdulillah*.

Spiritually, Catholics and Muslims can learn from each other how to be more God-centered through the above principles and expressions. On the one hand, Catholics may learn to “say” *Bismillah* and *Alhamdulillah* in their daily activities and actions with the same awareness as Muslims’ do. On the other hand, Muslims may deepen and strengthen their faith by learning from the Principle and Foundation, and the Contemplation to Attain Love how to be more aware of God’s love for them and find God’s presence in all things and in their daily lives. This has implications on a practical level. If Catholics and Muslims are aware that everything comes from God and for God, and that they should love and praise God because God loved them first, then they can agree on some common actions based on that awareness. For example, Catholics and Muslims, together, can take care of the environment based on the awareness that God created the world for human beings as a gift. Thus, they should thank God for God’s love by working together to care for the environment. Another example is how Catholics and Muslims can cooperate in acts of social charity, especially in this time of pandemic. They can do this based on the awareness that God loves them, so they should thank and love God by loving those who are suffering. There are plenty of common actions that can be done based on the same awareness. The point is that every action should be based on God and for the greater glory of God—*Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam* and *Allahu Akbar*.

CHAPTER 4
DIALOGUE OF PRAYER
AND SPIRITUALITY

God's Manifestation through Nature: Lessons from Muslim and Christian Mystics in the Time of the Pandemic

Heru Prakosa, S.J.

Abstract

Some responses to the survey by the Loyola Hall Research Centre have pointed out that the Covid-19 pandemic occurs primarily as a result of an ecological crisis. It has taken place due to the problems of the one-sided connectedness human beings have with themselves, others, nature and God. This challenge has also been highlighted by several Muslim and Christian mystics. As such, nature becomes the locus in which God wants to disclose Himself and where we can enter into the mystery of incarnation and redemption. In accordance with the Universal Apostolic Preferences, ecological conversion is indeed a necessity.

Introduction

In June 2020, at the time of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Loyola Hall Research Centre in Lahore, Pakistan launched a survey using Google Forms.¹ The survey was formulated in English and Indonesian, and was circulated mostly in Pakistan and Indonesia. Some respondents however also sent the survey to their colleagues living in other countries.

The survey consisted of 22 multiple choice and eight open-ended questions. They can be summarized as follows: In the time of the Covid-19 pandemic, how can we identify our faith dynamic

¹https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSewtcwWpTZp8CjmJpx4J9WwckDzLfKltx-LkKksP8_OdraeFg/viewform

on the levels of understanding, expression and praxis? What is our understanding of God, human being and the universe today? How do we understand such relationships? How do we express our faith today? How do we put our faith into praxis? Could God be using this pandemic to awaken us to find new ways of living out our faith?

From 6 June until 9 July 2020, we received 365 responses, of which 270 came from Indonesia, 80 from Pakistan and the rest from Sri Lanka, India, Kenya, Canada, Germany, Italy and Vietnam. Females consisted the majority with 199 respondents (55%) whereas male respondents were 166 (45%). In terms of religious tradition, 180 respondents were Muslims, 177 were Christians, three were Hindu, one was a Buddhist, one subscribed to a local religion and three respondents identified as "other." Most of them had a bachelor's or master's degree and were either students or lecturers.

Learning from Muslim Mystics

To start with, I shall raise some reactions expressed by a respondent from Pakistan to the open-ended questions: "Who is God according to you in the time of the Covid-19 pandemic? And who is a human being?" The respondent said:

"Therefore, the forced lockdowns, the forced isolation [are] a sign to human beings that we need to go back to these religious practices in order to come closer to God. Ibn 'Arabi states, we need to be "alone with the Alone." In Islam, this practice of isolating oneself from the world to worship God is called *khalwa*."

The human beings' place in the cosmos is to bow their heads in front of their Lord, knowing that all Power and Might belong to God. This does not mean that they should stop creatively engaging with the world to find solutions to the common problems confronting humanity. But the most powerful way to become truly human is to be godlike. One cannot be godlike unless one gets to know oneself. To know oneself, one needs to be, according to Ibn 'Arabi, alone with the Alone.

"Alone with the Alone" refers to a book written by Henri Corbin on Ibn 'Arabi (1165-1240), a Muslim mystic born in Murcia, Spain. The book speaks about Ibn 'Arabi's thoughts on the relationship between God and creatures, i.e. all existing beings in the universe.

By bringing together the name of Ibn 'Arabi, the notion of *khalwa* and "alone with the Alone," perhaps the respondent is suggesting that the lockdown caused by the Covid-19 pandemic can be considered a time of retreat, to distance ourselves from our routines, and renew our way of understanding, way of discerning and way of proceeding, alone with God Himself, especially in re-examining our relationship with all of creation.

According to Ibn 'Arabi, the relationship of creatures with their creator is necessary inasmuch as God Himself wishes to be known. God, who is inconceivable and whose attributes are self-existence, according to the *Hadith Qudsi*, "was a hidden treasure" and "loved to be known."² Based on that Hadith, God created creation so that He would be known.

The relationship between the Creator and the creatures will take place when human beings develop a vision of *theophany*, or

the manifestation of the divine or the sacred in a perceptible way through the things we encounter in the universe. Ibn 'Arabi reminds us, however, that the initiative always comes from God:

“If then you perceive me, you perceive yourself
But you cannot perceive me through yourself.
It is through my eyes that you see me and see yourself,
through your eyes you cannot see me.”³

The nature of a human being is described by Ibn 'Arabi as *al-ḥaqq al-khalq*, which demonstrates the image of the universe and the divine. With a humanity realm and a divinity realm, human existence is inseparable from the existence of the universe. As such, the universe is like a mirror through which the splendor of the Creator manifests. In turn, human beings are responsible for polishing the mirror so the image of God can be reflected in the diversity of creation.⁴ The cosmos itself is God's shadow. In addition, the universe can also serve as the medium through which God the Creator discloses Himself by manifesting the attributes of His names. In sum, God calls human beings to be the guardian of the universe and the vicegerent to preserve His creatures.

Going back to the survey, a high percentage of the respondents said that in the pandemic God is present immanently. On the question, “How do I experience the presence of God in the time of the Covid-19 pandemic?” the results are:

| | Pakistan, etc. | Indonesia |
|-------------------------|----------------|-----------|
| Transcendence | 14.8 % | 16.7 % |
| Immanence | 47.4 % | 27.1 % |
| Transcendence-immanence | 37.8 % | 56.2 % |

According to Ibn ‘Arabi, the universe can be regarded as a macrocosm and human beings as microcosm or the miniature of the universe. Among all creatures, human beings are superior because in them God has brought together all the beings that are scattered in the universe. All created beings receive the appearances of God’s names and attributes in a partial way, while human beings receive the appearance of all God’s names and attributes in a holistic manner.

Ibn ‘Arabi’s view of the human being in relation to God the Creator and the creatures cannot be separated from his main doctrine commonly known as the Oneness of Being (*waḥdat al-wujūd*).⁵ On this point, Ibn ‘Arabi speaks about the perfect human (*al-insān al-kabīr*) who is able to pursue self-knowledge and the knowledge of God through inner knowledge (*ma’rifā*) in order to entail all cosmic grandeur. The perfect human serves as a medium between God and the cosmos, between the Creator and His creatures.

Recalling the survey, the response from an Indonesian respondent below seems to correspond to the idea elaborated by Ibn ‘Arabi:

“Man is the image of God, a person who is given the trust and responsibility to preserve the integrity of God’s good creation.... God is one. Humanity is one. Truth is one. Nature is one. His will

and love permeate all things. Not just humans but nature and all existing beings are correlated to each other.”

The ways in which the environment communicates, as pointed out by the respondent above, have been highlighted by a ninth century Sufi mystic, Ali Al-Khawas, whose idea was also quoted by Pope Francis in his encyclical, *Laudato Si'*.

“The initiate will capture what is being said,
when the wind blows,
the trees sway,
water flows,
flies buzz,
doors creek,
bird sings,
or in the sound of stirring flutes,
the sighs of the sick,
the groans of the afflicted.”⁶

Al-Khawas offers his reflection on nature from the perspective of a mystic by stressing “the need not to put too much distance between the creatures of the world and the interior experience of God.”⁷ The point here is to make us aware of the connectedness of God with the universe, i.e. the immanent presence of God in our daily life. God continues to be present in the process of creation, including in the rustling of leaves, thunder, rainfall. In sum, there is a mystical meaning to be found in a leaf, in a mountain trail, in a dewdrop, in a poor person’s face. “He’s inviting all human beings to transcend, to go out of themselves and therefore to im-

⁶ Eva De Vitray-Meyerovitch [éd.], *Anthologie du Soufisme*, Paris, 1978, p. 200.

⁷ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, art. 233: the footnote 159.

prove the relationship that we have with our people, with the Earth, with God.”⁸

Another Muslim Sufi who developed his thought on natural mysticism was Shihab al-Din Yahya Suhrawardi (1154-1191). By combining the ideas of Mazdeism and Neoplatonism, based on the principle of emanation, he developed a philosophy of Illuminationism (*'isyrāq*) to bridge the connectedness of the transcendental God and the cosmos – both macrocosm and microcosm. In his opinion, everything on earth must be conceived as the manifestation of the light of God, or the Supreme Light of lights (*nūr al-anwār*). The Supreme Light of lights is the source of all motion, which has a central role for the formation of all that exist.

Suhrawardi classified nature into four types,⁹ namely: the realm of reason or intellect (*al-'aql*), the realm of the soul (*al-nafs*), the realm of physical matter (*al-jism*), and the realm of suspended imagery (*al-mitsāl al-mu'allaq*). The first three realms have often been discussed by some of his predecessors, while the fourth nature is a new innovation discovered by al-Suhrawardi. This fourth type refers to a *mundus imaginalis* that operates like an intermediary realm, or an “isthmus” between the world of pure light and the world of darkness.

According to Suhrawardi, the light of all light gives off “light” because of its position and the rays scattered throughout the cosmos. It is through these rays that the cosmos maintains its unity, motion and change. The universe is an eternal radiance from the first source whose position is higher than any matter. Since all creatures are part of an archetype of pure light, then nature is

⁸<https://time.com/3927357/pope-francis-ali-al-khawas/>

⁹Roxanne D. Marcotte, “Suhrawardī’s Realm of The Imaginal, in <https://ip.ras.ru/uplfile/smirnov/ishraq/2/8marco.pdf>

inherently alive as well as sacred. In this manner, the universe is conceived to be like a human being, to be a person with sensory perception, imagination, rational thinking and spiritual intuition.

Almost in the same era, a prominent Sufi on natural mysticism was born in India, Mu'in al-Din Muhammad Chishti (1142-1230). Chishti founded one of the most influential Sufi schools in India called the Chishtiyya, whose theology somehow shares a common view with Hindu philosophy, i.e. the vital livingness of the elements and the status of the human form as a microcosm encapsulating the breadth, depth and range of the whole universe.¹⁰ The spiritual responses to the ecological crisis lies in the acknowledgment of the sacredness of nature or environment because it is the place where we can find truth. Consequently, the conservation and protection of the natural environment is regarded as a spiritual priority.

Learning from Christian Mystics

One can definitely mention several important figures in Christianity who were concerned about the sanctity of the universe and all life that God has placed in it. One of them is the Italian friar and mystic Francis Assisi (1181-1226), who lived in the period that was not too different from Ibn 'Arabi's time. He is well known for the "Canticle of Creatures":

"Praised be You, my Lord,
with all Your creatures,
especially Sir Brother Sun,
who is the day and through whom You give us light."

¹⁰Pir Zia Inayat Khan, "Persian & Indian Vision of the Living Earth", in Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee (ed.), *Spiritual Ecology: The Cry of the Earth*, California: The Golden Sufi Center, 2013, p. 228.

Another name worthy of honor and esteem in such an issue is Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955). As a French Jesuit paleontologist, philosopher, theologian and mystic, he composed a Hymn of the Universe, through which he envisions human beings as part of creation. Along with all creatures, human beings pursue a progress that reaches the summit and culmination of creation.¹¹

“Blessed be you, harsh matter, barren soil, stubborn rock:
you who yield only to violence,
you who force us to work if we would eat...
Blessed be you, perilous matter, violent sea, untamable passion:
you who unless we fetter you will devour us....”

Why does Teilhard compose a hymn on physical matter, like rocks, ethers, atoms? By physical matter, he does not mean what people usually understand it to be. In his mind, there is no duality of spirit and matter. Instead, physical matter is the matrix of spirit. In a concrete sense there is no matter and spirit. All that exists is “matter becoming spirit.” There is neither spirit nor matter in the world; the stuff of the universe is spirit-matter.¹²

Physical matter along with spirit are so concomitant that together they form a *Weltstoff* and serve as spiritual energetic forces for the whole universe. Consequently, the universe has a creative power that makes it move towards its completion. Just as human beings are alive as a result of the spiritual energetic forces, so is the universe. The main point here is that everything in the universe is alive and sentient with vitality. But then, where is the position of the human being in this line of progress? Teilhard maintains

¹¹ Teilhard de Chardin, *Hymn of the Universe*, (transl. Gerald Vann), New York: Perennial Library Harper & Row, 1969, p. 65.

¹² Teilhard de Chardin, *Human Energy*, (transl. J. M. Cohen), New York: A Helen and Kurt Wolff Book Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc. 1969, pp. 57-58.

that in the movement of the cosmos towards the highest degree of consciousness, human beings are situated at the topmost point. It is clear because human beings, according to him, are the last-formed, most complex and most conscious of "molecules."¹³ The basic characteristic of human beings, the root of all their perfections, is their gift of consciousness in the second degree: "Man not only knows; he knows that he knows."¹⁴

Calling to mind the survey, below is the result of the multiple choice question, "What has caused the Covid-19 pandemic?"

| | Pakistan, etc. | Indonesia |
|--|----------------|-----------|
| Disrespect for God's prescriptions | 39.0 % | 31.5 % |
| Disrespect for the natural environment | 42.1 % | 52.6 % |
| Disrespect for the other fellows | 18.9 % | 15.9 % |

A big number of respondents are thus aware that the pandemic is partly caused by disrespect for the natural environment. This is related to ecological devastation.¹⁵ Teilhard reminds us that the root of human being is not outside this universe.¹⁶ In addition, "plants and animals are excessively fragile in their structure."¹⁷

¹³ Teilhard de Chardin, *The Future of Man*, (transl. Norman Denny), New York: Harper & Row, 1964, p. 59.

¹⁴ Teilhard de Chardin, *The Future of Man*, p. 126.

¹⁵ Cf. Charles Beraf, "Covid-19 is Another Proof of Ecological Devastation", in *The Jakarta Post*, 31 March 2020.

¹⁶ Teilhard de Chardin, *The Divine Milieu*, (transl. Bernard Wall), New York: Harper & Row, 1968, p. 59

¹⁷ Teilhard de Chardin, *The Future of Man*, p. 250.

Consequently, it is necessary for human beings to preserve and sustain the integrity of the natural ecosystem.

Teilhard affirms that human beings along with other existing beings of the universe are “drawn” ultimately to the Omega, God himself. “God draws them to the full extent that they are capable of being drawn.”¹⁸ Just as human beings experience being drawn so close as to achieve unification, so the universe as a whole is also being drawn towards an ultimate union. All these become possible because of the consciousness that potentially has been present in all existing beings of the universe and continues to develop as well as proceed towards its fulfillment in the Omega. The universe thus becomes the field of God’s presence, the cosmic spiritual center in which “God is all in all.”¹⁹ This corresponds to the biblical passage²⁰ and *the Spiritual Exercises*:

“God dwells in creatures:
in the elements giving them existence,
in the plants giving them life,
in the animals conferring upon them sensation,
in man bestowing understanding....
God works and labors for me
in all creatures upon the face of the earth.”²¹

Teilhard’s conviction above, in fact, corresponds to the responses found in the survey. The responses confirm Teilhard’s argument that the total oneness of all beings in the universe lives in the divine milieu. The idea of the divine presence in all things can also

¹⁸ Teilhard de Chardin, *Activation of Energy*, (transl. Rene Hague), New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971, 146.

¹⁹ In Latin: *Erit in omnibus omnia Deus*. Teilhard de Chardin, *The Future of Man*, p. 308. Cf. Teilhard de Chardin, *The Divine Milieu*, p. 114.

²⁰ 1 Cor. 15: 28.

²¹ *The Spiritual Exercises*, # 235-236.

be seen from the responses to the multiple choice question, "Concerning cosmos or the universe, which understanding is more significant and relevant?"

| | Pakistan, etc. | Indonesia |
|---|----------------|-----------|
| The universe exists in relation to itself | 6.3 % | 1.9 % |
| The universe exists for serving the needs of human beings | 11.6 % | 3.6 % |
| The universe exists in relation to God and all created beings | 82.1 % | 95.1 % |

The challenges raised by Teilhard were also Merton's concerns. Thomas Merton (1915-1968) was not a theologian, but his poetries or poems clearly show topics and themes on natural mysticism, even becoming an important part of his theology.

Merton spent 27 years in the Trappist Abbey of Gethsemani, Kentucky, USA (1941-1968). During that period, he witnessed not only God's presence in a hidden way but especially God's communication to him through nature. There he realized the importance of connectedness, not only with his own self and God, but also with the world as well as with nature. Instead of being a place to escape from people and nature, the Abbey became a venue that called him to reach a deeper level of prayer in the form of natural mysticism. As such, natural mysticism is a type of connectedness that emphasizes an awareness of God's presence in the cosmos, in such a way that it gives rise not only to a deep awareness of the sanctity of nature but also to the human responsibility to nature.

It was in the Abbey of Gethsemani that he underwent an en-

counter with God through animals and plants, through which he also reached self-awareness and self-consciousness.

“Out here in the woods
I can think of nothing except God
and it is not so much that I think of Him either.
I am aware of Him as of the sun and the clouds
and the blue sky and the thin cedar trees.”²²

It is clear here that nature helps him not only in providing “a material object” but also “a formal object.” This means that nature served for Merton as the content of his poetries or poems, at the same time a means for him to experience God’s presence around Him. Nature became a great source and space for Merton for contemplation, where he continued to find his true self hidden in God’s presence.

Undoubtedly, Merton’s poems contain a theological reflection and an invitation to enter into a deeper relationship with Christ through creation. In “Song for Nobody” (1963), for example, he makes an allegorical or metaphorical comparison between Christ and a yellow flower:

“A single yellow flower
becomes a gentle sun
in whose dark eye
someone is awake”²³

²²Thomas Merton, *The Collected Poems of Thomas Merton*, New York: New Directions, 1977, pp. 344-345. Quoted from, Rachel Marian Knight-Messenger, “Mystical Theology and Ecological Theology: The Role of Nature Mysticism in Building Ecological Theology and Ethics” (Thesis), https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/bitstream/1807/107429/3/KnightMessenger_Rachel_M_202011_PhD_Thesis.pdf

²³Thomas Merton, *The Collected Poems of Thomas Merton*, pp. 337- 338. Quoted from, Monica Weis, *The Environmental Vision of Thomas Merton*, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 2011, p. 110.

Through his contemplation, Merton comes to realize that our attitudes toward nature are merely the extension of our attitudes toward ourselves and toward each other. Human beings are free to be at peace with themselves and others as well as nature. He affirms the beauty of creation but also the suffering of creatures. For him, the struggle for the survival of nature is necessary. His concerns about selfish attitude, environmental devastation and civil rights led him to a commitment to, solidarity with and compassion for human beings, other beings and the Ultimate Being.

Merton's attention to the crisis of human violence against one another and other creatures can also be found in some of his letters, one of which was addressed to Rachel Carson. In the fall of 1962, Carson, a marine biologist, published her book *Silent Spring*, which deplores the effects of pesticides on nature, especially on insects. In his letter responding to Carson's book, Merton lamented his own participation in destroying the environment around the Abbey. Merton was able to diagnose a deep problem, that when ecological problems arise, human beings often create further problems in their responses. Unfortunately, human beings are not always aware of their limitations.

This paradox of plainness and exalted dignity also appears in Merton's poetry. In "O Sweet Irrational Worship," for example, he exclaims:

"I have become light,
Bird and wind!

My leaves sing.
I am earth, earth.²⁴

²⁴Quoted from, Monica Weis, *The Environmental Vision of Thomas Merton*, p. 18.

This is also the reason why Merton refers to his current time—in fact this current time—as a suicidal age. There is only one remedy, according to him: it is that human beings should make a self and social transformation, particularly by sustaining the environment.

In Light of the Universal Apostolic Preferences

Some Muslim and Christian mystics share the idea that the universe is sacred because it is the locus of divine manifestation. The universe came to exist and continually proceeds to move towards its culmination in the ultimate union with God Himself. Such a conviction also corresponds to the responses received in the survey.

Here is the result of the multiple choice question, “Concerning cosmos/ universe, what understanding do you have?”

| | Pakistan, etc. | Indonesia |
|--|----------------|-----------|
| The universe is more important | 9.4 % | 6.7 % |
| The universe is less important | 11.6 % | 1.1 % |
| The universe is as important as human beings | 79.0 % | 92.2 % |

Through the Universal Apostolic Preferences promoted by the Society of Jesus, a call to cherish and renew creation has been issued.

“Creation today is crying out as never before, laboring to be set free (Romans 8). Today’s environmental crisis is impacting in a particular way on the poor and vulnerable. Action is needed urgently by Christians and by all people of good will. Whole nations and peoples need an ecological conversion if we are to be honest custodians of this wonderful planet.”²⁵

The Covid-19 pandemic can be a time of learning. The more human reason adequately understands the nature of the cosmic being, the more it recognizes the divine presence. A Sufi quote says: “God sleeps in the rock, dreams in the plant, stirs in the animal, and awakens in man.”²⁶ In my opinion, similar to what occurs to a computer, the pandemic may have marked a time of “defragmentation.” A process of reorganizing the universe has occurred in such a way that the related pieces of the ecosystem are put back together, with God, with Creation, with each other and with ourselves.

Nature is the *locus theologicus* related to incarnation and resurrection. Regarding the top-down dynamics of incarnation, we believe that the incarnation of God happened when God decided to materialize and to expose who God is. We are called to participate with God who has created and brought all good. To borrow Richard Rohr’s expression:

“Two thousand years ago marked the human incarnation of God in Jesus, we Christians believe, but before that there was the first and original incarnation through light, water, land, sun, moon,

²⁵<https://www.jesuits.global/uap/caring-for-our-common-home/> Rom. 8: 1, “We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies.”

²⁶The quote is usually mentioned in reference to Ibn `Arabi. Cf. <https://www.pepquotes.com/ibn-arabi-quotes>

stars, plants, trees, fruit, birds, serpents, cattle, fish and every kind of wild beasts This was the cosmic Christ (Eph. 1: 9)."²⁷

Concerning the bottom-up dynamics of resurrection, we believe in the process of re-creation. We are invited to get involved with Christ who continues to work for redemption. John Duns Scotus (1266–1308) says that God has never stopped thinking, dreaming and creating the Eternal Christ Mystery. Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) adds that the immense diversity and pluriformity of this creation more perfectly represents God than any one creature alone or by itself.²⁸

The arguments developed by Muslim and Christian mystics, along with the result of the survey, highlight the point of connect-edness, that creatures exist only in dependence on each other, to complete each other, in the service of each other.²⁹ We are challenged to make an ecological conversion based on the faith and the wisdom we embrace that Christ Himself has a cosmic body which extends throughout the universe.³⁰

Ireneus (d. 202) once said, *Gloria Dei vivens Homo, vita autem hominis visio Dei*—The glory of God is a living human being; and the life of human being consists in beholding God. It can be modified: “The glory of God is the living created beings; and the life of the created beings consists in beholding God.” This *adagium*, surely, can be the response to Ibn ‘Arabi’s interrogation questions below:

²⁷ Richard Rohr, “Creation as the Body of God”, in Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee (ed.), *Spiritual Ecology: The Cry of the Earth*, p. 257.

²⁸ Richard Rohr, “Creation as the Body of God”, in Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee (ed.), *Spiritual Ecology: The Cry of the Earth*, pp. 257–258.

²⁹ *Laudato Si'*, art. 86; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, art. 340.

³⁰ Teilhard de Chardin, “Cosmic Life”, in *Writings in Time of War*, (transl. Rene Hague), New York: Harper & Row, 1968, p. 58.

“Dearly beloved! I have called you so often and you have not heard me. I have shown myself to you so often and you have not seen me. I have made myself fragrance so often, and you have not smelled me, saporous food, and you have not tasted me. Why can you not reach me through the object you touch or breathe me through sweet perfumes? Why do you not see me? Why do you not hear me? Why? Why? Why?”³¹

³¹Henri Corbin, *Alone with the Alone: Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabi*, pp. 174-7

The Way to Inner Freedom

Gerardette Philips, R.S.C.J.

Abstract

Finding ways to share the depths of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius with Muslims using the spiritual depths of Sufism is important, especially in this time when more than half of the world's population are followers of Islam and Christianity. Sharing the Way of Inner Freedom from our faith traditions helps us to understand each other, even if the path we follow is not the same. The journey together can be mutually freeing as well as a gift for our world today.

Introduction

When I look back, I can remember very vividly the time when I became attracted to “the indwelling presence of God who inhabits my heart” as well as the presence that lives on in the heart of those other than myself. This quest of going within and beyond left me feeling both spiritual joy as well as spiritual restlessness. I knew that there was something bigger than everything else that was drawing me inward as well as beyond.

For several years now I have had the privilege of entering into my sacred and divine space through the guidance of St. Ignatius' Spiritual Exercises. I have also had the joy of sharing mostly with lay and religious women and men the Spiritual Exercises through the 30-day and 8-day retreats and the 19th Annotation (Retreat in Daily life). Over this time of being director as well as directee, I have come to realize more and more keenly that the language, imagery and process of a thirst for God in the Spiritual Exercises

help meet one of its goals, that is, to enable the retreatants to grow in spiritual freedom. In Ignatius' words, the Exercises "...have as their purpose the conquest of self and the regulation of one's life in such a way that no decision is made under the influence of any inordinate attachment" (SE 21).

There are different propositions for the purpose of the Spiritual Exercises. Most commentators say it is for the one making the Exercises to come to some sort of decision. While others suggest that the Exercises are meant to be a school of prayer or an instrument for bringing one into union with God. John English, in his book, "Spiritual Freedom," says:

"It seems that a reliable decision demands closer union with God, and that the closer one draws to God, the more often and more stringently God demands decisions in response. The key to both of these approaches to the Exercises is a person's need to become free."¹

What about the journey into the Presence in the heart of others to the beyond? That God was waiting to encounter me in the heart of Muslims became more and more clear to me. The spiritual joy and spiritual restlessness now began to find its answers for me in Sufism. A spiritual understanding of religion based on the journey of relationships in mutual love between God and human beings, love between human beings, and love between human beings and the entire universe. In the words of Rumi, the 13th century Sufi mystic, "In the end a person tires of everything except heart's desiring and soul's journeying"²

¹English, John J., S.J., *Spiritual Freedom*. Chicago, 1995 p.18.

²Vaughan-Lee, L. *Sufism: The Transformation of the Heart*. The Golden Sufi Center, California, 1997 p.161.

So far, a considerable amount of work has been done between the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius and Zen. Ruben Habito, a Zen Master as well as an expert in Ignatian Spirituality, brings these paths to enlightenment together in his book, "Zen and the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius Loyola." A similar work has been done between Ignatius and Buddhism. The new anthology, "The Pilgrim and the Sage," edited by Fr. Ari C. Dy, S.J. features essays of about 10 authors (nine of whom are Jesuits), which explore the meeting points between Ignatian Spirituality and Buddhism. Too, Jesuits, mainly in the Indian subcontinent, have seen and put into practice the Spiritual Exercises in Hinduism. One such article is by Pavulraj Michael SJ in the journal, "Studies in Interreligious Dialogue 28/1, 59-76 on Finding God in All Things," which is a dialogue between the Bhagavad Gita and the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius. This list can go on but what strikes me is that very little work has been done with St. Ignatius and Islam or Muslims.

The Jesuits Among Muslims in Asia network wish to mark this Ignatian Year by "sharing and deepening our charism of Ignatian Spirituality with regard to the Muslim community." A call to turn our gaze to the Muslim community not just in Asia but in our world continues to require such a response. This is especially urgent if we desire peace between more than half of the world's population that is made up of Muslims and Christians.

This essay is a humble attempt to respond to the above invitation. It will show how the depths of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius can be shared with Muslims using the spiritual depths of Sufism. This journey together can be mutually freeing. I address the topic in five points as it develops. The first is to have

a look at the desire for freedom. The second and third points are to bring forth the richness that is in the movement of the mystical way of St. Ignatius in the Spiritual Exercises and its similar movements in the Way of Sufism. The fourth is to journey together to freedom using the dynamics of the Spiritual Exercises and the Way of the Sufis. This journey of freedom will be offered in the final and fifth point as a gift for the world.

The Desire for Freedom

Recently at a peace workshop my colleagues and I did for children, youth, adults and seniors, we asked them to draw a symbol of themselves. In every group, several of them drew birds or kites flying, or planes up in the air. Three children drew Superman! When asked to share their symbols, all of them spoke of being free. Flying is one of humans' oldest inner psychological processes. We all seek to fly, to be free from our finite and restricted states of mind, the confines of living in a physical body, the pressure of existing in a community of rules. So, freedom may mean different things to different people, depending upon the context of their individual life. We realized that whatever the age, everyone craves for some kind of personal liberation. We saw that essentially, as human beings, we are living within certain limitations. We are a limited entity. We also saw desire within us to be a little more than what and who we are. A longing to touch something beyond us, to be in a boundless space. Is it the Ultimate? God? Truth? Freedom?

When reflecting on this I wondered why it is so difficult to imagine the beyond. It is easy to imagine something that is mea-

surable, but how can we aspire for something that we are unable to imagine?

In this pandemic situation, we are offered so many ways to be free, but unfortunately, we do not see what prevents us from being free. Hence to become free, it may help to see the “ropes” which bind us. If we cut these ropes, there will be some sense of freedom. Then we realize, there is another set of ropes that binds us, perhaps even more strongly. If we cut that, there will be freedom. But then we notice there is another set, and another, yet another and so on. It does not matter how many sets of ropes bind us, there must be a point where we cut enough of them till nothing binds us anymore. The number may be big, but still, it cannot be infinite. Only freedom can be infinite. What binds us has its limitations but there are also possibilities. Only freedom, inner freedom, can be limitless. On our journey, our growth in freedom will be determined by what binds us now and how to transcend it.

The Mystical Way of St. Ignatius

The mystical experience of Ignatius has inspired a spirituality which can be seen as a kind of ordinary, everyday mysticism. This is based on a great love that directed his life to do everything for the greater glory of God. I like to focus on those characteristics of Ignatius’ own experience of God, which form a spirituality and approach to prayer that is called “Ignatian.” Ignatius’ experience of God as he described in his formation period when in Manresa was that God was dealing with him in the same way a schoolteacher deals with a child while instructing him.³ His

³Harvey Egan, *An Anthology of Christian Mysticism*. Liturgical Press, Minnesota, 1991.

experience of God may be an invitation to many other men and women today, whatever their faith may be, to be aware of how God deals with them.

Ignatius is better known as a spiritual director, advisor, counter-reformer, founder of the Society of Jesus, leader, missionary and educator. His apostolic achievements and those of his Jesuit companions from his time to the present day somehow overshadow the importance of his mysticism. However, the Autobiography of St. Ignatius that he dictated with much hesitation to a Jesuit companion, an intimate friend, and his spiritual diary show that Ignatius was undeniably a mystic. His own life of purification, illumination and transforming union to God forms the very foundation of the Spiritual Exercises. This is Ignatius' legacy, which has profoundly influenced the history of Christian spirituality.

In the Exercises structured in four weeks, we find three themes that are significant in the integration of prayer and freedom. These are:

1. the invitation to make all choices in life to the extent that they help us toward our end, and free ourselves from them to the extent that they hinder us from it (SE 23). This is seen in the "Principle and Foundation" of the Exercises; freeing oneself from all inordinate attachments;
2. the "Rules for Discernment of Spirits," which give us a guide for the interpretation of the movements of our hearts within the dynamics of choice; and
3. the understanding of the unity of all things in the love of God described in "The Contemplation to Attain the Love of God." The inner dynamism of the Exercises is to "find God in all things." The most important advantage is the attainment of freedom by being sons and daughters of God. This freedom

can only come with experience as a grace from God and the work of the Spirit, a continued challenge and gift as needed today as in the day of Ignatius.

The Principle and Foundation

The Principle and Foundation begins the Exercises. It contains a mini form of the major themes of the Exercises and of Ignatius' mystical vision. It describes how we are related to God and to creation that is always seen in view of our end: Who is God? This implies the need for choice and how to use created things as a means to the end. The Exercises thus anticipate the dynamics of the "Election" and the "Rules for the Discernment of Spirits" to guide us in all our choices. The final vision of the Exercises in the "*Contemplatio*," the union of the person and God in Christ through love, is first seen in the Principle and Foundation, in which the end of all our striving of "saving one's soul" is stated.

Right from the start we observe Ignatius' understanding of the relationship between God as Creator and all of creation. The Principle answers existential questions: Why am I created? Who am I? Whose am I? Why am I here? Where have I come from? How am I to relate to the rest of the world? How do I do this in practice? And how can I judge how well I am doing? Am I really free? These questions form part of the process of freedom and moves me to find their answer in knowing Jesus more clearly, loving Jesus more intimately and following Jesus more closely. "Our one desire and choice should be what will best help us attain the purpose for which we are created."⁴ Desire is an important dimension of the Exercises and of the life of the Spirit as a

⁴Tetlow, Elisabeth M., Trans. *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola*, University Press, America, 1987.

whole.⁵ Ignatius very clearly asks those making the Exercises to ask specifically for what they want at the time they are praying. He took his own desires seriously because he considered them graces from God. Hence, he instructed members of the Society of Jesus to “endeavor to conceive great resolves and elicit equally great desires.”⁶

Discerning the Spirits – The Election

Ignatius repeatedly calls us back to the First Principle. Therefore, in deciding how to live my life or how to live the choices I have already made, “I must consider only the end for which I am created, that is, for the praise of God our Lord and for the salvation of my soul.”⁷ Whatever the choice may be in terms of vocation, lifestyle, profession, state of life “my first aim should be to seek to serve God, which is the end.”⁸ How does one make that particular choice? Ignatius describes three times and ways for making a choice that will lead one to freedom in responding to the “will of God.” The first is when a person’s heart is moved to choose “without hesitation or the possibility of hesitation.”⁹ The second is through the “experience of desolations and consolations, and the discernment of diverse spirits.”¹⁰ The third is a “time of tranquility.”

At the heart of the dynamics of choice in Ignatius’ vision of discipleship is the observation of the movements of one’s heart

⁵ Barry, William A., *What Do I Want in Prayer?* Paulist, New York, 1994.

⁶ Kinerk, E. Edward, *Eliciting Great Desires: Their Place in the Spirituality of the Society of Jesus, Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits* 16, November, 1984 p.6.

⁷ Puhl, Louis L., *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*, Loyola University Press, Chicago, 1952 SPEX 169 p.71.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Puhl, Louis L., *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*, Loyola University Press, Chicago, 1952 Sp. Ex 176 p. 75.

¹⁰ Ibid.

in response to the experiences of consolation and desolation. Ignatius coined the technical terms, “consolation” and “desolation” to describe the affective experiences at the heart of discernment. Consolation is the experience of feeling one’s heart aflame with love for God. Ignatius insists that this is a real experience: one is not thinking about being peaceful, loving God or feeling joy. One is experiencing this and all of this is taking one toward God. Desolation is the affective opposite, where one feels darkness, turmoil, restlessness, disturbances that are taking one away from God.¹¹ Ignatius gives a warning that no change or decision must be made when one experiences desolation. These are essential tools for decision making and for the attitude of the heart that desires to “find God in all things.”

The Contemplation to Attain the Love of God

The final meditation of the Exercises brings together the graces of the Four Weeks in a condensed form. Ignatius first invites us to consider that “love ought to manifest itself in deeds rather than in words”¹² and that love consists in mutual sharing: what one has, one shares. With this as a backdrop, Ignatius structures a four-part meditation focused on asking for the grace of “an intimate knowledge of the many blessings received, that filled with gratitude for all, I may in all things love and serve the Divine Majesty.”

In the first part of the *Contemplatio*, we are invited to remember God’s gifts, “ponder with great affection how much God our Lord

¹¹ Puhl, Louis L., *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*, Loyola University Press, Chicago, 1952 Sp. Ex 316-317 p.142.

¹² Puhl, Louis L., *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*, Loyola University Press, Chicago, 1952 Sp. Ex 230-237 p.101-103.

has done for me and how much He has given me.” In the light of one’s response to these many gifts received, Ignatius shares his own prayer with us in the words:

“Take Lord and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and my entire will – all that I have and call my own. You have given it all to me. To you Lord, I return it. Everything is yours; do with it what you will. Give me only your love and your grace. That is enough for me.”

In the second part of the *Contemplatio*, we reflect on how God dwells in all of creation and how through all of creation God gifts us with the gift of Himself. The only response that can be made is again in the words of the above prayer, “Take Lord....”

The third movement of the *Contemplatio* focuses on God at work in all of creation, giving being and life. God works for me; my response is again one of total self-giving.

The fourth and final part describes the incredible generosity of God’s goodness since all blessings and gifts come from above. One’s final prayer in the retreat is a repetition of the response already made: “Take Lord....” The *Contemplatio* leads the person back to the Principle and Foundation, thus being led in a continuous spiral process to greater and deeper inner freedom.

The Way of the Sufi: A Journey from Separation to Union

Sufism is a mystical path of love in which God, or Truth or Freedom, is experienced as the Beloved. The inner relationship of lover and Beloved is the core of the Sufi path. The wayfarer begins the journey with a longing for this oneness. This longing is born from the soul’s memory that it has come from God. The soul re-

members that its real home is with God and awakens the seeker with this memory. The soul begins to cry the primal cry of separation, the heart's longing for God. This is the song of the reed flute at the beginning of Rumi's Mathnawi:

"Listen to the reed how it tells a tale, complaining of separations, Saying, "Ever since I was parted from the reedbed, my lament has caused man and woman to moan. It is only to a bosom torn by severance that I can unfold the pain of love-desire.

'Everyone who is left far from his source wishes back the time when he was united with it.'"¹³

The journey back to God begins when God looks into the heart of God's servant and infuses it with divine love. This is the moment of *tauba*, "the turning of the heart" or *metanoia*. The glance of the Beloved awakens the memory of the soul, the memory of our primordial state of oneness with God. Without this glance, there would be no longing for God and no spiritual journey.

There is no God but God - *la ilaha illa Llah*

The first pillar of faith in Islam is the affirmation of Divine Unity and this is expressed through the profession of faith, the *Shahadah*. The process of turning away from the world and turning back to God is encapsulated in the saying, *Shahadah* (There is no god but God). The *Shahada* is composed of two elements; the negation, (there is no god) and the affirmation, (but God) The negation cuts us away from the world of illusion, turning our attention inward. Every spiritual path teaches that Truth is to be found within us and the experience of this truth leads us to freedom. The purpose

¹³Mathnawi, ed R.Nicholson (London: Luzac, 1925-40).

of negation (*nafy*) is the affirmation (*ithbat*) of Allah—a negation of all divinity, that is, of all secondary reality that has not sufficient meaning in itself, and an affirmation of the sole Reality of the Absolute Being. We negate the word in order to affirm that God alone is Is God—our Creator. When God asked the not-yet-created humanity, “Am I not your Lord?” They answered, “Yes, we witness it.” This “yes” is the soul’s affirmation hidden within the heart. We affirm that God is God who creates and gives substance and meaning. The spiritual path takes us away from the multiplicity of creation to a realization of the underlying oneness, *Tawhid*, it reflects. We learn that:

“In everything there is a witness for Him
That points to the fact that God our Creator is One.”¹⁴

From God we come and to God we return, *Inna li-Llahi wa-inna ilayhi rajiun*. Indeed, we belong to Allah, and indeed to Him we will return (al-Baqarah 2:156). Our life is in effect a journey from the point of departure (*mabda*) to a point of arrival (*ma’ad*), which in fact is the same as the point of departure. In Islamic philosophy (*hikmah*), this is represented as one complete cycle of the journey of life, which passes two arcs that form a full circle: the downward arc (*qaws al-nuzul*) from God to His creation (the world); and the upward arc (*qaws al-su’ud*) from His creation back to God.

Remembrance of Allah – *Dhikru’llah*

Dhikru’llah takes us to the very heart of the Sufi endeavor, which is becoming aware of the connection that unites the creature for all eternity to the Creator. At the core of the *dhikr* is the principle

¹⁴Nasr, Seyyed. H. *Islamic Spirituality – Foundations*. Crossroad. New York, 1987.

of remembrance. The practice of *dhikr*, which is the central method of consecration for the Sufi, takes place on three levels and in each of these achieves union.

4. The invocation of the tongue (*dhikr al-lisan*) uniting all actions to the One (*tawhid al-af'al*). Mastery of this stage corresponds to the acquisition of the "science of certainty" (*ilm al-yaqin*) largely attributed to the clarity of the mind.
5. The invocation of the heart (*dhikr al-qalb*) attributing all qualities to the Only One who is worthy to be qualified by the most beautiful Names (*tawhid al-sifat*). In Islam there are ninety-nine names attributed to God, *Al asma Al Husna*. This stage at the level of the heart is the "source or the eye of certainty" (*ayn al-yaqin*).
6. The invocation of the depths of the heart, of the "secret," (*dhikr al-sirr*) affirming that nothing exists except the One Who is the Name, the Named, and the Namer, in Allah's Absolute and Unconditional Essence (*tawhid al-dhat*). This stage is a gift from heaven where the individual is absorbed by God and both become one "truth of certainty" (*haqq al-yaqin*).

The Prophet is often quoted in Sufi circles as saying, "For everything there is a polish (*siqala*); and the polish of the hearts is *dhikr-ru'llah*."¹⁵ Rumi provides us with a poetic expression of the image of the heart being polished by *dhikr*. He tells us in the Mathnawi: "Breasts polished by invocation and meditation are such that the mirror of the heart receives the pure virginal image."¹⁶ The Sufi finds God not only hidden within the heart but also in the outer world for "wheresoever you turn, there is the Face of God" (Sura Baqarah 109). In the midst of all that reality offers the Sufi, *dhikr*

¹⁵ Vaughan-Lee, L. *Sufism: The Transformation of the Heart*. The Golden Sufi Center, California, 1997 p.51.

¹⁶ Mathnawi, ed R.Nicholson (London: Luzac, 1925-40).

helps to choose what leads to God and to detach from what does not lead to God.

The Highest Station – *Maqam*

The Sufi travels through stations (*maqams*) to meet the Divine. The highest is often referred to as *rida* – contentment, or according to the mystic Al Tirmidhi, the “innermost heart.” This is because contentment is a direct manifestation of faith. A dialogue between the Prophet (peace be upon him) and his companions confirms this. One day the Prophet (peace be upon him) asked his companions: “What is the hallmark of your faith?” They replied: “We are grateful in times of good fortune, patient in the face of adversity and remain content with *qada* (what was decreed).” The Prophet said, “...you are truly believers.” For those who possess the characteristic of *rida*, whatever comes to them from God is a blessing and entirely God’s will.

The innermost heart, on the other hand, is infinite in its scope and radiance. It is like a great axis that remains stable as everything else revolves around it. All the heart’s other lights are based on the innermost heart’s Lights of Unification and the Uniqueness of God. The innermost heart is irrigated with the water of God’s kindness, and its roots are filled with the lights of certainty. God cultivates the innermost heart directly, without any intermediary. The deepest truths are understood only through the innermost heart, where we reach the ultimate level of understanding. This means to transform oneself, to remove the veils that cover the light and to rest in the Light.

The serene self characterizes this as resting. It is content with the present, with whatever is, with whatever God brings us. This serenity and contentment is rooted in the love of God.¹⁷

In the words of Ibn Arabi:

“I prostrated before her through love. Seeing this, I knew that I was not attached to any ‘other.’ I glorified God, praising Him for having loved me; it was but the secret of my own being that my appearance had loved. Realizing that I am the very being of that which I love, I no longer fear separation nor do I fear abandonment (by the beloved).”¹⁸

Together on the Journey to Freedom:

If we take a look at the dynamics of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius and the Way of the Sufi, we see that both are neither ascetic nor monastic. They aspire to live the outer life in the world with an inner attention focused on God, thus integrating the inner and outer life.

For Ignatius and the Sufi, the journey to inner freedom can be expressed in following four stages of the process of journeying together.

The first stage is the “Freedom to Praise, Love and Serve God” as we see the truth of being created by love. When Ignatius leaves Loyola to come to Manresa, his image of God is that he had to prove himself to be accepted. It is only when he encounters God personally that he experiences the freedom that God offers. This is the most liberating experience. With God there is nothing to

¹⁷This whole section is taken from the book by Frager, Robert, *Heart, Self and Soul - The Sufi Psychology of Growth, Balance and Harmony*. Quest Books, Wheaton, Illinois, 1999.

¹⁸Reza Shar Kazemi. *Paths to Transcendence*. World Wisdom, 2006 p.81.

win, because there is nothing to lose—this is the explosion of freedom that God gives us. Whenever, in the writings of Ignatius we come across the word, God, he is referring to this reality that liberated him from his “hell.” This reality we call God is the principle and foundation of our existence. The Spiritual Exercises provide a means to bring us in contact with, and inserts us in, this reality that brings life and fullness. The human being is created to praise, reverence and love God. Ignatius is pointing us to someone who makes us what in truth we really are. For the Sufi this is the “Soul’s Journey into the World.” When born into a body, we forget our essential state of union with God. The ego covers the memory of wholeness with its sense of a separate identity. We become enslaved to the self with its desires and demands and are securely caught in the illusions of the world. Then in a moment of grace we are awakened. The soul’s memory of union ignites the fire of longing, and we begin the long, laborious journey homeward. Turning away from the outer world and constrictive desires, we look inward, to our one desire and choice that will enable us to attain the purpose for which we have been created. Attracted by the work of the Creator and the presence within the heart, we desire only what God desires because in all truth there is “no god but God.”

The second stage is the “Freedom From” all that prevents us from knowing and experiencing that we are loved; the freedom from all that stands in the way between us and God. It is not the experience of his sinfulness that Ignatius experiences, but it is the experience of the way God handled him and led him to freedom. This is the fruit, the reason, the atmosphere of the First Week. Ignatius invites us to begin every prayer period by asking for

a grace, and here comes the importance of grace, a felt interior knowledge of our true self and our interior knowledge of what prevents us from reaching the end which is God. The more one divests oneself of self-love, interest and will, the more progress one makes. For the Sufis, "The Journey with God" is the process of *fana*, the annihilation of the ego. The ego and its dark twin, the shadow, need to be removed from their position at the center of life's stage. Returning to the end for which we were created, to seek to serve God, all choices will move in that direction. Ignatius' three ways and times for making a choice can be practiced in the spiritual ambience of remembrance, *dhikr*, that the Sufi offers us, thus making us sensitive to what takes us to God and what takes us away from God. To accept in truth this creative tension within ourselves will not only lead us to freedom in responding to the will of God but the very response brings freedom and change. The journey to God dissolves the grip of the self that carries with it the pain of the crucifixion, as in the Persian saying, "The ego will not go with laughter or with caresses. It must be chased in sorrow and drowned in tears."¹⁹

The third stage is "Freedom For" receiving the gifts that God gives us. Ignatius takes steps to arrive at the interior knowledge of the relationship of love that we have experienced with God. Those who love remember and those we love live in the memory we have of them. The memory ignites something in us. This is what the Sufis call a "Journey in God" and this is when the spiritual journey really begins. Our state of surrender allows us to experience our deepest nature in which we are eternally united with God. The state of union begins to unfold dynamically within

¹⁹Nasr, Seyyed. H. *Islamic Spirituality – Foundations*. Crossroad. New York, 1987.

the soul. Thus awakening in one the memory of all gifts received from God, the presence of God in all of creation, how God works for us in all of creation, and to consider all blessing and gifts coming from God alone. The response of Ignatius to this contemplation to attain love is in the prayer, "Take Lord and receive... Give me only your love and your grace. That is enough for me." For the Sufi this is *rida*-contentment, or the arrival to the station *maqam* of the innermost heart that takes us to the truth of who we are in God. This truth sets us free for God alone. In the words of al-Quraishi: "The inner reality of love means that you give all of yourself to the One until nothing remains of you for You."²⁰

The fourth stage is the "Freedom With" God. The truth and freedom of being transformed! For Ignatius this is an experience at the end of the Exercises. The experience of Jesus' own joy in us, as in John 15:11: "My own joy may be in you and your joy may be complete." This joy depends on the depth of union with Jesus. We end the Spiritual Exercises with the fundamental Ignatian exercise-the Presence of the Experience of the Risen Jesus that transforms us. This is an experience that is always rooted in the reality of life and that always takes place in the heart. For the Sufi, this is the "Journey with God," *fana*, the annihilation of the ego that leads to *baqa*, abiding in God, also known as "abiding after passing away." The experience of union with God is not the end of the journey, but the beginning of a new life in which the mystic becomes more and more deeply immersed in God's presence, more and more lost in God, and more and more alive by the friends and followers that follow the path.

²⁰Quoted by al-Qushayri in *Principles of Sufism* p.330.

The Need of the Time

Sufism is the ancient wisdom of the heart. Like a stream which goes underground and then reappears, this wisdom is always present in the world, sometimes visible and sometimes hidden. Some great Sufis have been public figures; many have worked in the disguise of ordinary men and women. They belong to God and respond to the need of the time.

The Spiritual Exercises are not a project to undertake but a process to undergo. It is not what we do but what we allow to happen to us to receive the fruit of the process. We use the underlying dynamic process of the Exercises to help us discover where God is inviting us—at this moment of our life—to a fuller life and greater freedom. There are many wonderful Jesuits who have offered the Exercises and some non-Jesuits who share the Exercises with passion. They belong to God and they too respond to the need of the time.

In this time in our world where there is a hunger and a thirst for truth, wisdom and nourishment, we are called to share the truth of who we are. As pilgrims together on the journey from God, to God, in God and with God, we share this truth of being loved as well as beloved. This is the truth that sets us free!

Ignatian Mysticism and Sufism: A Way for Christian Muslim-Dialogue

Midhun J. Francis Kochukallan, S.J.

Abstract

It is possible for Sufism and Ignatian Spirituality to have a shared ground for dialogue. In terms of discourse, Semitic faiths share a lot of common characteristics. Ignatius' mysticism and the Sufi's (Islam's) mysticism are two approaches we can use to engage in conversation. Their common spirituality lies in their understanding of God's "oneness," which is manifested in the believer's life via obedience to the commandments. This is not a purely intellectual event, but rather a personal and transformative encounter with God, where both participants experience a loving and merciful creator. Because of this, they are able to serve others since they have encountered God as a loving creator of all humanity.

Introduction

Ignatian mysticism and Sufism can serve as a bridge for Christian-Muslim dialogue because both traditions have in common certain elements of mysticism. The mystical experiences of each tradition enable Christians and Muslims to understand each other as children of God. The mystical experience of the Ignatian community life and the Sufi mystical experience of brotherhood offer a path of convergence, which can promote a deep and lasting collaboration between Christians and Muslims. This is because the mystical experiences of the persons of both traditions have several common traits. According to McIntosh, we often use the term "mysticism," which is actually something of an ac-

ademic invention; earlier eras referred to the most intimate and transforming encounter with God as “contemplation” (McIntosh, 1998, p.11). If we analyze the goal of every mystic, we realize that it is God. In this essay I would like to explore some of the possibilities of Christian-Muslim dialogue on the basis of the mystical experience of both religions, which enables interfaith dialogue in the present world.

Since its inception, Islam has had great contact with Christianity. Muslim-Christian communication is as old as Islam. During the period of the Islamic birth in the Arabian Peninsula and expansion in the eastern provinces of Byzantium, there were numerous disputes and wars between the Byzantines and the local Christian communities, which produced many conflicts and wars, allowing the new religion to expand easily. Indeed, “the Arab conquests of the Byzantine eastern provinces and the consequent establishment of Muslim dominance foreshadowed the end of the long tradition of Hellenism in western Asia” (Grypeou et al., 2006, p. 1). However, there are both negative and positive aspects to the relationship between Christianity and Islam. Both faiths have been friendly in many areas from their inception. John of Damascus, who succeeded his father and grandfather as the Caliph’s secretary, exemplified the friendly connection, yet also regarded Islam as the sum of all heresies.

William Dalrymple, a Scottish historian, made two important observations on Christian-Muslim relationship while traveling throughout the Middle East several years ago. First, he observed that while visiting ancient cells of monks near the Monastery of Mar Saba in the Israeli-Occupied West Bank, every cell had a prayer niche almost identical to the *mihrab*, which is a basic

feature of all mosques today (Sharp, 2012, p. 11). He concluded that, “. . . the prayer niche must be another of those features of the early Christian world which has been lost to modern Western Christianity, yet which is still preserved in Islam” (Sharp, 2012, p. 11). “Dalrymple’s second observation attests to a truth that Orthodox Christians and Muslims have known instinctively for centuries—that they originally came from one civilization and share the same ancestry” (Sharp, 2012, p. 12). However, despite this close relationship, the “Arab” character of Muhammad and Islam is becoming increasingly prominent in the Islamic tradition as it progresses. True, there is an initial appeal to commonality—not so much in terms of ancestry as in terms of salvation history. However, as time goes, it becomes extremely important for Muslim tradition to disassociate itself from pre-existing Christian and Jewish “civilizations,” and to trace its genealogy back to Abraham through the line of Ishmael and Hagar.

Islam and Jesuits

St. Ignatius had unfavorable views regarding Islam prior to his conversion; but, as the founder of the Society of Jesus, he asks the Jesuits to go to the territory of Muslims to preach the Gospel, and never expresses any harsh thoughts about them. St. Ignatius’ encounter with the Moor exemplifies his attitude toward Muslims before his conversion. It’s inspirational to consider that if it hadn’t been for a mule’s whim, he would have been executed for murder before arriving in Manresa (Autobiography, c. 2, nos. 14-16). The Jesuits visited North India three times during the 16th century and stayed in King Akbar’s court, with whom they had a close relationship. In fact, the Mogul Mission has been a mystery

in the history of Christianity in Asia for the last five centuries, with many viewing it as a continuation of the Christian-Muslim relationship. Fr General Arturo Sosa SJ invites the whole Society of Jesus towards “the conviction that our life and mission must be closely integrated in order to truly incarnate the promotion of justice, by striving for reconciliation in all its dimensions as an imperative of our faith” (Sosa, 2017). The invitation is to have “the construction of a new culture of dialogue and reconciliation.” It is not the past mistakes or relationship we need to foster, instead we need to focus on the source of each religion or tradition, in order to have a culture of dialogue, which enables one to be more effective in the mission of reconciliation.

Trinity: Unity of God

In two instances, the Qur’an chastises those who proclaim the Trinity. In Sūra 5:72–73, Christians are admonished to stop bringing idols before the One True God (Beaumont, 2012, p. 111). The second passage in which the Trinity is challenged is Sūra 4:171. These early Islamic teachings made it difficult for Christians to encounter Muslims since the revelation they experienced in the Incarnation mystery represented the truth to them.

In the Ignatian contemplation on “Incarnation meditation,” the retreatant is asked to meditate on the Trinity and His response to the challenges of the universe. The answer of the Trinity is to incarnate the Divine Word, the second Person. God the Son will become human form as Jesus of Nazareth and be known as Emmanuel, which means “God with us.” The Trinity’s design is the “mystery of the Incarnation,” which is the cause for the Advent and Christmas seasons (SPEX 101-109). Christians believe that

Jesus is the Incarnated Logos. (Jn 1;14) They also believe that the fullness of revelation is in Jesus Christ. "In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe" (Heb 1:1-2). The early Christians needed to defend their belief in God as one essence (*ousia*) in three persons (*hypostases*) which was shared by all denominations of the church in the Middle Eastern territories under Muslim rule. They may have been divided over their understanding of the union of the divine and human in Christ, but they were united in their faith in the Triune God. Ignatius believed that Jesus taught this great mystery clearly in the Gospel, and we can experience this mystery by contemplating over created things.

Abū Qurra (d.c.830), Abū Rā'ita (d.c.835) and Ammār al-Basrī (d.c.860) attempted to defend and explain the Trinity in Arabic for a Muslim audience that was increasingly involved in debate with Christian intellectuals (Beaumont, 2012, p. 116). Abū Qurra said, "Christians do not believe in three gods when they say that the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God; and that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are one God even though each of them is complete in himself" (Beaumont, 2012, p. 117). He was certain that those who negate the Christian teaching object to the Trinity because their reason is confused by the Christian claims that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are three hypostases (*aqānīm*) in one God (*ilah wāhid*), and that each of the hypostases is perfect God in himself (Beaumont, 2012, p. 117). "But Abū Qurra recognizes that the analogy with three men must not lead to the supposition that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit

are separated or differentiated, since they would then be three divine beings rather than one divine being” (Beaumont, 2012, p. 117). He supplied *wajh/ wujūh* as a translation of the Greek term *prosōpon* (person), which is a synonym for hypostasis in Greek (Beaumont, 2012, p. 117). So, he referred to the divine nature in various ways. The three persons (*wujūh*) share the same nonphysical nature (*latafa*). Therefore, each of the persons shares the same essence (*dhāt*). The three persons share the same oneness of divinity (*wāh.idiyya al-lāhūt*) (Beaumont, 2012, p. 117). In fact, Ignatian Spirituality and Christian Theology emphasize the unity of the three persons in One God.

“The first pillar of Islam is essentially a foundational pillar, which forms the backdrop of all the other pillars of Islam. This pillar consists of two testimonies the utterance of which enters one into the fold of Islam. The first part of the testimony is *Ash-hadu alaa ilaaha ilallah* (to testify there is nothing worthy of worship except)” (Mirza & Bakali, 2010, p. 53). The worship is only to Allah. There are no gods except God. The central creed of Islam consists of the two testimonies of faith or *Shahddahs*, which state that: There is no god but God, and Muhammad is the Messenger of God. This testimony is an utterance of pure monotheism negating the belief in all other deities, other than God, (Mirza & Bakali, 2010, p. 53), which was popular among the Arabian tribes. The prophet had come across two types of people in the Arabian Peninsula. In Mecca, he encountered Arabian Paganism who were idol worshippers. In Medina, he encountered Judaism and Christianity, which influenced him to affirm monotheism. He was totally against idol worshippers. “God is absolute and therefore devotion to him must be totally sincere” (Al-Islāmī, 2008).

The testimony of faith emphasizes: “There is no god but God. It reminds Muslims that their hearts, their individual souls and all the faculties and powers of their souls (or simply their entire hearts and souls) must be totally devoted and attached to God” (Al-Islāmī, 2008). It is the total submission to God. In fact, the word *Islam* means submission. In a similar sense, the Trinitarian God of Christianity is the source of unity in the church. This unity of God enables Christians to engage in dialogue with Islam who profess the same God (Lumen Gentium 16, Nostra Aetate 3). Being a committed Muslim, one must be able to submit oneself fully to God because it is “God who has created all human beings equal in rights, duties and dignity, and who has called them to live together as brothers and sisters, to fill the earth and make known the values of goodness, love and peace” (Francis, Abu Dhabi, 4 February 2019). The ultimate aim is to encounter the creator, who created the whole human being. Likewise, the Incarnation meditation in Ignatian Spirituality invites us to be in union with God.

Jesus in Qur’an

Jesus is considered as a word of Allah in Qur’an: “The Messiah, Jesus, the son of Mary, was but a messenger of Allah and His word which He directed to Mary and a soul from Him” (Qur’an 4:171). The Qur’an also approves of the virgin birth of Jesus. She (Maryam) said, “How can I have a boy while no man has touched me and I have not been unchaste?” He (Jibreel) said, “Thus [it will be]; your Lord says, ‘It is easy for Me, and We will make him a sign to the people and a mercy from Us. And it is a matter [already] decreed’” (Qur’an 19;20-21). Jesus was also considered as

a servant: "Jesus was not but a servant upon whom We bestowed favour, and We made him an example for the Children of Israel" (Qur'an 43;59). But the Qur'an disagrees that Jesus is not created. "She said, "My Lord, how will I have a child when no man has touched me?" [The angel] said, "Such is Allah; He creates what He wills. When He decrees a matter, He only says to it, 'Be, and it is'" (Qur'an 3;47). John of Damascus claimed that "the Arian monk had given Muhammad mixed information about Christianity and this is echoed in the message of Muhammad. Support for Christian teaching can be found in the statement" (Francis, Abu Dhabi, 4 February 2019). Though John had a very prominent post as secretary to the caliph, "John goes on to mock the teachings in the Qur'an about Christ, particularly that he was not crucified but only 'his shadow,' and that he denied before God that he was his son, and continues to criticise Muhammad's unrestrained sexual appetite and what he regards as perverse teachings in various parts of the Qur'an.... John thought Islam a false religion, based originally upon an encounter between Muhammad and a heretical Christian monk, from whom he gained some knowledge of the Bible. Thus, Islam can be dismissed as a Christian heresy since it has no integrity in itself, and whatever truthfulness or good it contained derived from the proper source of true teaching in the Bible" (Thomas, 2005, p. 11). Early Islam had a very deep relationship with Christianity, as we have seen in their relationship when it came to religious and political matters.

Ignatian Jesus

In the Ignatian tradition, Jesus is the "Incarnated *Logos*," who completely became human in order to connect with humans and

restore them to their natural condition as “the image and likeness of God” (Gen 1:26). The Call of the King is a meditation in the Spiritual Exercises that invites us to participate in Christ’s universal healing ministry. Christ is a king in command of an army, but he is also a commander who collaborates with his followers. Ignatius goes on to add: “I wish to conquer all diseases, poverty, ignorance, oppression, and slavery—in short, all the evils that face humanity.... Those that want to join me on my mission must accept the same food, drink, clothing, and other privileges as my company” (SPEX 95). This allows the disciples to choose whether to stand with Jesus or with the rest of the world. Whatever life the Spirit has called us to, once baptized and confirmed, we are invited to stand in Jesus’ company under his banner (SPEX 136-148). In certain ways, this Ignatian method prepares the retreatant to strive for justice in the world. In essence, one is being urged to follow the correct consciousness.

Mysticism and Sufism

“An ascetic and mystical element that was implicitly present in Islam since its very inception became explicit during the first Islamic centuries (the seventh and eighth centuries C.E.)” (Knysh, 1999, p. 1). Unlike Christian mysticism, Islamic mysticism did not begin because of any persecution. One can say it received inspiration from Christian mysticism, which was popular in the Eastern and Western churches in the seventh and eighth centuries C.E. “This period witnessed the appearance of the first Muslim devotees and ‘moral athletes,’ who formed primitive ascetic communities in the central and eastern lands of Islam, primarily in Mesopotamia, Syria and Eastern Iran” (Knysh, 1999, p. 1). Many

people started following the early mystics as part of being away from the secular sphere and luxuries of the world. "As an outward sign of this pietistic withdrawal, some of them adopted a distinct dress code, which often featured a rough woollen robe" (Knysh, 1999, p. 7). These mystics were known as Sufi saints in Islam. The word Sufism is Latinised from the Arabic word, *suf*, which means "wool" (Knysh, 1999, p. 5). "By the end of the eighth century C.E., in the central lands of Islam, the nickname *suffiyya* ("wool-people" or "wool-wearers") became a self-designation of those given to ascetic life and mystical contemplation" (Knysh, 1999, p. 7). Sufism became a prevalent characteristic of the Muslim social order in the later Middle Ages (twelfth to sixth centuries CE).

Communion as the Community

The constitution of the Society of Jesus demands its members, even as novices, to develop fraternity. The practice of community life should enhance the novices' affective development as well as our members' brotherhood (Con. 50). The mystics in the early Islamic traditions were called "moral athletes" (Knysh, 1999, p. 7), and they formed "*tariquas*" or "brotherhood" (Knysh, 1999, p. 7). Muslim mystics often trace this term to the root *Safā*, with the general meaning of "purity," and to the phrase *ahl al-suffa* ("the People of the Bench"), that is, the pious and indigent companions of the Prophet who lived in his mosque" (Knysh, 1999, p. 5). We may interpret that these mystics lived in a mosque under a head. The Constitution of the Society of Jesus describes brotherhood as the "union of hearts." This is an expression of sincere communication between persons, which we see in the Acts of the Apostles in the Council of Jerusalem. Peter, as the head of the Apostles,

and Paul as the head of the Church of Antioch, discussed and came to a decision on the controversy of the law of circumcision. Community life is an essential element among the Jesuits. General congregation 35 says, "The Jesuit community is a sign to the world of the Reign of God which we proclaim by our lives together" (GC 35,176). This type of community life is not just about living together under the same roof, but it is a life of "union of hearts." It is a life of communion among the members. This communion helps them to forget the self and thus enable them to love one another.

Self-renunciation

When the church acquired freedom from the Roman Empire, many of the clerics enjoyed political status. They had forgotten the real value of Christ's teaching on self-renunciation, from which "arose a movement that in a variety of ways expressed a rejection of the conventional worldly values" (Jean, 1989, p. 89). Similarly, "the acts of penitence and self-renunciation, which their [Islam's] practitioners justified by references to certain Qur'anic verses and the Prophet's utterances, may be seen as a reaction against Islam's newly acquired wealth that often led many faithful to abandon the frugal and heroic ways of self-denial associated with the original Muslim community in Medina" (Knysh, 1999, p. 2). Sufis also realized that many of the Umayyad and their officials were not following the spirit of the Holy Qur'an, which said, "Whatever you are given in this life is nothing but a temporary provision of this life and its glitter; what God has is better and more lasting. Will you not then understand?" (Qur'an 28:60) "They argued that the truly God-fearing person should try to save himself by with-

drawing from the overbearing world and its sinful and unjust ways. "In an attempt to achieve this goal, the mystic had to contend not only with the corruptive trappings of the world, but also with his own base self (*nafs*), which Sufis see as the seat of egoistic evil lusts and passions impeding their progress towards God" (Knysh, 1999, p. 10). These ways of life are so much similar to the life adopted by Christians in the deserts. Many of these people had very good contacts with the Christians of Eastern countries, like Syria and Constantinople. Self-renunciation is an important act of getting into the mystical life. The Incarnation mystery of Christian spirituality is a basis for the renunciation because being God, Jesus emptied himself and did not consider himself equal to God (Phil 2:7). Instead, he renounced everything and entered into the world of human race. The person who has renounced himself has to enter into this stage where he tries to understand this mystery. Every mystic has to go through this experience in his life. The poverty vow of the Jesuits declares them to be men for others. Expensive goods should not be used for personal gain, so that humility and lowliness can be preserved for greater divine glory in all things (Con. 577).

Purification

A person who desires to renounce everything in the world has to be purified. In each religion, there is a process called purification. "Mystics in every religious tradition have tended to describe the different steps on the way that leads toward God by the image of the Path. The Christian tripartite division of the *via purgativa*, the *via contemplativa* and the *via illuminativa* is, to some extent, the same as the Islamic definition of *shari'a*, *tariqa* and *haqiqa*" (Schim-

mel, 1975, p. 98). Naturally these paths are narrow and difficult to go through. In other words, these difficulties experienced by the person can be called the process of purification. The early mystics in the church left the cities in order to purify themselves. They were also doing works of charity in the form of discourses and the giving of advice to the common people. Personal purification is very important in the mystical life. "Most of early Muslim ascetics emphasized personal purity, moral uprightness, fear of God and strict compliance with the letter of the Divine Law; there were those who carried their search of God's pleasure a bit further" (Knysh, 1999, p. 8). In Sufism, the ascetics were "allowed to practice self-imposed strictures which they deemed as preparation for the imminent Final Reckoning" (Knysh, 1999, p. 9). This purification process will enable one to experience the ultimate or the absolute.

Union with the Absolute

The union of hearts among the mystics enables them to be one with the Heart of the Absolute. Mysticism is an experience of a devotee "seeing one's own face in the face of God" (Nelstrop & Podmore, 2016, p. 1). General Congregation 32 affirms that, "We begin with the Ignatian insight that the unity of an apostolic body such as ours must be based on the union of each and all with God in Christ. For if we have come together as a companionship, it is because we have, each of us, responded to the call of the Eternal King" (GC 32 D11, n 6). As the person "ascend[ed] beyond cataphatic knowledge of God towards divine union, the divine idea became its entitlement and reality" (Nelstrop & Podmore, 2016, p. 1). This is one of the concepts referred to as "Deification" in

Eastern Christianity and “Becoming another Christ” in Western Christianity. This personal experience can make devotees from the two traditions of Sufism and Christianity engage in interfaith commitment in life. Whatever be the Sufi approach to renunciation and to the question of how far to detach oneself from mainstream social life, some prominent renunciants and the renunciant communities that formed around them began to direct their energies increasingly to the cultivation of the inner life. This inward turn manifested itself especially in new discourses on spiritual states, stages of spiritual development, closeness to God and love; it also led to a clear emphasis on “knowledge of the interior” (*ilmal-batin*) acquired through ardent examination and training of the human soul” (Karamustafa, 2007, p. 2). The human soul forgets oneself and becomes one with the absolute. The lost image and likeness is regained through obedience.

Service and Love

We learn to love when we progress from contemplation to action. We are expected to love people who are poor, hungry, sick, imprisoned, lonely or marginalized. Love, therefore, is more than just an emotion. Love must be rooted in truth. “*Al-mu’min mir’at al-mu’min*, the faithful is the mirror of the faithful, is a Prophetic tradition that the Sufis consider an excellent maxim for social intercourse” (Schimmel, 1975, p. 228). A Sufi saint is one who experiences the union of heart with the absolute, and lives in the world. He has the moral responsibility of looking after the other, as the greatest commandment Christ gave to the rich man: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment.

And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” (Mt 22:36-40). The practical application of this maxim can be seen clearly in Sufi history and borne in one of the movement’s most remarkable aspects, fraternal love, which originally came to exist among the Sufis of one community.

The Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID) aims at “the promotion of interreligious dialogue in accordance with the spirit of the Second Vatican Council, in particular the declaration, *Nostra Aetate* (The Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, n.d.). The PCID wants Christians and Muslims to have a good relationship. To this end, “it promotes mutual understanding, respect and collaboration between Catholics and the followers of other religious traditions” (The Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, n.d.). There are two very important things in interfaith dialogue. They are heart-to-heart relationship and participating in mutual experiences.

Conclusion

One has to enter into the space of the other in order to have a religious experience with the other. This religious experience will enable one to understand who he is. But entering into the space of the other is a difficult task. The one who enters may not be accepted by the other. Incarnation spirituality gives hope for Christians to be able to do so. Jesus entered into the human space in order to be part of humanity in every sense. “A major challenge is creating spaces and means for ‘rubbing shoulders’ with diverse people in an increasingly pluralistic world. Not only is there a call to ‘rub shoulders’ with diverse peoples, but the call is to love our

neighbors — our religious neighbors — in ways that push relational boundaries. Miroslav Volf argues that living with the ‘other’ in peace is ‘an expression of our God given humanity’” (King, 2016, p. 203). Human beings are created as social beings. There is communication between all of them. The isolated human being cannot live a proper life. It is the same with the isolated religion. No religion can live as an isolated entity. Every religion has a connection with other religion(s). The mutual sharing of religious experience of mysticism will enrich the other, enabling the identity of the other to flourish and nurture, so one can go forward to a good and peaceful life. Interfaith dialogue has emerged as a major means for interacting with peoples of different faiths that work toward achieving such goals. *Nostra Aetate* is an invitation to Christians to enter into this dialogue of experiences.

The courage of embracing “otherness” is at the heart of dialogue, which is based on the sincerity of one’s intentions. Dialogue is indeed compromised by pretense, which increases distance and suspicion; we cannot proclaim fraternity and then act in the opposite way. The mutual sharing of experiences can come from interreligious prayer. Faith in God is an essential element in interfaith dialogue. Faith leads a believer to see in the other a brother or a sister to be supported and loved. The document signed by His Holiness Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Ahmad Al-Tayyeb on “Human Fraternity” goes like this: “Through faith in God, who has created the universe, creatures and all human beings (equal on account of his mercy), believers are called to express this human fraternity by safeguarding creation and the entire universe and supporting all persons, especially the poorest and those most in need” (Francis, Abu Dhabi,

4 February 2019). *Lumen Gentium* 16 says: “But the plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator, in the first place amongst are Muslims; these profess to hold the faith of Abraham and together with us they adore the one merciful God who will judge humanity on the last day” (LG 16). Reconciliation, a form of cooperation, requires some collective action presuming an essential harmony of underlying interests between both faith communities. Proponents of interreligious collective action for reconciliation seek to awaken similarly minded activists from different religious backgrounds. Dialogue is the place where we can find common ground to work together. More focus must be given to agreements rather than disputes. Jesus is considered as a word of God and a prophet. The oneness of God will enable one to understand Islamic and Christian mysticism as common ground for dialogue.

There is a lot of misunderstanding and conflict among peoples of different faiths in the twenty-first century, very particularly among Muslims and Christians. These misunderstandings and conflicts challenge not only the religious sphere but also the academe, which has moved peacebuilding and interfaith dialogue to the top of the academic agenda. The basic need of human beings is love; in other words, every human being wants to live in harmony and peace. Most of the time, the means one takes to acquire peace and harmony is violence and conflict. People believe that if one destroys one’s enemy, one can live in harmony. But that is impossible. This quest for living at peace with one another has prompted theologians and missiologists to explore a theological ground with the view of creating understanding and encouraging human encounters that foster respect and dignity for all peo-

ples. Mysticism invites common people to engage in interfaith dialogue of life and experiences. Mysticism in both traditions emphasizes the oneness of God, who is compassionate and merciful. Mystics awaken their hearts to experience the oneness of God. The Ignatian tradition of contemplation enables one to enter into this level of mystical experience. Love is the fundamental law among the mystics—love of one self, love of God and love of neighbor. The one who has experienced love cannot hate anyone. This is the challenge of mysticism, and it leads to service.

I pray with Muslims

Mona Lisa D. Pangan

Starting Out in My Journey

In my college years at Xavier University (XU)-Ateneo de Cagayan in the Philippines, I was a *Kristohanong Kabataan sa Pagpakabana* (KKP) student volunteer. KKP is a social involvement program that forms student volunteers to become socially aware citizens. Its advocacy is based on a faith that blossoms forth in the works of justice. The formation I got as well as the mission statement of the university became rooted in my consciousness, which eventually affected my life's choices. I was captivated by the tagline that was imprinted on our shirt: "Dare to lead... Dare to make a difference... Be a KKP Volunteer!"

Indeed, after my graduation in 1997 I made a bold decision that was contrary to my family's desire for me. I had been hired by a telecommunication company, but my heart told me to be a volunteer or to work in the social development world. I did not join the Jesuit Volunteers of the Philippines or the Year of Service (YOS) program of the university. Instead, I volunteered for three years in the Catholic Center Campus Ministry in Iligan City, Lanao del Norte. A center for young people, it was founded by a French missionary Fr. Michel de Gigord, M.E.P., who introduced me to the world of interreligious dialogue (IRD), particularly Muslim-Christian relations. I did not know anything about IRD then. I had little knowledge about Muslims and most came from what I had heard from my older relatives, Muslim classmates in college and the media. So Fr. Michel sent me to Silsilah Dialogue Institute in Zamboanga City for a two-week intensive summer

course on Islam, Christianity and Interreligious Dialogue. What I gained from that summer course broke the ground for my deep engagement with this unpopular dimension of the Church's mission. After my training, I began my work as staff in charge of the Dialogue Committee from 1997 to 2000.

I Am Neither a Priest Nor a Nun

My first six months as a volunteer was a baptism of fire. I felt exasperated because students kept comparing me to my predecessor, Fr. Michel. Several times I wanted to quit because I could not stand being compared to him. It didn't help that I was having difficulty in understanding the dynamics and approaches of IRD in the real context. The difference between theory and reality dawned on me and I had a really challenging time. I found myself very inadequate to run the Dialogue Committee and I realized that the learning I got from Silsilah was not enough. However, Fr. Michel kept on telling me not to quit! He supplied me with books to supplement my learning and understanding of IRD. I was left with no option but to force myself to read the books he recommended. It felt like I was doing a monthly book review because he would ask me what particular lessons I had gained from my readings. Listed below are the first books I read, which helped me in my work for the Dialogue Committee.

1. Life in Dialogue by the late Bishop Bienvenido Tuditod, D.D., the first bishop of the Prelature of St. Mary in Marawi City, Lanao del Sur
2. Life in Dialogue by Fr. Sebastiano D'Ambra, P.I.M.E.

3. Blood Brothers: The dramatic story of a Palestinian Christian who works for peace in Israel by Elias Chacour.
4. The Little Prince by Antoine de Saint-Exupery

I consider these books foundational to my learning process, especially in engaging in the dialogue of life with students or young people, whether they are Muslims, Christians or Indigenous Peoples. One important lesson I learned from those readings was to be true to myself and not to be who I am not. I was then only 21 years old but I learned that I did not need to pressure myself to imitate my predecessor.

In my encounters with the students, creating a creative space for dialogue was the name of the game. An aphorism I tried to live by wherever I was and with whomever I met was expressed in the spirit of dialogue by Bishop Kenneth Cragg and Bishop Bivenido Tudtud of Marawi City: “The first thing to do when you enter another culture or another religion is to take off your shoes, for the place where you stand is sacred ground.” These words were inspired from the encounter of Moses with God representing the burning bush at Mount Horeb in Exodus 3:4-5, “‘Come no nearer’ God said ‘until you remove the sandals from your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground.’” In those days, given my youthful sense, I did this literally with a few of my students. One time at Aya-aya waterfalls in Lugait, Misamis Oriental, we made a ritual using the above aphorism as our prayer, before taking off our slippers and jumping into the water.

My First Eid-ul Fitr Experience

My committee members and I were so excited to make our first prayer observance of the Eid-ul Fitr celebration in Barangay

Cabaro, which is a predominantly Muslim village in Iligan City. We wore with pride our newly printed shirt emblazoned with a crescent and a cross. However, when we arrived early morning, all eyes in the village stared at us suspiciously. The people talked with one another in Meranao, which I did not understand. Our team felt uneasy, but I told my students to remain calm and continue walking towards the *masjid*. Unfortunately, when we got there the Imam prohibited us from entering for the prayer observance. I panicked a little because I had earlier arranged and coordinated our visit with my contact in the area. Disappointed, I reproached myself silently that if only Fr. Michel had been with us, the situation would have been different; our prayer observance would have been beautiful, meaningful and fruitful because, surely, they would accommodate us. Though I was dismayed that they prohibited us from making our prayer observance inside the *masjid*, I was still grateful because the Imam allowed one of my students to go inside and observe. After the prayer, my Muslim contact, Atty Saidali Gandamra, arrived and apologized for the miscommunication. He then invited us to his house for a sumptuous treat. He explained the significance of Ramadhan and the *Eid-ul Fitr* celebration, and we had an engaging conversation, which was very consoling.

A year after, we tried again to observe *Eid-ul-Fitr*. This time was a bit different because the Muslim community was more accommodating. In fact, there was a Muslim woman who approached me and tried to befriend me. With a smile on her face she invited us all to come to her house and offered some snacks to celebrate the *Eid*. In my last year as a volunteer at the center, we visited the community for a third time for a prayer observance of *Eid-ul-Fitr*.

The atmosphere during this time was totally different. I did not expect the people in the community to prepare several Monobloc chairs for us. To my surprise, they did not do their prayer inside the *masjid*, instead they performed it outside, in a vacant lot, so we could observe them properly. After their prayer, I was given some grain of rice by a Muslim man who said, "I am sharing *Allah subhanahu wa ta' ala's* blessing to you." I was astounded and moved by the kindness and gesture of acceptance they showed us. My students and I went back to the center overwhelmed with joy for such a friendly, beautiful and fruitful encounter with our Muslim brethren in the community.

The Launching of the Mindanao Week of Peace in November 1999

Peace is the top issue of the government in Mindanao. The deeply rooted century-old conflict between Muslims and Christians has been passed on from generation to generation. As I grew older, it seemed like the armed conflict between the government troops, the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), which had displaced thousands of innocent civilians, was never going to end. *Alhamdulillah* that in 1996 the Bishops and the *Ulama* of Mindanao convened to discuss the issue of peace and how their role as religious leaders can help in healing the past and building the future of Mindanao. The Bishops and the *Ulama* made a proactive intervention and gave recommendations in the peace talks between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) and the MILF. The outcome of the religious leaders' intervention was the issuance of Presiden-

tial Proclamation 127¹ declaring a week-long celebration of peace in Mindanao in order to provide an avenue where various forms of peace initiatives and Mindanaoans' aspirations can be articulated, voiced and communicated. Furthermore, the Proclamation enjoined all government agencies and their instrumentalities, as well as civil society organizations based in Mindanao, to engage in relevant and meaningful activities in the celebration of the annual Mindanao Week of Peace.

Among the series of activities that I joined during the launching in November 1999 was a series of church and *masjid* visits for religious leaders. I was the youngest and the only young person in a group of religious leaders from Lanao del Norte and Lanao del Sur to go to Marawi City for the Friday *Dohor* Prayer Observance. I was overly excited because it was my first time to actually go inside the *masjid*. All the Christian delegates (priests, pastor, three religious sisters and myself) were welcomed by the late Dr. Mahid Mutilan, the Muslim convener of the Bishops-Ulama Conference (BUC), to his house in Barangay Saduc, Marawi City. There and then we were divided and assigned to a particular *masjid* for the prayer observance. I was assigned together with the three sisters in the Islamic Center, which was the biggest *masjid* in the city proper. Before we went I asked Dr. Mutilan if I could borrow a veil, but he said there was "no need" since I am a Christian and this was part of the launching activities. I was confident that everything would be all right even if I was not wearing a veil in-

¹Former Philippine President Joseph Ejercito Estrada issued Proclamation 207 on 5 November 1999. Unfortunately, four months after issuing the proclamation he waged an "All-Out-War" against the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), which displaced millions of residents, some of whom returned home only after Estrada was ousted in January 2001. Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo assumed the presidency in January that year following the impeachment of Estrada. She then issued Proclamation 127, which was practically a reiteration of Proclamation 207.

side their *masjid*. Our local escorts brought us to the second floor of the building designated for Muslim women for their obligatory prayer (*salat*). I could not contain the joy I felt deep inside when I sat beside the Muslim women who were performing their *salat*. I wondered why the person giving the sermon was obscured by a brown cloth that covered the railings. I wanted to peep as I was really curious, but I was reluctant because the Muslim women were looking at me. So I behaved myself at the corner and waited until the prayer finished.

After the prayer, as we were descending the staircase, my overwhelming feeling of joy was suddenly replaced by shock as a man who came out of nowhere shouted that I was a “*Kafir*” because I had not worn a veil inside their *masjid*. As I reached the ground floor, I was surrounded by Meranao Muslim men. I felt so helpless from the humiliation. I knew the man said a lot of foul words at me. It was a good thing that I could not understand their dialect. All I said to them was, “I am so sorry.” I tried to say something but it seemed like no one was listening. Suddenly, another man came and tried to stop the disgruntled man. He approached me and apologized for his fellow Meranaos, and asked me to forgive the person because he did not know why I was there inside their *masjid*. I was relieved and consoled to have a Muslim Meranao defend me in the midst of a hostile crowd. My Islamic Center prayer observance was a great learning experience despite the public humiliation I received. I learned that I should not assume that all will be well every time I enter other people’s sacred ground even if people in authority say so. I should always remind myself of the expression of Bishop Kenneth Cragg: “Our first task in approaching another people, another culture, another

religion is to take off our shoes, for the place we are approaching is Holy. Else, we may find ourselves treading on men's (and women's) dreams. More seriously still, we may forget that God was there before our arrival."

My Dialogue with God and Muslims at Xavier University

After the death of my father, I ended my term as a volunteer in the summer of 2000. I went back to my home in Cagayan de Oro City to be with my family, especially with my mother. Two weeks after settling in I visited the KKP Office, where I was a volunteer in my student years, and met the KKP director, Ermin Stan B Pimentel, who at that time was also the director of the Campus Ministries Office. Ermin asked me what my plan was since I had already ended my volunteer work in Iligan City. Jokingly I replied, "*Mopahulay sa ang Marine, Min!*" (This Marine will take some rest, Min!) My response did not sit well with him. "*Walay pahulay-pahulay sa mga Marines!* (There is no rest for the Marines!)," he said. "You better go to the Campus Ministries Office and if you find a spot or a corner where you can work comfortably, then tomorrow give me your application and I will hire you." Just like that, I was hired and assigned to work in Interreligious and Cultural Dialogue (IRCD) because of my exposure and experience in Iligan and Marawi cities.

When I set foot in XU, the IRCD Program of the Campus Ministries was not yet established. Although there were some initiatives, there was no clear program structure and direction. My first few months in IRCD were purely exploratory especially because I was new to the academe set-up. It was like testing the placid river and finding out whether my experimentation would produce a

ripple effect. In July 2000, I met Dr. Rene Oliveros. He challenged me to organize the Muslim students in the university if I was really serious about putting up a program structure and directions for IRCD. I took his challenge seriously and did my best to organize the Muslim students.

“To Whom Shall I Entrust Them, Mona?”

Entering the ground of the Muslim students was not easy. Suspicion hovered at every corner. They wondered: “Why would a Catholic woman want to organize us and journey with us during our stay at the university?” It took some time for them to welcome me. There were many instances when they questioned my intention and motives. I could still recall the male Meranao Muslim students who repudiated me when I introduced myself as well as the program of IRCD inside the classroom. In order to ease their suspicion, I responded to all of their questions squarely and shared with them the objectives of the IRCD program of the Campus Ministries. I was not totally intimidated by their reactions and suspicions. I knew they needed the assurance that I was not converting them to Christianity. In spite of their rejections, I did not stop befriending them. I was more challenged to continue journeying with them despite their discreet mistrust. Deep in my heart I prayed and hoped that one day they would understand why I would like to be with them.

With patience, humility, determination and perseverance I was able to organize the students as Sira’j Muslim Religious Organization, with the help of a friend, Ms. Soraya Ali, who became the first part-time teacher of Muslim Religious Studies at XU. The good thing about Sira’j is that the members are under the guid-

ance of the Campus Ministries. Initially, the students wanted to call their organization, Sira'j Muslim Students' Association, but I strongly insisted that it should be a religious organization. We had several discussions about the nature of their organization until the members reached a consensus. The organization was officially recognized as a religious organization by the university in 2003.

Over the years, I have been accompanying Muslim students in the university in Sira'j and in their faith journeys. Since the creation of their organization until today, I am their moderator. Many times I have told them that they need an *Ustadz* to be their moderator because of my limitation as a Christian. However, they do not want me to leave them. Perhaps they feel secure with me because they know I am always there to help them when they encounter difficulties in dealing with offices and departments, especially with the wearing of the hijab for women, and other religious practices and activities.

A lot of times I wanted to stop accompanying them. However, every time I brought this concern to my prayer and discernment, I always heard Jesus saying, "To whom shall I entrust them, Mona?" In the Ignatian tradition of Finding God in All Things, I am called to go beyond the borders of Christianity to a culture and religion that is foreign to me. My discernment always led me to care for the young Muslims in Xavier University.

An Ignatian Retreat: Trust is a Hard Thing to Earn Because It Entails Genuineness of Heart and Intention

After three years as a campus minister, I was given a new challenge by the director to come up with a recollection and retreat

module for Muslim students. He said it was high time that we provided our Muslim students their own Islamic spiritual formation. As a Jesuit institution, XU requires its students to undergo a recollection every year and a retreat on their last year of studies. My former colleague Ms. Jana Jean Dacobor and I had to look for a Muslim religious scholar who could help us develop a recollection and retreat module that was parallel to the module we were giving our Christian students. *Alhamdulillah*, we got Dr. Nagasura Madale to help us. Surprisingly, our Muslim students had very negative reactions. They asked me who made the module and scrutinized the personal background of Dr Madale, who had served as vice president of Capitol University in Cagayan de Oro City. Indeed, introducing something new to the life of the Muslim students in the university was not easy. It took a lot of patience before they gradually learned to appreciate our efforts in providing them with their own Islamic spiritual formation.

Facilitating a Muslim Recollection (Retreat) Based on Trust and Respect

My Interior Preparation

I start with acknowledging that there are certain areas in our religious practices and beliefs that are non-negotiable and cannot be compromised. They demand our utmost respect. I know of my desire to incorporate some of the processes that I do with my Christian students in their spiritual enrichment, but I need to be constantly aware of my Muslim students and respect their own way of proceeding. During the early years of my facilitation, I would cover the sacred statues of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Crucified Christ inside the session hall for fear that I might of-

fend them. Nonetheless, there were times when I forgot to cover the statues and some Muslim students would ask if I could put them away during the session. Every time I would do so, I would feel torn between two loves. It hurt me that my Muslim students could not “accept or respect” my Jesus though I know they acknowledge him as one of their great prophets. At the Lestonnac Youth Center owned by the Company of Mary, I would drape a white cloth to serve as division between male and female students, as well as mats on the floor for their *Dohor* and *Asr* prayers. Sometimes I would ask myself why they could not tolerate the sacred statues inside the session hall. It would take several years for a breakthrough to happen.

Normally, in all Muslim recollections and retreats, I make the students understand that spiritual formation is part and parcel of the university’s holistic formation program. I encourage them to treat it as an opportunity for self and spiritual growth, and not just a mere school requirement. Except for the Islamic input that is given by an *Ustadz*, I usually facilitate the entire process of the recollection or retreat, including the psycho-spiritual activities, sharing of reflections and spiritual conversations. Every time the *Ustadz* gives his input, I listen very well and try to connect it to the next individual or group activity and reflection.

The Recollection Proper

I first introduce myself as a Roman Catholic who will facilitate either their whole-day recollection or two-day retreat. I have found that creative getting-to-know-you activities are an effective way of breaking their inhibition. For example, I ask them to describe themselves positively using a word whose first letter is the same

as the first letter of their name. But, from the outset, the most important thing is to establish some ground rules, which should come from the retreatants themselves, knowing that they belong to different ethnic groups, such as Meranao, Taosug, Maguindanao, Iranun, Sama, and Yakan. To formally begin, I ask for a volunteer to lead the opening prayer or *du'a* to be offered for the group and the recollection process.

The process of facilitating a recollection and retreat for Muslim students is actually not that different from facilitating a retreat for Christian students, except that for the Muslims we have to be mindful of the schedule of their obligatory prayers. I have noticed that many of them feel awkward, especially with the atmosphere of silence throughout the recollection or retreat, but I always tell them to give it a try. Who knows, they might have new discoveries and realizations in that moment of solitude. Still, I encourage them to be honest with me if they do not find the silence helpful. I ask them to give me suggestions or alternatives. But in my experience so far, they have all tried doing their retreat/recollection in silence.

Their Desires

While on retreat or recollection, it is essential to get hold of their desires because it will help them dispose themselves to the process of self-introspection, noticing their growth points and assessing their relationship with the people around them and with Allah, as well as to define and redefine their life's horizon in their prayer life. I am grateful that the students have been honest enough to tell me that they are not faithful in their prayer life and desire to

be more faithful to their obligatory prayer, the teachings of Islam and the hadith of Prophet Muhammad.

In moments of individual reflection, I usually use a modified prayer method of St Ignatius of Loyola. I ask them to find a place or a corner where they can reflect comfortably and not be distracted by their companions; to take a comfortable position, which they can hold for about 20 to 30 minutes; and to pray a *du'a* before delving into the activity or reflection matter. Then once they are finished with their reflection I ask them to make a review through journal writing with the help of some reflection questions. During the small group sharing, I ask whether it is possible to have a mixed group of male and female members. Some don't like to be in mixed groups, so I let them be, while others find it a welcome change because it gives them an opportunity to listen to each other's sacred story. During the plenary, however, both male and female students are able to share in front of everybody. Many of their sharing have been intense and emotional, especially when it comes to issues in their family and their relationship with Allah.

I make sure to process and mirror to them the salient points that were shared. I had never tried the Ignatian method of spiritual conversation in pre-pandemic times except with the Muslim and non-Catholic graduating students of the College of Medicine. These days, I make use of online spiritual conversations for all students regardless of their faith and year level. A facilitator will give the guidelines and then the students are grouped into five. A Campus Minister guides the three rounds of sharing. During the first round, the students share the fruits of their prayer and reflection based on the inputs and the reflection questions given to them. After a minute of pause, we proceed to the second

round, turning the conversation on the points shared by their companions that they found life-giving, inspiring or striking. The last round of the conversation is more on God's invitation, challenge or personal message to them having shared and having heard from their companions. We conclude the conversation with a simple prayer. Often times I ask a Muslim student to do the closing prayer. So far there have been no complaints or objections. In fact, the spiritual conversation has enriched the students' sharing experience that it is actually given the highest rating by the students in their evaluation.

Usually, we close our online recollection or retreat with a reconciliation activity, in which they are encouraged to write a letter to Allah asking forgiveness for their sins. The *Ustadz* or a *hafiz* student will lead the prayer or *du'a*. The students will then exchange gestures of peace or words of gratitude to one another. During in-person retreats or recollections, I would place a clay pot outside the venue with a lighted candle where the students would burn their prayer.

Main Issues of Muslim Students

A prominent issue that students, especially the women, often share is arranged marriage with someone whom they do not yet know or like. They have no choice but to obey their parents. They have this strong belief that after Allah, their parents deserve their thanks and obedience for the favors they have done for them. The Qur'an stresses gratitude to parents and doing good to them (Surah Al-Israh 7: 23). However, I remember a female student whose prayer was for "Allah [to] grant my plans to divorce my husband." In fact, the last time I met her, she asked me to con-

gratulate her because the Shariah court had given her a certificate of divorce. And now she is happily married to the man she loves. Another instance that deeply moved me was when a student shared how her father's marriage to a second wife affected her. I thought it was not a big deal for Muslims because it is allowed in their teachings, but the pain she felt for her mom and her siblings was excruciating. The male students are not usually so open about sharing these kinds of issues although they can resonate with them. Often they prefer to share about their hopes of making their parents proud. Thus, they really aspire to finish their studies and land a job to repay their parents' sacrifices.

When it comes to their faith life, many of the students are challenged in fulfilling their five obligatory prayers because of their class schedules and school activities. This makes them feel very guilty. They struggle with balancing their faith, academic, social and family life given multiple distractions from social media, online games, peer pressure, family concerns and many others. Some of them have also shared about their lack of knowledge of Islam and its teachings, and how this affects their relationship with Allah. Remarkably, they are grateful to be in a Jesuit and Catholic institution because of the opportunity to nourish and be enriched by their own Islamic faith through a recollection.

It has always been an honor and a privilege to listen, know and learn from the Muslim students' sacred stories. I find listening to their faith-life journeys not only inspiring but also life-giving. Indeed, God can be found not only in all things but also in all people. I feel God fully alive in the presence of these students, and He reveals Himself to me through them. I cannot help but be awed by His overflowing love and grace, especially when the

students are able to share openly to their companions their desire to become better versions of themselves for others and for Allah. Though challenging, what a privilege that God has entrusted to me this beautiful ministry. How I wish there would be more Roman Catholics, lay or religious, who would be willing to accompany Muslim students.

Islam and Ignatian Spirituality

I have discovered that Ignatian Spirituality does not contradict Islam but rather complements and supplements it. At the heart of Ignatian and Islamic spirituality is man's predisposition to surrender to the will of God. The Prophet Muhammad said, "No babe is born but upon *fitrah*"² –every child is born a "Muslim." The Arabic word *fitrah* means "primordial human nature" or predisposition. "Muslim" here does not mean that the child will end up belonging to a religion. It means that every child born into the world, regardless of religion, has a predisposition to submit to God. The child Jesus is a case in point. In Islam, Jesus is called Abdullah (ʿabd-Allāh) or someone who is a "slave of Allah." Jesus (Issa in the Qur'an) was declared a "slave of Allah" from the time he was born. The child Jesus said: "*Qaala innee 'abdullaahi*" (Verily! I am a slave of Allah) Q. 19:30. Submission to God's will is the sole basis of any authentic religion. All the Prophets of God even in the Jewish tradition, which the Qur'an mentions, called their people to submit to the One and only God. The only true religion as far as God is concerned is "Submission to God" (Islam).

²Sahih Muslim, Book 033, Number 6426.

Ignatian Consolation

There were occasions during the recollections and retreats that left me feeling deeply consoled. One instance that stands out was when a Muslim student shared how grateful he was to be studying in a Jesuit school. As I listened to him, I was deeply moved when he mentioned that he was now praying faithfully the five obligatory prayers. He admitted that he had not been a prayerful man, but he was now seeking more knowledge and wisdom about Islam. After the sharing, I noticed that the sacred statues had not been covered. I apologized about forgetting to cover them. However, I was surprised by their response: "You need not cover them anymore Ma'am Mona; it is all right with us that the statues remain uncovered." I was overjoyed. Deep within, my soul was shouting, "Thanks be to God!" At last we had reached a new level of tolerance and respect. That moment really overwhelmed me with joy and gratitude.

Another source of consolation was the sharing of a female participant who was part of the first cohort of graduating students to undertake the retreat module for Muslims. Because of the retreat, she said she had started reading the Qur'an again after 10 long years. I also remember Jalani Pamlia who was a very active student leader when the Sira'j Muslim Religious Organization was first starting out. He helped me to organize his fellow Muslim students and develop the organization's governance structure. When I implemented the first Muslim retreat in September 2003, he was one of the retreatants. He would ask me to remind them when it was time for their prayer. Jalani is now an *Ustadz* and is working for the government. For some years before he married,

he taught part-time in the Muslim Religious Studies department at XU and helped me facilitate Muslim spiritual formation sessions. He would give the Islamic inputs, and I would facilitate the entire process and provide the reflection activities. One time over lunch, he told me that he was observing me in my facilitation and asked if I knew someone who could train him in facilitating recollections and retreats. I am grateful because God always sends someone to help me continue the ministry of accompanying our Muslim students.

Conclusion

Never had I imagined that, for more than half of my life, God would send me to accompany Muslims. God has filled me with the courage and strength to attempt the impossible with nothing. I did not know anything about Muslims but God schooled me in places where I could witness his works of mercy, love and reconciliation among and between Muslims and Christians, especially in the service of the missionaries in Lanao del Sur and Marawi—the Columban Fathers, Mission Etrangere de Paris, C.I.C.M., the Carmelite Monk Sisters and diocesan priests. I was like a seed being planted by a farmer in fertile soil. In the process, I cracked open to pave the way for God’s plan for me to engage in this tough ministry of the Church. By faith and trust I can grow like the mustard tree where birds and other living creatures can take shade and rest.

Accompanying Muslim students in the university is my way of introducing Jesus Christ in their lives as students of a Catholic university. Sometimes I ask myself, “What difference have I made in their life as Muslims?” Maybe an equally important

question is, “What differences have my Muslim students made in my life?” Without offending them, have I made them see Jesus as He wants to be seen? I remember when I attended one of the meetings of the Bishops-*Ulama* Conference, the executive director asked me, “Mona, how are you going to introduce Jesus to our Muslim brothers and sisters without offending them?” I had no answer for her then. Now as I look back, I ask myself: “Have I offended them?” “Have I convinced them to become Christians?” I would like to think I have not! My Muslim students remain faithful Muslims and I remain a faithful Roman Catholic.

My presence with Muslim students has brought deeper meaning to my being a Catholic. It has made me appreciate my faith all the more. These Muslim students are God’s gift to me. Every time I am with them in their spiritual formation, there is no sense of division of the divine at all, especially when things are grounded in faith. I always have that feeling of *tawhid* (oneness) with them. I hope in my own little way to be able to heal the deep wounds and hatred of the past, and by God’s grace, help build a future where genuine reconciliation is felt in the grassroots, where, in the name of God’s peace, all creatures live together harmoniously.

AFTERWORD

The Christian-Muslim encounter is a complex and fraught field. While there is much that is mutually enriching in the history of their encounter, there is also much that is perplexing. Memory and text can be used to reinforce misunderstanding and antagonism which seem to reinforce Jan Assmann's¹ controversial thesis that monotheism(s) is inherently violent. Yet, there are many sources and experiences, not least in the teachings of Christianity and Islam themselves, which offer a counter testimony. They do not remain unknown to each other, and we can see with what great respect Islamic philosophy was treated by Christian scholars in the Middle Ages. Neither is Jesus unknown to the Qur'an and Hadith, which often contain beautiful portraits of Jesus the prophet.² Despite sharing a monotheistic faith, neither Christianity nor Islam can be said to be uniform religions. Each contains many different streams of thought and worship, sometimes in conflict with each other, as well as many differing schools of mysticism. Both recognize and express the human encounter with a transcendent Mercy as the proper object of human faith, hope and peace.

Yet, one of the major obstacles to a fruitful dialogue is the self-generating interplay of fear, distortion and misunderstanding. The "other" quickly becomes demonized. As history demonstrates, it is too easy to exploit these dynamics for social, politi-

¹ Assmann, Jan. *Moses the Egyptian* [electronic Resource]: *The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1998. Also Bernstein, Richard J. "Jan Assmann: The Mosaic Distinction and Religious Violence." *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* 32.1 (2011): 1-32.

² Khalidi, Tarif. *The Muslim Jesus: Sayings and Stories in Islamic Literature*. Cambridge, Mass.; London: Harvard UP, 2001; Siddiqui, Mona. *Christians, Muslims, & Jesus*. New Haven; London: Yale UP, 2013.

cal and economic ends that undermine the peace that both Islam and Christianity seek for humanity. This has certainly increased since 9/11 and the tragic aftermath from which we have not yet recovered. Truly productive dialogue entails the real humility to attend to the “other” in all their dimensions; it requires a narrative hospitality that does not impose pre-constructed identities or prejudices but gives time and space in which the other may disclose themselves. There is the patient and sustained work of attention to the other and to oneself, which entails a movement of de-construction: to become aware of the presuppositions and pre-judgements that already shape our ways of knowing and evaluating the imaginary before us.

Practically from its beginning, the Society of Jesus has been actively committed to an engagement with Islamic cultures. Like that of the Catholic Church, the method and purpose of this encounter has changed over the centuries. It took a significant turn with the promulgation of *Nostra Aetate* in Vatican II.³ What is fresh and creative in this collection of essays is the way in which they apply the method and hermeneutic of the Spiritual Exercises – anthropological and theological – to the encounter of Christianity and Islam, now more urgent than ever.

Taking the optic of the Spiritual Exercises as way of structuring and guiding the different levels of engagement may seem like an unusual methodology. However, reading these contributions, we can begin to see its originality and creative possibilities. The Spiritual Exercises arise out of the experience of Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Society of Jesus. Being a product of

³For a recent comprehensive study and assessment of *Nostra Aetate* and the current work of the Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue cf. Jukka Risto, *Trinity in Unity in Christian-Muslim Relations: The Work of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue*. Leiden; Boston, 2007. The History of Christian-Muslim Relations 7. Esp. Chapter one pp.1-38.

16th century Spain, Ignatius was aware of Islamic culture, yet the Exercises are able to transcend the cultural and historical limitations which the culture of the period can impose. The essays you have just read are evidence of this. In the case of that preliminary work of deconstructing our conditioned frames of understanding which can mask knowledge and mislead our encounters, the First Week of the Spiritual Exercises offers us a hermeneutic process. We are invited to know and understand our “sinful” entanglements, personal and historical, which distort our epistemologies and our responses. The over-riding dynamic of the Exercises is of a God who is transcendent but profoundly intimate in the loving care of creation and humanity. If all things, especially humans, are created to give God glory (SPEX 23), it is evident that this is best accomplished in love and service of “the Divine Majesty” and each other (our neighbor). Creation, itself, is not marginal to this, for creation is part of the Divine plan and shares in the Divine purpose of reflecting God’s salvific mercy (SPEX 60; 234).

Obviously, in the Christian understanding, Jesus, through his life and mission of loving obedient service to God and to neighbor, is our primary teacher, even to the point of sacrificing his own life for the life of others. This capacity to make love real in actions as well as in words for the good of others and for the life of the whole community is again central to the Spiritual Exercises. It opens up the mystery of Divine love and purpose. It also discloses the mystery of human freedom itself, the supreme and distinguishing mark of every person. One of the explicit purposes of the Exercises then is seeking the gift of this freedom from God, coming to know what prevents us from making God the supreme object of our desire and our hope, and what entangles us so that

we misuse our freedom. The more deeply we enter into this relationship and grow in loving service, we discover that we grow in a sense of gratitude. Gratitude is the hallmark of the truly free person. These are just some of the central dimensions of the Exercises which also have their resonance in the great theological and mystical traditions of Islam. Indeed, it is through this very encounter with each other that our understanding and gratitude not only for what we can share but also of what makes us distinct can deepen. Instead of seeing our “differences” as an obstacle or a threat, we come to appreciate them as “gift.” As such, they can also be the source of a mature reconciliation and joyful appreciation of the mystery of the Divine at work in history.

That “love ought to manifest itself in deeds rather than words” and “love consists in a mutual sharing of goods...the lover gives and shares with the beloved what he possesses...” (SPEX 230, 231) must also become a cardinal principle in guiding the encounters between Islam and Christianity. For Ignatius and, indeed, for the Society of Jesus, this principle is not a clichéd or trite formula. It is grounded in our experience of the compassion of God and how God deals with us and our world in patience and abundant mercy. It is made concrete in the life of Jesus. The principle of a love made real in action opens the way not only to dialogue but to “deeds” of transformative and reconciling love. It obliges us to search out those ways in which we can work together for the healing of humanity, creation and the flourishing of all life. This is a practical work of conversion and transformation to which we are all summoned and for God’s greater glory can only be accomplished together. Often, it is in “deeds” that respond to the urgent human and ecological needs that all humanity faces that we es-

establish the conditions for dialogue rather than vice versa. It is only when we hear the compassionate and all-merciful God calling to us in the suffering cries of the poor, marginalized, oppressed and, indeed, in the cry of an anguished exploited and abused creation, that we realize that deeds must precede words. There is the prior “dialogue” of merciful and loving acts which give all our words body and life. These urgent and demanding common tasks or missions will only be fruitful if we can bring the profound spiritual and visionary resources of Islam and Christianity to bear on them. In the Document for Human Fraternity and World Peace, agreed by the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Ahmed el-Tayeb, and Pope Francis (February 2019), we may begin to see the shape of this other practical level of dialogue in common love of God and Humanity.

The insights, scholarship and perspectives found in this collection are offered to us in this year when the Society of Jesus marks the conversion of St Ignatius. Through the process of his own conversion Ignatius recognized that effective dialogue must become a genuinely affective relationship of reverence, care, respect and hospitality between participants. Ultimately, it must be a work of love. This collection of essays is such a work. We pray that all of us may continue to walk this road of peace and dialogue together affectively and effectively. It is the path that seeks a more complete conversion to the truth, holiness and compassion of God.

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About the Contributors

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JOURNEYING WITH MUSLIMS: THE IGNATIAN WAY

Journeying with Muslims: The Ignatian Way (2022) is the first anthology of papers published by the Jesuits Among Muslims In Asia (JAMIA). The present volume includes papers categorized into the Four Ways of Interfaith Dialogue: (1) Dialogue of Life, (2) Dialogue of Action, (3) Dialogue of Theological Exchange, and (4) Dialogue of Prayer and Spirituality. The shared faith in the oneness of God, to discern His will, and subsequently submit to it is a consistent thread in all the papers. This book is a well-discerned response to the challenges to Muslim-Catholic relations in Asia. It documents how Ignatian Spirituality is lived and shared by Jesuits and their companions with their Muslim friends. The God-given spiritualities of St. Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556) and Prophet Muhammad (c. 570 – 8 June 632 CE) are shared in contemplation and action. The charisms of the Muslim five daily prayers (al-salat) and Ignatian “examen of consciousness” forge friendships committed to work for God’s Greater Glory.

About the Jesuits Among Muslims In Asia (JAMIA)

The Jesuit Conference of Asia Pacific (JCAP), which includes the nations of East and Southeast Asia, as well as Australia and New Zealand, promotes interreligious dialogue with Islam and Buddhism. Established in 2009, The Jesuits Among Muslims In Asia (JAMIA) is a network of Jesuits active in the study of Islam and engaged in solidarity actions with Muslims. It is composed of Jesuits and lay companions from the Conferences of Asia Pacific and South Asia, particularly Jesuits in Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan, Bangladesh and India. As a network, they are called to share their knowledge with other Jesuits, along with the Church, who, in turn, can engage more widely with Muslims through their work as educators, pastors, intellectuals and social workers.

