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SALVATION FOR ALL THE PEOPLE
(A Study on Isaiah 56: 1-8 from the perspective of
Christian-Muslim dialogue)

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Paper presented at
The International Conference "Nostra Aetate Today: Reflection 40 Years
after Its Call for a New Era of Interreligious Relationship," The Pontifical
Gregorian University, Rome, Italy, 25-28 September 2005

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THE PONTIFICAL GREGORIAN UNIVERSITY
ROME, ITALY
2005

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I. Introduction

A. Theoretical Construction: Academic Approach to interfaith dialogue

Plurality of religions, beliefs, patterns of worship, ethics, organization, etc. is an existential reality. It is a fact of our contemporary world, both on the global scale and often on the level of specific societies. One might say that, "to be religious is to be interreligious." A historian of religion, Max Muller said that, "Who knows one religion knows none."

Religions are life expressions of the experience of revelation in a given historical context. They are, therefore, limited by factors of history, culture, language, etc. Dialogue becomes necessary in order to transcend this limitation. No expression is extremely complete and thorough. Thus, "one way to advance in the experience of the fullness is to become more and more enriched by the contributions of complementary expressions."¹ With the encounter of a new religion, a concealed jewel of truth is now awakened, and a new potential comes to blossom. For example, Thomas Merton had a new interpretation of Christian religious experience after his encounter with Buddhism.²

Again, dialogue can enrich one's religious experience. Nevertheless, it does not mean that one should leave his religious heritage behind and release it; he should put it in an encounter with the reality of other religious heritage, which may positively give contribution to it.

Usually, interreligious dialogue ignores the theological problem which is considered to be a "conflicting area," whereas in these areas, interreligious dialogue will enrich religious experiences and will develop a spiritual pilgrimage. Dialogue is not a neutral dialectic, but it should cause changes for in participants without falling into reductionism and/or exclusivism. The belief and the faith of the participant should be involved not excluded or put it in the brackets as what phenomenology demands in its "epoche" concept.

Dialogue is learning of truths attain by others and come back with those truths to enrich our own spirituality. It called, in John S. Dunn's term, "passing over" from one religion and way of life to other religion which may differ from our own religion. Then, we "come back," enriched by new knowledge and perspectives, not only adapted other religious perspectives, but also develop our own religious perspective.³ Learning from other religion not to be like others but to "come back" to understand deeper our own faith in a new way.

¹V.F. Vineeth, CM, "Interreligious Dialogue: Past and Present. A Critical Appraisal", in *Journal of Dharma*, no 1, vol xix, jan-march, 1994, 37

²Vineeth, "Interreligious Dialogue", 37., cf. *The Asian Journal of Thomas Merton*, (New York:New Direction Book, 1973, cf. also Thomas Merton, *Mystics and Zen Masters*, New York, 1967; Knitter in his dialogical odyssey has the same experiences, when he encountered with Buddhism. See, Paul Knitter, *One Earth Many Religions, Multifaith Dialogue and Global Responsibility*, New York: Maryknoll Orbis Books, 1995

³John S. Dunne, *The Way of All The Earth, An Encounter with Eastern Religions*, London: Sheldon Press, 1972, p.xiv

Indeed there are differences between religions and even there should be differences, due to the differences of the cultures which influenced it, but these differences are not annihilating the existential similarities' qualities.

Theological and spiritual dialogue will be valuable only if accompanied by the courage of the participant to question and criticize himself when encountered with the core of other religious experiences. An encounter with other religion does not mean that he sinks himself inside forever, until forgetting to go out and back to his own religion. Nevertheless, as already mentioned, this "passing over" from one culture to other cultures, from one way of life to other ways of life should be followed by the process called "coming back" with a new horizon to our own culture, way of life and our own religion. This is what we called "spiritual pilgrimage." Thus, "passing over" here means the courage to go to spiritual pilgrimage to other religion and "come back" means comes back from the pilgrimage to our own religion with the new perspective enrich for our own religion. "A creative dialogue is also possible only if there are complete openness, and no preliminary assumption that one revelation . . . must be the yardstick for all others."⁴

Spiritual experience indeed is a place where religions can meet. Spiritual experiences are not some thing incommunicable, the heart-hidden experiences, but the experience, which can be discussed and fully understood, although not completely expressible.⁵

Pluralism can be in any faith, from the very simple until the very basic, and in every level. These differences indeed cause more or less shake the social stability. In order that pluralism, as the problem should be overcome not by refusing it but holding conversation or discussion that commonly called dialogue. "Pluralism is a reality that should be faced and dialogue is an attitude for perceiving it."⁶

According to Hans Kung, a Christian theologian who was considered as the most liberal, if the world people would like to solve the crises that threaten them, they have to be in agreement (theoretically and practically) with 'a global ethic'. This agreement cannot be attained unless the world religions work together for doing it, as he said 'there can be no peace, unity, dialogues among the nations unless there is peace, unity, dialogue among religions'.

⁴John Macquarrie, "Christianity and Other Faiths," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 20, 1964, 43-44

⁵See Aykara, Thomas A, (ed.), *Meeting of Religions*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publication, 1978, see also, Mary Lou van Buren, "Spirituality in the Dialogue of Religions" dalam Hinson E. Glenn (ed.), *Spirituality in Ecumenical Perspective*, p. 51. In Islam, according to Seyyed Hossein Nasr, it was mysticism which is naturally has qualification to deal with the hidden unity beyond religious form, see Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Sufi Essays*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1973, p. 123

⁶See, N. Ekennia, 'Pluralism and the Committed Dialogue' in *International Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. xxxvi, no. 1, March, 1996, p. 85-95

B. *The Focus of the study*

By the study on Isaiah, this paper is an interfaith dialogue on the problem of salvation both in Christianity and Islam. Every religion has salvation as its objective. "Salvation is a key notion in every religious consideration."⁷ One of the theological points of Isaiah is salvation, and it is also the Christian message. It is said that 'Salvation is a gift of grace that humans do not deserve and cannot earn.'⁸

C. *General introduction to Isaiah*

Isaiah, the author, preached in Judah during the 8th century B.C.E. He lived in Jerusalem with his wife and two children (7: 3; 8: 3). He is often called 'the son of Amoz'.

Isaiah was well educated and aware of the international political scene. Even Motyer said that "Isaiah was deeply involved with a political leader of his day, though he had scant success in winning them to his view of the proper policy for the people of the Lord in this world."⁹

In his era the northern kingdom of Israel became completely plunged into idolatry and carnality and falls to Assyria in 722 BC. The threat of the invasion from Assyria is real to Judah as well. Isaiah reproves the nation's leadership for looking to political alliances with Egypt and others for security instead of trusting in God

Isaiah accuses the people of Jerusalem with sin and impiety as the cause of their troubles. Social injustice was widespread in the land, with rich landowners exploiting the poor (Isaiah 5: 8). Spiritual life was at a condition of decline, with both priests and prophets extremely praising the wealthy in hope of gain (Isaiah 56: 10-12; cf. Micah 3:11). Jerusalem itself was a boiling pot of political factions, intrigue, and corruption.

Isaiah, the prophet, pleaded for repentance and genuine reformation of life (Isaiah 1: 16-17). He predicts of the captivity in Babylon but prophecies of liberation, rescue and a coming glory. "He looks beyond all the events of his own troubled time to coming, suffering, and reign of the Messiah."¹⁰

The book of Isaiah is "not only an essential part of the Bible but also belong to its essence - it points to the heart of the biblical message."¹¹ It can be seen from its contents. If it is said that the whole Old Testament is a place where God basically rebukes and reproves the people sharply and tells what will happen if they do not behave, Isaiah played that role well. If many passages of the Hebrew Bible narrate how the prophets of ancient Israel called out to the people to turn back to God, Isaiah certainly does this too, even does it well.

⁷Maurice Eminyan, *The Mystery of Salvation, A Theological Study of Its Biblical, Historical, Social and Existential Aspects*, The Malta University Press, 1973, 1

⁸David L. McKenna, *The Communicator's Commentary, Isaiah 40-66*, Dallas: Word Books, 1994, 563

⁹J. A. Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, Inter-Varsity Press, 1993, 463

¹⁰"Walking Thru the Bible, Isaiah," [Http://fly.hiwaay.net/~wgann/walk_ot/isaiah.htm](http://fly.hiwaay.net/~wgann/walk_ot/isaiah.htm), 3

¹¹John J. Schmitt, *Isaiah and His Interpreters*, New York: Paulist Press, 1986, 2

The Old Testament is also the record of God activity with humankind to arrange a society, which is some thing intervening or intermediate in association with God. This connection of God with the human community and enterprise is called the covenant. Just as does the Bible, "Isaiah exhibits a preoccupation with the relationship between Israel and its God, a relationship often described as a covenant."¹² Roberts said at any rate, Isaiah does seem to have been influenced to some extent by covenant theology.¹³

This fabulous book contains 66 chapters. It is the longest book if we count the chapters. It is also being the prophetic book, which most frequently repeated in the New Testament and quoted in the Jewish Mishnah. There is no agreement and no clear evidence about the unity of Isaiah. It is also not clear whether the prophet himself was the one to write down his words or whether someone else close to him began the collection of his saying and passed on to later generation. Different scholars have different outlooks to the book. Some scholars argue that one man wrote all 66 chapters of Isaiah, but other said that more than one man wrote those. Some said that Isaiah may have written chapter 1-39 and someone else added chapter 40-66 later. Knight argues that chapters 1-39 basically attributes to the First Isaiah, but on the other hand, chapters 40-55 derives undisputedly from the hand of only one author, which called Deutero- or Second Isaiah, since we do not know his name. It accept and adopt the theological idea of his predecessor then expounds and develops it to conform to the very different world that Israel by then had to confront impudently when in exile in Babylon. Deutero was certainly a disciple of the first Isaiah although they were generation apart. His unified document is an editing of the sermons he uttered in Babylon in the years 541 - 540.¹⁴

Schmitt concluded that first Isaiah delivered his sermon in Jerusalem in the eight-century B.C.E, while second Isaiah preached in the exile of the sixth century B.C.E., and third Isaiah is material, which comes from the time of the return to Jerusalem after the exile and reflects the struggles of the period of restoration in the fifth century B.C.E.¹⁵

David L. McKenna on chapters 56-66, said, that since there was a mark of sudden changes in literary style in chapter 56-59, they create third Isaiah, or 'Trito Isaiah' as the author.¹⁶ Lynellen Perry on "Analysis of Isaiah 40-66" argues, "all 66 chapters were written by one man, before the Exile."¹⁷ Yet A.S. Herbert, a scholar who accepts the theory of more than one Isaiah, becomes completely surprise at similarity of literary style

¹²John J. Schmitt, *Isaiah*, 4

¹³J.J.M. Roberts, "Isaiah in Old Testament Theology," *Interpretation* 36, 1982, 135

¹⁴George A. F. Knight, *The New Israel, Isaiah 56-66*, Grand Rapid: Eerdmans Publication C.O, 1985, xi

¹⁵John J. Schmitt, *Isaiah*, 14

¹⁶McKenna, *The Communicator's*, 563

¹⁷Lynellen Perry, "Analysis of Isaiah 40-66," [Http://www.lynellen.com/writ/isa40-66.html](http://www.lynellen.com/writ/isa40-66.html), 1

between chapter 56-59 and the earlier chapter written by the first Isaiah. He conceded, "there is much in this section which recalls the language of the eight century prophets."¹⁸

The reasons that Isaiah was written before Exiles according to Lynellen Perry are the facts that,

first, the sacrificial system still seems to be in operation, which it would not have been during the Exile and for a number of years after the return

the second indication is that the writer shows concern for the disadvantaged just like the historical Isaiah. The third evidence is that idolatry is a problem.¹⁹

Furthermore, she maintains that even though the unity of Isaiah has been challenged on the basis of language, style and theology of the two sections, yet its unity is supported by the book of Ecclesiasticus, the Septuagint, the Talmud, and the New Testament.²⁰ Walter Brueggemann even said that there is a basis of unity for the book of Isaiah in its various collections, i.e., "the continuity and the connectedness of this divine power."²¹

John Oswalt, by using the eclectic method, while positive toward Duhm's analysis of the three portions of the book of Isaiah, he rejects their rigid separation and citing Child's work (1979) that the historical settings of Second and Third Isaiah are suppressed by the theological unity of the book. He also cites Brueggemann's appraisal that Second Isaiah is seen organically derived from First Isaiah, and Rendtorff's judgment that Third Isaiah has no independent existence.²²

Another argument said that the book as a whole should be regarded as the work of 'Isaiah's disciples', so that the unnamed prophets who start behind chapters 40-66 should be claimed as, in some sense, the disciples the earlier Isaiah of Jerusalem.²³ Nevertheless, there is no fact or data to give approval to us that such a circle really existed, and to assume their existence for such a long period of time after the original prophet's death makes the concept of a 'disciple' almost entirely meaningless.²⁴

There are also many indications to show that the contents of the book have moved to a number of stages of organizing and redaction and that what we have now is a result of a process of editing and addition. Nevertheless, as the prophetic word of God is

¹⁸A.S. Herbert, *The Book of the Prophet Isaiah, Chapter 40-66*, The Cambridge Bible Commentary, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975, 136, also cited by McKenna, *The Communicator's*, 564

¹⁹Lynellen Perry, "Analysis", 1

²⁰Lynellen Perry, "Analysis", 2

²¹Walter Brueggemann, 'Unity and Dynamic in the Isaiah Tradition,' *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, 29, 1984, 90

²²Millard. C Lind, Review on *The Book of Isaiah: Chapter 40-66*, by John N. Oswalt, NICOT, Grand Rapids/Cambridge, U.K: Eeddmans, 1998, in <http://www.bookreviews.org/Reviews/0802825346.html>, 1

²³R.E. Clements, 'The Unity of the Book of Isaiah,' *Interpretation*, 119

²⁴R. E. Clements, 'The Unity', 119

basically a divine message with respect to his actions and intentions toward his people, and it should be not surprise for us to find that it has been the continuity and connectedness of this divine purpose which provides the appropriate foundation of unity in the four major prophetic collections.²⁵

Torrey, who was active in Palestine near the end of fifth century, writes that “the twenty-seven poems are the work of a single hand, there is clearly no other possibility,”²⁶ whereas Arthur Weiser concludes that, “in Isaiah 55-66 we are not concern with the work of a single prophet ‘Trito-Isaiah’ but with a collection of appendices to the book of Isaiah by different hands and from different times.”²⁷

The structures which characterize chapters 56–66 as differs from 40-55 is as follows. An analysis of the last eleven chapters of the Book show that they consist of many separate or very loosely connected speeches, having for the most part some general points of likeness each other, but differing from chapter 40-55 in style, ideal, and historical outlooks.²⁸ The other sections of 56-66 are become different from the work of second Isaiah by total deviant in style, ideas, and feeling, “while the resemblances or reminiscences which can be traced are only such as would be accounted for by supposing that the author of these sections had known and admired the utterances of his great predecessor.”²⁹

More than any other factor, what distinguishes chapter 56-66 from 40-55 is the number of passages in which the prophet is dealing a concrete community directly.

Where chapter 40-55 seems to be a written appeal to an Israel that is scattered across the earth – north, south, east and west, yet chapter 56-66 the prophet seems to be standing in the midst of Judean community, proclaiming his message of hope and striking out at the religious hypocrisies and vicious pagan perversions that obstruct the fulfillment of God’s purpose.³⁰

The setting of 56-66 was absolutely Palestine, which reflected a community steadfastly established in Judah. There fore, since chapters 40-55 was assumed to be by a Babylonian prophet, chapters 56-66 had either to be conveyed from a different prophet or explained as the product of the period after the return of the prophet and his exiles to

²⁵R.E. Clements, ‘The Unity’, 129

²⁶CC. Torrey, *The Second Isaiah*, New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1928, 203, cited by Paul D. Hanson, *The Dawn of Apocalyptic, The Historical and Sociological Roots of Jewish Apocalyptic Eschatology*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979, 32

²⁷A. Weiser, *The Old Testament: Its Formation and Development*, tr. D. M. Barton, New York: Association, 1961, 207, cited by Hanson, *The Dawn*, 32

²⁸W. A. L. Elmslie and John Skinner, *Isaiah XL– LXVI*, Cambridge: at the University Press, 1946, xxi

²⁹Elmslie and Skinner, *Isaiah*, xxii

³⁰James D. Smart, *History and Theology in Second Isaiah, A Commentary on Isaiah 35, 40-66*, Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1965, 36

Palestine.³¹ Parts of Isaiah are highly influenced by the wisdom literature and have a common style, as Isaiah also embrace a number of passages that have wisdom characteristic, yet the book cannot be called wisdom literature.³²

Isaiah is also of the greatest poets of the Bible, as many scholars argue. "His images and comparison are visual and striking. His style is compact and forceful, and his prophecies form artistic wholes."³³

The main theme of the book is repentance and conversion that God is sending either judgments or comforts, depending on how people respond to Him. During the whole time of Isaiah's life and through the multi various qualifications of his views and enriched insight regarding God's activity, Isaiah continued his work with one purpose in mind, to preach conversion and repentance. From the beginning, however, three theological streams run through the prophet's writing, i.e., the person of God, the promise of salvation and the proof of redemption in personal righteousness and social justice.³⁴ The opening of chapter 56 confirms all three of these theological themes, "thus says the Lord: 'Keep justice, and do righteousness, for my salvation is about to come, and my righteousness to be revealed.'" (Isaiah 56: 1)

II. **Isaiah 56: 1-8 (A House of Prayer for All Nations)**

A. *The verses:*

Thus, says the Lord: "Keep justice, and do righteousness, for soon my salvation will come, and my deliverance be revealed. Blessed is the man who does this, and the son of man who holds it fast, who keeps the Sabbath, not profaning it, and keeps his hand from doing any evil." Let not the foreigner who has joined himself to the Lord say, "The Lord will surely separate me from his people"; and let not the eunuch say, "Behold, I am a dry tree." For thus says the Lord: "To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose the things that please me and hold fast my covenant, I will give in my house and within my walls a monument and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name which shall not be cut off. "And the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord, to minister to him, to love the name of the Lord, and to be his servants, everyone who keeps the Sabbath, and does not profane it, and holds fast my covenant - these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples. Thus says the Lord God, who gathers the outcasts of Israel, I will gather yet others to him besides those already gathered."

B. *Settings*

God would not speak into a vacuum nor would God convey a message formed in a vacuum. According to Shah Wali Allah Dehlawi (d. 1762) the ideal form of *din*, which he interprets to mean primordial ideal religion, corresponds to the ideal form of nature. 'Actual manifestations of the ideal form descend in successive revelations depending on

³¹James D. Smart, *History*, 17

³²John J. Schmitt, *Isaiah and His Interpreters*, 3-4

³³Schmitt, *Isaiah*, 14

³⁴McKenna, *The Communicator's*, 564

the particular material and historical circumstances' of recipient community. Every succeeding revelation reshapes the elements 'previously found into a new gestalt which embodies *din*, in an altered form suitable to the recipient community'.³⁵ It thus follows that, according to Dehlawi, with every succeeding context, *din* has adapted 'its form, beliefs, spiritual practices to the customs, previous faiths and temperaments of the nations to which it has been revealed'.³⁶

If this is true to any religion, it is most certainly true of Judaism and Christianity. The word of God, spoken through the prophets of Israel, was intended for very specific times and situations. "It was spoken into the communities of an ancient people who inhabited the Palestinian land bridge between Asia and Egypt during the first millennium B.C. Through the Prophets, God dealt with the realities of Israel's day-to-day living"³⁷

The community of audiences of Isaiah is the small community. They were an oppressed and outcast group, which had no power or status in the larger community. It may include foreigners and eunuchs among its number, but certainly saw itself as the real Israel, which was "righteous, chosen, the true servants of Yahweh, his holy people."³⁸

C. *The Author and the dating of Isaiah 56-66:*

The scholars do not know for sure who wrote Isaiah 56-66. Yet, they are now stands in the bible. The dating of Isaiah 56, the verses that I discuss here, varies. Clinton E. Hammock summarized these varieties of the dating in his article, by mentioning his previous author. For example Whybray dates Third Isaiah, including 56: 1-8 too soon after the return, around 520 B.C.E.; Westermann sees Isaiah 58: 1-8 (along with 66: 18-24) as a later addition to Third Isaiah. Whybray rejects Westermann's theory that layers of text were added symmetrically before and after a central core (chapter 60-62) as too schematic. If Westermann is correct, said Clinton, however, Isaiah 56: 1-8 and 66: 18-24 could be dated to a later time period than the core material.³⁹ Another scholar, Hanson, giving Isaiah 56: 1-8 an eschatological reading, dates it to the mid-fifth century and contemporary with Zechariah⁴⁰

D. *Content and structure of chapter 56-66*

Chapter 56- 66 of the book of Isaiah, which part of it I will discuss here, is more problematic than the preceding chapter. The relationship of these chapters with its preceding parts is still a topic demanding additional examination and discussion. Paul

³⁵Cited by Essack, *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism*, 55

³⁶Shah Wali Allah Dehlawi, *Hujjat Allah al-Balighah*, Cairo: Dar al-Kutub, 1952, 187, cited by Essack, *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism* 55

³⁷Elizabeth Achtemeier, *The Community and Message of Isaiah 56-66*, Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1982, 9

³⁸Elizabeth Achtemeier, *The Community and Message of Isaiah 56-66*, Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1982, 17

³⁹Clinton E. Hammock, Isaiah 56: 1-8 and the Redefining of the Restoration Judean Community, *Biblical Theology Bulletin*, Vol. 30, no. 2, 2000, 46-57

⁴⁰See, Paul D. Hanson, *The Dawn*, 1975, 32-46

Hanson and Elizabeth Achtemeier have a very thorough analysis of this third Isaiah, but they did not deal with the relation of the third Isaiah with the second Isaiah. Brueggemann suggests that the third Isaiah (chapter 56-66) has a very different linkage to 40-55. "It is second Isaiah which makes Third Isaiah possible. If second Isaiah is about the public embrace of pain as the way to return to the old stories, then Third Isaiah may reflect the result of this."⁴¹ Furthermore he concludes that all parts of the Isaiah tradition are "dynamically related to each other."⁴²

Recent study of chapter 56-66 had a tendency to stimulate the awareness that these chapters are closely related to chapter 40-55, even though it is hardly possible that they derive from the same prophetic author. Rather they are correctly classified to the period of the late sixth and early fifth centuries B.C. when the restoration of religious and political life was taking place in Judah under Persian imperial supervision.⁴³

A.S. Herbert, a scholar who accepts the theory of more than one Isaiah, nevertheless, becomes filled with surprise at a similarity of literary style between chapters 56-69 and the earlier chapters written by first Isaiah when he concedes, "There is much in this section which recalls the language of the eighth-century prophets."⁴⁴

There is also a literary-critical analysis that showed that the content of the earlier chapters (40-55) should be ascribed almost completely to the era of the Babylonian exile in the sixth century B.C. and the content of chapters 56-66 must be later still.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, there is "a general agreement that chapter 56-66 were composed in Palestine."⁴⁶

E. *Theological Themes or Issues*

The central concept (if there is any) to the book of Isaiah is the vision of Yahweh as the Holy One of Israel. "The focal point of the call of Isaiah is the holiness of God."⁴⁷ It is also the third Isaiah. Although they make less use of the term *holy*, yet it presents a basically similar portrayal of divine reality. The chapter 56: 1-8 depicts the meeting people in which all are at one, all are equal, and all are welcome in the house of God. All these can be attained only by keeping justice, doing righteousness, observing Sabbath, and avoiding evil. Thus, the ethical or moral dimension which reflected in the first Isaiah, in the third Isaiah it has returned to the place of prominence. "Isaiah of Jerusalem was a constant critic of his people's sins."⁴⁸ Nevertheless, "Isaiah is not inviting people to

⁴¹Brueggemann, 'The Unity', 99

⁴²Brueggemann, 'The Unity', 102. Cf. James D. Smart, *History and Theology in Second Isaiah: A Commentary on Isaiah 35, 40-66*, Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1965

⁴³R. E. Clements, 'The Unity', 123

⁴⁴McKenna, *The Communicator's*, 564

⁴⁵R. E. Clements, 'The Unity of the Book of Isaiah', *Interpretation*, 118

⁴⁶Elmslie and John Skinner, *Isaiah XL-LXVI*, xix

⁴⁷J. A. Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, Inter-Varsity Press, 1993, 17, see also, J.J.M. Roberts, "Isaiah in Old Testament Theology," *Interpretation*, 131

⁴⁸Roberts, "Isaiah", 134

seek salvation by their own works of righteousness but urging those who belong to the Lord to devote themselves to the life that reflect what he has revealed to be right.”⁴⁹

1. *Foreigners and eunuchs:*

The verses I discuss here are about the proclamation of salvation for foreigners and eunuchs. “Foreigners” are people who are stranger to us. Usually we are distrustful of them unless they are ready to become like us. Eunuchs are people who are outcasts among us. In the Jewish community, they were disgrace because they were sterile and could not bear children. According to Deuteronomy 23: 1, “He who is emasculated by crushing or mutilation shall not enter congregation of the Lord.” It can be inferred that such a person (eunuch) was excluded from the congregation of Yahweh by the above code. Thus, “The prophet’s protest is perhaps directed against the application of the rule to persons who had suffered involuntary mutilation.”⁵⁰

Unlike the above command, Isaiah says that the only requirement for participation in the full privileges of the community of faith is fidelity to the spiritual, ritual and ethical essentials. Thus, eunuchs will have a place in the temple. The guarantee is given to eunuchs and to foreigners that they will not be excluded from the privileges of worshipping Yahweh in the Temple and so sharing in the blessings of Israel’s covenant. “Eunuchs represent all of the outcasts who will be gathered into the new community of faith.”⁵¹

Thus, although basically third Isaiah’s view of salvation is nationalistic, as Roberts said,⁵² but in chapter 56: 7, a certain universalism does come through. The nations do refer to Yahweh as “our God”, and the temple will be called a house of prayer for all peoples.

The foreigner and the eunuch are also offered as noticeable cases in a point of the all-embracing inclusiveness of verse 2. The message concerns the outcast persons. Indeed “the Old Testament was never exclusivist on a nationalistic basis.”⁵³ The verses are a concrete expression that the grace of God is unlimited.

It is, in one of the most illuminated and radical statements, God in Isaiah sees far into the future and say, “for My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations”(v.7b). There is a very essential teaching from this verse, that the prophet has taken to the core of the religious universalism, as already mention, in which Jerusalem Temple is the House of God of the whole earth and must therefore be open for prayer not only to the Jews but also equally to all genuine religious devotees. Indeed, inclusion in the one fellowship of all people which overcome all barriers that separate different members of human family from one another is a necessary condition for human survival

⁴⁹Motyer, *The Prophecy*, 464

⁵⁰Elmslie, and Skinner, *Isaiah*, 84

⁵¹McKenna, *The Communicator’s*, 570

⁵²Roberts, “Isaiah,” 141

⁵³Motyer, *The Prophecy*, 466

in the face of increasing interaction between peoples who are different in many ways. It is more than a moral imperative.

God will bring the foreigners and eunuchs to his holy mountain. They are welcome to the place where God can be found. Thus, not only will they be permitted to come to God's Temple, but God himself will conduct them. They will be treated just as any believing Israelite. God will make them joyful in his house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on his altar (v.7)

2. *Keeping Justice and Doing Righteousness:*

The requirements to be included in the House of prayer are keeping justice and being righteousness, observing Sabbath and avoiding evil. Isaiah preaches social justice and personal righteousness, for both Jews and Gentiles, as the proof of salvation. It seems that "spiritual religion for any people in any age is still the same. Social justice and personal righteousness go hand in hand as universal virtues that God expects of His children."⁵⁴ And social justice and righteousness are inseparable. It has to be done as 'because my salvation' will come. It means that "obedience is to be lived out as a response to salvation."⁵⁵

Righteousness in the verse obviously represents moral conduct, obedience to precepts of God.⁵⁶ It also means a right relationship with the covenant of God that led to loving others as oneself and doing good in order to lead others into the same right relationship with God.

3. *Observing the Sabbath and Avoiding All Evil:*

Isaiah declares that the person who is experiencing the true blessing of life will be the happy person, and it manifests an attitude that expresses itself in two behaviors. He is careful to avoid two things: *profane the Sabbath*, and *do any evil*.⁵⁷

It might be wondered why God in this verse raises Sabbath - keeping to the essential for spiritual religion. The Old Testament gives the answer, i.e., "keeping of the Sabbath signaled the covenant relationship with God. By giving Him a day for rest and worship, we honor His name and renew our covenant relationship with Him."⁵⁸

Joining the Sabbath ritual as a spiritual essential is the ethical expectation that the person of faith 'keep his (or her) hand from doing any evil' (v.2c). In our daily life, temptations to do evil are ever-present. In obedient to God's command, we discipline our selves against the subtle and obvious temptations to sin. "The Sabbath is frontline protection against sin."⁵⁹

⁵⁴McKenna, *The Communicator's*, 565

⁵⁵John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapter 40-66*, Grand Rapid: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998, 455

⁵⁶Elmslie, and Skinner, *Isaiah*, 83

⁵⁷Oswalt, *The Book*, 455

⁵⁸McKenna, *The Communicator's*, 566

⁵⁹McKenna, *The Communicator's*, 567

III. **The significance of the verses for a contemporary encounter of people of different faiths**

The prominent issue in these verses is about salvation. Salvation, as already mentioned is the key notion in every religious consideration. It is the objective of every religion. The problem now is who will get the salvation. Does God want absolutely everyone to be saved or only those who have faith in Christ? What is the relationship of Christianity to other religion?

A. ***Uniqueness and exclusiveness in Christianity***

It can be inferred from the messages of the verse that salvation is for all the people without differentiation, be it Jews or non Jews, by describing that foreigners and eunuch which is consider to be people who are stranger to us and usually we are suspicious of them unless they are willing to become like us, will have place in the Temple of God. Eunuchs as people who are outcasts among us also not excluded from this code.

Indeed there is another feature of New Testament which says about Jesus or Christianity as exclusive, or at least normative. Jesus is the 'one mediator' between God and humanity (1Tim 2: 5), and there is salvation in no one else, for there is 'no other name' by which persons can be saved (Acts 4: 12), and no one comes to the Father except through him (John 14: 6), Jesus is 'the only begotten Son of God (John 1:14), whoever see him sees the Father (John 14:). Hence Jesus is viewed as the one who truly and fully reveals God. Jesus is claimed to be the particular Savior of the world. If there is no other name than Jesus by which humans are saved, if Jesus is the only way of salvation, then what about all those who have followed of Muhammad or other religious figures that God has worked decisively to save humanity?

If Christology was and is evolutionary, said Knitter, if it is in continuing need of interpretation, it can be asked whether such 'one and only' or 'final' language really does belong to the main content of what the early church experienced and believed.⁶⁰

According to Wessels, in reality, Acts 4: 12 ('No other name') does not deal with the relationship of Christian toward other religion, but with the healing ministry of Peter and John. Answering to the question of the rulers, elders, and scribes who asked by what power they did his healing (Acts 4:7), they replied, "by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth . . . And there is salvation in no other name" (Acts 4: 10, 12). This respond is not a sermon dealing with penance or a missionary tract, but a witness in a courtroom. "No other name is a witness, a declaration, respecting the name of the one (not Jesus himself, but God) through whom salvation is achieved."⁶¹ This text is proposed not as a judgment of other religions, but as a confessional statement about the character of the path Jesus Christ followed.⁶²

⁶⁰Knitter, *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Toward the World Religions*, New York: Maryknoll Orbis Books, 1985,182

⁶¹Antonie Wessels, "Some Biblical Consideration Relevant to the Encounter Between Traditions," Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and Wadi Z. Haddad, (Eds.), *Christian-Muslim Encounters*, University Press of Florida, 1995, 55

⁶²Wessels, "Some Biblical", 55

Another approach was given by Frances Young, that the 'one and only' adjectives used to describe Jesus belong "not to language of philosophy, science, or dogmatics, but rather to the language of confession and testimony."⁶³ Thus, in talking about Jesus, the New Testament author uses the language not of analytic philosophers but of enthusiastic believers, not of scientists but lovers. "In describing Jesus as "the one and the only," Christians were not trying to elaborate a metaphysical principle but a personal relationship and a commitment that defined what it meant to belong to this community."⁶⁴

The new interpretation of such traditional claim is also made by scholars in a pluralistic Christological approach. John Hick, for example, although he has discompose and provocative reassessment of the "myth of Incarnation," but it needs not and should not be read as a refusal of the divinity or the saving power of Jesus. Rather it is referred as a way of reinterpreting what it means to call Jesus divine in such a way that Christians can understand the role of Jesus more clearly and follow him more resolutely.⁶⁵ Another example of pluralistic model is proposed by Knitter. Christians can continue to affirm and announce to the world that Jesus solely is divine and savior. "Verily but not only"— this, said Knitter, catches the new efforts to affirm the significant of Jesus in a world of many religions. Theologically, according to Knitter,

this means that while Christians can and must continue to announce Jesus of Nazareth as one in whom the reality and saving power of God is incarnate and available, *they will also be open to the possibility/probability that there are others whom Christians can recognize as son or daughter of God.* Personally, such a pluralistic Christology allows and requires Christian to be committed fully to Christ but *at the same time genuinely open to others who may be carrying out similar and equally important roles.* Ecclesiastically, this means that the churches will go forth into the whole world with a message that it universally relevant and urgent, but *at the same time will be ready to hear other messages from very different sources that may also be universally meaningful and important.*⁶⁶

Indeed the question of the finality and uniqueness of Christ is a serious issue in interreligious dialogue. Is Jesus unique among the religious figures of history? If so, how is Jesus unique?

Harvey Cox in his book, *Many Mansions*, described why was he so intrigued by the 'many mansions' Jesus speaks of in John 14: 2 as well as by John 14: 6, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man comes into the Father, but by me". Furthermore he said, "these verses stand only a few lines away from each other in the same chapter of the same Gospel, but they have traditionally supplied both the dialogic universalist and antidialogic particularist with their favorite proof texts."⁶⁷

⁶³Frances Young, "A Cloud of Witness," in *The Myth of God Incarnate*, John Hick, ed. London: SCM Press, 1977, 13

⁶⁴Knitter, *No Other Name?*, 185

⁶⁵See John Hick, "Jesus and the World Religion," in *The Myth of Incarnation*, Ed. John Hick, London: SCM Press, 167-85

⁶⁶Knitter, *One Earth many Religions, Multifaith Dialogue and Global Responsibility*, New York: Orbis Books, 1995, 35 (Italic is mine)

⁶⁷Harvey Cox, *Many Mansions, A Christian's Encounter with Other Faiths*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1988, 10

In solving the apparent contradictory verses above and showing how Jesus does have something vital to teach us about how to participate in interfaith dialogue, he proposes an evolution of understanding approach. According to him the meaning of religious texts changes from time to time and from place to place. "To follow Jesus means to deal with specifics, not generalities."⁶⁸ Furthermore, he reminds us that religion is always a mixed blessing. "Jesus, after all, was fiercely opposed by many of the religious people of his day. His attacks on the misuse of religion remind us that, whatever religion exists, we can be sure that someone is trying to use the gods to dominate, frighten, or oppress someone else."⁶⁹

Considering uniqueness, there are some forms of it, as Knitter argues in his book *No Other Name?* Conservative Evangelical and mainline Protestant models hold to an exclusive uniqueness, affirming that only in Jesus can true revelation be found. In such an understanding, the Christ event is essential of any true encounter with God, anyway in history. The Catholic models, displeased with that exclusivity, propose an inclusive uniqueness for Jesus. They said that God revealing–saving action in Jesus includes all other religion, either as anonymous, cosmic person within them or as their final fulfillment. In this view, Jesus remains, if not essential of, at least normative for, all religious experience, for all times. All this traditional Christian claims are "insufficiently sensitive to the way they contradict contemporary awareness of historical relativity and to the way they impede authentic dialogue with believers of other faiths."⁷⁰ After criticizing those models, Knitter proposes the theocentric models which called a relational uniqueness for Jesus. It affirms that "Jesus is unique, but with a uniqueness defined by its ability to relate to –that is, to include and be included by –other unique religious figures." Such understanding of Jesus views him not as exclusive or even as normative but a theocentric, as a universally relevant manifestation of divine revelation and salvation.⁷¹

The opinion above was based on the principal concern that there has been a new evolution in the "texture" of human experience, very different from the "context" of the New Testament and past dogmatic statement about Jesus.

It includes a new "historical consciousness" of the relativity of all cultures and historical achievements, a new awareness of pluralism, and especially a clearer realization of the need to fashion a new form of unity among peoples. "Not to understand Jesus anew in this new texture, not to open oneself to the possibility of a new Christology, is to run the risk of confining the past in an idolatrous 'deposit of faith'."⁷²

The question of the uniqueness of Jesus also described by Hans Kung in his book, *On Being Christian*. In Kung's understanding of the concept of 'unique', it is not simply in the sense that every individual and every religion is different and therefore unique; rather, unique means surpassing all others, one and only, superior, absolutely and

⁶⁸Cox, *Many Mansions*, 12

⁶⁹Cox, *Many Mansions*, 13

⁷⁰Knitter, *No Other Name?*, 172

⁷¹Knitter, *No Other Name?*, 172

⁷²Knitter, *No Other Name?*, 173

universally normative for others, definitive. "He clearly argues that Jesus is ultimately archetypal, and so it is not just one of the many 'archetypal men' that Karl Jaspers has identified throughout history."⁷³

From the literature and theological discussion, it is evident that the issue of the validity of claiming uniqueness for Christ over other religious figure and for Christianity over other religions as described by Kung was questioned over past years.

It was Knitter who argued that the claim that Christ and Christianity are unique in the sense understood by Kung is "not necessary for Christian identity and living and not conducive to genuine dialogue with other religions and not possible according to the norm of theological and historical-critical method."⁷⁴

Being Christian is to follow Jesus Christ as the Way (*immitatio Christi*), and someone will get salvation via Jesus, as discussed before. Traditionalist people understand it that there will be no salvation without Jesus. But further, that concept changes, even if they come to the opinion that church membership is not the guarantee of salvation.⁷⁵

To follow Jesus Christ as the Way means to be with him where he is and to do what he did and is doing. Orthopraxy has priority over orthodoxy, and both need to be contextually performed. Christians witness that the manifestation of God in the world occurs in Jesus and in the Spirit. However, no worldly manifestation of God (including that in Jesus) can exhaustively absorb God, who is always greater. Furthermore, our capability to understand and to accept the incompatible God is limited. *Deus semper maior*.⁷⁶

While it is also well known that 'Jesus is the Lord, Mat 7: 12 said: '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.

Furthermore, if Mat 28 said: 'Baptize', in this case, although conversion indeed in the root of baptism, but it was wrong to think that baptism is 'a pure spiritual act' as it was more 'a social-political act.'⁷⁷ The history saw the fact. Therefore, *if the mysteries of salvation basically depend on an individual encounter with God, all the mediation is relative.*

There is another verse which is considered more inclusive. Genesis chapter 14 is an example. If in Genesis 12: 2 we read that Abram was blessed by God and called from Ur to become himself a blessing in Canaan, this blessing also plays an important role in the story about the meeting between Abram and the king of Salem (Jerusalem),

⁷³Knitter, "The World Religion and the Finality of Christ: A Critique of Hans Kung's On Being A Christian," in *Interreligious Dialogue*, Richard W. Rousseau, ed., Ridge Row Press, 1981, 203

⁷⁴Knitter, "The World Religion," 204

⁷⁵Michael Amalados, SJ, 'Dialogue and Mission. Conflict or Convergent ?' in *EAPR*, 1986, 76-77

⁷⁶Banawiratma, SJ, 'Contextual Theology and a Dialogical Approach to Building Democracy: Christian Perspectives', paper will be published, Yogyakarta, 2001, 7

⁷⁷Amalados, 'Dialogue and Mission', 58

Melchizedek . Genesis 14: 1-11 described a war being waged among certain kings, and the taking Abram's nephew Lot as prisoner by the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah. Abram pursued them, defeated the king and liberated Lot. On his way back he was received by Melchizedek in a place not far from Jerusalem, and offered the bread and wine of hospitality through which peace was established. Abram recognized Melchizedek not only as king but as priest, thereby implying that he, or at least the narrator of the story, acknowledges El as worshiped by Melchizedek to be identical with Jahweh, the same God who led him from Ur of Chaldees (Genesis 12: 1)

Another argument was given considering the death of Jesus. Does Jesus die for a specific group of people, the elect, or for all people? Fackre and Sanders affirm what is known as unlimited atonement, "where Jesus died for every single individual, whether non-Christian or Christian." According to them the passages speaking of 'world' and 'all' meant that God wants every single individual to benefit from the work of Christ.⁷⁸

Although Christians claim that Jesus is their necessary and happy starting point and focus for understanding themselves and other peoples, but they must also remind themselves that the Divine Mystery they know in Jesus and call *Theos* or God, is ever greater than the reality and message of Jesus. Thus Christians are open to the possibility that other religions may have their own valid views of and responses to this Mystery, "Thus they would not have to be unilaterally "included" in Christianity. Rather, all the religions could be, perhaps need to be, included in—that is, related to —each other as all of them continue their efforts to discover or be faithful to the inexhaustible Mystery or Truth."⁷⁹

What brings a person to faith in and commitment to Jesus is a converting experience. Jesus empowers the heart and illumines the mind that one can now feel and know and, especially, act in a different manner. Indeed the experience of faith necessarily includes the conviction that Jesus *is* God's revelation and grace, but it does not necessarily include the conviction that he alone is this revelation and grace. Therefore, as John Macquarrie has urged, "one can be totally committed to Jesus and at the same time genuinely open to the possibility of other revelers and saviors."⁸⁰ The core of the New Testament witness is that in Jesus men and women encountered the fullness of God and thus experienced "a complete and true manifestation of the fundamental meaning of the authentic human existence."⁸¹ This message can be maintained without insistence that he is the only such manifestation.⁸²

B. *Isaiah in Dialogue with the Qur'an*

⁷⁸Gabriel Fackre, Ronald H. Nash and John Sanders, *What About Those Who Never Heard?*, InterVarsity Press, 1995, 12

⁷⁹Knitter, *One Earth Many Religions*, 8

⁸⁰ See *Principles of Christian Theology*, London: SCM Press, 1966, 155-58, cited by Knitter, *No Other Name?*, 201

⁸¹ David Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order: The New Pluralism in Theology*, New York: Seabury, 1975, , 223, cited by Knitter, "The World Religion," 207

⁸² Knitter, "The World Religion," 207

The same spirit from Isaiah also can be inferred from the Qur'an, as we can see in the following discussion.

Human diversity or pluralism is not only inherent in the divine scheme of things, but also deliberately designed to promote understanding and cooperation among various people. This can be inferred from the verse of the Qur'an: 'We (God) have created you (human beings) into (different) peoples and tribes so that you may (all) get to know (understand and cooperate with) each other; the most honorable among you in the sight of God are the pious (righteous) ones'.

The last part of the verse above emphasizes that the quality of morality and human worth is to be judged by the person's moral conduct, rather than by his or her membership in a particular ethnic, religious or other group. In other verse the Qur'an said 'faith in God and the Last Day, rather than religious affiliation, is the sole criterion of right and wrong, truth and falsehood and salvation or damnation on the Day of Judgment. It is also what Isaiah says that the only requirement for participation in the full privileges of the community of faith is fidelity to the spiritual, ritual and ethical essentials. Indeed, *religion is not only what we believe but how we live.*

According to Prophet Muhammad, God has raised 124,000 prophets at along the past history of mankind, and 315 of them were messengers, 'a huge number', the Prophet insisted. All people are therefore necessarily expected to believe in all prophets and all messengers of God, implying recognition of the fundamental truth in their tenets. Al-Qur'an instructs its followers to declare that they believe in all prophets, and to confirm that, 'we make no difference between one and another of them and we all submit ourselves to Him. It is also due to these principles that the Qur'an does not recognize the Exclusives notion of the phrase, 'Extra ecclesiam nulla salus'. Instead the Qur'an proclaims that: 'those who believe (in the Qur'an) and those who follow the Jewish (Scriptures) and the Christians and Sabians, whoever believe in God and the Last day and work righteousness, will have their reward with their Lord; on them will be no fear nor will they grieve.'⁸³

Both the Qur'an and early prophetic traditions clearly indicate that Muhammad was convinced that the biblical personages of Old Testament were prophets like him and that the Scriptures they brought were divinely revealed books. Despite their diversity of forms and contents and historical and cultural frames of reference, but all sacred scriptures emanate from a single archetypal heavenly source of revelation called in the Qur'an Ummu al-Kitab (the essence of the Book). The Qur'anic imperative to believe in all God's messages and prophets, is based this unity of revelation, for in essence God's religion is one and the prophethood is one. This means having faith not only in well known prophets and their scriptures, such as Moses and the Torah, Jesus and the Gospel, Muhammad and the Qur'an, but in 'whatever Book God may have revealed'.

IV. Conclusion

From the discussion above we can learn that the salvation is not limited to a certain group, but for all the people. All creation can be the locus for discerning the presence of God, as Rahner said, and different forms of prayer, fasting, almsgiving and other type of spiritual discipline are expressions of the human desire to surrender

⁸³Al-Qur'an 2: 62

completely to unfathomable mystery, to God, who is the source of knowledge, freedom, and love.⁸⁴

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 Christians 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'.⁸⁵

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,⁸⁶ 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.⁸⁷ 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.⁸⁸

There is a common platform as Schimmel and Falatury said in *We Believe in One God: The Experience of God in Christianity and Islam*,

The most important task was to clarify the issues, and to reach the conclusion that, in spite of outwards 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.⁸⁹

In 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 are basically ineffable, since "what counts at the deepest level in religion is the spirit of faith and not any formal

⁸⁴ See Karl Rahner, *The Practice of Faith: A Handbook of Contemporary Spirituality*, New York: Crossroad, 1983. See also his *Spirit in the World*, New York: Continuum, 1994, cited by Michael Downey, *Understanding Christian Spirituality*, New York: Paulist Press, 1997, 34

⁸⁵ Translation from the Qur'an

⁸⁶ Anthony J. Gittins, (Ed.), *Life and Death Matters, The Practice of Inculturation in Africa*, Germany: Steyler Verlag, 2000, 25

⁸⁷ Gittins, *Life and Death Matters*, 25

⁸⁸ Bevans, , *Models of Contextual Theology*, 49

⁸⁹ Schimmel and Falatury, *We Believe in One God: The Experience of God in Christianity and Islam*, London: Burner and Oates, 1997, p. xvi

affiliation.”⁹⁰ God gives every community their own way to attain salvation, and there are many. Not one, of doing so although man should be cautious regarding some of them which may mislead. *We are co-pilgrims in pursuit of the Divine.*

Wallahu a’lam (God knows best)

Rome, September 25, 2005

Syafa’atun Almirzanah

⁹⁰Vahiduddin, Islam and Diversity of Religion’ in *Islam and Christian Muslim Relation*, I, p. 3-11

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19 August, 2005

Dear Dr. Syafa'atun Almirzanah,

Passport No. M 690818

You are invited to participate in the international conference "Nostra Aetate Today: Reflections 40 Years after Its Call for a New Era of Interreligious Relationships", which will take place in Rome at the Pontifical Gregorian University from 25-28 September, 2005.

We wish to inform you that we do not assume any financial responsibility or costs (registration costs; residence reservation fees; lodging; local or international travel costs; personal expenses; etc).

A provisional program, which will be periodically updated, and further information on the Conference is available at www.unigre.it/naetate.

We look forward to your presence with us in Rome during what we think will be an important event for interreligious relations.

With kind regards,

DANIEL A. MADIGAN SJ
Director
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