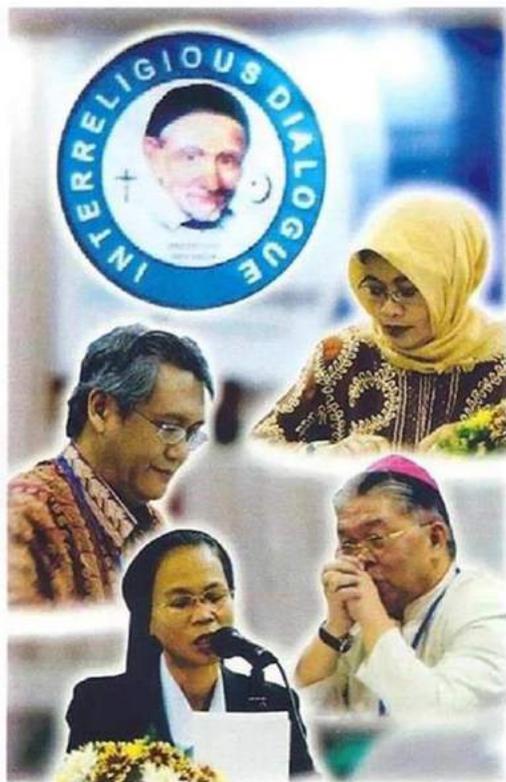


VINCENTIANA

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S.I.E.V. Symposium



Dialogue with Islam

CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION
GENERAL CURIA

IN MEMORY OF

Fr. Julio Suescun Olcoz, C.M.



Born: 7 May 1935

Ordained: 20 September 1959

Died: 10 June 2012

Editor of Vincentiana 2007-2011

Editor's Note

This issue of Vincentiana is devoted to coverage of the 2011 SIEV Symposium on Christian-Muslim Interreligious Dialogue. Held in Indonesia, a country with the world's largest Muslim population, this conference brought together Vincentians, Daughters of Charity, lay colleagues, and specialists in this field to offer Christian and Muslim perspectives on this issue.

Their theme was “Duc ad Altum” – *put out into the deep* – from Luke's Gospel (*Lk.* 5:2-6). Using the image Jesus gave the disciples to cast off their fear and apprehension and to get into a boat to go fishing, this symposium sought to move participants beyond popular stereotypes and sycophantic responses of Islam and Christianity. Judging from the program and presentations, it was a deeply enriching experience, both in the exchange of information, and the final outcome: formulating a statement of solidarity, with strategies that will promote interreligious dialogue.

To be sure, this is not a casual topic to explore or interact with in today's world. News stories often remind us of the complexity of the relationship between Christians and Muslims. The coming of the “Arab Spring” in largely Muslim countries has presented great challenges to find new ways of interpreting and enacting governance, religious freedom, and human rights.

The Vincentian Family has been involved in this issue for some time. In 1999, a ground-breaking symposium on the topic of Christian-Muslim dialogue was held in Fatqa, Lebanon. Vincentians, Daughters of Charity, and lay colleagues who ministered in countries with large Muslim populations, sought to share their experiences. They also looked for ways to witness to their faith and to live out the Vincentian charism in collaboration with the Muslim community.

In this issue, confreres Abdo Eid, Christian Mauvais, and Armada Riyanto, all who live and minister in Muslim countries, share their experiences, providing a grasp of the challenges one faces in living out Christian discipleship and the Vincentian charism. Jesuit Felix Korner, who has written and lectured extensively on Christian-Muslim dialogue, presents a framework for understanding its ecclesial development and how to proceed. Academicians and authors Mudjia Rahardjo and Siti Musdah Mulia, adherents to Islam, share their observations on the growth of their faith in Indonesia and around the world and possibilities for collaboration.

To end on a hopeful note, confreres Armada Riyalto, and Claudio Santangelo each present faith-filled, stirring sentiments on ways to move forward in this difficult, but very important task. Drawing from their own experiences, they present essays replete with their rich homiletic and pedagogical prowess. Finally, many of us, I am sure, have had the experience of taking part in a long, complicated conference or meeting, and felt the sting of someone smugly saying at its end, “Well, where do we go from here?”.

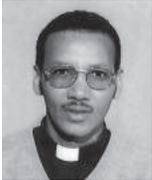
Except in this case, the 2011 SIEV symposium participants not only asked but answered the question. The “Synthesis and Lines of Action” proves their time was well-spent. It challenges each of us to understand and act upon these convictions. The lasting contribution of the 2011 SIEV symposium is that it has given all of us practical ways to truly “*put out into the deep*”.

Sincerely in St. Vincent,

John T. Maher, C.M.

Editor, *Vincentiana*

About Our Authors



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FEATURE

Vincentian Symposium on Inter-Religious Dialogue with Islam

Introducing our Topic

Inaugural Speech: Basic Principles for Dialogue with Islam

Varghese Thottamkara, C.M.

Dear Rev. Fathers, Sisters, Brothers, Honored Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an indisputable fact that in every part of the world, we live with people of multi-religious faiths. Two prominent religions today in the world are Christianity and Islam. So it is of great significance that we discuss and discern ways of co-existing peacefully, respecting one another and working together for the common welfare of the entire society. It is this conviction that has brought us together here to this workshop.

Another fact that brings us together is the realization that all human beings are children of God. God does not and cannot make any distinction or discrimination between his children. No matter we realize and acknowledge this, or fail to do so, without counting the merits or unworthiness of the human person, God continues to be faithful unconditionally and gratuitously. “For He makes his sun rise both on the wicked and the good, and gives rain to both just and the unjust” (Mt. 5:45b). So God continues to love and care for all the human beings regardless of their race, color, sex, age and creed. That is the reason for our search for co-existence and collaboration in bettering the world.

Three questions are of paramount importance to discuss here:

- How can we co-exist peacefully?
- How can we respect one another giving each one the freedom to be what one is and to profess what one believes?
- How can we work together for the well-being of the society and humanity at large?

Finding answer to these questions may be spelled out as the aim of this workshop. When we start such a study and dialogue there are some basic principles to be kept in mind.

1. One must be rooted in one's faith and convictions. Without having a deeper knowledge of the theology and spirituality of one's own religion and having lived it experientially, it is difficult and can be futile, to learn and respect the tenets of other religions. It is insecurity and lack of convictions in one's own faith that makes some attack people of other faith. When one is sure of one's stand, there is no need to defend it vehemently. So one of the basic requirements for inter-religious dialogue is a profound theological knowledge and deep conviction of one's own faith.
2. Respect is the key word in inter-religious dialogue. One may not agree and accept of all the tenets, teachings, practices and traditions of other religion. But one should be able to respect the freedom, logic and convictions of other persons as they are. We should be able to disagree agreeably. Respect should be for the other person, his/her freedom of conscience. Just as I have my own reasons and convictions of my faith and the right and freedom to profess it, my neighbor also has the same God-given right and freedom. I can neither question it nor consider his/her convictions to be false. When I learn to respect the other, I too will be respected. "Do to others whatever you would that others do to you" (Mt. 7:12). This is the Golden rule of the Holy Scripture.
3. Search for the points that unite and not that divide us. There are many converging points on which all can agree and start working on and leave the divergences with due respect. If all concentrate on the common points of convergence and work towards the common good, much can be done for the humanity at large. It is when we concentrate on the points of divergence and focus on our differences that a lot of negative talk, anger and intolerance occur. So it is my hope that through our participation in this workshop, we can develop principles and practices to discuss points of commonality in our faith traditions, while also acknowledging and respecting the legitimate differences in the spiritual heritage of each of our faiths.

With these words, in the name of the Vincentian family and in the name of the Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission, I welcome cordially and wish sincerely all the participants of this workshop to have a fruitful and enriching workshop. May this workshop be an experience of deeper convictions, respectable dialogue and compassionate collaboration for the good of the humanity.

Called to Live Together, but How?

Abdo Eid, C.M.

*The reality is not homogeneous...
Differentiation and undifferentiated work constantly,
the inhabitant is the model of balances in imbalances.
fault and adjustment.
There is movement, everything is relative.
In a world of widespread movement of property and persons,
ideas and cultures.*

(MICHEL, 1994)

A "REAL" TALE

It is November 7, 2010 and we are in the convent of the Redemptorists of the Melkite Catholic rite. P. Sami, at least eighty years old, always smiling and with a bright voice, serves as our guide in the convent Museum, the Chapel, and finally we end the trip on the terrace which provides a partial view of the Lebanon Mountain and South of the country. Valleys and mountains reflect the invasion of architecture modern, but in disarray; it was not so long ago, this was all oak forests, olive trees, vines, fig trees and umbrella pines.

And we ask the question: are these new buildings and homes for Christians or Muslims? Seeing our faces anxious in fear of an answer not to our liking, he looks at us and smiles by saying: **May Allah build with them! They are many, are they not also created by God?**

Is he serious or is it a joke? Does he really understand what he just said? Did he just say this to ease his Christian conscience and answer the call to love our enemy? Or is he saying this because really he believes it? The concern of this response gives each of us pause, as we experience a wide range of confused feelings, before which, a respectful and contemplative silence arose in honor of the white beard of this man. He has suffered during his life from persecution that obliged him and his community to escape from the convent to save their lives, and that was the reality of his story...

HOW TO UNDERSTAND THE REALITY?

The situation in Lebanon, as in the Middle East, is rather complicated and any attempt to capture it in a short article will result in failure. Who can explain what is happening currently in Egypt, Libya, Syria, and in many countries of the Middle East and Africa?

Dr. Kabbara (1994) said that the possibility of living together is possible with equality and the balance between the existing forces, sharing the same territory. The absence of such a balance results in a power dominating the other, limiting freedom and making the dictatorship possible and maybe inevitable. Thus, for the author, the key to coexistence between Christians and Muslims in Lebanon is guaranteed by this balance between the two forces, living in mutual respect for the freedom of the other.

This view of the situation is enough to show that if the only guaranty is the balance of the forces on both sides, results become very diminishing. But still, it is difficult to maintain this balance for the rapid and continuous increase ratio of Muslims, as to the Christian and Catholic youth emigrating faraway in search of better life conditions. Georges Corm (1994) proposes the urgent need to move from the simple idea of coexistence into the elaboration of the modern concept of citizenship and Social Justice.

Corm saw in the 1990s what had happened to Lebanon, in light of the international and regional context in the Middle East: the new generation of political men in the country represented different religious confessions, taking into consideration the equilibrium of the external forces more than the interest of the Lebanese people. Corm invites the creation of an awareness of citizenship in a state of law to safeguard the national unity out of a system of the politicized groupings. This is a call for a cultural rebirth, capable of orienting not only Lebanon, but also all the Arab world to authentic democracy and social justice. But in reality, we are far from the rebirth and the realization of this project of true national unity in the country.

In Lebanon, my country, there are many people – be they Christian or Muslim, priests or imams, different members of the clergy – who think as P. Sami did. Sami believed that despite years of destructive war, pain and martyrdom experienced by so many Lebanese families wounded in history and the flesh, the memory of an entire country and the fabric of a society which, by some miracle is still standing. The worst part is this deadly ignorance on the identity of the other/enemy who inevitably lives by my side and the label “Christian” or “Muslim” would be sufficient to create among the two – with exception of P. Sami – (the evidence to the contrary) a clear reluctance and refusal of the difference. This narcissistic form of belief and of

loving only ourselves drowns the Lebanese in his own limited and egocentric being.

Ad intra, the herd is divided, attached to opinions and lives in the confusion following different political confessions with the same religious title “we are the Maronites” but belonging to different flag colors and different political policies (Forces Geagea Lebanese – Frangiyé – Tayyar of Aaoun, Marādah Kata’eb of Gemayel, etc.). Hatred and resentment remain as a practical joke, but we are incapable of forgiveness, although we all have had communion from the same bread. However, each group assigns to himself and expresses itself as savior of the Maronites in Lebanon. Is all that hope or decline?

- How to speak to Muslim of Christian forgiveness, if all he sees is hatred between Christians and the lack of mercy?
- How to preach to the Arabic/Muslim world that Christ has saved us, and it is the reason why we are free people, if we are still slaves of flags, colors, and political systems?
- How can we say that the Church of Jesus is that of the poor, when most of our educational institutions are existing exclusively for the rich?
- How can we talk about our nationalism and citizenship, if we Christians are the first to leave the country in search of better opportunities of life beyond the seas?
- Furthermore, how can we tell Christians to remain, at the time where we are facing an economic war, where the prices of basic necessities (home, food, etc.) are out of reach?
- And worse, how can we be witnesses of faith, if it is always rooted in the law without growth and the experience of a second baptism, which fills us with Christ who makes us new creatures able to be salt and light?
- How not to have fear of some groups of Muslim fanatics that are infiltrating Christian villages and in a short time emptying them of their residents because of a high population growth and the purchase of houses and land at frightening prices?

A Lebanese Christian expresses his concern by saying: “We see us Christians caught between fear and helplessness... since currently Muslims hands are in the power of decision...”. They want us to be weak and under their authority. They have a clear and specific plan: we see them invade the country, the region, the world... They reduce us then as we are reduced and we shiver in fear and anguish... “God it’s terrible...!”.

The Lebanese, and particularly we Christians, have always developed our hope in forces and foreign powers (European or American) to us pull us miraculously from the brink of being destroyed. This will never

happen since these powers are always looking out for their own interests and siding with the most powerful. I am not so sure that they have been, even for one day, protective of the Christians, as they declare up till now. Different political agreements have been made during the last decades between the Muslim and Christian sectors, but they only remain political agreements instead of being a goal for all, a desire to satisfy and also to achieve together a development that is looking for honesty and integrity.

NEW CHRISTIANS, FILLED WITH CHRIST

The current society sees Christian communities marked by the spirit of the Beatitudes. Only a Church within the Gospel has the authority and credibility to show the face of Jesus to the women and men of today. This is what the Orthodox Patriarch Ignace VI said in 1985, when he spoke of the role of the Church and its relationship with the Muslim world. So our Church must cease to be the Church of *reactions*, of ethnic or linguistic features, frozen by the anxiety to survive, so that finally it can be the Church that is spreading as the salt, and seeking its identity in its own mission.

An expert Eastern figure of the Muslim world and the Koran is the Orthodox Bishop Monsignor Georges Khodr (1979). The first thing that he requested for Christians is that they fully convert to Jesus Christ. This brings us to put aside religious pride and the belief that we are superior to the other. The personal achievement of a Christian is the path of humility. When arriving at this point, one might expect that Muslims would discover Christian values, and then be opened to the mystery of God's will for them and for the whole humanity.

Conversion, change of heart... that is what we need. Conversion, or better yet, to be aware of what has always been the life of a Christian: simple, small, fragile and persecuted. It seems to me that we have never understood nor accepted the promises of Jesus concerning persecution, the cross that awaits those who believe in his name, as we do not believe anymore in the strength of simplicity, gentleness and humility.

Conversion is the road to freedom... radical freedom, said Nolan (2007). It is infringement by Jesus to the deepest core of one's being. It is this same freedom that he challenged his friends with, encouraging them to do their best to get to it, and it is also the same challenge that he is throwing at us today, at the time where we walk among the chaos.

The basis of this radical freedom, always according to Nolan, is trust. We're free to the extent we learn to appreciate the way in which God loves us, which leads us to give us entirely and put our trust in Him. This trust in God allows us to have a mindset open and daring, be free

to explore avenues for new thoughts and the unorthodox. We are so free we can even sometimes say honestly: "I don't know". And, most important is that we will be able to say: "In reality, whatever". It is this freedom that allows loving without reserve, to accept ourselves the way we are and to accept all people, including our enemies, the way they are.

There is also the important reality of trust in the other. Trust in the goodness that is inside of this "*angry being*", confidence in the truth that it is inside and confidence in its ability to know good and evil. But images transmitted by the "*other-Monster*" hinder the path to reach this confidence and is crippling it. That is the word: paralyzed. We feel paralyzed, in our policies as we dream and desire to have a better country.

CONCLUSION

Christians and Muslims are all called upon to enter into a process of liberation of the heart from the political yoke of belonging to a master (political leader) who, in the name of religion, subjects the will of the people to his, making them slaves for his own benefit, while leaving some crumbs for their subordinates.

The Lebanese Christian is called in humility to see God's work in religious diversity, a hand that distributes salvation to the Muslim as well as to the Christian and equally for all. Since God is love by excellence, and we all are the masterpiece of God's work of love, it is a call to get off the pedestal, and to reject any deception of superiority upon our brother or sister.

For this, to our East, Catholic and non-Catholic churches should respond seriously, and not only with speeches, ideas and speculations (i.e., 'Synod for the East'), but with hands-on projects for a re-evangelization of all the ecclesiastical pyramid structures inside and out. We want bishops to be shepherds, simple and humble. We want priests who knock on the doors of people's houses and call on each parishioner-well and ill. We want dedicated women and men who are a sign of hope, so that the world can continue to wish for the eternal. We want lay men and women who know the true face of the Son of Man, and experience in their lives the life-giving force of his Resurrection.

We all are a reflection of the society that we belong to, or, to say it another way, these are the same societies that reflect who and what we are. It is time to have the courage to offer our world something new, the novelty of Jesus and his Gospel, our treasure that we need not to hide anymore. Let me share something with you yet.

I was still upset for what is happening in my country, Lebanon: Christians who are leaving; others fleeing their regions and leaving them to Muslims; the invasion of Muslims who are buying land in Christian villages and building huge buildings; the high Muslim birth rate next to Christians with smaller numbers. Yet one day, passing beside a Muslim building in construction, I felt coming out of my soul, a song that had surprised me and here it is:

*Come, dear friends, come
We have something very important to tell you
Something that no one had the courage to tell you
Something that should not be kept from you anymore.
Come, we will share together
The secret of our hope
Come and touch our hearts
Burning of love for you.*

What can I call that? Change, awakening, a conversion? I don't know... but there is only one thing sure: Inside me there are peace and too much of hope.

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The “Stripping” of the Church in Algeria

Christian Mauvais, C.M.

1. Introduction

This essay I present to you is well placed. It is a particular experience, a moment of history in a region of North Africa, concerning the Church in Algeria. Not being a theologian, I have been helped by documents written by bishops, theologians, and witnesses who know this particular history. New paths have been laid out and ideas shared for the mission in the Muslim world.

The title of our symposium is: “Put out into the deep”. In order to move forward, we must leave that which holds us back, perhaps which hems us in, in all cases that which prevents us from moving ahead! So I am going to begin by recalling some of the stages that allowed the Church in Algeria to move where she had not necessarily thought of going, or at least where she had not chosen to go. To put out into the deep, to experience the journeys, it is sometimes necessary – always? – to allow oneself to be led by events! Is not that the way the Spirit breathes?! It is a matter of trust!

2. The stages that led to the Church’s ‘stripping’

The fate of the Church in Algeria has been marked from the country’s independence **in 1962** with the departure of a million Europeans, almost all Christians, who, for the most part, lived next to the Muslims in a type of common “bubble” as Bishop Pierre Claverie said. They were accompanied in this departure by several thousand Algerian Christians. They were Christians rooted in their country. The first shock: *the Church was deprived of its faithful!* She had to reposition herself; many priests and religious went into formation and health care. The arrival of aid workers such as teachers and technicians gave back a small breath of life; these latter were responsible for the Church’s Christian witness in this Algerian Muslim society. These Christians came from elsewhere and for a time, even if some have settled in Algeria until the present. **The first stage of our Church’s stripping!**

In 1976, the nationalization of works took place! *Here the Church was deprived of what made her visible*: parishes, schools, hospitals; that which gave her gravitas! Almost 700 churches and chapels were transformed into mosques, cultural centers, and annexes to public schools! To this we must add the Algerianization of executives, which had the effect of severely restricting the Church's involvement in the professional sector, both public and private, to where today, it is almost impossible for a priest, religious, or even a foreign layperson to be hired in an Algerian organization. **The second stage of our Church's stripping!** The Church has no other choice but to accept being nothing more than a discreet and hidden presence in the midst of the population.

In 1993, there was what is called the "black decade" with the place of the GIA [Armed Islamic Group], which wanted to rid the country of Jews, Christians, and "unbelievers" from the Muslim land because these latter had spent many years spreading evil in Africa¹. It was thus that the departure of almost all the Christian families took place, including those belonging as Catholic Algerians. Half of the women's religious communities had to leave the areas of their service, as well as the Poor Clares and the Little Sisters of the Poor. Out of 222 women religious in 93, three years later there were only 70 left! The new community reformed after independence left. **The third stage of our Church's stripping!** It must be added that the 'black decade' blocked renewal of the Church's permanent members for more than ten years, thus widening the gap between those present in the country a long time and the younger ones who bring different ecclesial sensitivities. We must recognize that to put into deep water shakes things up, requires another outlook, and brings risks!

Between 8 May 1994 and 1 August 1996, 19 religious men and women were assassinated. "*For a few weeks*, wrote Father, at the time bishop, Teissier, *we found ourselves before the risk of seeing the fundamentalist violence make our Church in Algeria disappear definitively*"². This was **the fourth stripping**, which Father Teissier called the physical death.

More recently (2006), the law on non-Muslim worship, from then on, poses a sword of Damocles over the modest platforms of Church service, which like most of the country's associative activities, entirely at the mercy of the authorities. This, we can say, is a paralysis.

¹ "...in the political framework of the clearing out of Jews, Christians, and unbelievers from the Muslim land of Algeria, a GIA brigade set up an ambush in which it killed two crusaders who had spent many years spreading evil in Africa..." Leaflet distributed.

² Bishop HENRI TEISSIER, *Chrétiens en Algérie [Christians in Algeria]*, DDB, pp. 63-64.

So, over the course of time, the events of the country's history have impoverished our Church, weakened it, and stripped it! Thus freed, she discovered and became aware that she is in the midst of a people of a different faith, which she begins to look at face to face. This is the first surprise for her, who is putting out into the deep, losing sight of the usual horizon! This successive stripping, which necessarily led to conversions, allowed her to resituate herself, to question herself, and to open herself; in that, does she not join the experience of the first Christian communities?! I quote Father Teissier:

*"It is really a matter of a new understanding, by the Church, of her mission in her relation to a people, who do not share her faith. She is rooted in the conviction that there is a gift of God to be put to work by the meeting among persons of different religious traditions, in this case, Christians and Muslims. Beyond the vagaries of history, prejudices, and resentments, fraternity without borders is part of the Church and Christian-Islamic friendships evangelize both parties by which they learn to communicate to each other the gift of God, for each one's greater fidelity in his soul and conscience. These convictions are a very special contribution of the Church in Algeria to the life of the universal Church at the end of the 20th century"*³. *"Every human being is the object of God's affection and we have a mission to serve this tenderness of God"*⁴.

Cardinal Duval already affirmed:

*"The Church must live with and for everyone, because the great commandment of Christ is fraternal love; thus the Church lives for humanity. "How can the Church be faithful to Christ's Spirit if she is not attentive to the graces that the Spirit pours into the human heart? I am convinced that the practice of fraternal love is the manifestation of the Christian message. It is through it that the truth of the Gospel is made known"*⁵. *"It seems that our meeting with our Muslim brothers in the Maghreb must place the reestablishment of trust among men and women, whom history has too often set against one another, first among our objectives; [...] respect for persons is one of the most fundamental expressions of evangelical love. It cannot flourish except on a terrain of true humility"*⁶.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 49-50.

⁴ MARTINE DE SAUTO, *Henri Teissier, un évêque en Algérie* [Henri Teissier, *A Bishop in Algeria*], Bayard, 2006.

⁵ MARIE CHRISTINE RAY, *Le cardinal Duval, un homme d'espérance en Algérie* [Cardinal Duval, *A Man of Hope in Algeria*], Cerf, 1998, pp. 128-129.

⁶ CERNA [Conference of Bishops of the North African Region], 4 May 1979.

3. Weakness allows the Church to welcome the gift of God!

Our Church finds herself without specific places to carry out her mission of charity (schools, hospitals, etc.) and practically without people. She is led to turn toward the people with whom she lives and to understand that she receives a mission for this people who are Muslim. Put out into the deep means a stripping, but it opens other horizons and allows her to be attentive to others, present at the side of those whose otherness is a source of wealth and communion! It allows her to be led into the deep without knowing well what she is going to discover, receive, be called to give, yet with the certainty that the Master is on board. This is not done without suffering, but the wounds of the different passages for going out into the deep are like the gaps through which the Holy Spirit breathes! God gives her a gift. She is ready to receive it!

"Beyond these sufferings, or rather within these sufferings, we have deepened our mission and our relations with our Muslim partners. ***We are living the mission in weakness.*** The Christian people are no longer there, but there is still a people in Algeria; it is the Muslim people but they are the people whom God gives us to meet, to serve, to love and with whom we must carry out the work of salvation. We strive to live in truth a Gospel relationship with the persons and communities who are Muslim; but they are brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ"⁷.

With few remaining and numerically small, the Church discovers more deeply that God has tenderness and that he shows it to every human being. It is there that she has a mission to carry out in relationship with her Muslim partners.

She is not only small in number, but even more so spiritually; weakness that is similar to that of Jesus, the Servant, which calls us to be close to those who are far away and from whom we could remain distant (Phil 2:6-7). "*Weakness is not a virtue in itself, but the expression of a fundamental reality of our being, which unceasingly must be renewed, informed, fashioned by faith, hope, and love in order to allow itself to conform to Christ's weakness, to Christ's humanity*" wrote Christian Chessel, a young White Father shortly before his assassination. He continued:

"If weakness is chosen, it becomes one of the most beautiful languages to speak God's 'discreta caritas' for mankind, both charity full of discernment, but also the discreet charity of someone who wanted to share the weakness of our human condition. To learn our helplessness and become aware of the radical poverty of our being before God

⁷ TEISSIER, *op. cit.*

can only be an invitation, a pressing call to create with others relationships of non-power. Having learned to recognize my weakness, I can not only accept that of others, but see in it a call to bear it, to make it mine in the imitation of Christ”⁸.

Thus we have opened another dialog, another way of reading the Gospel and living it in the midst of the Muslim people. This confirms the testimony of a Little Sister of Jesus on the occasion of the funeral of a priest, Pierre L., who died suddenly in November 2010. The cathedral was three-quarters full of Muslims:

“...the funeral, with all those young Muslims in tears, had no need for commentary. I could not help but feel the force of this small and hidden Church’s witness, loving without asking for compensation. I sensed it better and you could almost touch how much this form is the very essence of the Church in Algeria, in her insignificant number, in her invisibleness, in not claiming her rights, in her humble and daily meeting, nothing more, with the other and so close in her humanity. This form of presence is the word of the Gospel that the Lord wanted to plant there, and no one I hope has the right to root it out”⁹.

And this testimony of a Muslim, a doctor, after these ten difficult years:

“I believe that it is God who wants the Church’s presence in our Islamic land [...] you are a cutting on Algeria’s tree which, if God so wishes, will blossom toward the light of God”.

The sending on mission in Matthew 28 is to be understood with Matthew 25 or Luke 10: the Last Judgment and the Good Samaritan parable, at the center of our mission, love toward whomever and on what we will be judged: “What have you done to your brother or sister, what love have you given him or her?”. It is, then, this relationship with the other which gives meaning to our being sent: our closeness to one another, Christians and Muslims. To welcome a Muslim who becomes Christian is good, but to welcome a Muslim who wishes to remain Muslim is also good. It is our mission and the path already opened by Brother Charles de Foucauld, universal brother, and which takes up what the Bishops of CERN said¹⁰:

“The Gospel is Good News for all. The life of every person and community, inhabited by the Spirit, is God’s gift to Christians. It is our

⁸ Presented by Msgr. Claude Rault in an issue of the magazine, *Spiritus*.

⁹ Little Sister Maria Chiara in *Rencontre*, January 2011, p. 27.

¹⁰ Conference of Bishops of the North African Region.

duty to gather the generous, positive signs that the Spirit puts into every person. The Muslim religious tradition is a place of authentic spiritual experience and becomes a sign that God gives us. It is a sharing of humanity by which the mission, which is to welcome and fructify God's gift everywhere that it has been placed by the Spirit, is fulfilled!".

The tragic events, experienced by all, have established this conviction that God's Spirit acts in the heart of every person to associate him/her to the Paschal Mystery, to this way of death and resurrection. This conviction has supported each member of the community during this entire crisis. It was the fundamental motive for the fidelity of the "martyrs". This new look at the mystery of salvation at work in the life of our Islamic brothers and sisters has been one of the determining elements of the change of our Christian community's attitude in relation to the Muslim community.

"You have done well to choose to live with this people, to share its joys and pains. You have chosen or it is God who has chosen for you [...] I would not be logical if I did not say that your existence on this land and with this people has gone beyond you, because a part of you belongs to us. One cannot exist somewhere without belonging, in some way, to the other" (this quote came from a Muslim teacher who has a degree in Islamic sciences).

Thus, the community of Algerian Christians is led to become simply "sign and servant of God's gift for all the people, welcome of God's gift made to the other, to serve the tenderness of God". It is a matter of a meeting, of a sharing that God entrusts to us in order that reconciliation, mutual recognition, friendship, and communion finally come.

"In fact, you live what the Council said of the Church as sacrament, that is, a sign. We do not ask for a sign to increase our numbers, but to be a sign"¹¹.

4. The meeting, God's gift, becomes a sacrament!

"As Christian minorities, we find ourselves in a situation of radical dependence with regard to the Algerian society. That makes us poor persons in the sense that we have no power in our hands [...] this defenseless condition increased with the threats of armed groups on our life. But, by grace, we often were able to assume this unarmed

¹¹ John Paul II to the Bishops of the CERNIA during the *ad limina* visit in 1986.

existence as a gift from God, who gives us to our brothers and sisters” (Henri Teissier).

The real meeting terrain is that where we are given together to our brothers and sisters in daily services; it is the place where the dimension of charity is lived out; where the “discreta caritas” of God is implemented, and where the gratuity of love is to be seen: in centers for the handicapped, Catholic Charities, University Cultural Centers, extra help with school work, promotion of women, the health field where some sisters succeed in getting jobs through friendship or relationships, etc. All this is a social terrain and a spiritual terrain!

In these places, there are solutions to be found with regard to the best way of loving each other, of serving him/her, and these solutions are found by Christians and Muslims who, in order to do so, each lean on the basis of his/her conviction of conscience. It is they who seek together and give appropriate responses in which they are involved. Each one tries to listen to what God says to him/her through the Bible or through the Koran. It is not neutral and God is committed in these places and in these decisions. The sacrament of meeting between Christian and non-Christian can account for what happens here.

*“Our littleness and the precariousness of our situation do not give us a big place in our societies. But, by this very fact, these two elements become a sign of the very free love of God for our peoples”*¹².

“The foundation of dialog is to witness to and act in charity and for charity. This means that it is the dialog of life which does not die but is reborn from its ashes and stands the test of time and humanity” (Msgr. Sleiman).

*“Interreligious dialog does not aim at conversion, but rather at looking, listening, seeing what we have in common at the service of society, peace, and social cohesion”. “This seems like little, one must admit, but it is very difficult”*¹³.

The service of the poor is truly a place where Christians and non-Christians can collaborate and seek together God’s presence. In order for this world of communion among men and women to happen, there must be a meeting among men and women. Every day we are edified by the gift God gives to others, as a priest, a friend of Pierre, testifies:

“Pierre lived his priesthood by offering hospitality in his rectory to many people, by saving lives, by visiting the unfortunate, by attending

¹² CERNA, 18 November 1999.

¹³ Cardinal Tauran, Thursday, 17 March 2011.

the marriages of his Muslim student friends, by teaching, by literacy work, and by wanting to help others grow. The testimonies insist on Pierre’s remarkable generosity; they tell us of the fruitfulness of a priesthood rich in friendship. Pierre only celebrated a few baptisms, marriages, and funerals, but for years he never ceased administering the sacrament of fraternity, an integral part of the Eucharistic life. Ubi caritas ibi Deus est”.

Or again this testimony of two Muslims:

“...What now remains of him is the courage and enthusiasm that he transmitted in order to help us move forward and the light to enlighten each one of us on the path of life in order to bring us a bit closer every day to the great human wealth that he embodied so well: the gift of self”¹⁴.

In order to give this sacrament to one another, we must be sacrament-persons, that is to say, we have to be signs for one another and servants of the gift that God gives to each one and one by the other. Pierre was one of those persons!

Basing himself on the Church Fathers and on the theology of Vatican II, the theologian, Christoph Theobald¹⁵ recalls that sacraments, before being signs and ritual practices, are persons, sacrament persons, who risk themselves in a real relationship with the other they meet. The Church herself is a sacrament in the measure in which she puts herself at the service of this relationship in truth in order to therein signify the presence of Christ.

The future of the Church is born there where our partners recognize us as concerned with them by the values which make people and the human community in Algeria grow. These values are a gift of God. Those who have this experience want a future for the Church, as an Algerian testifies:

“The presence of religious, their sacrifice, their gift of self, and their work are a comfort for all those who, at times, falter and lose hope. By this living example of God, they pull themselves together, regain confidence, and continue. The Church in Algeria gives us the occasion to learn to struggle so that humanity might grow in justice, truth, liberty, solidarity, and fraternity”.

¹⁴ H. Saidani and M. Rabhi in *Liberté*, 4 December 2010.

¹⁵ CHRISTOPH THEOBALD, *Présences d’Evangile: Lire les Evangiles et l’Apocalypse en Algérie et ailleurs* [Gospel Presences: Reading the Gospels and the Apocalypse in Algeria and Elsewhere], published by Atelier, 2003.

The Church's situation is inseparable from the situation of the societies to which it is grafted. It is in the very measure in which the Church shares to the end, without skirting, the path experienced by all the people, as a process of meeting and shared birth: birth of a country, birth of a Church to its vocation to be the sacrament of salvation, that this is played out. According to the conception of Christoph Theobald, it is: *"Not a salvation deferred to the afterlife, but a salvation here and now because salvation is that every person, to the last, hears in his/her life the word 'Blessed', this word of the Beatitudes which summarizes the Gospel entirely and which the Apocalypse sings"*.

Again, according to Christoph Theobald, the term that seems to best summarize this new understanding of the mission is that of "presence"¹⁶, which summarizes the following convictions – the Spirit precedes us; the Spirit is already present and active/actor:

- it is the call to be present in the today, at the center of life (an active presence, a listening, a meeting of solidarity)
- we do not control the gift (fruit) of the meeting.

*"With the monks, we see in what sense the Gospel and the shocks of history led them to transform their attachment to a land and a space in their own walls into a passion for an inhabited land, for the space made of men and women, here harassed by poverty and violence; to remain became **to remain with** the population and stability became **solidarity with** the population no matter what happened. [...] If the Muslims are shown as loved, even to not only living but dying for them, dying with them, it is because they are first perceived as lovable: lovable by love of kindness, of reciprocity, of friendship, born of and in their prayer too"*¹⁷.

5. God's surprises which shake up our Church!

*"We pray to the Holy Spirit, author of every apostolic initiative, that he might give us from stage to stage the evangelical boldness and the courage to invent what is required by new situations"*¹⁸.

Yes, the Spirit works and leads always elsewhere, always to openness. So phenomena have come to jostle the missionary conscience of

¹⁶ Christoph Theobald prefers the term presence to the term witness (which connotes a context of process) or accompaniment (which connotes a certain condescendence).

¹⁷ Dominique Motte, O.P., in a lecture about the film at Gruson in France.

¹⁸ The Bishops of the CERNA, 17 June 1997.

our Church. To put out into the deep is an occasion to welcome surprises, God’s winks. The Church’s vitality is revealed elsewhere and in other ways! We have to be ready to welcome what is offered, what is given to the Church which permits her to continue her mission as she has discovered it without remaining immobilized.

As God’s surprises¹⁹, we note:

- The influx of sub-Saharan **students**, which make up a majority of the Church’s laity, even if in recent times some “expatriates” (young families) come for work; to these are added members of the DCC²⁰ and VIPs. The name “sub-Saharan students” hides a very great diversity of nationalities, languages, and cultural and ecclesial traditions and it is with all this that we have to make community! Let us point out that the young people, without having chosen it, find themselves in the vanguard of the meeting, by the daily contact that they experience with Algerian students in the universities and in the cities. It is a sharing of a very close life, which has its repercussions: tensions, discoveries, shared friendships, etc. As Christians, they live immediately the Church’s mission at the center of the Muslim world. Their presence obliges us to be attentive to this population, to accompany them, to offer them a sacramental life and formation. That has not been simple: “We are there first of all for the Algerians, the Muslims”!
- To these young students is added the flood of **migrants** who stop in Algeria on the route that leads them toward Europe. They are remaining there longer and longer and some of them settle there! They are becoming increasingly numerous and invite us to “reinvest” in a usual pastoral ministry. To form it from this diversity of communities is a real challenge! The only common denominator is that they are here in Algeria. They come with family and build another family here. They too live in the midst of the Muslims, working with and for them. They are, like the students, first in line to witness to Christ. *“The renouncement of proselytizing in order to gain the ‘right’ to exist in Muslim countries and the reluctance to engage in student ministry (to keep the priority to presence with the Algerians) are shaken up by a new outbreak of the universal”*.
- Another surprise and not the least is the emergence of **Algerian Christians**. *“Even as the decision not to proselytize was almost a consensus within the Church, here in another way, without direct*

¹⁹ H.J. GAGEY, *Actes de l’Assemblée interdiocésaines d’Algérie [Minutes of the Interdiocesan Assembly of Algeria]*, 2004.

²⁰ DCC: Delegation of Christian Aid Workers.

relation to the discreet witness by the Catholics, groups of Jesus' disciples are forming. Some knock at the Catholic Church's door, but most define themselves as Evangelical Christians and fully intend to form the authentic Church in Algeria". This is another new opening due to the fact of putting out into the deep and which allows for open pursuit: how to establish a bridge with these unexpected brothers, and this without cutting off the relationship with our Muslim brothers²¹. More and more Algerians are touched by the Spirit, this Breath of love that leads them to join us and make community with us. This requires an entire ministry of accompaniment and formation.

- The third surprise is the diversity of the Church's members, her **universality**. The arrival of priests and religious from Sub-Saharan Africa, from Latin America, from Asia, and even the arrival of an Arab bishop (Jordan) change the vision of the mission. The advantage is that the constant mix between Christians and Westerners is questioned. The Church is no longer French! The other side of this richness is that these new players no longer know or know poorly the Church's history, its various passages, and its way of being in this country. They come burdened with their history, their formation, and their way of seeing the mission, which is more in the proclamation, in the fact of being seen than in discretion. That does not happen without tension even within religious communities!

Thus the Church is invited to continue putting out into the deep: to allow herself to be shaken and formed, while affirming her convictions born of her particular journey in the Muslim milieu; and to keep to this double fidelity, on the one hand, to her history, to her ties with the Muslim people, which is the people into which and for which she is sent, and on the other hand, to these new groups who are awaiting formation and more ordinary pastoral ministry!

It must be noted too what the grace of our Church in the reality of her small number, in the midst of the Muslim people, effectuates in the heart of this "new laity", who are finding again the way to the Church, rediscovering the Gospel, reawakening the faith that was more or less asleep or that was settled, bringing it out of monotony, and which commits itself again, putting itself at the service of Christians and the local population. What shakes them up is that this Church is close to the people, formed in small communities all well integrated in this country, where mutual understanding is attainable. The Church seems to be like the yeast in the world's dough. She awak-

²¹ Jean Toussaint in a talk in Tunis for a meeting of major superiors in 2009.

ens hearts to another dimension: that of faith, of charity and that is the road to hope.

To put out into the deep, into deep water is risky but promising. There are difficult passages to experience, but which open to a surprising richness. The Spirit, this Breath of love, really guides the Church and has her discover the place which is hers: planted in the midst of a people to whom she must witness to the merciful tenderness of the Father. This was Jesus Christ’s work in coming to take his place in the heart of this world.

To conclude, I give the floor to three witnesses: a bishop, a monk, and an Algerian.

- *“The communion that Jesus announces is a communion that excludes no one. The Eucharist we celebrate is the announcement of God’s universal love, and our life must express this communion, which is only carried out by the Paschal journey of death and resurrection. But each time we celebrate the Eucharist, we gather together all these confused, indistinct, obscure calls of people and we announce in advance the date, the day when there will be a universal banquet to which all peoples will be invited”*²².
- *“My death will, of course, seem to vindicate those who hastily called me naive or idealistic: ‘Let him say now what he thinks of it!’ But they must know that I will finally be freed of my most burning curiosity and will be able, God willing, to immerse my gaze into the Father’s in order to contemplate with him all his children of Islam as he sees them, completely illuminated with the glory of Christ, the fruits of his Passion, invested by the gift of the Spirit whose secret joy will be ever to establish communion and to refashion the likeness while playing with the differences”*²³.
- I end with this friend of the Church: *“There is a ‘Muslim church’ in Algeria. She is made up of all the women and all the men who recognize themselves in the message of universal Love and its commitment to a pluralistic and fraternal society: she is more numerous than you think [...] thank you to the Church for having left her door open: she discovers a new people. And together, we discover God, because God is not a private property”*.

Translated by Sister ANN MARY DOUGHERTY, DC

²² MARTINE DE SAUTO, *op. cit.*

²³ Spiritual testament of Christian de Chergé, 1 December 1993 - 1 January 1994.

Duc in Altum

Vincentian Journey of Dialogue from Fatqa (1999) to Pacet (2011)

Eko Armada Riyanto, C.M.

Jesus said to Simon, “Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch”. Simon answered and said, “Master, we worked hard all night and caught nothing, but I will do as You say and let down the nets. When they had done this, they enclosed a great quantity of fish, and their nets began to break” (Luk 5:4-6).

Jesus’ words “put out into the deep water” (*duc in altum*) encourage each one of Vincentians gathered together in Pacet, Indonesia 2012 to make more efforts to journey in path of interreligious dialogue of which the late Pope John Paul II called as “path of a must”. In Vincentian tradition, our Holy Founder Saint Vincent de Paul has indicated clearly providential relationship with Muslims since the beginning of his apostolate adventure as evangelizer of the poor. It would not be surprising that members of the Vincentian families who are working in Islamic contexts spreading from Arabic countries (Middle East), Africa, Europe or even North America to Southern Philippines, India, and Indonesia (Asia) are in good number. Vincentians works vigorously in various ways in Muslim countries (with Muslims) not only because of the providential call of the mission in the Church but also of the very charisma sprung from the person, Saint Vincent de Paul. From experience of mingling with the fellow Muslims we believe that even Islamic societies long for good news too. In this sense our commitment to interreligious dialogue with Muslims has long history, and is definitely and worthily to be continued, cultivated, and explored in a more beautiful ways in the future.

The history of the Vincentian journey of interreligious dialogue with Islam – in worldly level so to speak – has two wonderful “stops” of reflection and study. The first is in Fatqa, Lebanon (1999), the second one in Pacet, Indonesia (2011). This article wishes to highlight briefly both what we learn and discover in Fatqa (1999) and what we dream in Pacet (2011).

WHAT WE LEARN IN FATQA (1999)

The beauty of Panorama. It was Fatqa, the chosen city to host the first gathering of Vincentians reflecting on dialogue with Islam. The dates set up were from July 26 to August 5, 1999. Fatqa is blessed by God with beautiful scenery of nature. It locates in a hill from which the beauty of panorama is humanly provoking. Yet, above all, Fatqa was the chosen city in which deepening of our understanding of Islam has been taken place for the first time (in the sense of theological and spiritual level) and strongly promoted and fostered. Participants were 49 (28 CM and 21 DC sisters). They came from Austria, Barcelona, Eritrea, Indonesia, Salamanca, Napoli, Toulouse, Paris, Philippines, Slovenia, Torino, Belgium, Granada, Pamplona-Zaragoza, Madrid-S. Vicente, Sevilla, Marseille, Paris, Suisse, England, and North Africa. I was one of the fortunate participants who did not only enjoy the atmosphere of brotherhood and sisterhood but also was inspired by both studying the materials in the House of Sisters Maronite and mingling a bit with friendly and generous people of Lebanon.

Reconciliation is always possible. Lebanon has been experiencing a lot of suffering (as have other countries) caused by religious conflicts and tensions. But the people of Lebanon have also witnessed the possibility of reconciliation. Though it has been said by experts that conflicts among people were not caused by religion but rather politics or social issues, we cannot deny the fact that religions or at least religious people have often fallen into misunderstanding, prejudices, miscommunication, tensions, and, worst of all, conflicts that turn to bloodshed. The Vincentians could feel the beautiful atmosphere of reconciliation among Muslims and Christians. Lebanese people were and are exemplary ones in successfully turning conflict into peaceful coexistence.

Dialogue as sharing of appreciation. The presence of Hisham Nashabé was a generous share. "How I, as a believing and practicing Muslim, look at the Christian faith" by Hisham Nashabé was one of the candid way of speaking about a personal historical experience of living together with Christians. Hisham did not represent any Islamic group so that we had him as he is. At the beginning he was underlying the importance of freeing religion from any political trap and of being tolerant. No doubt, one of striking messages put forward by Hisham was an invitation of working together hand in hand to transcend difficulties and obstacles.

Dialogue as learning other doctrines. Fatqa was filled with beautiful efforts to have more knowledge and understanding about doctrines, especially with regard to Islam. Samir Khalil Samir, S.J. contributed two important topics: "*Monotheism and Trinity: The problem of God and Man and its implications for life in our society*" and "*Is the Koran Revealed? Is Muhammad a Prophet? A Christian point of view*". Father Samir's expertise and passion on Islam brought some light of knowl-

edge and understanding. Yet, such knowledge is to be regarded as initial one. It is however somewhat apologetic if we put as a material of learning religion. Dealing with dialogue (with any religious believers) I think one should have a proper understanding of his own religion in such a way that others may not only be regarded as those subordinate to us. Fr. Samir's opinion definitely provides knowledge to prevent such an attitude. "Revelation and Inspiration in Christianity and Islam" by Emilio Platti, O.P. was one of careful study on Koran in connection with Christianity. This contribution is valuable to us who need an understanding based on proper knowledge. Father Khaled Akasheh gave us "*The Theological Foundations of Interfaith Dialogue*". Khaled's talk is simple in presentation and yet most valuable in message of urgency of having dialogue in the life of the Church.

"*Various Trends in Contemporary Islam*" by Jean Landousies CM depicts Islamic movements inspired by Mohamad Kassab (Algeria) and Sayyid Qutb (Egypt) as well as in the contemporary Europe. Islam is both unified and diverse. Father Landousies' account on trends of contemporary Islam is to be followed up in more thoroughly sociological and political point of view. It is a rare study among Christians, since we have often equated that understanding Islam means understanding Koran. To mention a simple example, Islam in Indonesia is not just one in terms of sociological structures as well as spiritual way of living out the doctrines. Dialogue with Islam cannot be stuck in only a mere understanding of who Muslims are or what category they belong to. Dialogue needs studying cultural contexts that blend into ways of being religious and living out faith. I regard that Father Landousies understanding of various trends in Islam (in dialogue) is like an urgent invitation to go back to experience of people themselves who embrace religion of Islam in diverse contexts of countries in the planet (not only to delve Islamic doctrines). The heart of dialogue is not merely on possession of proper knowledge or understanding, but also on commitment and love to mingle with the people themselves.

Dialogue with Muslims was in the heart of Saint Vincent. One of the most interesting studies in Fatqa was that of Father Yves Danjou, "*Saint Vincent and Islam*". Fr. Danjou's study imposed awareness that our journey of dialogue with Islam can be regarded to have its very start in Saint Vincent himself. Well, Saint Vincent has never had an experience of dialogue with Muslims (in the modern sense), yet he showed at least an ardent interests of Islam in his contemporary point of view. It would not be exaggerated to understand that interreligious dialogue could be, to some extent, part of charisma and spirituality of our Founder. *Quid nunc Vincentius?* What St. Vincent would do now when dealing Muslims in our contemporary time? This is a discerning question that guides us to journey in dialogue with Muslim brothers and sisters in Fatqa 1999 and Pacet 2011.

“We did learn a lot of beautiful things”, Jean Landousies CM, member of the Preparatory Commission, wrote in “Conclusions” indicating at first experiencing the joy of *being together* as one family of St. Vincent and St. Louise. That joy was immense, simply because our confreres and DC sisters in Lebanon were witnesses of being truly Vincentians by making tireless efforts at dialogue with Muslim brothers and sisters, regardless of painful experiences.

Fr. Ignacio Fernandez de Mendoza CM, vicar general of the CM at that time, in his remark of end of the meeting in Fatqa said, “We have discovered a somewhat surprising fact: the C.M. missionaries and the Daughters of Charity that live in missions in contact with the Muslim world are very numerous. We have received first hand information on the relationship between Christians and Muslims. But above all, our personal and group sensibility about this problem, after what we have heard and seen, is very different from what it was before the Encounter”. And, at the meeting in Fatqa, Fr. Robert Maloney CM, then the Superior observed, “By such study and by simple presence, we can grow in knowledge of Islam and the Church’s teaching about interreligious dialogue, especially as it relates to Moslems. 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. The Congregation should also form some experts in Islam and interreligious dialogue [commission]”.

WHAT WE DREAM IN PACET (2011)

It is clear that *the dominant atmosphere of the Vincentian gathering in Pacet, Indonesia (August 7-17, 2011) is full of dreams*. The 64 participants (lay collaborators, CM fathers, DC sisters, and some sisters from Vincentian family) are coming from 38 countries, such as USA, Europe, Africa, Asia, as well as Oceania. The Indonesian confreres and sisters woo the heart of participants by doing their best to welcome them in Pacet, a hilly small town in the East Java where the Vincentians have made up a major presence in Indonesia in a cottage hotel (Sativa) owned by the alumni of Vincentian senior high school. The international preparatory commission (Claudio Santangelo CM, Armada Riyanto CM, Franz Kangler CM, Eid Abdo CM, Christian Mauvais CM) suggested the topic of the meeting approved by Fr. G. Gregory Gay, CM Superior General. “*Duc in Altum*” (put out into the deep water). The topic has somewhat been regarded as the “continuation” of the Fatqa (1999).

In Pacet we Vincentians dreamed the following: to have more dialogue as way of life; to dialogue beyond conflicts (regardless of painful experiences) implicating ceaseless human pardons; to be more faithful

in living out Church's teachings; to persevere more in practicing them when working together with Muslims; to have more stories of witnessing exemplary experiences of interreligious dialogue with Muslim brothers and sisters; to explore opportunities to work with Muslim brothers and sisters; and to have concrete plans moving forward, such as a network of collaboration among Vincentian universities and higher education for interreligious dialogue and study. While the Pacet held no formal intellectual study (with regard to Islam or its relationship with interreligious dialogue) as was done in Fatqa, we did review Church documents with regard to dialogue and mission. However in Pacet, we focused on sharing stories and witnessing to ways of concrete collaborations and living together through a series of sharing sessions, group discussion, as well as reflections on films and visits to various sites.

Indonesia is par excellence a Muslim country, but regardless of the population size, it is not constitutionally an Islamic one. It is the biggest Muslim country in terms of population and percentage. Indonesian Muslims make up about more 12% of Muslim population in the planet. And, about 85% of all Indonesian populations are Muslims; Catholics are only 3%. Despite this reality, Indonesia does not consider itself to be a Muslim country, even with over two hundred million of Muslims. Indonesia is a state based on a constitution which promotes freedom of religion. Despite our small number, Catholics have been working hand in hand with others, especially Muslims, to build better future of the society.

Journeying dialogue beyond conflict. The journey of interreligious dialogue after Fatqa is not an easy one. In countries where the Vincentian Family is active, political upheavals do occur. However, Islam has been experiencing a "new" face, of which I do regard more as bias. Not to mention an example of the tragedy of 9/11 in New York, Islam has been easily stereotyped as religion closed and related to terrorism. In Indonesia, a powerful bomb blast in Bali was the very beginning of such a stereotypical misrepresentation of Islam in the country. India did experience the same thing in Mumbai terror. The Philippines seems to be relentlessly in trouble in with the instability of the Mindanao region. Nigeria, Kenya, and other African countries have experienced some bitter violence done by Islamic terrorists. The same trouble happened in Europe as well.

Despite troubles connected with Muslims, we should not still link Islam as a religion of violence. We need to remember that violence done by a certain Islamic group has often caused sufferings of other Islamic communities. One must not presume that violence is always directed toward non-Muslim communities. Like other religions, Islam tries to guide its adherents into a beautiful relationship with God. We should not regard Islam from one aspect and deny its contribution to humanity throughout the ages. We have recently witnessing unstoppable "rev-

olution” to democracy in the Muslim world such as in Egypt, Syria, Libya, Tunisia, and other countries. Though some expert conceive that this phenomenon has nothing to do with religious issues but rather political ones, it is indeed still related to new understanding of social and democratic revolution triggered and connected by Islam. Practically speaking this means that the Vincentian Family is now encouraged to find new ways to bridge working together with new realities in the change wrought by the “Arab Spring” in various Islamic countries.

Journey of dialogue to transcend the limit. In the case of Indonesia, however, a part of being free country in constitution, non-Muslims have experienced uncomfortable situations. Some even feel being oppressed and persecuted by the majority. In some parts of Indonesia, there is no real religious freedom since, for instance, to build house of prayer (such as churches or the like) is still difficult. In times of political and social trouble some churches were burnt down. But, in Pacet we are **not** discussing religious persecution or conflicts as such. We dare to go beyond all of discontent situation and to transcend our human limit of fear and discourage. In the words of Mgr. Petrus Canisius Mandagi MSC (President of Office of Interreligious Affairs for the Indonesian Bishops Conference and Bishop of Ambon, a place where the bitter conflict between Muslims and Christian Protestants occurred some years ago), “We need to transcend whatever kind of tensions and conflicts we have experienced and to take courage of offering pardons and mercies”.

Our gathering in Pacet was to reflect interreligious dialogue in a more profound way based on living in coexistence, inspired by our Vincentian charism and spirituality. What do we mean by “transcending limits”? To transcend limits is to go beyond our human capacity by recalling our existence as a Christians and persons of deep faith. God gives us faith to go beyond our limits. Faith makes us capable to transcend our history of suffering, pain, and oppression.

Dialogue is a way of life. Felix Körner SJ, a professor from the Gregorian University, helped the participants to deal with the recent documents of the Church on interreligious dialogue. It has been suggested by Church that being faithful to the doctrines is to be based not only in proper understanding of them but also to ground such an understanding in the context of the concrete lives. Bishop Mandagi is an exemplary Catholic who is not only faithful but is able to persevere in living out his Catholic faith as a person of peace. “Dialogue is a way of life” is the truth that we need to live out daily life. Our confreres and DC sisters working in Africa, Asia, as well as Indonesia are those who bear witness of the truth that dialogue is indeed a way of life.

Dialogue with Islam needs broaden horizons of society. From two Islamic scholars (Prof. Dr. Mudjia Rahardjo and Prof. Dr. Musdah Mulia), we learned that understanding Islam is not simply understand-

ing religion as itself; it must be regarded as Islamic society, politics, culture, and way of life. Learning Islam is not just learning religion of Islam as such. Study of Islam means study of Islamic society with diverse cultural traditions, different ways of life, and hermeneutics of symbols lived and experienced in daily life. Just to mention an example of Muslim Indonesians, it was noted that there is vast number of different styles of being Islam. Indonesian Muslims are not the same with Arabs. Sociologically Muslims living in the northern coastlands of Java (a main island of Indonesia), differ from those who live in the Central area. So, by studying Islam we do not mean merely understanding the Quran and religious traditions or proper hermeneutics. Rather, we need to embrace sociological, cultural, and a philosophical methodology to approach richness and diversity of Islam. To the Vincentian Family, such an understanding helps us to not to take for granted Islam as unified and diverse one, but rather to be fervent in doing interreligious dialogue within sociological and political context.

More stories and witnesses to share about. The most interesting presentation – according to the participants – is that of Sister Anna Wiewiek Soepraptiwi DC and her Muslim friends. Sr. Anna and her Muslim friends (Abu Muslich and Nadia) told stories of how they work hand in hand to give relief to victims of tribal conflicts between Madurees and Dayak people. Sr. Anna is the former Visitatrix of Indonesian Province; Abu Muslich is one of the Islamic leaders; and Nadia was young lady, Muslim student, an activist of social movement. Their stories were inspiring and touching simply because Muslims (Abu Muslich, Nadia and friends) and the DC sisters have been able to transcend difficulties and obstacles coming from themselves and some fanatics. A lot of uncomfortable situations are part of their beautiful togetherness. For instance, Nadia told us that it was DC sister who reminded us to go for prayers, whereas most of Muslim friends were keeping busy with services. Abu Muslich was in tears remembering how Sr. Christa DC (an Indonesian sister whom she worked with) was so diligent and courageous in saying that they needed to move forward to help the displaced people of Madura amid problems provoked by fanatics. It is indeed true that similar stories may be found in other countries, as we had similar reports from DC sisters and confreres working in Egypt, Israel, Algeria, Chad, Marocco, Istanbul, Albania, Austria, Spain, and Southern Philippines.

Courage to transcend obstacles sprung from share of Sr. Anna and her Muslim friends left us with a deepening and practical awareness of what we mean by interreligious dialogue. Dialogue is not simply to talk with, but rather to work with in a concrete ways of charity. From seeing, knowing, understanding Islam as a unique and different religion with a set of beliefs, we need to go forth sharing and building up communities of dialogue. The most challenging task is not in how

we learn normative doctrines of Islam but in how we realize our understanding into formation of communities of collaboration and dialogue based on charity.

Dialogue and friendship are two faces of the same coin. A methodology of interreligious dialogue has been revised extensively, not just in terms of theological hermeneutics, but also in practical language. We have often conceived that dialogue with Islam needs “common words”. It is indeed undeniably important. Dialogue with Muslims embraces diverse and creative languages in that we need to dare to explore a friendly relationship. Working together in pastoral services is one of beautiful friendships. Pacet (2011) reminds us not just of the beauty of being together as Vincentians, but also of new calls of being Vincentians as persons of dialogue.

More plans and dreams to work out. Exploring formation of dialogue for the Vincentian Family by strengthening programs of interreligious dialogue for ongoing formation:

- *That strong and solid collaboration among Schools and faculties in the Vincentian family be promoted in concrete ways.* We have School of Philosophy and Theology “Widya Sasana” in Indonesia (in collaboration with Carmelites and others); We run DePaul seminary (theological faculty of Adamson University) in Manila; and the CM’s in the USA have great resources at DePaul, St. John’s and Niagara Universities. All three schools, with different program of religious or cultural studies and many more in the US are a fine resource. A humble dream of Pacet in networking with these schools/faculties of theology and philosophy would be collaboration of research and of making concrete contributions to building up of better life of society especially in Muslim world.
- *That new journal of theology-philosophy as well as inter-cultural study of spirituality, pastoral, as well as religious studies be created.* So, we may journey from superficial understanding of Islam to study and research of diversity of Islamic societies; not mentioning from comforting oneself with prejudices to making effort of theological reflection. Documents of the Church are valid sources of our theological exploration, and yet they need to be revisited in new perspectives that can bring them down to earth. Language of documents is theological, philosophical as well as ontological one of which words and idioms are to be reinterpreted in the history of hermeneutics.
- *That pastoral services and social activities around the globe promoted by Vincentian family be rekindled and fostered* in line with spirit of interreligious dialogue. Personal involvement is mostly recommended. We need to move from seeing the uniqueness to experiencing collaboration with Muslims.

- *A strong and gearing team or commission of interreligious dialogue* consists of members of different countries and continents in the Vincentian Family in their recommendation of the participants of Pacet (and following up on the encouraging letter in 2000 of Fr. Robert Maloney) urgently be formed. The Commission must be a *directed* and *productive* group that proposes and provides forums or seminars for the Vincentian Family to engage in and develop theological, cultural and spiritual reflection on interreligious dialogue.
 - With the priorities and emphases arising from our Vincentian mission and presence in the Islamic countries, in regions where sensitivity of dialogue is mostly concerned.
 - To support and accompany members (sisters and priests) who are working hand in hand with Muslims in such a way that they may not feel alone in their missions.

The Commission should encourage and provide *programs of an ongoing formation in different levels* for the members of the Vincentian family regarding matter of dialogue and working together with brothers and sisters from other faiths (Islam). The Commission should set itself *as a part of the Catholic Church mission* in taking seriously interreligious dialogue providing and contributing theological and vincentian reflections or documentations; in this mission the Commission seeks collaboration with other institutions of the same concern within and beyond the Catholic Church for the benefit of our Vincentian mission. The fact that there are many Vincentians working in the Islamic countries is a *providential call* of the Vincentian family to set this “new apostolate” of interreligious dialogue in better and more appropriate way for the benefit of our mission.

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Islam in the Past Ten Years in Indonesia and in the World¹

Mudjia Rahardjo²

The history of religions and especially Islam in Indonesia is very complex. It also reflects the diversity of Indonesian cultures. In the 12th century, many predominantly Muslim traders from India arrived on the island of Sumatra, Java and Kalimantan where their religion flourished between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries. The dominant Hindu and Buddhist kingdoms of the time, such as Majapahit and Sriwijaya, were in decline and the numerous Hindus and Buddhists mostly converted to Islam, although a smaller number, as in the notable case of Hindus immigrating to Bali, moved off Java and Sumatra. Islam in Indonesia is in many cases not fully practiced in comparison to Islam, for example, in the Middle East regions.

As stated in the first principle of the state ideology, belief in the one and only God, religion holds significant roles in Indonesia. Derived from that principle, the Indonesian Constitution guarantees the right to the freedom of religion. However, the government only recognizes six official religions, namely Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism and Confucianism.

To this day, a number of religions are practiced in Indonesia. It is logical therefore; their collective influence on the country's political, economical and cultural life is very significant. As of 2007, the population was estimated at 234,693,997. Based on the 2010 census, approximately 85.1% were Muslims, 9.2% Protestant, 3.5% are Catholic, 1.8% Hindu, 0.4% Buddhist and other or unspecified.

With 87% of its citizens identifying as Muslim, it is well known also that Indonesia is the world's most populous Muslim-majority country. Generally, Muslims have been concentrated in the more populous west-

¹ A personal reflection presented in the Symposium of Interreligious Dialogue on Islam in Prigen, Indonesia, August 7-17, 2011, initiated by International Commission on Islam of the Vincentian Family.

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ern islands of Indonesia such as Java and Sumatra. In the less populous eastern islands, the Muslim population is proportionally lower.

Indonesia is the world's third-largest democracy, after India and the U.S. Ninety percent of Indonesians are Sunni Muslims. But with many different religions practiced in Indonesia, conflicts between believers are often unavoidable. Moreover, Indonesia's political leadership has played an important role in the relations between groups, both positively and negatively.

Politically, parties based on moderate and tolerant Islamic interpretations have had significant, but not dominant success in the national parliamentary elections in most of elections. Hard line Islamist parties, however, have had little electoral success and their bases of support remain. One form of Islam, known as neo-fundamentalist, adapted for new ways of thinking about the relationship between Islam, politics and society. Nonetheless, a number of fundamentalist groups have been established, including the Majelis Mujahiden (MMI) and their alleged associates Jamaah Islamiyah (JI). The Islamist Justice and Prosperous Party (PKS) has a different point of view from the neo-fundamentalists, notably the anti-Semitic views and anti-Western conspiracy theories of some of its members.

The Nature of Islam in Indonesia

In terms of religious teachings and the fundamentals of faith (aqeedah), Islam in Indonesia is no different from that of Islam in other places, the Middle East alike. As a monotheistic religion, Islam is widely understood and well practiced as the religion of peace. Islam came to the archipelagic Nusantara (ancient lands of Indonesia) through various ways and from various places, mostly South India, Persian, and Southern Arabian Peninsula. Islam was spread through the works of merchants and scholars, who were able to blend in and mixed well with the local predominantly Hindu and Buddhist societies, as early as 13th century. Just in the span of seven centuries, there are more Muslims in today's Indonesia compared to the entire Muslims in the Arabian Peninsula, the birthplace of Islam. Compared to other religions, Islam is then the fastest religion spread around the world.

From the outset, pluralism has always been the nation's religious spirit. One theory illustrates that such spirit stems from the geographical nature of Indonesia, where the country is rightly situated between Asia and Australia, and between the two world's oceans, the Pacific and the Indian. It allows the local inhabitants to receive constant influences from all places through trading and economic activities, and adapt well to it. Yet, such a theory should be coupled with our objective understanding on the nature of religious teachings. At its core, Islam, like

other religions, always puts a special respect for diversity. It also embraces tolerance and care for others.

But those two factors – geography and foundations of religious teachings – while necessary and important, are inadequate to explain the true face of Islam in Indonesia today. We need to take another important element into our account, and that is the Muslims in Indonesia themselves.

Here we are talking about the devoted, true, and enlightened Muslim scholars who gained their prominence through their moderate interpretation and moderate voice of Islam. But the question is why in fact violence tends to be attributed to Islam? The most probable answer is that due to the growing number of Muslim inspired by the success story of Islamic revolution and radicalization rooted from the Middle East regions.

Indonesia is fortunate to having moderate Muslims and Islamic organizations that form the majority of its body of Islam in the country. The works of the Nadhlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, two largest Muslim organizations in Indonesia, in the promotion of unity, prosperity and tolerance, are commendable and exemplary. Even in the early formative years of the Republic in 1945, despite their strong influence over our national politics, moderate Islamic leaders at that time made the decision not to make Indonesia an Islamic state. And at the subsequent stages of our statehood, the question of Islam and the state remains at the realm of a constructive dialogue, leading to a deeper mutual understanding on the role of state to ensure the harmony and tolerance amongst peoples of different faiths in Indonesia.

The majority of Muslims in Indonesia are convinced that the difference(s) within and across faiths should be settled through intensive dialogues. This provides a strong rationale for Indonesia to take an active role in promoting inter-faith, inter-civilization, and intercultural dialogues with our friends and at all levels. In the Islamic perspective, interfaith diversities are viewed as a “blessing from God”. The duties of human are, therefore, to love each other (*tahabbub*), to help each other (*ta’awun*), and to forgive each other (*ta’afuf*). The prerequisite for all of the duties, of course, is the presence or existence of mutual understanding (*ta’aruf*) through continuous dialogues among the religion adherents.

Arguably, settling differences in a peaceful manner is not the biggest problem that everywhere Islam is facing nowadays. All conflicts and collisions in the name of religions may have something to do with a mistaken sense of religiosity or simply competing and contentious interpretations of the religions concerned. While many perceive that radical groups as proponent of violence are growing, there are also

counter movements from the moderate Muslim. That is why the most acceptable approach to overcome the radical groups is not by military power, but by strengthening the power of moderate Muslims. The expected outcome of this approach is the process of moderation among Muslims.

Muslims in Indonesia are now also continuously strengthening their education system, and enhancing the modern curriculum of Madrasahs (Islamic schools), while restlessly improving the welfare of and justice system for the peoples. The origins of anger mostly result from ignorance, hunger, and injustice. Hence, we must not fail to address them in a comprehensive and effective manner.

Most of Muslims in Indonesia believe that Islam, democracy and modernity are solution for their social and economic problems that often bother social harmony and threaten national unity. And they are the true face of modern and transformed Indonesia today and in the future.

Tolerant Islam

Islam in Indonesia has a long tradition of being more tolerant than in the Middle East. As Islam began to spread in the Middle East and elsewhere, it often did so through violent conquests. In contrast, Islam came peacefully to this part of Southeast Asia via traders from India. Indonesians saw the new religion was more logical and therefore more culturally acceptable than the existing system of beliefs.

The way Muslims in Indonesia see Islam is like the way American Christian see Christianity. They follow the basic beliefs, but their lives do not revolve around religion in an ideological sense. That's why some Islamic parties never win absolutely in Indonesian politics. It proves that Indonesians are religious but not in an ideological term.

However, some fear that the rise of militant and fundamentalist Islam around the world is also having an impact in Indonesia. Islamic observance has turned more conservative in parts of the country, more women are wearing the veil, and Islamic political parties have gained strength: As Indonesia moves toward democracy, the radical Islamists have no place anymore in government.

As we noted, in 2002, a terrorist group bombed a nightclub on the predominantly Hindu island of Bali, killing 202 people, most of them tourists from Australia, Britain, and the U.S. Since then, the government's counterterrorism efforts have led to the capture of many Jemaah Islamiya operatives. While the group still poses a threat, it is believed that its abilities have been significantly degraded. Indonesian Government has been working hand in hand with the people to fight against Islamic extremism.

The Need for New Interpretation

From its name alone, Islam is a religion that clearly incorporates the meaning and aspirations of peace and the welfare of mankind. Yet it must be admitted that this pure and basic sense is often blurred, owing to various happenings in the history of Islam, which seem at a glance, not to reflect peace. Of the Prophet's first four successors to the leadership of his followers, i.e., those known as "the wise and clever successors", only Abu Bakar died naturally, while Umar, Utsman, an Ali did not die peacefully, but, for different reasons, were killed tragically.

At present the world stage is laid waste by violent conflicts, in which various religions are involved. In the Middle East, conflict involves both Islamic and non-Islamic people. In various other parts of the world, religious conflict also increases and spreads, both within and among faiths. In Northern Ireland, conflict within the Christian religion is between Protestants and Catholics. Conflict within Islam continues between Iran and Iraq. In addition, in the Middle East, especially in the coastal region of the Eastern Mediterranean, conflicts of a deeply religious hue, are currently raging; among Jews, Muslims and Christians; between Christians and Muslims, Christian against Christian, and Muslim against Muslim in Lebanon.

In South Asia, there is a series of religious conflicts between Hindus and Muslims, Hindus and Catholics, Hindus and Sikhs, particularly in the Punjab, Hindus and Buddhists in Eastern India, and the conflict between the Tamils and the Singhalese in Sri Lanka. The Southeast Asian region is also beset by religious conflict; in Myamar and Thailand, between Islam and Buddhism; in the Philippines, between Catholics and Muslims, and in Indonesia, within certain limits, there is still potential for religious conflicts, of which the explosions at some places are signs. Of course, religion is not the only factor. Political factors and the problem of the arms trade, both legal and illegal, also generate conflicts.

Religion and Peace

As a Muslim, I ask myself, "Is there peace in Muslim society?". Indeed, what has happened in the Islamic community today is what was feared in the Qur'an. Conflict arose amongst them from differences in interpretation and implementation of God's teaching.

It is ironic that disputes and conflict arose precisely after the revelation of truth and the proof to support that truth. However, the irony is probably only in the passing view. Because truth that is clear and supported by proof, in order to be able to function in a society, must

be further spelled out, interpreted, and specified. This is where the basis of disagreement lies, i.e. when differences in detail, interpretation and specification are accompanied by jealousy, giving rise to a spirit of competition among various groups of believers. In other words, conflicts arise after the strengthening of subjectivism and the implanting of self-interest.

Although God's Word was spoken about in the past, yet the lesson behind it is a call for mankind to draw an analogy with the present situation, especially as it can be historically proven that this kind of conflict and disagreement was experienced by Muslims. This is *i'tibar*, meaning an analogy which is a method of understanding the Holy Book, particularly the symbolism it contains. Thus the Qur'an narrative of the early people contains the warning of how men received the truth, yet then disputed amongst themselves "in the name of that truth". In other words, the message is that Muslims should not be like that.

This wider and deeper observation of disputes and conflict among people can be explained and brought back to the nature of man. Furthermore, it is possible that the threat to world peace can be brought back to the natural negative character of mankind, always in disagreement and in conflict.

Attempts to find a solution for the problem of the threat to peace, and to discover the form of the contribution of religion towards realizing world peace, actually constitute the ideal form for man. This is also probably utopian because it is human nature itself which cannot make peace. The Qur'an narrates the cosmic drama when God created Adam as a caliph on earth, amid protests from the angels, that man was bound to do damage in the world, and to spill much blood. God rejected the protests of the angels, and persisted in His decision to make man His guardian deputy on earth, relying on the ability of man to know his environment through his intellectual ability, which was to produce science.

However, the protest contained an important truth which is very relevant to the problem of the peace we want to achieve now. Thus in the Qur'an it is mentioned that human beings, although created as the best creatures, can change into the lowest creatures.

It is not easy to achieve peace, but peace can be realized by paying attention to three problems:

- To develop a strong sense of responsibility to humanity. As the earth becomes smaller and smaller, that responsibility must now be global in nature, not just national, and even less of a local character.
- To foster and develop the field of religious contact, that is, to educate the individual to be always good; and

- The third, relates to the problem of disarmament, particularly of the powerful states.

Then what can we do in connection with religious conflict, and religion as a source of conflict and dispute? According to my interpretation and understanding, the Qur'an in principle, teaches pluralism! In a pluralistic society, it is a fact that only God can claim the truth. One principle which is closely connected with pluralism is, for example, the principle: "There is no compulsion in religion". God has provided indeed determined, different paths for various groups of people in their efforts to seek and discover truth.

In addition, the above words are also directly linked with an injunction on expecting all people to follow the same way of life, and on forming a monolithic society. The fundamental impossibility of creating a monolithic society owing to the human talent for plurality is the principle which underlies the teaching of not justifying religious coercion, even less the enforcement of individual opinions or ordinary social concepts as ideologies.

As a way to God, religion, especially Islam, which teaches surrender to God, must be dynamically understood. It is this dynamic which probably constitutes the essential spirit of Islam. This dynamic is the logical consequence of the basic view, that each different time and place demands a different personification and materialization of the way to God. It is this dynamic which takes form in the doctrine of *ijtihad*, because *ijtihad* is the methodology available to mankind in its attempt to understand God's message. Nevertheless we must realize that, because each *ijtihad* is none other than man's attempt to understand truth, the product also continues to have human characteristics, subject to the quality of human relativity.

This dynamic of religious understanding is also reflected in the teaching that faith, or religious feeling alone is not obtained "once for all time" (i.e. is static), but rather is something which is subject to the laws of growth and change. It can increase or decrease, strengthen or weaken.

Concluding Remarks

I want to restate that in terms of number of adherents, religious practices and world views of Muslims in Indonesia, there is no significant change in the last ten years. Some minor changes happen to world views of young Muslim inspired by the success story of Islamic revolution in Middle East. However if we contextualize the phenomenon in Indonesian history, such radicalization is not really

new. They are still attracted by the obsession of establishing an Indonesia Islamic State.

This ideology is not well accepted due to the moderate nature of Islam in Indonesia. The moderate regardless of being commanded or not by the government will always be loyal to the Pancasila as the state ideology. What makes me optimistic to the future of Islam in Indonesia is that the majority of Muslims will be with the other religion adherents in whatever condition, and give no respect to those who violate other religious believers.

As other Indonesian Muslims, I believe that the Holy Book of Qur'an does not explicitly command Muslims to live in an Islam-based state. So let us struggle to live in harmony based the three pillars of togetherness: *to love each other, to help each other, and to forgive each other.*

Interreligious Dialogue Beyond Conflicts

Pacet, Java, Indonesia, August 11, 2011

Felix Körner, S.J.

We will proceed in three steps:

1. Where we are: realization, relation, reflection
2. Where we want to go: hopes, levels, themes
3. What it costs: clarity, justice, success

Each step will revisit the title “Interreligious dialogue beyond conflicts” and try to uncover a new dimension of it. What we might discover is this:

- a) Dialogue is about getting us beyond conflicts.
- b) Dialogue does not mean solving all conflicts.
- c) Dialogue is more than just conflict resolution.

Before this, however, we will have to make some preliminary remarks on interreligious dialogue.

1. UNDERSTANDING DIALOGUE

Philology

The word “dialogue” is a rather recent acquisition to Church vocabulary. Ecclesial texts first mention “dialogue” during the Second Vatican Council; but before it appears in one of its documents, we find it in a letter: the newly elected Paul VI mentions “dialogue” in his first encyclical in 1964, *Ecclesiam Suam*. The pontiff characterizes the Church of today in a triple way: It has to be the Church of deeper self-knowledge, renewal, and dialogue. Inspired by God’s dialogue with creation, the pope calls the Church to dialogue on all levels.

Church-world dialogue, interreligious dialogue, ecumenical dialogue, and intra-Church dialogue were explicitly mentioned. Although

Paul VI was clearly influenced by the French philosophers and their attitude of *dialogue*, the Latin version of the letter did not use the word “*dialogus*” but “*colloquium*”. This sounds as if the openness and honesty you need in order to enter into a real “dialogue” had ceded to a settled, but uncommitted talk. The choice of phrasing may, however, have had mere idiomatic reasons¹.

Gaudium et Spes will, a year later, be marked by the attitude of “dialogue” as its leitmotif; and it will use even in Latin “*dialogus*” without inhibition, interchanging it with “*colloquium*.” It even quotes Paul’s inaugural encyclical, as if “*dialogus*” was found there².

Terminology

Can we define what dialogue is? We should be careful. Defining our terms at the beginning is scholastic methodology. Rather than *terminological consistence* – a mathematical virtue – we should strive for the Biblical attitude of *creative faithfulness*, also in words. Faithfulness does precisely not say that we know already what the words we use mean, and we’ll stick to that. In the history of salvation there is promise in the words used, and therefore risk; think of “Messiah” or “Lord”³. Still, a preliminary designation of “dialogue” can help. *Dialogue is what happens if I have a view and become interested in someone who sees it differently.*

Epistemology

This designation leads to seven characteristics of a truly dialogical attitude.

1. My starting point is not a “position” in the sense that I have *decided* to believe this or that; speaking of a “view”, rather than a position, I claim to have reality contact;

¹ For Thomas Aquinas *dialogus/dyalogus* is the designation of a genre of literary works, especially Pope Gregory’ whereas for “conversation” he uses *colloquium*. *Coloquio* is also Ignatius of Loyola’s word for the exercitant’s encounter with Mary, Jesus and the Father toward the end of meditation or contemplation (*Spiritual Exercises*, § 45).

² *Gaudium et Spes*, § 40, note 81.

³ Peter, as opposed to Jesus, seems to start with a (“scholastically”) defined concept of “Messiah” and needs to see that it is not his definition but the life of Jesus that provides the “true” meaning of the word. *Κύριος/kurios* turns out to be a rendering of “Rabbi” (teacher), of “Lord” (for the Roman emperor), and of “Adonay” (JHWH).

2. But, I am also aware of the fact that what I claim is *only* a view of things; I accept the difference between view and reality; and the possibility of other views;
3. And now in fact, I come to see that there is really someone with another view;
4. I am not necessarily giving up my view, nor am I immediately reaffirming it, trying to convince the other;
5. I am, rather, interested in the fact that someone can have a different interpretation, possibly a different “view”, that is – experience, rather than illusion (*Wahn*);
6. I become interested in the person who holds it;
7. And I wonder whether his view is correct, or mine, or both; or none of them.

This brief epistemological reflection has shown us dialogue is not a timid self-annihilation, an expression of pathological insecurity, but a healthy minded realism, that includes, even when it comes to religion, the bold claim that in your belief you are in reality contact, and precisely therefore you can be wrong or incomplete with your view. It is not politeness that inclines you to changing your ideas; you change them if you have reached a new perception of reality.

Chronology

A contextualization of Catholic-Muslim relation should provide two frameworks. The *most recent events* should be briefly called to mind; then, in a more detailed and reflective manner, the development of Church attitudes in the last 50 years should be reviewed.

November 2004. The Aal al-Bayt Institute, supported by the Jordan Hashimite Royal family, launches two important documents, the so-called *Amman Message*⁴, an attempt at creating an intra-Muslim dialogue and at reminding Muslims and non-Muslims of the non violent mission Islam has. Simultaneously, the *Amman Interfaith Message* is pronounced. In it, King Abdullah calls for benevolence and dialogue between Judaism, Islam and Christianity and quotes the Biblical commandment of love of God and love of one’s neighbor.

Christmas 2005. Pope Benedict XVI publishes his first encyclical, *Deus caritas est*.

⁴ www.ammanmessage.com

March 2006. Pope Benedict puts his Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue (PCID) under the direction of the President of the Pontifical Council for Culture, Cardinal Paul Poupard, sending PCID's former director, Mons. Michael Fitzgerald, as nuncio to Cairo.

September 12, 2006. Pope Benedict delivers his Regensburg Lecture. Pointing out the centrality of *logos* (reason) for Christianity he contrasts this with Islam's violent and inhuman character. In quoting a statement by Emperor Manuel II Palaiologos (1391) and even in expressing reservation towards the wording, the pope's words were taken to be an insult to Islam.

October 12, 2006. 38 Muslims write an open letter to the Pope, expressing their dissent with the contents and tonality of the Regensburg lecture, asking for a new phase of dialogue.

November 28, 2006. Benedict XVI, in his speech in the Religious Directorate of Turkey, in Ankara quotes, approvingly, Pope Gregory VII's words to a Muslim leader in 1054: "We believe in one God, albeit in a different manner"⁵.

October 13, 2007. The *Common Word* signed by 138 Muslim is sent to the Pope and church leaders of the world.

November 2008. Taking up this initiative, the first seminar in the newly founded Catholic-Muslim Forum is held in Rome. Its title is: Love of God, love of neighbor: theological and spiritual foundations; human dignity and mutual respect.

November 2011 a second seminar in the Catholic-Muslim Forum is being planned. Possibly the subject will be: Reason, Faith, Human person.

Let us now review the last 50 years of interreligious attitudes in the Catholic Church. We can do so by marking out three phases, each one represented by a Pope. Paul VI, John Paul II, and Benedict XVI. A common view is that after years of dialogue, with Benedict we are back to dogmatics. Perhaps, however, a different reading is more accurate; an interpretation that sees Benedict's words, decisions and moves to be a coherent development of what has gone before. Three concepts will be introduced to characterize the three pontificates in terms of interreligious policy: realization, relation, and reflection.

⁵ *Patrologia Latina*, volume 148, column 451; www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedictxvi/speeches/2006/november/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20061128_pres-religious-affairs_en.html

2. WHERE WE ARE: REALIZATION, RELATION, REFLECTION

Paul VI: Realization

Throughout Church history, there have been interesting interreligious encounters. Christian theologians have been debating with Muslims since the beginning of Islam⁶. The underlying question, however, was either, how to refute Muslim belief, or how to establish its similarity with Christianity. Comparisons occurred, but difference had not been perceived as theologically relevant. The Council realized that discussing a non-Christian belief is productive for Christian theology. Three causes for this paradigm shift can be named: The dialogical attitude of Paul VI, the post-Vatican II conciliar spirit, and the urge many Catholics felt to return to the arena of people's existential questions, to make the Church again a factor in the shaping of human conscience, politics and society.

It was not, however, mere power calculation; it was, rather, the intuition that we have to listen to others in order to be truthful. The theological change was, then, that other religious views were discovered to be theologically valuable; that Catholic thought could learn from other Christian traditions, as it had always learned from philosophical innovations; and that it could be newly inspired by listening to the witness of Israel. From there, arose the intuition that Christian theology might also have a theological interest in other religions, especially in Islam.

In classical theological language, different sources of authoritative knowledge were listed as *loci* of theology⁷. At least in a wider sense, as a point of view for new discovery, we could say, interreligious encounter has come to be realized as a new *locus* of theology.

John Paul II: Relation

The genius of John Paul II manifested itself in his personal charism, the charm. He had suffered from different totalitarian regimes, Nazi Germany to begin with. His character was extrovert and creative, so

⁶ Cf. FELIX KÖRNER, *Kirche im Angesicht des Islam. Theologies des interreligiösen Zeugnisses*, Stuttgart 2008, chapter 3, and chapter 6, § A. And: "Bibliographie du dialogue islamo-chrétien", in: *Islamochristiana* 1 (1975), pp. 125-181; 2 (1976), pp. 187-249; 3 (1977), pp. 255-256; 4 (1978), pp. 245-267; 5 (1979), pp. 299-317; 6 (1980), pp. 259-299; cf. also MICHAEL PENN, "Syriac Sources for the Study of Early Christian-Muslim Relations", in: *Islamochristiana* 29 (2003), pp. 39-78.

⁷ MELCHIOR CANO, *De Locis theologicis* (Salamanca, 1562) lists ten: Scripture, oral tradition, the Catholic Church, the councils, the Roman Church, the Fathers, scholastic theologians, natural reason, philosophers, and history.

he always tried to bridge gaps and tensions. There was an intuitive – and in Poland not very common – liking for the Jews, a readiness to adopt thought from a culture other of his generation might have seen as mere enemy: his PhD was on Max Scheler! He also seemed to like theists: an obvious reaction to the atheisms he had experienced. A man of great gesture and a father figure, he became popular also in majority Muslim countries; more popular, one might say, than in the critical Occident. Young Muslims felt encouraged by him. His aura and his readiness to reconcile came across credibly; he successfully sowed enthusiasm. His message and attitude was, on many levels, inclusivist. For the *Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue*, redesigned during his pontificate out of Paul VI's *Secretariat for Non-Christians*, the "JP II" years very active and productive.

Benedict XVI: Reflection

In an attempt at reforming the Pontifical curia, Benedict subordinated his Council for Interreligious Dialogue to the Council for Culture. His Regensburg lecture (September 12, 2006) seemed to prove right what some had been predicting about the "German Shepherd": the end of successful, diplomatic interreligious bridge building – clear borders – truth, rather than love – uncompromising, not understanding.

We need to see, however, that Benedict was in fact going the next necessary step. The preparatory work done by his predecessors called for a new phase; and the step he is taking is not moving from friendship to conflict. He rather sees the opening of gates John Paul had achieved as an opportunity to now do something with the open gates. Benedict's pontificate is one of theology, of intellectual seriousness, and reflection. The Regensburg lecture must be understood in this context. Benedict apparently wanted provoke to new thought his academic colleagues, as he had often done with Lutheran fellow theologians. He was himself surprised and embarrassed to see that what he had provoked was, at first, not new thinking, but offense and violence.

In autumn 2008, however, a constructive Muslim suggestion was taken up in the Vatican, and now leaders and scholars of Catholic and Islamic background came together, precisely to reflect⁸. Since then, he has several times formulated that interreligious encounter is valuable to him. Especially elucidating is Benedict's London statement of September 17, 2010. He described interreligious relationship as a double

⁸ October 12, 2006: Open letter of 38 Muslims to the Pope; October 13, 2007: *Common Word* of 138 Muslims to Leaders of the churches; November 4-6, 2008: First Catholic-Muslim Forum.

movement: side by side and face to face⁹. That is to say, together with believers of other religions I can testify to those parts of my society that do not dare to ask the ultimate questions; and facing my fellow believers, I can share the richness of my own heritage. Benedict does, however, not speak of “interreligious dialogue”, we sometimes hear¹⁰. He really wrote once that, strictly speaking, interreligious dialogue is impossible¹¹. Why?

3. WHERE WE WANT TO GO: HOPES, LEVELS, THEMES

There is a fundamental difference between ecumenical and interreligious dialogue. All Christians want to witness the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as saving the world. The separation of Christianity is perceived differently by various Christians; but in the Spirit of Christ’s prayer, the Catholic Church feels the urge to promote dialogue with all Christians “*ut unum sint*”¹² as a visible unification of all Christians into the one, truly “catholic”, Church.

Such a catholic unity includes respect for the varieties of spiritualities, traditions, languages and cultures within Christianity. The Catholic intuition is that only such a unified – though not uniform – witness is credible. So we have a clear aim for ecumenical dialogue, and we have come to learn a lot in it¹³. How far is interreligious dialogue different from that? It is the relation we have with human beings who do not witness the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as saving the world¹⁴.

⁹ Cf. FELIX KÖRNER, “Eine neue Epoche. Die interreligiösen Beziehungen sind unter Benedikt XVI. Theologischer geworden”, in: *Herder Korrespondenz Spezial* 2-2010, Konflikt und Kooperation. Können die Religionen zusammenfinden?, pp. 21-24. Articles by the author quoted in this paper are accessible online: <http://www.sankt-georgen.de/lehrende/koerner.html>

¹⁰ An explicit approval of interreligious dialogue is in Benedict’s 2010 Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini*, § 117.

¹¹ In a letter to Marcello Pera which was published as preface to Pera’s book *Perché dobbiamo dirci Cristiani. Il liberalismo, l’Europa, l’etica*, Milano 2008. But Benedict was here expressing his agreement with Pera’s view that interreligious dialogue as public confrontation does not necessarily lead to finding the truth. Cf. FELIX KÖRNER, “Dialogunmöglich? Leitlinien für ein Glaubensgespräch mit Muslimen”, in: *CIBEDO-Beiträge* 2/2009, pp. 48-50.

¹² “That they may be one”. John 17:21.

¹³ WALTER CARDINAL KASPER, *Harvesting the Fruits. Basic Aspects of Christian Faith in Ecumenical Dialogue*, London 2009.

¹⁴ This seems a rather loose definition, speaking so generally of “relation”; but in fact official Church documents want to tag as interreligious dialogue even the most casual day-to-day encounter between a Christian and a non-Christian. See below, § 2.b(i).

Since with other Christians we (at least think we) are starting from the same impulse of desired Church unity, we can speak of the great dialogical aim of Christians uniting. With other religions, matters are different. We cannot have a common fundamental aim, because other religions have other basic purposes than the Church. It is the sacrament of Christ¹⁵, or, in the words of the oldest document of the New Testament, what we want is “your sanctification” (1 Thessalonians 4:3).

In order to show respect for this distinction of religious aims, some theologians, like Pope Benedict, hesitate to speak of interreligious dialogue altogether. We cannot agree in the fundamental articles of faith with non-Christians. There is, however, a Pontifical Council which bears that name, and Benedict himself praised interreligious dialogue explicitly in 2009¹⁶. Only the difference needs to be kept in mind that interreligious dialogue is not working for theological agreement with other religions.

What, then, can be our aims in interreligious dialogue? In a dialogue where our starting points are so fundamentally different, it is more adequate not to speak of aims. Such a dialogue cannot not be designed tactically. Human freedom makes a truly dialogical process unpredictable; aims may, here, change on the way. We should, therefore, rather speak of our motivations and of our hopes.

Hopes

Our hopes in interreligious dialogue are five. Each can all be termed “understanding”, but each time in a different sense.

1. We need to find agreement (“come to an understanding”) in practical questions that have to do with religious observance. For example in Germany, Muslims can bury their dead in particular areas now without the coffin, which was originally mandatory to protect ground-water.
2. In dialogue we come to understand why others see things the way they do. For example, they can understand the plain linen that is covering the corpse as a reminder of the imminence of the bodily resurrection; a similar clothing is worn by men during the pilgrimage to Mecca, thus anticipating death and final judgment.
3. In coming to discover the views of others, many Christians believe they come to understand their own religious intuitions, beliefs and practices better. For example, Muslims often show themselves

¹⁵ *Lumen Gentium*, § 1.

¹⁶ Address at the Hussein bin Talal Mosque, Amman, Jordan, 9 May 2009.

surprised at the existence of four canonical gospels; they think the Gospel is the text entrusted to the “prophet” Jesus. In discussing this view, Christians can grasp the logics of “witnessing”. God’s saving action is not only the message, but the life, death and resurrection of Christ. These are events of God’s salvation; they are controversial, and thus require testimony.

4. There is another hope in interreligious dialogue: the hope that my counterpart may understand Christ to be Savior of the whole world; the hope that my partner in dialogue may accept Christianity and ask for baptism. It is by no means embarrassing to mention this as a hope. It cannot be a strategic aim; but it should not be kept hidden, either. If dialogue is: becoming more interested in the other’s view, and if I have discovered Christ to be the Savior, I will also be seen as wanting to share this. This is not problematic, as long as three conditions are fulfilled:
 - a) you are not ashamed about your hope, but open;
 - b) you are not using any tricks or pressure;
 - c) you are not offended or less interested in the other, if one does not fulfill that hope.
5. In the fifth hope, with even with a person or a group that does not want to be baptized, I have a lot of themes for dialogue. I am interested in why they do not accept; and if my interest in their views is sincere, I might also feel tempted to change my own view and start seeing things the way my partner in dialogue does. In any case, I remain interested in the relationship with others in order to dialogue on other themes. The purpose of the Church to sanctify the world. To evangelize, as the post-conciliar word goes, is not restricted to baptizing people. Evangelization means to transform the face of the world in the sense of the Gospel. Those who do not want to become Christians can still be partners in the Church’s project to shape our societies of today. Priorities, objectives, visions for humanity, economic, cultural, social, humanitarian methods can still be shared. That is why the Church formulates and presents its Social Teaching. Non-Christians are often inspired by it, and have proven exemplary in its implementation.

Levels

Ecclesial documents have, since *Dialogue and Mission* (1984; §§ 28-35) and *Dialogue and Proclamation* (1991; § 42), often repeated a four level scheme of interreligious dialogue. Being “levels”, they are aspects of interreligious encounter as a whole, rather than separating different sorts of activities, but they claim to be a complete description; and more than only recounting what is happening – and providing a

language of categories for it – the list is also setting its accents: it is encouraging certain types of encounter by mentioning them. I will argue, however, that one important level has been overlooked.

- (i) *Everyday life is already mentioned as a level of dialogue*, though there may not be much “-logue”, much speaking, going on. But using the same minibus, working for the same company, attending the same school is highlighted as a moment of dialogue; highlighted, that is, as an occasion to show humanity, even respect and interest.
- (ii) *Common projects, humanitarian activity is the second level*. The experience of the Jesuit Refugee Service, for example, is that its work for a displaced people is more convincing, easily accepted, influential as an impulse for reconciliation, if members of different religions carry responsibility for the service together.
- (iii) *Mystical experience is pointed out as a third level*. Spiritual exchange beyond the borders of a religion is in fact daring and elucidating. Conspicuous events like the Assisi prayer event come to mind; there is an organization of inter-monastic dialogue crossing religious boundaries.
- (iv) *The last level mentioned in the documents is expert encounters*. Exchange between, say, Muslims and Christian thinkers has a long story both in is called today the Middle East and in places like Andalusia. Since 1986, professors from Ankara’s Muslim Divinity Faculty and the Gregorian, Rome, are paying exchange visits to each other; and high ranking delegations from the Catholic and Islamic world are meeting within processes such as “Catholic-Muslim Forum”. Today, many faculties, associations, even scholarly publications like *Encyclopaedia of the Qur’ān*, are opening spaces for academic encounter.
- (v) But as mentioned above, one might argue that one level is missing. Perhaps it has even been left out intentionally, because such dialogue can be embarrassing, create trouble. Those who live among Muslims will share this experience. As a lay person as well as a non-academic, you are easily being involved in discussions with Muslims. A typical question would be why Christians do not accept Muhammad as prophet although he was foretold by Jesus and although Muslims accept Jesus as prophet. This is likely to be the most common form of dialogue. Mentioning it, means also preparing Christians for such encounters. Rather than making them learn by heart quick and clever answers, we have to set our minds to a particular dynamic: witnessing to our faith, but not in front of an unbeliever but in conversation with somebody who believes, but believes something different.

Themes

If we bring together the various ends we have unraveled so far, i.e., space for reflection, hope of understanding, lay discussion, we can also see what needs to be asked now: What progress has been achieved through interreligious dialogue? What can be done in the future?

Jewish-Christian dialogue has been quite successful in the last decades. Three theological steps ahead should be pointed out:

A) *Covenant not revoked*

In the face of theologies of election that would like to see the Church substituting Israel, Pope John Paul II pointed out in 1980 in Mainz, Germany, that Israel *is* God's people of the covenant He has never revoked. Benedict is faithful to this¹⁷. Contemporary theology does not claim several covenants but sees that God's one covenant, as witnessed in the Bible, consists of a series of covenantal acts¹⁸.

B) *Torah not abolished*

In 1966, Klaus Berger, a now famous New Testament scholar, tried to defend in his doctoral thesis that Jesus' interpretation of the Jewish Law was not abolishing it. Berger's view was declared heretic then. Times have changed. By now, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is able to declare, that Jesus was not breaking with the Torah: "The Law of the Gospel fulfills the commandments of the Law. The Sermon on the Mount, far from abolishing or Devaluing the moral prescriptions of the Old Law, releases their hidden potential and has new demands arise from them: it reveals their entire divine and human truth" (§ 1968).

C) *Brotherhood not lived*

Benedict XVI also encourages contemporary exegetes to learn more from how our Jewish brothers, with whom we pray to the same Lord, deal with Scripture¹⁹. As opposed to Jewish-Christian Dialogue, stock-

¹⁷ E.g. in his address at the Roman Synagogue, January 2010.

¹⁸ NORBERT LOHFINK, "Ein Bund oder zwei Bünde in der Heiligen Schrift?", in: *L'interpretazione della Bibbia nella Chiesa. Atti del Simposio promosso dalla Congregazione per la Dottrina della Fede. Roma, settembre 1999*, Città del Vaticano 2001, pp. 272-297.

¹⁹ Talk at the Roman Synagogue, January 2010, § 5 and § 3. Cf. also: PHILIP A. CUNNINGHAM - JOSEPH SIEVERS - MARY BOYS (Eds.), *Christ Jesus and the Jewish People Today. New Explorations of Theological Interrelationships*, Rome 2011.

taking seems more disappointing when it comes to Muslim-Christian Dialogue. Here are several reasons for that.

- a) With Jews we share the Hebrew Bible. That is, Christians accept the scriptures of the “Old Testament” in the sense of “covenant”: The texts witness action, and the name “testament” says that it is as such accepted by the Church: God’s covenantal action is being verified there. Both Jews and Christians are, by starting from this book of books, making a unique historical claim. We say that God is becoming accessible through his own initiative, and this initiative happens in a particular place and time with a particular people; and thus, for all nations and the whole world. We share history as theological attitude, as credal focus and a confession to this series of events.
- b) There is another theological attitude which we share with Israel because of our acceptance of the Hebrew Bible as basic holy text. Within that history there was promise and disappointment, and faithfulness and development on this level of meaning. Instead of working with terminology, with static definitions, the historical character of the Bible shows us that God is faithful to what He says in a way often surprisingly different from what we expected. Example: How can we be the elected people, if we are lead into exile? Answer: Election is not protection, but the risky task of testimony. So, the concepts that were being used consistently dynamically proved to go in a direction different from the first understanding we had. Christian theological talk has this historical openness which is dynamic faithfulness rather than defined knowledge.

Two other reasons why Jewish-Christian dialogue is progressing theologically with unique efficacy become understandable only when we look at Islam.

- c) The point of dissent with Jews is whether Jesus is the Messiah. The Koran, and therefore Muslims today, speak of Jesus as *al-masīh*. Islam therefore says we accept Jesus as Messiah. Christians can answer that this is a confusion of words, since we mean by Messiah the one through whose life, death and resurrection the final era of God’s salvation has dawned. In dialogue with Jews, there is the reality that, with all difference in what we mean by it, both sides accept that our disagreement is about accepting Jesus as Messiah.
- d) With Islam, moreover, the situation is particular in another sense. A claimed revelation, the Koran, declares that the texts we consider to be Holy Scripture are mistaken. The unicity of Christ Jesus is said to be a product of distortion of what Jesus really

said (Sura 4:171; cf. 5:116), and Jesus' suffering and death are rejected (Sura 4:157).

- e) Muslim theology has, since its outset, had many questions, wordings, assumptions, and methods in common with Christian theology; but socio-political dimensions have their repercussions in theological encounters, too. Although there has always been an international and professional theological discourse in Islam, often exemplary for Christian thinkers, today's Muslims may start from an inferiority complex in the face of what can be seen as Western achievements. Even scholars of Muslim adherence can become unnecessarily apologetic when seeing occidental academic performance, e.g., in philosophical or historical research.

These features make interreligious dialogue difficult, and make Muslim-Christian theological exchange particularly delicate; but not impossible, nor useless, or fruitless. What makes encounter between Islamic and Christian experts especially interesting is that in it, we can discover the core tenets of Christianity in a new light. There are a series of fundamental implications of the Christian faith which will remain controversial with Islam. That is not disappointing; it is rather a consequence of their being fundamental. Fundamental convictions are so basic that it is difficult to change them; so much depends on them! And it is difficult to argue for or against them; the arguments you want to use may rest on these fundamental convictions. Since they are "fundamental", they are not easily seen, they are often implicit; and it is already an achievement to discover them.

One might wonder why there is no real progress in philosophy; human beings are still controversial about questions Plato and Aristotle were already disputing. That's precisely because of the fundamental character of those topics. You can with good reasons hold quite a contrary stance. When we return to interreligious dialogue with that in mind, we are not claiming that the fundamental convictions of Islam and Christianity are arbitrary and simply a matter of your taste and decision. I think we have very good reason to see things the way the Christian faith sees it. Still, we have to be realistic in accepting that many will not share it.

That is because the Christian faith is "costly", it costs something; you have to give up some cherished customs of interpreting the world. That is the *metanoia*, the "change of mind" into which the Gospel "newness" (Romans 6:7) calls us. That is the scandal, the difficult, sacrificial side of Jesus. You can show with good arguments that it is reasonable to trust in this, but you cannot argue someone into accepting it. The three fundamental, controversial implications of the

Christian faith as they can be discovered in dialogue with Islam are here suggested to be these²⁰:

1. God is risking his own divinity in history. God is binding himself to the people he elects and wants the success of his Kingdom to depend on our decisions.
2. We have a vocation we are too weak to fulfill. Our call, the fulfillment of humanity is “to love as I have loved you” (John 15:12). With only our effort and predisposition, it is impossible.
3. It is in the other that you come to yourself. The I-thou separations are constantly being challenged and overcome by Jesus (John 12:25, etc.); but self-giving love is no self destruction either. We are able to love because we can enter, in hopeful joy, into the story, persona, and to have communion with Christ: our life is sacramental.

The provisional result. We can now see why it was useful to distinguish different “hopes” in interreligious dialogue.

It is different to hope for “understanding” in practical questions, and to “hope” your partner in dialogue will discover Christ as savior. In practical questions, you can hope for agreement with people of other faith. In the fundamental convictions just uncovered, however, you do not hope for agreement with Muslims. They would in fact no longer be Muslims, if they agreed. Jews, however, can accept them. But there are other controversies in every interreligious encounter. With Israel it is controversial, as we have seen, whether Jesus is the Messiah.

We can now also see why it was useful to call our motivations “hopes”, rather than aims. The conversion of humanity to Christ cannot be a strategic task. It requires the freedom of a person to take the risk of trusting. Not everybody will take the cost to leave his security and trust in a God who hands himself over into a particular history. So we can strive for the fulfillment of this wish with all our existence, in prayer and testimony. We can hope for it; but we also understand that it is part of God’s history of salvation²¹ that not everybody will agree in the fundamental implication and in the explicit faith in Christ as savior.

We are reflecting on “interreligious dialogue beyond conflicts”. First we saw that interreligious dialogue is a way of solving conflicts: you can come to an understanding in practical questions because you see the other’s religious foundations. “Beyond conflicts” then meant: leading beyond conflicts. Interreligious dialogue is getting us beyond

²⁰ Cf. FELIX KÖRNER, *Kirche im Angesicht des Islam. Theologie des interreligiösen Zeugnisses*, Stuttgart 2008, pp. 328-330.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 340.

conflicts. Now, however, we are seeing something else, we find fundamental controversies and have to say: Interreligious dialogue beyond conflicts – the dialogue is pointing out irreconcilable views, it is not solving all conflicts!

This need not be a shocking result. It can in fact be liberating. It requires, however, some basic rethinking. Islam starts from the proposition that Christianity, Judaism and the Koran's message were intended to be the same. Therefore Muslims can be quite disappointed about a contribution in dialogue that holds: God has bound himself to a particular history; it is only through entering into that history, Christ's death and resurrection that a human being can have the justified knowledge of joyful freedom from sin and death. – Muslims normally presuppose that we Christians declare our theological agreement with them, as they do with us. Christians should, however, not go along here. Why hesitate when interreligious unity is being offered?

To declare that in fact Christianity and Islam mean the same is to prescind from the historical particularity of the history the Bible witnesses. Going beyond that history is a way of generalizing human community with God. Salvific knowledge and love of God thus has become part of our birth equipment. Everybody has it already, you simply have to look into nature, feel into your soul, and think. The view that union with God is natural, leads logically to the claim that theistic belief is rational; little understanding is left for those who do not feel called and graced to belief. Unbelief becomes irrational, or, even, evil. In Christian faith, we claim that our experience of communion with God is not based on our exercise of reflection or meditation. The Christian faith is, rather, the trusting movement of leaving yourself onto a person outside yourself, Christ, who has called you into his life.

Another problem with declarations of core agreement is that it is, of course, the Koran which Muslims want to provide as criterion and explanation of the terms of agreement. Here is an example. Abraham was already a believer; but a believer in the Koranic sense (Sura 3:67), not, however, one who trusted in God's particular election of a people. The Koranic Abraham was a believer just like Muhammad. The defining instance is now the Koran²².

Muslim suggestions of interreligious agreement often motivate their efforts by saying a national and even the international unity of humanity can better (or, only) be guaranteed, if we are in religious agreement.

²² Even unbelief proves to have salvific consequences in the whole: "*Kata men to euangelion echthroi di' humas / κατὰ μὲν τὸ εὐαγγέλιον ἐχθροὶ δι' ὑμᾶς* – Concerning the Gospel, they are enemies: for your sake" (Romans 11:28).

That is a dangerous view. We will, rather, have to construct our societies and the future of this world with people whom we accept to be different. We need to shape political systems and societal attitudes in a way that allows for deviation; that respects otherness; that enjoys dissent which is open to inspiration from a variety of conflicting sources. Otherwise a human union that declares to be unified in its existential stances will always look for the evil disturber that is to be held guilty of the failure of our beautiful project of oneness. This dissenter may be called the Jew or the atheist, the gay or the missionary. Religious freedom thus proves to be an excellent test case for whether societal structures are really human, that is, allowing for difference. States must be pluralistic; that includes also allowing for individual believers to be quite exclusivist in their views of salvation.

The project of declaring unity can create a hype of emotion; it is therefore often disappointing when, of all people, the Christians opt out. We have, however, to de-emotionalize dialogue processes. A less enthusing, but in fact more respectful motto than “Our beliefs are the same”, can be the one suggested by the author at the end of the first seminar in the Catholic-Muslim Forum: *We can be friends in difference*. Within that framework of respected difference and interest in that difference, theological dialogue gains new momentum. The following subjects that are, one might argue, on the agenda. Each of them is huge and most of them are traditional; but in dialogue with Muslim thinkers these theological themes receive new insight, if we do not only find the common denominator but try to see the different accents each religion is making.

Confession

The character of language Christians use in theology is different from Muslim ways to express themselves theologically. The biblical word for the Christian linguistic relation with God is *homologia*, that is, “confession”.

- a) We are referring to particular historical events that we profess in gratitude;
- b) we are confessing our own imperfection, including our own linguistic inadequacy – and therefore often use provocative formula; because we want;
- c) in confession, to enter into the new reality, new creation – confession has its original context in handing ourselves over into the reality that is Christ: in baptism. Muslim religious language, from the Koran onwards, is more terminological (cf., e.g. Sura 10:68).

God

The question is so basic that it almost sounds brutal: Looking at Islam, do we have the same God? Official Church documents are in a careful and beautiful way affirming this. *Lumen Gentium* (1964): “*Nobiscum Deum adorant unicum misericordem* – along with us adore the one and merciful God” (§ 16); and *Nostra Aetate* (1965, § 3) “*qui unicum Deum adorant* – They adore the one God”. It is good that the texts do not say “have the one God”. but “adore”. God should not be set before us. We can only try to set ourselves before him. Otherwise we are dealing with him as if he was an object at our disposal. The Christian faith, because of the Trinitarian confession, stresses that even the human ability to “adore”, to live in correspondence to God, is God’s own reality. The Spirit – the relationship that creation can have towards God – is itself God. So for the Christian faith, God is not only the aim of our prayer; but prayer itself is, so to speak, “God happening”. Christian prayer is living Trinity.

Prayer

Can Muslims and Christians pray together? A Christian view of life tries to take account of human weakness. We cannot put ourselves into the right relationship with God. It is God’s particular activity in election and sanctification that gives us the confidence to say we are in communion with Him. The election of the Jewish people has been opened for all humanity in Christ. It is only in accepting his paschal mystery – his death and resurrection – that we have the justified trust that our prayer is truly communion with God. It is a gift of God’s grace – through the history, person and body of Christ – that we can live in God, that is, live a life of adoration. In our public testimony, we always have to show our dependence on God’s particular acting. Therefore, it would be obscuring our witness to God’s elective grace if, e.g., in an assembly event, Christians recited a prayer text simultaneously with Muslims.

Prophet

Can Christians acknowledge that Muhammad was a prophet? In a theological sense, “prophet” means more than “someone who claims to have a divine mission”. For the Christian faith, rather, a prophet is a person who, with a new message, is preparing people for the encounter with Christ. Preparing people for the encounter with Christ is, generally, not what the Koran is doing. In so far, it would be a lack of honesty if Christians declared Muhammad to be a prophet; and they would, thus, also approve wholesale of the message he delivered.

State

Is it possible, for someone who is trying to take the Koran seriously, to approve of state secularism, i.e., structural separation between official politics and Islam? The basic texts and the early history of Islam do not seem to favor such a model. There are, however, serious new approaches in Muslim reflection to argue with the fundamental Islamic texts for a pluralistic correlation of state and religion. For example, Muslims can see the basic Koranic impulse to be a call to conversion; and real conversion presupposes real freedom (Muḥammad Ṭālibī).

Rationality

Sometimes we hear the claim that Christianity is more rational than Islam, that the Bible is closer to human reason than the Koran. That would be difficult to sustain. The Koran is rational in three senses: it appeals again and again to reflection and observation (e.g., Sura 3:13; with a suggestive “perhaps”, e.g., 59:21), it is distinct in its theological terminology (e.g. God *lam yalid wa-lam yūlad* has not begotten and is not begotten – which can be taken as opposing the confusing Christological claims the Church makes, all the way to θεοτόκος/theotokos “bearer of God”)²³, and the Koran presupposes that people already know what is good (the good is *marūf*, “known”, e.g., 3:104). Islam holds itself to be the religion of nature (*fiṭra*)²⁴.

Concerning rationality, Christianity is in a different situation. It claims that our natural reason still has to be purified. Only through the grace of acknowledging the history of salvation human beings come to see the truth and take part in it consciously. What they discover about the world, about themselves, about God, in this “enlightenment by Christ”, can then, however, be shown to be truly rational; not in the sense of “deducible from principles everyone has anyway” but as “in accordance with all being”. Such new insights of newness would be: personality as becoming-by-self-giving (faithful monogamy, celibacy, incarnation). After the surprise, Christian thought can attempt to come back to rational human concepts and try a new type of philosophy. It is not irrational; but it is not deducible, either.

Dialogue beyond conflicts – even in questions where we will not reach a common view, dialogue is a vital endeavor. It is the place of

²³ In his Regensburg lecture of September 12, 2006, Benedict XVI seemed to share, if not its form, the contents of Emperor Manuel Palaiologos’ claim that λόγος, rationality, is a Christian domain over against Islam.

²⁴ Cf. the famous *ḥadīth* in the collection of Buḥārī 23,42. All human beings are born Muslim.

mutual learning, enrichment and, possibly, influence. It helps us to see, formulate, evolve our own views; and it is the preparation, exercise, and backup of living conditions in which plurality is possible.

4. WHAT IT COSTS: CLARITY, JUSTICE, SUCCESS

“Into the deep!” is Jesus’ mission to Peter (Luke 5:4). It is an excellent turning word for people who have started seeing the challenge of interreligious dialogue. Peter and his partners²⁵ have been trying to catch fish all night. They are tired now, cleaning their nets, frustrated because all their effort resulted in catching waste. Simon puts his boat at Jesus’ disposal for teaching the crowd from a short distance within the shallow waters of Lake Gennesaret. This is an acceptable, even comfortable situation for Simon; but suddenly the tone changes. Jesus has a personal mission for Simon. He wants him to set out into the deep. Simon has nothing but his fatigue, and a surprising, authoritarian command; an unlikely “word” (5:5).

Every Christian has a personal mission into a task that is beyond his or her own capacity. Transcending calculable efficacy – that is the point. In interreligious dialogue it is precisely this dynamic that we are experiencing. If we take it seriously, it is risky, it is a sacrifice. We are letting go of three securities.

Clarity

There is a fascination, even joy, in following clear argumentations all the way to the convincing conclusion; but the story of Jesus is disappointingly different. As Christians, we are constantly challenged to get beyond our cherished ways of securing ourselves; we are called to reconsider everything. Just think of the priest holding up what one might say is a piece of bread, proclaiming: “Behold the lamb of God!”. It is a call to see what you see in reality in a new way. Interreligious dialogue is a manifestation of this dynamic of risking newness. You cannot know what will be happening. If you are able to predict the results in the other, as well as yourself, it is not a dialogue. If you are not able to see that you might be wrong, and that you may have understood the other wrongly, or your own faith, you are not daring to be in reality contact. Simon is challenged to risk the deep waters; he thinks he knows them but he is able to prescind of his judgment.

²⁵ Both for the *metochoi* and the *koinōnoi* in Luke’s narrative the Vulgate has: *socii*.

He trusts the word of Jesus. There was not even an explicit promise in Jesus' sending. He only said: "Let down your nets for a catch". Simon may have heard and seen some of Jesus' convincingness before. Now he simply trusts.

In our way of doing interreligious dialogue, a basic attitude needs to be: trusting. We are called to trust on four levels.

- a) We need to create an *atmosphere* of confidence and, if necessary, confidentiality, in which honesty is possible, in which we can mention doubts, in which we can express experience in an unprotected way, and in which our partners can be heard as persons uttering what they truly feel, see, fear and hope.
- b) We need to be more and more aware of the *status* of our semantic, ethical, theological contributions in an interreligious dialogue. They are tried on historical experience and many good arguments; but that does precisely not mean that we can speak about them boldly. We need to see that our position is weak; we need to acknowledge the investment, the hope, the trust that is involved in saying "Christ is Lord" (Philippians 2:11), or even: Jesus is God (cf. John 20:28). Only at the end of history, that will be clear. So we need to leave space and understanding for views different from the Christian faith.
- c) Where a dialogue dares to go beyond the personal sharing, trying to express in a representative way what "my religion means, is up to", a twofold *check* can be trust building: Can what is being said in an official way during a dialogue meeting be made public and thus be endorsed also by the representatives' community of believers? Was it possible also to mention the difficult, dark sides of that religion and reflect on their meaning for today, e.g., harsh verses from the foundational texts or past aggression?
- d) Our language will never be able to clarify everything. Some will always say they do not understand. We need to rephrase again and again, learn from misunderstandings and questions; but we should not strive for a formalized language. Rather, Christians can very well retrieve the old formula and trust in the *sacramental* character of our confession. A word like "I am the way and the truth and the life" (John 14:6) is not evident to everybody; it will always require a certain readiness to accept it. This readiness is a gift. But we can also trust that, if we leave demagogic and rhetoric tricks aside, the Christian witness can exert an attraction on human beings.

Justice

Simon wants Jesus to go away, once he sees that he himself, Simon Peter, is about to become part of a truly new story. Simon has, maybe only now, become aware of his sinfulness. He seems to foresee that he will, if involved in Jesus' mission, make terrible mistakes. Jesus is not accepting sin as an excuse. Just as he can turn a night's failure into a great catch, so he can make a sinful story into part of his own witness. Simon Peter will not be turned into unfailing perfection. He will prove to be a betrayer (Luke 22:58, etc.); but that will not hinder salvation. His betrayal will, rather, become meaningful elements in the history of salvation. Dialogue is more than conflict resolution. We will not solve all problems; but within dialogue, still, some healing can happen. Especially on our own side, if we let go of our fantasies of power and perfection, of our activist and interventionist tendencies.

A genuine dialogue that is sacrificing the idea of justice may have these characteristics:

- a) We can admit that the Church has a history of sins and that we ourselves are over-challenged by the task to present the Christian faith justly. An honestly self-critical attitude is normally quite liberating.
- b) But dialogue can be painful. I am easily insulted by what others say. There is no recipe against wounds or indeed for the cure of such pains; but sometimes there is a possibility to mention my own suffering without using that experience in a self victimizing or otherwise strategic way.
- c) To see that I am not the justice side of a dialogue helps me to see how much dedication and courage, beauty and love there is in the lived faith of other people; Muslims can be heroic in their surrender to God. I must be careful, however, not to idealize the others but rather afford the sense of humor that is needed to deal with other human beings in a human way.
- d) Our attention is also drawn to the fact that in meeting people of other faith, by insecurity and especially in the face of unforeseen events I myself may make mistakes, exaggerate, even lie. Once we realize it, we hope to be able to speak about it, try to explain how it happened.
- e) We should not overestimate the efficacy of interreligious dialogue. We are not creating world peace through a dialogical strategy²⁶.

²⁶ Cf. FELIX KÖRNER, "Einigung jenseits der Religionsgrenzen? Eine Problematisierung von Weltethos- und Naturrechts-Programmen", in: *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft* 94 (2010), pp. 90-105.

It is more realistic, and even more helpful, to accept that we cannot build world peace but rather try to humbly testify, as Christians, to the fact that every human being has an inclination towards selfishness. Accepting that and still keeping up the dialogues and collaborations is already very much.

Success

Simon's great draught is no sunshine story. His nets tear. He needs help from other people. Their boats almost sink. Simon has to discover and admit his own incapacity; and even the new job he is getting is not really beautiful: "Catching men"²⁷. Again, there is a lot of trusting required that this is really good for humanity, to bring them into a net like fish. A surprising insight is to be gained from this. If we are entering into a dialogue that is inspired by the Gospel, insight is to be gained from this. If we are entering into a dialogue that is inspired by the Gospel, our action will not be crowned by success; rather:

- The quality standard of our action is whether it is done in communion with Christ. Our decisions and expectations underlie the criterion whether they unite us more with Christ. His life was not a success story. It was, rather, *krisis*, and only in Christ's resurrection there is real victory. So, what we need to learn is to desire to follow his – often unexpected – command; we need to set out on our missions in the subtle, mild style that is his own, marked by joy, inner freedom, humility, obedience and trust rather than by efficiency, productivity, heroism and admiration.
- Not thinking in terms of success is no excuse for working only with half concentration, or with an inner reservation; and we should not try to avoid evaluation of our work. It is, however, working with more involvement, if I accept that my own primary measurement of what is a great work may not be Christ's! So discernment, constant examination of our motivations and methods, and a prayer life are called for; that is, moments in our daily lives that do not only support what we have been doing so far, but that can also put them into question and transform them.
- Missions are not to be accomplished. "Mission accomplished" is, rather, a military expression. A real mission of Christ will always

²⁷ The verb from which the participle ζωγράφων is formed, "someone who is catching alive, taking prisoner" only appears one other time in the New Testament: 2 Timothy 2:26, where it is Satan's action!

be transformed during the process of its fulfillment. For Christians, it remains important to see that I am not the principle agent in history. It is God's history. He will make a good story out of it all; but often very different from what I thought it should have been. Fundamental indications of whether it is truly his voice that is sending me out into the deep are: am I remaining in communion with Christ? With others? And also with the Church?

We have tried to explore what dialogue beyond conflicts can be. Interreligious dialogue can get us beyond the conflicts of every day questions; but it does not solve all tensions. Some conflicts will remain. Dialogue is, rather, more than a strategy of conflict resolution. It is the readiness to venture into unknown depths out of communion with Christ and in the hope to get deeper into this very communion.

Interfaith Dialogue Beyond Conflicts

A Muslim Point of View

Siti Musdah Mulia¹

Introduction

Indonesia is the largest Muslim country in the world and demographically is the fourth most populous country after China, India and the United States, with 224 million people inhabiting an archipelago of 17,112 islands. Currently, more than 200 million Muslims live in Indonesia. They constitute 84 percent of the country's total population and 13 percent of all Muslims worldwide. However, despite the predominance of one single religion, Indonesia is essentially a multicultural society. Spread throughout the archipelago are more than 214 ethnic groups speaking distinct local languages. Among the 35 million Indonesians who are not Muslim. Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism as well as various local indigenous religions are commonly practiced.

Indonesia protects all believers of religions as stated in its Constitution 1945. Such condition came up because the founding fathers of Indonesia – they were prominent Muslims and Christians – did not choose religion as the foundation of the state. Rather, they chose *Pancasila* as state philosophical foundation and at the same time as the guideline in establishing the state's political power. Certainly, such a choice was not made without reason nor was an easy thing to do.

The historical record has displayed and born witness to the fact that the debate of Indonesian founding fathers had torn the group into two severely opposing poles: the nationalists and the Islamists. It was aggravatingly bitter and tough. The former advocated *Pancasila* (adherence to a constitution and statement of national ideals which will be detailed later); the latter wanted Indonesia to be based on the Islamic Ideology. Such heated debate occurred in meetings prior to or in the wake of the Independence Proclamation, especially in the sessions held in the Parliament in the 1945.

¹ Chairperson of ICRP (Indonesian Conference on Religion for Peace). See: www.muhammadmuslimah.com

Historical background of Islam and Christianity

Islam and Christianity are not the native religion of Indonesian people. In fact, both religions came from outside Indonesia. Islam is always understood as Arabic religion or East religion; meanwhile Christianity is considered as European religion or Western religion. This misuse understanding brings to prejudice.

Islam came to Indonesia in the 13th century and was spread by traders and preachers who disseminated Islamic teachings throughout the Indonesian archipelago. The key to the success of Islamic propagation in the archipelago was not conquest. That is a fact. Rather, it was the ability of Islamic preachers to adopt a cultural approach to the local traditions, beliefs and wisdom which had been dominated by Hinduism and Buddhism prior to the coming of Islam.

Instead of forcing *sharia* (Islamic law) on the community, the preachers of Islam who became well known as nine saints (especially in Java), developed a cultural Islamic approach by accommodating certain aspects of local traditions, beliefs and wisdom. As a result, there was a process of indigenization of Islam in Indonesia. Throughout the history of Indonesia, Muslims were able to develop mutual respect, understanding and tolerance of others. It is obvious that the development of Islam in Indonesia is very different compared to that of Islam in the Middle East.

Meanwhile, Christianity came to Indonesia in the 16th century with colonialism, especially, Dutch colonialism and Portuguese colonialism. The population of Christianity in Indonesia now is approximately 24 million people. The close association of Christianity with Western imperialism and colonialism has made many Muslims always consider Christians as colonialism.

In fact, despite the association of Christianity with colonialism, Indonesians Christians tend to be very nationalistic. Most Indonesians Christians enthusiastically joined in the struggle for independence. It is very important to note that every general election, the Catholic Council of Bishops and the Indonesian National Council of Churches have jointly issued a political statement.

Often, joint statements such as these begin by praising God for the Indonesian nation-state and thanking God for accompanying the Indonesian people in their struggle to realize the ideals of 1945 constitution of Indonesia; namely national sovereignty, justice, prosperity and peace. The statement will then usually state that all Indonesian Christians are called by God to participate in the national elections to choose leaders who are committed to *Pancasila*, the constitution and the national ideals.

Our task as lovers of peace is to help people realize that Islam and Christianity are two religions which carry the universal message of peace, freedom and salvation. Both are present in society, interacting with people all over the world, conveying a new morality for social transformation. Islam and Christianity are a moral force because of their transcendent and humanistic character. Islam and Christianity not only present beliefs in a vertical aspect (between humanity and God), but also carry teachings which contain horizontal aspects (among human beings). So, both religions respect humanity.

How to understand Islam in Indonesia?

While many people commonly speak of Islam and Muslims in all-encompassing terms, there are many interpretations of Islam and many varieties of Muslims. Muslims come from diverse nationalities, ethnic and tribal groups, and cultures, speak many languages and practice distinct customs. The majority of the world's Muslims live in Asia, particularly in Indonesia, not the Arab world. Only about one in five of the world's Muslims are Arabs. The largest Muslim communities are in Asia, including Indonesia. And millions of Muslims live in the US and Europe, where they represent the second or third largest religion in many of these countries.

Because of globalization and emigration, today the major cities where Muslims live are not only exotic-sounding places such as Cairo, Damascus, Baghdad, and Mecca but also London, Paris, New York and Milan. Religiously, culturally, economically, and politically, there are multiple images and realities of Islam and of Muslims².

Muslim women's dress, educational, professional opportunities and participation in society vary significantly, too. Women in some Muslim societies cannot drive cars, and are sexually segregated, but in many other parts of the Muslim world, such as Indonesia, they can drive cars, ride motorcycles, and even fly planes. Some Muslim women are required by law to cover fully in public, while others are not. A growing number of women are choosing to cover their heads, while others do not.

In Indonesia, Muslim women make up the majority of university students. Indonesian Muslims are convinced that gender equality and women empowerment are consistent with Islamic values³. In other parts of the world, Muslim women lag behind men in matters such as

² JOHN L. ESPOSITO - DALIA MOGAHED, *Who Speaks for Islam?*, Gallup Press, New York 2007, p. 2.

³ MUSDAH MULIA, *Muslimah Sejati*, Nuansa Cendekia, Bandung 2011, pp. 21-57. See also MUSDAH MULIA, *Muslimah Reformis*, Mizan, Bandung 2004, pp. 273-291.

basic literacy. In Indonesia, Muslim women serve in government and parliaments, and even have headed government to be a president, while in other Muslim countries women still struggling for the right to vote and hold office.

The religious commitment of the founding fathers

As stated, Indonesia is a unique case; despite the fact that the majority of Indonesians are Muslims, Indonesia is not an Islamic state. Indonesia's state ideology is not Islam, but is based on *Pancasila*, known as the "Five Principles": belief in God, a just and civilized humanism, the unity of Indonesia, people's power, and social justice. These five principles are compatible with the universal values of human rights; they are also conducive to building peace within the community.

The choice of Pancasila as the philosophical foundation on which the nation and state are based, witnesses the victory of nationalistic, but moderate Muslims and Christians in Indonesia. This fact is also seen in key figures in the Muslim and Christian communities who have taken into account the importance of maintaining pluralistic and democratic value in shared life as nation in Indonesia.

This fact of pluralism will always be manifested and may not be negated in the life of the state and nation. Also, the active roles played by both Christian and Muslim leading figures, especially those of the founding fathers in embodying peaceful, tranquil, inclusive, and pluralistic respecting Indonesia will always be kept in mind and disseminated. These two ideas are of considerable usefulness and can serve as the inspiration-generator for the efforts to foster peace, justice, and humanity in Indonesia.

***Pancasila* as the common ground in overcoming prejudice**

The founding fathers prepared the Indonesian constitution based on *Pancasila*. This constitution has been amended four times, yet the regulation concerning religion as stipulated in Article 29 of the 1945 Constitution has remained the same. The article holds these important concepts:

1. The state is based on the Belief in One Supreme God;
2. The State guarantees the freedom of each of its citizen to embrace their respective religion and to perform religious duties in accordance with their respective religion and belief.

The provision of the article expressly indicates that Indonesia state comprehensively guarantees the religious freedom of its citizens.

What is worth underlining here is that both eminent leaders of Indonesian Christians and Muslims hold forth an inclusive, moderate, and tolerant disposition. They believe in the importance of maintaining harmonious togetherness as a nation; the significance of upholding human dignity and esteem regardless differences of religion; and the importance of supporting basic human rights, especially those of religious freedom for all inhabitants, including minority and vulnerable groups.

The endeavors made by both the Christian and Muslim communities to establish strong and solid civil society by upholding democracy, reinforcing human rights and promoting justice (including gender justice), have become more apparent. The strong indication towards this tendency was made clear by the advent of a number of legislations and public policies, such as Act Number 39 of 1999 on Human Rights. As far as religious life is concerned, this Act (in Article 22) lays down the following:

1. Every individual has a free choice for embracing his or her own religion and belief and for performing his or her duties in compliance with the religion or belief adhered to.
2. The state guarantees followers of any religion or belief with freedom to observe and perform religious duties in accordance with his or her religion or belief.

In addition, the commitment upheld by Indonesia has become stronger by the birth of Act Number 12 in 2005 on the Ratification of International Covenants concerning civil-political rights stipulated therein the assertion of freedom of advocating any belief.

The problem of Law enforcement

At the level of policy and legislation, the guarantee granted by the state for freedom of advocating any belief in Indonesia is sufficiently adequate. The problem lies in the practical level of law enforcement. Law enforcement on all policies is, to a considerable extent, influenced by the socio-political situation and condition of the government within a given period of time. Should the central government adopt strong and firm measures in the application of laws, then the implementation on all public policies will go as desired. On the other hand, if the central government adopts a weak and inconsistent manner, the implementation of various laws will meet with barriers and handicaps.

In addition, other matters in Indonesia which have often hampered the enforcement of democracy, fulfilment of human rights, and promotion of peace and justice have been related to the current economic

and political gaps. The failure of the government in providing for social welfare and improving the intellectual life of the nation is the reason for certain Islamist groups resorting to destructive acts of vandalism. The community's desperate poverty and ignorance have often been exploited by certain groups for the pursuit of their own political and economic interests. That is terrible.

It is this unfortunate condition that is alleged to have given birth to radical Muslim groups. The advent of radical Muslims is much influenced by a wide variety of factors; among others, by the failure of the government to advance the welfare of the society, especially in the development of public services, such as education and health. In the mind of this radical group, the best and most appropriate solution to solve the prevailing problem is to bring an Islamic state into reality. They consider establishing an Islamic state as the only and most appropriate solution, which they believe will bring the nation towards a better situation.

A number of conflicts related to religion and acts of violence in Indonesia are, in essence, not theological in nature. Rather, they are economic and political in character. To put it more bluntly, those conflicts are the reflection of widespread discontent and negative reactions demonstrated by members of a lower strata of society towards the social division and economic-political marginalization looming large ahead of them. From a religious perspective, this condition is right. Why? Are not the biggest enemies of religion injustice exemplified in the form of poverty, ignorance, and narrow mindedness?

All religious traditions in one way or another speak to the reality of having an aim of providing solutions to various humanitarian problems. Those seen as religious foes and enemies are often thought to be expendable so as not to bring about disasters of greater magnitude and multitude in the life of society. Poverty and ignorance have made it easier to bring the less fortunate and underprivileged members of society away from religion. A community's poverty and ignorance incline its people to be easy prey for certain groups who will take advantage of them. Religious communities are often divided and exploited in such a way that they may end up fighting with one another. Thus, inter-religious conflicts will arise accordingly.

The role of Islamic and Christian organizations in overcoming prejudice

Every religion, no matter which it is, has four dimensions: spiritual, ritual, social, and humanist. Concerning the first dimension, spirituality is the relationship between an individual and God. Spirituality is also very private and cannot be interfered with by others. The ritual

dimension usually has two aspects. First, it is concerned with the relationship between the individual and God, and secondly, it is to develop a refined personality through noble acts. So there are worldly and spiritual elements. Regarding the social dimension, every religion consists of the same subject matter, but differs in the strategy and form used in promoting this subject matter.

All religions desire a peaceful, safe, prosperous, and equitable society. It is only the strategy to achieve this prosperity which is different. So between spirituality and rituals, a healthy and synergetic social element must be forged. This is like a pyramid structure. If healthy and synergetic social relations are not established, what is left is like a pyramid turned on its head. All religions are similar with regard to the human issues such as peace, justice, honesty, compassion, and other key values.

An interesting phenomenon from both Christian and Muslim religious communities in Indonesia is the presence of progressive or reformist groups. The groups come from the Islamic and Christian organisations, such as PGI (the Indonesian National Council of Churches), KWI (the Catholic Council of Bishops), NU and Muhammadiyah (the two big Islamic organisations in Indonesia). Besides that, there are many religious Muslim and Christian NGOs which voice the importance of peace, democracy, and human rights on behalf of religion of Churches), KWI (the Catholic Council of Bishops), NU and Muhammadiyah (the two big Islamic organisations in Indonesia). Besides that, there are many religious Muslim and Christian NGO's, which advocate on the importance of peace, democracy, and human rights on behalf of religious and humanistic values.

The most prestigious thing progressive Muslims and Christians have done is an effort to reinterpret religious teachings, despite the fact that the attempts of these groups have often received much opposition and resistance from radical groups or the groups maintaining a conservative religious mindset that very often make no accommodation to the reality of plurality and modernity in Indonesia.

In many cases, ICRP, an association of religious leaders of all religions and beliefs in Indonesia, which is actively involved in promoting religion for peace, demands that the government eliminate all regulations and public policies which are discriminatory against minority groups and cause ignorance of the civil rights of the citizen. Christian and Muslim prominent figures in ICRP always promote observance of civil rights for all citizens and observance of human rights, without taking account of religion, ethnicity, nationality or gender differences.

The endeavour to promote peace in the perspective of gender equality is put as the priority to be carried out by Indonesian Muslim and Christian women. They are, amongst others, associated in Islamic

Women's organisations and NGOs, such as Fatayat NU, Muslimat NU, Mitra Perempuan, Perempuan PGI, Rahima, Puan Amal Hayati and Nasyiatul Aisyiyah. These organisations actively carry out training and advocacy for people, especially women. These institutions also train their cadres to develop women activists and thinkers who are progressive, inclusive and highlighted. There are also numerous Christian and Muslim women activists and intellectuals who are actively voicing democracy and gender equality in the bureaucratic state institutions and parliaments.

Promoting interfaith dialogue: developing culture of peace

In my experience, promoting interfaith dialogue must begin from the principle of acceptance of others. For me, this principle of acceptance of others is very important in promoting interfaith dialogue and must be instilled in society regardless of religion, ethnicity and race. Because of that, several steps need to be taken, among others:

- *First*, to reinterpret the religious teachings which are incompatible with the principles of humanity. Worship is no longer understood as only to praise God, but also as having a profound concern for humanity's problems. Here, when possible, religion is seen as a locomotive to free human beings from tyranny and all forms of discrimination, exploitation and oppression.
- *Second*, to increase a moderate religious understanding. The moderate groups in every religion must disseminate a "humanist outlook". It is done in order to give a different perspective on religion which facilitates tolerance and dialogue.

The forms of dialogue show not only the variety of content and the scope of the dialogues but also the quality. Besides this, the participants involved in the dialogues often exhibit different views to the goals of the dialogues. Those involved in dialogues about social issues, for example, have certainly not yet been ready to enter into a spiritual dialogue.

Therefore, interfaith dialogues are an attempt to overcome all forms of prejudice in religious society. Dialogue participants believe that up to a certain point, faith can be discussed by human beings, among human beings and communicated by language. In short, faith is dialogical. Faith is a dialogue first between God and human beings, and second among human beings.

In this context, I do believe that interfaith dialogue is not only possible, but also necessary to engender an appropriate understanding of other religions. Through dialogue, each side understands the problems

faced by other religions and so there emerges a feeling of sympathy and empathy which motivates a desire to work together and to overcome their problems.

In the context of the international society, the term 'culture of peace' has been echoed since 1997. In that year, the United Nations declared the Year 2000 as the "International Year of Peace", and declared that the years 2001-2010 should be "The International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World". So the culture of peace is the integrated approach to prevent violent conflicts which in time will bring and maintain peace. Through the culture of peace, acts of violence can be reduced in order to establish peace between human beings and their surroundings.

In the context of developing a culture of peace, one of the basic points to be considered is how religious communities can take active roles in building platforms for peace and tolerance. The values of universal peace and tolerance, taught in all religions, have the potential to enlighten leaders and lead followers of religions in establishing an everlasting peace, each in their own surroundings.

The problem which has to be considered is the fact that the relationship between people with different religious backgrounds is not always peaceful. Conflicts and violence related to religions can occur anywhere, including in Indonesia. Yet, it is important to note that conflicts between religions are not supported by any religion, but rather as an impact of religious identity mobilisation in the struggle between groups of people, including those who are speaking on behalf of a certain religion, in fighting for justice or in a struggle to win resources and power.

There are many forms of interfaith dialogue that can be carried out by multi-faith communities. I propose a form of dialogue in action where the actions of supporters of interfaith ideologies are used to transform the community to become a more just and humanitarian society⁴. In other words, enlightenment and transformation at a personal level is not enough. Dialogue participants have to make social transformations and this transformation must be carried out across all religions.

Therefore, we can still rely on religious communities as a vehicle to govern one's individual spiritual relationship with God and social relationship with other people and to use them as a force for transformation for individuals and communities in order to gain common progress in all aspects of life, including peace, justice and welfare.

⁴ B.J. BANAWIRATMA, S.J., *Bersama Saudara-Saudari Beriman Lain (Together With Brother and Sister in Faith)*, *Dialog: Kritik dan Identitas Agama (Dialog: Criticism and Religious Identity)*, Yogyakarta: Dian/Interfidei, 1993, pp. 26-27.

The development of a culture of peace will only be effective if it is carried out basically in the framework of achieving peace and welfare in the future. Therefore, one of the strategic factors to which we must pay close attention is how the future generation, especially the children, can understand and apply the culture of peace in their lives.

The development of the culture of peace in children is closely related to the educational activities in which they engage in their home, school, and society. So far, education in many countries still indicates some difficulties in assisting students to become whole human beings. There are many factors involved; amongst others are weak educational infrastructure (funds, human resources, curricula, etc.), and overemphasis on cognitive ability while overlooking the impact of the culture of violence which is still strong in our everyday life.

Developing the Culture of Peace through Religious Education

One of the ways to develop the culture of peace is to engineer an educational system that will underpin dialogue between religions. So far, religious education taught in some schools tends to be more dogmatic and focused on rituals. Such education in religion develops a sense of absolute truth, which can not only result in denial of other religions but a deficient understanding of the religion itself.

This approach to educating about religion in school underlines a literal and formalist comprehension. Such an approach may cause the followers to be unable to think and act critically and with appreciation towards their religion as well as those of others. Therefore, it is not surprising that in some religions in various countries, religious differences have resulted in an inability to work together to create a social world that is comfortable for everyone.

So far an appreciation of the plurality of religions has developed well among religious elites in many countries, including in Indonesia, because they have developed a tradition of dialogue and used a phenomenological approach in viewing other religions. The dialogue tradition should enable each believer of a religious tradition to act openly and develop communication with other groups. This is in contrast to the phenomenological approach, which would enable followers of a religion to understand other religions from the viewpoint of the religion concerned. Such an approach will annihilate the sense of certain religious egoism which judges other religions by their own viewpoint.

Right now, the problem is how to encourage such religious attitudes for the public so that an open attitude respecting other religions can be developed not only between elites but for everyone. Our need is to discern how to develop a pluralistic attitude as a common and accepted

one in society so that we can create a harmonious relationship bringing peace to different groups of people. In a broader sense, pluralism also means respecting other groups with their various differences in terms of religion, ethnicity, citizenship, gender, and social status.

Strategically, such education in the plurality of religion must cover the following activities:

- *Pedagogical activity*, where a curriculum for plurality education will be researched, engineered and implemented.
- *Dissemination activity*, where a program of education in religious pluralism will be communicated to stakeholders of education and wider society.
- *Research and development activity*, where the dynamic response by society toward violence, including relationship between religions, can be identified systematically and used for program development.
- *Policy advisory activity*, where we shall give effort to make change in policies in different levels of society towards the reinforcement of plurality in religion, which in the end shall bring peace, justice and welfare for all of God's creation.

In conclusion, it should be noted that education for peace is one of the key ways to develop the culture of peace in promoting inter-faith dialogue. Such educational programmes for pluralism in religion must be developed in respect of the fact that current educational systems for religion taught in schools is ideological, absolutistic and formalist.

Finally, the tradition to develop a dialogue between religions and to take a phenomenological approach in viewing other religions must be intensified. Why? Because it will enable each religious person to act openly and to develop communication with other groups and helps them to understand constructively about other religions. Educational programs for pluralism in religion will also intensify our appreciation of differences of religion, ethnicity, citizenship, gender, social status and other differences that we find in our everyday lives.

Recommendations and solutions

It can be concluded that Indonesia is unique. Indonesian Christian and Muslim communities are intensely influenced by local culture which is tolerant, open and inclusive, as well as respecting humanity. The Indonesian Muslim community is different to those of other areas, especially the Middle East. The Indonesian Muslim community has a long experience of living together – side by side – with people with

different religions. The founding fathers of this country respected humanity and were active in efforts to overcome prejudice and campaign for justice and peace.

Now, what should be done by all Muslims and Christians as their important contribution to the civilization of peace? I propose three concrete actions as follows:

- **First**, Muslims and Christians must work together to continue the efforts of cultural reconstruction through education in its widest sense, particularly, education in family life. These efforts are needed to be implemented because a culture of peace, respect, tolerance and inclusivity cannot emerge naturally and spontaneously in society. It must instead be arranged in such a way through the education system. Why is it important? To reduce prejudice in society, children must be taught to embrace multiculturalism. A few researchers found that prejudice and bias are often learned in childhood. So education is a means to a harmonious multicultural society. Multicultural education can shield people from the negative effects of globalisation. Multicultural education promotes the universal values of religion which teach peace and justice, and promote human dignity. I believe that the implementation of multicultural education will be very useful for a diverse country like Indonesia.
- **Second**, Muslims and Christians must work together to continue the efforts of law reform. We have to reform some laws and public policies which are not conducive to the establishment of peace and justice as well as the upholding of human rights.
- **Third**, Muslims and Christians work together to continue efforts for the renewal of religious interpretation. Current interpretation, as widely practised in the Muslim community, is not at all compatible with the principles of human rights, particularly women's rights and gender equality. So we have to propose a new interpretation of religion which is more conducive to promoting peace and justice, and upholding human rights. It is this type of interpretation which will lead us to eliminate all forms of prejudice, hatred and violence.

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Dialogue with Islam¹

Eko Armada Riyanto, C.M.²

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.

Put Out into the Deep: The Vincentian Way

Claudio Santangelo, C.M.

FOREWORD

My intervention today is not intended to revisit the theme of relations between St. Vincent and Islam. Such work has already remarkably been done by Father Yves Danjou in the session on Islam which was held in Lebanon in 1999 (cf. *Vincentiana* 43, n° 4/5). My much more modest objective is to show certain traits of Vincentian spirituality that could characterize our “putting out into the deep” in regard to dialogue with Muslim people. In other words, what I would like to do is to show how there is a Vincentian way to follow the message of the Gospel and the teachings of the Church in this domain, and that we Vincentians can make a unique contribution to this particular theme.

My focus will be the analogous; that of our little Vincentian boat, small in comparison with the large ship which represents the Church, but still a signal, an indicator of possible routes. We are akin to the little boats on the Bosphorus that travel in front of the large cruise ships to show them the best routes of passage.

The methodology that I will follow will be to extract some “things that are old and things that are new” from the treasures of Vincentian spirituality and of the Church, and to show how they helped me and were confirmed during my limited experience of living and working with Muslim people in Turkey. I hope that they can be of some help for you, too.

MOVING THE BOAT: THE SAIL

Let’s get on the Vincentian boat and let’s cast off. We are aware that the Lord calls us to navigate the boat that was given to us that we should not just simply float or navigate by sight. We have to leave the security of the shore, where we feel comfortable to go where we will meet the unknown. This is done by confronting the high seas and discovering new horizons and new “challenges” from God. We have to rid ourselves of our knowledge and certitudes, following His words,

to go fishing in full daylight after a night of a complete fruitless catch. Once we have lifted the anchor of our personal securities, of our personal opinions and of stereotypes and commonplaces that kept our boat firmly tied, we can now move the boat.

We have at our disposal a sail and two oars. Let us focus on the first. The sail is big enough to make us move rapidly, without using much energy. However, to have it really function well, the boat needs some wind, which is something that we cannot produce ourselves. This is something that has to be given to us. What we can do is to look for the wind and then intercept it and use its energy. I am certain that all of us here present, have felt and continue to feel in our lives the blowing of this wind, sometimes strong like during the day of Pentecost in Jerusalem, other times gentle as the breeze that caressed Elisha on the mountain of Horeb. This is the wind that makes our hearts expand and fills them to the point that we sell everything we have in order to acquire this precious pearl. The love of Christ urges us and wants to continue to push us out into the world. *Caritas Christi urget nos*. It should be the love of Christ and nothing else. It seems to me that this should always be present in our relations with Muslim people.

If we want our dialogue to be fruitful and to be free from the dryness of conveniences and formalities, strategies and human techniques, we always have to be careful that there is the imprint of Christ's love, the same love that we have experienced and received. To build a relation of confidence and openness, it is important that we free ourselves as much as possible from our human reasoning, our calculation, our need to attain goals. I have personally experienced how sensitive our Muslim friends are on this point and how important it is to safeguard our dialogue from adding these things to it. Let me read an e-mail that I received some time ago from a Turkish friend that really made me think:

“Sadly, there is a lot of ignorance in my country. Before meeting you, I saw Christians as missionaries (people who proselytize). When I met you, you did not make any remarks about my religion and you did not make any comparisons. This really surprised me. Now, I look at Christians as normal people”.

I would add that it is important, not only that we should not make comparisons, but that we should not even think them! It is only the love of Christ that can guarantee the purity of our intentions and our words, which preserves our actions in freedom and in *holy indifference*. Let us reflect on these words of Saint Vincent:

“It isn't enough to do what God asks of us, but we should, in addition, do it for love of God [...] everything we do or suffer, if we don't do it or suffer it for love of God, is useless for us; even should we be

burned alive or give all our possessions to the poor, says Saint Paul, if we don't have charity and don't do or suffer for love of God, then all that is useless for us" (11, 384s.).

"God is an inexhaustible source of wisdom, light, and love; it is from Him we must draw what we say to others; we have to efface our own spirit and personal feelings to give place to the operations of grace, which alone enlightens and enkindles hearts; we must set ourselves aside in order to be in communion with God; we must consult Him to learn His language, and ask that He Himself speak in us and through us; then He will be doing His own work, and we won't spoil anything" (12, 13).

Pope Paul VI defined the dialogue as an internal drive of charity (ES 64). Truly, although dialogue is expressed by human words and actions, its origin transcends our humanity. It is found in the Will of God. It is again Pope Paul VI, who told us in the encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam* already cited, that the origin of the dialogue is in the mind of God Himself. Revelation itself, according to the mysterious divine plan, can be looked upon as a dialogue between God and man. It's a dialogue that has its culmination in the Incarnated Son of God. God never ceases to speak to mankind and in this dialogue He reveals something of Himself, of the mystery of His own life, of His own unique essence and trinity of persons (cf. ES 70).

Therefore, since dialogue comes from God, in order not to misunderstand its essence and its identity, we ought to constantly go beyond our human limitations to draw on and make our own the Spirit of God and to be clothed with the Spirit of God. This is what St. Vincent said to Father Antoine Durand, appointed superior of the seminary of Agde:

"[...] all human diligence can do here is to spoil everything, if God doesn't take a hand in it. No, Monsieur, neither philosophy, nor theology, nor discourses can act in souls; Jesus Christ must be involved in this with us – or we with Him – so that we may act in Him and He in us, that we may speak as he did and in His Spirit, as He himself was in His father, and preached the doctrine He had taught Him; those are the words of the Holy Scripture.

So, Monsieur, you must empty yourself of self in order to clothe yourself with Jesus Christ... we too, wretched creatures, even though we are only flesh, hay and thorns, yet if Our Lord imprints His own character on us, and gives us, so to speak, the sap of His Spirit and grace, uniting us to Him like the vine branches to the vine stock, we do the same as He did on earth – I mean we carry out divine actions..." (11, 311).

“We carry out divine actions”. That is the sign that we put out into the deep with our sails in full mast. We know well that this is not an easy thing to do. The “I” and our human reasoning quite often overtake us, and so we take down our sail and our little boat stops in dead calm. This is why we should often ask for the help of God, that He help us to purify our intentions, our words and our actions so that others may see Him through us.

Let me give a final consideration on the wind and on the sail. The gospel of Luke tells us that in light of the large number of fish, Simon Peter motioned to the others and a second boat came to their aid. Would it be possible to imagine that the same wind could blow on the sails of other boats and lead them too to put out into the deep? Father Andrea Santoro, a missionary priest in Trabzon, in Turkey, where he was martyred in February 2006, was convinced that: “In the end, the important thing is to bring in us the good that Jesus wants for all and to let Him reveal it through us” (Letters from Turkey, Rome, 2006, p. 172). To our Vincentian ears, these words sound very close to those of our founder:

“We’ve been chosen by God as instruments of His immense, paternal charity, which is intended to be established and to expand in souls” (12, 214).

Now, I believe that among the divine actions that the Lord enables us to carry out he asks us also to help others lift their sails and intercept the same wind that helps us move our boat. I think that this wind of love does not know any borders or limits and that sometimes if we only signal, other boats will help us. Here are some thoughts of my young friend from Istanbul:

“You talked to me of helping the poor, for example those who live in Africa. If I want, will you help me? Can you send me to these places to help them? Is this not only my dream? I will work for the Church, I know. Actually, I can also work for the Church: that is the house of the Lord, like the mosque. These days, I am thinking of my life: I have a job, I can buy things, I have a girlfriend whom I like a lot, whom I want to marry and have children with... but all that is ordinary things. Maybe, I can help other children and then my life will really make sense. I want to change something, I feel like my life is meaningless. And I also think that God has given us something that does not have limits and that we can share non-stop: it is love. Why then am I so selfish? I want to find a way to destroy my selfishness”.

MOVING THE BOAT: THE FIRST OAR

As I have already mentioned, our little boat, besides having a sail, also has two oars. The combined action of the sail and of the oars allows us to sail even faster, but this demands from us a constant effort and commitment. The harder we work the oars, the faster the boat will go. Let us now examine our oars, those that the Lord has equipped the Vincentian boat with and which He wants us to use. The first oar bears the name of **the Mystery of the Word made Flesh**. We know well the paramount position that the Incarnation had in the life and thinking of St. Vincent. He never ceased to stop contemplating the grandeur of this mystery:

“Only Our Lord... was so enamoured with the love of creatures as to leave the throne of His father to come to take a body subject to weaknesses” (12, 216).

Over and over he remarks how, in assuming human nature, the Son of God conformed with man and in doing so, more even than Saint Paul, Jesus was all to all.

“He not only adopted our natural human ways, but, in a certain sense, our moral ones as well: an understanding like ours, a way of comprehending physical things the way we do... which shows that He had the same thoughts about them as we do. He also had the same manner of acting; He walked like us and worked like us. In a word, in order to insert himself better among us, He became like us... He willed to appear and act like us in order to be loved. He willed to take on our nature in order that we might be united to Him” (12, 205 s.).

Specifically, in the abasement in becoming human, in the Son of God, who wanted to clothe himself in our weak humanity and become poor among the poor, St. Vincent sees the source and reason of our apostolate. Christ is really and effectively present in His suffering members.

He would say to the Daughters of Charity:

*“You are serving Jesus Christ in the person of the poor. And that is as true as that we are here. A sister will go ten times a day to visit the sick, and ten times a day she’ll find God there [...] Go visit a chain gang, **you’ll** find God there. Look after those little children, you’ll find God there. How delightful, Sisters! You go into poor homes, but you find God there. Again, Sisters, how delightful! He accepts the services you do for those sick persons and [...] considers them as done to him”* (9, 199).

And he reminded to his missionaries that:

“I must not judge a poor peasant man or woman by their appearance or their apparent intelligence, especially since very often they scarcely have the expression or the mind of rational persons, so crude and vulgar they are. But turn the medal, and you will see by the light of faith that the Son of God, who willed to be poor, is represented to us by these poor people” (11, 26).

It seems to me that the insistence of St. Vincent in putting before us Christ as represented in human beings could help us not only in our service to the poor, but even more in our relationships with people different from us, namely the people who do not share our Christian faith. Often, we risk labeling someone on the basis of their religious creed: “That’s a Muslim!”. Other times, instead, we approach others with an instinctive sense of openness, in the name of a vague sense of benevolence and trust. As Vincentians, I think we are called to do more. We should train ourselves to “turn the medal” and see in the other, even in Muslims, the light of faith, the face of the Son of God. The Incarnation of the Son of Man is an oar; it seems to me, we should take advantage of, to advance in the sea of the world. If the Word wanted to become flesh and came to live among us, if he “*willed to take on our nature*” it means the face of Christ is represented in each human person, in a certain way. It remains for us to “open” our eyes, to understand his features.

The intuition of St. Vincent has been authoritatively confirmed by the doctrine of the Church. We can read these precious statements in the pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, of Vatican Council II:

“By His incarnation the Son of God has united Himself in some fashion with every man. He worked with human hands, He thought with a human mind, acted by human choice and loved with a human heart. Born of the Virgin Mary, He has truly been made one of us, like us in all things except sin” (GS 22).

No one can ignore the value and the weight especially of the first statement: “*By His incarnation the Son of God has united Himself in some fashion **with every man***”. It is a statement that Pope John Paul II took and expanded in the first encyclical in his pontificate, *Redemptor Hominis*, of March, 1979:

“...man – every man without any exception whatever – has been redeemed by Christ, and because with man – with each man without any exception whatever – Christ is in a way united, even when man is unaware of it” (RH 14).

The same thought has been presented in numerous discourses and meetings with people of the Muslim faith. Let’s think about the impact

of this truth when it comes to our relations with Muslims. How will our attitudes and our perspective change if we truly believe that with them too the Son of God has united Himself! Suddenly, we no longer look at them as strangers, as people far from us, “outside” of our world, or at the most as potential recipients of our message or of the service that we want to give them. We now relate to them as people who are “inside” the history of salvation, inside the love of God, inside the mystery of the Incarnation. They too, whether they know it or not, carry in themselves something of Christ. They become to us people who, even without being aware of it, have something to tell us about Jesus Christ. They reveal something of Him, some of His facets. How much then, will our interest towards them expand!

Personally, I have become more attentive and more curious in discovering the presence of Christ in people who do not know Him as the Son of God. It seems to me that “it counts more” to find this presence here, rather than where it will be logical and expected. It is a great joy for me to hear from the voice of my Muslim friends almost the echo of the words that Jesus said in the Gospels: “God wants to be found by those who are lost... He wants us next to Him... love is the most important key in His World”. These are the words of a Turkish friend.

Christian De Chergé, the prior of the famous community of Trappist monks of Tibhirine in Algeria, martyred in the spring of 1996, wrote:

“To enter into truthful dialogue we must accept, in the name of Christ, that Islam has something to tell us about Christ” (CHRISTIAN SALENSON [Ed.], *Prier 15 jours avec Christian de Chergé, prieur des moines de Tibhirine*).

Christian Salenson, commenting on these words writes:

“For a strange paradox, Christians receive Christ that they announce, precisely from those to whom they are giving the message. They do not know Christ exhaustively simply because He fully revealed himself at Nazareth, but they also receive Him from other believers and from different people”.

Yes, Christ has something to tell us even through our Muslim friends; not merely something interesting and important on religions, on brotherhood, on dialogue, but also something **on** himself, or rather, **of** himself. Let us take in our hands the oar of the Mystery of the Incarnation, let us meditate on it, on its implications, and let us strive to use it with renewed vigor. It will push us into the sea of the world, not only in our interfaith dialogue, but also in our knowledge of Our Lord.

MOVING THE BOAT: THE SECOND OAR

Let us now have a look at the second oar with which our boat is equipped. On it we can read: **the universal dimension of the mission**. If we look at all the activities and fields St. Vincent wanted his sons and daughters to be engaged in, we can't but be impressed with their variety and multiplicity. This is true both at the level of ministries: missions to the lower classes and *ad gentes*, seminaries, assistance to prisoners, to slaves, to orphans, to suffering people, to mentally challenged, to soldiers, to impoverished noble people etc., and at a geographical distribution level: France, Italy, Poland, Ireland, Madagascar. Truthfully, for St. Vincent, the mission did not know borders or limitations of expression. Even more importantly, he did not have any restrictions on recipients. He explained clearly this conviction to the Daughters of Charity:

"You have a vocation obliging you to help equally all sorts of persons: men, women, children, and in general every poor person who needs your assistance" (10, 363).

To the missionaries, with rightly famous words, he recalls that:

"Our vocation is to go, not just to one parish, not just to one diocese, but all over the world; and to do what? To set people's hearts on fire, to do what the Son of God did. He came to set the world on fire in order to inflame it with His love. What do we have to desire but that it may burn and consume everything" (12, 215).

On the other hand, St. Vincent strongly condemns the attitude of those who would like to narrow the horizons of thoughts and actions:

"But what sort of men will turn us away from those good works already begun? They'll be... men who seek only to enjoy themselves and, provided they have enough to eat, don't bother about anything else. And who else? They'll be – I'd rather not say it – they'll be men who coddle themselves... people who have only a narrow outlook, confining their perspective and plans to a certain circumference within which they shut themselves away, so to speak, in one point; they don't want to leave it, and if they're shown something outside it and go near to have a look, they immediately go back to their center, like snails into their shells" (12, 81).

There is no doubt, therefore, that in the eyes of the Saint both communities are called to open themselves, to "put out into the deep", to nurture a global vision and a universal perspective, to "form a strong, holy attachment to the service of God" (12, 82). It is the Almighty who

has given them this mission. For Saint Vincent, this is nothing but the very continuation and expansion of the mission of the Son of God, “to set the world on fire in order to inflame it with His love”. May the fire of God’s love touch all people in all nations and on all continents. May we reveal and make it present through our own lives, through our actions and words. May we make the face of God known and loved by everyone, without exception, since every human being needs and has a right to know this love. May our love be the pathway that they will come to know God’s love. Our mission is universal, because God’s offering of His love is universal, because the thirst after this love is within the hearts of every human being.

“We’ve been chosen by God as instruments of His immense, paternal charity, which is intended to be established and to expand in souls” (12, 214).

Annalena Tonelli, an Italian lay volunteer who gave her life in Somalia in 2003 so that the charity of God could establish itself among people who never knew it, said in her testimony: “After 34 years of proclaiming the Gospel with my life only, and with my burning desire to do this until the end, Muslims tell me that I will go to heaven like them. They say: we have the faith, and you have love”. She revealed love, she bore witness, and put it into practice in her life.

In the course of the history of the Church, as Fr. Robert P. Maloney said at his conference at the Vincentian Center of Permanent Formation, the “paradigm” of mission has been nuanced in many diverse ways: crusade, teaching, call to conversion, liberation, witness, inculturation, dialogue, pilgrimage, prophecy (*On Being a Missionary Today*, ROBERT P. MALONEY, *He Hears the Cry of the Poor*, 1995, p. 118s.).

Personally, the definition and program of the mission that I prefer are the ones given by St. Vincent about 350 years ago:

“It’s true, then, that I’m sent not only to love God but to make Him loved. It’s not enough for me to love God, if my neighbor doesn’t love Him” (12, 215).

I believe that this Vincentian “paradigm” will always remain modern and true. We are called to use this “oar” too, if we want to move to deep waters without fear.

St. Vincent wrote to Charles Nacquart, appointed to the mission of Madagascar:

“Go then, Monsieur, and since your mission is from God, through those who represent Him for you on earth, cast your nets boldly” (3/22/1648).

We too must go to the sea of the world casting the nets of the love of God, pushing us always to advance with full sails in the wind and rowing hard. It could very well happen that our actions could give very little or no fruit. Should we then feel discouraged, let us meditate on the words that Saint Vincent wrote to Father Anthony Fleury, who was sent on a difficult mission to Saintes:

“[You must] be convinced that God asks of you only that you cast your nets into the sea, and not that you catch the fish, because it is up to Him to make them go into the net. Have no doubt that He will do so if, having fished all night long despite the difficulties of the undertaking and the hardness of people’s hearts – almost all asleep to the things of God – you wait patiently for day to come, for the Sun of Justice to awaken them, and for His light to illuminate and warm them. To this work and patience, you must join humility, prayer, and good example; then you will see the glory of the Savior” (11/6/1658).

Allow me, in concluding my presentation, to share with you some of the occasions where I was able to see “the glory of the Savior” in a Muslim land. These were moments when I found the universality of our mission confirmed and corroborated.

In all simplicity I can say that during the time I spent in Turkey, I didn’t have any other goal or interest or desire in discussions with my Muslim friends other than this: to make known the love God has for each one of them, and to help them discover how much they are loved by His unconditional, freely given love. I was not so much concerned if they shared my beliefs in Jesus: I was more concerned that they felt Jesus’ love, that this love could reach them through myself, and that the image that they had of God opened and became more complete: that they not only respected or feared God, but that they came to love Him.

One day one of my young friends asked me in amazement: “Why do you worry about me? I am not even a Christian. Why do you waste time with me, listening to my ordinary things and problems? You should take care of young Christians!”. I could reply to him: “Because we are all, even you, creatures of God, and we all have the right to His love”.

The same young person, on another occasion, shared with me this personal thought that instantly paid me back for all the labor I had done with the sail and the oars, deprived of my certainties. He said to me: “I always prayed to God: Please, show me the right way, do not allow me to go astray and lose your way... And He made me meet you... and now I love Him very, very much”.

I acknowledge that I am privileged. The Lord knew that I would be in Turkey for a short time only and granted me graces in a concentrated and intense time. I certainly do not claim that it happens like this all the time or that these feed-backs be so evident. But since my presentation may sound a bit idealistic or naive, I decided to share with you some of the blessings that God has given to me in concrete experiences because I am firmly convinced that, as I read somewhere, “All that exists is by definition possible”.

Thank you for your attention and patience in listening to me.

Closing Reflection: “Putting Out into the Deep” of Our Own Lives

SIEV Symposium on Christian-Islam Dialogue
(Pacet, Indonesia, 7-17 August, 2011)

Abba Zeracristos Yosief, C.M.

I am happy, indeed honored, to offer closing remarks at the end of this SIEV Conference on inter-religious dialogue between Christians and Muslims. In keeping with the conference theme, “Put Out into the Deep”, I will share my reactions this conference from the ‘deep’ of my own heart.

My initial reaction is one of thanksgiving: first and foremost, we thank God, for it is in Him that all our activities have their beginning and their accomplishment! We thank the leadership of the Double Family of St. Vincent de Paul, Fr. G. Gregory Gay, C.M., Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission, and Sister Franc Evelyne, Superioress General of the Daughters of Charity, for their support, encouragement, and funding of this conference. I also wish to thank the Commission for their wonderful and thorough work in preparing this Symposium. And I would like to thank each one of you, for your presence at this conference by your active and inspiring contributions. As happens in international meetings, here too, symbolic language was as powerful as the verbal communication. From this point onward, I think it is always better if we commit ourselves to learn at least one other language besides our native tongue to better communicate with our brothers and sisters, as well as for our won enrichment.

What did we learn in these days? What insights and actions can we take away from our time together at this conference? I would like to propose several for your consideration.

- First of all, through our time together, I believe we have a better understanding of the nature and Islam and a way of approaching dialogue with Christianity. Two Muslim professors who spoke at

this symposium assured us that being a Muslim is not about *being violent, a troublemaker or a terrorist*. They told us that Islam is "*a way of life*".

- We also learned that *interfaith dialogue* aims to develop **a culture of peace**. This goal is achieved in two ways: first, by reinterpreting religious teachings which are incompatible with the basic human values; secondly, by naming and challenging governmental policies which discriminate against other religions and minority groups.
- We learned that here in Indonesian, Islam compared to the rest of the Islamic world, is differentiated and inculturated, as it was born in the womb of Hinduism and Buddhism. Thus, it is different in kind from how Islam is lived out in other cultures and countries. At the same time, however, this might not represent the whole Islam in the world.
- In our time together, we also learned that Christianity and Islam have narrow common doctrinal ground. From a theological point of view, interfaith dialogue can be slow, difficult, and at times, almost impossible. Yet, if we reflect on the beautiful witness of so many who shared in these days together, we see that lively dialogue is possible. Why? Because, we might say, our dialogue came not from religions, but from human beings. True dialogue is not a compromise of religious belief, but a sharing of life among peoples. As Christians, we are called to look for all traces of the truth everywhere. We know that in every human heart there is a hunger for peace, love, freedom, respect, tolerance, and forgiveness. On these human values, we can build a better world together with our Muslim brothers and sisters.
- At the same time, we learned that we need to be attentive and sensitive to the complexities of inter-religious dialogue between Christians and Muslims. While being respectful always, we should be cautious, not presuming to "bridge the theological gap" by over-simplifying the complexities of our faith for the sake of dialogue. We also need to be attentive to today's temptation of relativism in discussing the teachings and tenets of our Catholic faith. We must be able to make clear distinctions between what is negotiable or not in doctrinal and religious beliefs with gentleness and respect for those whose faith and belief is different.
- Lastly, as dialogue is sharing what we love most, evangelization is the most sincere instrument of our dialogue. We know that evangelization is not proselytism: our mission is to announce Jesus.

Our world today is unfortunately a very divided one; between north and south, rich and poor, Christians and Moslems, Catholics and Protestants. In other words, there are all types of artificial divisions

which create unnecessary barriers and tension. Thus, as Christians living in this divided and broken world, we have an important mission: to be credible sign and a sacrament of love, unity, peace, harmony, and brotherhood. To achieve this goal in our lives and communities, I would like to offer the following recommendations for your consideration:

1. Let us work to deepen our Christian and Vincentian vocation and charism, and to develop an appreciation for the religion of Islam.
2. To achieve this end, perhaps as a Vincentian family we can enrich our knowledge base of Islam, of its historical development and theological religious foundations. We can also familiarize ourselves with the Koran, the holy book of Islam, a biography on the prophet Mohammed, and current influential books on Islam.
3. We can also seek to learn more about the Islamic faith and its people in the different areas in which we live and minister.

What's next? What are you going to do with this experience? I encourage the commission, as well as all of us here today who attended this conference to undertake some concrete steps, actions to be implemented in our working places when we go home. As you know, with your input, the commission that arranged to follow up with "lines of action" to assist local communities, provinces, and conferences of Visitors, and the General Curia in continuing and strengthening this interfaith dialogue between Christians and Muslims. As we take our leave, I encourage all here to share this experience as much as you can with your brothers and sisters at home.

Safe Journey Back Home to all, God bless you!

Interreligious Dialogue with Islam: Contexts, Vision and Action

Synthesis Statement by Symposium Attendees
(Pacet, Indonesia, 7-17 August, 2011)

SIEV Symposium Participants

We, the 57 participants of the International Symposium on Interreligious Dialogue with Islam, coming from 38 different countries and representatives of different Provinces of the Congregation of the Mission, Daughters of Charity, other Vincentian religious orders and lay partners – all members of the Vincentian family, gathered in Pacet, Indonesia on August 7-17, 2011, during this time of the holy days of *Ramadhan*. Together with the call of prayer from nearby mosques, we also feel God is calling us “to put out into the deep” (Luke 5:4), to be immersed into the lives of our Muslims brothers and sisters.

We spent days of study and readings, of interacting with Muslim and Christian speakers. We also listened to witnesses, both Christians and Muslims share their pastoral experiences of interreligious dialogue from different contexts. In workshop groups, each one was given the chance to share his or her own personal and pastoral experiences. We also visited places where Muslim-Christian collaboration happens in Indonesia – Vincentian seminaries and a theological-philosophical school, a Muslim *Pesantren* (Islamic boarding school), an Islamic university, and *Bhakti Luhur* – a large Vincentian network all over Indonesia that takes care of persons with disabilities – Muslims and Christians alike. We also attended multi-cultural liturgies and presentations in local parishes and schools as we were introduced to indigenous Indonesian cultures. Our creative liturgies, common recreation and meals add meaning to our cherished stories and realizations. All these encounters, limited as they were, helped shape our present feelings, convictions and resolve to uphold interreligious dialogue, especially with our Muslim brothers and sisters.

We present here what transpired in those days but we know that our words could not capture how the Spirit moved us during these days of encounter.

A. 'SEEING' OUR DIFFERENT CONTEXTS

It was twelve years ago, in 1999 at Fatqa, Lebanon, when the Vincentian family first gathered to look into its ministry in a Muslim context. Many things have happened since then. Through the help of our speakers, we endeavoured to “see” and examine our new contexts. Since we are in Indonesia, we found it helpful to first understand the Muslim and Christian relations in Indonesia. In the workshops, however, we also found out that some general developments are also present everywhere albeit in different ways and expressions. We also realize that Islam is different in every context where it finds itself since it is significantly influenced by the culture and the socio-political situation of its practitioners.

On the one side, we see some problematic areas: the growing radicalization of the Islamic movement; the intensive promotion of fundamentalist readings of Islam; the growing imposition of *Shariah* laws in some places and the seeming denial of freedom and human rights that goes with it; the violent riots or kidnapping-for-ransom cases allegedly done by radical Muslim groups resulting in a consequent culture of fear and silence; poverty and marginalization of many Muslim groups which can breed such violence; the stereotyping of Muslims as “terrorists” and the widespread ignorance about the Islam religion itself that begets prejudices and mistrust. We understand, however, that many of these biases and stereotypes are misplaced, fired up as they are by factors other than religious ones. But we recognize that religion can be used for the elite’s political, economic or ideological agenda.

We say this because we have also seen and heard from many moderate Muslims who are open to dialogue, to the humanistic readings of Islamic texts, and to collaborative efforts with Christians and other faiths. We see many signs of hope in Christian-Muslim relations: the increase of educated young people who have critical and open minds; the empowerment of women in both Muslim and Christian contexts; the numerous initiatives for peace and dialogue in the ‘official’ and grassroots levels; the humanitarian interventions and socio-cultural events done in common; many concerted efforts to uplift economic conditions; and the experience of mutual respect and friendship among Muslim and Christians in their everyday lives.

We spent some time listening to testimonies of our pastoral ministries that promote a culture of interreligious dialogue and peace. We see great signs of hope in the field of pastoral care, education, health care, social development, relief and humanitarian aid, and work among migrants, to cite but a few examples. In particular, we were struck by the work of *Bhakti Luhur* and its way of reaching out to Muslims and Christians alike; we are happy to hear about the initiatives of the Daughters of Charity and Vincentians of Indonesia, Chad, Libya, Iran,

Philippines, Algeria, Lebanon, etc. in their work of collaboration with our Muslim brothers and sisters. On a more personal level, we also see in our own journeys openness to Islam as we encounter Muslim friends in the context of work and personal relationships.

As we see this good news among us, we also feel that there is still much left for us to do. We realize that sometimes our own personal, professional, theological training do not help foster an inclusive and dialogical approach to life. For some of us, there have been so much doctrinal absolutes and exclusivity coming from our rigid formation, education and community structures that led to insensitivity, elitism and arrogance. Most of us realize that we need to know more about Islam in order to quash our own prejudices and biases. Beyond intellectual knowledge, however, there is also a felt need among us for more interpersonal encounters with Muslims and peoples of other faiths.

B. REFLECTING ON OUR COMMON VISION

After seeing the lights and shadows of our experiences, we tried to envision what God is inviting us to do. We discerned what it takes to follow the command of Jesus to “put out into the deep” and cast our nets (Lk. 5:1-11). With the help of our speakers, we learned of Christian and Muslim resources on interreligious dialogue and tried to understand them in our contexts.

We realized that despite the impression of its rigid structures, there have been attempts within the Catholic Church itself to include those ‘outside its walls’, in its own frame of life and salvation. This theme was already reflected on by some Church Fathers, medieval theologians, many saints, the Popes, and the Church’s most recent documents. But we are also made aware that the same dialogical direction is also present in the Islamic texts from the *Qur’an*, its interpreters and theologians, to Islam’s most recent invitation to dialogue with Christianity, *A Common Word* (2007). We are happy to affirm recent developments initiated by the Vatican to dialogue with Islam – i.e., the Catholic-Muslim Forum – under the auspices of the Pontifical Council on Interreligious Dialogue. We realize that documents and ‘official talks’ are very different from the ordinary events of everyday life. We can only hope that the openness among the international leaders of both religions can cascade to their respective members and be put into action in grassroots communities where Muslims and Christians live together.

Together with the voices of many witnesses placed before us, we proclaim our vision and convictions on interreligious dialogue.

1. Dialogue is not a strategy; it is a way of life, and spirituality. Since dialogue could not be tactically prepared, we could not also program its aims and results. In interreligious dialogue, we leave it to the Spirit to lead us.
2. Interreligious dialogue starts with interpersonal encounters in the context of personal friendships. We are convinced that dialogue first happens in the 'dialogue of life' and 'dialogue of action' within the interpersonal and grassroots levels. When basic trust is established among friends, we will then have the courage to dialogue on the levels of faith, theology and religious experience.
3. Interreligious dialogue is not a denial of our own faith convictions. It is being fully rooted in its foundations so much so that I can face the other in total openness and honesty. If we could not agree on one area of the dialogue of faith, there are still many other areas in practical life that we can talk about and collaborate. We believe that our differences serve as the basic foundation of our unity.
4. These are the personal and communal attitudes necessary for interreligious dialogue: presence among the peoples of other faiths, the courage to risk, openness of mind and heart, mutual trust, patient waiting, sensitivity to people's needs, and ultimately, the utmost humility to let go.
5. Interreligious dialogue comes from deep within our Vincentian calling to be in solidarity with the poor of our times many of whom also belong to peoples of other faiths. We believe that charity is the foundation of interreligious dialogue.

C. TOWARD COMMON LINES OF ACTION

To fulfill our vision, we commit ourselves and recommend the following lines of action.

1. On the Level of Local Communities

1.1. AWARENESS

- Create awareness promotion by reading documents of the Church and of Islam on interreligious dialogue.

1.2. FORMATION

- Intensify formation programs on interreligious dialogue at all levels and ministries e.g. schools, parishes, communities, houses of formation and publications.

- Develop a deeper knowledge of the language and of the culture of the country.

1.3. FRIENDSHIP

- Develop a dialogue of life and friendship among believers.
- Visit communities of other believers on their feast days.
- Invite Muslim people of good will to our activities, especially our social/charity work for a true collaboration.
- Make our activities simple, so that contacts with ordinary people are possible.

1.4. REVISION OF LIFE AND ACTIVITIES

- Take time to heal the wounds experienced in the past, so that a climate of trust can be created.

2. On the Level of the Provinces

2.1. FORMATION

- Organize Provincial gatherings and symposiums on interreligious dialogue with Islam.
- Foster on-going formation on interreligious dialogue e.g. by inviting experts.
- Provide a common preparation to priests and sisters assigned to specific missions before taking on any pastoral work. Offer the same preparation to priests and sisters who work with immigrants from Muslim countries.

2.2. MISSION PRIORITY

- Make apostolate on interreligious dialogue a Provincial priority.
- Be willing to send priests, sisters and collaborators to Muslim majority countries in the spirit of interreligious dialogue.

2.3. NETWORKING

- Create concrete Provincial lines of action to enter into dialogue with Muslims, underlining the importance of dialogue of life and collaboration.
- Build contacts with Episcopal commissions on interreligious dialogue.

3. On the Level of the Congregations

3.1. COMMISSION

- Form a permanent international commission on interreligious dialogue. This commission will include our VF members.
- Write a letter of support to the Muslim communities for Ramadan.

3.2. FORMATION

- Set up another Vincentian gathering, also at continental level, without waiting another 12 years.
- Articulate the aspects of interreligious dialogue in relation with our charisma of evangelizing the poor.
- Include Islamology in our formation courses.

4. On the Level of the Worldwide Vincentian Family

4.1. COMMISSION

- Create an international team on interreligious dialogue.

4.2. AWARENESS

- Establish a Vincentian day for interreligious dialogue.

4.3. FORMATION

- Promote collaboration among Vincentian universities and faculties in research and academic programs on interreligious dialogue.
- Organize international conferences on interreligious dialogue.

In the end, we remind ourselves with the words of St. Vincent to our confrere, Anthony Fleury, when he was sent to the mission in Saintes:

“[You must] be convinced that God asks of you only that you cast your nets into the sea, and not that you catch the fish, because it is up to him to make them go into the nets... To this work of patience, you must join humility, prayer, and good example: then you will see the glory of the Saviour” (6 November 1658).

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May the Lord bless the work of our hands!

