CELEBRATING DIFFERENCES
THROUGH DIALOGUE IN INDONESIA

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Introduction

Interfaith dialogue is one of the most impressive intellectual discourses of the twentieth century. It became the topic of the day, from the formal fora of academia to popular discussion in the cafes. Like any other phenomenon, it does not stand by itself. It emerged at a result of many factors. One of them, if not the most important, is what Gilles Kepel called the "crisis of modernity".[1]

With the exception of those who a priori reject such discussion, a lot of people assume that the intensity and quality of the dialogue will increase in the future. Today, even, there is no more discussion about the importance of the dialogue, but rather about 'what is the most appropriate approach/method for the dialogue, and how the dialogue can yield praxis consciousness at the grass root level and not only at the academic or intellectual levels.

Indonesia as a Pluralistic and Pancasila State

Plurality is a fact of our contemporary world, both on a global scale and often on the level of specific societies. Throughout most of recorded history, humanity has experienced a rich plurality of religions. This is due to the manifoldness of the divine revelation and of its human pursuit in different cultures. "Religions are many and varied and they reflect the desire of men and women throughout the ages to enter into relationship with the Absolute Being."[1]

Theological explanations of this plurality vary from tradition to tradition as well as within a single tradition. In the Abrahamic faiths such explanations tend to fall into two distinct, but not always mutually exclusive, categories. There are those explanations that attribute religious plurality either to ignorance of the truth, or perversity in the face of truth. And there are other explanations which suggest that religious plurality is somehow a part of the divine design to bring humanity together as one family before God. Suffice to say that it is this second category of explanations that one most often finds at the theological heart of most efforts at interfaith dialogue.

In Islam, there are at least two Quranic verses which are frequently interpreted as the basis for an Islamic theology of religious pluralism that recognizes the degree to which such pluralism can be seen in a positive light. The first (5:48) speaks of human communal, and perhaps therefore cultural and religious plurality, to be part of the divine design. The reason it offers for this plurality is so that different groups of human beings will "compete with each other in virtue." The second (49:13) has a very similar theme. It suggests that God has "appointed" cultural and perhaps even religious diversity for the human race in order that they may be faced with the challenge of coming to know each other and striving with one another to be the "most honored in God's sight" by being the

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1 See Gilles Kepel, *The Revenge of God: The Resurgence of Islam, Christianity and Judaism in the Modern World,* Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993, p. 191

[1]Pope John Paul II in Asisi, 27 Oct 1986

most God-conscious (*atqâ*). In Christianity there have been many biblical passages attested to support interreligious dialogue (Gen. 1:27; Isaiah 56:1-7; Mark 9:40; Luke 9:50). In the meeting in Assisi (October, 1986) of religious leaders from all over the world, Pope John Paul II summarized a basic insight common to many Christian theologies of religious pluralism and dialogue when he said, addressing the assembly: "Religions are many and varied and they reflect the desire of men and women throughout the ages to enter into relationship with the Absolute Being."[2] In this he echoed the teaching of *Nostra Aetate* that "the Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy" in the other religions of the world.[3]

For many Western observers, of course, Indonesia is not what first comes to mind when one thinks of the Muslim world. The average Westerner is perhaps more familiar with its ancient Hindu-Buddhist temples and graceful Balinese arts than with the fact that Indonesia--the fourth most populous nation in the world--is also the world's largest majority-Muslim country. Some 88 percent of this nation's 220 to 230 million people officially profess Islam. On these grounds alone, what Indonesian Muslims think and do should be a matter of general interest.

Plurality is also the very texture of Indonesia. In terms of religion in Indonesia, many researchers maintain that there is a demographic paradox: despite the huge Muslim majority population, Indonesia is constitutionally *not* an Islamic state. On the other hand, it is not a secular state either. Constitutionally it is a unitary state which embodies and simplifies a philosophy called *Pancasila* ("Five Principles"). These principles are: (1) belief in the one Supreme God; (2) a just and civilized humanity; (3) the unity of Indonesia; (4) democracy led by the wisdom of unanimity arising from deliberations among representatives of the people; and (5) social justice for the whole people of Indonesia. Therefore, Muslims' acceptance of Pancasila is no doubt one of the most important Indonesian Islamic roots of pluralism.

Despite its religious diversity, Indonesia has until recently been generally known as a country where a number of great world religions meet and develop in peaceful co-existence. The region is also known as one of the least Arabicized areas throughout the Muslim world.

In the vast archipelago, with its many islands, tribes, languages and cultures, the Indonesian state wants to create a modern and stable nation with a firm national cohesion. One of the aspects of the ideology of Pancasila is the promotion of this national unity.

Pancasila can be viewed as a secular as well as an equality definition of monotheism since religion is defined as ethics and separated from the state. This is the foundation which made it possible to overcome the tension between Islam and a secular national state in Indonesia and to demonstrate a successful pattern for harmonious unity of cultural-ethnically and religiously differing communities.

Basam Tibi in one of his article in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, October 27, 1995, opines that since the Arab core countries of Islamic civilization have neither such, a

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Pope John Paul II in Assisi, 27 Oct 1986

[3] *Nostra Aetate* (October 25, 1965)

cultural-ethnical and religious foundation for inner peace nor - despite their oil-based prosperity - can neither offer an economical successful development model the question comes up whether it is Southeast Asia, that is Indonesia, that will become the center of Islamic civilization while moving into the 21st century because of its model capabilities.

It is important to note the definition of a tolerant and pluralistic monotheism by the then President Sukarno who described the first principle of Pancasila as follows: "It's the principle of belief in God. It means that all Indonesians believe in God in the sense that the Christians believe in God in harmony with the teachings of Jesus Christ, the Muslims in line with the teachings of Mohammed, the Buddhists practice their religion as prescribed in their holy scriptures. But we all together believe in God. The Indonesian state is a state where every believer can worship God according to his own choice of religion. The Indonesian people believe in God in a refined (advanced, cultured) manner that is without the egoism of any one religion."

This Pancasila definition of Monotheism is a clear-cut deviation from the traditional Islamic *Dhimmi*[4] principle. Pancasila puts Muslims, Christians, Hindus and Buddhists on an equal level. That's not only a revolution in Islamic thinking but also a translation of the mystical ideas of the great Sufi Muslim Ibn Arabi into a political program. The Sufi Islam's tolerance and its rejection of any dogmatism becomes a basis of political reality in Indonesia.

In Indonesia, non-Muslims are not "*dhimmis*" but citizens of equal standing. It offers a model, for an equal definition of Islam and Christianity which is expanded also to Buddhism, Hinduism, and Confucianism, religions which are not mentioned in Islamic revelations. The late 20th century is not the world of the 7th century when everything revolved around the then perceived main centers of civilization, the Christian and Muslim empires as well as around the Jewish religious communities.

Religious harmony exceeds by far the parable of Lessing as demonstrated by Indonesia; it has to embrace the other world religions, and Indonesia represents here a model for peace. Even today one finds in Indonesia a blend of *adat* (local customs and traditions often from pre-Islamic times) and Religious Islamic rules. The result is an Indonesian version of Islam that is not seldom quite independent.

The former Indonesian Minister for Religious Affairs, and the founding father of Comparative Religion in Indonesia, Mukti Ali, on the occasion of the "First Conference on Islamic Civilization", caused a lot of frown among his audience when describing *adat* as the nucleus of Indonesian Islam. Responding to the provocation that this would not be Islamic and he would have to decide whether he is Muslim or Indonesian, he stated in a sovereign (independent, supreme) manner: "I am an Indonesian Muslim."

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[4] A dhimmi may be defined as a person with accountability and inviolability (holiness), he is granted human right and constitutional rights. In classical Islamic jurisprudence the term dhimmah means accountability and inviolability, which is usually termed personhood in modern legal discourse. Dhimmah is also commonly understood as "protection," "treaty" and "peace" because it is a treaty that puts non-Muslims under the protection of Muslims (it is the concept of the rights of minorities)

Indeed, most Indonesians are Muslims, and the rest are Christian (Catholic and Protestant), Hindus, Buddhist, Confucians, and even a very small Jewish community. The reality of religious pluralism is not just a matter of the historical past, but also a reality of the living present, reflected in curiosity about other religions, studying them at various levels and reading each other's scripture. As we do so, we are often inspired by each other's insights and practices. Sometimes we find in that our various traditions share some of the same fundamental values that each of us cherish in our own religions, albeit expressed in different ways. One might say that, *to be religious today in Indonesia is to be inter-religious.* Avoiding pluralism is avoiding the reality of different point of views and beliefs in society. From the beginning, people in Indonesia grappled with what social theorists today sometimes regard as a uniquely modern problem--cultural pluralism.

Intra-Muslim community, from early on, the mainstream tradition recognized that there were different ways of being Muslim, and different balances of divine commandment and local culture (*adat*). This cultural precedent may well explain why, in the late colonial period, so many Indonesian Muslims rallied to the nationalist cause. In Indonesia at least, the nationalism they embraced was plural and multiethnic rather than, as in so much of Europe, premised on a single ethnic prototype.

The explanation above, however, do not intend to ignore the anti-pluralist group who expressed their attitude in a movement that demand for the application of *sharia* rule within the Indonesian republic. Especially in the current moment, they gather together in the political party called "*Partai Keadilan Sejahtera*" (The party of Justice and welfare). Most of the participant came from secular university campuses who currently realize and thus study their religious tradition by the impact of Indonesia's Islamic revivalism. Those people consist of about ten percent of the whole Muslim society in Indonesia.

After the fall of Suharto, the second president who led Indonesia for more than thirty years, Indonesia has been suffering from a serious social crisis which affected so many different levels of Indonesian life, including the political and economic. A country long praised for its multicultural tolerance found itself caught in a downward spiral of ethno-religious violence. This crisis caused riots and other forms of violent conflict in many areas, such as Jakarta (the capital), Poso (South Sulawesi), Ambon, Banjarmasin (South Kalimantan), Pontianak (West Kalimantan), and Irian (West Papua), just to mention a few. Although religion was not the main causal factor, people often framed their political interests and identity in terms of religious symbols, values, and ideals. This should come as no surprise given the fact that religion operates at some of the deepest elements in Indonesian life. People involved in the current crisis are waiting for a vision and strategic plan to restore the integrative nature and character of Indonesian society. They are looking to the government for leadership and for the stability and security necessary for a lasting peace. The current crisis raises questions which, in the view of many Indonesians, transcend the differences of culture and religion. The crisis and its suffering stand as a challenge to the various religious communities of Indonesia, to forsake isolationism, and to work together to address social ills. Though these ills are not caused by religion, inter-religious dialogue and activity can possibly become a basis for joint reflection and action. This crisis of 1997-99 also underscored the scale of the challenge faced by Indonesian of all faiths.

And it is important to point out that one should be very cautious not to jump to the conclusion that most of the conflicts and violence in recent Indonesia are religiously motivated. In fact most of them are rooted in the economic and political problems that have not been solved since the time of Soeharto's New Order. Religion, or more appropriately religious symbols, came only later as a rallying point and rallying cry in the confrontation

The Ambon communal violence, which erupted in January 1999 and worsened and spread to other parts of the Maluku province but now has largely stopped, is perhaps the most often quoted as a clear case of religious conflict in Indonesia in recent years.

It is no secret of course that Muslims and Christians in Maluku had long been involved in a sort of race to gain the upper hand in the religion, economics and politics of the region. There is a suggestion though that the Ambon or Maluku communal riots have their root causes in the contest for economic resources and the increasingly disproportionate distribution of political power in the local bureaucracy between Muslims -- consisting of indigenous Maluku and migrants better known as the BBM (Buginese, Butonese and Makasarese) all from South Sulawesi -- and indigenous Christians over the last two decades at least.

Looking at the conflict and violence between Muslim and Christian groups in Indonesia, one should be aware that the case is far from a reflection of Indonesia as a whole. Given the fact that Islam is the single largest religion in Indonesia, it is reasonable to expect that Islam and Muslims play a greater and more positive role in the development and enhancement of a democratic and multicultural Indonesia.

Indonesian Islam is essentially a tolerant, moderate, and "middle way" Islam given the history of its early spread, which was basically peaceful and had been integrated into diverse ethnic, cultural and social realities of Indonesia. The bulk of Indonesian Muslims belong to moderate mainstream organizations such as the Nahdlatul Ulama, Muhammadiyah and many other regional organizations throughout Indonesia.

All of these Muslim organizations support modernity and democracy. They oppose the establishment of an Islamic state in Indonesia as well as the implementation of shariah in the current Indonesian nation-state.

There are a number of small or fringe groups of radical Muslims, which have captured the media's imagination. These groups have the potential to create tension not only among Muslims, but also with non-Muslim groups.

With the leadership mostly in the hands of non-native Indonesian Muslims, or more precisely figures of Yemeni origin, these groups have in fact very limited influence in Indonesian as a whole.

One should not exaggerate their influence. Moreover, following the bombings in Bali on October 12, 2002, most of these radical groups have either disbanded themselves or been forced to lay low.

Indonesia has miraculously remained intact as one nation, but if it is to survive for six decades or more, merely accepting our differences will not be sufficient. We need to go further to turn every corner of this country, from Sabang to Merauke, into a better place to live for everyone, regardless of race, ethnicity, culture, language, religion, gender, generation, social and economic status.

If we want to go one step beyond unity in diversity, pluralism is the way forward, that include respecting differences, and striving to work together on the basis of equality. Dialog is also an important part of pluralism in order to nurture relations between people of different backgrounds. And there is also cooperation to achieve common goals. The four main tenets of pluralism -- mutual respect, equality, dialog and cooperation -- should be applied in promoting peaceful coexistence among people of diverse backgrounds, whether within marriage, in villages or communities, or in a nation.

History and the state of interfaith dialogue in Indonesia

The term dialogue is a new term, but in practice dialogue is as old as Indonesia. It is the way of living. It is unfortunate that usually when we are talking about interfaith it is about when there was a clash between religious communities. We also need to draw our attention when interaction between them is neutral and natural in the context of daily life and peaceful condition. Two settings will be elaborated on the state of interfaith dialogue in Indonesia.

1. Dialogue in everyday live

Interesting story in Denpasar on religious harmony in Bali will be cited here:

The sound of the muezzin echoes on a chilly February morning.

In many areas of the nation where Muslims are a majority, such a call to prayer is commonplace. This is not the case, however, in Bali.

This particular prayer is issuing from a small mosque in Banjar Kwanji, Dalung district, some 15 kilometers north of Denpasar. Most of the residents living around the mosque are Balinese Hindus.

Alongside the mosque is a church, which is always full every Saturday and Sunday for services. Ten meters more to the north, there is a beautiful Hindu shrine. Unsurprisingly, the sounds of the muezzin, the ringing of church bells and the rhythmic Hindu chanting fill up the sky in this small village surrounded by green paddy fields and new housing complexes.

"We have created a harmonious environment for our villagers, some of them who come from Java and other areas outside Bali," said Nyoman Karyasa, a long-time resident of Banjar Kwanji. People of different faiths respected and helped each other here, he said.

About 90 percent of Bali's estimated 3.5 million population are Hindus, while the remaining 10 percent comprise Muslims, Protestants, Buddhists and Catholics.

Non-Hindu minorities, however, have found no difficulty establishing places of worship on the island of the gods.

Halidi, a Muslim leader from the Al-Muawatul Hariyah Mosque in Kampung Bugis, one of the largest Muslim enclaves in Bali, said that Muslims had a long history here. "We were given this plot of land by the King of Pemecutan, a devout Hindu royal."

"We have long had good relations with the royal family of Pemecutan. If they have a big ceremony, we immediately lend a hand. The royal family has been so generous," he said.

In Bali, places of worship are constructed through mutual religious consultation rather than by a piece of paper issued by a government institution.[5]

And Baby, a Catholic priest who lives in the area, believes the new ministerial decree regulating places of worship is against universal human rights and the state Pancasila ideology. "This planned decree is a form of interference into the private life of citizens in terms of religious issues," Baby said. "In the last 10 years, Bali set up an interfaith communication forum in which religious leaders work closely to share and solve any problems between groups that might arise," Baby said.

According to Baby, providing space for communication and cooperation among religious groups was much more important than issuing a rigid policy that in the end would only harm relations. Protestant minister and Bandung Churches Association head Wayan Sudira Husada said the people of Bali openly welcomed "guests from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds."

Despite their openness, Bali's "guests" or non-Hindus, still had to respect the culture and religion of their hosts, he said.

The island's provincial government has issued its own regulation on the establishment of places of worship. It requires the approval of at least 100 families in the area before a non-Hindu place of worship can be built.

"Such a regulation may discourage people from constructing a place of worship, but with the right 'heart-to-heart' approach, the local people would likely give the plan the nod Indicate agreement)," Wayan said. Regular meetings with Banjar officials and members also eliminated misunderstandings between non-Hindu and Hindu populations, he said. "We need to set up a bottom-up approach -- from the Banjar people to the government. Not the other way around," Wayan said.

"In the forum, Hindu religious and community leaders together with leaders from other faiths work together to create a peaceful Bali."

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[5] The revised version of the 1969 Joint Ministerial Decree on building places of worship on the decree regulating places of worship is approved. The revised law retains (keeps) the basic principles of the old law, but now requires local government officials to issue permits upon consultation with local religious forums and branches of the Religious Affairs Ministry. Residents of areas where a new place of worship is slated to go up must also give their consent The decree rules that new places of worship must have congregations of a minimum of 90 people. A minimum of 60 people of other faiths living in the area must also give their consent for the building. There is also a requirement to obtain building permits from local administrations and the Communication Forum for Religious Harmony (FKUB).

Just to let you know, there is a Mosque in Islamic Boarding school Nurul Huda in West Nusa Tenggara, which was built not only by Muslims but also with the support from other religious tradition. The leader of this pesantren admitted it, and said: "this is an approve of a cooperation and harmony in building places for prayer in the village, thus it is also to be admitted that this mosque belongs not only to Muslims community but to all communities."[6]

2. Dialogue in an Academic Setting

Academically, it can be said that the department of comparative study of religion in the faculty of theology in Islamic University in Indonesia, where I taught, is the pioneer of the dialogue. The department was established in 1961 by Prof. Dr. H. A. Mukti Ali, the first director. He was a student of Wilfred Cantwell Smith in McGill University, Montreal Canada. When he was appointed as a Minister of Religious Affairs (Sept, 1971), his primary interest was inter-religious harmony. In fact seeking to religious harmony has been undertaken before him. It has been held the meeting between the leaders of religions to talk about religious harmony in Indonesia. In the meeting, Muslim leaders had an objection to Christian evangelization among Muslims. The Protestant and Catholic leaders maintained, however, that evangelization of all peoples is one of their responsibilities according to their religion. Ultimately, no agreement could be reached, and the dialogue failed. Mukti Ali continued the former effort, but in a different way. According to the former model, religious leaders were invited to be the main participants. One of Mukti Ali's principal contributions to the development of this dialogue was to shift the focus from religious leaders to academics with expertise in religion or related fields from premier institutions such as the Institute of Islamic Studies, major Christian schools of theology, and major graduate programs from a variety of different universities. If in the former, the initiator was the government (top-down), in his era it was changed, the initiators were the experts themselves (bottom-up). If in the former the subject discussed were theological problems, in his era the theme discussed was "development" and the role or place of religion in the development process. From these he established a theory on "living in religious harmony" (*kerukunan hidup beragama*), and "dialogue." His very well known concept is "agree in disagreement."

Multi Ali, appointed ministry of religious affairs in 1971, had participated in the International Dialogue held in Ajlatoun, Lebanon in 1970. He favored the cooperation between the adherents of different religious community. According to him such working together was more effective among the common people to overcome mistrust and suspicion based on religious diversity than theological discussions which were important mainly to religious leaders.

It should be noted, however, that until 1971 in Indonesia, there was no one talk about religious harmony and the means necessary to support it. Since independence, the relationship between the state and religion had been a hotly contested issue. Among religious people, they were afraid if Indonesia will be a secular state. Conversely, people also afraid if Indonesia will be a theocratic state. Those problems also were of Mukti Ali's consideration. He did not agree with those who insisted that religion ought to be a

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[6] Rita Widiadana, "Respect, understanding defer religious conflict," The Jakarta Post, February 26, 2006

strictly personal affair. In *Pancasila*[7] as the way of life of the nation, the belief in one God is a life ethos for the Indonesian people. Thus, he came up with the phrase, "Indonesia is not a secular state, but it is not a theocratic state either, Indonesia is a Pancasila state." Sometime he also said that Indonesia is a socio-religious state.

In order to stimulate the efforts for interreligious harmony, the Department of Comparative Religion at the Islamic University of Indonesia Suna Kalijaga Yogyakarta, also founded an Indonesian branch of the International Association for the History of Religion in 1990. In 1993 this department took the initiative to convene (organize) a national conference, commemorating the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions of Chicago. Prominent members of Hinduism, Buddhism and Christianity were invited. Dr. Sularso Sopater, General Chairman of the Indonesian Council of Churches, delivered a speech on the future of religious pluralism, while two Hindus from Bali, I Gusti Ngurah Bagus and I Ketut Wiana also spoke about the themes of pluralism and the participation of religions in the national development. Finally the Congress adopted the text of a declaration expressing the same themes. The conference also inaugurated the National Foundation for the Study of Interreligious Harmony, where I was the secretary, which later on started an international journal, published in English, *Religiosa*, Indonesian Journal on Religious Harmony. The association hosted an IAHR Regional Conference on "Religious Harmony: Problems, Practice and Education" in Yogyakarta and Semarang, Indonesia, 27 September - 3 October 2004

Actually, since 1960's discussions have been initiated among young Muslim intellectuals about the vision s of the Islamic student organization for future Islamic society. One of the results of the ensuing heated debates was a greater awareness on the part of some Muslim leaders of the pluralistic character of Indonesian society. Pointing to the fourth pillar of the Pancasila, many agreed that mutual deliberation and consensus should include, on equal term, representatives from other religious group in helping define the future ideological and moral orientation of Indonesians. In the task of nation building every group should participate and no one, these Muslims included, could force others to accept against their will.

In 1980 a forum was established through the Department of Religious Affairs where religious questions and matters of interfaith relations could be discussed. Members of the forum were to be the leaders of different religious communities. The forum is charged with considering the relationship of the first pillar of the Pancasila, the belief in Supreme God, to the other pillars of inclusive humanity, nationalism, consensus, and social justice. In the context of this forum, leaders of the religious communities have the chance to meet and to try to resolve issues that otherwise would be discussed within their individual communities.

Considering the pluralistic character of Indonesian society, it is clear that such contribution from each would work toward complementary and cooperation rather than support domination of any one. It gives opportunity to every religious group to develop a vision of society that is really inclusive, taking into account the rights and tasks of other communities as well as their own. The impetus for cooperation necessitates the

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[7]Pancasila means five principles. This is a way of life of Indonesian People, founded by Soekarno, the first president.

identification of a theological rationale and justification that acknowledges the existence of adherents of other religions and faiths.

There several thinkers as significant contributors to this new form of conversation. One is Nurcholish Madjid, known for his earlier attack against the "Islamic state" concept heralded by the older generation. In his article entitle "The Actualization of the Teaching of Ahlussunnah wal Jama'a" he developed the theme that the understanding of an exclusive Islamic society is unacceptable in Indonesian society. He cites historical precedent for an antisectarian perspective, arguing that Muslim should accept other interpretations of truth provided they are consonant with belief in One God. Thus, he says, the exclusive claim to truth and knowledge goes against the Word of God and its spirit. What is demanded from believers is mutual respect and understanding. This inclusive theology, according to him is not the process of Islamic adaptation to modernity, but it is inherent in Islam. After a brilliant career in the student movement and a Ph.D. under Prof. Fazlur Rahman in Chicago (1984), he set the tone for his later work in Indonesia with the title of a book in 1987 *Islam as a Modern and Indonesian Faith.* The two key words of his thinking are secularization and contextualization. The very controversial word secularization was used by him in the early 1970s (following Harvey Cox' The Secular City and the positive interpretation of this term by Friedrich Gogarten) to indicate the necessity to make the message of the Qur'an concrete and relevant under new conditions, in every society. Secularization, according to Madjid, means bringing up-to-date the ethical doctrines of Islam. Modern Muslims should study the Qur'an and formulate the basic values found therein. These should be the basis for the application of these values to a modern Islamic society. In the late 1980s the less controversial word of contextualization was used to indicate the permanent task of finding new formulations for the ethical call of Islam.

From a wide reading of Western and Christian books, Madjid made many openings towards Christian theologians, such as the following comment on S. 3:64:

> Sura 3:64 reads: Say People of the Book! Come now to a word common between us and you, that we serve none but God and that we associate not aught with Him. The Qur'an asks us, that is the followers of the scriptural religions, not the adherents of natural religions like animism or paganism, to abandon all practices of creating our own gods, in the sense that we have to free ourselves from objects that are binding and suffocating us spiritually. This is in line and identical with the meaning of the first line of our confession: I witness, that there is no god; this means: 'I declare myself free from the limitations of false beliefs, that bind and suffocate my spirit'. Then, in order to complete this process of liberation, this statement has to be continued with: except Allah (al-Ilah, i.e. the true God) who is understood according to the doctrine of the One and Only God, tawhid uluhiyya or strict monotheism. This is the true theology of liberation, if we ... are allowed to use a terminology that has become popular amongst Catholic religious activists in Latin America. There is no true liberation for a human individual before s/he really understands and truly practices these words in her or his life.[8]

Another leading figure (central character) of cooperation between Muslims and non-Muslims in Indonesia is Abdurraghman Wahid, a former president and elected

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[8]Nurcholis Madjid, "Beberapa Renungan tentang Kehidupan Keagamaan untuk Generasi Mendatang," *Ulumul Qur'an* 4/1, 1993, 4-25

general chairman of the Nahdlatul Ulama (the biggest Islamic Social Organization), in 1984. generally considered a traditionalist, he is nonetheless not a proponent of a kind of frozen taqlid. He entertained that Muslims and non-Muslims must struggle for the goal of Pancasila together. And like Nurcholish, he justifies this by pointing to the fitra of humankind.

In the 1990s he was elected as one of the presidents of the interfaith World Conference on Religion and Peace. During the aftermath of the Situbondo riots and the attacks on churches in 1996, he ordered his youth organization, Anshor, to work together with Christian youth organizations to secure the safety of religious buildings.

On the non-Muslim side, they also feel the urgent need to develop standard of ethical and moral behavior relevant to their developing society. They have to come to some insight into theological meaning of such interdependent with adherent of other faiths in the context of the nation. Department of Communion of Churches in Indonesia, for example, offering an annual seminar in which representative of the different religious communities are invited to share their insight on the challenges before them, it tries to contribute to the kinds of common efforts that are being envisaged and proposed by Muslim thinkers such as Nurcholish Madjid and Abdurrahman Wahid.

There is a development in mutual understanding between religions. In Indonesia, besides departments of comparative religion in several universities which concern about interfaith dialogue are increase for decades, NGOs which involved in interfaith dialogue are also remarkable.

The Indonesian government is not the only body active in the field of interfaith relations. There are several private organizations, commonly referred to as NGO's or non-governmental organizations, that deal with the same issue. The most striking difference between government initiatives and NGO policies is that the latter combine social activism with interfaith commitment. The Lembaga Kajian Islam dan Sosial (LKIS, Foundation for the Study of Islam and Society) started in the early 1990s in Yogyakarta as a debating club of young Nahdlatul Ùlama' students and scholars. They developed ideas about the civil society as a society in which the government should not be the sole player in the political game so that many different parties could fulfill their democratic role. They stimulated contacts with people who were not Muslims, and devoted several seminars to interfaith relations. In 1993 they started a publishing house that issued, among others, studies about Hasan Hanafi and translations of works by Ali Asghar Engineer and Abdullah an-Na'im. Especially the last mentioned author is very outspoken in his remarks about Muslim attitudes to women and to other religions.

On the initiative of Protestants, Institut DIAN/Interfidei (Dialog Antar Iman, Interfaith Dialogue) was founded at 20 December, 1991 in Yogyakarta, Indonesia by notarial document no.38, and then publicly announced institutionally at 10 August, 1992.

The Institute is not representing institutional religion, but is a community of various religious adherents. The working scope of the institution is not limited on the state-recognized religions (Islam, Christian, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism), but also on every religious expression in the Indonesia society, such as Confuciansim, tribal religions, and traditional beliefs. The institution is to serve as a forum, wherein religious

thinking and faith concepts which evolve from the dynamics of discourses on pluralism, as well as real life encounters, were shared and discussed.

DIAN is also active in the inter-denominational struggle for the defense of human rights. The largest national human rights organizations, the Lembaga Bantuan Hukum (Foundation for Legal Aid) and Forum Keadilan (Platform for Justice), are interdenominational, and prominent Christian and Muslim leaders are active in both of them. The cooperation for the sake of democracy and justice is here a higher priority than the theological dialogue.

Challenges and attempts to meet the challenges

Based on the experiences we have so far in our activities on the interfaith dialogue and the current condition we are facing nowadays, I can enlist several challenges and then how we attempt to meet these challenges.

1. the increasing strength and force and the spread of fundamentalism in every circle or arena in response to secularism and thus they refuse to conduct dialogue. Indeed along with the rise of global interfaith dialogue, fundamentalism represents one of the most significant developments in modern religion. Robert Wuthnow has called it "one of the defining elements of the religious mosaic" in our period.[9] Some have even claimed that fundamentalism was "the religious phenomenon of the twentieth century." This is part due to the traditional education system and religious scholarship which is "isolated" from or not in conversation with social-historic and cultural problems. And also the framework they use to define the "world" is always in the framework of orthodoxy and do not involve the "other". Even the "other" is considered as the "enemy". Those have created more room and open opportunity for the fundamentalist to develop. The rise of religious fundamentalism around the world, including among Muslims, has made interfaith dialogue both more difficult and more important than ever, says a high-ranking cardinal in the Catholic Church. Francis A. Arinze

2. there is a competition of power of "interest" within the power of the elite because they tend to ignore a larger problem that are embedded in religious identity and experience. Politization of religion seems to be occurred

3. the rise of 'monism', a principle that acknowledges one substantial or principle of reality. The current phenomenon appeared that this notion is coming to build "monism" and ignore "pluralism".

How to deal with:

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[9] Robert Wuthnow, Christianity in the Twenty-first Century (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993, 109

1.   The academic study of religion has come a long way toward an informed understanding of fundamentalism. Thus, fundamentalism is not outside the system of equally valid approaches to ultimate reality that we call world religions.

Interfaith dialogue will never fulfill its unique mission until it recognizes the fundamentalisms of the world as valued conversation partners. The way in which the academic study of fundamentalism has matured in recent decades can provide a model for constructive exchange between fundamentalists and members of other religious movements. The academic study of fundamentalism has moved from a paradigm of prejudice to an approach of structured empathy. Interfaith movements can engage fundamentalism in a more positive fashion if they recognize the affinities between the native antimodernism of fundamentalism and the emerging postmodernism of current ventures in global ecumenism.

The perception of many people, including the Catholic community, is shaped largely, and for some, exclusively, by images of overseas conflicts which involve fundamentalist Muslim groups. These stories and images of peoples involved in particular historical, political or economic struggles are then superimposed on our Indonesian Muslims who suffer by association of their faith.

Without ignoring their role, I will just inform you that they consist of about 2 percent of the whole Muslim society in Indonesia. In order to understand the reality of Islam in Indonesia, comprehensive way of understanding is needed, not limited to fundamentalist Muslim, per se. Borrowing Abdurrahman Wahid term, the word of Islam is like a forest. If we see from far distance we will see "one blue view", but if we see it closer, or even when we enter into it, we will see many different trees. Thus, conservative fundamentalist is just one of a thousand of the "tree of Islam" spread out in the forest of Islam

At the end of modernity, the future of interfaith dialogue is contingent upon its ability to find common ground with fundamentalists in all world traditions. It must seek the "moving hinge" between the old pluralism that was only exclusivism reconfigured and a genuinely new pluralism that embraces the major movements of the time. Such a proposal, of course, is bold. But if fundamentalism was the religious phenomenon of the twentieth century, the wider ecumenism can no longer afford to ignore it or abhor it. It may be the religious phenomenon of this century, too.

As stated before, the spread of religious fundamentalist was partly due to the traditional education system and religious scholarship that is "isolated" from or not in conversation with social-historic and cultural problems.

Indeed there is a historical tendency in Indonesia on decontextualization of Islam. It means that it seems that there is a collective conscience that Islam is a religion without context. Islam is Islam. (full stop). There is no elaborative description.

In this case, I need to mention that it is essential to understand Islam in the context of civilization. The glory of Islam did not lie on how far truth claim has been

defended, but it lies on how far Islamic civilization is meaningful and beneficial in a plurality context. Islam, as Nurcholish Majid argues, is a modern religion, a religion that has capability in adapting and accommodating a social change. The capability of Islam in transcending it territorial limits is an approval that Islam is adaptive and accommodative. Islamic modernity can be seen in the live of ulama' (intellectuals) who are not only 'alim (expert) on science of religions but also in social sciences. Al-Khawarizwi, al-Biruni, Ibn Khaldun, Ibn Sina, al-Farabi, Imam Ghazali, Ibn Rushd and others are ulama.' Nurcholis continuously mentions in order for Muslim community be able to implement the nature of Islamic civilization. Islamic civilization is as wide as the sky and as deep as the ocean. He often cited Ali ibn Abi thalib, "Wisdom is the treasure of believers, wherever you find it, it is your right to have it."

In this case also, re-contextualization of Islam is crucial. Indeed "Islamic" is Arabic or Middle Easternic, as most of Islamic tradition were born there. But it should be noted that Islam has spread up around the world, thus Islam has transcended its limits. For this reason we need to frame Islamic for Indonesianess. Thus, in interpreting Islam it is crucial to consider its Indonesianess. Every community has their own local wisdom and local genius, thus, we need to negotiate between tradition and modernity, between Islamic and Indonesianess.

2. Developing and upgrading intra faith dialogue, interfaith dialogue and organizing tolerance regime in our political system.

Pluralism is more than toleration. Pluralism necessitates of willing to build constructive understanding about "others". Thus, pluralism is a dialogue. The Qur'an commands dialogue (shura) for problem solving. God has given us the way to pluralism. Thus, every problem should be solved by dialogue.

3. Reconstructing "diversity"

In this situation it is important to reconstruct "diversity" in the current social change. Diversity is a fact and cannot be avoided but more important is how diversity can built the attitude of togetherness. Diversity can result a commitment to build Indonesian justice and harmony. Diana Eck (2002), the director of Pluralism Project, Harvard University highlights the meaning of pluralism. That is, pluralism is an *active engagement* into diversities and differences. Diversity necessitates *participative attitude*, thus pluralism actually is about fact and reality, and not about theological differences. It means that in the level of theology, we have to admit that every religion has its own ritual, that is differ from one religion to others. But in the social level, we need active engagement between community to build togetherness/cooperation. Only by cooperation the nation will grow better and capable of birthing luminous works. Thus, in social level, pluralism is more than "admitting" differences but "combine" differences for the purpose of togetherness

In Conclusion, at least there is four elements we need to do:

1. need for critical action in response to the strong fundamentalism and radicalism movement. Fundamentalism and radicalism by using violence in the name of religion need a serious concern.
2. need for new interpretation on pluralism in Indonesian context. This is to avoid fatal misunderstanding or as explored by Edward W Said, *misinterpretation* and *misrepresentation*. The rise of arbitrarily interpretation on pluralism will result a serious impact especially for the diversity itself.
3. learning from the experience of other in interpreting pluralism. Avoiding pluralism is avoiding important values such as development, justice, and peace
4. need common commitment on indonesianess, that is commitment to live in differences and diversity.

A big nation is a nation that can reconstruct pluralism to build togetherness and unity in diversity. As Diana Eck said, pluralism is a process of continuous creativity, because pluralism is an effort to solve the problem of diversity, and not an effort to divide, let alone making social unrest. Thus,

-We need a comprehensive methodology on the paradigm of contemporary Islam, especially in response to the weakness of methodology of Islamic law or jurisprudence. Theologically, it is easy to find moderate perspective, but not in jurisprudence. In this case, hermeneutic is crucial. Khalid Abou Fadl, has begun the reconstruction of the methodology of Islamic jurisprudence. He deconstructs the perspective of "in God's name," which is almost followed by the school of Islamic jurisprudence. Nashr Hamid Abu Zayd tried to relate hermeneutic with the concept of takwil in the Qur'an.

-need to understand Islam as a concept of "liberation." Liberation paradigm is needed as opined by Farid Esack, that necessitates fighting injustice, oppression and discrimination. Thus, the hermeneutic offered has to encourage the existence of praxis movement till the gross roots.

-need *interfaith movement*. Inclusivism is important but more important is realization of differences and the need of cooperation in the level of praxis to encounter the real problem in the community.

The book *al-Islamiyyun al-Taqaddumiyyun* written by a human right activist, Shalahuddin al-Jursyi from Tunisia can be an important resource to make the Islamic discourse more mature and progressive. Shalahuddin al-Jursyi writes, that Progressive Islam has an option for the poor *(al-mustadh'afun)* , via de-bureaucracy of government, absolute freedom and empowering civil society. Al-Jursyi gives a concrete direction on the area that should be done by an activist progressive Islam.

Progressive Islam agenda is to give a public a discourse that religion is not a blanc check, selling symbol like an echo of formalization of shariah in the current political context. Religion should present a moral and ethical consciousness,

awareness, giving direction to liberation and public defense. Thus, being religious is not just by defending God but more important is defending public benefit.

What might my own dialogue experience in Indonesia contribute to developing Islamic 'theology of dialogue'?

From the elaboration above, we can see that in the contemporary world, there seems not many have been done by Islamic thought. Islamic discourse seems severed from the problem of humanity. Religious thought is isolated in one place, while human reality is in another place. Thus the ideology brought by religious thought is not able to bridge the distance between thought and reality.

We need to see a belief through the 'spectacles' of its era and tradition. Belief, which is so far taken for granted as a ritual, has to illuminate the problem of humanity. Sacralizing belief without touching the disadvantage/poor (mustadh'afin) /without option for the poor, is a proof of ignorant believer.

The book *Min al-`Aqidah ila al-Tsawrah: Mauqifuna min al-Turats al-Qadim* (from belief to revolution, our attitude to the old tradition) by Prof. Dr. Hassan Hanafi, a professor in Cairo University, can be an inspiration for this need.

Anthropocentrism theology conceptualized by Hasan Hanafi recover the dimension disappeared in the religious doctrine. It focused on the problem of humanity.

In analyzing the rise of formalistic, radicalistic, and fundamentalistic Islam, we do not need to borrow the perspective or thought coming form "outside", but we can use our own Islamic tradition.

The Qur'an and its commentaries are rich with other, pluralistic possibilities. This is also the case, however, because the politics of the Muslim reformation depends not only on the recovery of hallowed textual truths but on a reading of the realities of the larger modern world. To quote the great Syrian Muslim democrat Mohammad Shahrour, Muslims "have been used to reading this book [the Qur'an] with borrowed eyes for hundreds of years."[53] More are reading it today with their own eyes. Like all thoughtful readers, however, they draw on what they see around them to enrich their understanding of the text. In so doing, they notice meanings previously overlooked. For many Muslims, the charge of this new reading is to recover and amplify Islam's democratic endowments so as to provide the ethical resources for Muslims in a plural, mobile, and participatory world.

The basic assumption is that, there is a serious problem in the epistemology of belief in Islam since old time till now. The epistemology developed by many of us accentuates theocentric dimension, that is dimension which defend God with all efforts, but oppress the marginalized/poor. Theocentric approach is beneficial for someone in authority. Many authorities who are under theocentrism (in God's name) legalize authoritarianism in God's name.

This anthropocentric theology can recover the disappeared dimension in religious doctrine that God is both the God of the heavens (*Ilah al-samawat*) and of the earth (*Ilah al-ard*).

This Islamic anthropocentric theology will give more attention to the problem of humanity, such as liberation from oppression, option for the poor, and empowering critical community. A Belief conceptualized in God, Angel, Book, Prophet, the hereafter, and fate has to be a belief that concerns for option for the poor, democracy, gender equality, pluralism and non-violence.

Thus a theology that we can propose here is an Islamic contextual anthropocentric theology,[10] that accommodate to the era and context.

Chicago, May 6, 2006
Syafa'atun Almirzanah
1100E 55th Street,
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[10] Islamic University Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, has developed a scientific approach called "interconnected-integrated entities", not an isolated entity approach, which open more opportunity for fundamentalist movement to develop.

The Bernardin Center for Theology and Ministry

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FOR ALL HUMANITY*

A dialogue between Catholics & Muslims sponsored by the Bernardin Center at Catholic Theological Union and the International Strategy and Policy Institute (ISPI).

"For All Humanity*": Catholic-Muslim Dialogue in a Global Perspective

* "...to promote together, for all humanity, social justice and moral welfare, as well as peace and freedom"(Nostra Aetate 3)

**May 4, 5 & 6, 2006 (Thursday - Saturday)
Catholic Theological Union, Chicago**

A conference bringing together leaders of Catholic-Muslim dialogue from Indonesia, Israel-Palestine, Nigeria, and the United Kingdom.

Sponsored by the Bernardin Center at Catholic Theological Union, Chicago and the International Strategy and Policy Institute (ISPI)

For more information:
Phone: 773.684.1056
Email: BernardinCenter@ctu.edu

The Bernardin Center for Theology and Ministry

About Our Presenters

Our Story Tellers

Arif Choudhury
Arif Chourdhury is a Bangladeshi-American Muslim storyteller, filmmaker and stand-up comic. He tells humorous stories about growing up as the only Bangladeshi-Muslim immigrant family in north-suburban Chicago.

Susan O'Halloran
Author of several books and producer of videotaped keynotes and performances including "Tribes & Bridges" at the Steppenwolf Theatre, O'Halloran's stories shine a light on difficult social issues and make them less confusing and overwhelming.

Presenters from Indonesia

Syafa`atun Almirzanah
Syafa`atun Almirzanah is a Muslim scholar from Indonesia specializing in interreligious and conflict resolution work, as well as comparative mysticism. She is currently completing her Ph.D. (Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago) and D.Min. (Catholic Theological Union).

Thomas Michel, S.J.
A Jesuit Catholic priest, and member of the Indonesian Province, Fr. Tom Michel is the director of the Jesuit Secretariat for Interreligious Dialogue in Rome and is also the ecumenical secretary for the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences.

Presenters from Israel-Palestine

Zafer Mohammad
Zafer Mohammad worked for the Palestinian Ministry of Religious Affairs and the Palestinian Youth Council in Ramallah. With an MA in peace studies (Notre Dame), Zafer is completing his MA in Bible (CTU) and will enter Georgetown's Ph.D. program in religious pluralism in the Fall.

Geries S. Khoury
Geries Khoury is a Christian scholar and author in Palestine. He is currently the dean of the Theological Department at Mar Elias Educational Institutions/Ibilin and is director of Al-Liqa, a major center for interreligious dialogue and Christian-Muslim relations in Israel-Palestine.

Presenters from Nigeria

Matthew Kukah
Matthew Kukah is a priest of the Catholic Archdiocese of Kaduna, Nigeria. Presently a Senior Rhodes Scholar at St. Antony's College at Oxford, he has published extensively on the issues of religion, democracy and human rights in Nigeria.

Ishaq Oloyede
Ishaq Oloyede, a professor of Arabic and Islamic Studies and deputy vice-chancellor for academic affairs at the University of Ilorin in Nigeria, is a leading Muslim figure in Nigerian conflict resolution and Christian-Muslim dialogue.

Presenters from the United Kingdom

Ian Linden
Ian Linden is an associate professor at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London specializing in religion and conflict in Africa. He has been engaged in interreligious dialogue for over ten years and is a recent appointee to the Muslim-Christian Forum of Great Britain.

Abduljalil Sajid
Abduljalil Sajid, a British Muslim of Pakistani origin, is chair of the Muslim Council for Religious and Racial Harmony in the U.K. A Muslim scholar and educator, Imam Sajid specializes in articulating an authentic interpretation of Islam for the 21st /15th century.
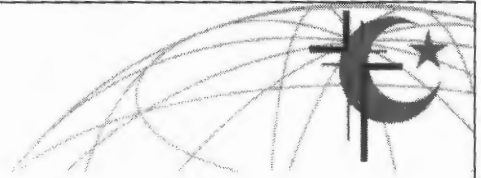
The Bernardin Center for Theology and Ministry

Conference Schedule

The aim of this conference is to bring together Catholic and Muslim dialogue leaders from Indonesia, Israel-Palestine, Nigeria, and the United Kingdom for the purposes of becoming more familiar with the global dimensions of Catholic-Muslim dialogue, thus strengthening and encouraging an important effort in global peacebuilding. The participants will each be addressing the following questions: What is the state of the dialogue in your region? What are the greatest challenges you have faced in the dialogue and how have you addressed them? What might learnings from the dialogue in your region contribute to a developing 'theology of dialogue' in your religious tradition.

Thursday, May 4, 2006
5:00 p.m. Registration and check-in
5: 47 p.m. `Asr (afternoon) Muslim prayer
6:00 p.m. Welcome and opening remarks
6:30 p.m. Interfaith Story Telling
7:54 p.m. Maghrib (sunset) Muslim prayer

Friday, May 5, 2006
8:00 a.m. Christian morning prayer
8:30 a.m. Continental breakfast
9:00 a.m. Muslim-Christian Relations in Israel-Palestine
12 noon Lunch (on your own)
1:05 p.m. Jum`a (Friday congregational) sermon and Muslim prayer
2:00 p.m. Muslim-Christian Relations in the United Kingdom
5:00 p.m. Refreshments and conversation
5:47 p.m. `Asr (afternoon) Muslim prayer

Saturday, May 6, 2006
8:00 a.m. Christian morning prayer
8:30 a.m. Continental breakfast
9:00 a.m. Muslim-Christian Relations in Indonesia
12 noon Lunch (on your own)
12:52 p.m. Zuhr (midday) Muslim prayer
2:00 p.m. Muslim-Christian Relations in Nigeria
5:00 p.m. Closing Remarks
5:48 p.m. `Asr (afternoon) Muslim prayer