CONVERSION, MISSION/DA'WAH, AND INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

(An Islamic Perspective and Christian-Muslim Dialogue)

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I.   Introduction

Two contemporary issues of pressing concern to rethinking Islam, especially in so far as it concerns freedom of religion, pluralism and interreligious dialogue, are conversion and *da'wah* (mission). Since the Declaration of human rights in 1945, the concept of freedom of religion has emerged as an essential part of international law. In the West, people think of the freedom to convert from one religion to another as a central concern of provisions guaranteeing religious freedom. However, in Muslim milieus the perspective is different; and the question of whether there should be freedom to convert to another religion remains a central concern.

It is historically significant that when the Declaration of Human Rights was issued the most influential statement of this freedom, objections were raised by Saudi Arabia. The Saudi Arabian UN representative was specifically outspoken in criticizing this provision on the grounds that Islam did not permit Muslims to change their religions. [1] This objection has been the basis for much subsequent research and argument concerning Islam and freedom of religion.

A voice favoring the article in question was Pakistan's representative, an Ahmadi, who spoke forcefully in defense of the proposition that freedom of religions as presented in that article was fully consonant with Islam. But other Muslims failed to agree with his opinion. There is still a serious point of conflict and tension between Islam and concepts of human rights as issued by the UN. The conservative Muslim opinion has been supported by the availability of the ban on conversion from Islam and death penalty for apostasy, especially in Egypt.[2] Although Islam fully recognizes the rights of individuals to practice the religion of their choice, apostasy (*ridda*) in traditional Muslim societies is strictly forbidden and carries harsh sanctions and the punishment of death. The rights of Muslim citizens to voluntary renounce his or her religion is categorically denied. Changing religion as a matter of personal choice is not allowed and sanctions against apostasy appear to be so well-entrenched in penal law, that any conceivable future change in this area seems unlikely.[3]

Much also has been written about the relation of Islam and Islamic culture to Western notions regarding the organization of society and human rights. But one should

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[1]David Little, John Kelsay, and Abdulaziz Sachedina (eds.), *Human Rights and the Conflict of Cultures: Western and Islamic Perspectives on Religious Liberty*, Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1988, 35-37

[2]Since the 1970, there have been persistent demand in Egypt for a revitalization of the death penalty for apostasy from Islam. Also the notorious 1994-1996 case of the Egyptian University professor Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid, who divorced against his will for his adduced apostasy, showed that Egypt's court were prepare to penaltize religious dissent in other ways. See Ann Elizabeth Mayer, *Islam and Human Rights, Tradition and Politics,* Third Edition, Colorado: Westview Press, 1999, 154

[3]Mayer, *Islam and Human Rights,* 154

acknowledge that the point of much of this writing is to demonstrate that Islam and the West are at the opposite poles concerning to these important issues. In order that we find Adda Bozeman says that "Islamic culture is not guided by notions of right or principle, as the West understands them."[4] So does James Piscatori when he says "Islamic theory does not present a notion of the right of the individual."[5] In other words, these scholars argue that Islam is incompatible with the idea of human rights. Their main argument is that the provisions of the *shari'a* are in conflict with this concept and that these provisions continue to control the minds of Muslims. It is obvious that classical Islamic Law, whose foundations were laid by Muslim jurists living between the eight and eleven centuries, does not contain much in the way of modern human right principles. To assume that it should, is anachronistic, judging classical *fiqh* by the standard of modern human rights discourse. This is similar to judging Roman Law with the yardstick of modern international public law. And at the same time this approach fails to recognize the variety within Islam and its potential for change and development. This view point is mainly derived from a monolithic perception of Islam, exclusively referring to radical Islam, especially its development in the Middle East.

Obviously, the monolithic tendency of many Western observers in understanding Islam is due largely to their limited knowledge of its nature. While it may be true that secular bias, as Esposito contends to believe,[6] has contributed to the failure of many non-Muslim scholars to understand Islam properly, the major pitfall lies in their ignorance of the fact that Islam is a *polyinterpretable*[7] religion.

It is clear enough that western culture is characterized by diverse perspectives on the issue of human rights. Should one not then, expect a similar diversity within other world cultures and ideological frameworks?

II.   Theoretical frameworks

As mention above, 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. So how is *Islam,* especially *shari'a* here to be understood?

There are a number of factors which can influence the outcome of an individual Muslim's understanding of the *shari'a.* Sociological, cultural and intellectual circumstances, or what Arkoun describes as the *'aesthetics of reception'*, are significant

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[4]Adda Bozeman, *The future of Law in Multicultural World,* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971, 76 , cited by Charles Amjad-Ali, 'Text and Interpretation: Superfluity on Issues of Human Rights in Islam, *Al-Mushir,* vol. 36, no. 3, 1994, 72 and Little, *Human Rights,* 33

[5]James Piscatori, 'Human Right in Islamic Political Culture', *Moral Imperatives of Human Rights,* ed. Kenneth W. Thompson, Washington: University Press of America, 1980, 157-158, 144, cited by Amjad-Ali, "Text and Interpretation", 73 and Little, *Human Rights,* 33

[6]See,John L. Esposito, "Seculer Bias and Islamic Revivalism"in *The Chronicle of Higher Education,* May, 1993

[7]A lengtly socio-historical discussion on this issue is found in, among other, Marshall. G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in World Civilization,* vol. I-III, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974

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.[8]

Different intellectual inclinations influence the effort to understand the *shari'a* 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 the *shari'a*, 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 interpretable 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 it quite equally, "it is both understood differently and utilized differently."[9]

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.

Shari'a, unlike Qur'an, is not devoid of human opinion. It is for this reason that there are various schools of jurisprudence which differs from each other on many questions. According to Abu Zaid, various schools of jurisprudence (*madhahib al-Islamy*) are nothing but the reflection of the evolution of life in the Islamic world and these schools changed and evolved, transforming according to conditions of time and circumstance.[10]

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.[11] Even an

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[8]See, Arkoun, ' The Concept of Authority in Islamic Thought', in Klauss Ferdinand and Mehdi Mozaffari, eds., *Islam: State and Society*, London: Curzon Press, 1988, 58

[9]Nazih N. Ayubi, *Political Islam: Religion and Politics in the Arab World*, London: Routledge, 1991, 60-61

[10]Faruq Abu Zaid, *al-Shari'ah al-Islamia baina al-Muhafizin wa al- Mujaddidin*, Cairo: n.d,, 16

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

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 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*[12] was used right from the beginning.

III.   Contemporary Implementation of Islam
A.   Rethinking the Shari'a Rule on Apostasy

Before I apply the above approach to the context of the matter of the freedom of conversion discussed above, first we must determine more precisely what religious liberty is. Bearing the issues of conversion in mind, is religious liberty only the right to become an apostate (unbeliever)?

According to Muhammad Talbi, religious liberty, in fact, is fundamentally the right to decide for oneself, without any kind of pressure, fear, or anxiety, whether to believe or not to believe, the right to pretend with full consciousness one's destiny, the right, of course, to discard every kind of faith as superstitious inherited from the dark Ages, but also the right to adopt the faith of one's choice, to worship, and to bear witnesses freely.[13] Is this description in accordance with Islamic teaching?

Religious liberty is the fundamental right of everyone. From a Muslim perspective, based on Qur'anic teaching, religious liberty is fundamentally an ultimate act of respect for God's sovereignty and for the mystery of God's plan for humanity. Ultimately, to respect human freedom is to respect God's plan. In short, to be a true Muslim is to submit to this plan.

Al-Qur'an states that an individual's spiritual destiny is a matter strictly between the person and Allah. "Other people, including our Prophet Muhammad, have no power to alter an individual's religious belief through coercion, nor, for that matter, any responsibility to try. Presumably genuine submission or surrender to Allah's will, along with the appropriate dispositions of gratitude, devotion, steadfastness, etc. must come from the heart, must involve the deepest and most intimate kind of personal consent and

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[12]In 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, 178

[13]Mohamed Talbi, 'Religious Liberty: A Muslim Perspective', in *Religious Liberty and Human Rights in Nations and in Religions*, ed. Leonard Swidler, Philadelphia: Ecumenical Press Temple University and New York: Hippocrene Books, 1986, 177

commitment." So, then, "compulsion and external interference would appear to be the antithesis of Islamic faith."[14] This is so much so, that even Muhammad was strongly admonished by God not to compel people to follow the truth of revelation. 'If it had been thy Lord's will, they would all have believed all who are on earth! Wilt thou then compel mankind against their will to believe? (10: 99). Thus, the principle of the freedom of conscience is firmly established in the Qur'an.   As mentioned above, there seems to be a tension between the Islamic and the Western perspective on the matter of human rights. Since Islam is polyinterpretable, any discussion of Islam and religious liberty must begin with the stipulation that a dialogical approach requires a greater appreciation of the statement of Muslims themselves on matters of human rights. Furthermore, it is important to know the extent and nature of disagreement among representatives of Islam on these matters. Our goal must be to understand the different perspectives that may be connected with the tradition of Islam.

For more than a hundred years, Muslims have argued that Islamic law can and must be revised and reinterpreted in order to adapt it to present-day needs. Islam and an adherence to Islamic law do not, in themselves, have to be an obstacle to the enforcement of human rights principles.

An-Na'im argues that the provisions regarding slavery and discrimination on grounds of gender and religion in *shari'a*, must be abolished. While traditionally such practices were the norms, these aspects of public law of *shari'a* are today fundamentally inconsistent with the realities of modern life.[15] He welcomes the juxtaposition of the *shari'a* and universal human rights as part of his synthetical exercise, provided that it leads to a very serious reform of *shari'a*.[16] Furthermore, he states that the aspect of the *shari'a* which violates freedom of religion and conscience as a human right is the notion of apostasy. Besides its obvious discrimination against non-Muslims, this principle of *shari'a* also violates the freedom of belief and expression of Muslims themselves.[17] In order to resolve the human rights problem related directly or indirectly to the above noted principle of *shari'a*, a drastic Islamic reform is urgently needed. He gives an appropriate methodology of reform, i.e., an appreciation of the impact of historical context on interpretation of sources of Islam. If early Muslims were able to interpret the Qur'an and other sources according to their context, contemporary Muslims should be able to do the same at the present time. Throughout its history, the understanding and implementation of Islam were influenced by the social and political realities of Muslim communities. While An-Na'im believes that al-Qur'an is divine, he also believes that there is no way of implementing divine texts without the intervention of human agencies in terms of both

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[14]Charles Amjad-Ali, 'Text and Interpretation: Superfluity on Issues of Human Rights in Islam', in *Al-Mushir*, No. 36, 1994, 79

[15]Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im, *Toward an Islamic Reformation, Civil Liberties, Human Rights and International Law*, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1990, 175-177

[16]An-Nai'm, *Toward an Islamic,* 179

[17]Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im, 'Qur'an, Shari'a and Human Rights: Foundations, Deficiencies and Prospects, in *Concillium*, no. 2, 1990, 64 and An-Nai'm, *Toward an Islamic*, 183-184

interpretation and application.[18]

Historical precedents for reform in *shari'a* conceptioning apostasy already exist. Many thoughtful Muslims in the past were prepared to reform, even to discard, the premodern Islamic jurisprudence of the apostasy penalty and accept the concept of religious freedom.[19] Contemporary Muslims who have repudiated the penalty argue that the premodern juristic interpretations were unwarranted by Islamic sources and out of keeping within the principle that there is 'no compulsion in religion' (based on the Qur'an 2: 256).[20]

In a current moment liberal Muslims indicate that there is no verse in the Qur'an that stipulates any earthly penalty for apostasy and that the premodern jurist's ruling on apostasy were extrapolated from incidents in the Prophet's life and from historical events after his death that actually lend themselves to a multifariousness of interpretation.[21] A number of Muslim scholars have concluded that "the Qur'anic principle of religious liberty shares common foundations with the Western concept of religious liberty, after having drawn distinctions between the Qur'anic concern for the freedom of conscience and concerns of public order that historically led jurists to devise a rule that the apostate should be punish by death."[22]

Contemporary scholars have found many reasons for rethinking the jurists' ruling that apostate must be executed. Mahmoud Ayoub, in 'Religious Freedom and the Law of Apostasy in Islam' has said that the Qur'an treats the problem of apostasy in the context of faith and the rejection of faith. In this context, "apostasy is a religious and moral decision subject to divine retribution or pardon on the Day of Judgement. Apostasy is, therefore, a personal inner moral decision, ultimately lying outside the jurisdiction of the sacred law."[23] In the past, apostasy was never a problem for the Muslim communities. It remained a largely theoretical issue because the people executed for apostasy until the end of the Abbasid caliphate in the thirteenth century were so very few. [24]

The Lebanese scholar, Subhi Mahmassani, affirms that the facts accompanying to the application of the penalty were intended to be narrow. He points out that the Prophet never killed anyone purely for apostasy alone. Indeed, the death penalty was applied

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[18]An-Na'im, 'Qur'an, Shari'a,' 67, see also An-Na'im, *Toward an Islamic*, 185-186

[19]See for example the commentary of Mahmud Shaltut on verse of the Qur'an 26: 4 in *Al-Islam 'aqidatan wa shari'atan*, 2nd ed., Cairo: n.d., 33

[20]See Muhammad Talbi, 'Religious Liberty: A Muslim Perspective' in Swidler, *Religious Liberty*, 175- 188

[21]Mayer, *Islam and Human Rights*, 157-158

[22]Abdulaziz Sachedina, 'Freedom of Conscience and Religion in the Qur'an', in, *Human Rights and the Conflict of Cultures: Western and Islamic Perspectives on Religious Liberty*, ed. David Litle, John Kelsay, and Abdulaziz Sachedina, Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1988, 53-90

[23]Mahmoud Ayoub, 'Religious Freedom and the Law of Apostasy in Islam,' *Islamochristiana* 20, 1994, 78

[24]Ayoub, 'Religious Freedom,' 90

when the act of apostasy from Islam was linked to an act of political betrayal of the community. This being the case, Mahmassani argues that "the death penalty was not meant to apply to a simple change of faith, but to punish acts such as treason, joining forces with the enemy, and sedition."[25]

Muhammad Talbi[26] said that in this field, a traditional theology did not follow the spirit of the Qur'an. Instead it seriously abridged the liberty of choice of one's religion. According to this theology, although the conversion to Islam must be, and is in fact, without coercion, it is practically impossible, once inside Islam, to get out of it. According to this understanding, "conversion from Islam to another religion is considered treason, and thus the apostate is liable to the penalty of death."[27]

The elaboration of traditional theologians relies on the precedent of the first calif of Islam, Abu Bakar (632-634. C.E.), who strenuously fought the tribes who rejected his authority after the Prophet's death and refused to pay him the alms taxes, comparing their rebellion to apostasy. They also rely on the authority of the *hadits*[28] 'anyone who changes his religions must be put to death'[29].

A careful review of the context in which these references occur, however, reveals that the only allowable use of force is for purposes of defense not for coercion. It means, "if non-Muslims themselves instigate force for purpose of military conquest or religious persecution, or through breach of a solemn treaty, then and only then, is forceful reaction justifiable. These passages justify force as retaliation for persecution and the threat of destruction."[30] In other words, the distinction as well as the symmetries between 'morality' and 'religion' are very much in play here. Underlying this justification is an appeal to basic moral requirements - either to keep promises and treaties, or to protect some communities' basic welfare and security against aggression. So construed, these injunctions to use force against unbelievers and apostates are grounded in emergency conditions, which consist of moral rather than religious provocation. Thus, "it is not primarily because the unbeliever holds the beliefs they do, but because of their manifest moral violations, that they are liable to punishment and coercion."[31]

The approach above is consonant with Fazlurrahman's opinion that the aim of

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[25]Subhi mahmassani, *Arkan Huquq al-Insan*, Beirut: Dar'al-'Ilm li'l - Malayin, 1979, 123-124, cited by Mayer, *Islam and Human Rights*, 158

[26]See Leonard Swidler, *Religious Liberty*, 182

[27]See, Abd rahman al Gazari, *Kitab al-Fiqh 'ala al Madhahib al-Arba'a*, Beirut, 1972, vol. 5, 422-426

[28]In Islam *hadith* is the term applied to specific reports of the Prophet Muhammad's words and deeds as well as those of many of the early Muslims. See, R. Marston Speight, 'Hadith' in John L. Esposito, *The Oxford Encyclopedia*, 83

[29]For this hadith see, e.g., Buhari, *Sahih*, Cairo: ed. Al-Sa'b, n.d., ix, ; Abu Dawud, *Sunan*, Cairo, 1952, II, 440. See also Buhari, *Sahih*, viii, 201-202, and ix, 18-20; Abu Dawud, *Sunan*, II, 440-442

[30]Amjad Ali, 'Text and Interpretation,' 81

[31]Amjad-Ali, 'Text and Interpretation,' 81-82

Islamic ideology, as it expressed in the Qur'an, is to create a just society, to 'command good and forbid evil'.[32] This ideology is presupposed behind each principle of the Qur'an, the principle which was its inspiration, the historical conditions in which it was applied, and, more importantly each of these processes must be placed within the totality of the Qur'anic revelation.

The *hadith* above-mentioned, upon which the penalty of death essentially rests, is always more or less involved with rebellion and highway robbery in the traditional sources. The quoted cases of 'apostates' killed during the Prophet's life or shortly after his death, are all without exception, persons who, following as a result of their 'apostasy' turned their weapons against the Muslims, whose community at that time was still small and vulnerable. In this circumstances the penalty of death seems to be an act of self - defense in a war situation. Furthermore, the *hadith* justifying the death penalty is not, technically *mutawatir*[33], and consequently it is not binding.

From the modern point of view, this *hadith* can and must be questioned. Even according to Talbi, there are many persuasive reasons to consider it undoubtedly forged. It may have been forged under indirect influence of Judaism and Christianity.[34] In any case, this *hadith* at variance with the teaching of the Qur'an, where there is no mention of a required death penalty against the apostate.

What is needed for a new understanding is to transcend beyond our apparently limiting sociological and historical necessity. We are often unaware of the extent to which we are bound by sociological, cultural and historical circumstances, which make us see them as being absolute. It seems to us that we are bound by a sociological determinism which makes us intolerant and disrespectful to others, and thus unable to support religious liberty. Indeed, negative confrontation, such as that mentioned at the beginning of this paper, relating to the freedom of religion, could be avoided if we could transcend ourselves from the experiential limits of our social and cultural circumstances. Concerning conversion, if the Saudi Arabian representative could transcend his socio-cultural experience, he would ask himself 'why does Islam impose the death penalty on someone who convert from Islam to other religion, seeing that this penalty is in the level of *fiqh*, not in the level of the Qur'an. There is no injunction in the Qur'an on penalty or punishment. That standard is available in the Qur'an, but an edict that the convert must be killed is only in the *shari'a* which is polyinterpretable. For this reason one way to create further understanding interreligious relations is going back to the Qur'an. Only then, can we transcend ourselves beyond our socio-cultural, socio-historical even socio-psychological necessity. This was fully consonant with the actions of Umar, a second caliphate, when faced with the death of the Prophet Muhammad. He had the courage to

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[32]Qur'an, 3: 104 and 110; 9: 71

[33]*Hadith* is called *mutawatir* when it is transmitted by several driving chains of reliable warrantors

[34]According to Muhamed Talbi it is related to death by stoning as punishment for blasphemy for both Israelites and non-Israelites in the Hebrew Bible (based on Lev 24: 16 and Deuteronomy 13: 2-19). See Muhamed Talbi, 'Religious Liberty: A Muslim Perspective', in Leonard Swidler, *Religious Liberty*, 184

say, 'the Qur'an is enough for us'. Iqbal as well is of the opinion that the Qur'an has been the ultimate source for Islamic consideration.[35]

To recapitulate, there is no mention in the Qur'an of any kind of penalty for conversion. To use the technical term for a legal penalty explicitly specified in the Qur'an, we would say that there is no specified *hadd* in this matter. On the contrary, Muslims are advised to 'forgive and over look till God accomplished this purpose, for God hath power over all things'.[36]

In the current moment Muslims who call for the execution of an apostate are not compelled to do so by unambiguous Islamic authority supporting this penalty. There are plentiful grounds for determining that the juristic rules on apostasy no longer apply. Muslims may select a lot alternative interpretation of the Qur'an consistent with modern ideas of religious freedom. When they maintain that apostates are to be executed, one must wonder whether Islam or political concerns provide their motivation.

B.   *Mission in Christianity and Da'wah in Islam in Dialogue*

Another problem related to the freedom of religion is *da'wah* or 'mission'. Dictates of religious freedom call for a new understanding of the concept in Muslim practice. Besides da'wah in Islam, in this coming discussion I also will mention about mission in order to come with new understanding of da'wah and mission in each respective religion. It hopefully will lead to better mutual understanding.

In the very beginning of Islam a conversation took place between a group of Muslim refugees and the Christian king of Ethiopia:

"What do you say about Jesus?"
"We say about Jesus that which our Prophet has told us
(may blessings and peace be upon him):
Jesus is the servant and messenger of God, the spirit and word of God
whom God encrusted to the Virgin Mary" [37]

After hearing the reply, the latter who pick up a stick from the ground said: "I swear, the difference between what we believe about Jesus, son of Mary, and what you have said does not exceed the width of this stick."[38] Unfortunately, Christian and Muslim encounters did not take this conversation as a starting point.

There is a widespread feeling among Muslims, also in Christianity, today that traditional *da'wah* and mission dynamism is going weaker and it caused by, among others, repeated interreligious communication, including interreligious dialogue.[39] It

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[35]Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1968, 168

[36]Al-Qur'an II: 109

[37]Cited by R. Marson Speight, *God is One, The Way of Islam,* New York: Frienship Press, 1989, cet. Ke 3, 1990, and by Abderrahman Lakhsasi, "The Qur'an and The 'Other'", Leonard Swidler, *Theoria ->Praxis, How Jews, Christians and Muslims can Together move from Theory to Praxia*, Peeter, 1998,90

[38]Marson Speight, *God is One,* 1989, 1

[39]In Christianity, proclamation leading to conversion is seen only as one aspect of evangelization, the other aspects being dialogue, liberation and inculturation. And the other religions are seen in a more

seems that *da'wah* / mission and dialogue are in a conflictual relationship, and this could lead to review and rethink the problem of *da'wah*/ mission

Both Christian and Islam are missionary religions. Adherents of this religion are eager to share their riches of faith and heritage with their fellows. They want to communicate, so their fellows can experience theirs. But "notoriously, in the attempt to fulfill this missionary vocation, *da'wah* activities of Muslims among other religions, have sometimes led to grievances."[40] The absolute commitment of the Christian to mission and of the Muslim to da'wah has been one of the principal contributory factors to the tension and conflict. Thus, the problem is not only because of their faith system which each understands to be universal, but because each try to convert other as far as possible. For those reason "rethinking" and "reinterpret" the meaning of mission/da'wah which is accepted by both sides is needed.

Both Christianity and Islam consider that their respective messages from God is relevant to all people every where and every time. The truths they were entrusted with were then, were universal truth. Each has been commanded to present their faiths. It is expressed in Islam in the form of da'wah (mission), invitation and calling to Islam. For Christians, there is a *'Great Commission'* to undertake as an evangelization, conveying the good news. Da'wah in Islam is addressed both for Muslim and non Muslim. It is also in Christianity. It is wrong to equate Christian mission merely with evangelism. Christian mission "also contains the notion of *diakonia*, the demonstration of Christ's love through service."[41]

The root of Christianity and Islam - as Semitic religions - can be traced from Abraham,"the father of monotheism." By this foundation, both share their basic beliefs. There are many areas they do agree with, for example, both are monotheistic religions, accept a line of prophets who have been the recipients of revelation from God. Both have scriptures that describe of the coming Day of Judgment. There will be then, the possibility of reward in heaven or punishment and damnation in hell. Indeed there are many areas where both disagree with. The most of the disagreements are the Christian doctrines of Trinity, the nature of revelation with the consequent the status of the Qur'an and the Bible and of the Prophet of Muhammad.

The fundamental teaching of Islam is *tauhid*, thus the Christian insistence on God as the three-in-one could not be understood. Therefore for both there is a tension between either accepting or rejecting the other's theological legitimacy. Beside that, there is the potential that enable them to find a common platform *(kalimah sawa')* as said in

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positive light as 'ways of salvation' calling for interreligious dialogue, see e.g Mary Motle and Joseph R. lang (eds.), *Mission and Dialogue*, Maryknol Orbis, 1982, pp. 633-642 and J. Neuner, (ed.), *Christian Revelation and World Religions*, London: Burns and Oates, 1967

[40]Concerning 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, p. 365-366

[41]Elizabeth Scantlebury, 'Islamic Da'wa and Christian Mission: Positive and Negative Models of Interaction between Muslim and Christian' *Islam and Christian-Muslim, Relation*, vol. 7, no. 3, 1996, 254

We Believe in One God:

> The most important task was to clarify the issues, and to reach the conclusion that, in spite of outward dogmatic differences, there is already a common basis of religious experience. In fact, a deeply religious Christian and a very devout Muslim probably have a more solid foundation of mutual understanding than modernized or excessively secularized members of Christian and Muslim communities.42

Nevertheless this positive attitude between them (Christians and Muslims) seems relatively rare. Conversely, between them, the differences are more valuable. Ultimately the problem is not that there is a fundamental common platform between them, but that by receiving truth of one would refuse truth of the other. This problem of truth led them to the problem why a person is failed to receive what is obviously true to the believer. But the most crucial issue is over the question of the individual's salvation. Will it be Muslim or a Christian who will be saved ?

The above positive and negative perspectives led to universalism and exclusivism in answering the problem.

There is a notion that Allah will give reward to anybody doing righteousness (amal shaleh), though they are not Muslims. Yews and Christians are called *ahl al-Kitab*. They are belong to Abrahamic religion. Indeed the Qur'an calls Abraham as a person who did not belong to an organized religion, but as a *hanif,* means a sincere person in pursuit of God and as a Muslim, a person who was surrender to God.[43] Thus, It is understandable that the Qur'an has a positive attitude to some elements of the Christian way of life. This has brought several Muslims thinkers to accept Christianity, because "*what counts at the deepest level in religion is the spirit of faith and not any formal affiliation*".[44]

Those attitudes more or less also are based on the opinion that the only criterion of true or false, good or bad, salvation or damnation in the Day of Judgement is *believe in God and the here after and doing the good things (amal shalih)* as stated in the Qur'an sura 2: 62 and 5: 69.

Like in Islam, similar tension is also available in Christianity over defining who is or is not to be included as part of Kingdom of God. While there is a saying that, 'Jesus is the way' and 'Jesus the Lord', Matt 7: 12 says 'that not all my servants who called me 'Lord', 'Lord', will enter the Kingdom of God, but only someone who performs Father's will, that will enter the paradise'. All people try to perform the Father's will, yet not all are succeeded to find the right Father's will.' This led to the problem how is a person who perform good works without admitting Jesus Christ. This problem is debatable. Of the more inclusive will be described below.

The document of the second Vatican council which influenced Catholic communities since 1965 talked about 'the declaration of Christianity with non Christian

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[42]Schimmel and Falatury, *We Believe in One God: The Experience of God in Christianity and Islam,* London: Burner and Oates, 19979, xvi

[43]See, the Qur'an Sura 3: 67

[44]Vahiduddin, 'Islam and Diversity of Religions', *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relation*, Vol. I, No. 1, 1990, 9

religions *(Notra Aetate)*, which is not based on the doctrine *'extra ecclessiam nulla salus'* anymore. Karl Rahner in *The Theological Investigations* called non Christian above as *'anonymous Christian'* and they will save as far as they life sincere to God [45]

Beyond those opinions are the perspectives using parallelism paradigm[46], which believe that every religion has its own way of salvation and in order that Christian's claim as the only way or as the way which complement other way should be refused. The examples of the expression of those opinions are *'other religions are equally valid ways to the same truth'* (John Hick), or *'other religions speak of different but equally valid truth'* (John B. Cobb, Jr), or *'each religion expresses an important part of the truth'* (Raimundo Pannikar)

The elaboration above shows that there seems a 'red thread' of universal theological point of view in Christianity and Islam, but it is the exclusive opinion which colored the majority of believers.

Mission and da'wah, as mentioned, are essential religious duty in both Christian and Islam. Mission means sending message, with the purpose of continuing the message of Jesus on earth, based on the command, 'Go therefore and make disciple of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.'[47]

In the history of earlier Christianity, mission was stand from the opinion that the disciples of Jesus believe that Jesus is a man who has a special relationship with God and brought good teachings. Those disciples then created a community. They confined that they have a special relationship with him, thus they asked everyone to have the same relationship. Their invitation was, 'let be with us as the followers of Jesus !'[48]

The perspective above was changed. Beginning from that very simple opinion, then it became what now is called the *'Great Commission'* based on Matt 28: 19-20.

When Protestantism aroused that concept was changed again. Mission had a new meaning, that is giving a 'service' to the people and invited the to be Christians.[49]

In the new era, those perspectives are being corrected. Then there are many new opinions based on the texts, part of them is the awakening of the new paradigm of Christian mission in Peter III : 15 and 16 : *'Always be ready to make your defense, to anyone who demand from you, and accounting for the hope there is in you, yet do it with*

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[45]See, Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigation*, vol 5, London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1966, 131

[46]See, John Hick, *God and the Universe of Faiths*, Oxford: One World Publications, 1993,

[47]Matt 28: 19. See, Uwe Hummel, Strategi Misi di Indonesia Menyongsong Abad 21, (The Strategy of Mission in Indonesia facing the 21th century) in Panitia Penerbitan Buku Kenangan Prof. Dr. Olaf Herbert Schumann, *Agama dalam Dialog,* (*Religion in Dialogue*), Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 1999, 215

[48]Barbara Brown Zigmund, 'Dialog Agama-agama dalam Konteks Missionarisme Baru', (Interreligious Dialogue in the Context of New Missionary) in Komaruddin Hidayat dan Muhammad Gaus, eds. *Passing Over, Melintas Batas Agama,* (Passing Over, Beyond the Limit of Religion), Jakarta: Gramedia, 1998, 26-27

[49] Zigmund, 'Dialog Agama-agama, 28

gentleness and reverences'.[50]

Thus, we see there are changes. If in the earlier time Christians are commanded to go out, invited all nation to be Christians (defensive), but now it became offensive, that is trying to understand the doctrine in a good manner.

Da'wah in Islam constitute the fulfilment of the commandment from the verse, invite to the Way of your Lord with wisdom and fair preaching, and argue with them in a way that is better'[51]. Beside that, da'wah is the invitation undertake by Muslims to enable them to share their experience of the truth with others, as mentioned before. According to the history, after receiving the revelation, Prophet Muhammad was commanded to preach what he received silently, because of the impossible condition. When the condition was more conducive, however, he was commanded to preach openly.

Da'wah is directed both to Muslims and non-Muslims. It is also the Christian mission.

The idea of God's revelation on the truth and the human freedom to receive or refuse it is crucial in the Islamic teaching on revelation and human responsibility. This is God's covenant to human being since the beginning,[52] in order that it is also the foundation of *taklif* (responsibility) and the consequences of reward and punishment in the hereafter.

Sura 2: 256 that there is no compulsion in religion, also has became the foundation for Christians who were forced to be Muslims to come back to their religion. It is this principle of freedom of religion which has helped reserving and maintaining Eastern Christianity in the society dominated by Muslims.[53]

In fact, the Qur'an as the authentic source of Islam, always point religion in a universal meaning. Even the term 'Islam' itself is used in a general meaning as surrender to God and receiving the One God, and not only for the mission of revelation to Prophet Muhammad. (P.b H).

The Qur'an also maintains the unity of humankind as family.[54] All human being has equal basic rights, including the rights to choose one of religions without coercion.

In the Qur'an no human being, both the king or people, priest or lay people, is allowed to limit the grace and the mercy of God, not to speak nor to do on behalf of His name to make a judgment on reward or punishment. God is the only Ultimate Giver of Law.[55] Every good things is admitted where ever it came from.[56] No individual or community can claim monopolizing the grace of God and refusing the grace of God for other people.[57]

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[50]Zigmund, 'Dialog Agama-agama, 28

[51]See, the Qur'an Sura 16: 125

[52]See, the Qur'an Sura 7:172

[53]See, Mahmud Ayoub, 'Islamic Context of Muslim Christian Relations, *ICMR*, 1992

[54]See the Qur'an Sura 4: 1

[55]See the Qur'an Sura 6: 164

[56]See, the Qur'an Sura 3: 113

[57]See, the Qur'an Sura 2: 62

The Qur'anic appreciation to other religions, other prophets and their scriptures is not only a honor, but an admission of the religious truths. Islam does not consider them as 'the others' that should be tolerated, but as standing 'de jure' as truly revealed religions from God.[58]

The challenge of the Qur'an, and more to Muslims, is to consider *ahl al-Kitab* (People of the Books) as the big family in faith who speak in the different languages, but adore the One God. Consistently, the People of the Book are mentioned in the Qur'an as *ahl al-Kitab*. The word *ahl* always means family relationship. The *ahl* of a person are his family: the wife, the husband and the children. In order that the phrase *ahl Kitab* should means the family who received the Books (the Family of the Books). Further, the Qur'an commands Muslims and all people of faith to show their good attitudes to their close family. The Qur'anic stressing on the centrality of the Book can help Jews, Christians and Muslims to be the children of Abraham living in harmoniously, to be a happy family. [59]

C.   *Rethinking Mission and Da'wah*

It is a necessity that should be accepted that we are no in the circle of a globalism and

pluralism of ethnicity and religion. This condition in turn compel us to rethink and reconsider the concept of mission/da'wah and the concept of monopolizing salvation out side each faith.   It is also led us to attempt to find a way forward in discovering acceptable methods of mission and da'wah.

Da'wah is seeking to let other people to share and enjoy the truth experienced. Da'wah means calling or invitation.[60] Calling or invitation is not coercion. The Prophet himself let a Christian who was not sure with Islam to keep his earlier belief and come back to his home safely.[61]

It is obvious that the societal order desired by Islam is one, where every person has freedom in practicing his own belief and expressing to others. Thus, Islamic Da'wah is more about invitation to think and argue. Islamic Da'wah works on the principle that the rights to think is innate and belong to all men.[62] The principle that da'wah is not coercion is based on the Qur'anic dramatization on the justification for the creation of

[58]Al-Faruqi, 'The Role of Islam in Global Interreligious Dependence' in *Toward a Global Congress of the World and Religions,* ed. Waren Lewis, New York: Barry Town, Univication Theological Seminary, 22-23

[59]Mahmud Ayoub, Islam and Christianity between Tolerance and Acceptance, in *ICMR,* vol. 2, no. 2, Des. 1991

[60]For the meaning of Da'wah see, *The Encyclopaedia of religions*, ed., Mircea Eliade, New York: Mac Millan, vol.4,1987, 244 and M. Canard, 'Da'wa' in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam,* vol II, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1965

[61]See, Ismail Al-Faruqi, *Islam and Other Faiths,*edited by Attaullah Siddiqui, UK: The Islamic Foundation, 1998

[62]Ismail Al-Faruqi, 'On the Nature of Islamic Da'wah', in *International Review of Mission*, Vol. LXV, No. 260, Oct., 1976, 392

human being.[63] Here the existence of human being, that is as *khalifah Allah* (God's vicegerent) – the career of responsibility offered to him to fulfill God's will– , is admitted. It enable him to actualize the task of the *khalifah* (vicegerency).

In Christian world, mission constitute the personal duty of every individual Christian, as part of his or her faith to witness and to evangelize.[64] Evangelization is giving a good news. "When proclaiming the Good News, one should do it with great respect for freedom of God who is acting, the freedom of other who is responding and the church's own limitations as a witness."[65] Proclamation leading to conversion is considered one of the aspects of evangelization only. The other aspect are dialogue, liberation and inculturation.[66]

Paus Paulus VI in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* said that *evangelization* means bringing a good news to all people and by its effect it changes human being from inside and renew him.67 The Sinode of the bishops in 1971 decreed that the action on behalf of justice and participation in changing the world is the basic dimension of the teaching of the church.68 The same voice is represented by Asian bishops who see *evangelization* in Asian context as a '*threefold dialogue*', culture, religion and the poor people.69 Thus, "it would be wrong to consider evangelization narrowly as proclamation, leading to baptism, and, what is worse, look upon other types of activity as merely means or first step to proclamation. The primary task of evangelization is the advancement of the mystery of God's plan for the world– the promotion of the Reign." 70

Being Christian is to follow Jesus Christ as the Way (*immitatio Christi*), and someone will get salvation via Jesus. Traditionalist people understand it that there will be no salvation without Jesus. But further, that concept changes, even they come to the opinion that membership in church is not the guarantee of salvation.71

Furthermore, if Mat 28 said: 'Baptize', in this case, although conversion indeed is at the root of baptism, but "it would be wrong to think that baptism is a pure spiritual act.

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[63]See, the Qur'an Sura 2: 30

[64]Arne Rudwin, 'The Concept and Practice of Christian Mission' in *Christian Mission and Islamic Da'wah*, UK: The Islamic Foundation, 1982, p. 16. This article was published earlier in *International Review of Mission*, Vol. LXV, No. 260, Oct., 1976, 374-384

[65]Michael Amaladoss, *Making All Things New, Dialogue, Pluralism and Evangelization in Asia*, New York: Maryknoll Orbis Books, 1990, 59

[66]See, Mary and Yoseph R. Long (eds.), *Mission and Dialogue*, Maryknoll, Orbis, 1982, 633-642

[67]*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 19

[68]Justice in the world, 'introduction', quoted by Michael Amalados, SJ, Dialogue and Mission: Conflict or Convergence ?, in *EAPR*, 1986, no. 1, p. 75

[69]C. G. Arevalo, 'Further Reflections on Mission Today in the Asian Context', in *Toward a New Age of Mission II*, 130-153

[70]Michael Amalados, Dialogue and Mission: Conflict or Convergence ?, 75, See also Amalados, *Making All Thing New...*, 57

[71] Michael Amalados, SJ, 'Dialogue and Mission. Conflict or Convergent ?', 76-77, See also Amalados, *Making All Thing New...*, 58

It is also a very socio-political act."72 The history proved the fact. Therefore, *"if the mysteries of salvation depends basically on the encounter between an individual and God, then all mediation is relative".*73

According to Islam *da'wah* is the fulfilment of the 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. It 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*."74 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)

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.75 That is people must be called to the way of God, persuasively rather than violently.76 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 Teaching?' (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

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72 Amalados, 'Dialogue and Mission', 58

73Amaladoss, *Making All Thing New*, 58

74Ismail 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, p. 306. This article was published in *International Review of Mission*, vol. lxv, No. 260, October, 1976, pp. 391-406. See also, *Christian Mission and Islamic Da'wah*, Leiscester : The Islamic Foundation, 1982, p. 33-42

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

76Asghar Ali Engineer, 'The Islamic Outlook on Interreligious Dialogue' p. 20

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

While the above definition of *da'wah/* mission is certainly true, there have been many manipulative or corrupt forms of *da'wah/* mission. This can be said for both Islam and Christianity. Barbara Sigmund argues that *The Great Commission* upon which Christian mission is based, is influenced by Roman legal thought, 'that this is right and that is wrong, that it should be done and that should be abandoned'. In practice, the mission calling people to be Christians, even by coercion, is based on the motive of the aspiration for salvation.77 Islam can be seen to be quite similar. 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'wa*h. A starting point might be replacing the word '*da'wah*/mission' with the word dialogue, as Faruqi suggested.78 Furthermore,

> "the word 'dialogue' is a dimension of consciousness, category of ethical sense and the altruistic arm of Islam and Christianity. 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."79

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.

If such a perspective is accepted, *da'wah*/mission for all religions could be carried out in an atmosphere of respect and acceptability. God's universal saving will is present and active everywhere through various ways. Because of the universal salvific will of God, and the socio-historical character of the human person, the salvific divine-human encounter is takes place through all religions and their symbolic structures, Scriptures and codes of conduct and rituals. It is its principle, that the Qur'an does not recognize the exlusivistic notion of the phrase, '*Extra ecclesiam nullus propheta*', neither '*Extra ecclesiam nulla sallus*'. Instead al-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 they grieve.80

77Barbara Zigmund, 'Dialog agama-agama dalam konteks Missionary baru' (Interreligious Dialogue in a new Missionaries Context) in *Passing Over*, Jakarta: paramadina, 1998, p. 27

78Muhammad Shafiq, 'Trialogue of the Abrahamic Faiths Guidlines for Jews, Christian and Muslim Dialogue: Analysis of the Views of Ismail Raji al-Faruqi' in *Hamdard Islamicus*, vol. xv, No. I, p. 70

79Ismail Faruqi, 'Islam and Christianity: Problems and Perspectives' in *The World in the Third World*, pp. 167-168

80Al-Qur'an 2: 62

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.81

IV   The Last Words

If we pay more attention and are more curious, we see that people are more often have attitude which led toward divinize religion, although we know that God is not identical with religion. Buddha Gautama said: "Although in this Dharma, there are universal values, but you should consider it just as a *raft,* do not divinize. The raft is useful if you use it to come across the river, to God".

There are a lot of things that have been done on behalf or in the name of a religion, which is actually not in accordance with the spirit of the religion itself. There are a lot of example, but the most well known is Crusade, where Christians and Muslims had a competition not for God nor for Christ, but for a religion. It is this such *'Religion Idolatry'* on behalf of God, that has caused suffering and bloodshed.

Do we not able to transcend political, social, cultural and historical dictum ? If we have an excellence experience on religion, I think we can. Indeed, *'religion is not only what we believe but how we live'..*

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,82 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 salvation83, and there are many, not one, of doing so84 although man should be cautious regarding some of them which may misleading.85

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. He saves Christian through Jesus Christ (according to Christian beliefs), so Jesus is the way for Christians while respective traditions constitute the way for others. God says in the *Qur'an*: 'To each among you have We prescribed a law and an open way. If Allah had so willed, He would have made you a single people, but His plane is to test you in what He had given you, so strive as in a race in all virtue. The goal of you all is to Allah. It is He that will show you the truth of the matters in which you disputes'.86

81Al-Qur'an 5: 69

82Nurcholish 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

83The Qur'an 5: 48

84The Qur'an 29: 69 and 5: 16

85See, the Qur'an 16: 9

86Translation from the Qur'an

Since human beings are not generic but unique, the expressions of responses to the *'kalam Allah'* (Word) of God will be many and vary rather than one and the same,87 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.88 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.89 *We are co-pilgrims in pursuit of the Divine.*

Wallahu A'lam (Allah knows Best)

March 15, 2002

Syafa'atun Elmirzana

87Anthony J. Gittins, (Ed.), *Life and Death Matters, The Practice of Inculturation in Africa,* Germany: Steyler Verlag, 2000, 25

88Gittins, *Life and Death Matters,* 25

89Bevans, , *Models of Contextual Theology,* 49

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Presenters and Speakers

Syafa'tun al Mirzana: Professor of Religion at the State Islamic University in Yogyakarta, Indonesia

Sharmin Ahmad: Bangladeshi Muslim Human Rights activist

Frederick Denny: Professor of Islamic Studies at the University of Colorado, Boulder CO

Mir Mustansir: Professor of Islamic Studies at Youngstown State University, Ohio

Mark Swanson: Director of Islamic Studies program at Luther Seminary, St. Paul MN

Pisamai Vogelaar: Former officer for Islamic Affairs in Thailand's Department of Education

Harold Vogelaar: Professor of Islamic Studies at Lutheran School of Theology, Chicago

Theodore Ludwig: Surjit S Patheja Chair of World Religions and Ethics in VU's Theology Department

Nelly van Doorn-Harder: Assistant Professor of Theology, VU

Khaldoun Samman: Assistant Professor of Sociology, VU

Josh Messner: VU Student

Benjamin Leese: VU Student

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