JESUIT CONFERENCE of ASIA PACIFIC

ASIA PACIFIC THEOLOGICAL ENCOUNTER PROGRAM (APTEP)

Toward a Theology of Dialogue with Islam

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Editors:
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EDITORIAL NOTES

Pope Francis' 2024 visit to Indonesia is historic. It iterates the priority of his papacy which is the mission of the Catholic Church in Asia. The reaction of Muslims in Indonesia, exemplified by the warm welcome extended by President Joko Widodo, and Grand Imam Nasaruddin Umar to Pope Francis have been an image of fraternity in the gesture of brotherhood while recognizing each other as equal in diversity. In effect, it has extended the same respect for the Christian minority of Indonesia being the home of the largest Muslim populations in the world.

Australian Archbishop Peter Andrew Comensoli of Melbourne, closely following Pope Francis' Apostolic journey, tells Vatican News that Asia is the future of the Church. Asia is home to ancient religions of Shintoism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, and Hinduism. Five centuries past, Christians remain a minority in an Asia dominated by Muslims and Hindus. Islam is the only religion that affirms Christians as People of the Book (*ahl al-kitāb* أهل الكتاب (with whom Muslims intimately share Jesus the Word, Mary and the Spirit. The names *Eisa al-Masih* (Jesus the Christ), *Ruh al-Qudus* (The Holy Spirit), and *Maryam umm Eisa* (Mary the mother of Jesus), can

only be found in two sacred scriptures—the Qur'ān, and more so, in the New Testament. Muslims believe that the Qur'ān affirms what has been revealed in the earlier scriptures.

In APMS's special issue on Muslim-Christian Relations the Indonesian experience,[1] Fr. Greg Soetomo SJ's Introduction: '*Immersion Seeking Faith Understanding*'—explains the theological method and framework of the papers for Two Jesuits and a Xavierian rose to the challenge of Theological Exchange with Muslims in mind: *The Journeys of Muslims to China* (Mark Tri, SJ), *Witnessing to Eisa al-Masih in the Muslim World* (Richard Niyukuri, SX), and *Echoes of Muslim-Christian Disputes in Early Islam: A Theological Exchange and Its Lasting Influence* (Isodorus Bangkit Susetyo Adi, SJ). The encounter with Muslims is shared as a spiritual journey in Pham Van Doan, SJ's *Hajj (Pilgrimage): Encountering God in Indonesia*, and as a Dialogue of Spirituality in Sr Nurhayati OSU's *Growing as an Indonesian Ursuline Together with Muslim Friends.* Brazilian Carlos Cesar Barbosa, SJ's *Charity as Dialogue of Action in the*

[1] All the papers in this publication are published in ASIA PACIFIC MISSION STUDIES JOURNAL. Volume 6-2 (October 2024).

Collaboration between a Muslim Sheikh and a Catholic Priest the Homeless in São Paulo.

Renato Taib Oliveros reviews the significance of Pope Francis and Grand Imam Nasaruddin Umar's signed Joint Declaration of Istiqlal, entitled *Fostering Religious Harmony for the sake of Humanity, and reflects on its impact on Christian-Muslim relations in Asia*. The paper affirms that interfaith dialogue is an effective tool to resolving conflicts, and curbing climate change in the region.

Renato Taib Oliveros, PhD

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Immersion Seeking Faith Understanding - APTEP and Its Theological Method

Greg Soetomo, SJ

Abstract
How do we construct and organize a step-by-step of doing theology in the context of dialogue with Islam? The answer to this question is neither singular nor uniform. One of the possible paths is through immersing into a Muslim community. From such encounters, explanations are formed, then reflected upon and written systematically in the light of Catholic faith teachings. The search of this theological method is based on the evaluation and reflection on the *Asia Pacific Theological Encounter Program* (APTEP) conducted from June 4 to 24, 2024, in Indonesia, particularly in three cities: Jakarta, Salatiga, and Yogyakarta. This four-week program, held under the umbrella of the *Jesuit Conference of Asia Pacific* (JCAP), had a different focus and concentration for each week.

The Catholic Church recognizes four types of dialogue: the dialogue of life, the dialogue of action, the dialogue of religious experience, and the dialogue of theological exchange. Throughout the program, these four types of dialogue were engaged simultaneously. Although there are theoretical distinctions among these dialogues, in real-life experiences, there are no rigid separations between them. For the purposes of this

article, the fourth dialogue, theological exchange, serves as the culmination of the other three.

Twenty-one participants from nine countries (Angola, Brazil, Burundi, the Philippines, Indonesia, Myanmar, Singapore, China, and Vietnam) joined the APTEP program, consisting of laypeople, nuns, scholastics, and Catholic priests. Their journey over four weeks was a journey of dialogue. Their dialogue stories, through a systematic process, became theological activities where experiences and life journeys in time and space sought to understand faith.

Preparatory Week

Organizing a group of nearly two dozen people from different countries, moving through several locations, with a variety of activities, requires meticulous preparation and implementation. From budgeting, preparing logistics, managing venues, to communicating plans and decisions to involved personnel, all needed detailed preparation. Efficient communication and coordination were crucial in ensuring the program ran smoothly.

While APTEP is an abstract and intellectual theological program, it must be supported by tangible

tools and well-organized systems. Behind the well-executed organization was a process of community building. The solid community built through spiritual and non-spiritual activities greatly contributed to the clarity and gave a mental joy in the heavy and serious work of reflecting on faith experiences.

Clarity and the direction of the program were conveyed through virtual meetings (*Zoom*) during the preparation stage. One participant wrote afterward, "Before joining APTEP, Father Greg Soetomo had already prepared us to conduct research. This process helped me prepare myself for the APTEP program." The preparation phase thus became an integral part of the theological journey.

Encounter with the Muslim Academic Community

The first week, from June 4 to June 10, the participants stayed at the *Indonesian International Islamic University* (UIII; *Universitas Islam Internasional Indonesia*) located at the outskirts of Jakarta. APTEP began within the context of this Islamic state university, home to students from various countries and continents, with classes conducted in English. UIII's mission is to

introduce Indonesia's moderate Islam to global civilization.

On campus, participants engaged in encounters that often shaped their perceptions. Carlos, a participant from Brazil, was impressed by a brief conversation with Mahmud, a student from Egypt: "He expressed that, due to his religious and cultural background, his knowledge of Christianity is limited, and he sees APTEP as a valuable opportunity for both religious traditions to deepen their mutual understanding."

During informal conversations, some Muslim students began asking more specific questions about Catholic traditions, such as the practice of celibacy among Catholic religious members. The door opened even wider when participants asked about the hijab in Islam and the 'political hijab' in countries like Iran. Benafsha from Afghanistan commented, "A person's choice of attire, whether wearing a *hijab* or not, does not define their open-mindedness or conservatism; it is their ideas that truly matter."

The academic environment led participants into critical discussions on various topics like *Moderate Islam of Indonesia*, *Contemporary Issues in Islam*, *Muhammad-The Qur'an-Islamic Tradition*, *Christianity in Islamic*

Civilization, and *Religious Radicalism*, with lecturers providing freedom for in-depth discussions. Sr. Hedwig CB from Indonesia, who originally came from a Muslim family, reflected, "Though I come from a Muslim family and was once Muslim, my knowledge of Islam was still limited. The insights from UIII speakers and discussions among APTEP participants deepened my understanding of Islam. This knowledge changed my perception, and I now see Islam more clearly."

This week, according to some participants, seemed to pass quickly. A week that could be titled, "New knowledge, new experience, new friends."

Living Together, An Irreplaceable Experience

In the second week, 21 participants relocated from Jakarta, leaving behind an urban setting, to a 'medium-sized' town in Central Java called Salatiga, which is closely connected to a rural atmosphere. Traveling by chartered bus, the participants covered a distance of around 500 km, arriving at a place with a different daily life atmosphere and dynamics; from a university campus setting to an atmosphere of a community and village; from a multicultural and international Muslim community that is scholarly and academic to a traditional, monolithic

Javanese Muslim society influenced by Nahdlatul Ulama's form of Islam.

From June 11 to 17, the participants were divided and dispersed into two locations, forming two groups. This division resulted in the creation of new communities, each with its own experiences and dynamics.

The first group was placed in the Edi Mancoro Islamic Boarding House (*Pondok Pesantren*), located in Gedangan Village, Tuntang Subdistrict, Semarang Regency, Central Java. At an altitude of 500 meters above sea level, the boarding house is situated at the foot of Mount Merbabu and not far from Rawa Pening, surrounded by forests and rice fields.

Edi Mancoro Boarding House is categorized as a semi-modern Salafiyah dormitory, where the students live to study the "Kitab Kuning" (classical Islamic texts). The mosque at the boarding school serves as the center for religious study and worship. Students study the Qur'an and practice applying Islamic values within the boarding school, while formal education is conducted outside the house. Edi Mancoro is widely known as a meeting point for various communities and social movements, including interfaith movements.

APTEP participants engaged with the daily dynamics of the boarding school in the morning, which typically involved various spiritual activities, dawn prayers, and studying classical texts and the Qur'an in its different forms.

The second group stayed in a complex called the Qaryah Thayyibah Learning Community, located in Kalibening Subdistrict, Tingkir District, in the city of Salatiga. This community was founded and led by a Muslim scholar with a background in traditional Islamic boarding school education and higher education, who transformed into a social activist. He read two books that changed the orientation of his social vision: *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* by Paulo Freire and *Deschooling Society* by Ivan Illich. This Learning Community embodies the philosophy that the best education takes place in real life. In this educational concept, children are the central subjects of learning, and the diversity of each child's talents is respected.

The experiences of living in these two places opened the participants' eyes and minds. Sr. Siti OSU from Indonesia, after spending a week at Edi Mancoro, wrote, "My experience here brought many blessings as a Catholic woman. Before the Idul Adha ceremony, we were invited

to join morning prayers—a different experience altogether." Another nun, Sr. Nurhayati OSU, remarked, "In many places, in the Muslim neighborhood, I have seen women treated as second-class citizens, but in the Qaryah Thayyibah community, I witnessed gender equality in action."

Another nun from Vietnam, Sr. Lucy Mien, who stayed in the Qaryah Thayyibah Learning Community, shared her experience: "I have observed that the Muslim community places great importance on togetherness and hospitality." She personally witnessed how the Muslim community has a strong commitment to practicing their faith. They almost never miss or fail to perform the five daily prayers. Being faithful to their religion and to God does not mean forgetting humanism. Sr. Lucy further wrote, "Muslims often share meals, warmly welcome others into their homes, and joyfully celebrate their festivals together."

Finally, the description of interreligious tolerance in the city of Salatiga can be briefly explained through the testimony of a participant from the Philippines, Roy Mendoza, a history professor at Ateneo de Manila. He was surprised to see a pig farm in Salatiga run by Jesuits, which actually serves as a training facility for young

people in agriculture and livestock farming. What surprised and amazed him the most was seeing many Muslims working on the farm, raising animals that are considered forbidden in Islam. He expressed his admiration, saying, “What could be a better illustration of tolerance and Islamic moderation?”

Experience that Becomes Faith Knowledge

The last week in Yogyakarta, from June 18 to June 24, 2024, was a contemplative week filled with reading, writing, reflecting, organizing, and systematizing ideas into a coherent piece of writing. Of course, there were moments of recreation and relaxation, which were intended to foster creativity in this intellectual contemplation. This week’s atmosphere was well captured by Doan, a participant from Vietnam: “When the first disciples sought to learn, Jesus invited them with the words, ‘Come and see.’ Similarly, APTEP 2024 extends the same invitation to me. In accepting it, I’ve had the chance to explore Islam, listen to scholars speak on Indonesian Islam, and immerse myself in their way of life—experiencing their faith, sharing their environment, and savoring their food. This journey has enriched my understanding of Islam and left a lasting impression of

Indonesian Islam's spirit of tolerance, respect, and harmony. As I honor the beliefs and practices of my Indonesian Muslim brothers and sisters, I am also called to deepen and live out my own faith as a reflection of my vocation and mission."

The one-month APTEP journey was an intellectual pilgrimage through experience and involvement. Understanding daily experiences in depth requires solid explanations, which, of course, must be grounded in theoretical imagination. The latter, a theoretical pilgrimage, was undertaken through the study of the long history of Christian-Muslim relations. Theological reflection through selected texts became the foundation for delving into this issue. Discussions were held to demonstrate the development of interactions between Christian and Muslim communities as they have evolved over centuries. The process of how Islamic beliefs and practices relate (similarities–differences) to Christian thought systems and teachings was explored to support this foundational idea.

Two books by the same author, Hugh Goddard, a professor of Islamic Studies at the University of Nottingham, were instrumental and provided essential but comprehensive information for this purpose. Drawing

from these two books and expanding through other literature, participants sought to enter the space of interfaith and theological dialogue. The following are the titles of the two books with brief explanations.

First, *Christians and Muslims: From Double Standards to Mutual Understanding*. The author's thesis in this book is that there are numerous misconceptions in the ways these two communities have evaluated each other's faith over the centuries. They have used their own standards and criteria to assess and draw conclusions about the other's traditions. Hugh Goddard offers many enlightening points by comparing the doctrines of the two religions, using a comparative approach to bridge the two different standards and promote mutual understanding.

Second, A *History of Christian-Muslim Relations*. In this second book, the author explores the fourteen centuries of encounters between Christian and Muslim communities. The author examines the socio-cultural and socio-economic challenges that accompany the dialogue and theological tensions in these encounters. From this book, we gain a nuanced picture of Christian-Islamic relations. Throughout the centuries, we will encounter

many surprises in the stories of these two communities' relationships in various times and places.

Each participant read one chapter from these two books. Their presentations were based on critical reading methods, focusing on the following eleven questions, which they answered concisely:

1. Briefly explain the title of the chapter being read. What is implied by the title? (2-3 sentences)
2. Understand and formulate one theory used to discuss the chapter? (2-3 sentences)
3. What problem is discussed in the chapter? (2-3 sentences)
4. (*Based on* 1, 2, 3) Formulate the main question the chapter seeks to answer? (1-2 sentences)
5. The answer to question 4. (5-7 sentences)
6. Find one insight or wisdom from the article. This is a significant idea that sticks in your mind. Use this to explain a new reality being faced or thought about. This reality can be a concrete social fact or a theoretical (theological, socio-political, philosophical) idea. (2-3 sentences)
7. To systematically explain and implement, a new theory must be formulated—one that is imagined by abstracting from 6. (4-5 sentences)

8. Thus, formulate the problem to be discussed. (4-5 sentences)
9. Closely related to 8, formulate the new question to be answered from this article. (1-2 sentences)
10. Hypothetically, what is the answer to question 9? (5-7 sentences)
11. Based on 6 through 10, create a title for the article and 4-5 subheadings that detail the title.

The following discussions are a collection of ideas and reflections from the participants in developing these eleven points.

Faith that Explains Itself

In her writing, Sr. Hedwig CB recounts the spiritual and faith journey of her older brother. Initially, her brother was a Muslim who later converted to Catholicism. He embraced Catholicism with great enthusiasm and became involved in Church activities. However, after a long faith struggle, he returned to Islam, embracing Sufism. She reflected on her journey and the faith struggles of their Catholic family as an experience of interfaith dialogue. Reflecting more systematically, she made a comparative study of the similarities and

differences between the Sufism practiced by her brother and the Catholic mysticism of the Congregation of the Sisters of Charity of St. Charles Borromeo (CB), the religious community to which Sr. Hedwig belongs. Her colleague in the CB congregation, Sr. Astrid CB, shared the dynamics of two Muslim women in a girls' dormitory run by the CB, which, of course, had a Catholic structure and culture. The two Muslim women, one from Nahdhatul Ulama (NU) and the other from Muhammadiyah, navigated the ebb and flow of Catholic faith practices in the Stella Duce 2 Yogyakarta dormitory with grace.

Sr. Clarin ADM (*Abdi Darah Mulia*; *Congregation of the Sisters of Charity of the Precious Blood*) from Indonesia also reflected on her experience of being from a predominantly Muslim family. She examined how the ADM spirituality she lives by is compatible with the spirit of dialogue with people of different beliefs and spiritualities. She also reflected on the extent to which she has lived out ADM spirituality in her community and family life. Her colleague, Sr. Ermelinda, wrote an article discussing religious tolerance within ADM spirituality, particularly in its efforts to provide a foundation for the dialogue between Catholics and Muslims.

Sr. Ratna OSU, an Indonesian Ursuline involved in a parish on the outskirts of Jakarta, wrote about her observations on the practice of dialogue and tolerance in St. Monica Parish, Serpong, South Tangerang. She explained her reflections within a broader context: the socio-political environment in which the Catholic Church and the parish exist and thrive.

A participant from Myanmar, Han Zaw, concluded the month-long APTEP program with his faith reflection: "In essence, this is an inspiring reflection that Muslims and Christians can engage in dialogue rooted in love and respect, anchored in our shared humanity. This aligns with the spirit of dialogue championed by Pope Paul VI in *Nostra Aetate*. The stories and experiences of APTEP's dialogue demonstrate that Muslims and Christians can always walk this path together, united in their belief in God/Allah as the ultimate truth in their lives. This shared journey toward God serves as a reminder that both faiths are fellow pilgrims, striving to comprehend the boundless love of God for the world and its people."

Selected APTEP participants' writings are published in this edition of *Asia Pacific Mission Studies* (APMS).

About the Author

Greg Soetomo SJ, a native of Indonesia, joined the Society of Jesus in 1989. Before completing his Islamic Studies at Jakarta's Islamic State University in 2017, he served as the chief editor of *Hidup*, a weekly Catholic magazine in Indonesia, for twelve years (2002–2014). His research primarily focuses on interreligious studies between Islam and Christianity, and he is actively involved in Muslim-Christian dialogue as well as exploring the role of the Church in the socio-political context of Asia. Additionally, he serves as the Prefect of Spiritual Formation at the Arrupe International Residence (AIR) in Manila and holds the position of Socius at the Jesuit Conference of Asia Pacific (JCAP).

Joint Declaration of Istiqlal 2024 Pope Francis & Grand Imam Umar

Renato Taib Oliveros PhD

Abstract
The Istiqlal Declaration states that our world is clearly facing two serious crises: *dehumanization* and *climate change*. A moderate Islam is the antidote to the global jihadist movement. If Christ's death on the cross for all is the basis of dignity for all human beings; Allah's choosing man as *Khalifah* (custodian) of His creation is the basis of dignity in Islam. As God's *Khalifah* is Islam's central tenet on climate change. The dignity extended by Allah to man ought to be extended to the rest of creation. Where is Christ in the Istiqlal Declaration? The words and actions of Jesus incarnates the ar *Raheem* the attribute to Allah the-Most Merciful God. However, God's mercy is based on justice, and the condition for forgiveness is reconciliation. Climate change, the result of man's ecological sin, calls for reconciliation and restitution with God's creation, in the words of the Istiqlal Declaration, to forgive others and be reconciled for the sake of harmony and humanity.

The Grand Imam Nasaruddin Umar kissing the forehead of Pope Francis is the face of fraternity as the Qur'an says "*… and surely you will find the nearest of them in affection to Muslims are those who say: We are Christians.*" (5:82b) The fruit of their interfaith encounter in Indonesia's Istiqlal Mosque is the 2024 Joint

Declaration to foster 'Religious Harmony for the Sake of Humanity.' The document upholds the contribution of Indonesia's philosophical principle of "Pancasila" (1945-2024) in fostering harmony amongst believers of all faiths. Indonesia is home to the largest Muslim population in the world. Despite its overwhelming Muslim majority, Indonesia has refrained from declaring Islam as its national religion to preserve Pancasila's ideal of religious freedom defending the dignity of every person to practice one's religion. Pancasila has shaped an inclusive Indonesian culture that fosters fraternity, tolerance and unity in Indonesia's multi-religious and multicultural society.

The Istiqlal Declaration, however, recognizes that '…from the events of recent decades, our world is clearly facing two serious crises: *dehumanization* and *climate change*.'[1] Dehumanization wrought by widespread violence in the name of religion, and climate change due to exploitation of creation. The declaration states that '…interreligious dialogue ought to be recognized as an effective instrument for resolving local, regional and international conflicts … our religious beliefs and rituals

[1] "Joint Declaration of Istiqlal 2024," accessed September 13, 2024. https://www.osservatoreromano.va/en/news/2024-09/ing-036/fostering-religious-harmony-for-the-sake-of-humanity.html.

have a particular capacity to…foster a deeper respect for human dignity.'[2] Grand Imam Nasaruddin Umar of Istiqlal State Mosque, said: 'Indonesia can be a model of interfaith dialogue.'[3] Aligned with Pope Francis' interreligious initiatives, Umar is the founder of the Indonesian interfaith organization *Masyarakat Dialog Antar Umat Beragama.* In response to the two crises is a call for each to be guided by our shared religious values to defeat the culture of violence in order to overcome both dehumanization and environmental destruction.[4]

Moderate Islam as Antidote to Extremism

In dialogue with APTEP participants, *Universitas Islam Internasional Indonesia* (UIII) explains that Islam in Indonesia is moderate because it is opposed to extremism that is susceptible to terrorism and violence. A moderate Islam is the antidote to the global jihadist movement that has reached its peak with ISIS in 2014. *Islamic extremism is foreign and not indigenous to Indonesia. They are influences and ideas from outside like the* ISIS's

[2] Joint Declaration of Istiqlal 2024, iii.,
[3] Linda Bordoni and Lisa Zengarini, "Imam Nasaruddin: 'Indonesia Can be a Model of Interfaith Dialogue'," Vatican News,,accessed September 5, 2024. https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2024-09/imam-nasaruddin-indonesia-can-be-a-model-of-interfaith-dialogue.html.
[4] Joint Declaration of Istiqlal 2024, i., .

reestablishing the caliphate or Wahabism's puritan Arab Islam. According to Dr. Syafiq Hasyim, coordinator of UIII, Indonesia's Islam was introduced not by conquerors but by peaceful traders, some of them belonging to Sufi *Tarīqas* (Orders). Sufism being a spiritual movement, not legalistic and respectful of indigenous beliefs, inculturated Hinduism and Buddhism thus shaping an Islam in Indonesia that is moderate, inclusive, compassionate, reconciliatory, fraternal, and respectful of other beliefs.

Indonesia's Islam mirrors what the Qur'an says "Thus, We have made you a *wasatal* (moderate/*pertengahan*) nation that you might be witnesses to humanity" (*al-Baqara* 2:143). Moderate does not mean mediocrity in being a Muslim but moderate because it takes the middle-path which is balanced and inclusive, tempered and not extreme in one's actions and ideas. UIII promotes Indonesia's moderate Islam they believe as Indonesia's main contribution to today's Muslim world plagued by violent extremism.

Bases of Human Dignity

The Istiqlal Declaration calls Muslims and Christians to be at the forefront of defending human dignity. If

Christ's death on the cross for all is the basis of dignity for all human beings; in Islam, Allah's choosing man as *Khalifah* (custodian, steward) of His creation is the basis of dignity of every person. "Indeed, I will make upon the earth a *Khalifah* (steward, custodian)" (Q. 2:30—*innee jaa'ilun fil ardi khalifatan*). The Qur'anic concept 'inherent dignity' (*al-karamah al-muta'asilah*) is attributed to each person regardless of race, religion, actions, and status in life. For Allah to entrust to man His creation, despite protest from angels, raises man's dignity even higher than angels. So much so that Allah commanded the angels to prostrate before Adam (2:34), the representative of man the descendants of Adam.

Climate Change

The role of human beings as God's *Khalifah*-custodian of God's creation is the central tenet of the Islamic declaration on climate change.[5] However, man has failed to live to their duty of stewardship but has corrupted and abused the earth instead. *Khalifah* does not mean that the custodian of God and acts like the master and 'Lord of the universe.' (*rabbil alamin* Q. 1:2) We

[5] Madeleine Arnaout, The Islamic Declaration on Climate Change, last modified February 19, 2022. https://ummah4earth.org/en/story/8808/the-islamic-declaration-on-climate-change/.

are caretakers of the Earth on behalf of Allah but not masters of it. We are caretakers, not owners or masters. We are "to take decisive action in order to maintain the integrity of the natural environment and its resources, for we have inherited them from past generations and hope to pass them on to our children and grandchildren."[6] The earth is not ours to exploit, but our responsibility to care and sustain for the benefit of the next generation, in the same way that an earlier generation passed them on to us.

The dignity extended by Allah to every human being ought to be extended to the rest of God's creation. The Quran says, "It is He who has appointed you custodian on the earth…" (Quran 6:165) 6:165. "And it is He who has made you *khalifah* upon the earth." (*wa Huwal lazee ja'alakum khalaaa'ifal ardi*) This defines the integrity of creation in which dignity is to all creatures. Man, being the apex of God's creation, has benefitted much from the fruits of creation to sustain life. But as *khalifah*—custodian of God's creation man is obligated to protect and save it for future generations.

Yet the "…human exploitation of creation…has contributed to climate change, leading to various destructive consequences such as natural disasters,

[6] Joint Declaration of Istiqlal 2024, iv.

global warming."[7] Recently, in Asia we have been experiencing an increase of powerful typhoons and monsoon rains causing floods and landslides endangering lives especially the most vulnerable poorest of the poor. The Amazon rainforest is named the lungs of the earth. In the same way, Borneo is the lung of Southeast Asia. Yet according to "Global Forest Watch,"[8] the Indonesian portion of Borneo has a remaining 4 million hectares primary forest. It lost 10.7 million hectares of tree cover between 2002 and 2019, a 75% depletion in the last three decades of the 20th century because Borneo became the main timber exporter in the world, greater than Africa and Brazil combined. If this does not stop its effect on the climate in Asia can be disastrous. The Istiqlal Declaration is a reminder that "…a healthy, peaceful and harmonious living environment is vital for becoming true servants of God and custodians of creation, we sincerely call…to maintain the integrity of the natural environment and its resources."[9]

[7] Joint Declaration of Istiqlal 2024, 2.
[8] Global Forest Watch. "Borneo, Indonesia Primary Forest Loss 2002-2023," accessed August 14, 2020, https://www.globalforestwatch.org/dashboards/country/IDN/
[9] Joint Declaration of Istiqlal 2024, iv.

Conclusion: ar-Rahman ar-Raheem

Where is Christ in the Istiqlal Declaration? The Declaration states that "the values shared by our religious traditions should be…directed towards promoting a culture of respect, dignity, *compassion*, *reconciliation* and fraternal solidarity in order to overcome both dehumanization and environmental destruction."[10] In the shared values listed are two identified closely with the prime attributes of Allah as *ar-Rahman*, *ar-Raheem* (The-Compassionate, The-Merciful). As a Compassionate God, Allah is a loving God who provides, and as a merciful God, Allah is a merciful God who forgives the sins of man. The-Compassionate Allah is *al-Khalaq* (the Creator) who created the earth, our common home, to be the source of food, shelter and other necessities in life for man to survive, and live a dignified life deserving of all human beings.

> *And We have certainly honored the children of Adam and carried them on the land and sea and provided for them of the good things and preferred them over much of what We have created, with [definite] preference.* (17:70)

[10] Joint Declaration of Istiqlal 2024, i.

In Jesus we find a generous giver as exemplified in the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves and fishes to feed the five thousand (Mt 14: 17-21, Mk 6: 30-44, Luke 9: 10-17, Jn 6: 1-14). The provision of feeding bread for the multitude continues to this day in the Eucharist celebrated in remembrance of Jesus at daily Sacrifice of the Mass. In the institution of the Eucharist at the last supper, Jesus feeds us to satisfy our spiritual hunger by giving His Body as the bread of life.

Aside from Allah the Compassionate provider, Allah is also the-Merciful the one Who Forgives or is the-Forgiver. By His words and actions, Jesus mirrors Allah *ar-Rahman ar-Raheem*, the *giver* and *forgiver*. In the prayer the 'Our Father,' Jesus taught His disciples to pray "*<u>give</u> us this day our daily bread, and <u>forgive</u> our sins*." Jesus forgives our sin against man and nature (ecological sin). As a ***forgiver*** —Jesus said, "*Forgive them for they know not what they are doing*" (Luke 23:34), and to the sinful woman "*Your sins are forgiven*." (Luke 7:48) As a ***giver*** Jesus offered Himself as the daily bread "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." (Luke 22:19)

The words and actions of Jesus incarnates the *ar-Raheem* that Muslims attribute to Allah the-Most Merciful

God. However, God's mercy is based on justice, unlike God's unconditional love, the condition for forgiveness is reconciliation—"*Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who have sinned against us*." In the words of the Istiqlal Declaration, to forgive others and be reconciled for the sake of harmony and humanity.Climate change, the result of man's ecological sin, calls for reconciliation and restitution with God's creation.

Jesus is the incarnate of *ar-Rahman ar-Raheem*. In the Qur'ān, the usage of the definite article ***ar/al*** (the) before the attributes *Rahman* and *Raheem* (Compassionate and Merciful) is to witness that the said attributes are to be attributed only to Allah and to Him alone. Similarly, the definite article '*The*' before Messiah (*al-Masih*) is to witness that there is only one Messiah and his name is Jesus. The angels said, "Mary, Allah gives you good news of **a-*Word* from-Him** (*bi-Kalimatim min***Hu** [Allah]) whose name is ***the-Messiah*** (*smuhu l-***Masih***u*) Jesus son of Mary (*Eisa ibnu Maryam*). (3:45a)

About The Author

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Charity as Dialogue of Action: A Theological analysis of the Collaboration between a Muslim Sheikh and a Catholic Priest in Assisting the Homeless in São Paulo

Carlos Cesar Barbosa, SJ

Abstract

Father Júlio Lancellotti and Sheik Rodrigo Jalloul have joined forces in a collaborative effort to address the needs of the homeless population in São Paulo, Brazil. Their initiative aims to promote social justice and the common good, ensuring that the most vulnerable members of society receive the support and care they require. By working together, they not only provide tangible aid to the homeless but also foster interfaith dialogue and social justice, breaking down cultural and religious barriers. This partnership exemplifies a commitment to inclusivity and mutual respect, showcasing the power of unified action in addressing social issues. The city of São Paulo, Brazil's largest metropolis, is the scene of the remarkable collaboration between Sheikh Rodrigo Jalloul, the first Shiite cleric born in Brazil, and Father Júlio Lancellotti, the Archdiocese of São Paulo's vicar for people experiencing homelessness. Moved by Allah and Jesus's teachings, both religious leaders find in charity the bridge to work together and face the challenges—and even the prejudice—coming from within their respective religious communities. This paper aims to analyze the theological foundations of charity in both Christianity and Islam through the work of Sheik Jallou and Father Lancelotti, seeking to emphasize the role of charity as a factor capable of generating rapprochement and dialogue between Christianity and Islam.

Introduction

According to the last census in 2022, Brazil has an estimated population of 203,080,756 inhabitants.[1] Recent data presented by the Brazilian Observatory of Public Policies with the Homeless Population of the Federal University of Minas Gerais (O'PopRua/POLOS-UFMG)[2] estimates that approximately 300,868 people live on the streets across the country. The increase in the homeless population in Brazil can be attributed to a combination of socio-economic and historical factors and reflects a social and economic crisis that culminated in the COVID-19 pandemic. Over a decade after the National Policy for the Homeless Population (Decree No. 7,053/2009) was introduced, the situation for homeless individuals in Brazil has deteriorated, especially since 2017. This decline is attributed to economic and political turmoil, rising unemployment prompting migration, and persistent issues like drug addiction and family conflicts.

[1] IBGE, "Censo Demográfico 2022: Panorama," Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística, accessed July 2024, https://censo2022.ibge.gov.br/panorama/.

[2] Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, "Observatório Popular de Direitos: Rua," accessed July 2024, https://obpoprua.direito.ufmg.br/index.html.

Implementing effective public policies for the homeless remains a significant challenge.[3]

The social and economic crisis has led to a rise in the number of homeless individuals, especially in São Paulo, Brazil's largest city. The city, with a population of more than 11 million, has seen a total of 80,369 people living on the streets, marking a 24% increase compared to a previous count.[4]

Father Julio Lancellotti closely follows the reality of the city of São Paulo. More than half of his 75 years of life have been dedicated to working with the street population. Father Lancellotti serves as the episcopal vicar for homeless individuals in the Archdiocese of São Paulo and as a parish priest. He is renowned for his advocacy of the rights of the poor, abandoned children, and people living with HIV/AIDS. Father Júlio Lancellotti embodies the mission of living alongside the poor. He ministers to over 30,000 homeless individuals, addressing their needs at the "Centro São Martinho" and at his parish,

[3] Honorato, B. E. F., & Oliveira, A. C. S., Homeless Population and COVID-19, Revista De Administração Pública, 2020, 54(4), 1064–1078, https://doi.org/10.1590/0034-761220200268

[4] Agência Brasil, "País Tem 300,8 Mil Pessoas em Situação de Rua; Mais de 80 Mil em SP," accessed July 15, 2024, https://agenciabrasil.ebc.com.br/direitos-humanos/noticia/2024-07/pais-tem-3008-mil.

Saint Michael Archangel, where he provides food, clothes, and hygiene products with the help of volunteers.[5]

Sheik Rodrigo Jallou, the first Brazilian to attain the title of Sheik, works with Father Julio in social initiatives for the homeless. He has faced challenges as a religious leader in the Islamic faith, including being deported from Iran in 2013 under accusations of espionage, which he vehemently denies. Sheik Jalloul has also encountered significant discrimination, such as being excluded from certain mosques in Brazil. Jalloul has a vision for Islam in Brazil that emphasizes inclusivity, dialogue, and social development. He advocates for unity between Sunni and Shia Muslims and respect for the LGBTQ+ community, viewing these efforts as crucial for religious and social progress. Jalloul aims to establish a comprehensive Islamic center that will serve as a cultural, social, and religious hub. He is also actively involved in various charitable initiatives, supporting the homeless and neglected in the community.[6]

[5] Vatican News, "Laudato si' in Action: Fr Lancellotti's Work for the Poor in Brazil," October 19, 2021. accessed July 15, 2024, https://www.vaticannews.va/en/church/news.

[6] Rodrigo Jalloul, "Xeque Rodrigo Jalloul Quer Criar Cultura de Doação Entre Muçulmanos no País," accessed July 15, 2024, https://www.uol.com.br/ecoa/reportagens-especiais/xeque-rodrigo-jalloul-quer-criar-cultura-de-doacao-entre-muculmanos-no-pais/#cover.

Sheikh Rodrigo Jalloul and Father Julio Lancellotti first crossed paths during an interfaith dialogue in a TV show. After the event, Jalloul kindly offered Lancellotti a lift home, which sparked a discussion about their social work. Impressed by Lancellotti's commitment, Jalloul agreed to visit the parish and observe the impactful work being done with the homeless. Despite some initial doubts during the first visit, Jalloul continued to engage with Lancellotti. This led to the formation of a deep and respectful friendship based on consistent support, such as providing breakfast every Monday. Through this bond, Jalloul grew to admire and adopt Lancellotti's compassionate approach to social work, recognizing the fundamental humanity and dignity of the homeless. They became friends and went on various activities together, such as interviews in various media.

Charity As A Dialogue of Action

The concept of interreligious dialogue, as articulated in the document "Dialogue and Proclamation– Reflection and Orientations on Interreligious Dialogue and the Proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ" by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, encompasses four primary forms: the dialogue of life, the

dialogue of action, the dialogue of theological exchange, and the dialogue of religious experience. The various forms mentioned play a crucial role in fostering peaceful coexistence among diverse religious beliefs. The collaborative efforts of Father Julio Lancellotti and Sheik Rodrigo Jalloul in São Paulo serve as a real-life illustration of these dialogic forms in action. By spearheading initiatives to aid the homeless, they not only offer tangible assistance to the most marginalized individuals, but they also advocate for social justice and the common good while promoting mutual respect and inclusivity. This partnership transcends cultural and religious divides, showcasing how the dialogue of action and the dialogue of life can converge to address urgent societal challenges. Furthermore, by sharing their religious experiences and spiritual values, they contribute to a deeper understanding of Christianity and Islam. This underscores the importance of interfaith dialogue as an effective means of social transformation and promoting human dignity. In this context, the partnership between Lancellotti and Jalloul not only meets the immediate needs of the community but also serves as a model of how different religious traditions can join forces towards a

common goal, promoting peace and solidarity in a world marked by divisions.

Lively debates within and between religious communities are crucial for developing new perspectives on religious identity and practice. These dialogues are crucial not only for building bridges between different faith traditions but also for developing a critical conscience within each religion, which influences attitudes toward others. Strengthening interfaith engagement requires looking for more inclusive models that involve dialogue partners who are often excluded from conventional activities, promoting alternative practices that encourage collaboration and mutual understanding. Thus, when addressing the interactions between Christianity and Islam, it is crucial to recognize that charity and solidarity are core values that can unite these traditions. This contributes to a richer and more meaningful dialogue that responds to the contemporary challenges faced by both faith communities.[7]

Theological Foundations of Charity in Christianity

[7] Nelly van Doorn-Harder, "In Search of New Approaches to Inter- and Intra-Religious Christian and Muslim Debates," in *Christian Theology and Islam*, ed. James J. Buckley and David S. Yeago (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 110.

Charity has a rich history in Christianity, dating back to the early days of the church as documented in the Acts of the Apostles (2:44-45; 4:32-35). These passages illustrate the early Christian community's dedication to communal living and resource-sharing, exemplifying the practice of practical charity. The Gospels also emphasize the significance of giving to others through acts of charity.

The well-known Good Samaritan passage (Luke 10:25-37) illustrates the essence of Christian charity, emphasizing the importance of showing love and providing assistance to others, regardless of their background or status. In Luke 14:12-14, Jesus recommends that when hosting a meal, one should invite the poor, crippled, lame, and blind instead of wealthy friends or relatives. This is because the needy cannot repay, but God will reward this at the resurrection of the righteous. At the beginning of Luke chapter 21, Jesus acknowledges wealthy persons making substantial donations and a poor widow contributing two small coins. He points out that the widow's donation was greater as she gave everything she had, unlike the rich who gave from their surplus. In the Gospel of Matthew (5:42), Jesus teaches to give to those who ask and not to turn away from those seeking

assistance. He also emphasizes the greatest commandments in Matthew (22:37-40), highlighting the importance of loving God and loving one's neighbor as the two greatest commandments.

References to Christian love in the New Testament are also clearly heard in Saint Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians, chapter 13, where the apostle commends the value of love, emphasizing its importance above other spiritual abilities. The essence of Christian love is defined as the love of one's neighbor. It is rooted in God's love and is a duty that rests not only on each member of the community of believers but also on the entire Church at every level.

Charity is also a fundamental principle in the Magisterium of the Catholic Church. In his encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, in 2005, Pope Benedict XVI rightly emphasized that the radical form of material communion, which was practiced in the early Christian communities as described in the Acts of the Apostles, has not been consistently maintained as the Church grew. Nevertheless, the fundamental principle that no member of the community should suffer from poverty that denies the dignity of life, remains a core value. Benedict XVI concludes that charity is therefore considered an

essential element of the Church's identity, crucial for fostering a life of dignity and solidarity among the faithful.[8]

More recently, in 2013, Pope Francis has consistently stressed the significance of charity in his teachings. In the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, for example, Francis reminds that "*the service of charity is also a constituent element of the Church's mission and an indispensable expression of her very being. By her very nature the Church is missionary; she abounds in effective charity and a compassion which understands, assists and promotes.*"[9]

Charity in Islam

On the other hand, charity also holds a key position in Islamic theology and practice. The Qur'an, the holy book of Islam, stresses the importance of charity as a crucial element in the believer's faith and ethical duty. The idea of charity in Islam includes mandatory and optional acts of giving to reduce poverty, advocating for social justice, and encouraging community unity. Islam

[8] Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, (Vatican City: Vatican Press, 2005), n. 10.
[9] Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, (Vatican City: Vatican Press, 2013) n. 179.

emphasizes the importance of charity, both in its obligatory (*zakat*) and voluntary (*sadaqah*) forms. *Zakat*, one of the five pillars of Islam, ranks third. The first is the *shahádah* (the declaration of faith), the second is *salat* (the daily prayers), the fourth is *saum* (fasting during Ramadan), and the fifth is *Hajj* (the pilgrimage to Mecca).

In a literal, etymological, or linguistic sense, *zakat* (the plural of which is *zakawát*) signifies purity or purification, as it is mentioned in Al-Qur'án: "*Indeed, he who purifies himself (tazakká) will succeed.*" [Al-Qur'án 87:14].[10] Its purpose is to redistribute wealth within the community, reduce economic inequalities, and purify wealth itself. Surah Al-Baqarah (2:177) states, "*Righteousness is in... giving wealth, in spite of love for it, to relatives, orphans, the needy, the traveler, those who ask, and for freeing slaves.*"

Additionally, followers of Islam are also encouraged to give *sadaqah*. This voluntary form of charity can be given at any time and in any amount and is highly valued in the sight of God. *Sadaqah* (charity) can be categorized into two types: **1.** *Sadaqah Tatawwa or Nafila*, i.e., voluntary or optional contribution or charity, also

[10] Sheikh Aminuddin Muhammad, "Zakát - O Terceiro Pilar do Islam", (Maputo: Sautul Isslam,2007), 18.

referred to as "*Lillah*," which can be donated to anyone, including non-Muslims. It can also be used for any good deed. **2.** *Sadaqah Mafrudha or Wájiba*, i.e., obligatory contribution or charity, which includes or incorporates *zakat*, as stated in Al-Qur'án 9:60, and also *Nazr*, *Fidyah*, *Kaffára*, and *Sadaqatul-Fitr* (*Zakátul-Fitr*)."[11] Each of these terms represents a different aspect of Islamic worship, charity, and ethical obligation.

The Qur'an highlights the importance of *sadaqah* in numerous verses, such as Surah Al-Baqarah (2:261), which compares charitable giving to a grain that sprouts into seven ears, each bearing a hundred grains, symbolizing the multiplication of blessings. It is important mention that when discussing *zakat* and *sadaqah*, it is essential to emphasize the sincere intention in every charitable act. Indeed, the purity of intention (*an-Niah*) is crucial, and should be carried out solely to serve Allah and not to seek recognition or social status. Surah Al-Insan (76:9) is very clear on it, when it emphasizes, "*We feed you for the sake of Allah alone; we desire from you neither reward nor thanks.*"

[11] Ibid, 19.

Going even beyond, the Hadith, encompassing the sayings and actions of Prophet Muhammad, provides comprehensive guidance on the practice of charity, extending beyond financial contributions to include all acts of kindness. As the Prophet stated, "*Every good deed is charity*."[12]

Comparative Analysis of Charity in Christianity and Islam

Both Christianity and Islam place significant emphasis on charity as an expression of faith and a moral duty. In Christianity, the concept of charity stems from the teachings of Jesus Christ, who stressed the importance of showing love for one's neighbor and engaging in selfless giving. The New Testament encourages acts of kindness and support for the less fortunate.

Similarly, rooted in the understanding of God as merciful (*Rahman*) and compassionate (*Rahim*), Islam emphasizes the importance of charity. The Qur'an and Hadith underline the significance of both obligatory (*zakat*) and voluntary (*sadaqah*) acts of giving. Both faiths

[12] Jabir, "Every Good Deed is Charity," *Riyad as-Salihin*, Chapter: "Numerous Ways of Doing Good" (باب بيان كثرة طرق الخير), Hadith 134, trans. (or reported) in Al-Bukhari and Muslim, accessed September 2024, https://sunnah.com/riyadussalihin:134

regard charity as a means to purify one's wealth, assist those in need, and advocate for social justice.

Despite these similarities, there are significant differences in their theological and institutional frameworks. In Islam, *zakat* is a mandatory form of almsgiving, constituting one of the Five Pillars of Islam, and is calculated as a fixed percentage of a Muslim's wealth. Islamic theologians, such as Sheikh Aminuddin Muhammad, assert that there is no equivalent practice to *zakat* in other religions. According to him, terms such as charity, almsgiving, tithing, giving, and others that translators have used do not accurately convey the true meaning of the word *zakat*.[13] Regardless of different interpretations, the sources of Islam (Qur'an, Hadiths, and Islamic jurisprudence) indicate that *zakat* is essentially a form of charity aimed at reducing economic inequality and supporting the needy. It fulfills both a spiritual duty and a social function in Islam.

On the other hand, Christianity does not specify a set amount for charity; instead, it emphasizes voluntary and spontaneous acts of generosity driven by love and compassion. The Catechism of the Catholic Church (n.

[13] Sheikh Aminuddin Muhammad, "Zakát - O Terceiro Pilar do Islam," (Maputo: Sautul Isslam,2007), 20.

2043)[14] and the Code of Canon Law (canon 222, §1)[15] affirm that faithful followers are encouraged to support the material needs of the Church according to their means, without mandating a specific percentage.

In Brazil, the National Conference of Bishops (CNBB) raises awareness about the importance of sustaining the Church rather than levying taxes. Generosity inspired by charity should guide donations, which can be lower or higher than 10%, taking into account local needs and the personal inspiration of the faithful.[16] The document 'CNBB 87: *General Guidelines for the Evangelizing Action of the Church in Brazil* (2019-2023)' emphasizes charity as an essential part of evangelization and the Church's mission. It highlights the importance of promoting social justice and solidarity through concrete acts of charity.[17]

Christianity and Islam have differing theological perspectives on charity, but their common focus on generosity and compassion underscores the universal

[14] *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1994), no. 2043.
[15] *Code of Canon Law*, canon 222, §1.
[16] Conferência Nacional dos Bispos do Brasil (CNBB), *Diretrizes para a Formação e Sustentação do Dízimo nas Comunidades Eclesiais*, São Paulo: Edições CNBB, 1999.
[17] Conferência Nacional dos Bispos do Brasil (CNBB), *Documentos da CNBB 87: Diretrizes Gerais da Ação Evangelizadora da Igreja no Brasil (2019-2023)*, Brasília: Edições CNBB, 2019.

significance of these virtues. Islam's structured approach to charity through *zakat* differs from the more flexible charitable practices in Christianity, yet both aim to aid those in need and advance social justice.

We can conclude that charity plays a vital role in promoting mutual respect, empathy, and community support in both religions. The charity practiced by Father Julio and Sheik Rodrigo, in addition to expressing a moral duty preached by their religious traditions, is an unequivocal expression of love for others. The hard work they do in favor of the homeless in São Paulo not only lessens the suffering of those in most need but also creates a space for interreligious dialogue through mutual respect that overcomes cultural and dogmatic barriers. Today, similar to the prophets of the past, modern prophets also experience rejection and defamation and often find themselves being marginalized and unheard. The key point is that there are still leaders in all religions who are courageous enough to stay true to God and themselves. Leaders like Julio and Rodrigo demonstrate to Brazilian society and the world that charity is the embodiment of their beliefs and teachings.

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Hajj (Pilgrimage): Encountering God in Indonesia

Pham Van Doan, SJ

Abstract

Believing that the Holy Spirit is at work in other religions, the Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in them. Thus, the Church teaches Catholics to respect the truth and goodness in other religions. The Church guides them to edify these religions by understanding their teachings under the full light of truth. These teaching enabled me to encounter God in what is true and holy in other religions, namely Islam in Indonesia with the APTEP 2024. Reciprocally, my experiences during this pilgrimage to a predominantly Muslim land gave me a deeper understanding of teachings in both Islam and Christianity. It has given me a greater understanding and respect for Muslims in Indonesia. APTEP 2024 is for me a Hajj (pilgrimage in Islam) through which I encountered God in the socio-political and religious context of Indonesia. This encounter result in the more contemplative and prudent perspective in dialogue and collaboration with believers of other faith.

I set forth for my 2024 Asia-Pacific Theological Encounter Program (APTEP), keeping in mind the teaching of the Second Vatican Council in the *Declaration on The Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions*: **Nostra Aetate** (NA), that *[O]ther religions found everywhere try to counter the restlessness of the human*

heart, each in its own manner, by proposing "ways," comprising teachings, rules of life, and sacred rites. 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. (NA 2)[1]

The 2024 APTEP was the pilgrimage enabling me to deepen my understanding of the aforementioned teaching in the context of Indonesia.

Hajj, in Islam, is a pilgrimage made to the Kaaba, the 'House of Allah,' a sacred place in the holy city of Mecca. If pilgrimage is "a visit to a place that is considered special, where you go to show <u>your</u> respect,"[2] the 2024 APTEP was a pilgrimage for me because with this program I sought to encounter God in Indonesia. While the 4 years of studying theology allowed me to encounter God in the Philippines, a Catholic majority country; Indonesia, with Islam as its major religion, was the new context for me to

[1] Pope Paul VI, *Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions: Nostra Aetate*, October 28, 1965, accessed August 23, 2024, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html.

[2] "Pilgrimage," accessed August 23, 2024, https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/pilgrimage.

encounter God's presence, especially in *Nostra Aetate*'s words: '*the restlessness of the human heart*' and '*what is true and holy*.'

First of all, I saw "*the restlessness of the human heart*" during the journey. Sitting on the buses from Jakarta to Yogyakarta, I enjoyed looking at the passing villages. I observed that what stood out in most of the villages was the roof with a semi-sphere tower, the traditional symbol of a Muslim Mosque. This observation recalled similar experiences when I traveled in the Philippines and Myanmar. Most of the villages there also have their respective central buildings. What was different was that what stood out in most of the villages in the Philippines was the steeple with a cross at the top which is the sign of a Church, and in Myanmar the Stupa tower signifying a pagoda. The central position of these mosques, churches and pagodas in those villages of the countries raises my conviction that in the depth of the human heart, religion has a special place, if not a central place. This witness enables me to understand what *Nostra Aetate* confirms: "*other religions found everywhere try to counter the restlessness of the human heart.*"[3] This

[3] Pope Paul VI, *Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions: Nostra Aetate*, 2.

restlessness is the human desire for holiness, for transcendence, for the absolute, or for God in Christianity and Allah in Islam. God indeed presents in the depth of the human heart manifested in a longing for holiness and goodness. Therefore, for me, the presence of a mosque, a church and a pagoda in the central location of a village is a visible sign of God's presence among those people.

Then, I could hear "*what is true and holy in these religions*." During the program, I spent a week living at the learning community Komunitas Belajar Qaryah Thayyibah (KBQT) at Kalibening, Tingkir, Salatiga in central Java, Indonesia. The small area has three mosques from which the prayer is announced loudly and clearly five times every day via megaphones. I felt disturbed by the prayers, at first, especially in the early morning around 3:30 am. I was woken up by the loud prayer in Arabic which was a noise for me rather than a prayer as I did not understand it. However, beyond that irritation was a deep amazement. How could they keep such punctual prayers? It was a great devotion indeed. Their belief in God is expressed through their devotion to prayers. What a beautiful devotion it is. This act of worship is called Salat which is one of the five pillars of Islam: Profession of Faith (*shahada*), Prayer (*salat*), Alms (*zakat*), Fasting (*sawm*),

Pilgrimage (*hajj*).[4] Together with the Church, I "*[regard] with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings*" which "*often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men.*"[5]

Furthermore, I witnessed how "*what is true and holy*" in Islam enlightens Indonesian society academically, socio-politically and practically. Academically, Universitas Islam Internasional Indonesia (UIII) or Indonesian International Islamic University (IIIU), a newly established graduate institution that has seven schools and offers various academic programs focusing on the study of Islam and the Muslim world, "*produces innovative discoveries, shapes a brighter future, and contributes to the betterment of human life and civilization through exceptional education and breakthrough research.*"[6] Their openness to and promotion of religious tolerance and collaboration are evident.

They welcomed the 2024 APTEP participants, providing dormitories and rooms at the university for conferences and even celebrating Mass. Moreover, its

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[4] Rahman, Fazlur, Mahdi, Muhsin S. and Schimmel, Annemarie, "Islam," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 2 July 2024, accessed July 4, 2024, https://www.britannica.com/topic/Islam.

[5] Pope Paul VI, *Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions: Nostra Aetate*, 2.

[6] Universitas Islam Internasional Indonesia, "Vision & Missions," accessed 17 October 2024, https://uiii.ac.id/about/vision-missions.

professors and lecturers who were the key speakers of the 2024 APTEP program showed their open and collaborative perspectives about other religions in the country, particularly Christianity. Socio-politically, the Salatiga government embraces a tolerant policy pertaining to religions with the motto: respect and harmony. This tolerance has been initiated and promoted since the time of the 4th president of Indonesia, Abdurrahman Wahid from 1999 to 2001, more colloquially known as Gus Dur.[7]

Practically, this policy is not merely idealistic but practical at different levels. At the urban level, observant visitors to the center of capital Jakarta will see an interesting scene: the mosque is located opposite the Cathedral. It is not a sign of confrontation but the sign of dialogue and harmony. Indeed, this is testified by the fact that they share parking spaces with one another. On Sunday, Catholics can park their vehicles at the campus of the mosque while attending Sunday Mass or, vice versa, Muslims can park their cars at the Cathedral's yard during their special celebrations at the mosque. At the family level, many families have members who are either Muslim

[7] Abdurrahman Wahid, Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abdurrahman_Wahid

or Christian. Besides, many students have close friends of different religions. Therefore, mutual respect and harmony enable them to sustain their kinship and friendship.

As a result, this pilgrimage consolidated my esteem, together with the Church, for the Muslim brothers and sisters in Indonesia, by knowing and respecting the similarities and differences. It is confirmed in *Nostra Aetate* that:

The Church regards with esteem also the Moslems. They adore the one God, living and subsisting in Himself; merciful and all- powerful, the Creator of heaven and earth, (5) who has spoken to men; they take pains to submit wholeheartedly to even His inscrutable decrees, just as Abraham, with whom the faith of Islam takes pleasure in linking itself, submitted to God. Though they do not acknowledge Jesus as God, they revere Him as a prophet. They also honor Mary, His virgin Mother; at times they even call on her with devotion. In addition, they await the day of judgment when God will render their deserts to all those who have been raised up from the dead. Finally, they value moral life and worship God especially through prayer, almsgiving and fasting.[8]

[8] ***NOSTRA AETATE*****,** Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, **2nd Vatican Council,** 28 OCTOBER 1965, #3. https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html

Finally, this 2024 APTEP pilgrimage equipped me with the general knowledge of Islam that helped to deepen my discernment. This discernment is necessary to labor in God's field of evangelization where both wheat and weed are growing. Indeed, the *Decree on Priestly Training*: ***Optatam Totius*** (OT) reminds us that "*Let them also be introduced to a knowledge of other religions which are more widespread in individual regions, so that they may acknowledge more correctly what truth and goodness these religions, in God's providence, possess, and so that they may learn to refute their errors and be able to communicate the full light of truth to those who do not have it.*" (OT 16)[9] Similarly, the Church teaches "*that through dialogue and collaboration with the followers of other religions, carried out with prudence and love and in witness to the Christian faith and life, they recognize, preserve and promote the good things, spiritual and moral, as well as the socio-cultural values found among these men.*"[10] While doing one's best for the greater glory of God

[9] Pope Paul VI, *Decree on Priestly Training: Optatam Totius*, October 28, 1965, accessed August 23, 2024, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651028_optatam-totius_en.html, no 16.

[10] ***NOSTRA AETATE*****,** Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, **2nd Vatican Council,** 28 OCTOBER 1965, #2. https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html

and the salvation of souls, the laborers should be aware of and respect the Holy Spirit at work, just as it is taught in ***Gaudium et Spes***: "*For, since Christ died for all men, and since the ultimate vocation of man is in fact one, and divine, we ought to believe that the Holy Spirit in a manner known only to God offers to every man the possibility of being associated with this paschal mystery*." (GS 22)[11]

Yogyarkarta, June 20, 2024

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[11] Pope Paul VI, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World: Gaudium Et Spes, December 7, 1965, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html, no 22 accessed august 23, 2024.

Growing as an Indonesian Ursuline Together with Muslim Friends

Nurhayati Wiguno, OSU

Abstract

The author's meaningful childhood experiences in interfaith dialogue of life, spiritual experience, and cooperation with Muslim friends became a strong foundation when choosing to live in a convent, where she must live 24 hours a day continuously with other Sisters of different backgrounds, cultures, ethnicities, and nationalities. Saint Angela's charism of *siete piazzevole*, the twofold of love, and contemplation in action can be a strength in realizing the Ursuline Mission to engage in dialogue to find new breakthroughs that can make us neighbors to others.

Growing Together with My Muslim Friends: A Biographical Journey

Living with Muslims

The "dialogue of life" is where believers share their faith testimonies in daily life and help one another to build a more just and equitable life. Dialogue is a collaborative effort to discover common ground. Empathy becomes the inner attitude of participants in sincere dialogue. It is not only knowledge and intellectual exercise, but also the

spirit of brotherhood and humanity that forms the foundation of this encounter.

I experienced the beauty of this dialogue during my childhood in the villages of Sidamulya and Sidareja, where I was born and grew up until I attended junior high school. My name is Sri Nurhayati, and I was born in a small town called Sidamulya, in the sub-district of Sidareja, Cilacap District, on May 16, 1966. My family's religion was a mix of Catholicism and Confucianism since the time of my grandparents, both on my mother's and father's sides. I am three-quarters Chinese and one-quarter Javanese by blood. In Indonesia, the majority of the population is Muslim, including the people in my small town, but the population of Christians (both Catholics and Protestants) make up around 15%. My father had very good relations with everyone and never considered their religion. He was very friendly and knew nearly everyone in our small town.

Before I started school, around the age of three, my first best friend was Mugirahayu. She and her family were Muslim. Our families were also very close. When we started school in January 1970, she went to public school, and I went to Catholic school. Despite attending different schools, she remained my best friend. When we came

back from school, we would play together until lunchtime, then rest, bathe, and play again. This was our daily routine. Of course, we also played with other children from different religious backgrounds—Protestant, Buddhist, Catholic, and Muslim—but we never felt any sense of difference among us.

In 1975, my family moved to another small town called Sidareja, about ten minutes by car from our previous house, near the bus station. Our neighbors on the left were a Muslim family with seven children. The father's name was Mr. Karim, and his wife's name was Mrs. Yayuk. The majority of our surrounding neighbors were also Muslim, with a minority being Protestant and Catholic. Very quickly my family became part of this community and, as usual, my father made friends easily. Nearly every day, my brothers and I played with the neighboring children without thinking about their religion. We played games like Ganefo, Hide and Seek, Engklek, Bekel Ball, and Congklak.

In our country, we have only two seasons: the dry season from March to September and the rainy season from October to February. When I was a child, the seasons were still regular. Sometimes we had long dry seasons. During these long dry seasons in our village, all the wells

dried up except for three that had spring water. These belonged to Grandma Tjien Ik, a Catholic, Mr. Jumar, a Muslim, and Grandma Jiyem, a Muslim. Everyone would simply go to the nearest well for water. In the village, everyone had equal rights, and the well owners never considered our religious backgrounds.

We just put our buckets side by side, and all the water was free. This is one of my amazing memories. This happened from 1975-1982 until I left my village to continue my journey to reach my dreams. We didn't just share water; we also shared food with our neighbors. When my mother cooked something a little special, we would share it with our neighbors, and they would do the same. One of our neighbors, whom we called Mak Tjien Ik, sold different kinds of snacks every day and sent one package of snacks to my youngest brother every day.

Sharing Religious Experience with Muslims

Religious experience dialogue occurs when people of different faiths share the beauty of their faith experiences with one another. Each individual gains a deeper understanding of other religions, not through theological concepts, but through real experiences and stories. This leads to a sense of trust in religions different

from their own. Religious diversity becomes the horizon of thought and action for those who engage in and cultivate dialogue at this level.[1]

I was fortunate because, after graduating from junior high school in June 1982, I continued to a public senior high school in Purwokerto. It was a good opportunity for me to learn and grow together with my Muslim friends. My childhood experiences also contributed to my ability to adjust and form friendships easily in senior high school. In 1982, we wore the national uniform from Monday to Thursday and on Saturday—white and grey. On Friday, we wore a skirt or long pants in a dark color and a T-shirt in any color. All the female students couldn't wear hijab because we had the same uniform. From the first to the third year, we had eight parallel classes. In the second semester, we had to choose between Science, Social Studies, or Language.

The majority religion was Islam. In my class during the second semester, there were eight Christian students. Usually, there were only 2-4 Christian students. We had the same opportunities for academic and extracurricular activities, including participating in competitions, class

[1] Greg Soetomo SJ, "Maturing As Believers Through Inter-Religious Encounters," *Asia Pacific Mission Studies*, 2, no. 1 (2020): 66-77.

leadership, and leadership in the internal student organization. In our social interactions, we never thought about our religions. I always sat with my Muslim friends. During Islamic religious teachings, we, the Christians and those of other religions, were free to go to the canteen or do our homework. We received our religious lessons on Friday when every Muslim student went home.

One day, in the first semester of 1982, my Christian friends and I in the class wanted to know about Islamic teachings, so we stayed in the class to listen attentively. When the Islamic teacher, Mr. Fadlan, realized that we had stayed in the class, he began to talk about Christians having three gods, how they worship statues, etc. We were very disappointed. We looked at each other and left the class. After that first bad experience, I never tried to listen to Islamic teachings again. Although the teacher said these things about us, it never affected our relationships with our Muslim friends. Some of them were very sympathetic to us and told us that the teacher was wrong and shouldn't have spoken like that.

Our principal, Mr. Soediro Wirohadikusuma, was very special to me. He was honest, very tolerant, and respected. Some said that he followed the local religion. Every year before Christmas, he had a meeting with us,

the Christian students. He told us to celebrate Christmas together in our school and that everybody must come and celebrate Christmas, because Christmas is the biggest celebration for Christians. If someone couldn't come to the celebration because they didn't have the money, he would pay for them. I still feel the echo of his words in my life to this day. He was very respectful towards other religions and paid attention to us as a minority.

One incident shook our school at the end of May 1985. I was in the third year. We had just finished the written exams and would soon have the practical exams. There was a long weekend holiday. Ten of our friends from the Science stream attended an intensive Muslim religious workshop. On Monday, my female friend who attended the workshop wore a hijab, and the male friends didn't want to sit with female friends.

They began to talk in front of the class about what they had just learned, and my other Muslim friends didn't agree with them, so it caused chaos. The Christians, including me, just remained silent because we didn't understand what had happened. Our principal came to our class to intervene and restored peace. He called the small group of militant Muslims to his office. What I knew was that they were required to return to school wearing

the national uniform. If they refused, they would have to leave the school. Seven of them accepted, but three refused and chose to leave the school.

It was a sad moment for me, and I still cannot understand it. Some big questions remain in my mind. Some said that they had been brainwashed to become radical. They targeted all the clever students. How could it be that my friend, I-in, who likes to borrow my books because she is a member of the flag-raising troop and sometimes misses lessons due to practice, could change so drastically like that? How could my friend who sits behind me, Anisa, who talks or asks about homework every day, change so drastically? How could Arif, the top student in our class who is very humble, gentle, and modest, change like that?

Collaboration with Muslims

To become an Ursuline, I had to go through stages of formation such as postulancy, novitiate, and juniorate, followed by ongoing formation. I began my postulancy in Malang on June 13, 1992, and my novitiate in Bandung for two years, after which I took my first vows on June 13, 1995. Since I left the novitiate, I have moved from one community to another. My first community was

Vincentius in Jakarta until mid-1997, then I moved to the Malang community, Jl. Pos community, Bandung Supratman, the Generalate in Rome, and then I returned to Jl. Pos 2 in Jakarta, where I have remained until now. My apostolic work has always been the same—as a treasurer.

In all these communities and in each school where I worked, except in Rome, I have always collaborated with people of different religions, including Muslims, as teachers, administrative staff, or support staff. In this paper, I wish to share my experience of dialogue and collaboration, especially with Muslims, in the Santa Ursula community and school. I have served in this community and school twice. The first time was from January 2001 until June 2005, and the second time was from August 1 until now. The work of a treasurer involves maintaining fixed assets like buildings, cars, facilities, and infrastructure, as well as managing liquid assets to ensure good investment for funds, budgeting, and controlling income and expenditures, among other responsibilities. These tasks require me to collaborate with many people internally—those who work with us daily—and externally—those who come from outside.

Currently, we are working with Mr. Suwono, a Muslim, as well as his entire team, who are also Muslims. Mr. Suwono has been working with us for a long time, mainly for painting the walls inside and outside classrooms and the convent. Mr. Suwono and his team know us well. They are even accustomed to calling us "Sister."

We are in the process of preparing to build a school in Penajam Paser Utara, East Kalimantan. There is a lot of work to be done before the actual construction begins. First, a topographical survey is needed to assess the land's contours. For this, we are collaborating with Mr. Thohir, a Muslim. We are also receiving significant assistance from Mrs. Nurlela, a Muslim, in handling the necessary permits.

A beautiful tradition that has been practiced for decades in the Santa Ursula community and school, and almost every other Ursuline school, is that on every *Idul Fitri*, the Sisters visit our Muslim employees at their homes. We visit them from house to house, enjoying ketupat and other traditional Lebaran foods until we are full. Conversely, during Christmas, the Sisters hold an open house, and the employees and their families come to wish us a Merry Christmas. This gives us the

opportunity to get to know our employees' families better.

Vision and Mission of the Ursulines in Three Dialogues

Dialogue of Life

One of the Ursuline missions is: "We are longing to be women of dialogue. Inspired by the words of Pope Francis at the audience during our General Chapter in 2019, we desire to live the spirit of encounter and approach others with the intention of seeking their good."

If dialogue is a bridge that erases prejudices, educates, uplifts people from ignorance, and unites various communities to walk together in building goodness, then Saint Angela's spirit of *siete piazzevole* can be one of the answers for Ursulines who strive to live the spirit of encounter and approach others for the common good.

In Italy, piazzas are everywhere, as they are in Indonesia and all other countries. In Rome, there are several famous piazzas, such as Piazza Saint Peter, Piazza Navona, Piazza Spagna, Piazza del Popolo, and many others. To better understand what a piazza is, I would like to share a bit about one of my favourite piazzas, Piazza

Navona. Piazza Navona is located in the heart of Rome, not far from Largo Argentina and the Basilica of Sant'Andrea della Valle. There are many restaurants, as well as street artists offering ready-made paintings or offering to paint your portrait. There are street musicians and dancers hoping for your donation. Of course, it is also a popular tourist destination, but many people simply pass through on their way to other places, or sit down as I often do, to enjoy the beauty of the fountains, the paintings, or to watch the street artists busy selling their wares. Some people bring their own food and enjoy their lunch there. The visitors are diverse, from the elderly to adults, teenagers and children. Their nationalities are equally varied—Europeans, Asians, Africans, Latin Americans. I myself enjoy sitting there, just to refresh, then return to my routine activities feeling refreshed.

So, a piazza is an open space that welcomes everyone, whether they are just passing through, stopping, meeting with friends, sitting and enjoying solitude amidst the crowd, or engaging in activities. Of course, not all piazzas are as beautiful as Piazza Navona; many are quite ordinary. When Angela says, "*siete piazzevole*," which means "to be like a piazza," she means to be open, gracious, hospitable, and filled with joy. I

believe that being like a piazza is a very suitable disposition for fostering a dialogue of life with others and building trust with one another.

How can we live the spirit of *siete piazzevole*? We need to learn from Jesus himself in Philippians 2:6-8: "Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant...He humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross." So, the first attitude is to not cling to one's status; the second is to empty oneself, and the third is to humble oneself. If we adopt these attitudes, a community of brotherhood (Constitutions No. 4) will be formed.

If every Ursuline lives the spirit of *siete piazzevole*, then the communities will also become communities that are open to receiving anyone who comes, regardless of nationality, culture, religion, and so on. Dialogue and shared search will take place, leading to finding the best solutions to address problems in society.

Dialogue of Religious Experience, the dialogue of religious experience occurs when people of different faiths share the beauty of their faith experiences with one another. Each individual gains a deeper understanding of

the other's religion, not through theological concepts, but through personal experiences and real-life stories. As a result, a sense of trust is formed towards religions different from their own. Religious diversity becomes a horizon for thinking and acting for those involved in and committed to dialogue at this level.[2]

"In fidelity to the charism of Saint Angela, we make our own the twofold love which inspired her to give herself entirely to the service of God and the salvation of the world."[3] Saint Angela's charism aligns with the greatest commandment in the Torah and the Book of the Prophets, as found in Matthew 22:37-39, or its parallel gospels in Mark 12:30-31 and Luke 10:27, which states: "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 neighbour as yourself."

Loving God means listening to His word, spending time with Him in prayer, so that we may know and love Him more deeply and while seeking His will in our lives. Our love for God is expressed by glorifying, giving thanks,

[2] Greg Soetomo SJ, "Maturing As Believers Through Inter-Religious Encounters."
[33] Constitutions of The Roman Union of The Order of Saint Ursula, Nature and Mission of Our Institute, 2, (1984), 1984, 13.

and serving others, because Christ is also present in our neighbors. Loving our neighbour means being present, willing to listen, spending time, giving attention, and even sacrificing our own interests.

These two forms of love are what Ursuline Sisters are called to embody. When we love our neighbors, openness and trust naturally emerge, paving the way for dialogue and mutual sharing in various forms, such as sharing knowledge and material resources. Faith- sharing is encouraged to build and strengthen mutual trust. Through this sharing and dialogue in daily life, we aim to develop a deeper sensitivity toward one another. Inspired by Saint Angela, we are called to be attentive to the needs of those around us and to work together to find solutions that serve the common good.

In the prologue of the testament, Angela wrote: "And among the good and necessary means that God has granted me, you are one of the most important."[4] One dimension of love is recognizing that others are very important. This also strengthens us to be open, to listen, to be humble, and to respect others.

[4] Saint Angela Merici, "The Words of Saint Angela, Rule, Councels, Legacies/Testament, The Prologue of the Testament," 10, (1995), 76.

Dialogue in Collaboration, the nature and mission of the Ursulines states: "The Roman Union of the Order of Saint Ursula, a branch of the spiritual family founded by Saint Angela Merici, is an international religious institute of pontifical right, in which contemplation and apostolic life are so interwoven that each gives life to the other."[5] This clearly shows that an Ursuline is active in service to others, while contemplation or prayer becomes our strength. Angela even said that the fruitfulness of our apostolate depends on our union with Christ.

In today's global world, the Ursulines feel that we are all connected to the global community, where we are interdependent with each other. We feel the impact of the Russia-Ukraine war, the Middle East conflict, and what is happening in Myanmar. We also face issues like human rights abuses, the mistreatment of refugees, global warming, economic inequality, cyber security, educational disparities, water and food crises, and other challenges that require global cooperation to address.

The Ursulines are not silent; we want to engage in dialogue to find new breakthroughs that can make us neighbours to others. We want to convey the message of

[5] Constitutions of The Roman Union of The Order of Saint Ursula, Nature and Mission of Our Institute, 1, (1984), 13.

love, which is also part of the charism of Saint Angela: "We make our own the twofold love which inspired her to give herself entirely to the service of God and the salvation of the world."[6] Here, we see the need for encounters, mutual listening, and collaboration with others, regardless of ethnicity, nationality, culture, or religion. We set aside differences and work together to find solutions for a better world.

"The mission entrusted to us by the Church to be exercised in her name is that of education in its varied forms, for the sake of evangelization."[7] If all Ursuline schools, with their value of *Serviam*, and their students—both current and alumni—become salt in their families or in the places where they work (as was the mission of Saint Angela in Brescia), then they can be instruments of change in the world, at least in the world around them.

In the last counsel, Angela also wrote: "See then how important is this union and concord. So, long for it, pursue it, embrace it, hold on to it with all your strength; for I tell you, living all together thus united in heart, you will be like a mighty fortress, or a tower impregnable

[6] Constitutions of The Roman Union of The Order of Saint Ursula, Nature and Mission of Our Institute, 2, (1984), 13.
[7] Constitutions of The Roman Union of The Order of Saint Ursula, Nature and Mission of Our Institute, 5 5, (1984), 14.

against all adversities, and persecutions, and deceits of the devil."[8] I believe that for dialogue and collaboration, this union and concord are very important. How can we engage in dialogue and work together if everyone is only concerned with themselves or their own group? To build a better world, we need unity and harmony.

Have I Become a Dialogical Ursuline in Indonesia?

In the Dialogue of Life, my childhood experience, growing up with Muslim friends and feeling the beauty of sharing water and food in a simple village community, has become a strong foundation as I entered the Ursuline life and had to live with others from different backgrounds in terms of education, ethnicity, culture, and more. I strive to accept whoever comes into my life, as taught by Saint Angela, and I try to embody the attitude of *siete piazzevole.*

Even though I had a strong foundation from my childhood, living with others 24/7 was not easy. Some had very different characters from mine, which was shaped by a family culture of democracy, where we were free to express our opinions. Some had such delicate characters

[8] Saint Angela Merici, "*The Words of Saint Angela, Rule, Councels, Legacies/Testament: The Last Counsel*," 10-18, (1995), 70-71.

that they were easily offended, making me seem harsh because of my straightforwardness.

Since I left the novitiate, I have made a promise to say yes to wherever my Provincial assigns me. In 2010, I received a new mission in Rome as a General Treasurer. At the Generalate, we lived with Sisters from various countries: England, France, Poland, Thailand, Taiwan, Australia, Indonesia, Brazil, India, the USA, Slovakia, Senegal, and Italy. In terms of finances, we had a Solidarity Fund. This fund was to help other provinces in need, whether for formation, repairs to their convents, their schools, etc. Proposals for financial assistance had to be submitted before the end of March, and I had to present them in the middle of April. Once, another Sister and I had different opinions about money, but at that time, what she said hurt me so much that I considered returning to Indonesia. After several days of dialogue with God, I found the courage to discuss it with her, and we reached a solution. This dialogue helped me to avoid making the wrong decision.

In Dialogue of Religious Experience

My experience in public school during senior high school, especially the way we could respect each other

despite our different religions or not even thinking about our differences, has influenced my life.

My motivation when I entered the convent was, first, to love God, because I felt that Jesus had been so good to me, full of love and patience. Second, I wanted to serve others because of His love, seeing them as important as myself in the eyes of Jesus. Most people who enter the convent have motivations similar to mine. However, even with the same motivation, sharing experiences, engaging in open dialogue, and accepting each other with all our strengths and weaknesses is not easy. If love is the foundation and the bridge between differences, living together should not be difficult. Difficulties arise because we still have strong egos, different characters—since each person is unique—lack of open and honest communication, and generational differences that lead to differing attitudes, with each generation believing theirs is the best.

One of the outcomes of the 2019 Chapter and the 2020 Provincial Assembly is that each Ursuline is required to write a daily diary about things I am grateful for today, detailing where I found God in today's events, inspirations, priorities, and so on. We are also asked to share about our retreats. This sharing of faith is expected

to help us to know each other better so that we can love one another and discover that among the means God has given us, you are the most important.

In Dialogue of Action, "The Roman Union of the Order of Saint Ursula is an international religious institute of pontifical right, in which contemplation and apostolic life are so interwoven that each gives life to the other."[9] In our Constitution number 60, we are to make one hour of personal prayer each day. "In Saint Angela, the Holy Spirit brought about the union of contemplation with action. Docility to the Spirit, which held such an important place in her life, must also, as she asked of us, characterize our lives."[10]

As a daughter of Angela, each day I try to make one hour of personal prayer. This makes my day truly meaningful and different from when I don't pray. I become calmer in facing problems, and my thoughts are clearer. My close relationship with Jesus influences all my daily activities. I strive to be more sensitive to the whispers of the Holy Spirit and hope that it will bear fruit in my service to others.

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[9] Constitutions of The Roman Union of The Order of Saint Ursula, Nature and Mission of Our Institute, 1, (1984), 13.
[10] Constitutions of The Roman Union of The Order of Saint Ursula, Our Spiritual Life, 50, 32, (1984), 32.

Many people say that working with lay people is easier than working with members of your own community. There is some truth to this. When I was at Jl. Pos in 2003, I once disagreed about the best time to paint the elementary school. As the treasurer, I had planned to do it during the long vacation in June–July. However, the Sister who was the school principal did not agree and wanted it done during the short Christmas break. My argument was that it had not been budgeted for in 2003 and the time was too short. She did not want to listen to me and wrote an argument that was possibly more than 100 pages long, like a thesis, and sent it to the Provincial, the foundation chairperson, and me. This is one example of what can happen due to a lack of dialogue. However, in the end, we became good friends and remain so to this day.

We all want to do the best we can for others and wherever we serve. Angela spoke of the importance of unity and harmony. I also feel the truth of this—how can we progress if we are still fighting among ourselves? Therefore, cooperation, unity, and harmony are essential aspects of living together.

Conclusion

One of Saint Angela's charisms that an Ursuline must live by is the intertwining of contemplation and apostolic action, where each nourishes and inspires the other. This involves two ongoing dialogues: one with God and one with others. In these dialogues, one must possess the attitude of *siete piazzevole* (be like piazza) and offer continuous forgiveness.

As an Ursuline, I strive to live this spirit in my daily life, in working with others, through the ups and downs and imperfections. Every day, I learn something new through the dialogue of life and cooperation with others. I persevere in one hour of personal prayer each day. Like Angela, I try to make Jesus Christ my only treasure.

Many people say that life is an art; I believe that dialogue is also an art of living, depending largely on how we react to challenges. This is a long journey toward the fullness of life, which will be reached at the time of my death.

About The Author

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The Journeys of Muslims to China to Knowing Who I Am

Mark Tri, SJ

Abstract

Being inspired by the inculturation of Muslims in Indonesia, I found the inculturation of Muslims in China to also be a journey of identifying believers between religion and nationality. The journey of harmonizing two distinguishing systems needs much effort, even from age to age. Learning from the past and adapting to the present needs profound immersion in the two systems. Interestingly, they found both the supplement and nuances between the two systems. Deepening the culture could lead to a new way to understand Islam, the Real One. Understanding Islam could enjoy the lively philosophy of China, which is the harmony of the universe.

Who am I?

The question of identity is always significant for humans because it expresses who they are. Could they have two identities? It is difficult to reply to this yes-no question because identity is very foundational. It impacts every part of a human, such as values, perspectives, choices, direction, and social relationships. For example, when I introduce myself, I ask myself which description of my identity do I want people to know about me: my nationality, my state, my career, or my residence? The

question that I met during the weeks of the Asia Pacific Theology Encounter Program was who am I?

Many Indonesian lecturers concluded with an either-or answer, I am an Indonesian or I am a Muslim. That kind of question of identity could lead to the wrong direction. The either-or answer could make the statement more static than dynamic. Either-or can be exclusive. It could label people into a static group without considering the other elements' dynamics and overlap.

However, the question can lead them to their deep inner self and reflect on the values they received or accumulated. Becoming an Indonesian is not simply a title. Indonesians carry a dynamic value of tolerance, which harmonizes the existence of different cultures and religions. It makes Indonesia a unique country since it is the largest Muslim country.

The struggles of finding or claiming identity are always both challenging and difficult. Their fundamental choice probably shows which values they are choosing. Their values probably identify them. They relate dialectically and dynamically.

However, that is the story of Indonesians. I am living in Hong Kong, China. Therefore, I want to tell the same story of the identity of Muslim Chinese more than

350 years ago when Wang DaiYu (1570 - 1660) tried to transmit Muslim doctrine to the Chinese.

Situation

Muslims went to China at the very beginning of Islam. They had problems with Chinese culture since Chinese culture profoundly developed and spread throughout the whole of China and its neighbors. Wang DaiYu learned that using Chinese wisdom was a huge move in introducing the Muslim faith to the Chinese.

Background

Wang Daiyu (1590-1658) was educated in a Muslim family and had Central Asian ancestry. He was a Chinese Hanafi-Maturidi. He could understand Islam in Arabic and Persian. Because of being good at astronomy and calculating calendars, he was assigned as an officer Master Supervisor of the Imperial Observatory. Wang Daiyu is an *ustadz* or learned Muslim. He tried to transmit the Muslim faith into Chinese.[1] Wang Daiyu's journey was somehow similar to the journey of Mateo Ricci.

[1] "Wang Daiyu," *Wikipedia*, May 24, 2024, accessed August 18, 2024, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Wang_Daiyu&oldid=1225386227; Sachiko Murata, *Chinese Gleams of Sufi Light* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2000), 19-21.

He had an advantage compared to Mateo Ricci in that he knew Chinese and learned classical Chinese from his adolescence. Although he was not raised in a Chinese literary family, his background and passion opened a wide perspective in this inter-religious dialogue. His versatility in opening conversation space for non-Muslim scholars was a historical event.[2]

His writings were not just translations of Muslim doctrine into Chinese but were a harmonization of the encounter between Muslims and Chinese pearls of wisdom. The Chinese expressions used in his writings enlighten us in his profound understanding of Chinese wisdom. He could borrow the terms of Chinese classical books at a deep level to demonstrate the Real One. The subtle way to distinguish the nuances between the Real One and the Numerical One showed his mastery or at least passion for Chinese wisdom.

He probably also learned from the history of the rite controversy among religious orders in the Catholics. He settled his statement of Islam in Chinese expression to avoid those controversies.[3]

[2] Sachiko Murata, *Chinese Gleams of Sufi Light* x-xi.
[3] Ibid. 5.

The book *The Great Learning of the Pure and Real* contains three parts with three chapters in each part. The three parts respectively deal with the Real One, the Numerical One, and the Embodied One. The Real One part will deal with the oneness of God. The Numerical One part will deal with the principle of the ten thousand things. The Embodied One part dealt with the human level, how to penetrate, connect, and unite with the Real One.

Neo-Confucianism followed a branch of the Chinese philosophy that investigated nature and principle (*li*). It was called the School of Nature and Principles. According to the branch of principle, the investigation of things led them to understand the principles of the world. The school renewed Confucian philosophy and combined it with Buddhist and Taoist philosophy. Chou Tun-i (1017-1073) borrowed the Non-Ultimate (*Wu-chi*) of Lao Tzu. He renewed a new diagram by following the "evolutionary process of creation" "through the passive cosmic force," which is the theory of the *Book of Changes*.[4]

Three main and cardinal concepts of the school are principle (*li*), nature (*hsing*), and destiny or mandate (*ming*).[5] By the time of Chu Hsi, he added four more

[4] Wing-Tsit Chan, trans., *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963), 460.
[5] Ibid. 460.

concepts, besides principle and nature, which are the Great Ultimate (*t'ai-chi*), vital-energy (*ch'i*), the investigation of things (*ko-wu*), and humanity (*jen*).[6]

The principle was mostly identified with *Tao* by many Neo-Confucians. The term *Tao* means the way. It was adopted by both Taoism and Confucianism; therefore, they contained a broad meaning derived from the context. The Great Ultimate was usually combined with the Non-Ultimate, one of the most significant ideas of Taoism. The term Non-Ultimate describes a state of being beyond all and denomination. On the other hand, the Great Ultimate could be denominated. Therefore, Chu Hsi explained that Chou Tun-i combined the two into a reality, in which the Non-Ultimate and Great Ultimate were before and after the appearance of forms. Movement and quietude, which design *yin* and *yang*, run the universe by the motivation of the Great Ultimate. The Great Ultimate had a close and complex relationship with principle.

For Chu Hsi, principle and vital-energy are two sides of the same reality. Principle is hidden, while vital-energy is manifest. Vital-energy determines the movement and quietude of everything that appears to

[6] Ibid. 589-590.

human beings. In effect, the whole universe is vitally dynamic and ever-changing because of the principle that animates it. *Ch'i* manifests *li*.[7]

A *Journey of Muslims to China*

Tawḥīd & Neo-Confucianism**,** Wang Daiyu followed the *tawḥīd*, the Islamic doctrine of the oneness of Allah. The Muslims' focus on the *tawḥīd* for him is reflected in three fundamental categories, the Real One, the Numerical One, and the Embodied One, which are respectively suitable with "God in himself or the 'Essence' (*Dhāt*), the Divinity (*uluhiyya*), and the perfect human being (*al-insān al-kāmil*)."[8] By doing this, he wanted to express that the faith claimed, "There is no god but God" (Quran 37:35). He found the Great Learning had a seed for developing that doctrine, the One. He clearly distinguished the ambiguity of words to extract the concept of God in Chinese culture. He used the Real One (the new word) to highlight the uniqueness of God, which also expresses the ultimate oneness of God.

He understood the way of analysis of the Oneness of Neo-Confucianism and the Non-Ultimate of Taoism.

[7] Sachiko Murata, *Chinese Gleams of Sufi Light* 37.
[8] Ibid. 74.

He applied the two Chinese philosophical schools to transmit the Muslim theologian idea to Chinese people. At that time, Neo-Confucianism tried to use Taoism terms to develop their ideas, especially the definition of the One, but did not have a clear idea of the Oneness of God, which was obvious in the doctrine of Muslims. Wang discovered a way of putting the real (*zhen*) following the term the One. It distinguished the ambiguity of the term the One. The most important point Wang wanted to point out was that The Real One is God distinguished from the Numeral One. On the one hand, he came to demonstrate the Ultimate, the Foundation of the Real One. The Real One was beyond other creation. On the other hand, he protested the doctrine that the Real One was the source of creation in all its boundless diversity. In other words, the Real One was the unique Oneness and present in the many. This expression was a good fit with the principle which became the One and Many in Neo-Confucianism.[9] After separating the Ultimate with heaven and earth, he developed Muslim doctrine following the temporal Neo-Confucius development and the flow of the Great Learning.

[9] Ibid.

Understanding Chinese

From Tien to the Real One, Confucian or Chinese wisdom confusedly used the term *Tien*, understood as God, as Nature. It was considered an object of the regime's religious adoration in the Chou Dynasty (1046 BC-256 BC). However, the word contained another meaning of the sky as "Heaven." The ambiguous meaning of the word brought a multi-layer throughout the history of Chinese culture and philosophy. According to Chu Hsi, *Tien* could be understood as a Ruler, Ethical Law, and Nature. *Tien* could also be understood as the Physical Sky, Ruler, Fate, Nature, and Ethical principle according to Fung Yu-lan.[10]

He recognized the ambiguity of *Tien* and the relative interpretation of God. Concretely, he understood that that ambiguity happened in Neo-Confucius's ambiguity between *Tien* and principle. Therefore, he chose a new term to settle the starting point for explaining Muslim doctrine. Starting with the new foundation, Wang borrowed those ideas to *inculturate* the Muslim faith into Chinese. His expressions used a lot of ideas and terms of those traditions.

[10] Robert Eno, *The Confucian Creation of Heaven: Philosophy and the Defense of Ritual Mastery*, (New York: State University of New York Press, 1990), 4.

The Flow of Great Learning, Wang Daiyu borrowed the idea of great learning to lead readers to reach final knowledge, that is knowing the Real Lord. This knowing is the knowing from the heart of the so-called true people (with the true heart). The knower and the knowledge must be true, like an adventure with the authentic desire to follow the true direction of the light.[11]

The best knowledge of a perfect human is knowing the Real Lord. He listed three levels of demonstration: the Root Nature, the Root Allotment, and the Root Act.[12] That is the foundation of the faith of the Pure and Real people.[13] He developed the role of collaboration between knowledge and cultivation. Knowing and practicing are both important.

The Root Nature means Creator of all things but beyond all things.[14] Many Neo-Confucian and Taoism terms were used here.[15] The Unique One does not belong to *yin* and *yang*, being and nonbeing. The Root Allotment

[11] 有正教而無正人，不異日光照於瞽目，何以分其皂白；有正人而無正教，豈啻明眼步於黃昏，烏得行于正路？(Wang Tai Yu 王岱與, *Cheng-chiao chen-Ch'uan 正教真詮, Chi'ng-chen ta-hsueh 清真大學, Hsi-chen cheng-ta 希真正答,* ed. Zhengui Yu (NingXia, 1987), *Cheng-chiao chen-Ch'uan 正教真詮*.) Hereafter just quote the Chinese texts without reference.
[12] 曰本然。曰本分、曰本為。
[13] 此理不徹，少有訛誤，自個系清真人矣。
[14] 造化萬物而不類萬物。
[15] 所謂本然者，原有無始，久遠無終，不屬陰陽，本無對待。

was explained as “the movement and quietude of the Root Nature.” It motivated all things but was not the principle, therefore, “nothing to do with the Numerical One” and still “always the Unique One.”[16] It gave life to everything. It gave knowledge to everything. It penetrated everything, therefore, knowing everything. It was both movement and quietude at the same time. Hence, both expressions point out the acting and making of Root Nature.[17] “Afterward, He mentioned and recorded the ten thousand things according to His own will. This is predetermination by the Real Lord’s movement and quietude.”[18]

Root Act possessed “all the subtlety of the formless.” It is the source of “the pure essences of the ten thousand spirituals and the ornaments of heaven and earth.”[19] It brought principles into everything. It was not principles but could not be separated.[20] It gave them oneness, life, knowledge, power.[21]

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16 即真一非幹數一，原來一，故始終獨一。

17 但靜則如如不動，動則紛紛不已，若言其靜，機無不顯；若言其動，未見其跡。所以動靜兩稱，正於本然為作之間也。

18 然後於任憑中，提記了萬物，茲乃真主動靜之前定也。

19 所謂本為者...總具無形之妙，是為能有。...雖萬靈之精粹，天地之文章，莫不賴於此有。

20 始發其所蘊之理但未發之時，其與真一個即不離，分之不開，合之有別。

21 原一之能與之一，原有之能與之有，原活之能一與之活，原知之能現之知，原能之能與之能。

He understood those philosophies well and applied them to explain the doctrine of Muslims in Chinese. He did it diligently. He reflected on the system of those philosophies and discovered the nuances between them and Muslim theology. He rearranged those nuances and explained them from the Muslim perspective. For example, in Neo-Confucianism the term principle typically took precedence in building the philosophical systems, but Wang put it at the end of the explanation about Real One.

Conclusion

Muslims wanted to live out their values in the Chinese culture. They tried to adapt to the new culture in the beginning. Wang Daiyu worked to develop that tradition, especially in separating the different meanings of *Tien*. He created the new term, Real One, to avoid any nuance from the old terms. The Real One, representing the 'Essence' (*Dhāt*), is one of three basic elements in the Quran to describe the *tawḥīd*.

About The Author

Mark Tri entered the Society of Jesus in Vietnam in 2013. In 2018, he was assigned to Taiwan to learn Mandarin. In 2020, he moved to Hong Kong to learn Cantonese. Since September of 2021, he has been working and studying in our school and chapels. He is in the third year of theology training at the Holy Spirit seminary in Hong Kong. This summer, he had a chance to spend three weeks in Jakarta, Central Java, and Yogyakarta, Indonesia to join the Asia Pacific Theology Encounter Program (APTEP), which aimed to learn about Islam and interaction with Muslim communities through Dialogue of Life, Action, Spirituality, and Theological Exchanges.

Witnessing To *Eisa Al-Masih* In The Muslim World

Richard Niyukuri, SX

Abstract

According to the statistics of the world population, Christian and Muslim communities make up the highest percentage of religious followers. Approximately 2.38 billion people practice Christianity globally. This means that about one-third of the world's total population is Christian.[1] On the other side, Muslims comprise more than 2 billion people worldwide; making Islam the second-largest religion in the world, exceeded only by Christianity.[2] By learning about these figures, one may be interested in knowing more about these two Abrahamic and revealed religions. The truth is that Islam was established in the 7th AD. The existing Christian community found it important to respond to the emergence of the Islamic religion. It did so on the basis of an already well-established tradition that focused on the theme of chosenness of Israel in the Old Testament and the new people of Israel chosen through the salvific mission of Jesus Christ. At the time, there was the view that a non-Christian religion, like Islam, was a false religion intending to undermine the true mission of the Church established by Christ himself. Thus, the two religions have known a dark history, characterized by a

[1] Most Christian Countries 2024, World Population Review, accessed August 25, 2024, https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/most-christian-countries.

[2] Muslim Population by Country 2024, World Population Review, accessed August 25, 2024, https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/muslim-population-by-country.

number of conflicts, such as military conquests taking control of lands belonging to the other, Crusades waged at the end of the 11th century through the 13th century, Jihad, etc.

Little by little, the Church has recognized the goodness that is in the Islamic religion and its members since the Second Vatican Council. A number of dialogues between Christians and Muslims have taken place; however, the level of mutual understanding between these two communities is still low. Mutual ignorance of both parties also undermine their reciprocal understanding. As Christians who are called to dialogue with everyone, we find it urgent to understand other religions and to engage in dialogue for our mutual enrichment. In so doing, there is hope to witness to Christ in a non-Christian world.

I was in Indonesia from June 3-24, 2024, to attend the Asia Pacific Theological Encounter Program (APTEP) organized by the Jesuits. The program was an introduction to Islamic Studies with some time consecrated to immersion in some Muslim communities. While there are many Muslim countries, the choice of Indonesia was not accidental. In fact, Indonesia is the country with the world's largest Muslim population; it is home to over 242 million Muslims. This is about 87% of the Indonesian population and 11.7% of the world's total

population of Muslims.[3] Despite Indonesia's overwhelming Muslim majority, Indonesia is not an Islamic country; which means its constitution is not specifically based on religion. It adheres to universal values that are also available in Islam and other religions and are formulated into what is known as Pancasila—or the five philosophical pillars of the country.[4] Thus, Indonesia preserves religious freedom among its citizens. I myself experienced religious tolerance among Muslims and Christians in Indonesia. However, there remains a minority of Indonesian Muslims who are guided by extremist ideas.

We stayed in Java Island (Jakarta, Salatiga, and Yogyakarta), a largely Muslim island in Indonesia. After our theoretical experience at the Indonesian International Islamic University (IIIU), we moved to Salatiga (Central Java) for an immersion in a Muslim community. We stayed in an Islamic boarding School (Pondok Pesantren) at Edi Mancoro Institute. We mingled with Muslim students (*santri*) dressed in sarongs and hijabs. We communed with them as we attended their

[3] Ibid.
[4] Adam Fayed, "Why is Indonesia Considered a Muslim Country When it's Actually not?", accessed August 23, 2024, https://www.quora.com/Why-is-Indonesia-considered-a-Muslim-country-when-its-actually-not

prayers and engaged in their activities. In the village, some people could not figure out that we were Christians. Whenever I went around the village, children would run to meet me with much interest. However, the problem was the language. I could not understand many of the things they said to me in the Javanese language. But once, two 10-year-old kids came pointing at me and said, "*Islam atawa Kristan*?" I understood that they were asking me if I was a Muslim or a Christian. Then, I answered, "Christian." Then, I asked, pointing at them, "Christians…*bagus*?" (asking if Christians are good). They answered, "Yeah." I was happy to learn that they could recognize the goodness in Christians at their age.

This experience did not go unnoticed; I spent time mulling over it. I said that I am truly a Christian and a follower of Jesus Christ. Christ is my raison d'être. Then, some questions were raised, "Who is Jesus Christ for Muslims?" Belonging to the Xaverian Institute, whose charism is to proclaim the good news to non-Christians, how can I witness to Christ in the Muslim world? Moreover, when dialoguing with Muslims, how can I combine the dialogue and proclamation, which are essential to the Christian message?

In this article, I will try to give an answer. This will help me maintain my Christian identity while dialoguing with Muslims and other believers. Is there an advantage to knowing the religion of another without adhering to that religion?

My journey in encountering Muslims

I grew up in Burundi, a country where, according to statistics released in 2023, Muslim groups make up 12 to 15 percent of the population nationwide.[5] Seeing them is rare because they only stay in particular cities. Some Christians have biases and prejudices against them, considering them bad people. There is no dialogue between Christians and Muslims. They don't know each other, and so they are afraid of each other.

The first time I had contact with a Muslim was in an optic center in Bujumbura, Burundi. A Muslim greeted me, "A*ssalamu alaikum*." At the time, I didn't know how to answer. Afraid that he might hurt me, I left him immediately. I continued my journey with Muslims in the Philippines. My Xaverian community used to invite

[5] United States Department of State, Office of International Religious Freedom, Burundi 2023 International Religious Freedom Report, accessed 25August 2024, https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/547499_BURUNDI-2023-INTERNATIONAL-RELIGIOUS-FREEDOM-REPORT.pdf, 2.

Muslims for interreligious dialogue. In return, they invited us too. In 2021, I had a chance to attend Silsilah Courses online, focusing on Christian-Muslim dialogue. In 2023, I even went to Zamboanga in Southern Philippines to take some face-to-face courses on Islam and Christianity. I stayed in Silsilah Center, which was founded by a PIME Father, Sebastiano D'Ambra. This course was enriched by Islamic studies on Islam, encounters, and immersion with Muslim families.

My Indonesian experiences contributed important knowledge. I realized that Muslims are generally good people. I cannot generalize them as bad based on the examples of Muslim extremists. In Indonesia, the majority of Muslims are moderate. Religions in Indonesia are characterized by religious tolerance. The terms "moderate" and "tolerance" may get negative connotations according to the one who interprets them. However, some Indonesians view them in the sense of religious respect. While visiting the downtown of Jakarta, this respect is epitomized by the Catholic Cathedral and Istiqlal Mosque, which are built side by side and share a tunnel. Given that the Cathedral was the first Prayer House to be built in the Center of Jakarta, some people may have negative comments behind the construction of

the Mosque in that place. However, the two Houses of prayer still serve as a symbol of religious tolerance and respect that gives hope to the Xaverian Missionaries and all those engaged in dialogue with Muslims in continuing their mission.

The Charism of the Xaverian Missionaries

I belong to the Institute of the Xaverian Missionaries, which was founded in Italy, in 1895, by Saint Guido Maria Conforti. We are named after Saint Francis Xavier, our model and patron saint. The sole charism of our Institute is to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom of God to non-Christians,[6] those who do not know Christ and His Gospel. In our mission, we respond to the mandate of Christ, asking us to "Go… and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you."[7] We first proclaim the Gospel. The first and preferential to live out the Xaverian charism consists in the explicit proclamation of the Gospel to those who do not know it. This is done

[6] Cf. Xaverian Missionaries*, Constitutions and General Rule* (Roma: Viale Vaticano,2008), n02.
[7] Cf. Matt 28:19f.NAB (New American Bible).

out of obedience to Christ's command.[8] We are also engaged in interreligious and interfaith dialogue as a part of the Church's evangelizing mission.[9] We commit ourselves to understanding and accepting our non-Christian brothers and sisters with their values and their religions. We strive to promote the common values of the kingdom through a fraternal and qualified dialogue of life.[10] In our mission, we follow the path of *kenosis* chosen by Christ that asks us to make ourselves all things to all men.

Who is Eisa al-Masih (Jesus the-Christ) for Muslims?

If we want to know who Jesus is for Muslims, we refer to the Holy Qur'an, the sacred book that contains the message revealed by God through his Spirit (*Ruh*) to the prophet Muhammad. The chief source for a Muslim's understanding of Jesus is the Qur'an. The Qur'an recounts the annunciation and birth of Jesus, with some similarities to the record of the Gospels. In chapter 3, the Angels said,

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[8] Cf. Xaverian Missionaries, *Ratio Missionis Xaveriana* (Parma: Casa editrice Graphital, 2001),n055.1.

[9] Cf.J.Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*. *On the permanent validity of the Church's missionary mandate,* 7December 1990, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_07121990_redemptoris-missio.html (accessed 6 May 2024), n055.

[10] Cf. Xaverian Missionaries*, Constitutions and General Rule*, n013.

"O Mary, God gives you good news of a Word from Him. His name is 'the Messiah Jesus son of Mary '(*al-Masih Eisa ibn Maryam*), well-esteemed in this world and the next, and one of the nearest (v.45). He will speak to the people from the crib, and in adulthood, and will be one of the righteous." (v.46). Mary said, "My Lord, how can I have a child when no man has touched me?" He (the angel) said, "It will be so. God creates whatever He wills. To have anything done, He only says to it, 'Be,' and it is." (v.47). And He will teach him the Scripture and wisdom, and the Torah and the Gospel (v.48).[11]

In the same Qur'an, Jesus is frequently called the son of Mary.[12] In line with other Qur'anic references, the designation "son of Mary" indicates that Jesus was born of the virgin Mary. Mary conceived Jesus through God's creative Word.[13] However, while Muslims accept Jesus' virgin birth, they strongly deny that this virgin birth is a reason to call him the Son of God. Adam, they may add, was born without a father and mother.[14]

The Qur'an reveres Jesus as one of the great prophets. In verse 19:30, Jesus admits to being the slave (servant) of

[11]Ernest Hann, *Jesus in Islam. A Christian view*, (Hyderabad, India: Henry Martyn Institute of Islamic studies, 1978),5.
[12] Mark 6:3 NAB (New American Bible).
[13] Cf.Qur'an, 3:47.
[14]Ernest Hann, *Jesus in Islam*,5.

Allah; "He hath given me the Scripture and hath appointed me a Prophet." Here "the Arabic word for prophet (*nabi*) is the same as the Hebrew (*ncibi*). It seems to have been known to the Arabs long before the time of Muhammad."[15] For Muslims, God appoints Jesus as a prophet and apostle and has ordained for him the religion (Islam) which he commanded unto all other prophets. He is taught the Torah (*Tawrat*, the Books of Moses) and under inspiration is given the Gospel (*Injil*), a confirmation of the Torah.[16]

In the Qur'an, Jesus is named *Eisa* (25 times), "which is used in the personal sense without explanation. The form of the name has given rise to considerable comment, though there is general agreement that it came from the Syriac Yeshfi' which derived it from the Hebrew Yeshua."[17] Moreover, in the Qur'an, Jesus is the son of Mary (Ch1), Man, and Servant (slave). Jesus is not God; he is a slave of God. He is the Messiah (*al-Masih* in Arabic). The Qur'an calls Jesus "The Messiah" as a title of honor. However, the Qur'an does not provide us with the meaning of the term "Messiah" or the reason why Jesus alone is designated as "The Messiah," Prophet and Apostle

[15] Parrinder-Geoffrey, Jesus-in-the-Quran, (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2003). Last accessed August 23, 2024, https://kutub.nur.nu/English/Parrinder-Geoffrey_Jesus-in-the-Quran.pdf, 37.
[16] Ernest Hann, Jesus in Islam,11.
[17] Parrinder-Geoffrey, Jesus-in-the-Quran, 16.

(19:30), Spirit of God (21:91), and the Word of God (3:39,45).[18]

Concerning the mission and ministry of Jesus, the Qur'an admits that Jesus, son of Mary, was sent by God to follow in the footsteps of the previous prophets, confirming that which was revealed before the Qur'an in the Torah—guidance and an admonition unto those who ward off evil (Cf. Ch 5:46). In the Qur'an, the ministry of Jesus is directed to the children of Israel. He summons the children of Israel to the worship of God and to the unity among themselves, and legalizes things previously forbidden to them.[19] Chap 57:27 says, "we (Allah) caused Jesus, son of Mary, to follow, and gave him the Gospel, and placed compassion and mercy in the hearts of those who followed him." "And I heal the blind and the leprous, and I revive the dead, by God's leave" (3:49). In this line, the Qur'an briefly refers to some of Jesus' miracles (healings and his raising of the dead). Later, Muslim tradition adds flesh to the skeleton of Qur'anic accounts of some aspects of Jesus's ministry. They provide details for these and other works of Jesus. In fact, "He cured a number of blind and lepers.[20]

[18] Ernest Hann, Jesus in Islam, 34.
[19] Ibid., 12.
[20] Ibid.,13.

Muslims deny the death of Jesus on the Cross as a fact of history. Most of them agree that God made someone look like Jesus, and that person was crucified in Jesus' place (Cf 4:155). For them, Jesus escaped crucifixion and death on the Cross, that his living body was taken to heaven, and that he will return to earth in the future.[21] However, commentating on Ch3:55, some Muslims have clearly indicated that prior to his ascension, Jesus died (though not necessarily on the cross) for a few hours and then rose from the dead. Ahmadiyya Muslims also state that Jesus died.[22]

Having explored the understanding of Jesus by Muslims, we notice *Eisa al-Masih*, whom Muslims revere as the great prophet, is the same Jesus that we profess and announce, the messenger of God, and the bringer of good tidings from God. Though Muslims do not agree with us Catholics that Jesus is the Son of God. It follows that Jesus is the second person of the Divine Trinity; He is God; he is our savior, the perfect revealer of God and the mediator between humanity and God. By the salvific mission of Christ, we understand God himself, who is

[21] Ibid., 22.
[22] Ibid.

saving his people in the person of Jesus Christ, the eternal Word of God.

The Attitude of A Missionary Towards A Muslim

Preliminary. Like any other missionary, the Xaverian missionary is sent to announce Christ by proclaiming the Gospel of salvation and to make people disciples of Christ according to the mandate of Christ. He is sent to non-Christians, including Muslims. However, some guidelines should be followed in order to carry out the mission entrusted to him/her by Christ. Before proclaiming the Good News, he/she must follow some steps. One must get to know the people to whom he/she wants to preach the good news through encounters and dialogue.

For example, before dialoguing with Muslims, a missionary will study their religion. Jesus commanded us to love one another, even our enemies. We cannot love others if we don't know them. The more we know them, the more we love them. The more we know their religion, the more we appreciate their religion and deepen our relationships with them. Learning about the other's religion, deepens our faith because we will no longer base our knowledge of their religion on biases and prejudices.

A missionary needs to know the history of Islam. For example, Islam is an Abrahamic religion, like Christianity and Judaism. The Islamic religion began after the prophet Muhammad received his call to prophethood in the year 610 and started to gather people to have faith in One God (Monotheism) in Mecca, Arabia. During the course of the next 22 years, until his death in 632, he proclaimed his message of monotheism and its ethical consequences, firstly in Mecca, until his Hijra (migration) in 622/1, in Medina.[23] Islam means submission to the will of God. It is founded on five pillars: (1) Profession of Faith (*shahada*) which states that "There is no god but God, and Muhammad is the Messenger of God"; (2) Prayer (*salat*) by which Muslims pray facing Mecca five times a day; (3) Alms (*zakat*) by which Muslims donate a fixed portion of their income to community members in need; (4) Fasting (*sawm*) in which all healthy adult Muslims are required to abstain from food and drink during the daylight hours of Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic calendar; (5) Pilgrimage (*hajj*) in which every Muslim whose health and

[23] Hugh Goddard, A History of Christian–Muslim Relation, (Cambridge: Edinburgh University Press, 2000),19.

finances permit it must make at least one visit to the holy city of Mecca, in present-day Saudi Arabia.[24]

Missionaries need to know that there are many kinds of Islam; just as there are many denominations in Christianity. This will guide one in differentiating the moderate from the fundamentalists, extremists, radicals, or violent. This will help them recognize that there are good Muslims just as there are good Christians. Likewise, there are bad Muslims just as there are bad Christians.

Knowing Different kinds of Muslims

There are two main branches of Islams: Sunni Muslims and Shia Muslims (also known as Shiites). These two branches were first formed around a dispute over leadership succession soon after the death of the Prophet Muhammad in 632 A.D. While the two sects are similar in many ways, they differ over conceptions of religious authority and interpretation, as well as the role of the Prophet Muhammad's descendants.[25] Within each of these two branches, there are many other denominations, for example the mystical experiences known as Sufism,

[24] "The Five Pillars of Islam," last accessed August 23, 2024, https://www.metmuseum.org/learn/educators/curriculum-resources/art-of-the-islamic-world/unit-one/the-five-pillars-of-islam

[25] Pew Research Center, "Mapping the Global Muslim Population."

Ibadi, Su, Ash'ari, Kharijites, Barelvi, Deobandi, Salafism, Wahhabism, Ahmadiyya, Ismāʿīlism, Muʿtazila, Murji'ah, etc. Some of the Islamic sects and groups regard certain others as deviant or accuse them of not being truly Muslims.[26]

Some groups are moderate, while others are extremists and fundamentalists. The latter usually use violence against those who do not share the same ideas with them. There are some terrorist groups or rebels, such as the Taliban, Boko Haram, Al-Shabaab, Al-Qaida, and other Islamic groups conducting *jihad* by threatening the lives of others. Many of these Islamic groups are politically instrumentalized and want to impose their *shariah* on others. By this, we refer to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). We cannot pass this point without mentioning many deadly attacks (perpetrated by suicide bombers or in other ways) that have happened in the world against innocent people. On the list, there is the 9/11 attack on the Twin Towers in New York that killed 2,977 people in 2001.[27] There are also many other attacks on the Christian Church in some largely Muslim areas.

[26] "Islamic Schools and Branches," last accessed August 23, 2024, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamic_schools_and_branches.
[27] The Memorial, last accessed August 25, 2024, https://www.911memorial.org/visit/memorial

Learning from all that which precedes, who would not be afraid of terrorist Muslims? However, those extremist groups don't represent Islam as a religion. Islam is a good religion; its teachings are based on non-violence. To illustrate this, in July 2005, King Abdullah II bin Al-Hussein of Jordan convened an International Islamic Summit to specifically identify what Islam does and does not allow, who is a Muslim and who can speak for Islam. In it, over 180 leading scholars, representing 45 countries and supported by fatwas from 17 of the world's greatest Islamic authorities, reached, for the first time in history, a signed unanimous consensus on a number of critical issues. The declaration issued condemned the practice known as *takfir* (calling others "apostates"), a practice that is used by extremists to justify violence against those who do not agree with them.[28]

A missionary, together with the Church. The missionary who engages in dialogue is not alone. Through the Second Vatican Council, the Church encourages Her members and other people of goodwill to enter into amicable contact with other religious members in order to share about their values and to understand each other

[28] Joseph V. Edwin, *A Common Word Between Us and You: a New Departure in Muslim Attitudes Towards Christianity (*Birmingham: College of Arts and Law The University of Birmingham, 2000), 43.

in mutual respect. Dialogue helps the participants to learn from each other how to strengthen their relationship with God. By engaging in dialogue, one is challenged to open one's eyes to another reality and then to seek unity in diversity. As we may notice, we meet Muslims everywhere, in the case of Indonesia so we cannot do away with dialogue with them—at least the dialogue of life.

We share life every day in many circumstances. We are brothers and sisters. We move towards the same God whom we worship differently. Focusing on Islam, "the Church regards Muslims with esteem. So, we are called to enter a sincere dialogue (dialogue of theological exchange, dialogue of religious experience, dialogue of action, dialogue of life). We need to choose what kind of dialogue we want to conduct according to the needs." As we dialogue with Muslims, we remember that in "the course of centuries, not a few quarrels and hostilities have arisen between Christians and Moslems. However, the Second Vatican Council urges us to forget the past and to work sincerely for mutual understanding and to preserve as well as to promote together for the benefit of all

mankind social justice and moral welfare, as well as peace and freedom."[29]

Missionaries should realize that before they engage in any dialogue, God precedes them. This is even more apparent in Islam. They adore the one God, living and subsisting in Himself; merciful and all-powerful, the Creator of heaven and earth, who has spoken to men; they take pains to submit wholeheartedly to even His inscrutable decrees, just as Abraham, with whom the faith of Islam takes pleasure in linking itself, submitted to God."[30] They believe that Jesus is a great prophet. So, the Spirit of Christ that is with all creation is moving them to do the will of God.

Evangelizing mission of the Church: Dialogue and proclamation

By nature, the Church is missionary. It responds to the mandate of Christ by participating in His salvific mission (Mat 28:19-20). In writing his encyclical Letter, *Redemptoris Missio*, St Pope John Paul II noticed that "Missionary activity specifically directed 'to the nations'

[29] Vatican II, *Declaration on the relation of the Church to non-Christian religions (Nostra Aetate*), 28 October, 1965, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html (accessed 19 February 2024), n3
[30] Ibid.

was waning." For him, this tendency was certainly not in line with the directives of the Second Vatican Council and of the subsequent statements of the Magisterium. He then invited the Church to renew her missionary commitment because he noticed that the number of those who do not know Christ and do not belong to the Church was constantly increasing.[31] In the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, the term evangelization is taken in different ways. It means "to bring the Good News into all areas of humanity, and through its impact, to transform that humanity from within, making it new."[32] Thus, through evangelization, the Church "seeks to convert solely through the divine power of the Message she proclaims, both the personal and collective consciences of people, the activities in which they engage, their ways of life, and the actual milieux in which they live."[33] Here, we see that the Church is challenged to

[31] John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*. *On the permanent validity of the Church's missionary mandate,* 7 December 1990, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_07121990_redemptoris-missio.html (accessed 6 May 2024), n3.
[32] Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi. Apostolic exhortation*, 8 December 1975, https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19751208_evangelii-nuntiandi.html (accessed 5 May 2024), n18.
[33] Ibid.

announce Christ to non-Christians. No one comes to the Father except through Christ.[34]

Interreligious dialogue is important because it is part of the Church's evangelizing mission. St John Paul II once declared: "Just as interreligious dialogue is one element in the mission of the Church, the proclamation of God's saving work in Our Lord Jesus Christ is another... There can be no question of choosing one and ignoring or rejecting the other."[35] He opines that all Christians must be committed to dialogue with believers of all religions so that mutual understanding and collaboration may grow, moral values may be strengthened, and God may be praised in all creation.[36]

While the Church calls its members to strengthen dialogue, some view it as a failure to proclaim the good news. In some places, Christians are losing ground to Muslims, who are becoming more numerous. This issue should alert every Christian. Some Catholics may be afraid to preach the good news in some Muslim countries.

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[34]34 John 14:6 NAB (New American Bible)

[35] Pontifical Council for inter-religious dialogue, *Dialogue and proclamation*, 19 May 1991, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/interelg/documents/rc_pc_interelg_doc_19051991_dialogue-and-proclamatio_en.html (accessed 3 May 2024), n6.

[36] J.Neuner, J. Dupuis, *The Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church*, (Bangalore: Theological Publications, 2001), 443.

However, they can find ways to do so without forcing anyone to believe. For example, evangelicals who proclaim God's word through the internet have publicized that Christians are becoming more numerous in some Islamic countries like Iran.[37] We can appreciate their work of evangelization and learn from them. There is still a need to proclaim the Good News to all people, including Muslims.

There is no doubt that "The aim of proclamation is to bring people to know and accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and to encourage them to enter through Baptism, into the Church, the community of the disciples of Jesus."[38] However, we need to recognize that it is God who attracts His people to Himself. In this line, Pope Francis cautions those who dream of using proselytism in evangelization. In his book, *Ten Secrets for Happiness*, he says, "Don't proselytize; respect the belief of others. We can inspire others through witness so that one grows

[37] Hormoz Shariat, The Rosenberg Report: Millions of Iranian Muslims Converting To Christianity, last accessed August 23, 2024, | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o6YND_KifjU.
[38] Karl J.Becker, Ilaria Morali, *Catholic Engagement with World Religions* (New York: Orbis Books, 2010), 388.

together in communicating. But the worst thing of all is religious proselytism, which paralyzes."[39]

Proclamation through Dialogue with Muslims

In light of the aforementioned, a mission to strengthen dialogue with Muslims is necessary. Such dialogue strengthens our relationships, given the shared heritage of Abrahamic faith. In dialogue with Muslims, a missionary doesn't focus on converting them, just as they also should respect our expression of faith. We enrich each other in our faiths that lead us to the same destination. If a Muslim is faithful to his/her faith, one does not need to worry. If such Muslims heed God's voice in doing good, then that suffices. As Catholics, we are called to do the same. Muslims know Jesus as a great prophet and a model to be followed. However, Muslims lack something vital. Jesus remains in the past; He is not considered as someone who is still present and active in their lives here and now.

In this line, my work as a Missionary is to teach Muslims about the abiding and active presence of Jesus Christ within us. Jesus journeys with us, serving as a

[39] Harold Kasimow, Alan Race, *Pope Francis and Interreligious Dialogue. Religious Thinkers Engage with Recent Papal Initiatives*, 2018, accessed 10 May 2024, http://www.palgrave.com/gp/series/14561 216.

bridge between us and God the Father. He is the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Him.[40] He is the reason for our being; without Him, everything in our lives is chaos. Missionaries proclaim this good news whenever they are given a chance to share about their faith in other circumstances. This does not mean to convert Muslims; rather, it seeks to witness to Christ, whose Spirit dwells in each of us. In doing so, Muslims may encounter the person of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior through such missionary witness. Witnessing to Christ does not need to be always in speech. It can be through the witness of our daily life. By living the image of Christ in our lives, people will know and meet Christ through us. We need to become living testimony wherever we go. Saint Paul VI says, "Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses."[41]

While still recognizing the goodness and rays of Truth found in Islam (and other religions), a missionary must strongly affirm that the fullness of Truth is only

[40] Jn 14:6 NAB (New American Bible)

[41] Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi. Apostolic exhortation*, 8 December 1975, https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19751208_evangelii-nuntiandi.html (accessed 5 May 2024),n041.

found within the Catholic Church. Why? Because it is the Church that Jesus, the Truth itself, founded as a Sacrament of Salvation in the world. Jesus is always bestowing his salvific graces on everyone and in totality in the Catholic Church. The members of the Catholic Church do not possess the Truth. Instead, the Truth possesses them. Catholics don't know everything. Hence, they must approach others in humility and be open to engaging in intercultural dialogue. While open to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, a missionary must help the Muslims to enjoy the fullness of the means of salvation found only in the Catholic Church. However, he must do this prudently and patiently. He knows that God wants all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.[42] He can save his people, guided by his Spirit, in a way known to himself. But, in the Catholic Church, there are many facilities to receive the offer of God's salvation in its fullness.

Conclusion

All in all, a missionary is always an instrument of Christ. He is the mouthpiece of the unique and universal Savior of the world. This helps us to understand that in

[42] 1 Tim 2:4 NAB (New American Bible)

our missionary work, it is God himself who converts his people. We strive to do our best. We may fail to bring people to adhere to our faith, but at least we must make sure we are working with Christ, the first missionary. God is not against diversity. If God wanted to make all people Catholic, He could do it instantly. Yet, He respects the gradual process of mission. He respects our freedom. He also considers the heart of each one. He said, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven."[43]

Dialogue with Muslims can help us to announce Christ and His irreplaceable importance in our lives. In this enterprise, there is no such thing as proselytism. Our proclamation respects the freedom of each one, as God respects the freedom of his children. As a Xaverian, I need to learn from the Lord how I can continue to witness to Him in the Muslim world, considering the signs of the time. In this score, mission is still urgent. There are many ways to make this announcement. Let us use the means that we have. Interreligious dialogue is one of the means of witnessing to Christ; let us treasure it. With the theology of religions, proclamation seems to fall into

[43] Matt 7:21 NAB (New American Bible)

oblivion; it seems to privilege dialogue over proclamation. On the contrary, we need to proclaim the good news to non-Christians in season and out of season. That is the charism of my Xaverian Institute and the call of the whole Church.

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Echoes of Muslim-Christian Disputes in Early Islam: A Theological Exchange and Its Lasting Influence

Isodorus Bangkit Susetyo Adi, SJ

Abstract
This paper explores the theological exchanges between early Muslim scholars and Nestorian and Monophysite Christian theologians in the unique and pivotal 9th century CE. It highlights how these interactions shaped Christian and Islamic theology. First, the study examines the socio-historical context of early Islam, focusing on debates regarding the oneness of God and the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. It analyzes arguments from both sides, illustrating how Muslim critics challenged Christian theologians to express their faith and theology in a more Arabic-friendly manner. On the other hand, it will also show how the rationalistic argument used by Muslim and Christian theologians serves as an impetus for the decisive development of Islamic doctrine about the nature of the Quran. Ultimately, the paper underscores the significant impact of these theological exchanges on the development of both Islamic and Christian thought during this unique and transformative period.

Keywords: Christian-Muslim relations, theology, Nestorianism, Monophysitism, Trinity.

In his book, A *History of Christian-Muslim Relations*, Hugh Goddard emphasizes the crucial role of the divisions and diversity within the Christian church in shaping the Islamic community's perception and

understanding of Christianity.[1] Furthermore, he believes that exposure to a diverse range of Christian beliefs and practices profoundly influenced the development of Islamic theology, leading to the formation of distinct Islamic doctrines and practices and ultimately contributing to the establishment of a unique and rich Islamic identity.[2] Even though his conviction is arguable, it seems that the historical context of various theological disputes within the Christian church, along with the presence of non-Chalcedonian Christian communities such as the Nestorian and Monophysite near Arabia, is the key to understanding the early Muslims' interactions with Christians and their understanding of Christianity.

Taking this historical perspective into account, this essay will focus on surveying three theologians from the Nestorian and Monophysite denominations who had engaged in theological exchange with the early Muslim scholars in the 9th CE. The author believes that the intensity of their interaction with Muslim critics exerted significant theological influence on Islamic theology *vis-a-vis* and thus cannot be ignored in understanding Christian-Muslim relations in the past, present, and

[1] Hugh Goddard, *A History of Christian-Muslim Relations*, (Amsterdam: New Amsterdam Books, 2000), 11.
[2] Hugh Goddard, *A History of Christian-Muslim Relations*, 14.

future. This essay will be organized into three parts. First, a brief overview of the socio-historical backdrop of the rise and development of the Islamic movement will be presented. Then, it will delve into the historical perspective on the reception of Monophysitism and Nestorianism in the Arab World. Secondly, it will present the early Christian-Muslim debate about the oneness of God. It's aimed to show how early Christian scholars in an Islamic society addressed the Islamic idea of absolute monotheism. It will highlight patterns of argument and strategy used by both Christian scholars and Muslim critics that reflect their unique theological perspectives. Lastly, this essay will give some notes on how the early encounters between Muslims and non-mainstream Christians contributed to the formation of both Islamic and Christian theology.

A *Survey of the socio-historical and intellectual environment in* 7-9th CE

In the early seventh century, a new religious and military leader from Arabia, known as the Prophet Muhammad, brought a new religion. Within only two hundred years, this new religious movement significantly impact the world. Initially, the Arab conquerors left existing bureaucratic and legal structures in place,

requiring only taxes and respect for their religion. Yet, by the eighth century, the Muslim community gained confidence and aimed to transform society according to the teachings of the Qur'an. This idea led to the emergence of a new dynasty, the Abbasids, and the founding of Baghdad as their capital.[3]

Under the Abbasid rule, Arab-Islamic civilization thrived, leading to remarkable achievements in science, medicine, law, astronomy, poetry, literature, and art. This era is also considered the Islamic Golden Age.[4] On the other hand, in this era, when the Islamic empire became more powerful and stable, Christians living in North Africa and east of Byzantium had to face big changes in their daily lives. They were now all under the rule of Islam, which was increasingly influencing every aspect of their lives. Before Islam, these Christians had been divided based on their acceptance or rejection of different church councils. Still, now they were all facing the new challenges brought by Islam, regardless of their previous divisions and friction.

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[3] Sandra Toenies Keating and Ḥabīb ibn Khidmah Takrītī, *Defending the "People of Truth" in the Early Islamic Period: The Christian Apologies of Abū Rāʾiṭah*, The History of Christian-Muslim Relations, vol. 4 (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2006), 1.

[4] Sandra Toenies Keating and Ḥabīb ibn Khidmah Takrītī, *Defending the "People of Truth" in the Early Islamic Period: The Christian Apologies of Abū Rāʾiṭah,* 4.

At the turn of the ninth century, both Christian and Muslim communities underwent significant cultural changes. Arguably, this era marked a crucial time for Islamic thought and the establishment of a long-lasting pattern in the next millennium of relations between Muslims and Christians.[5] The stabilization of the Islamic community led to a more organized and solid society, preparing the way for substantial intellectual and cultural growth. Despite increased religious and social limitations, Christians and Jews found unique opportunities to engage in scholarly pursuits, a testament to the open-mindedness and intellectual curiosity of the Islamic Golden Age. As a result, this period saw a rise in theological exchange between Muslims and Christians which was unprecedented. It is important to note that "Christians" mentioned above refers to a specific group within the Christian Church which theologically embrace Monophysitism or Nestorianism. Essentially, they were two distinct Christological doctrines within the Christian Church that emerged in the 5th century in response to debates about the nature of Christ.

[5] Sandra Toenies Keating and Ḥabīb ibn Khidmah Takrītī, *Defending the "People of Truth" in the Early Islamic Period: The Christian Apologies of Abū Rāʾiṭah,* 4.

Nestorianism, founded by Nestorius, taught that Christ had two distinct natures—divine and human—that were only lightly united. In view of this, Nestorius believed that there are two persons (*prosopon*), two sons, with two natures—one is the divine logos, and the other is the historical Jesus. The divine logos is divine, and the historical Jesus is human in nature. As a result, according to him, Mary is *Christotokos* as mother of the human Jesus, but not *Theotokos* or the Mother of God according to the Council Ephesus in AD 431.

Nestorianism denies the full divinity of Jesus. Nestorius' followers were condemned as heretical at the Council of Chalcedon in 451. The principal purpose of the council was to re-assert the teachings of the Council of Ephesus against the teachings of Nestorius. The Chalcedon Council rejected Nestorius' notion and affirmed that the dual nature of Jesus is in one person, and the divinity can never be separated from humanity or vice versa. This Son of God is made up of two natures, one divine and one human, which are united in such a way that there is no confusion or mixture. The Incarnation of the Son of God does not imply that Jesus Christ is part God and part man, nor does it suggest that he is the result of a confused

mixture of the divine and the human. Instead, Jesus became truly human while remaining truly divine.

In contrast to Nestorianism, Monophysitism asserted that Christ possessed only one divine nature, with his human nature being absorbed into his divinity. Dioscorus, a key proponent of Monophysitism, sought to justify the concept of a single nature by explaining that Christ's divinity and humanity united in one divine nature, thus transcending his humanity. Similarly, Eutyches supported the divinity of Christ by stating that before the incarnation, there were two natures. But, after the incarnation, there was only one nature, the divine one, which overpowered and took over his human nature. At its core, Monophysitism was seen as denying Christ's full humanity.

Monophysitism emerged as a reaction to Nestorianism. Nonetheless, it was also condemned at the Council of Chalcedon. The council of Chalcedon in 451 confirmed that the unity of Jesus Christ's two natures constituted one Lord for us. Although this council discussed how the two natures relate to one person, they concluded that Jesus Christ is the perfect God and perfect man united in one person. The Nicene Creed proclaims that the *Word* "*…came down from heaven*, and *by* the Holy

Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became man named Jesus Christ (Jn 1:17)." By taking the temporal substance of the flesh into the eternal person of the divinity, God, the Word, by nature truly human in Jesus the son of Mary (*Eisa ibn Maryam*). This affirmation does not set up two persons in Christ but asserts that there are two natures in one person, Jesus Christ. In view of this "Chalcedonian Christian," before the incarnation, Jesus was the eternal Son with only a divine nature in one person. By the moment of incarnation, He remains divine who assumed human nature in Jesus. Thus, he remains fully divine and human after his ascended into heaven, with a 100% divine and glorified human nature.

Basically, neither Nestorianism nor Monophysitism were direct extensions of Arianism, which had been condemned earlier in the 4th century for denying Christ's divinity altogether with the God, the Father, and the Spirit. Both were seen as opposing the orthodox Christology affirmed at Chalcedon, which declared that Christ had two complete natures—divine and human—united in one person. Interestingly, the condemnation was not the end of their story. After being condemned as heretical, Nestorian Christians fled to Persia, where they

survived as accepted by the local Church of the East.[6] Furthermore, under Arab rule from the 7th century onward, the Nestorian church was granted legal protection and prospered for centuries. Nestorian scholars made important contributions to Arab culture. Meanwhile, the Monophysite churches, known as the Oriental Orthodox, also survived under Arab rule. They were recognized as a separate religious community (millet) and allowed to practice their faith. These churches included the Armenian, Coptic, Syriac, and Ethiopian churches.[7]

Historically, the survival of Monophysite and Nestorianism not only increased divisions within the Christian church but also had significant political implications in the areas surrounding Arabia. For instance, the spread of Monophysitism often went hand in hand with political allegiances. The Ghassanids, a powerful Arab tribe on the Byzantine frontier, embraced Monophysitism, which aligned them with the Byzantine Empire. Similarly, the Lakhmid tribe in the northeastern frontier of Arabia, which had close ties with the Sassanian

[6] "Nestorianism | Definition, History, & Churches," Encyclopedia Britannica, accessed August 7, 2024, https://www.britannica.com/topic/Nestorianism.
[7] "Monophysite | Definition, History, & Beliefs," Encyclopedia Britannica, July 20, 1998, https://www.britannica.com/topic/monophysite.

Persian Empire, adopted Nestorianism. Monophysite and Nestorian Christianity had a significant influence on the Arab tribes on the borders of Arabia, particularly in the northwest and northeast. This influence was often a result of cultural affinity and political allegiance, rather than purely religious conviction.[8]

The Early Christian-Muslim Theological Debate 9th CE

As mentioned in the previous section, by the end of the eighth century, a relatively peaceful atmosphere could be felt in the Mediterranean world after the Abbasid rose to power. This period brought a significant growth in the number of converts to Islam, as well as the flowering of intellectual communities. As a result, Christians became more aware of their Muslim rulers. They began to recognize that Islam was not just "the heresy of the Ishmaelites," as identified by John of Damascus and many Greek writers after him. Moreover, by the early ninth century, there was more interchange between Muslims, Christians, and Jews, resulting in an increased awareness of each other's views and the necessity to respond to their questions.[9]

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[8] Hugh Goddard, *A History of Christian-Muslim Relations*, 14.

[9] Sara Leila Husseini, *Early Christian-Muslim Debate on the Unity of God: Three Christian Scholars and Their Engagement with Islamic Thought (9th Century*

Indeed, throughout previous centuries, there has been an ongoing debate between Muslims and Christians regarding the unity of God. This topic gained prominence due to the core message delivered to Muhammad, which emphasized the belief in only one God, contradicting the core Christian belief about Jesus as both God and man. For instance, early anonymous Christian writings in Syriac, dating back to the eighth century, engaged in these debates. However, by the early 9th CE, following the path of the Syriac anonymous writers who systematically addressed the new theological challenges presented by Muslim critics, some Christian scholars had produced numerous manuscripts in Arabic, as it became the new *lingua franca.*[10]

It appears that Christian scholars continue to address challenges presented by Muslim critics, such as the legitimacy of Muhammad's prophethood, the revelation of the Qur'an, the status of the Gospel, the Trinity and Incarnation, and the laws governing Christian life. Even the list of these topics has become standard for

c.e.), History of Christian-Muslim Relations vol. 21 (Boston; Leiden: Brill, 2014), 1-2.

[10] Sara Leila Husseini, *Early Christian-Muslim Debate on the Unity of God: Three Christian Scholars and Their Engagement with Islamic Thought (9th Century c.e.),* 175.

Muslim and Christian apologetics in the next centuries.[11] Due to constraints related to the author, this essay will concentrate solely on how early Christian theologians defended the doctrine of the Trinity in response to Islam's strong focus on absolute monotheism. This will illustrate the distinct theological viewpoints of both Christian scholars and Muslim critics through their respective argumentative patterns.

In the ninth century, Muslim polemicists were highly critical of the doctrine of the Trinity. They attacked it primarily through simple logic based on the fundamental notion that plurality cannot be allowed in the Godhead.[12] In their eyes, the Christian doctrine of three hypostases and one substance and the concept of God having a Son could not escape this pluralism. Therefore, Muslim refutations would demand Christians to respond to such refutations of their doctrines. For instance, al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm (785–860) argues that God is too exalted to be related to his creatures, that Jesus had a human mother and acted as a human being, and so could

[11] Sandra Toenies Keating and Ḥabīb ibn Khidmah Takrītī, *Defending the "People of Truth" in the Early Islamic Period: The Christian Apologies of Abū Rāʾiṭah,* 6.
[12] Sara Leila Husseini, *Early Christian-Muslim Debate on the Unity of God: Three Christian Scholars and Their Engagement with Islamic Thought (9th Century c.e.),* 44.

not be related to God. And that if Jesus were equal to God, then Christians would believe in two divinities. If the Son was begotten from the Father, then he would be contingent upon the Father and so could not be identical to the Father, who is not contingent upon anything.[13]

Another example can be seen in the writing of Abū ʿĪsā al-Warrāq (d.c. 864). At the beginning of his 'Refutation of the Trinity,' he gives a fairly detailed summary of the teachings of the three main Christian sects, that is to say, the Melkites, Jacobites, and Nestorians. He is aware that Christians call God one substance (*jawhar*) and three hypostases (*aqānīm*), that the three hypostases are called Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and that the Son is the Word and the Spirit is the Life. Then, he goes to his major criticism of the doctrine, which, like al-Qāsim, is based on common sense logic. For al-Warrāq, three cannot be one, and one cannot be three, whether they are called individuals or properties. As he himself puts it, "that [the concept that one can be three and vice versa] is the most patent contradiction."[14]

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[13] Sara Leila Husseini, *Early Christian-Muslim Debate on the Unity of God: Three Christian Scholars and Their Engagement with Islamic Thought (9th Century c.e.),* 41.

[14] Sara Leila Husseini, *Early Christian-Muslim Debate on the Unity of God: Three Christian Scholars and Their Engagement with Islamic Thought (9th Century c.e.),* 42.

As we have seen, in the Muslim critic's mind, one cannot be three without the three being parts of the one, and three cannot be one. In this sense, the doctrine of the Trinity is simply a logical impossibility. This pattern of argument also appears in the work of Abū Yusuf al-Kindī (c. 800–c. 870). In his work "Refutation of the Christians," al-Kindī argues that according to Christian teachings, there is a clear structure within the Godhead. This is because the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are recognized as one substance but are also described as having distinguishing properties. The basis of all his subsequent arguments is the idea that the Christian description of God implies a necessary plurality in the Godhead.[15] This refutation, along with other Muslim works, describes Christian beliefs as recognizing 'three eternal hypostases' that remain one substance, where hypostases refer to individuals.

The challenges faced by Christians in this era were not totally new. The early Christians had to confront Jewish people who, like the Muslims, did not accept that Jesus was the Messiah and the incarnation of God. They also had to address the absolute monotheistic beliefs of

[15] Sara Leila Husseini, *Early Christian-Muslim Debate on the Unity of God: Three Christian Scholars and Their Engagement with Islamic Thought (9th Century C.E.),* 43.

Judaism, which denied the existence of multiple aspects within God. Yet, the great difficulty was compounded by some additional factors. First, the Christian community existed within a predominantly polytheistic context, where the concept of beings born from human and divine parentage was common. This made it necessary for Christians to clarify the meanings of "trinity" and "incarnation" to avoid being misunderstood as worshipping multiple gods and believing in a partly divine, partly human figure born from a god and a woman.

Secondly, it was the context of an escalating number of Christians converting to Islam in the Abbasid period. By the mid-ninth century, the Muslim population of Iraq was thought to have reached nearly forty percent. Christians, who had been the majority for several centuries, must have been shocked and perhaps worried by this rapid change. In addition, the Abbasid rulers made Arabic the official language for government activities and daily communication. This change demanded that Christian theologians cope with the extra challenges posed by the language.

In this very challenging situation that demanded creative responses, Christian theologians, such as Theodore Abū Qurra (c. 750–c. 830), Ḥabīb ibn Khidma

Abū Rāʾiṭa (c. 755–c. 835), and ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī (d.c. 840), came to the scene as the important three key apologists defending Christian doctrine in the Arabic world. Coincidently, they represented the major Christian denominations of their time, although theologically speaking, they do not belong to mainstream or Chalcedonian Christianity. Theodore Abū Qurra was a Melkite Bishop, Abū Rāʾiṭa was a Syrian Orthodox cleric, and ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī represented the East Syrian Church and is believed to have come from Basra, an important intellectual center at the time. They all lived under the rule of an Arab Islamic dynasty, were part of a new language and culture, and faced intellectual challenges from Muslim critics. In the unique circumstances of the 9th century, they enjoyed intellectual freedom such as they were encouraged by the Islamic rulers to translate foreign knowledge into Arabic. As a result, these Arabic-speaking Christian scholars were able to defend and explain their Christian beliefs.

It seems that their goal was to convince both Christians and Muslims of the rationality of Christian teachings about the nature and unity of God. In doing so, all three of them used various tools, arguments, and examples to explain Christian beliefs within Islamic

society and theology. First, all three authors used analogies to explain God's unity. They would compare God's unity to the unity of the sun, which has distinct features such as its disc, heat, and light but remains one and the same sun. This comparison was aimed at making the concept of the Trinity more understandable to their audience.[16]

Secondly, they often use biblical proof. Among the other two, it seems that Theodore Abū Qurra mainly explains the concept of the Trinity based on the content of the Christian scriptures, the teachings of the Fathers, and the decisions made by the Church councils. He believes that the evidence in the Bible that refers to the divine being as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is enough to convince anyone of God's Trinitarian nature. In view of this and considering that Muslim theologians of the period were familiar with the Bible as well as Christian history and teachings, Abū Qurra uses quotations from the Psalms to show that when God refers to himself in the third person, for example, 'The Lord said to my Lord,' he is referring to Himself and Christ, pointing out that He has

[16] Sara Leila Husseini, *Early Christian-Muslim Debate on the Unity of God: Three Christian Scholars and Their Engagement with Islamic Thought (9th Century c.e.),* 144.

an eternal Son.[17] Then, he also quotes Genesis 9:6 in which God said to Noah: "In the image of God I created Adam," and Genesis 1:27 states: "God created man, in the image of God He created him." These quotations aim to show that although, in each instance, God is both the speaker and the one being referred to, He is not considered as two gods.[18]

Another common strategy is the use of Arabic terminology. The terminology about the Trinity can be grouped into two categories: terms about the essence (*ousia*) of God and terms about His three manifestations (*hypostases*). The main Arabic terms related to God's essence are *jawhar*, *ṭabīʿa*, *dhāt*, and *māhiyya*, while terms related to His manifestations include *uqnūm* or *qunūm*, ***shakhṣ***, *wajh*, and ***khaṣṣa***, among others. The term *ʿayn* seems to refer to both God's essence and manifestations in different contexts. In Abū Rāʾiṭa and ʿAmmār, the most common translation of essence is the word *jawhar*, which has a Persian origin from the root *johr* and gained connotations of "jewel" or "precious stone" in Arabic at a

[17] Sara Leila Husseini, *Early Christian-Muslim Debate on the Unity of God: Three Christian Scholars and Their Engagement with Islamic Thought (9th Century c.e.),* 157.
[18] Sara Leila Husseini, *Early Christian-Muslim Debate on the Unity of God: Three Christian Scholars and Their Engagement with Islamic Thought (9th Century c.e.),* 157.

certain point.[19] By using Arabic terminology, it is hoped that the Muslim counterpart could understand better.

Lastly, the three authors also explain the doctrine of the Trinity using reason-based or logical arguments especially in the works of Christian systematic theologians ʿAmmār and Abū Rāʾiṭa whose arguments rely on logical proofs about the Trinity. Furthermore, they use philosophical reasoning, often based on Aristotelian thinking, and common-sense deductive logic for their arguments from reason.[20] It's worth noting that by using reason-based arguments, they posed a significant threat to Muslims. Indeed, their works were aimed at a primarily Christian audience who would face Muslim opposition, and it was hoped to stop Christians from converting. Yet, it seems that their strategy, which does not solely rely on scripture and is based on the common rational ground and formulated argument in a didactical style, brings challenges to their Muslim critics to respond in kind.

[19] Sara Leila Husseini, *Early Christian-Muslim Debate on the Unity of God: Three Christian Scholars and Their Engagement with Islamic Thought (9th Century c.e.),* 162.
[20] Sara Leila Husseini, *Early Christian-Muslim Debate on the Unity of God: Three Christian Scholars and Their Engagement with Islamic Thought (9th Century c.e.),* 174.

Theological Exchange and Its Lasting Influence

All in all, through this limited overview of the early Christian-Muslim debate, we can see that the early ninth century was an interesting time for relationships between different religions. At this time, Islam was a new religious and political system that had gained control of the Middle East and had authority over Christians, Jews, and the other faiths that had existed before it. In particular, this situation led to a complex theological exchange between Christian and Muslim scholars, which somehow solidified each theology.

Muslim critics, using logical sense, caused Christian theologians to have a hard time and demanded that they express and defend their faith creatively. By accepting the challenge of Muslim critics and the widespread conversion to Islam, Christian scholars seemed to be able to integrate faith and reason. Furthermore, by overcoming a new language and culture, they could explain their traditional doctrines using the available tools and fewer foreign things for the benefit of their own community and, in some cases, to address a Muslim audience directly. Definitively, as they continued to use traditional biblical and analogical arguments to present the doctrine in Arabic and Islamic society, they

invented a kind of theology that was more Islamic-friendly.[21]

However, as noted by many scholars, somehow the works of these Christian scholars may not show a substantial internal exploration of their own Christian beliefs in response to Islamic thought and culture.[22] Despite that, their theological ideas continued to have a lasting impact, and their arguments remained unchanged for centuries, especially nowadays when there is still a significant amount of online content created by Muslims that overdemand the logical sense of the doctrine of the Trinity, their work and arguments continue to be relevant. As these themes persist and Muslim critics today often still recycle similar logical arguments from the 9th CE, it's worth learning how they express, defend, and challenge their Muslim counterparts in an Islamic-friendly language.

While Islamic theology might not have directly influenced Christian theology, there is a conviction that the early Christian-Muslim discourse influenced Islamic

[21] Sara Leila Husseini, *Early Christian-Muslim Debate on the Unity of God: Three Christian Scholars and Their Engagement with Islamic Thought (9th Century c.e.),* 205.
[22] Sara Leila Husseini, *Early Christian-Muslim Debate on the Unity of God: Three Christian Scholars and Their Engagement with Islamic Thought (9th Century c.e.),* 210.

theology in the subsequent centuries. It's a matter of fact that the Christian scholars' writings, whether successful or not, were important enough to be discussed by high-esteemed Muslim scholars like Abū al-Hudhayl al-ʿAllāf (d.c. 840) and Al-Murdār (d. 841). On the other hand, through the use of common logical arguments, it seems that Christian scholars during this time were able to point out a serious theological problem regarding God and the Qur'an, which then sparked ongoing theological discourse that solidified Islamic theology.

Perhaps one of the most significant questions raised by Christian scholars to Muslim critics was about the status of the "Word of God" in Islam. The question to their Muslim counterparts is whether God has a Word.[23] If the Muslims say 'yes,' then they agree with the Christians. And if they say 'no,' then they make God mute and inferior to human beings. To the Muslims that agreed and said 'yes,' Christian scholars will ask whether the Word is a 'part' of God or 'something perfect from something perfect.' They know that a Muslim will not allow God to be composed of parts. In this way, they force a Muslim to accept the alternative: The Word is part of

[23] Sara Leila Husseini, *Early Christian-Muslim Debate on the Unity of God: Three Christian Scholars and Their Engagement with Islamic Thought (9th Century c.e.),* 179.

God. In this case, this leads to an expression of the relationship of God's hypostases to His substance.

Indeed, it's challenging to link the works of the Arabic Christian scholars definitively to the frequent theological debates in the Islamic world about the inimitability and linguistic perfection of the Quran that come in the next periods. However, it's equally challenging to dismiss the hypothesis that the above questions made by early Arabic Christian scholars might have sparked discussions about the Qur'an as the word of God, the origins of language, and the connection between divine and human speech. Ultimately, it's plausible that the Islamic theological views on the Qur'an's uncreated and eternal nature are the result of exchanges between Christian and Muslim scholars in the 9th century CE through logical discourse.

Conclusion

The initial interactions between Islam and various Christian denominations significantly influenced Muslim perceptions of Christianity. The presence of diverse Christian sects and their doctrinal discrepancies may have led Muslims to regard Christianity as a religion that had become corrupted and fragmented. Even today, many

Muslims continue to view fundamental Christian doctrines such as the Trinity and Incarnation as not aligning with the teachings of the Bible and lacking in coherence. Consequently, gaining insight into the historical encounters between Muslims and Christians can facilitate a better mutual understanding between the two groups. Importantly, it allows for an appreciation of how the respective theological perspectives have posed challenges, influenced, and ultimately enriched one another, as illustrated in this essay.

About The Author

Isidorus Bangkit Susetyo Adi is a Jesuit in formation from the Indonesian Province. He is currently studying at Loyola School of Theology, Ateneo de Manila University, working towards a Master of Arts with a Major in Theological Studies.

How do we construct and organize a step-by-step of doing theology in the context of dialogue with Islam? The answer to this question is neither singular nor uniform. One of the possible paths is through immersing into a Muslim community. From such encounters, explanations are formed, then reflected upon and written systematically in the light of Catholic faith teachings. The search of this theological method is based on the evaluation and reflection on the Asia Pacific Theological Encounter Program (APTEP) conducted from June 4 to 24, 2024, in Indonesia, particularly in three cities: Jakarta, Salatiga, and Yogyakarta. This four-week program, held under the umbrella of the Jesuit Conference of Asia Pacific (JCAP), had a different focus and concentration for each week.

The one-month APTEP journey was an intellectual pilgrimage through experience and involvement. Understanding daily experiences in depth requires solid explanations, which, of course, must be grounded in theoretical imagination. The latter, a theoretical pilgrimage, was undertaken through the study of the long history of Christian-Muslim relations. Theological reflection through selected texts became the foundation for delving into this issue. Discussions were held to demonstrate the development of interactions between Christian and Muslim communities as they have evolved over centuries. The process of how Islamic beliefs and practices relate (similarities-differences) to Christian thought systems and teachings was explored to support this foundational idea.