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ISLAM AND THE JAVANESE RELIGION:
Reconsidering Syncretism in the ‘*Slametan*’ Ritual

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Introduction

Java is famous for its combination of diverse cultural forms and religious beliefs.¹ It was once a Hindu-Buddhist land till the mid 16th century, when Islam arrived in the region. Java converted or more precisely adopted Islam quite late. The process started around 1500 CE.

Conversion to Islam never meant that one left all that one had previously believed and practiced behind. Elements from earlier religion have remained prominently present in the beliefs and rituals of common people all over the Muslim world as tenaciously as Christian trees and Easter eggs in Christianity.²

It is also the case for Javanese Muslims. As anthropologists have shown, Islam as actually practiced in a local context is often rather different from what we would expect from the study of Islamic scripture. Following Redfield's well-known distinction of Great and Little tradition, the beliefs and practices of Javanese Muslim communities can be designated as folk Islam or popular Islam, to distinguish them from 'high Islam', the scripturalist, *shari'a* oriented.³

In such a situation, in order for Islam to make sense to Javanese and for Javanese to grasp deeper Islam, it seems that syncretism is inevitable.⁴ It is an ongoing process of the

¹See Andrew Beatty, *Varieties of Javanese Religion, An Anthropological Account*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, back cover

²Martin van Bruinessen, 'Muslim, Minorities and Modernity: The Reconstructing of Heterodoxy in the Middle East and Southeast Asia', Utrecht, *ISIM Inaugural Lecture*, Nov.21, 2000, 4

³See Robert Redfield, *Peasant Society and Culture*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956, cited by Bruinessen, 'Muslim, Minorities...', 4

⁴Here I agree with Leonardo Boff, in *Church: Charism, and Power*, that syncretism is something positive and a normal process.

development of Islamic life, practice, and doctrine.⁵ (The coming of Islam to Mecca, not disregarding the Arabia tradition is an example). It is also said in the *Hadith* that when Muadz ibn Jabal went to the new area, the Prophet asked to him: ‘what can you do if you could not find a reference from the *Qur’an* and the *Sunna* (or *Hadith*) for your judgement?’. He replied: I will use ‘*ijtihad*’ (*al-Hadits*).⁶ It can be inferred from the *hadith* above that contextualization is a must. Furthermore, there is another saying: “*al-‘adah muhakkamah*”, what is proven by custom (culture) is also proven by *shari’a*.

The central ritual of Javanese Islam is the *slametan* (or *kendhuri*). Geertz said it is the Javanese version of what it perhaps the world’s most common religious ritual, the communal feast, and, as almost everywhere, it symbolizes the mystical and social unity of those participating in it.⁷

There is a wide variety of *slametan*, some are a solidarity-making, community celebrating type, others for more limited, specific purposes such as exorcizing an evil spirit, or celebrating a life-cycle ritual.⁸ This ritual, which involves a communal meal of carefully specified composition is one of the examples of syncretism between Islam and local (Javanese) tradition.

Religious mixture, and the resulting syncretism, it should be noted, is viewed negatively by some researchers, and has been rejected by the leaders of some groups and their followers. The idea of syncretism is considered by many today to “pollute” an assumed Islamic “purity.”

⁵Peter Schineller, ‘Inculturation and Syncretism: What Is the Real Issue ?’, in *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, Vol. 16, no. 2, April 1992, 50, with modification.

⁶In general usage, the Arabic word *ijtihad* denotes the utmost effort, physical or mental, expended in a particular activity. In its technical legal connotation, it denotes the thorough exertion of the jurist’s mental faculty in finding a solution for a case of law. See, Wael B. Hallaq, ‘Ijtihad’, in John L. Esposito, ed., *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World*, Vol. 2, New York: Oxford University Press, 1995, p. 178

⁷Clifford Geertz, *The Religion of Java*, London: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1960, 11

⁸Bruinessen, *Muslims, Minorities...*, 7

The term itself, often taken to imply “inauthenticity” or “contamination” the infiltration of a supposedly “pure” tradition by symbols and meanings seen as belonging to other, incompatible traditions.⁹ Although the idea has been rejected, we will see that syncretism is to be found *de facto*, however, in the everyday rituals, beliefs and practices of the majority of Javanese, including the most orthodox group.¹⁰

From the background above, the study will therefore concentrate on attempting to explain and analyze the relationship between Javanese and Islamic aspects of beliefs and rituals of *slametan*, a syncretic religious ritual in Javanese life. After the introduction, I turn to the *slametan* tradition itself, concluding that the *syncretism* of the Javanese and Islam, and elements from other traditions, does not deviate from the tradition of Islam as a whole, thus it should not be disdained.

This paper is grounded theoretically in the affirmation of the basic Javanese characteristic that maintains harmony. For Javanese this ‘synthesizing’ appears to be the central element of the dominant Javanese ideology. Sectarian intolerance seems to be foreign to Javanese thinking.¹¹ Beside other works on syncretism, the work of Stewart, especially, which use the term *syncretism* to refer to a systematic interrelation of elements from diverse traditions, an ordered

⁹Rosalind Shaw and Charles Stewart, ‘Introduction: Problematizing Syncretism’, in Charles Stewart & Rosalind Shaw (Eds.), *Syncretism /Anti-Syncretism, The Politics of Religious Synthesis*, London and New York: Routledge, 1994, 1

¹⁰It was also the case in African, See, Sergio F. Ferretti, ‘Religious Syncretism in an Afro-Brazilian Cult House’, in Greenfield and Droogers, (Eds.), *Reinventing Religions, Syncretism and Transformation in Africa and the Americas*, Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001, 88

¹¹M.C. Ricklefs, ‘Six Centuries of Islamization in Java’ in Nehemia Levtzion (ed.), *Conversion to Islam*, New York: Holmes & Meier, 1979, 102. He further argues when answering the question of why the new faith (Islam) was adopted at all, that the adoption of a new religion would have been no extraordinary matter for the Javanese elite, who had long been able to adopt various Hindu and Buddhist cults apparently without a sense of conflict. Thus, he would not greatly surprise to discover that there were members of the fourteenth-century elite who regarded themselves as Muslim, Buddhist, and Hindu at the same time.

response to pluralism and cultural difference, is used.¹² It does not imply a substantial merging of types, with a loss of their separate identities, some thing that cannot be presumed in the Javanese case.¹³ *Syncretism*, in this sense, refers to a dynamic, recursive process, a constant factor in cultural reproduction, rather than to a settled outcome. As Stewart suggest, seen in this light it is a concept which directs our attention toward 'issues of accommodation, contest, appropriation, indigenization and a host of other dynamic intercultural processes'¹⁴ Furthermore, I adopt Pinard de la Boullaye's '*sens divers*' of the term syncretism. At last using Islamic resources, the researcher analyzes the problem.

I. Theoretical Frameworks:

A. Anthropological concept

In this section I will endeavor to lay out a certain analysis regarding the concept of *syncretism* in the expectation of using it in the understanding the dialogue between Javanese and Islamic religion.

Syncretism is a tricky term, it is used with both an objective and a subjective meaning. The basic objective meaning refers neutrally and descriptively to the mixing of religions. The subjective meaning includes an evaluation of such intermingling from the point of view of one of the religions involved.¹⁵

Syncretism as a concept was introduced into anthropology by Melville J. Herscovits as

¹²Charles Stewart, 'Relocating Syncretism in Social Science Discourse', in Goran Aijimer Goteborg, (Ed.), *Syncretism and the Commerce of Symbols*, Sweden: IASSA, 1995

¹³Beatty, *Varieties of Javanese Religion*, 3

¹⁴Stewart, 'Relocating Syncretism in Social Science Discourse', 26, cited by Beatty, *Varieties of Javanese Religion*, 3

¹⁵Andre Droogers, 'Syncretism: The Problem of Definition, the Definition of the Problem', in Jerald D. Gort, Hendrik M. Vroom, Rein Fernhout, and Anton Wessels (Eds.), *Dialogue and Syncretism, An Interdisciplinary Approach*, Amsterdam: William B. Eerdmans and Editions Rodopi, 1989, 7

part of what, beginning in the second and third decades of the twentieth century, was conceptualized as the study of acculturation, contact between carriers of different cultures.¹⁶ Originally, it was proposed as a dimension of reinterpretation in the acculturation process, conceptualized to picture what happened to a once isolated people and their culture when they entered into (prolonged) contact with another, usually more powerful culture.¹⁷ The concept was that when acculturation takes place, each people may take from what it finds in the other certain forms, culture traits and /or their meanings, which they may reformulate in terms of their understandings, behaviors and/or practices. The new forms that may result might be composed of elements from the other culture taken over wholesale or a mixing of aspects of its own traditions and those of the other. The mixing and the process, including the reinterpretation of form and meaning that led to the new merged form, both came to be referred to as syncretism.¹⁸

Historically, syncretism was first used by Plutarch to describe the temporary coming together of the quarreling inhabitants of Crete as they overcame their differences of opinion in the face of a common enemy.¹⁹ In his essay he records ‘For, although the Cretans were frequently at faction and feud with one another, they become reconciled and united whenever a foreign foe attacked them. This they called ‘syncretism’.²⁰ From Plutarch’s story, it is

¹⁶Melville J. Herskovits, *Acculturation: The Study of Culture Contact*, Peter Smith: Gloucester, Mass, 1958, cited by, Andre Droogers and Sidney M. Greenfield, ‘Recovering and Reconstructing Syncretism’, in Sidney M. Greenfield and Andre Droogers, (Eds.), *Reinventing Religions*, 24

¹⁷Herskovits, *Cultural Dynamic*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1964, 190, cited by Droogers and Greenfield, ‘Recovering and Reconstructing Syncretism’, 26

¹⁸Droogers and Greenfield, ‘Recovering and Reconstructing Syncretism’, 26

¹⁹Droogers and Greenfield, ‘Recovering and Reconstructing Syncretism’, 27; See also, Droogers, ‘Syncretism: The Problem of Definition, the Definition of the Problem’, in Jerald D. Gort, Hendrik M. Vroom, Rein Fernhout, and Anton Wessels (Eds.), *Dialogue and Syncretism*, 9, and David Chung *Syncretism, The Religious Context of Christian Beginnings in Korea*, New York: State University of New York Press, 2001, 83

²⁰David Chung, *Syncretism*, 83, See also, Carsten Colpe, ‘The Phenomenon of Syncretism and the Impact of Islam’ in Kristztina Kehl-Bodrogi, Barbara Kellnel-Heinkele and Anke Otter-Beaujean, (Eds.), *Syncretistic*

noteworthy that the concept of syncretism begins its history with positive connotations, referring to a strategically practical, morally justified form of political allegiance - a form of 'brotherly love'.²¹ In the course of history the concept went through various changes in meaning, both positively and negatively. Yet, as we will see, beside the possibilities of a positive definition, syncretism presupposes encounter and confrontation. No religion, except the most isolated, is free from syncretism, both in respect to its origin and to its subsequent history.²²

In this paper, the term syncretism is used to indicate and analyze a certain aspect of mutual influence between Javanese and Islamic religious tradition. It involves a process in which beliefs and practices from one religious current or world and life view (in this case from Islam) are adopted by certain people in another religious current (Javanese), vice versa, and subsequently assimilated or repudiated. Concurring with Wilfred C. Smith, one could state that religious traditions are in a continual process of interpenetration. Adherents of one religion derive insight and practices from adherents of other religious traditions.²³ And that applies not only to religious traditions, but also to currents within a certain religion, as Vroom argues.²⁴

B. *Theological Consideration*

According to the sociology of knowledge, our beliefs and theories are clearly rooted in our past experiences. We all have been influenced formatively by the people, families, event,

Religious Communities in the Near East, Leiden: Brill, 1997, 35-6

²¹Shaw and Stewart, 'Introduction: Problematizing Syncretism', 3

²²Droogers, 'Syncretism: The Problem of Definition, the Definition of the Problem', 12

²³See Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Towards a World Theology*, Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1981

²⁴Hendrik M. Vroom, 'Syncretism and Dialogue: A Philosophical Analysis', in Jerald D. Gort, Hendrik M. Vroom, Rein Fernhout, and Anton Wessels (Eds.), *Dialogue and Syncretism, An Interdisciplinary Approach*, 27

and cultures (also religion) of our own existence.²⁵ Afghanistan militant people will understand Islam differently from Indonesian people. One cannot escape from the personal or social experiences which make up the sum of one's existence. Therefore, any person reading a text or viewing any situation does so through the lenses of his or her experiences.²⁶

Islam is a *polyinterpretable* religion. Although Islam may appear to be monolithic, its form and expression vary from one Muslim individual to another and from group to group. How is *Islam*, then, especially *shari'ah* here to be understood ?

There are a number of factors which can influence the outcome of an individual Muslim's understanding of the *shari'ah*. Sociological, cultural and intellectual circumstances, or what Arkoun describes as the '*aesthetics of reception*', are significant in determining the forms and substances of interpretation. '*Aesthetic reception*' means, 'how a discourse, oral or written, is received by listeners or readers', especially, in the case of Islam the reception of the Qur'an. It refers to the conditions of individual perception of each level of culture corresponding to a social group in every phase of historical development.²⁷

Different intellectual inclinations influence the effort to understand the *shari'ah* and thus lead to different interpretations of a particular doctrine. This can take the form of recovering the true meaning of the doctrine as literally expressed in the text, or finding general principles of doctrine beyond its literal or textual expression. Thus, while accepting the general principle of

²⁵Donald E. Messer, *Contemporary Images of Christian Ministry*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989, 62

²⁶Farid Esack, *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism, An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity against Oppression*, Oxford: Oneworld, 1997, 12

²⁷See, Arkoun, 'The Concept of Authority in Islamic Thought', in Klauss Ferdinand and Mehdi Mozaffari, eds., *Islam: State and Society*, London: Curzon Press, 1988, 58, cited by Syafa'atun Almirzanah, 'Freedom of Religion, Pluralism and Interreligious Dialogue (Islamic Perspective)', Paper presented at International Conference 'Convivencia, Enhancing Identity through Encounter between Jews, Christian and Muslim', in Seville, Spain, 2-6 July 2000, 4

the *shari'ah*, Muslims do not adhere to a single interpretation of it.

Emergence of a number of different schools of thought in Islamic jurisprudence and various theological and philosophical streams, shows that Islamic teachings are thus *polyinterpretable*. Throughout history the interpretive nature of Islam has functioned as the basis of Islamic flexibility. In addition, it also confirms the necessity of pluralism in Islamic tradition. Therefore, as many have argued, Islam could not and should not be perceived as monolithic. Thus Islam, as it actually exists, because of 'the divergence in the social, economic and political context', has meant different things to different people. And quite equally, 'it is both understood differently and utilized differently'.²⁸ One also has to take into account the sociological influences while interpreting a divine scripture. No interpretation, howsoever honest, can be free of such influence. The theologians and jurists of the first century of Islam who have acquired great prestige and whose opinion is taken as final in Muslim traditions, were themselves not free from such influences. Their formulations and interpretations must be seen against the sociological perspective of their time, and cannot be seen apart from these limitations. Thus, any interpretation of scripture bears marks of the ethos of its own times.

The principle of *tadrij*, whereby injunctions are understood to have been revealed gradually, best reflect the creative interaction between the will of God, realities on the ground and need of the community being spoken to.²⁹

God would not speak into a vacuum nor would God convey a message formed in a vacuum. According to Shah Wali Allah Dehlawi (d. 1762) the ideal form of *din*³⁰, which he

²⁸Nazih Ayubi, *Political Islam: Religion and Politics in the Arab World*, 60-61, cited by Syafa'atun, 'Freedom of Religion', 4

²⁹Esack, *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism*, 81

³⁰In general it means Religion

interprets to mean primordial ideal religion, corresponds to the ideal form of nature. 'Actual manifestations of the ideal form descend in successive revelations depending on the particular material and historical circumstances' of recipient community. Every succeeding revelation reshapes the elements 'previously found into a new gestalt which embodies *din*, in an altered form suitable to the recipient community'.³¹ It thus follows that, according to Dehlawi, with every succeeding context, *din* has adapted 'its form, beliefs, spiritual practices to the customs, previous faiths and temperaments of the nations to which it has been revealed'.³² This situational character of the Qur'an is well described by Fazlurrahman³³

To understand the Qur'an in its historical contexts is not to confine its message to that context; rather, it is to understand its revealed meaning in a specific past context and then to be able to contextualize it in terms of contemporary reality.³⁴

Earlier Islamic thinkers, like Ibn Taymiyah, had already recognized the necessity for change in view of changing circumstances, and it is for this reason that he came out with a doctrine that religious edicts can change according to changing times.³⁵ Even an orthodox thinker like him thought it necessary that *ahkam* (edicts) should change with the change in historical and sociological circumstances.

If we carry this argument a little further we can say that while the Qur'an was undoubtedly revealed for the whole of mankind and for all times to come, it contained that which

³¹Cited by Essack, *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism*, 55

³²Shah Wali Allah Dehlawi, *Hujjat Allah al-Balighah*, Cairo: Dar al-Kutub, 1952, 187, cited by Essack, *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism* 55

³³Fazlurrahman, *Islam*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1966, 10

³⁴Essack, *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism* 61

³⁵Cited by Ashgar Ali Engineer, Islam, status of Women and Social change, in *Islam and the modern age*, 21, 1990, 190

had significance for the Arabs to whom it was revealed in order to be acceptable to them in their place and time. To be acceptable to the people to whom it is revealed, scripture must have immediate relevance to them. One might say, scripture is contextually determined by their history, cultures and traditions. One cannot therefore deduce from verses in the Qur'an in isolation from their historical context as constitution or as legal code. It is for this reason that the principle of *ijtihad* was used right from the beginning.

II. Javanese Religion and Islam

There has been a strong tendency for scholars to minimize the significance of textual Islam in the religious lives of Southeast Asian Muslim, and this is true in Java.³⁶ Javanese religion is generally understood as a synthesis of animism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam, in which animism is numerically and conceptually predominant. Geertz remains the most articulate proponent of this view. And for more than a quarter of a century his analysis shaped the ways in which scholars have interpreted Javanese religion, culture and history.³⁷ It was Marshall Hodgson who first pointed out that they are not unlike follow Islam in many other parts of the world.³⁸ A recent study, by Merle Ricklefs, 18th century religious texts from the Kartasura court

³⁶W. Roff, 'Islam Obscured? Some Reflections on Studies of Islam and Society in Southeast Asia,' *Archipel* 29, no. 11, 1985, 7-34, cited by Mark R. Woodward, 'The *Slametan*: Textual Knowledge and Ritual Performance in Central Javanese Islam,' *History of Religion*, Vol. 28, no. 1, August 1988, 55

³⁷Woodward, 'The *Slametan*', 55; according to him most studies of contemporary Javanese religion and the conversion of the Javanese to Islam take Geertz's view as a point of departure. See, e.g., A. Day, 'Islam and Literature in Southeast Asia: Some Premodern, mainly Javanese, Perspectives,' in *Islam in Southeast Asia*, ed. M. Hooker, Leiden, 1983; D. Eickelman, 'The Study of Islam in Local Contexts,' *Contributions to Asian Studies* 17, 1982, 1-16; R. Ellen, 'Social Theory, Ethnography and the Understanding of Practical Islam in Southeast Asia,' in Hooker, ed.; James. Peacock, *Muslim Puritans: Reformist Psychology in Southeast Asian Islam*, Berkeley, 1978; and M.C. Ricklefs, *Yogyakarta under Sultan Mangkubumi, 1749-1792: A History of the Division of Java*, Oxford, 1979

³⁸He criticized Geertz's distinction between *Santri*, who take their Muslim religious duties seriously and *Abangan*, the Javanese who viewed as animistic and neglect ritual practices mandated by *shari'ah* (Muslim religious law). Hodgson argued that the *shari'ah* is but one of a multiplicity of modes of Muslim piety, See M. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1974, I: 359-409. Woodward also argued that the degree to which Javanese neglect the *shari'ah*, as Geertz viewed, has been greatly exaggerated. Like other great religion, Islam is characterized by diverse modes of textual exegesis and

shows how deeply Islamized court culture already was then.³⁹ The following section will describe what is slametan, one of the Javanese tradition, look like.

A. 'Slametan' in Javanese Society

'Slametan' is the main ritual that Javanese celebrate at life cycle events or when making important personal or public decisions. Geertz described *slametan* as a village ritual that loses much of its forces in urban environments.⁴⁰ The association of *slametan* with village life and animism lies at the heart of his theory that Javanese culture has resisted Indic and Islamic influence. But *slametan* is not exclusively, or even primarily, a village ritual. Nor it is limited to the *kejawen* community. *Slametan* is performed in mosques, at *pesantren*⁴¹, at the graves of saints, and in the homes of traditional *santri*.⁴² During this ritual, neighbors and relatives pool resources, distribute food, and consummating in a communal meal, thereby attempting to achieve the desire state of harmony and peace. Participants hope that the communal ritual will smooth the succession of the person in need to another step in the life cycle or that will lend support for making major decisions.⁴³

The basic idea of the Javanese worldview holds that worldly and spiritual affairs are highly coordinated. The truly powerful and mature human person should attempt to achieve an

ritual practice. See, Woodward, 'The *Slametan*', 56. The distinction between *santri* and *kejawen (abangan)*, is culturally specific instance of the recurrent tension between *shari'ah* minded and mystical interpretation characteristic of Sunni Islam. Both derive from the Qur'an and the emulation of Muhammad, claiming to capture the true meaning of Islam. See, I. Goldziher, *Introduction to Islamic Theology and Law*, NY: Princeton, 1981, 21

³⁹Bruinessen, 'Muslim, Minorities and Modernity,' 7

⁴⁰Geertz, *The Religion of Java*, 11-15

⁴¹Islamic Boarding School.

⁴²Woodward, 'The *Slametan*', 66

⁴³Thomas Schweizer, 'The Javanese *Slametan*: Knowledge, Practice, and Embeddedness of Ritual in Society', Paper presented in the workshop 'Reassessing Ritual, Power, and the Structuring of Relationship' at the 5th Biennial Conference of the European Association of Social Anthropologists, Frankfurt, 4-7 September 1998, 3

inner state of tranquility and self control and strive for harmony with her or his fellows. Points of turnover during the life cycle and times of important decisions are critical junctions at which time the person facing these situations could lose self-control and harmony and could thereby create damage not only to the human community, but also to the spiritual world. On these occasions, people are especially vulnerable to the attack of evil spirit, who could take control. *Slametan* is the proper ritual means to counter evil influences and to ensure that the person in need proceeds smoothly to the next step of her or his life course (childbirth, circumcision, marriage, death) or is protected on a new project (moving into a new place, changing jobs, etc.)⁴⁴

A *slametan*, a ceremonial meal consisting of offerings, symbolic food, a formal speech, and a prayer, is the epitome of the local tradition, which have been seen by the participants as integral to their lives as social beings and to their sense of themselves as Javanese.⁴⁵ The purpose is to create a state of well-being, security, and freedom from hindrances of both a practical and spiritual kind - a state which is called *slamet*. To be *slamet* is to be safe, blessed, well off, and, as Javanese often say, 'free from obstacle or hindrance.'⁴⁶ Clifford Geertz in his interview (in his *The Religion of Java*) he got two reasons for *slametan*: 'when you give a *slametan*, nobody feels any different from anyone else and so they do not want to split up. Also a *slametan* protects you against the spirits, so they will not upset you'.⁴⁷ Mulder also observes that the purpose of the *slametan* is to establish the condition of *slamet* in local community and the hearts of its

⁴⁴Schweizer, 'The Javanese *Slametan*,' 3

⁴⁵Andrew Beatty, *Varieties of Javanese Religion*, 25

⁴⁶Robert W. Hefner, *Hindu Javanese, Tengger Tradition and Islam*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985, 104

⁴⁷Geertz, *The Religion of Java*, 14

members.⁴⁸ While Koentjaraningrat described *slamet* as ‘a state in which events will run their fixed course and nothing untoward will happen to anyone’⁴⁹, Zoetmulder characterized *slamet* as psychological and social ‘homeostasis’.⁵⁰

Javanese themselves generally refer to both the social and psychological dimension of *slamet* when asked to define it. In social discourse it refers to both mental states and social conditions. The individual is *slamet* when his mind is at rest, untroubled by worldly concerns or supernatural fears. This state does not suggest withdrawal from the world but, rather, the absence of strong emotions and acceptance of one’s position in the social hierarchy.⁵¹ The community is *slamet* when there is an adequate level of material prosperity together with an absence of social or political conflict. Javanese often state that two modalities of *slamet* are interdependent because psychological tranquility is possible only in well-ordered social contexts, while social harmony is possible only when the emotions of individuals are stilled.⁵²

The harmonious cooperation of neighbors and kin during the preparation of the feast and the quiet performance of the ritual itself is highly valued by Javanese as a public sign of harmony among fellows. The heavy stress in *slametan* rhetoric on peace and harmonious cooperation is a sign that these conditions are perceived as precarious and critical: disharmony is always lurking behind the scenes, and concerted efforts are needed to counteract these evil tendencies.⁵³

⁴⁸Niels Mulder, ‘*Abangan* Javanese Religious Thought and Practice,’ *Brijdragen tot de Taal-Land - ed Volkenkunde* 139, no.2, 1983, 260-68 cited by Woodward, ‘*The Slametan*’, 66

⁴⁹Koentjaraningrat, ‘The Javanese of South Central Java’ in *Social Structure in Southeast Asia*, ed. G Murdock, New York, 1960, 88-115, cited by Woodward, ‘*The Slametan*’, 67

⁵⁰P. Zoetmulder, *The Cultural Background of Indonesian Politics*, Columbia, S. C., 1967

⁵¹Woodward, ‘*The Slametan*’, 67

⁵²Woodward, ‘*The Slametan*’, 67

⁵³Schweizer, ‘*The Javanese Slametan*’, 3

B. *The Practice of ritual 'Slametan'*

Slametan includes three principle components, an invocation (*ujub*), an Arabic Prayer (*donga*) and the meal. Inviting guests and preparing food are also integral components of the ritual.⁵⁴

The practice of *slametan* is as follows. A day or two before the event, when a family 'has work to do' (*duwe gawe*, is usual phrase for ritual obligations), the family asks a few closer female relative and neighbors to help in preparations (*rewang*). Acceptance is obligatory. There is no payment, but the host must feed the workers and help is given, with a clear expectation of reciprocity.⁵⁵

Usually *slametans* take place in the evening, just after the sun has gone down and the evening prayer (*maghrib*) is done. A long rectangular mat is laid out, with a set of offerings at one end, near to the inner chamber or kitchen. What kind of food is spread out along the mat depend on the occasion and purpose of *slametans*. Often there is a large cone rice, resting on briars in a basket, called the 'mound of misfortune' (*tumpeng serakat*), a chicken buried in another mound, packages of glutinous rice in tubes and diamond shapes, and so on.⁵⁶

The people invited are all close neighbors, since to a *slametan* one invites all those who live in the immediate area around one's own house. They are called together by a messenger of the host only five or ten minute before *slametan* is to begin, and they must drop everything and come immediately.⁵⁷ However, kin business associates, and others with whom the host has important social relationship are invited to the large ceremonies held for rites of passage,

⁵⁴Woodward, 'The *Slametan*', 70

⁵⁵Schweizer, 'The Javanese *Slametan*', 5

⁵⁶Beatty, *Varieties of Javanese Religion*, 31

⁵⁷Geertz, *The Religion of Java*, 12

particularly weddings, circumcisions, and funeral.⁵⁸

The guest arrived were seated around the mats, squatting in the formal Javanese sitting posture called *sila* (with the legs folded inward and crossed in front of the body and with the trunk ramrod stiff). They dressed soberly, usually, in sarongs and black velvet hats. When all have arrived, and the circle is complete, the ceremony begins.

First, the host or representative in his stead announces the occasion of *slametan* and opens it with a speech in the most polite language possible (i.e., very formal high Javanese). Earlier, he crumbles incense onto the ember and as aromatic smoke starts to rise he begins the speech. He expresses his profound gratitude for his neighbors' attendance, explains the purpose of *slametan* (*hajat*). Lastly he apologizes for his lack of eloquence or anything he may have said which disturbed anyone, and for the inadequacy of the food he is serving.⁵⁹ This is the first component of *slametan* called *ujub* or statement of intent. There is something more is meant here, the expression of intention is a performative utterance which, coupled with the expression of wishes, bring about, at least symbolically, the desired result. The address thus shares some characteristics of the spell, which often begins with the phrase, 'I have intention' (*niyat ingsun*) of doing such and such, ' followed by the action of cutting, anointing, or whatever.⁶⁰

The *Ujub* is followed immediately by a *donga*, Arabic chant-prayer. Ideally it must be recited by a mosque official, but in his absence anyone who knows Arabic will suffice. In the village the host may invite the *modin*, the official village religious specialist, to give the prayer. The *donga* is preceded by the Qur'anic formula '*Bismillahi al-Rahman al-Rahim*' (in the name of Allah the Compassionate, the Merciful). This formula, often shortened to *Bismillah* (in the

⁵⁸Woodward, 'The *Slametan*', 72

⁵⁹Geertz, *The Religion of Java*, 13

⁶⁰Beatty, *Varieties of Javanese Religion*, 46

name of Allah) is the most common *donga*.⁶¹ *Donga* is also drawn largely from the Qur'an passage suitable to the occasion are often selected, but the *Fatihah* (the first chapter of the Qur'an) is essential.⁶²

Praises be to Allah, Lord of the world! The Beneficent, the Merciful! Owner of the Day of Judgement! Thee we worship and Thee we ask for help! Show us the straight path, the path of those whom Thou hast favored; not (the path) of those who earn Thine anger nor of those who go astray. [1: 1-7].

The *Fatihah* is followed by one or more other selections from the Qur'an. There are a number of popular chapters, e.g., *Surat Yasin* (chap. 35) is always recited at death *slametan*, while *al-Ikhlās* (chap. 112) or *Qaf* (chap 50) is often recited at exorcisms and *slametan* intended to restore tranquility.⁶³ While the prayer leader recites the Qur'anic passages, the other guests and host hold their palms facing upward greeting each pause with a laud *amin*. Geertz states that participants appear to expect the gift from God.⁶⁴

With the chorus of *amin*, the food is sacralized (blessed), and the serving of it begins. The food is served on banana leaves, and distributed.⁶⁵ According to *kejawen* Muslim, this is the most significant element of *slametan*. The distribution of blessed food serves as basis for social harmony. It ensures an even distribution of the type of blessing required for a tranquilized society

⁶¹Mark R. Woodward, *Islam in Java, Normative Piety and Mysticism in the Sultane of Yogyakarta*, Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1989, 121

⁶²Woodward, 'The *Slametan*,' 78, see also Geertz, *The Religion of Java*, 13

⁶³Woodward, 'The *Slametan*,' 79

⁶⁴Geertz, *The Religion of Java*, 13. Not only in the *Slametan* but also at tombs and at the conclusion of the *salat* rite, *kejawen* Muslim and the traditional *santri* rub their faces to absorb the blessing descending from heaven. It is also a common devotional practice in the Middle East and Muslim Asia and is derived from the posture used in *salat*. See Woodward, 'The *Slametan*,' 79-80, also see, T. Hughes, *Dictionary of Islam: Being a Cyclopaedia of Doctrines, Rites, Ceremonies and Custom, Together with the Technical and Theological Terms of the Muhammadan Religion*, Calcuta, 1885, 469, cited by Woodward, 'The *Slametan*,' 80

⁶⁵But in the current situation, especially in the city, which is almost difficult to find the banana leaf and also for the more practice reason, the food is served on a special places made by cardboard or plastic

in which individuals can attain material prosperity and spiritual development.⁶⁶

When all have stopped eating, the participants ask permission and depart for home with a designated portion of empowered *slametan* food, *berkat* or “blessing”.⁶⁷ With their departure, the *Slametan* ends.

C. *The Impact of Slametan*

At a *slametan*, the number of guests varies, depending on the purpose of *slametan*. The wedding and death *slametan* have a huge of participants. In the *slametan*, participant are mixed by class, but are more homogeneous in religious orientation since hamlets are dominated by particular factions of Islam.⁶⁸

Slametans happen frequently since it is a rite of cycle-life. Those are the basic building blocks of neighborhood solidarity. It can be seen from how the preparation of *slametan* held. In a big *slametan*, in fact, the guests are more mixed in their class background and especially so in their religious orientation. The number of guests is higher, the foods are more varied and complete, even the portions of meat are bigger. Further, wealthy syncretist people might sponsor a shadow play (*wayang*) at weddings, while rich orthodox Muslims would invite an orchestra playing ‘Islamic’, Arab-pop Music, thereby stressing different religious orientations. Also, orthodox Muslim might invite an Islamic leader (*kyai*) from out side the village to perform the

⁶⁶Woodward, ‘The *Slametan*,’ 81

⁶⁷John Pemberton said, that rather than a form of commensal bonding, *slametan* are, in practice, more of a ritual take out. What, thus, attracts Javanese villagers to *slametan* is not so much the possibility of feasting together but the promise of returning home with a designated position of empowered *slametan* food, i.e., *berkat*. See, John Pemberton, *On the Subject of ‘Java’*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1994, 245

⁶⁸Most of them are come from *Nahdlatul Ulama*. (*Nahdlatul Ulama* is one of the biggest Islamic organization in Indonesia. They are usually called traditionalist Muslim). However, in current situation, there are also many people out side *Nahdlatul Ulama* who hold and attend *slametan*. It seems that tradition is more powerful than affiliation of a certain religious orientation.

prayer part of the reception.⁶⁹ All show how *slametan* can produce a particular solidaric social structure in the community.

The other effect of *slametan* is that everyone is equal and they do not wish to split up; human status distinctions are obliterated. Woodward describes further the effect of *slametan* in mystical perspectives. He said that the equality of everyone extends to the saints as well as the human community. This state of equality is obtained as the consequence of a state of spiritual union with the saints, the result of which is that human status distinctions are obliterated.⁷⁰ Even for the *kejawen*, in the *slametan* the hosts, guests, and saints attain a state of tranquility approaching that of mystical union. Like union with Allah, this state is momentary. When the guests leave, they resume their normal positions in social hierarchy. But the ritual is thought to establish the social condition of union of servant and Lord, which is believed to be essential if individuals and the community are to be truly *slamet*. Thus, the purpose of ritual is not to destroy hierarchy but to ensure its proper articulation.⁷¹

Besides social factors, the effect of *slametan* can also be seen in political factors. Schweizer argues that the main influence at present precisely, is political. After the 1965/1966 violence⁷² and with the establishment of New Order, the public display of harmony was the order of the day. The struggles of the past had to be silenced, and all participants attempted to demonstrate a new form of solidarity - and the *slametan* rituals were the main arena for doing so

⁶⁹See, Schweizer, 'The Javanese *Slametan*', 7

⁷⁰Woodward, 'The *Slametan*,' 83

⁷¹Woodward, 'The *Slametan*,' 83

⁷²There was riot in 1965/1966 called September 30 of Indonesian communist movement (PKI), which result the establishment of New Order.

in rural settings.⁷³ Thus, at least, *slametan* was still considered to be a public event that demonstrated to villagers themselves and to outside the world that communal harmony (*rukun*) prevailed, that conditions were peaceful (*slamet*), and that the cleavages of the past had been successfully overcome by the community.⁷⁴

III. **Syncretism in the Javanese *Slametan***

Geertz's study, of *the Religion of Java*, is indeed one of the most important works in the area of Javanese Islam. And, as already mentioned before, most studies of contemporary Javanese religion and the conversion of the Javanese to Islam take Geertz's view as a point of departure. However, there already are many criticisms of his work. In discussing the central ritual of Javanese Islam, the *slametan*, Geertz did not perceive much Islam in these religious patterns. He identified the *slametan* as a 'core ritual' in Javanese culture and as a prototypical animistic rite, but foreign to Islam, intended to reinforce village solidarity.⁷⁵ It was Marshall Hodgson, as mentioned before, who first pointed out that they are not unlike follower Islam in many other parts of the world.⁷⁶ Further he criticizes as follows:

The most important study of Islam in Malaya is Clifford Geertz' Religion of Java (Glencoe, 1960); it deals with the twentieth century, and with inner Java in particular, but much in it throws light on what happened earlier and is relevant to other parts of the archipelago. Unfortunately, *its general high excellence is marred by a major systematic error: influenced by the polemics of a certain school of modern shari'ah -minded*

⁷³Schweizer, 'The Javanese *Slametan*,' 8

⁷⁴Schweizer, 'The Javanese *Slametan*,' 8

⁷⁵Geertz, *The Religion of Java*, 10-15

⁷⁶Bruinessen, 'Muslim, Minorities and Modernity,' 7

Muslims, Geertz identified 'Islam' only with what that school of modernists happens to approve, and ascribes everything else to an aboriginal or Hindu-Buddhist background, gratuitously labeling much of the Muslim religious life in Java 'Hindu'. He identifies a long series of phenomena, virtually universal to Islam and sometimes found even in the Qur'an itself, as un-Islamic; and hence his interpretation of the Islamic past as well as of some recent anti-Islamic reactions is highly misleading. His error has at least three roots. When he refers to the archipelago having long been cut off from 'the centers of orthodoxy at Mecca and Cairo', the irrelevant inclusion of Cairo betrays a modern source of Geertz' bias. We must suspect also the urge of many colonialists to minimize their subjects' ties with a disturbingly worldwide Islam (a tendency found also among French colonialists in the Maghreb); and finally his anthropological techniques of investigation, looking to a functional analysis of a culture in momentary cross-section without serious regard to the historical dimension. Other writers have recognized better the Islamic character even of inner-Javanese religion: C.A.O. van Nieuwenhuijze, *Aspect of Islam in Post-Colonial Indonesia* (The Hague, 1958); W. F. Wertheim, *Indonesian Society in Transition* (2nd ed., The Hague, 1959), but Geertz stands out in the field. For one who knows Islam, his comprehensive data - despite his intention - show how very little has survived from the Hindu past even in inner Java and raise the question why the triumph of Islam was so complete.⁷⁷

Geertz's ethnographic analysis was uninformed by careful study of the Islamic textual tradition and particularly the *hadith*. The *slametan*, Woodward argues, is the product of the interpretation of Islamic texts and modes of ritual actions shared by the

⁷⁷ Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam, Conscience and History in a World Civilization*, Vol 2, The University of Chicago Press, 1974, 551, italics is mine

larger (non Javanese) Muslim community.⁷⁸ Its goals are rooted in local interpretations of the Sufi theory of mystical union, and that the modes of ritual action it employs are based on practices attributed to the prophet Muhammad by hadith.⁷⁹

Yet, whatever the scholars may conclude concerning *slametan*, it will be obvious that religion syncretism is manifest in any component of it.

Referring religion as a syncretic, may lead us to think of it as patchwork quilt, a bricolage, a strange agglomeration. It also may led us to make oppositions such as fusion versus purity, fusion versus separation, or in the case of Javanese religion, of *santri* versus *abangan*. In addition, it may be regarded as fertility, a new synthesis, convergence, an amalgam, analogy, juxtaposition, parallelism, or even as religious bilingualism, or as equivalence, a mask or coalescence. Moreover, besides the religious sphere, syncretism also occurs in the realms of philosophy, art and science.⁸⁰

Most researchers have regarded syncretism with disdain. Influenced by them, most leaders of religion have regarded syncretism as a decadent fusion that pollutes the purest religious tradition. This perspective does not acknowledge that no religion which is clearly pure or free from syncretism, both in respect to its origin and to its subsequent history, as already mentioned.

Religious syncretism is manifest in almost every aspect in the majority of Javanese rites.⁸¹ This situation is the product of the past historical process of

⁷⁸Woodward, 'The *Slametan*', 62, cited by Beatty, *Varieties of Javanese Religion*, 29

⁷⁹Woodward, *Islam in Java*, 52

⁸⁰Sergio F. Ferretti, 'Religious Syncretism in an Afro-Brazilian Cult House', 90

⁸¹It can be seen also in Javanese literature called *Babad*, and the story in *wayang* (shadow puppet) theater. See for example, S. Santoso, *Babad Tanah Jawa (Galuh Mataram)*, Surakarta: Citra jaya, 1979

Islamization.⁸² In Java, it was widely known that Islam was established by nine *wali* (saint). One of the most famous in Central Java was Sunan Kalijaga. He was portrayed as the founding of Demak (the first Islamic Kingdom), as the inventor of the *slametan*, the Javanese *wajang* play and the state ceremonies of the Demak and Mataram Kingdoms.⁸³ According to some accounts, he was the figure who spread Islam in Java by using a syncretic approach. He modified the elements of pre-Islamic culture by introducing Islamic elements. The result was *slametan*, *sekaten* (feasts celebration of the birth of Muhammad), *wayang* (shadow puppets) and so on.

Pinard de la Boullaye in his book *L'Etude Comparee des Religions* presented a 'sens divers' of the term syncretism as follows:

Sens a) Indifferentisme plus ou moins absolue [Tolerance and blending between cults which contain more or less equivalent elements]

Sens b) Indifferentisme relatif [Consensus of all Christian for example, on the essential issues regardless of their disagreement on other matters]

Sens c) Melange philologique et historique [Accidental (historical and philosophical) combination of the borrowed elements which more or less reflect different origin in different cults] ⁸⁴

Following his three meanings of syncretism, the researcher will analyze further the syncretism in *slametan*.

⁸²The early history of Javanese Islam is extremely obscure, especially the firm conclusion concerning the date at which Islam come to dominate religious and political life in central Java. See, Woodward, *Islam in Java*, 53-60

⁸³Woodward, *Islam in Java*, 96

⁸⁴M. Pinard de la Boullaye, *L'Etude Comparee des Religions*, II, Se Methods, 2dn Ed., Paris, 1925, Cited by David Chung, *Syncretism, The Religious Context of Christian Beginnings in Korea*, 83

One factor that stands out in the sense a) is 'equivalence'. In order to create syncretic phenomena, equivalence must be present when two or more religions come into contact.⁸⁵ There are several meanings of 'equivalence'. In this case its meaning in the broadest sense may be appropriate, i.e., like the Javanese dictum: '*sedaya agami sami mawon*' (all religions are the same/one). By this dictum, Javanese people have no difficulties to adopt something new or foreign for them (in this case Islamic), and blend it into theirs. There are many motivations of blending, as Chung mentions, i.e., political, economic, or cultural condition. Yet there is another factor under each condition above, the psychological factor. Attraction to foreign elements and yearning for excitement in exotic cults plays an important role. This is what Toynbee called 'sense of promiscuity', a product of the interactions between the socio-historical environment and human nature.⁸⁶

'Equivalence' also means antecedent analogy between some particular elements on each side. Convergence is usually the case.⁸⁷ In the case of *slametan*, the *ujub* or statement of intent, the first component, is a welcoming speech, to welcome the guest, explain the purpose of *slametan*, and to mention the saints and spirits who have been invited and the dish that is dedicated to each of them. Although it should be delivered in the most polite language possible, it is not simply a polite speech. It has at least five theologically motivated purposes, as Woodward observed: (1) to link an elaborate feast with the simple ritual meals at which Muhammad (PbH) officiated; (2) to define the community to whom blessing will be imparted; (3) to specify saints and other beings to whom food and prayer are dedicated; (4) to establish the good intention of the host; and

⁸⁵ Chung, *Syncretism*, 84

⁸⁶ Cited by Chung, *Syncretism*, 87

⁸⁷ Chung, *Syncretism*, 84

(5) to establish his humility.⁸⁸

All the talk of intentions may recall to some the Islamic *niyah* which preceded ritual prayer or *salat*. Woodward, again, takes the prominence of intention as evident of the Islamic tone of the *slametan*. He said that the *ujub* and the expression of humility it includes are also congruent with the textual concept of intention (*niyah*) and the belief that prayer is submission to Allah.⁸⁹ The point of *niyah* is an aid to concentration in worship.⁹⁰

The fundamental aspect of Pinard's sens b) is 'consensus', a consensus among the religions in alliance in one way or another regardless of their varieties. It may be called a *common platform*, or in Islamic language '*kalimah sawa*'. In a Plutarchian sense, the 'consensus' among the religious bodies may arise from a retrospective view on their fraternity, or their real or fictitious kinship bifurcation in history.⁹¹ In Islam, the principle of unity is obvious in the principle, that the Qur'an does not recognize the exclusivistic notion of the phrase, '*Extra ecclesiam nullus propheta*', neither '*Extra ecclesiam nulla salus*'. Instead the Qur'an proclaims that,

Those who believe (in the Qur'an) and those who follow the Jewish (Scriptures) and the Christians and the Sabians, whoever believe in God and the last day and work righteousness, shall have their reward with their Lord; on them shall be no fear nor shall

⁸⁸Woodward, 'The *Slametan*', 74

⁸⁹Woodward, 'The *Slametan*', 77

⁹⁰Constance E. Padwick, *Muslim devotions: a study of prayer manuals in common use*, London: SPCK, 1961, 50, 53, cited by Beatty, *Varieties of Javanese Religion*, 46

⁹¹Chung, *Syncretism*, 87

they grieve.⁹²

Those who believe (in the Qur'an) and those who follow the Jewish (Scripture) and the Sabians and the Christians, any who believe in God and the Last Day and work righteousness, on them shall be no fear nor shall they grieve.⁹³

On the face of the universality of religions and of their fundamental unity, all of the apparent differences among religions are but the external forms and the symbolical expressions of the same and one perennial truth which is basically ineffable,⁹⁴ since what counts at the deepest level in religion is the spirit of faith and not any formal affiliation. God gives every community their own way to attain salvation, and there are many, not one, of doing so although man should be cautious regarding some of them which may be misleading.⁹⁵

The *Ujub* in slametan is followed immediately by a *Donga*. The *Donga* is not restricted to *slametan*. *Donga* is a Javanese gloss for Arabic term *du'a*. It is prayer of supplication that may be included in *salat*⁹⁶ It is very obvious from the *donga*, that *slametan* has integrated many elements from Islam. What is interesting about all this from religious perspective is that even *kejawen* Javanese recognize the importance of this Islamic prayer.⁹⁷ This is what called 'consensus' in Pinard de la Boullaye's sens b) as the

⁹² Al-Qur'an 2: 62

⁹³ Al-Qur'an 5: 69

⁹⁴ Nurcholish Madjid, 'The Islamic Concept of Man and Its Implications for the Muslim's Appreciation of the Civil and Political Rights', paper prepared for the seminar on Enriching the Universalities of Human Rights: Islamic Perspectives on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Geneva, 9-10 Nov. 1998, 6

⁹⁵ See Al-Qur'an 5: 48; 29: 69; 5: 16 and 16: 9

⁹⁶ Woodward, 'The *Slametan*', 79

⁹⁷ Hefner, *Hindu Javanese*, 107

syncretic phenomena.

The fundamental character of the sens c) is the “accidental combination of the unequivocal portions of the ‘equivalent’ elements involved in the syncretic phenomenon.” This situation arises with the contact and merging of two societies with different cultural configurations. Communication can be the problem here, and this brings to the problem of ‘semantic features’ of the respective communicants.⁹⁸ Communication is carried through the channel of language, artistic expression and the process of symbolic communication.⁹⁹ It can be done by adopting and accommodating the native vocabularies or in certain case give religious meaning (in this case Islamic) to this accommodated words.

In the *slametan*, both Javanization and Islamization were carried out. The word *slametan* itself is a Javanization of the Arabic word ‘*salam*’ (peace). Other example, is the word *Sekaten* (slametan feast for the celebration of the birth of the Prophet Muhammad) came the arabic word *Shahadatain* (witnesses).¹⁰⁰ In history, Sunan Kalijaga as the *wali* who spread Islam in Java, did not disregard Javanese tradition but tried to insert the Islamic religion inside it, and let Islamic language be understood by Javanese.

IV. CONCLUSION: Contemporary Implementation of Islam

A. The Qur’an and Javanese religion

People argue that *slametan* has no explicit sanction in the Qur’anic tradition, but it

⁹⁸Chung, *Syncterism*, 89

⁹⁹Chung, *Syncretism*, 89-90

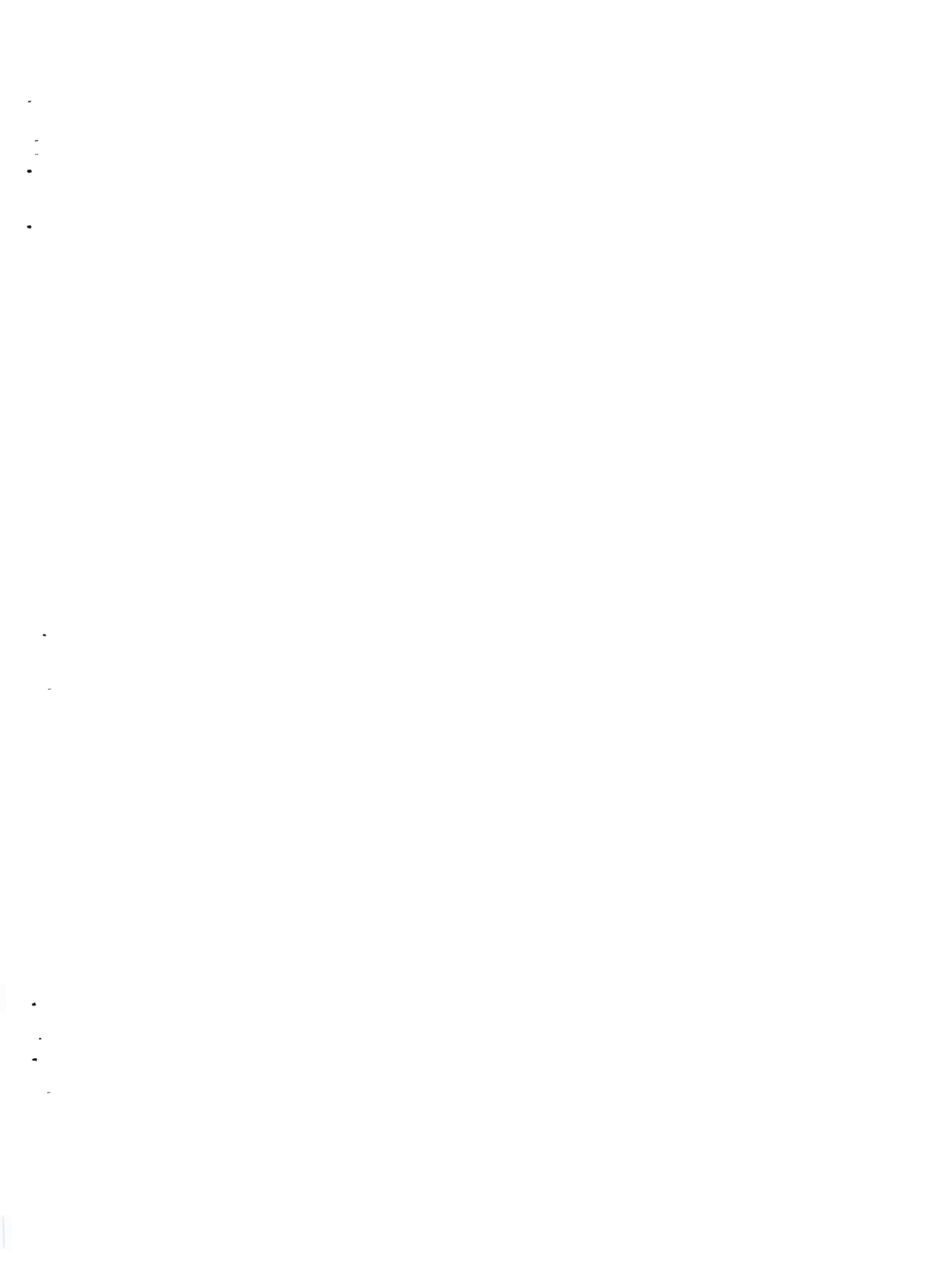
¹⁰⁰This type of syncretism is obvious in the story of Pandawa shadow puppet. For the story of Pandawa Shadow Puppet, see, Woodward, *Islam in Java*, 218-225

has long played an important role in Javanese Islam. What the Qur'an tells about Java may be the relevant question here. The answer is, of course, "not very much", since Java is not part of the context of early Islam. But the study of the Qur'an, as a non-local text, is an essential element of the analysis of Javanese religion for several reasons, as Woodward argues. The first is that many Javanese read the Qur'an, memorize it, and believe that it is the word of God. Perhaps the most important is the fact that non local texts, includes the Qur'an, served as part of the base upon which local oral and written traditions are constructed. In short, non local text are interpreted and acted upon. It is through this process of interpretation that the foreign text is localized and incorporated into local cultural and religious knowledge.¹⁰¹

In the *slametan* in question, we can see how Javanese try to incorporate Islamic tradition to their own tradition. In this case we can say also, that Javanese use their efforts to understand the Qur'an in their cultural perspectives. As already mention before, there are a number factors which can influence the outcome of individual in understanding the Qur'an. Sociological, cultural and intellectual circumstances, or what Arkoun describes as the '*aesthetics of reception*', are significant in determining the forms and substances of interpretation. Thus Islam, as it actually exists, because of 'the divergence in the social, economic and political context', has meant different things to different people. This interpretable nature of Islam has functioned as the basis of Islamic flexibility.

The general objection from orthodox Muslims to *slametan* laid on several aspects which are considered to be *shirk* (the association of other beings and powers with Allah). *Shirk* is the opposite of *tawhid* (the unity of Allah). It refers to polytheism in general and

¹⁰¹Woodward, *Islam in Java*, 52



to worship of idols in particular. Indeed, according to the Qur'an, *shirk* is held to be among the worst possible sins, for which there is no chance of forgiveness. Like the most Qur'anic doctrines, *shirk* is subject to a broad range of interpretations. The Qur'an does not give precise definition of *shirk*. The Wahabis and other extreme reformists hold that veneration of saints and prophets (which is available in *slametan* ritual), believe in magical power, and everything else that departs from radical monotheism is *shirk*, but the Javanese views of *shirk* reflect the different opinion.

In addition, incorporating foreign aspect for Islamic ingredient will not abolish or destroy the essence of Islam, as implied from Geertz's theory. It will be in opposition with the Islamic historical facts, including the earlier formative period (the most authentic and classic period), i.e., in the era of Muhammad. The Prophet used the element of local tradition (Arabs' tradition) to convey his messages. Related to the problem, there are many examples from Islamic literature in Middle East which is a 'blending' of Islamic and non Islamic elements. Thus, syncretism is a normal process of mutual influence between religious tradition.

B. Toward Appropriate 'Dakwah' (Mission)

It can be concluded, from the discussion above, that such problem is about interpretation and diversity in intensity of understanding and experiencing religion. And since the Qur'an as the source of Islam is polyinterpretable as such, the appropriate attitude is not to condemn the people with different interpretation from our own.

Islam is a missionary faith; among its adherents there is a desire to share the riches of the faith and the heritage with others. But notoriously, in the attempt to fulfill this missionary vocation, *da'wah* activities of Muslims among other religion and culture,

have sometimes led to grievances.¹⁰²

Islam considers its messages from God to be relevant to all people, everywhere; Islam considers that the truth it was entrusted with is universal in nature. Thus, Muslims are under a constraint to present their faith as a fundamental religious duty. This is expressed in *da'wah*, the invitation or call to Islam, based on the verse 'Call men unto the path of your Lord by wisdom and goodly counsel. Present the cause to them through argument yet more sound' (Q. 16: 125). *Da'wah* is, thus, the fulfilment of this commandment 'to call men unto the path of Allah', and essential religious duty. Furthermore, it is an effort, by Muslims to enable other humans to share and benefit from the Supreme vision of religious truth, which he has appropriated.

According to Islam, *da'wah* is certainly not coercion, for Allah has commanded 'No coercion in Religion'(Q. 2: 256). It is an invitation whose objective can be fulfilled only with the free consent of the called. Since the objective is an exercise by the called of his own recognition that Allah is his Creator, Master, Lord and Judge, a forced recognition is a *contradictio in adjecto*.¹⁰³ Humanistic ethic regards coerced *da'wah* as a grave violation of the human person, which is why al-Qur'an specified the means of persuasion to be used. 'Argue the cause with them (non-Muslim) with the more comely argument' (Q. 16: 125). If they are not convinced, they must be left alone (Q. 5: 108), 3: 176-177 and 47: 32)

¹⁰²Concerning Christian/Muslim missionary activities,, Emilio Castro has hinted at the potential for a deteriorating relation between Islam and Christianity in their comparable concern to fulfill 'mission' imperatives. It might be assumed that this is purely because of a mutually exclusive message, but the theological question is not so clear cut. See, Castro E. *Editorial, International Review of Missions*, (Chambesy Dialogue on Da'wah and Mission) 65, 1976, 365-366

¹⁰³Ismail Faruqi, 'On the Nature of Islamic Da'wah' in Ismail Faruqi, *Islam and Other Faiths*, edited by Attaullah Siddiqui, The Islamic Foundation and The International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1998, 306. This article was published in *International Review of Mission*, vol. lxxv, No. 260, October, 1976, 391-406. See also, *Christian Mission and Islamic Da'wah*, Leicester : The Islamic Foundation, 1982, 33-42

Indeed, it is wrong to say, if we go by scripture, that there is no injunction in the holy Qur'an to convert to anybody to that particular faith. On the contrary, there are two clear directions laid out in the Qur'an: First, that the Qur'an does not give you any new truth. It only preaches to you the truth, previously preached by other prophets. Secondly, the Qur'an says, 'Call people to the way of God'. The expression used here is the way of God, not 'Islam'. The avoidance of the word 'Islam', creates a specific implication.¹⁰⁴ That is people must be called to the way of God, persuasively rather than violently.¹⁰⁵ Indeed according to the Qur'anic protestation, even the Prophet Muhammad was a 'warner'. While Muhammad felt sorry for disbelievers, again and again, both in Meccan and Medinese periods of his carrier, al-Qur'an said that, 'We have no sent the Qur'an to you that may live in anguish'(Q. 20: 2), 'are you, then, going to melt away your soul in sorrow for them that they do not believe in this Tea-ching ?' (Q. 18: 6). '...wherefore do not feel sorry for the disbelievers'. (Q. 5: 68).

Islamic *da'wah* is ,therefore, an invitation to think, to debate and argue rather than a forceful mission. Islamic *da'wah* operates only under the principle that the right to think is innate and belongs to all men. *Da'wah* is a critical process of intellection; thus never dogmatic. Since it is always critical involving the intellect, it should always keep itself open to new evidence and to new alternatives, so that it continually casts and recasts itself in new forms, in cognizance of the new discoveries of human science, and of new needs of the human situation. In engaging in *da'wah*, the *da'i* (preacher) is not the ambassador of an authoritarian system, but is a co-thinker who is cooperating with the

¹⁰⁴The word Islam here means a specific religion, not in its generic meaning. In generic meaning, all religions are Islam, means surrender to God.

¹⁰⁵Asghar Ali Engineer, 'The Islamic Outlook on Interreligious Dialogue' 20

mad'u (tha called) in the understanding and appreciation of Allah's revelation.

While the above definition of *da'wah* is certainly true, there have been many manipulative or corrupt forms of *da'wah*. The word '*da'wah*' often has connotations of conversion, leading to conflicts over gaining converts. It is for this reason, that we must rethink the *da'wah*. A starting point might be replacing the word '*da'wah/mission*' with the word dialogue, as Faruqi suggested.¹⁰⁶ Dialogue is, in fact, education in its widest and noblest sense. It is a method through which reality becomes known. It is a means of free intercourse of ideas. The end of dialogue must be a conversion of truth, not a conversion to Islam or to any other religion. A conversion with conviction of truth is only legitimate.¹⁰⁷ The success of interfaith dialogue is expressly dependent on the exclusion of any attempts at converting one other. In this case we do not convert people, but we merely help them for the grace of God work in his heart and head.

For the orthodox Muslim, especially Muhammadiyah as one of the biggest Islamic organization, which is very well known with the purification movement, they can learn such attitude from their founding father Ahmad Dahlan. When he, who was Javanese, was asked by his student Sugarda, in *Kweek Schools* Jetis Yogyakarta, 'is it allowed to perform salat (prayer) in Javanese', he answered: 'Yes, before you can pray in Arabic', but you should try to say in Arabic, as the Qur'an was revealed in Arabic. It was the smooth and flexible attitude. For Javanese people the relation between one's soul and one's God was essentially an internal and sacred matter, greater pressures for orthodoxy could produce among some Javanese a reaction against what might seem a

¹⁰⁶ Muhammad Shafiq, 'Triologue of the Abrahamic Faiths Guidelines for Jews, Christian and Muslim Dialogue: Analysis of the Views of Ismail Raji al-Faruqi' in *Hamdard Islamicus*, vol. xv, No. I, 70

¹⁰⁷ Ismail Faruqi, 'Islam and Christianity: Problems and Perspectives' in *The World in the Third World*, 167-168

distasteful intrusion into their spiritual life.¹⁰⁸

God has manifested and revealed himself in various ways to different peoples in their respective situation. God saves people through their own tradition, and God's universal saving will is present and active everywhere through various ways. And since human beings are not generic but unique, the expressions of responses to the '*firman*' (Word) of God will be many and vary rather than one and the same,¹⁰⁹ their capacities to experience and to express the ultimate reality are varied and conditioned. The spark of divine creativity animates every culture and that God can be worshiped and encountered in myriad ways.¹¹⁰ Within the human culture we find God's revelation in the very complexity of culture itself, in the warp and woof of human relationship, which are constitutive of cultural existence.¹¹¹

Thailand, June 21, 2007

Syafa'atun Almirzanah

¹⁰⁸M. C. Ricklefs, 'Six Centuries of Islamization in Java', 112

¹⁰⁹Anthony J. Gittins, (Ed.), *Life and Death Matters, The Practice of Inculturation in Africa*, Germany: Steyler Verlag, 2000, 25

¹¹⁰Gittins, *Life and Death Matters*, 31

¹¹¹Stephen B. Bevans, , *Models of Contextual Theology*, New York: Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 1992, 49

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สถาบันเพื่อการศึกษาศาสนาและวัฒนธรรม
มหาวิทยาลัยพายัพ

INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY OF RELIGION AND CULTURE
PAYAP UNIVERSITY



March 28, 2007

Syafa Almirzanah
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago
1100 E 55th Street
Chicago, IL 60615
USA

Dear Ms. Almirzanah,

This is a formal invitation to the Institute for the Study of Religion and Culture and Payap University's triennial conference on Religion and Culture. The conference will take place June 24-30, 2007 at the Payap University Campus in Chiangmai, Thailand. We look forward to your paper presentation titled, "Islam and the Javanese Religion: Reconsidering Syncretism in the 'Slametan' Ritual." We look forward to your participation.

Warm Regards,

Reverend Elizabeth Marie Melchionna

Researcher, Institute for the Study of Religion and Culture

International Conference on Religion and Culture
Institute of Religion, Culture, and Peace
Payap University, Chiang Mai, Thailand
June 24-30, 2007

Program

Sunday, 24 June 2007

13:00-15:00 Registration at Amari Rincome Hotel Lobby
14:00-16:00 Registration at conference venue (Sirindhorn Learning Resource Center, Payap University)

15:30 Bus leaves Amari Rincome Hotel to conference venue at Payap University

16:30 – 18:00 ***Opening Ceremony (Room 1)***

18:00 – 19:00 Welcome Dinner (Foyer)

19:00 – 20:00 **Keynote Address: (Room 1)**

*“Religion, Culture, and the Importance of the Bricoleur:
Problems and Possibilities of Socially engaged
scholarship”*

**Frank Reynolds,
Professor Emeritus at University of
Chicago Divinity School**

20:00-20:30 General Discussion

20:30 Bus returns to Amari Rincome Hotel

Monday, 25 June 2007

8:00 Bus leaves Amari Rincome Hotel to conference venue at Payap University

8:45-9:45 **Keynote Address** (Room 1)

“Towards a Culture of Peace: A Buddhist Perspective”

Venerable Phra Paisal Visalo
Abbot of Sukato Forest Temple, Thailand

9:45-10:15 General Discussion

10:15-10:30 Break

10:30-12:30 **Papers & Panels**

Syncretism (Room 4)

- *Syafa Almirzanah* (Indonesia) “Islam and the Javanese Religion: Reconsidering Syncretism in the ‘Slametan’ Ritual”
- *Peter Clark* (England) “Divine Healing Japanese Style in Different Cultures”

Religion and Ethics (Room 5)

- *Larry Vander Spek* (USA) “C.S. Lewis’ *Abolition of Man*: A Christian Perspective on Objective Values”
- *G. Sivapalan* (Malaysia) “Beliefs in Luck Among Malaysians: A Survey”

Women in Ministry (Room 6)

- *Elizabeth Koepping* (Scotland) “Dealing the Culture-Card against Episcopal Women’s Ministry”

Monday, 25 June 2007 (afternoon)

12:30-13:30 Lunch

13:30-15:30 **Papers & Panels**

Dialogue of Religion and End-of-Life Ethics (Room 4)

- *Scott Stonington* (USA) “Bioethics and End-of-Life in Thailand: Western Ideologies, Thai Bodies”
- *Erin McCarthy* (USA) “Towards a Transnational Ethics of Care”

Thai Cultural Identity (Room 5)

- *Julia Cassaniti* (USA) “Influences on Religion in Everyday Life: A Comparative Study of Karen Christians and Thai Buddhists in Northern Thailand”
- *Jen-Nae Wang* (Taiwan) “Christianity and Buddhism in Thailand: An Emerging Dynamic”

Religion among Minority Groups (Room 6)

- *Manimaran Subramaniam* (Malaysia) “Hindu Festivals Among Indians in Malaysia: An Introduction”

15:30-15:45 Break

Monday, 25 June 2007 (afternoon) -- continued

15:45-17:45 **Papers and Panels**

Religion and Science (Room 4)

- *Adrian Hermann*, “Buddhism and the Religion/Science Distinction from Chaophraya Tiphakorawong to the XIV Dalai Lama: A World Society Perspective”

Movie and Discussion (in English) (Room 5)

“Our Life is Like our Breath.” Life in a Thai forest Buddhist monastery.

Panel Discussion (in Thai) (Room 6)

Buddhism and Thai Culture

*Phra Sriyansopone, Phra Sutheeworayarn,
Phrakhru Platsamphiphatanawiriyacarn,
Dr. Suvit Rungvisai*

17:45-19:00 Dinner

19:00-20:00 **Keynote Address** (Room 1)

“Islam in Malaysia Today: Between Peace and Conflict”

**Maznah Binti Mohamad, Asia Research Institute
National University of Singapore**

20:00-20:30 General Discussion

20.30 Bus departs for Amari Rincome Hotel

Tuesday, 26 June 2007

8:00 Bus leaves Amari Rincome Hotel for conference venue at Payap University

8:45- 9:45 **Keynote Address** (Room 1)

*“Religion, Culture and the Mission of the Church:
Perspectives of Asian Catholic Theologies”*

Peter Phan
Professor of Catholic Social Thought
Georgetown University

9:45-10:15 General Discussion

10:15-10:30 Break

10:30-12:30 **Papers & Panels**

Religion and Economics (Room 4)

- *Larry Harwood* (USA) “British Protestants, Economics, Politics, and Contemporary American Christianity”
- *Abbas Ali Soltaini and Zahra Govani* (Iran)
“The Relationship between Religion and Economics from the Perspective of Islam”

Religion and Myth (Room 5)

- *Kenneth Dobson* (USA) “The Unlikeliest Link: Mythic Archetypes as a Means toward Transcultural Theologizing”
- *Joseph Lobo, SJ* (India)
“Mythicization of History and Historicization of Myths”

Buddhism and HIV/AIDS (Room 6)

- *Laurie Maund* (Australia) “The Sangha Metta Project”

12:30-13:30 Lunch

Tuesday, 26 June 2007 (afternoon)

13:30-15:30 **Papers & Panels**

Religion, Culture, and Education (Room 4)

- *Tia Jamir* (India) “The Role of Teachers in Shaping the Moral Lives of the Community: Origen as a Test Case from Late Antiquity”

Religion and Text (Room 5)

- *John Schroder* (USA) “Truth and Deception in the *Lotus Sutra*”
- *Mohammad Adibymehr* (Iran) and *Mohammadreza Pirooz* (Iran) “A Sociopragmatic Study of Encouragement Based on Islamic Sources: the Koran and the Islamic Traditions”

Religion and Social Engagement (Room 6)

- *Laura Van Voorhees* (USA) “Faith Applied: Examining How NGOs’ Religious Beliefs Affect Their Programs”
- *Russell Bowers* (USA) “Encouraging Evangelicals to Engage Ecumenically”

15:30-15:45 Break

Tuesday, 26 June 2007 (afternoon) -- continued

15:45-17:45 **Papers and Panels**

Thai Cultural Identity (Room 4)

- *Tim Bose* (USA) “Missionary Buddhism Among the Tai: Observations from a Missionary Pilgrimage”
- *Nancy Eberhardt* (USA) “Religion and Self-Transformation”

Movie and Discussion (in English) (Room 5)

“Sacrifice”. Human trafficking and sexual exploitation in Burma/Thailand.

Panel Discussion (in Thai) (Room 6)

Christianity and Thai Culture

*Miguel Garaizab, S.J., Chuleephan Srisunthorn,
Prasit Pongudom, Suwicharn Phathanaphraiwan
Nitraporn Laddakornpan*

17:45-19:00 Dinner

19:00-20:30 **Plenary Panel** (Room 1)

“Religious Insight: Text and Spiritual Practice”

Louis Gabaude (Ecole Francaise d’Orient Extreme)

**Dhammada Bhikkuni (Songdhammakalaya
Monastery, Thailand)**

Jalil Nozari (Independent Persian Researcher)

Calvin Roetzl (Univ. of Minnesota)

John Butt (Payap) – Moderator

20.30 Bus leaves for Amari Rincome Hotel

Wednesday, 27 June 2007

- 8:00 Bus leaves Amari Rincome for the Elephant Camp
- 9:00 **Elephant show and ride**
- 11:00 Bus departs elephant camp for Amari Rincome
- 12:00 Lunch (at Amari Rincome Hotel)
- 13:00 Short talk about Doi Suthep Temple
(at Amari Rincome Hotel)
- 13:30 Bus leaves Amari Rincome for Doi Suthep Temple
- 14:00 **Visit Doi Suthep Temple**
- 15:30 Bus leaves Doi Suthep Temple for hotel
- 17:30 Bus leaves Amari Rincome for
Northern Thai Kantoke Dinner and Cultural Show
- 21:00 Bus returns to Amari Rincome

Thursday, 28 June 2007

8:00 Bus leaves Amari Rincome Hotel for Payap University

8:45-9:45 **Keynote Address (Room 1)**
“Muslim Peacebuilding”

Abdul Rashied Omar, Professor of Islamic Studies and Peacebuilding, Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, Notre Dame University

9:45-10:15 General Discussion

10:15 – 10:30 Break

10:30-12:30 **Papers & Panels**

Religion and Media/Marketing (Room 4)

- *Prasit Roekphisut* (Thailand) “Religious Symbols as Marketing Brands”
- *Seyyed Hassan Hosseini* (Iran) “Religion and Media, Conflict or Compromise”

Religion and Politics (Room 5)

- *Lawrence Schultz* (USA) “Beyond Winning Elections: Islamic Party Activity and Social Justice in Indonesia”
- *Bernard Adeney-Risakotta* (USA) “Religion and Globalization in Indonesia”

12:30-13:30 Lunch

Thursday, 28 June 2007 (afternoon)

13:30-15:30 **Papers & Panels**

Religion and Societal Behavior (Room 4)

- *Doran French* (USA) “Religious Involvement and Social Competence of Indonesian Muslim Adolescents”
- *Mariam Alimi* (USA) “Revitalizing Islamic Society: Bangladeshi Imams Share Experiences with Indonesian Ulama”

Religion and Emerging Traditions (Room 5)

- *John Williams* (USA) “Superstition and Exorcism in Twentieth-Century China: Toward a New Understanding of the Red Spear Societies, 1920-1927”
- *Scott Lowe* (USA) “A Spiritual Melting Pot in the American Heartland: the Eclectic Neo-Hindu Community of Fairfield, Iowa”

Islam in Africa (Room 6)

- *Bill Roberts* (USA) “Islam and the Fabric of Daily Life in The Gambia.”

15:30-15:45 Break

Thursday, 28 June 2007 (afternoon) -- continued

15:45-17:45 **Papers and Panels**

Religion and Architecture (Room 4)

Taylor Potter (USA) "Church Architecture in Thailand"

Movie and Discussion (in English) (Room 5)

"Beyond the Gate" (Violence under the Khmer Rouge)
or "The Pastor and the Iman" (Reconciliation in Nigeria)

Panel Discussion (in Thai) (Room 6)

"Islam and Thai Culture"

*Sawanee Jitmoud, Jeerasak Sohsan, Zakee Pitakumpol,
Suchart Sethamalinee*

17:45-19:00 Dinner

19:00-20:00 **Keynote Address** (Room 1)

*"Thinking through our Christian Theology in a
World that is Plural"*

**Damayanthi Niles, Professor of Systematic
Theology, Eden Theological Seminary**

20:00-20:30 General discussion

20:30 Bus returns to Amari Rincome hotel

Friday, 29 June 2007

8:00 Bus leaves Amari Rincome Hotel for conference venue at
Payap University

8:45-9:45 **Keynote Address** (Room 1)
*“Buddhism and Chinese Culture: A Case Study of Guanyin
Veneration”*

**Yu-min Lee, Senior Curator,
National Palace Museum, Taiwan**

9:45-10:15 General discussion

10:15-10:30 Break

10:30-12:30 **Papers & Panels**

Translatability of Religion (Room 4)

- *Miriam Levering* (USA) “Writing the History of Buddhism: Modernist, Post-Modernist, and Post-Colonial Approaches”
- *Bradley Holt* (USA) “The Translatability of Christianity and other Faiths: Religion and Culture in the Thought of Andrew Walls and Lamin Sanneh”

Religion and the Arts (Room 5)

- *Dina Bangdel* (USA) “Art as Symbolic Signifier: Visual Culture and Religious Identity in Newar Buddhism”
- *Bonnie Brereton* (USA) “Imagining the Thai-Lao Buddhist Universe: Tales from Isan Murals”

Faith and Identity (Room 6)

- *James Winship* (USA) “Faith Claims and Identity Politics”
- *Stanley Sewell* (Australia) “The Abode of God: Some Thoughts about God, Man, and the Church for the end of this Century”

12:30-13:30 Lunch

Friday, 29 June 2007 (afternoon)

13:30-15:30 **Papers & Panels**

Religion and the Arts (Room 4)

- *Eva Pascal* (USA) “The Transcendent Body: Gender in Sukhothai Art”

Religion and Environment (Room 5)

- *Ahmad Zaharuddin Sani bin Ahmad Sabri* (Malaysia) “Water from an Islamic Scrutiny”
- *Dilip Sarma* (India) “Sa Ma Shanti Redhi!–May I Be in Peace!”

15:30-15:45 Break

15:45-17:45 **Papers & Panels**

Interfaith Violence and Peacemaking (Room 4)

- *Ivan Hall* (USA) “Religion, Cross-Cultural Understanding and Peacemaking: Revisiting the Links Pioneered by F.S.C. Northrop a Half Century Ago”
- *Farsijana Adeney-Risakotta* (Indonesia) “Ritual Violence and Interfaith Peacemaking”

Panel (Room 6)

“Religion and Culture among Young People in Thailand and Australia,” *Philip Hughes* (Australia), *Janram Chaisri* (Thailand), *Parichart Suwanbubbha* (Thailand)

17:45-19:00 Dinner

19:00-20:30 **Plenary Panel (Room 1)**

“Religion and Culture: Beyond Niebuhr”

John Carman (Harvard)

Suwanna Satha-Anand (Chulalongkorn)

Graham Ward (Manchester)

Patrick Ryan, SJ (Fordham)

Mark Tamthai (Payap) – Moderator

20:30 Bus returns to Amari Rincome hotel

Saturday, 30 June 2007

8:30 Bus leaves Amari Rincome hotel for conference venue at
Payap University

9:00-11:30 **Plenary Panel (Room 1)**
“Reflections on the Conference”

Yu-min Lee
Maznah Mohamad
Damayanthi Niles
Peter Phan
Frank Reynolds
Phra Paisal Visalo
Mark Tamthai (moderator)

11:30-12:00 ***Closing Ceremony (Room 1)***

12:00 Farewell Lunch (Foyer)

13:30 Bus departs conference venue to Amari Rincome Hotel

Conference Presenters (Country of Institutional Affiliation)

Abbas Ali Soltaini (Iran) Ferdowsi University
Abdul Rashied Omar (USA) Notre Dame
Adrian Hermann (Germany) University of Bielefeld
Ahmad Zaharuddin Sani bin Ahmad Sabri (Malaysia) Universiti Utara Malaysia
Bernard Adeney-Risakotta (Indonesia) Indonesian Consortium for Religious Studies
Bill Roberts (USA) St. Mary's College of Maryland
Bonnie Brereton (Thailand) Academic, Chiang Mai
Bradley Holt (USA) Augsburg College
Calvin Roetzel (USA) University of Minnesota
Chuleephan Srisunthorn (Thailand) Payap University
Damayanthi Niles (USA) Eden Theological Seminary
Dhammada Bhikkuni (Thailand) Songdhammakalaya Monastery
Dilip Sarma (India) Engineer
Dina Bangdel (USA) Virginia Commonwealth University
Doran French (USA) Illinois Wesleyan University
Elizabeth Koepping (Scotland) University of Edinburgh
Erin McCarthy (USA) St. Lawrence University
Eva Pascal (Thailand) Payap University
Farsijana Adeney-Risakotta (Indonesia) Duta Wacana Christian University
Frank Reynolds (USA) Professor Emeritus at University of Chicago Divinity School
Graham Ward (England) University of Manchester
G. Sivapalan (Malaysia) University of Malaya
Ivan Hall (Thailand) Japanese Historian, Chiang Mai
Jalil Nozari (Iran) Independent Persian Researcher
James Winship (USA) Augustana College
Janram Chaisri (Thailand) Church of Christ Thailand
Jeerasak Sohsan (Thailand) Foundation for Education and Development of Muslims in Northern Thailand
Jen-Nae Wang (Taiwan) Presbyterian Church in Taiwan
John Butt (Thailand) Payap University
John Carman (USA) Harvard University
John Williams (USA) Colorado College
Joseph Lobo,SJ (India) Karnataka Regional Theology Center
Julia Cassaniti (USA) University of Chicago
Kenneth Dobson (Thailand) Christian University of Thailand
Laura Van Voorhees (USA) Academy for Educational Development
Larry Harwood (USA) Viterbo University
Larry Vander Spek (Thailand) Payap University
Lawrence Schultz (USA) St. Andrews Presbyterian College
Louis Gabaude (Thailand) L'Ecole Francaise d'Orient Extreme
Manimaran Subramaniam (Malaysia) University of Malaya
Mark Tamthai (Thailand) Payap University
Maznah Binti Mohamad (Singapore) National University Singapore

Miguel Garaizab, SJ (Thailand) Seven Fountains Center
Miriam Alimi (USA) Academy for Educational Development
Miriam Levering (USA) University of Tennessee
Mohammad Adibymehr (Iran) University of Tehran
Mohammadreza Pirooz (Iran) University of Qom
Nancy Eberhardt (USA) Knox College
Nitraporn Laddakornpan (Thailand) Payap University
Parichart Suwanbubbha (Thailand) Mahidol University
Patrick Ryan, SJ (USA) Fordham University
Peter Clarke (England) Oxford University
Peter Phan (USA) Georgetown University
Philip Hughes (Australia) Edith Cowan University
Phra Sriyansopone (Thailand) Rama Nine Temple
Phra Sutheeworayarn (Thailand) Mahachulalongkorn Rachavitayalai University
Phrakru Platsamphiphatanawiriyacarn (Thailand) Mahamakut Rachavitayalai University
Prasit Pongudom (Thailand) Church of Christ Thailand
Prasit Roekphisut (Thailand) Payap University
Russell Bowers (USA) Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary
Sawanee Jitmoud (Thailand) Rajbhat Dhonburi University
Scott Lowe (USA) University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire
Scott Stonington (USA) University of California- San Francisco
Seyyed Hassan Hosseini (Iran) Sharif University of Technology
Stanley Sewell (Australia)
Suchart Sethamalinee (Thailand) Payap University
Suvit Rungvisai (Thailand) Makamakut Rachavitayalai University
Suwanna Satha-Anand (Thailand) Chulalongkorn University
Suwicharn Phathanaphraiwan (Thailand)
Syafa Almirzanah (USA) University of Chicago
Taylor Potter (USA) Academic
Tia Jamir (USA) Dallas Theological Seminary
Tim Bose (Australia) Uniting Church Australia
Yu-Min Lee (Taiwan) National Palace Museum
Venerable Pra Paisal Visalo (Thailand) Abbot of Sukato Forest Temple
Zakee Pitakumpol (Thailand) Prince of Songkla University
Zarah Govani (Iran) Ferdowsi University

2007 Religion and Culture Conference Co-Sponsors

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- Church of Christ in Thailand
- Asian Christian Higher Education Institute
- The Christian Conference of Asia (CCA)
- Presbyterian Church U.S.A. (PCUSA)
- Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA)
- Naropa University
- Association of Christian Universities and Colleges in Asia (ACUCA)
- Philosophy and Religion Society of Thailand

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Institute of Religion, Culture, and Peace

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Hospitals

McCormick Hospital (24 hour) 053-241-010; 053-562-200
Chiang Mai Ram I (24 hour) 053-224-851; 053-861-871

Police

Tourist Police 053-248-130
Emergency 191

Transportation

Chiang Mai Airport 053-270-234/222
Thai Airways Reservations 053-211-044; 053-210-210