

Dialogue with Islam¹

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Dialogue with Islam is one of the most challenging tasks of the Christians today. It is challenging for some reasons: *theologically*, Islam and Christianity have the same monotheistic roots of faith as “Abrahamic religions”; but *historically*, Islam and Christianity do have many *memoria passionis* due to the so called “holy crusades” against each other for defending the Holy Land and for invasions in the past; *philosophically*, Islam and Christianity pursue the same wisdom related to God, but there seems to be unfinished tension among them; *sociologically*, people of both Islam and Christianity are altogether more than one third of the whole population of this planet; *politically*, the two of these religions are concerned with peace in the Middle East (Palestine and Jerusalem) and the growing fundamentalism which has always created terror and violence everywhere; and from *human perspective* of everyday life, all of us are to seek ways of dialogue to bridge and to collaborate with one another to make the better world possible³.

¹ As published in ARMADA RIYANTO, C.M. (Ed.), *Interreligious Dialogue and Formation*, the Vincentian CCC of Asia Pacific and Widya Sasana Publication, Malang, 2010, pp. 125-149. I propose this article as personal reading that highlights some (not all substantial) ideas of interreligious dialogue with Islam in my opinion.

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³ In Chapter four of the book or document of *Guidelines for Dialogue Between Christians and Muslims* (1981), published by Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, prepared by Maurice Borrmans, we find a discourse of “Dealing with Present Obstacles” with regard to Dialogue with Islam. In the first place we are invited to recognize and then to forget wrongs of the past; then, to eliminate prejudice that Islam is fatalistic, legalistic, morally lax, fanatical, opposed to change and a religion of fear. In the second, we discover the Mus-

If I may guess what sort of feeling we do have in our heart, when hearing about “Islam”, there are mixed perceptions. What we perceive about Islam is consciously or unconsciously affected by recent news. What we heard about Islam is somewhat a blend between fact and bias. Islam has often been falsely identified with radical groups such as Hamas, Hizbollah, Jamaah Islamiyah, Taleban, Al Qaeda and the like. Countries in Africa, Asia, Australia, Europe and even America have had sad experiences with the presence of radical Islam groups. India with the recent tragedy of Mumbai, the Philippines with somehow unfinished conflicts in the South, and Indonesia with the growing radicalism of Islamic groups are facts that influence our view of Islam.

However, Muslims are statistically almost one fifth of the population of the whole world and nearly seventy percent of the East Asian people. So, it would be unfair if we understood Islam from the perspective of the existence of radical or fundamental groups as mentioned above.

Understanding is not *par excellence* knowledge. Understanding means conscience. By “conscience” I do not mean merely in a moral sense. Rather, it refers to human capacity to transcend sensible appearances. With conscience we have often discovered beauty or goodness behind thing or fact whose appearance is sensibly not likeable. Dealing with the vulnerable, for instance, has oftentimes been unlikeable experience. But, when you use your capacity to transcend physical appearance, you will find a wonderful witness of human virtues in their humble presence. So, with this meaning of understanding I would like to start to deal with dialogue with Islam. In so doing, I outline the paper with a simple method, “why, what, and how” we do dialogue with Islam.

lim view of Christianity such as the claim that the Christian Scriptures have been falsified, that the Christian Mysteries are ineffectual, that Christianity is not a pure monotheism, that the Church is only an earthly power, that Christians have been unfaithful to the message of Jesus. In the third place, we have to deal with obstacles that remain as dietary restrictions, mixed marriages, duty of the apostolate and problem of religious minorities (especially Christian minorities in Muslim countries). In my opinion such obstacles are still there in journeying dialogue with Muslims. This is one of the stories indicating that dialogue with Islam is a major task to carry on. However there are also potential areas of fraternal encountering and sharing of agreements to be realized, such as the Divine Mystery, the gift of the Word, the role of the Prophets, the support of communities, secrets of prayer, ways of holiness, etc. (pp. 100-111).

1. ON *WHY* OF DIALOGUE WITH ISLAM

Our Being Vincentian in Islam World

On March 30, 2000, the new millennium, our former Superior General wrote a *letter* on the presence and apostolic commitment of the Vincentian family in the Muslim world. I would say that this letter is indeed important; but to some extent its important message has not seriously and systemically been followed up in concrete ways.

Recalling that contemporary society is increasingly multicultural and multi-religious, Fr. Robert Maloney C.M. encouraged the Vincentian family to be present and diligent to create contacts, dialogues, and mutual collaboration with the Muslims. Muslims represent more than one billion people throughout the world. Dialogue and collaboration can make sense of being Vincentian in many countries especially in Asia.

“The Islam that we encounter is simultaneously both unified and diversified”, Fr. Maloney remarked. “A simple glance at a map will show its sociological and cultural diversity from Morocco to Indonesia. This diversity is also seen within Muslim societies themselves, going so far as to give rise, at times, to grave internal conflicts. In some areas, relations with other religious bodies have taken an aggressive turn. Nevertheless, the violence and intolerance experienced in too many places should not conceal from us the reality of a significant number of believers who live their religion in peace and respect for others”.

Fr. Maloney challenged us to seek ceaseless effort despite difficulties and impossibilities of dialogues and collaboration between Christians and Muslims. “This Islamic reality, which encompasses not only the religious life of individuals but the whole complex of their social life, cannot leave us indifferent. It is, in fact, one of the most important challenges for the Church and society in many countries. Could our religious communities and societies not find ways to live in peace and collaborate sincerely? Would true religious liberty not be possible in every country? Will the disciples of Christ be able to proclaim the Good News while respecting the consciences of others, and, even more, will they, in their relations with others, live what they proclaim, despite difficulties? Can they expect, at the same time, that the disciples of Mohammed will be increasingly concerned about promoting respectful, fraternal attitudes toward those who do not share their faith?”.

Dialogue with Islam has been one of the urgent issues in our Congregation. From July 26 to August 2, 1999, in Fatqa, Lebanon, a number of Vincentian confreres and Daughters of Charity, along with several lay members of the Vincentian Family many countries, took time to discuss these issues. Several specialists in Muslim-Christian relations

joined them in their reflections. I was among the participants who were moved and touched by fervent appeals to realize the so-called “inter-religious dialogues with Islam”. This was also in connection with the turbulent political as well as social situation we experienced in our country, Indonesia. At that time hundreds of churches were burned down and many religious people (mostly Christians) were affected.

Fr. Maloney encouraged us to be faithful to Vincentian Spirituality, while at the same time urging us with beautiful words to do more dialogue and collaboration with Muslims. “Our Vincentian spirituality can help us see Muslims in a new way, while realistically acknowledging the difficulties, often tragic, unfolding in certain countries. It will be useful for us to refocus on St. Vincent’s way of looking at the individual person. A spirit of dialogue is part of his heritage, as well as a spirit of seeking reconciliation between individuals and among human communities. A deep attitude of humility can help us discern patiently and prudently the values that others hold, values sometimes expressed in surprising ways. I want to encourage the Vincentian Family to move forward energetically in making contact with the followers of Islam and to witness among them to the spirit of the Gospel. I suggest that in the years ahead we engage in a deeper examination of the meaning of the Church’s mission among Muslims and become involved in it more actively”.

What should we concretely do in dialogue with Islam? Our former Superior General indicated the importance of having proper knowledge of Islam and the Church’s teaching on interreligious dialogue. He mentioned so clearly that “It will also be important for us to foster a basic understanding of Islam, especially in our houses of initial formation and in our ongoing formation”. He also urged that “The Congregation should also form some experts in Islam and interreligious dialogue”.

Only after nearly ten years of such statement of our Superior General, we the group of Commission of Vincentian Charism and Culture (CCC) and formators in Asia Pacific now gather together in Gopalpur-on-sea (India) to realize that appeal of his for our formation. Amazingly, this statement needed ten years to be realized!

What about the appeal that “our Congregation should also form some experts in Islam and interreligious dialogue”? Do the provinces, such as Indonesia, Philippines, India North and South, China-Taiwan, Australia or Vietnam make effort to provide confreres dedicating themselves in this field of interreligious dialogue for benefit of formation of our candidates and of the local Church where we engage in apostolic commitment?

Above all, as Vincentians seeking personal contact with Muslims, we should work with them in areas common to us, such as the service of the poor, the struggle for justice, and respect for human dignity. “Through high-quality meetings, shared life experiences and common

work, prejudices will be overcome, and it will become possible to open channels of mutual respect and reconciliation, and to build peace and brotherhood in the human family”.

In the end of his letter, Fr. Maloney expressed beautifully a need for continuing commitment to fraternal dialogues with Muslims. “St. Vincent told us that love is inventive. So we should look for concrete ways to go out to men and women who do not share our faith, something which has been a part of our charism from the beginning. For centuries, the Vincentian Family has had a remarkable commitment to education and culture in many countries with an Islamic tradition. I am eager that we would continue this commitment today and broaden it to promote fraternal dialogue among all believers and people of good will, as the teaching of the Church since the Second Vatican Council invites us to do”.

Saint Vincent and Muslims

Our Holy Founder never lived in Muslim world except in time of his captivity (which is still historically controversial). Yet, it does not mean that he was not unfamiliar with Islam. In several occasions, Vincent did indicate his knowledge on Muslims (from North Africa or Turkey), his interest to do mission in Islam world, and his concern toward people (slaves) in Islamic countries⁴.

It was the countries of North Africa, known as Barbary, that have the strongest appeal for Saint Vincent. As Chaplain General of the Gallies, he had first-hand knowledge of the wretched state of most of the prisoners in the galley crews, whether they were condemned by the law or if they were Muslims reduced to slavery. His concerned gaze reached out beyond France to the prisons of Algeria. He proposed starting up some kind of mission there, under the pretext of ransoming captives and even of founding

“a sort of hospital for the galley slaves which would justify our living there” (SV II, 369).

⁴ Due to the Vincentian Family’s gathering in Fatqa, Lebanon, there are several articles of sharing as well as study with regard to Muslim-Christian topics published in *Vincentiana* (n° 4/5 - July-October 1999). Articles dealing with Saint Vincent and Muslims are well exposed such as these written by Fr. Ives Danjou CM, “Saint Vincent and Islam”; also Fr. A. Moussali, CM, “Relationships with Islam in the Time of St. Vincent. History and Attitude of St. Vincent and his Missionaries to Muslims”. The articles of “Monotheism and Trinity. The Problem of God and Man and its Implications for Life in Our Society” written by Fr. Samir Khalil Samir SJ and “Revelation and Inspiration in Christianity and Islam” by Emilio Platti, OP are also worthwhile.

In a letter written on February 25, 1654, St. Vincent explained to the Ambassador in Turkey, Monsieur de la Haye-Vantelay, his commitment to do mission in Muslim world:

“We committed ourselves six or seven years ago to assist poor Christian slaves in Barbary spiritually and corporally, in sickness and in health. For this purpose we have sent there several of our confreres, who strive to encourage them to persevere in our holy religion, endure their captivity for the love of God and work out their salvation in the midst of the trials they are undergoing [...] To facilitate this good work, they had to be placed in the beginning with the Consuls as their chaplains for fear that the Turks might not allow them to practice our holy religion” (SV V, 84).

In other occasion, on November 15, 1657, Vincent even used the example of the Turks to persuade the Daughters of Charity not to drink wine *“except in the case of invalids or the very old”*. He said:

“Believe me, Sisters, it is a great advantage never to drink wine. The Turks never drink it, although they live in a very warm country and they are far healthier than people here who do, which shows that wine is not so necessary to life as people think. Ah! if it was not so common we should not see so much disorder. Isn't it a great pity that the Turks, and all who live in Turkey, which has an area of ten thousand miles, the equivalent of one hundred and fifty of our leagues, live without wine and that Christians use it so excessively!” (SV X, 360-361).

St. Vincent's knowledge on Muslim world can also be seen in his speaking to the Priests of the Mission during repetition of prayer:

“You see that in certain towns such as Constantinople, for example, there are police to go round and check on those who speak too loudly and make too much noise and if they find someone who gets carried away and speaks too loudly, there and then and without more ado they make him lie stretched out on the pavement and they beat him twenty or thirty times with their batons. Now these Turks act in this way purely out of fear of the police, with what more reason should we not act in this way out of virtue” (SV XI, 212).

The way how St. Vincent saw Islam might differs with our way. His understanding of Islam was related to his time when Islam was a threat to Christianity. However, Vincent gave a concrete example of what and how to cultivate dialogue with Islam. Amid challenges and difficulties, he showed us his fervent interests to respond the call to do missionary activities spreading the good news also to the Muslim world.

Quid nunc Vincentius? What would St. Vincent do if he were living in our contemporary situation especially in Asia where 70% of some populations are Islam? Would he not create more contact and dialogue with Muslims?! Or, would he not encourage confreres to study about Islam and how to deal and collaborate with Muslims.

2. ON WHAT OF ISLAM: UNDERSTANDING AND MISUNDERSTANDING

Nostra Aetate

Vatican II launched a declaration on the relationship between the Church and non-Christian religions, *Nostra Aetate*, the document that changes our understanding as well as relationship with other religions such as Islam.

In the opening phrase, the document underlines the sense of unity among different people. The Catholic Church has been aware of the new sign of the times that humankind is drawn closer to each other.

“In our time, when day by day mankind is being drawn closer together, and the ties between different peoples are becoming stronger, the Church examines more closely her relationship to non-Christian religions. In her task of promoting unity and love among men, indeed among nations, she considers above all in this declaration what men have in common and what draws them to fellowship. One is the community of all peoples, one their origin, for God made the whole human race to live over the face of the earth. One also is their final goal, God. His providence, His manifestations of goodness, His saving design extend to all men, until that time when the elect will be united in the Holy City, the city ablaze with the glory of God, where the nations will walk in His light” (NA, 1).

As can be seen, “the document on Islam” is pretty short. It contains only two paragraphs. The first deals with appreciation toward Muslims. The second recalls historical experience of hostilities between Christians and Muslims, and yet at the same time appeals to forget the past by working for mutual collaboration for peace and freedom.

“The Church regards with esteem also the Muslims. 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. 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 the moral life and worship God especially through prayer, almsgiving and fasting. Since in the course of centuries not a few quarrels and hostilities have arisen between Christians and Muslims, this sacred synod urges all 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” (NA, 3).

Top 10 myths about Islam

A definition of Islam is “submitting oneself to God”⁵. Everyone who submits his/herself to God is called Muslim. In this sense, I am a “Muslim”, and so we are. In a website called “About.com: Islam” (it can be accessed in <http://islam.about.com/od/commonmisconceptions/tp/myths.htm>). On January 10, 2009, I found a short article entitled *10 Myths About Islam*, written by **Huda** (a Muslim educator and writer) with over a decade of experience researching and writing about Islam on the Internet. An American woman of Irish/English descent, she has been a Muslim for the past 16 years; she is the author of *The Everything Understanding Islam Book*, published in 2003. She currently teaches elementary school in the Middle East. Here are her 10 myths about Islam:

1. Muslims worship a moon-god

Some non-Muslims mistakenly believe that Allah is an “Arab god”, a “moon god”, or some sort of idol. Allah is the proper name of the One True God, in the Arabic language. The most fundamental belief that a Muslim has is that “There is only One God”, the Creator, the Sustainer – known in the Arabic language and by Muslims as Allah.

⁵ To understand what Islam is, we should not surely rely on a mere definition or normative explanation about religion of Islam. We should go into experience, reflection, and study of Islam. One of studious persons who dedicate himself to dialogue with Islam is Father Thomas Michel S.J. He belongs to the Indonesian province of the Jesuits and is an American. He taught in University of Sanata Dharma, Yogyakarta, Indonesia and is the former Secretary Executive of OEIA (Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs) of FABC. Some his inspiring articles, speeches, notes can be read in his personal website <http://www.sjweb.info/dialogo/index.cfm> (June 9, 2009).

2. Muslims do not believe in Jesus

In the Qur'an, stories about the life and teachings of Jesus Christ (called 'Isa in Arabic) are abundant. The Qur'an recalls his miraculous birth, his teachings, and the miracles he performed by God's permission. There is even a chapter of the Qur'an named after his mother, Mary (Miriam in Arabic). However, Muslims believe that Jesus was a fully human prophet and not in any way divine.

3. Most Muslims are Arabs

While Islam is often associated with Arabs, they make up only 15% of the world's Muslim population. The country with the largest population of Muslims is Indonesia. Muslims make up 1/5 of the world's population, with large numbers found in Asia (69%), Africa (27%), Europe (3%) and other parts of the world⁶.

4. Islam oppresses women

Most of the ill-treatment that women receive in the Muslim world is based on local culture and traditions, without any basis in the faith of Islam. In fact, practices such as forced marriage, spousal abuse, and restricted movement directly contradict Islamic law governing family behavior and personal freedom.

5. Muslims are violent, terrorist extremists

Terrorism cannot be justified under any valid interpretation of the Islamic faith. The entire Qur'an, taken as a complete text, gives a message of hope, faith, and peace to a faith community of one billion people. The overwhelming message is that peace is to be found through faith in

⁶ Nearly one in five people in the world today claims the faith of Islam. A diverse community of believers spans the globe. Over fifty countries have Muslim-majority populations, while other groups of believers are clustered in minority communities on nearly every continent. Although Islam is often associated with the Arab world and the Middle East, fewer than 15% of Muslims are Arab. Distribution of Muslims (source: <http://islam.about.com/library/weekly/aa120298.htm> – accessed on Jan 10, 2009):

Africa	308,660,000	27.4%
Asia	778,362,000	69.1%
Europe	32,032,000	2.8%
Latin America	1,356,000	0.1%
North America	5,530,000	0.5%
Oceania	385,000	0.0%
World	1,126,325,000	100.0%

God, and justice among fellow human beings. Muslim leaders and scholars do speak out against terrorism in all its forms, and offer explanations of misinterpreted or twisted teachings⁷.

6. Islam is intolerant of other faiths

Throughout the Qur'an, Muslims are reminded that they are not the only ones who worship God. Jews and Christians are called "People of the Book", meaning people who have received previous revelations from the One Almighty God that we all worship. The Qur'an also commands Muslims to protect from harm not only mosques, but also monasteries, synagogues, and churches – because "God is worshipped therein".

7. Islam promotes "jihad" to spread Islam by the sword and kill all unbelievers

The word Jihad stems from an Arabic word which means "to strive". Other related words include "effort", "labor", and "fatigue". Essentially Jihad is an effort to practice religion in the face of oppression and persecution. The effort may come in fighting the evil in your own heart, or in standing up to a dictator. Military effort is included as an option, but as a last resort and not "to spread Islam by the sword"⁸.

8. The Quran was written by Muhammad and copied from Christian and Jewish sources

The Qur'an was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad over a period of two decades, calling people to worship One Almighty God and to live their lives according to this faith. The Qur'an contains stories of Biblical prophets, because these prophets also preached the message of God.

⁷ Muslims were saddened by terrorists' attack on September 9, 2001. In websites such as <http://www.unc.edu/~kurzman/terror.htm> and <http://groups.colgate.edu/aarislam/response.htm> we may find various statements of Muslim communities as well persons against terrorism. These might indicate that Islam is not connected with violence and terror.

⁸ The word Jihad stems from the Arabic root word J-H-D, which means "strive". The Qur'an describes *Jihad* as a system of checks and balances, as a way that Allah set up to "check one people by means of another". When one person or group transgresses their limits and violates the rights of others, Muslims have the right and the duty to "check" them and bring them back into line. There are several verses of the Qur'an that describe jihad in this manner. One example: "And did not Allah check one set of people by means of another, the earth would indeed be full of mischief; but Allah is full of Bounty to all the worlds" (Qur'an 2:251). War is waged only to defend the religious community against oppression and persecution, because the Qur'an says that "persecution is worse than slaughter" and "let there be no hostility except to those who practice oppression" (Qur'an 2:190-193).

Stories are not merely copied, but the oral traditions are referred to in a way that focuses on the examples and teachings that we can learn from them.

9. Islamic prayer is just a ritualized performance with no heartfelt meaning

Prayer is a time to stand before God and express faith, give thanks for blessings, and seek guidance and forgiveness. During Islamic prayer, one is modest, submissive and respectful to God. By bowing and prostrating ourselves to the ground, we express our utmost humility before the Almighty.

10. The crescent moon is a universal symbol of Islam

The early Muslim community did not really have a symbol. During the time of the Prophet Muhammad, Islamic caravans and armies flew simple solid-colored flags (generally black, green, or white) for identification purposes. The crescent moon and star symbol actually pre-dates Islam by several thousand years, and wasn't affiliated with Islam at all until the Ottoman Empire placed it on their flag.

Five Pillars of Islam

Muslims observe five formal acts of worship, called the five pillars of Islam. Based on the foundation of faith, these pillars help build and structure a Muslim's daily life. Muslims believe in six main articles of faith which outline their beliefs in God (Allah), God's Prophets, God's Revealed Books (Quran), Angels, the Day of Judgement, Destiny (Divine Decree). There are five pillars:

1. *Declaration of Faith (Shahaadah)*: "There is no god but Allah, and Mohammed is the messenger of Allah". Embracing Islam is as simple as making the formal "declaration of faith", because believing this fundamental testimony is what makes one a Muslim.
2. *Prayer (Salaat)*: Muslim observe five formal prayers each day. The timings of these prayers are spaced fairly throughout the day, so that one is constantly reminded of God and given opportunities to seek His guidance and forgiveness. Muslims observe the formal prayers at the following times⁹:

⁹ *Muslim Prayer Call*. This is the Adhan, it's called out when the Prayer time is in. People prepare to wash themselves making Ablution (Wudu'). Then they stand in the prayer when the Iqamah is made. The words of the Iqamah are as follows: *Allahu Akbar, Allahu Akbar (Allah is the Greatest, Allah is the Greatest)*;

- *Subuh* or *Fajr* (pre-dawn; around 4 a.m.) – This prayer starts off the day with the remembrance of God; it is performed before sunrise.
 - *Luhur* or *Dhuhr* (noon; around 12 a.m.) – After the day's work has begun, one breaks shortly after noon to again remember God and seek His guidance.
 - *'Asr* (Afternoon; around 3 p.m.) – It is time to take a few minutes to remember God and the greater meaning of our lives.
 - *Maghrip* (sunset; at 6 p.m.) – Just after the sun goes down, Muslims remember God again as the day begins to come to a close.
 - *'Isha* (evening; at 8 p.m.) – Before retiring for the night, Muslims again take time to remember God's presence, guidance, mercy and forgiveness.
3. *Almsgiving (Zakat)*: Giving to charity is one of the five "pillars" of Islam. Muslims who have wealth remaining over the year, after paying for their own basic needs, must give a certain percentage of their income to help others. This almsgiving is called *Zakat*, from an Arabic word which means both "to purify" and "to grow". Muslims believe that giving to others purifies their own wealth, increases its value, and causes one to recognize that everything we have is a trust from God. Paying *Zakat* is required of every adult Muslim man or woman who possesses wealth of a certain minimum amount.
 4. *Fasting (Sawm)*: Fasting is done in the occasion of Ramadan for about a month or more. The Ramadan fast is vigorous, and there are special rules for those who may find it physically difficult to participate in the fast.
 5. *Pilgrimage (Hajj)*: Hajj is considered one of the five pillars of Islam. Muslim are required to make the pilgrimage once in a lifetime, if they are physically and financially able to make the journey to Mecca. Doing Hajj (pilgrimage) means being a special guest of Allah.

Ash-hadu alla ilaha illa-llah (I bear witness that no one deserves to be worshipped except Allah); Ash-hadu anna Muhammadar-Rasulullah (I bear witness that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah); Hayya ala-s-Salah (Come to the Prayer); Hayya 'ala-l-falah (Hasten to real success); Qad qamati-s-Salah, Qad qamati-s-Salah (Prayer is ready, Prayer is ready); Allahu Akbar, Allahu Akbar (Allah is the Greatest, Allah is the Greatest); La ilaha illa-llah (No one deserves to be worshipped except Allah).

Sunni and Shia in Islam

Islam is widely known with two main branches (in reality there are many), *Sunni* and *Shia*. Both *Sunni* and *Shia* Muslims share the most fundamental Islamic beliefs and articles of faith. The differences between these two main sub-groups within Islam initially stemmed not from spiritual differences, but *political* ones. Over the centuries, however, these political differences have spawned a number of varying practices and positions which have come to carry a spiritual significance.

The division between *Shia* and *Sunni* dates back to the death of the Prophet Muhammad, and the question of who was to take over the leadership of the Muslim nation. Sunni Muslims agree with the position taken by many of the Prophet's companions; namely, the new leader should be elected from among those capable of the job. This is what was done, and the Prophet Muhammad's close friend and advisor, Abu Bakr, became the first Caliph of the Islamic nation. The word "Sunni" in Arabic comes from a word meaning "one who follows the traditions of the Prophet".

On the other hand, some Muslims share the belief that leadership should have stayed within the Prophet's own family, among those specifically appointed by him, or among Imams appointed by God Himself. The *Shia* Muslims believe that following the Prophet Muhammad's death, leadership should have passed directly to his cousin/son-in-law, Ali. Throughout history, *Shia* Muslims have not recognized the authority of elected Muslim leaders, choosing instead to follow a line of Imams which they believe have been appointed by the Prophet Muhammad or God Himself. The word "Shia" in Arabic means a group or supportive party of people. The commonly-known term is shortened from the historical "Shia-t-Ali", or "the Party of Ali". They are also known as followers of "Ahl-al-Bayt" or "People of the Household" (of the Prophet).

Shia Muslims believe that the Imam is sinless by nature, and that his authority is infallible as it comes directly from God. Therefore, *Shia* Muslims often venerate the Imams as saints and perform pilgrimages to their tombs and shrines in the hopes of divine intercession. *Sunni* Muslims counter that there is no basis in Islam for a hereditary privileged class of spiritual leaders, and certainly no basis for the veneration or intercession of saints. *Sunni* Muslims contend that leadership of the community is not a birthright, but a trust earned, and which may be given or taken away by people themselves.

Shia Muslims also feel animosity towards some companions of the Prophet Muhammad, based on their positions and actions during the early years of discord about leadership in the community. Many of these companions (Abu Bakr, Umar, Aisha, etc.) have narrated tradi-

tions about the Prophet's life and spiritual practice. Shia Muslims reject these traditions (hadith) and do not base any of their religious practices on the testimony of these individuals. This naturally gives rise to some differences in religious practice between the two groups. These differences touch all detailed aspects of religious life: prayer, fasting, pilgrimage, etc.

Sunni Muslims make up the majority (85%) of Muslims all over the world. Significant populations of *Shia* Muslims can be found in Iran and Iraq, and large minority communities in Yemen, Bahrain, Syria, and Lebanon. Indonesian Muslims are mostly *Sunni*.

3. ON HOW OF DIALOGUE WITH ISLAM

Four Forms of dialogue

In Article 42 of a 1984 document by the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue called *Dialogue and Proclamation*, there exists different forms of interreligious dialogue. It may be useful to recall the main points mentioned in this document (*Dialogue and Mission*, 17). It spoke of four forms, without claiming to establish among them any order of priority:

- a) The *dialogue of life*, where people strive to live in an open and neighborly spirit, sharing their joys and sorrows, their human problems and preoccupations.
- b) The *dialogue of action*, in which Christians and others collaborate for the integral development and liberation of people.
- c) The *dialogue of theological exchange*, where specialists seek to deepen their understanding of their respective religious heritages, and to appreciate each other's spiritual values.
- d) The *dialogue of religious experience*, where persons, rooted in their own religious traditions, share their spiritual riches, for instance with regard to prayer and contemplation, faith and ways of searching for God or the Absolute.

More clearly the importance of interreligious dialogue is underlined in the statement that Pope Paul VI taught this clearly in his first Encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam*. Pope John Paul II has also stressed the Church's call to interreligious dialogue and assigned to it the same foundation. Speaking to the 1984 Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, the Pope declared: "(Interreligious) dialogue is fundamental to the Church, which is called to collaborate in God's plan with her methods of presence, respect and love towards all persons" (DP, 39).

Fraternal Meetings in Vatican

From November 4-6, 2008 Islamic and Catholic experts met at the Vatican, after years of chilly relations due to the growth of fundamentalism. Everything has now resumed, thanks to the work of Pope Benedict XVI, who affirmed that religion embraces reason and excludes violence. The most urgent theme in dialogue is religious freedom, so that every community may be guaranteed the right to proclaim and spread its faith. They addressed theological-spiritual themes, including "human dignity", and explored issues related to human rights, religious freedom, religious respect, and also alluded to the freedom to convert and change religions.

The meeting took place in Vatican to address serious concerns of both Catholics (Vatican) and representatives of the Islamic leaders of the world to seek the common ground of living together peacefully. Here is the comment of Fr. Samir Khalil Samir S.J., an expert of Islam from Lebanon¹⁰:

"This encounter between Muslim and Catholic experts in November is a start, and is a positive for the mere fact that it is being held: dialogue is better than indifference and reciprocal silence. In recent years, an important change has taken place. At first, the letters from the Muslim scholars requested a dialogue that would be exclusively, let us say, theological. But this ran the risk of being unproductive. The Holy Father and Cardinal Tauran stressed that dialogue would have to include the problems of daily life and the rights of conscience. One of the Muslim participants, Tariq Ramadan¹¹, agreed on this point. Christians and Islam obstructed by fundamentalism [...] Both religions claim to bear a message of truth, and are called to proclaim it and spread it in mission. But the ways in which this is to be done must be specified. Using means unworthy of religion,

¹⁰ Cf. SAMIR KHALIL SAMIR, S.J., "The Letter of 138 Muslim scholars to the Pope and Christian Leaders", in <http://www.acommonword.com/index.php?page=responses&item=14> (Accessed in January 10, 2009). There is also an excellent article by Fr. Samir Khalil Samir which puts Islam as a religion struggling with crisis and renewal. Cf. "Islam needs renewal from within, not withdrawal into itself, to overcome its crisis", in <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Islam-needs-renewal-from-within,-not-withdrawal-into-itself,-to-overcome-its-crisis-7164.html> (Accessed in January 10, 2009).

¹¹ Tarik Ramadan: "After causing a wave of shock, the words of Pope Benedict XVI in Regensburg two years ago have doubtlessly had more positive than negative consequences over the long term. Beyond the controversy, this conference prompted an examination of the nature of the respective responsibilities of both Christians and Muslims in the West". Cf. *Il Riformista*, October 31, 2008.

or that is prohibited, must be excluded¹². The Muslims, for example, accuse the Christians of conducting proselytism by doing ‘favors’ for the poor, and asking for conversion in exchange. But it is unjust to block advancement while permitting a religion to spread. The idea that is promoted in the Muslim world, ‘the truth has all rights, falsehood has no rights’, is also unjust. On the basis of this, the possibility for non-Islamic religions to spread is practically excluded. To this is connected the disdain toward apostates – as happened with the baptism of Magdi Cristiano Allam¹³ – who are viewed as traitors, instead of seekers of truth. Having schools is also important for both religions, and therefore this right must be defended, and must not be denigrated as proselytism. My impression is nonetheless that this dialogue can be fruitful if it respects three dimensions: 1) It must begin, and continue for years; 2) At the end, concrete, and documents must be drawn up, and distributed as widely as possible; 3) Maximum authority¹⁴ must be given to these documents produced” (Asia News).

An important and challenging declaration was published at the end of the meeting by the Vatican and by representatives of the 138 Muslim scholars. It affirmed a respect for life and the dignity of each person, man or woman; respect for freedom of conscience and religion; the rejection of discrimination on account of faith; the importance of bearing witness through prayer to the transcendent dimension of life in an

¹² Every day in the Muslim world, we see the Muslim faith proclaimed (on the radio, television, in newspapers, with megaphones from the mosque), but a Christian cannot even wear a cross, because “the spreading of falsehood” is forbidden.

¹³ Alam, a Muslim reporter working in Milan, has recently been baptized by Pope Benedict XVI in Rome before Christmas 2008.

¹⁴ Regarding “maximum authority should be given to the document”, Fr. Samir Khalil Samir added: “This is easy on the Catholic side: it is enough for a cardinal or another authority to sign it. On the Muslim side, there must be agreement among religious personalities and Islamic politicians. The laws that limit religious freedom are made by Islamic governments, not by Muslim scholars. Everyone who participates in this dialogue, in returning to his country, must reach out to his government and other Muslim associations. Furthermore, the decisions that depend on states should be voted on by the ‘Organization of the Islamic Conference’. For this not to happen would be a discouragement. The authority of the document is important. But the first and most urgent need is for religious freedom: the right of every religion to preach and to spread itself through legitimate and licit means, and not with illicit means, which must be enumerated. This is a spiritual principle – because it touches on the dignity of man – and also a theological principle, because it touches on the principle of man created in the image of God, free and therefore free to make mistakes” (Asia News).

increasingly secularized world; an affirmation of the duty to give young people a solid moral, civil, and religious education, and teach them about the faith of others. The declaration also spoke to the possibility of creating a permanent mixed committee, and announced a second forum to be held within two years, in a Muslim majority country¹⁵.

¹⁵ Here is the text of the declaration: 1) For Christians the source and example of love of God and neighbour is the love of Christ for his Father, for humanity and for each person. "God is Love" (1 Jn 4:16) and "God so loved the world that He gave his only Son so that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (Jn 3:16). [...] For Muslims, as set out in A Common Word, love is a timeless transcendent power which guides and transforms human mutual regard. This love, as indicated by the Holy and Beloved Prophet Muhammad, is prior to the human love for the One True God. [...] 2) Human life is a most precious gift of God to each person. It should therefore be preserved and honored in all its stages. 3) Human dignity is derived from the fact that every human person is created by a loving God out of love, and has been endowed with the gifts of reason and free will, and therefore enabled to love God and others. On the firm basis of these principles, the person requires the respect of his or her original dignity and his or her human vocation. Therefore, he or she is entitled to full recognition of his or her identity and freedom by individuals, communities and governments, supported by civil legislation that assures equal rights and full citizenship. 4) We affirm that God's creation of humanity has two great aspects: the male and the female human person, and we commit ourselves jointly to ensuring that human dignity and respect are extended on an equal basis to both men and women. 5) Genuine love of neighbor implies respect of the person and her or his choices in matters of conscience and religion. It includes the right of individuals and communities to practice their religion in private and public. 6) Religious minorities are entitled to be respected in their own religious convictions and practices. They are also entitled to their own places of worship, and their founding figures and symbols they consider sacred should not be subject to any form of mockery or ridicule. 7) As Catholic and Muslim believers, we are aware of the summons and imperative to bear witness to the transcendent dimension of life, through a spirituality nourished by prayer, in a world which is becoming more and more secularized and materialistic. 8) We affirm that no religion and its followers should be excluded from society. Each should be able to make its indispensable contribution to the good of society, especially in service to the most needy. 9) We recognize that God's creation in its plurality of cultures, civilizations, languages and peoples is a source of richness and should therefore never become a cause of tension and conflict. 10) We are convinced that Catholics and Muslims have the duty to provide a sound education in human, civic, religious and moral values for their respective members and to promote accurate information about each other's religions. 11) We profess that Catholics and Muslims are called to be instruments of love and harmony among believers, and for humanity as a whole, renouncing any oppression, aggressive violence and terrorism, especially that committed in the name of religion, and upholding the principle of justice for all. 12) We call upon believers to work for an ethical financial system in which the regulatory mechanisms consider the situation of the poor and disadvantaged, both as individuals, and as indebted nations. We call upon the privileged

Living our Everyday Life

What do we mean by dialogue? What is dialogue when it is lived in everyday life? A couple of years ago, I was asked to give a talk in an activity of Christian-Islam dialogue held by a Protestant denomination called GKJW (The Christian Church of Eastern Java), Malang, Indonesia, on our Christian commitment to interreligious dialogue. The participants were a hundred people composed 45 Muslims, 45 Protestants, and 10 Catholics. They came from various places in Indonesia. The activity was sponsored by both GKJW and a Christian organization from Germany. Christian-Islam dialogue lasted a month with various programs of exposure. For 45 Muslims there are programs of exposure in Catholic or Christian communities for a week; and 45 Protestants went to Islamic communities. I repeated Pope John Paul's teaching that "each member of the faithful and all Christian communities are called to practice dialogue, although not always to the same degree or the way"¹⁶.

of the world to consider the plight of those afflicted most severely by the current crisis in food production and distribution, and ask religious believers of all denominations and all people of good will to work together to alleviate the suffering of the hungry, and to eliminate its causes. 13) Young people are the future of religious communities and of societies as a whole. Increasingly, they will be living in multicultural and multireligious societies. It is essential that they be well formed in their own religious traditions and well informed about other cultures and religions. 14) We have agreed to explore the possibility of establishing a permanent Catholic-Muslim committee to coordinate responses to conflicts and other emergency situations and of organizing a second seminar in a Muslim-majority country yet to be determined. 15) We look forward to the second Seminar of the Catholic-Muslim Forum to be convened in approximately two years in a Muslim-majority country yet to be determined. See "*A Common Word Between Us and You* (Summary and Abridgement)", in <http://www.acommonword.com/> (Accessed January 5, 2009).

¹⁶ To representatives of Muslims of the Philippines, John Paul II addressed a beautiful message in Davao, February 20, 1981: "I deliberately address *you as brothers*: that is certainly what we are, because we are members of the same human family, whose efforts, whether people realize it or not, tend toward in God, who created us and whom we are trying to reach, in our own ways, through faith, prayer and worship, through the keeping of his law and through submission to his designs. But, are you not, above all, brothers of the Christians of this great country, through the bonds of nationality, history, geography, culture, and hope for a better future, a future that you are building together? Is it not right to think that, in the Philippines, the Muslims and the Christians are really travelling on the same ship, for better or worse, and that in the storms that sweep across the world the safety of each individual depends upon the efforts and cooperation of all?". Words of John Paul II underlined the fact that Muslims and Christians are experiencing of everyday life in the same "boat". FRANCESCO GIOIA (Ed.), *Interreligious Dialogue: The Official Teaching of the*

A Catholic, a woman spoke up and said to me, “Father, I agree on the importance of interreligious dialogue, but I can’t be discussing the Trinity with my Muslim neighbors. I’m a housewife, mother of four children. I would probably explain our faith badly. It is too difficult for me”. I answered that she was right and the Church doesn’t expect her to be carrying on theological discussions with Muslims. But I said, “You can teach your children that God also loves Muslims and others, and you can reinforce that teaching by your attitudes, charities, as well as acceptance and tolerance. Dialog is our perennial call to live peacefully with people from other faiths”¹⁷.

I feel that many of the members of our community might react to the Church’s call to dialogue in a way similar to this woman. We feel that we are not trained for it, and we are worried that in any theological exchange we might quickly be in over our heads. More than a half-century since the Second Vatican Council, many Christians still have a very restricted idea of what the Church is referring to by the term “dialogue” [Tom Michel, S.J.]¹⁸.

As recently as 1979, the Asian bishops sought to put the emphasis on dialogue as it should be practiced by ordinary Christians (that is, by “non-experts”). The Asian bishops gave priority to the “dialogue of life”, which they said was “the most essential aspect of dialogue”. According to the Asian bishops, the dialogue of life occurs when: “Each gives witness to the other concerning the values they have found in their faith, and through the daily practice of brotherhood, helpfulness, open-heartedness and hospitality, each show themselves to be a God-fearing neighbor. The true Christian and [their neighbors of other faiths] offer to a busy world values arising from God’s message when they revere the elderly, conscientiously rear the young, care for the sick and the poor in their midst, and work together for social justice, welfare, and human rights”¹⁹.

Catholic Church (1963-1995), Boston: Pauline & Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997, pp. 235-236.

¹⁷ E. ARMADA RIYANTO, C.M., *Dialog Interreligious: Historisitas, Tesis, Pergumulan, Wajah (Interreligious Dialogue: Historicity, Thesis, Discourse, Face)*, Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 2010, pp. 478-481.

¹⁸ THOMAS MICHEL, S.J., “Islam in Asia”, in <http://www.sedos.org/english/michel.htm> (Accessed in January 15, 2009).

¹⁹ There are two fundamental questions in the BIRA I (First Bishops’ Institute for Interreligious Affairs) in Sampran, Bangkok, Thailand, 18 October 1979: 1) What should be the pastoral position of the Catholic Church for our dialogue in the particular situations of each country? 2) What concrete steps should we take for the near future in our pastoral activity to advance the dialogue? See GAUDENCIO ROSALES - C.G. AREVALO, S.J. (Eds.), *For All the People of Asia*.

The bishops are moving away from the idea of dialogue seen as mainly a way “*talking or discussing*” to one of “*a way of living together*”, with the emphasis on “*sharing life*” in the context of daily living. In my reflection, dialogue is concretely sort of beautiful activities such as²⁰:

- *sitting together*: “*silaturahmi*” (paying visit and extending hands of blessing and respect), sharing, negotiating, and discussing;
- *standing together*: respecting one another and promoting equality and rights;
- *working together*: building the better life of society in various fields such as education, health service, economy, and politics;
- *experiencing ups and downs of everyday life*: cultivating the sense of solidarity, friendship, brotherhood, neighborhood;
- *meditating together* [I don’t use the term “*prayer*”]: learning and listening to each other spiritual experience of God and extending God’s love to one another;
- *journeying together*: ceaselessly searching the truth in a way that one experiences freedom and love only in God he discover!
- *Shall we not be dying together too?* If we live in peace with others, it would be beautiful that we will also die in the same peaceful way others experience. In other word, dialogue is nothing other than ceaseless activity to seek peace in our living together with others.

Cultivating the sense of being together

I am living in seminary located in a periphery of a small town, called Malang, East Java, Indonesia. Our seminary is surrounded by Muslims. So, we live with neighbors who are Muslims. Until now there has no any difficulty in our relationship. As ordinary people who live in a suburb we feel close to each other. We form a group or community consists of more or less 40 families. This group of families meets every Saturday evening respectively in a family who wins “*arisan*” (an activity of collecting money in a small amount from each member of the

Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences Documents from 1979 to 1991, Manila: Claretian Publications, 1997, pp. 109-112.

²⁰ I have been deeply inspired by the activity of “*To Pray together in Assisi*” initiated by the late Pope John Paul II. In my book, *Dialog Interreligijs: Historisitas, Tesis, Pergumulan, Wajah* (Kanisius, 2010), I mention John Paul II as an exemplary *man of dialogue* (Chapter 8). What he did was something beautiful and human in interreligious dialogue. He just wished to sit together, to share with persons of other faiths, to talk to each other, and to pray together. What a beautiful example from a person of dialogue!

group, then share that money to the lucky one after a simple procedure of play). Our seminary belongs to this group; seminarians take actively a part of such an activity every Saturday evening. By so doing, we the seminarians are doing something good to cultivate the sense of being together. Neighborhood means brotherhood. We experience that living out the spirituality of brotherhood can be broadened not just within our community but with people of other faiths whom we share the same feeling as brothers and sisters.

Our major seminary at Malang provides several different assignments of pastoral activities. One of them is called "*kampung* pastoral" which is a pastoral activity that makes seminarians involve themselves in activities of *kampung* (village). We believe that being together means involving oneself into everyday life of other people. When we involve ourselves, we cheer and experience what others cheer and experience in their daily lives.

Our house is also surrounded by five mosques big and small. Every time of the call to pray starts (there are five times, even at four a.m!) there is extremely big noise, since there are dozen of speakers producing a strong voice of *Adhan* (a call to pray). Unfamiliar ears would feel badly disturbed. To be honest, this is very disturbing. How do we get familiar and not feel being disturbed? Just stay calm, be still, and enjoy!

Once I experienced a beautiful moment. It happened during my travel to China. We were leaders of private universities in our region of East Java. In a hotel I stayed in a room with an Indonesian Muslim colleague, a professor of sociology. We are friends to each other. After long journey to the Great Wall we were tired and went back to our hotel. In a small room he took his things and said that he would pray just beside his bed (there were two beds). I said, "Great, I should do the same!". So, he started to pray and so did I. Honestly I did find that it was a moment of the beauty of our being together. We just do what we should do according to our own faith, and it was beautiful.

Befriending them

My daily activities are mainly learning and teaching. I teach some philosophical subjects in Widya Sasana College of Philosophy and Theology at Malang, East Java (Indonesia) in which more than 400 students (mostly religious) are preparing themselves to priestly ordination. The College of Widya Sasana has two programs: undergraduate and master programs of philosophy and theology. As I can share, this College hosts students from 12 dioceses of Indonesia and 15 different religious Congregations. Learning and teaching philosophy has always been a challenging task for me. Besides, I am invited to give

lectures in a state university to deal with “phenomenological research” in Ph.D program (University of Airlangga) and also in Islamic universities (Surabaya and Malang) as visiting professor of philosophical subjects.

Whereas in Widya Sasana College I work with professors from religious congregations as well as diocesan priests, in universities where I engage in lectures, I get occasion to meet people and intellectuals of different religions, mostly Islam. This is a blessing and an interesting experience to me. I became friends of Muslims from different branches of Islam. In Indonesia there are two main groups of Muslims. The first one is called “Nadlatul Ulama” (NU) whose perspective of doctrine is more popular and rooted in ordinary people’s tradition of life. It is the largest Islamic organization in Indonesia. The second biggest one is “Muhammadiyah” whose doctrine is somehow puritan and intellectual. Both share Sunni school.

In my experience, the Catholics can relate well with both NU and Muhammadiyah. They are good friends and are also active in working together with people from other faiths. When I work with them I feel all right. They are simple and enthusiastic. Befriending Muslims especially from both NU and Muhammadiyah is indeed beautiful. I also teach in both NU and Muhammadiyah universities. Mingling with Islamic scholars is a joy and blessing for me. I hope that they have the same joy when learning philosophy with my humble presence.

Working together for justice and peace and charity

In the words of the Asian bishops “working together for social justice, welfare, and human rights” is one of the manifestations of the dialogue of life. All around the world, Christians are striving, together with the followers of other religions, to build peace and to establish just societies.

The Daughters of Charity in Indonesia as well as in countries of Asia Pacific have always made beautiful efforts of collaboration for justice and peace concretely in society. In Indonesia, for instance, they are working together with the Muslims in many different areas of apostolates such as empowering women workers and women from villages, rendering health service or giving scholarship for poor children, taking care of leprosy persons, offering relief help to the survivors whenever there is natural disasters, etc. Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, CM Fathers, and Vincentian Family are also working hand in hand with different Islamic groups to give assistance to the poor, especially those who are vulnerable and victims of disasters.

I do believe that no any single institution can handle effectively promotion of justice, peace, and love in society. Christians should be

aware of the importance of collaboration. Every stage of our initial Vincentian formation must also seek ways and create possibilities that being man of collaboration is *par excellence* one of the most crucial requirements to be achieved by candidates.

4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Dialogue with Muslim is to be a dialogue from the heart

Has God desired enmity between Christians and Muslims? The roots of the natural affinity that should exist between Muslims and Christians go back to the very Scriptural origins of Islam, where the Qur'an states: "The closest in affection to [Muslims] are those who say: 'We are Christians', for among them are priests and monks and they are not arrogant" (Qur'an 5:82). This perception of divinely-willed friendship and cooperation between Muslims and Christians was expressed on the Christian side when the Catholic Church, in the Second Vatican Council decree *Nostra Aetate*, urged Christians and Muslims to move beyond the suspicions and conflicts of the past in order to work together to carry out a common mandate: "For the benefit of all", the decree states, "Let them together preserve and promote peace, liberty, social justice, and moral values" (*Nostra Aetate*, 3).

I do agree with Fr. Tom Michel who noted that "the long history of conflict, oppression, violence, and war between Christians and Muslims must be understood as acts perpetrated by those who *failed to live according to the teaching of their respective faiths* or else the misguided actions of those whose theological vision was too narrow to recognize God's work of grace within the other community"²¹.

In other word, dialogue with Muslims needs to start *from the heart*. Heart locates physically in the center of our body. As the center heart becomes so important to the physical structure of human existence. What comes up from heart is what comes up from human being. So, heart is indeed the representative of the human presence. But, heart is also symbol of love. That means the good things which are out of heart expresses love. Mind thinks, ear listens, mouth speaks, eye sees, and heart loves, contemplates, and meditates.

Virtues that flow from the heart are simplicity, meekness, humility, courage as well as charity and love. When saying that dialogue with

²¹ Cf. Fr. THOMAS MICHEL, S.J., "The Roots of Muslim Anger and Its Challenge for Christians", "Islamic Revival in Asia and Its Implications for Christian-Muslim Dialogue", "Christian-Muslim Relations: Are We Missing the Real Story?", in <http://www.sjweb.info/dialogo/index.cfm> (January 10, 2010).

Muslims starts from the heart, I mean we need to start from love and charity, not prejudice nor judgment. These virtues shape our ways of self-communication. They make friendship, solidarity, brotherhood, neighborhood, and togetherness possible. Such virtues make others feel to be accepted and welcome as they are.

These virtues are essential elements in dialogue with Muslims. When I say that in dialogue we also need virtue of courage, I mean courage to transcend our inferior and superior mentality as Christian. Christians who live in the midst of Muslims as majority have inferiority as predominant feeling; and those who are majority seems to easily have superiority over the Muslims. To some extent, Christians are to be courageous to initiate to seek concrete ways of cultivating dialogues with Muslims regardless of difficulties and obstacles.

Dialogue is possible when we start from the heart. This is my simple conviction sprung from “the well” (borrowing Danny Pilario’s metaphor)²² of experience of everyday life. By “the well” I mean love of God from which blessing and every good thing flows to our daily life. God is love.

There will be no peace on earth, if there is no love. If there is no love, if there is no dialogue. So is our living and being with Muslims. There will be no dialogue, if it does not start from the heart. We need dialogue with love. In this following song, it is said clearly that peace on earth starts with “me” and “us”. Love others begins with our deep and personal experience of being loved by God.

By SY MILLER and JILL JACKSON:

“Let There be Peace on Earth”

*Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me.
 Let there be peace on earth, the peace that was meant to be.
 With God our Creator, we are family.
 Let me walk with my neighbor in perfect harmony.
 Let peace begin with me; let this be the moment now.
 With every step I take, let this be my solemn vow:
 To take each moment, and live each moment, in peace eternally!
 Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me.*

²² As mentioned in his talk to Asia Pacific Formators and the members of the Commission of Vincentian Charism and Culture of Asia Pacific in Gopalpur-on-sea in February 10, 2010.