

# 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 sametime, 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!***