

International Conference on
MUSLIM-CHRISTIAN
DIALOGUE

CADENABBIA, ITALY - OCTOBER 1-4, 2009

A COMMON WORD **and** **What It Could Mean**

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AN AMAZING LETTER

When I asked my friend Prof. Dr. Nasaruddin Umar what had moved him to sign the letter of Muslim religious leaders to the heads of the Christian Churches he answered that he was one of those that had prepared the letter. Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad bin Talal, head of the Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought in Amman - who had organized the letter - had challenged him: What does Indonesia, the world's biggest Muslim country, do in order to change the world of Islam?

Thus for Prof. Nasaruddin this letter is also addressed to the Muslim world. It wants to challenge them to get out of their fixation on their own world. It wants to open to Muslims a horizon of worldwide responsibility for peace. For Prof. Nasaruddin this worldwide horizon of responsibility will grow out of the dialogue with other religions. He told me that when he visits pesantrens (the typical Indonesian Muslim boarding schools), he likes to bring along Father Benny Susetyo, a young Javanese Catholic priest who is the liaison officer of the Indonesian Bishops' Conference to other religions. In this way the kiai (the ulama heading the pesantrens) get to know Christians.

But this letter is, indeed, an important, even unique letter. Even the fact that it was possible to get 138 respected Muslim scholars from the whole Islamic world to sign it and to offer, through it, friendship to Christianity is something new. And, of course, the letter is first and for all directed to Christians. That these 138 Muslim scholars address the leaders of the Christian world as their brothers, without fear of getting too close to them, expresses their conviction that there is a real chance of working together in the future. As the "largest ... religions in the world and in history... the relationship between these two religious communities (is) the most important factor in contributing to meaningful peace around the

world.” Like we Christians, they see this task as the challenge of our time: That Muslims and Christians together open peace a chance in a world that is torn by conflicts.

What is so remarkable in this letter is that its argumentation is strictly theological. Working together because we are united by common values is already something especially important. But this letter, by arguing in a theological way, goes a step further. It offers collaboration for peace in the world before God! In this letter Muslims accept Christians as believers before God, something that, I should think, did not come easily. As it was not easy for the Catholic Church to express her appreciation for Muslims as believers in the one God in the second Vatican Council (in *Nostra Aetate*). Thus, the letter is a sign of theological empathy, something still very seldom on both sides. The writers wanted to proceed from the perspective of their addressees, the Christians. They wanted to show that what are the most important signpost for Christians are the same for Islam too. To make sure they we understood each other they did not use their own theological and ethical systematic. In the same line falls that the Muslim writers extensively quote from the New and Old Testament. We know that for many Muslims both texts – the foundational texts of Christian belief – are falsifications. By quoting extensively from these texts the authors distance themselves silently

from this theory of falsification which for Jews and Christians is extremely insulting. In other words, the writers take our holy scripture seriously.

For me the most important sentence of the letter is the following: "As Muslims, we say to Christians that we are not against them and that Islam is not against them." This sentence also challenges us Christians to say honestly that we are not against Islam! At the end of the letter the authors express what they offer us Christians: "Let us respect each other, be fair, just and kind to another and live in sincere peace, harmony and mutual goodwill." It is a lovely sentence – and what it says can be realized.

ONLY A BEGINNING

Of course, the letter is only a beginning. Most people of the Muslim and Christian world have not been touched by it. In Indonesia, not once I have heard this letter been alluded too. It has not got any attention. But this should not discourage the writers. The letter is something first. It opens a gap in the ideological fortifications we have built around each other. It will have its effect. Those of us in Indonesia that have read the letter feel very much encouraged by the fact that there are a respectable number of Muslim scholars who express in a beautiful way what we have felt animates our ongoing dialoguing.

It reassures us that we are on the right track. On the following pages I want to explain how dialogue between Muslims and Christians has been well-established in Indonesia. I shall first trace the actual situation of inter-religious relations now, then trace the development of a dialogue between Christians and Muslims in Indonesia, to, then, draw some conclusion on who best to proceed in such dialogues.

I. 63 YEARS OF CHRISTIAN MUSLIM RELATIONS

1. A FUNDAMENTAL PLURALIST CONSENSUS

On August 17, 1945 Sukarno and Hatta proclaimed Indonesia's independence under the nose of the Japanese occupiers (that had just surrendered to the allied forces). A day later its provisional constitutional assembly (PPKI) adopted a constitution (the "Constitution of 1945") where Indonesia declared herself to be based on five fundamental principles (known as Pancasila since Sukarno first formulated them on June 1, 1945) of which the first was "Belief in One God" (Ketuhanan Yang Maha Esa¹) and where § 29 proclaimed liberty of religion and worship. Besides firmly confirming

¹ The other four are: (2) Just and civilized humanism, (3) unity of Indonesia, (4) (Leadership by) the people lead by the power of wisdom thru common consultation/representation., (5) social justice for all the people.

religious freedom, these fundamental decisions meant that in Indonesia there was to be no discrimination on religious grounds.

How remarkable and extraordinary this philosophical and constitutional base was and is for Indonesia will be obvious if we look at the religious map of the country. More than 85% of all Indonesians are (Sunni) Muslim. Almost 10% are Christians, $\frac{2}{3}$ of them belonging to Protestant Churches, one-third being Catholics. 1,5% are Hindu, most of them being the original inhabitants of Bali. The others belong to indigenous religions, Confucianism, the Buddhist community, and some smaller communities. This means nothing else than that Indonesia was then, and still is, the nation with the biggest number of Muslims on earth. But at the beginning of the existence of the free Republic of Indonesia, her representatives unanimously decided to build a nation without religious discrimination and without giving Islam, the religion of the vast majority, any special constitutional or legal status. This decision was made with full awareness of its implications since it was preceded by intensive deliberations and bargaining about whether, first, Indonesia should become an "Islamic state" or not (the decision was "not"), and second, whether, at least, the Islamic shariah should be declared binding on Muslims (this stipulation was unanimously dropped on August 18, 1945). I believe only the

willingness of the Islamist representatives not to insist on any special status for Islam made possible the continuance of Indonesia as a single state up to this day.

Since then, religious freedom and non-discrimination, despite many frictions, petty discrimination, and serious conflicts during the last 13 years – which I shall come back to presently - have been a reality.² Christianity developed exceptionally well after Indonesian independence. The fact is that the religious life of most of the Christian communities on Java, Sumatra, South Sulawesi and in other Muslim regions of Indonesia goes on as usual without any hindrance. There is freedom of worship, freedom of religious instruction, freedom to baptize and to become a Christian (or a Muslim). Church bells are ringing out at liturgical hours every day in churches on Java. Although being a Christian has since long not been an advantage if one wants to make a career in government or as a state employee, Christians are not systematically

² Christians, Hindus, Buddhists and Confucians (the latter only since 2004; because of anti-Chinese racist prejudice everything smacking of being "Chinese" was outlawed under Suharto and Confucians had been forced to register as Buddhists, making Confucian marriages impossible, for example. This was changed under President Abdurrahman Wahid although its after-effects still linger. A grave ongoing violation of a human right is that, as a consequence of an extremely one-sided marriage law [since 1973] people belonging to traditional tribal religions cannot legally marry. Mixed marriages, too, have to be concluded according to the rites of one of the six now officially recognized religions.

discriminated against and can be found in all professions and at all levels of Indonesian society. Even radical Muslim groups have not challenged the principle that non-Muslims have, in Indonesia, the same legal and civil status as the Muslims and are citizens in the full sense of the word.

2. WORRYING DEVELOPMENTS

Thus, although there have always been inter-religious tensions and petty discriminations, the religious communities of Indonesia did live together peacefully. This situation took a decisive turn to the worst from about 1990. This was the time when Suharto took his famous turn to Islam. Many Muslim leaders regarded the change of attitude as long overdue. For them, the 20-year long shunning of political Islam by Suharto's "New Order" was an extraordinary discrimination against the majority religion. They also suspected Christian influences behind Suharto's negative attitude. Thus, they regarded Suharto's late "conversion" as a question of finally giving justice to the Islamic community.

Christians, on the other hand, saw themselves increasingly excluded from public positions, they now felt discriminated and a threatened minority. But what frightened Christians was a growing number of violent attacks on churches. More than six hundred churches have been destroyed or

violently closed during the last 14 years, not counting churches destroyed in connection with the civil wars in Eastern Indonesia. Really traumatic for Indonesian Christians were a number of attacks in 1996 to 1997 in which churches in cities on Java were destroyed, mostly burned to the ground, by masses, without provocation by the Christians.³ Especially worrying for Christians was the fact that not a single perpetrator has, to my knowledge, ever been brought to court. Christians were increasingly asking themselves whether their constitutionally guaranteed right of worship, even their right of

³ It began with an attack on 10 churches in Surabaya in 1996 (where damage was slight), then in Situbondo, Tasikmalaya and Rengasdengklok where *all 48 churches* (except one in Tasik) were systematically burnt down by mobs. (There followed two further mob attacks, one in November 1998 in Jakarta - followed two weeks later by Christian riots in Kupang that lead to the expulsion of Bugis people, - and one in January 2000 on the island of Lombok). Since these, for Indonesian Christian traumatic events are a crucial point in Christian-Muslim relations in Indonesia, they should not be politely glossed over as so often in "inter-religious dialogues"; on the contrary, they should be faced squarely, but unemotionally and realistically, even if a completely satisfying solution may be some time away. A list by the Forum Komunikasi Kristiani names 938 churches (up to June 1. 2004) that were closed by violent attacks, many of them destroyed or burned down, since 1945: 2 churches during the presidency of Sukarno, 456 under Suharto, most of them after 1990, the rest under the following three presidents; even not counting the approximately 250 churches that were destroyed during the civil wars in Sulawesi and the Molukkas (where also mosques were destroyed), you still get 688 churches that have been attacked during that period.

openly existing as Christians in majority Muslim regions, could be violated with impunity.

Although there have been no more large-scale devastations of churches since 2000, attacks on single churches on Java are continuing at the rate of at least once a week. Thus, as Christians complain, it is still extremely difficult to build churches in Java and in other Muslim regions even when there clearly does exist a Christian community needing a church. When the community, then, holds its services in a school or a similar building, this will often be banned by the local administration with the argument that the place has no permit as a building of worship. Often the argument is that a church should not be built in the midst of a Muslim community which, of course would mean the end of religious tolerance since a minority lives among most of another religion. It is, as I have heard, also difficult for Balinese Hindus to get building permits for their pura or for Chinese to build a klenteng among the Muslims. I have no data on whether similar complaints are voiced by Muslim communities in Christian regions.⁴

⁴ Mention has to be made here of an especially terrifying event, namely the bombings during Christmas night in the year of 2000 where 50 bombs were placed in or around Christian churches from North Sumatra to the island of Lombok, 30 of them exploding, resulting in 17 deaths and more than 100 wounded. The police made no serious effort to apprehend the perpetrators. Only after the Kuta bombers (the terrorist attacks on Bali on

3. CIVIL WARS IN EASTERN INDONESIA

The climax of inter-religious conflicts were two civil wars that for almost four years devastated parts of the Molukkas and Central Sulawesi. These wars ranged from 1999 to 2002 (in Poso, intermitted, until 2007) and resulted in about 8,000 deaths and hundreds of thousands of refugees, many of whom have not yet been able to return to their homes due to the uncertain security situation. But it is clear that in both regions the reasons behind the violence were highly complex, some of them reaching back into history or even into local culture (people in the Molukkas have traditionally been warriors and fights between villages were quite common⁵), others being connected with ethnographic and economic change and, as many Indonesians believe, with politics, both local and in Jakarta. But to say, as some do, that these conflicts were, in fact, not religious in character, is dreaming. The fact is that, for more than three years, for many people the answer to the question "are you a Muslim or a Christian?" decided over life or death. Although these conflicts were of another nature than that of the anti-minority violence in Java mentioned

October 12, 2002, where 202 people were killed) were caught did it transpire that they were also involved in the Christmas bombings two years earlier.

⁵ The situation in the Molukkas in the 16th and 17th century is described by A. Heuken, *Be my Witness to the Ends of the Earth. The Catholic Church in Indonesia Before the 19th Century*, Jakarta: Cipta Loka Caraka 2002.

above, the reasons for their outbreaks being more political, economic and communal, the disturbing fact is that the conflicts tend to boil down, in these cases, to confrontations simply between Christians and Muslims. Therefore, religious hatred can grow and develop its own momentum. The whole atmosphere between the involved communities gets poisoned. Add longstanding suspicions and prejudices and new outbreaks of conflict can be easily provoked by politically or otherwise interested parties.

Nevertheless, although these conflicts are conflicts between communities defined by their respective religion, they have not much to do with the teachings or other specific traits of Islam or Christianity. They should be characterized as communal conflicts. By this I mean that emotions, hatred, and prejudices relate to the collective identity of a primordial group, united by language, local culture, locality, religion, tribalism and so on. If a member of such a community infringes against a member of another one, his or her community will react collectively against the community of the perpetrator.

In fact, the Ambon and Poso conflicts are only a part of a general climate of violence and brutality that obtains in Indonesian society today. Small frictions, misunderstandings, or confrontations easily evoke violent reactions and physical fighting, using weapons. Very often they quickly involve

whole communities which then fight against each other. If, for instance, there is a fight between an extortionist and a taxi driver and the one is a Muslim and the other a Christian (as happened in Ambon), there is always the chance that it may become a war between their respective villages or kampungs. Indeed, it may widen, especially if kampungs are tribally or religiously homogenous, to become a war between ethnic groups (as happened on Kalimantan) or between religious communities.⁶ Thus these conflicts are first expressions of general social disintegrative tendencies in Indonesian society.

⁶ One can only speculate about the deeper reasons for this climate of communal violence. Under President Suharto people were not allowed to voice their grievances, they often felt themselves to be "victims of development", for example because they were driven from their land in favor of a government project with insufficient compensation, which in turn often evaporated before reaching their rightful receivers. Complaining would have exposed them to being accused of being communists which was, since 1965, the same as being threatened with death. Thus, they had to accept and keep silent. Communal conflicts too were silenced and thus could not be resolved. Thus, feelings of being the victim of injustice steadily accumulated. People got disappointed, felt isolated and abused, and their anger grew. After the democratic opening after the fall of President Suharto their anger burst unto the surface. At the same time, all the injustices of over more than 30 years were now remembered. Besides, rapid modernization with its breaking down of traditional social structures makes a plural society unstable. In other words, we have just begun to realize how big a task it is to unite such a number of different social components within the boundaries of a national state, in such a way that they all feel at home, evolve a positive commitment to each other as members of the same nation, and are reconfirmed in their respective social identities.

4. POSITIVE DEVELOPMENTS

These developments have left their scars in religious communities. Many Christians have asked themselves about their future in Indonesia. The existence of hard-line groups that sometimes resort to violence (especially against "sinful places" like gambling-dens or even coffeeshops, but in some instances also against Christian institutions that they say are engaging in "Christianization") added to this atmosphere of apprehension. Hard-line Islamic publications openly voiced, and still voice, extremely sectarian views, often directly alluding to Christians. There has been, in my view, an unfortunate tendency to religious segregation. A fatwa promulgated already 30 years ago by MUI (Majelis Ulama Indonesia) but only effectively promulgated after the fall of Suharto, commands that Muslims should refrain from expressing Christmas greetings. Since then, a whole tradition of grass roots level inter-religious contacts has dried up. I heard Muslim friends express their dismay at the fact that at school the teacher of religion told their children not to have contacts with non-Muslim and Chinese children. Christians are also worried about a tendency of local authorities enforcing shariah regulations in their regions. Hand in hand with local "shariaization" goes, in certain districts, often in the name of the newly won "autonomy of the regions", a policy of making religious life for Christian communities more and more difficult.

These developments could give the impression that things are unbelievably bad between religious communities, especially between Christians and Muslims. The astonishing fact is, that relations between Christians and Muslims, while still far from being without problems, are developing well. Undetected by most of the public, the last twelve years have seen some encouraging developments. The fundamental fact is certainly that the Pancasila national consensus - that Indonesia belongs to all Indonesians - still stands unchallenged. Political parties favoring making shariah law state law for Muslims represented about 17% of the 2004 electorate (while this year no party dared to come out in support of making shariah becoming state law). The two biggest political parties, then, Golkar (22%) and PDIP (18%), but also Abdurrachman Wahid's PKB (14%) and Amien Rais' PAN (6%), did not support introduction of the shariah.⁷ Even more significant is the fact that

⁷ The 2009 general elections confirmed a long-standing trend in Indonesia, namely the relative weakness of Islamist political parties (they got about 27% of the popular vote, almost 10% less than five years before. In the first free elections in Indonesia more than 50 years ago (1955) when an Islamic state was the most hotly debated topic Islamic parties got less than 43% of the votes. No free elections happened for the next 44 years. At the national elections 1999, after the fall of the Suharto regime, Islamic oriented parties⁷ only got 37 percent of the popular vote. In the elections 2004 these parties received 40%, while in this year's general elections these parties received less than 30%. And this in spite of the fact that Indonesian Islam has experienced a deepening process since the 70th of last century (meaning that now much more Muslim do their Muslim prayers and other duties). During the campaigns of 2004 and 2009 religion or say Islamic topics or requests

the leadership of the two big Muslim organizations, Nadlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, had clearly stated that making shariah into state law does not fit with the social-cultural conditions of Indonesia.

A second, highly significant and often overlooked fact is that the quasi-war between Christians and Muslims in Eastern Indonesia between 1999 and 2002 – where, in fact, both sides regarded themselves as the victims of violence from the other side – has not spilled over to other regions. There have been no revenge attacks on Christian by Muslims on Java and no attacks on Muslims in Christian parts of Indonesia (the one exception where the anti-Christian riots on Lombok in January 2000). More amazingly still, the much-vilified political elite in Jakarta, including the political parties, did not used the conflict in the Molukkas and Poso for political gains during their election campaigns. It is also remarkable, that during the campaign preceding the last two parliamentary elections (2004 an 2009) questions of religion were completely absent; even explicitly Islamic Parties like PKS did not campaign in the name

were almost completely absent. Political parties (including parties from an Islamic background) and presidential candidates show themselves inclusive, never alluding to religious or ideological divides. It must be that they instinctively feel that taking a "sectarian" attitude would diminish their electoral appeal. This doesn't mean that many Muslims would not be in favor of introducing some shariah rules. But it means that in politics they do not like religion to enter.

of Islam, but against corruption and for social justice. No party campaigned for the introduction of shariah (although some of them have it on their official agenda). All pairs of presidential and vice-presidential candidates for the presidential elections were "mixed" between "Islamists"⁸ and "nationalists" (all the "nationalists", of course, being Muslim too).

A third, in fact most amazing development during the last 14 years has been a significant warming of relations between Christians and the big Muslim organizations Nadlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah. Only 20 years ago there were almost now relations between Christians and "santri-Muslims"⁹, except of formal meetings, usually government sponsored, between the leaders of the religious communities.¹⁰ But which Catholic priest would have known a kiai or ever seen a

⁸ The expression is misleading; by this are not meant ideologues or fanatics, but, according to the Indonesian use of the word "Islam" in a political context, those who define their political participation according to Islamic ideas and pursue them through Islam-based parties.

⁹ "Santri" is the name for pupils of an Islamic boarding-school (pesantren), but the word is also used in a more general way for people living consciously and culturally as Muslims, in distinction to "abangan-Muslims" whose Islamic practices are incomplete; for the distinction between "abangan" and "santri" see Clifford Geertz 1960, *The Religion of Java*, Glencoe: The Free Press

¹⁰ Especially between Masyumi and the two Christian parties who were united by their commitment to democracy and their distrust of the communists; the same holds for the Muslims student organization HMI and the Catholic Student organization PMKRI.

pesantren (traditional Islamic boarding school) from the inside? Change began slowly, especially through the influence of the towering figure of Abdurrachman Wahid (NU leader and later President of Indonesia) who embodied a completely modern openness and commitment to religious freedom, drawing on the Islamic tradition exemplified by the Mogul rulers of India of protecting all minorities and feeling responsible for their well being. Strangely enough, relations between Christians and Nadlatul Ulama became cordial after the attacks on the churches of Situbondo.¹¹ But also the relations with, especially the leadership of, Muhammadiyah are now much better than they ever were. Here should be mentioned the fact that the Islamic State Universities (IAIN, UIN) have, in general, since the 70's, taught an open and dialogue minded Islam.

¹¹ But the real breakthrough came, astonishingly enough, after one of the for Christians most traumatic incidents, the destruction and burning down of all 25 Christian churches in and around the East Javanese city of Situbondo in October 1996. Situbondo is "NU country". Gus Dur (Abdurrachman Wahid), then head of NU, immediately condemned the riots and asked for forgiveness.¹¹ What then came reads like a good story. The young Catholic Javanese parish priest Benny Susetyo, instead of immediately trying to build up his burnt down church, and after receiving the blessing of Gus Dur, visited the surrounding pesantrens. There, the *kiais* expressed to him their horror at what had happened and promised help in building up the churches again. Since then, relations between Christians and NU got more and more cordial all over Indonesia. Thus, f. i., many Christian churches are now guarded at Christmas night by *Banser*, the militias of NU.

These tendencies got a big boost by the growing terrorist threat now hanging over Indonesia. The real watershed was the Bali bombings on October 12, 2002. They shocked Indonesians out of their somehow complacent attitude towards the reality of religiously motivated terror.¹² On the one hand, extremist groups that had used the new democratic openness after the fall of the Suharto government to come out into the open, now retreated into more low-profile positions. On the other hand, liberal Muslim groups, but also the popular leaders of the big Muslim organizations, began to present Islam more forcefully as an inclusive religion that, as the majority religion, felt responsible for the peace and prosperity of the whole of Indonesian society. Muslim groups-initiated prayer meetings among different religions for the victims of the Kuta killings. Leaders of the big Islamic organizations Nadlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah founded a National Moral Council consisting of the leaders of all Indonesia religions.

¹² Religiously motivated terror had been obvious since 1999, but was played down and never seriously investigated by the authorities. The first bomb exploded in April 1999 at Istiqlal Mosque; the people hired to place the bombs were easily caught, but, strangely enough, those that gave them the bombs and paid them never came to light – although the media reported that the house, in Western Jakarta, where the transactions were made, was quickly identified. The first climax of religiously motivated terrorism was, of course, the Christmas bombings of 2000 which, as I mentioned, were not investigated seriously. Only Bali – and President Bush? – changed all this.

II. TRACING MUSLIM – CHRISTIAN DIALOGUE

After telling the story of Muslim – Christian relations in Indonesia I now want to trace more precisely how during these extremely exciting, sometimes tragic and worrying, but finally hope inspiring times a dialogue developed between Christians and Muslims.

1. A BLEAK STARTING POINT

The starting point of Christian – Muslim relations in Indonesia could not have been bleaker. Christians came, missionizing, together with the Portuguese and the Dutch. Islam was, of course, regarded as the old enemy, and these feelings were reciprocated at the Muslim side. There always existed deep suspicions and prejudices between the Christian and Muslim communities. We have a difficult common history which became part of our collective identities, a history of crusades and colonialism, of Arab invasions (remember the song of Roland) and 300 years of the "Turkish threat" to Christian Europe. Muslims in Indonesia are suspicious about Christian intentions (these suspicions still linger up to this day. They have been reinforced by reckless proselytizing by certain Christian sects). Christians, on the other hand, are suspicious that "strict" Muslims, should they come to power, would restrict their religious freedoms; this fear is now reinforced by prolific

Muslim hardline publications filling Indonesian book shops. This also means that when conflicts involving Christians and Muslims break out, regardless from what causes, or if they are provoked from outside parties with certain political intentions, they may feed on these suspicions and prejudices.

Relations between Christians and Muslims did not offer themselves in the 19th century since missionary activity took place in the not Islamized regions of Indonesia (among the Batak in North Sumatra, in Central and North Sulawesi, in the Molukkas, in the Smaller Sunda Islands of East Indonesia and, much later, in Papua. But for Indonesia Java was always decisive (where about 62% of all Indonesians live, about 130 million people), politically and culturally. Here, of course, the Javanese (the Javanese speaking inhabitants of Central and Eastern Java, 40% of all Indonesians) with their specific culture and their complex and multiform Islam had a decisive impact on Indonesian Christianity and, specifically, on relations between Christians and Muslims which I cannot enter here. Suffice it to mention that the Javanese K. H. Ahmad Dahlan (who in 1912 founded Indonesia's second biggest Islamic organization, the modernist and moderately Wahabi leaning Muhammadiyah¹³) was a personal friend of the Dutch Jesuit

¹³ The biggest Indonesian Islamic organization, the "traditionalist" Nadlatul Ulama, was founded in 1926 by K. H. Hashim Azhari, the grandfather of

priest Father van Lith who is, among Catholics, regarded the founder of the Javanese Catholic Church.

2. GETTING CLOSER BECAUSE OF BASIC POLITICAL POSITIONS

Strong, if limited in scope, communications between Muslims and Christians developed in the Indonesian independence movement and in the four years of freedom struggle against the Dutch (1945-1949) where Christians, from the very beginning, played an active role.¹⁴ From this time on

later to become president of Indonesia K. H. Abdurrachman Wahid, partly as a reaction to ongoing criticism by Muhammadiyah that the typical Javanese *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school with a *kiai* at their head) compromised Islamic purity. Thus while Muhammadiyah was, in part, a reaction to Christian inroads in Yogyakarta, NU's subconscious enemy was Muhammadiyah.

¹⁴ This was the reason why Sukarno, Indonesia's first president, was a friend of the Christians. He had a especially close relationship with the first indigenous Indonesian Bishop, the Javanese Jesuit Mgr. A. Soegijapranata. Mgr. Soegijapranata was archbishop of Semarang, the capital of the province of Central Java. In 1946 when the Dutch returned to Indonesia and try to subjugate Indonesia again, Soegijapranata took up residence in Yogyakarta, then the capital of the free Republic of Indonesia under Sukarno, instead of staying the Dutch controlled Semarang. Soegijapranata was, after his death, declared a national hero by Sukarno. It may be mentioned that the official heroes of the three branches of the Indonesian Armed Forces, Adisutjipto (from the small Indonesian air force, shot down in 1947 by the Dutch; the airport of Yogyakarta is named after him), Slamet Riyadi (from the Army; he fell 1950 in the fight against Dutch supported separatist in the Molukkas) and Jos Soedarso (who commanded a torpedo boat of the

there existed very close relations between Muslim and non-Muslim politicians in Indonesia, while the Indonesian military, from the beginning did not allow religion to influence their decisions.¹⁵ During the 1950ths cordial relations develops particularly between leaders of the big reformist Muslim Masyumi party and the Catholic party, united by their conviction that Indonesia has to be democratic¹⁶ and their common suspicion about the true intentions of the ever growing communist party. During the 60th, before and after the decisive events of 1965 and 1966 (the leftist coup d'état, the subsequent annihilation of the Indonesian communist party, the rise to power of Suharto and the fall of Sukarno), this friendship continued in the close (anti-communist, later Suharto critical) collaboration between the Muslims Student Association (HMI) and the Catholic Students Association (PMKRI).

Indonesian navy sunk by the Dutch in 1961 in the scuffle around Papua) were Catholics.

¹⁵ The second Indonesian prime-minister, Amir Sjarifuddin (1947-18) was a Protestant as was Simatupang, the first chief of the general staff of the Indonesian Army.

¹⁶ This itself was counter-cliché: In democratic Indonesia – 1945 – 1959 – the strongest support for Western style democracy came from the Masyumi and the Protestant and Catholic parties, while the Java based Nadlatul Ulama and the Nationalist and Communist parties supported Sukarno's idea of a guided democracy. Masyumi suffered for their stand by being dissolved by Sukarno in 1960 while the Catholic party had to choose a more adaptive leader.

But outside the political domain communications between pious Muslim (the santris) and Christians were almost non-existent. Christians found their political and cultural allies among the so called “nationalists” (who, politically, were represented by non-Muslim parties), particularly the Javanese abangan (the majority of the Javanese who were only very superficially Islamized and culturally were far away from orthodox Islam both of the “traditionalist” and the “modernist” variant¹⁷), who absolutely did not want any imposition of Islamic law on the country. Thus, they strongly supported Suharto who supported private practice of Islam (the internal Islamiization of the abangan happened under Suharto), but suppressed political Islam with a strong hand. The motto of the Christians was “Pancasila state” against all tendencies in the direction of an Islamic state, while NU and Muhammadiyah were regarded with suspicion.

3. CHANGES BEGAN UNDER SUHARTO

But things began to change. From the beginning of the 70th a small group of young Jesuit priests¹⁸ began to doubt the general Catholic line of holding on to Suharto with the

¹⁷ For “abangan” see Geertz 1960.

¹⁸ Here also belongs Father Mangunwijaya, a priest of the diocese of Semarang,, an architect and famous Indonesian novelist.

argument that he represented the forces ensuring that Indonesia would not become an Islamic state. These Catholic dissidents were appalled about the ongoing human right violations under Suharto's military backed government, and they were convinced that overall Christians would only be safe in Indonesia if they developed trusting relations with "real" Muslims. From there developed, especially through collaboration in NGOs, a growing network of inter-relations between, mostly young, Christian and Muslim Indonesians with the same political, social, and cultural ideals.

Of major influence were a growing number of open minded, pluralistic Muslim personalities – not from the abangan, but from the "santri" faction. Thus, the then minister of religion Mukti Ali sent thousands of young Muslim intellectuals to Chicago and Montreal instead of Cairo in order to study Islam. These intellectuals then came back with an open-minded understanding of Islam, often much deeper than that of traditional, narrow minded religious teachers. At the same time, the Suharto Government, for political reasons, used to sponsor formal meetings between the leaders of the religious communities. But at that time, which Catholic priest would have known a kiai or have ever seen a pesantren? Change began slowly, especially through the towering figure of Abdurrachman Wahid who incorporated a completely modern

openness and commitment to religious freedom into a deep rootedness in Javanese Islamic. As grandchild of K. H. Hashim Azhari, the founder of NU he enjoyed an extremely high standing among the santri all over the country (who kissed his hands when coming to him to ask his advice). He was completely open minded, with an inborn contempt for narrowness. At my Driyarkara School in Jakarta we had already close relations with him in the 70th. Later he became chairman of Nadlatul Ulama for 15 years where he has promoted a modern, open minded Islam among NU's youth who now form the leading edge of Indonesian Muslim intellectuals. On the other hand, there was the theologian Nurcholish Madjid¹⁹. Nurcholish had angered many Muslims leaders with his 1970 pronouncement, he still as a student leader, of "Islam yes, Islamic parties no", and his assertion that Islam demanded secularization. Up to the end – when he had become the most famous Indonesian Muslim theologian²⁰ - he was hated by hardliners. Nurcholish declared that whoever surrenders to the Absolute according to his or her conviction was a Muslim – Islam meaning "surrender" - and therefore could go to heaven. Through his Paramadina people's academy he transmitted intellectual

¹⁹ Whom I had invited in 1973 to teach Islamology at our place, still before he did his studies under Fazlur Rahman in Chicago.

²⁰ He was the one chosen in the evening of May 20, 1998, to tell Suharto that it was time to step down.

formation, an open tolerant modern Islam, to thousands of Muslim intellectuals. Here also must be mentioned the fact the Islamic State Institution (IAIN), for instance Sunan Kalijaga in Yogyakarta and Hidayat Syarifullah in Jakarta, have since the 70ths taught an open and dialogue minded Islam.

Although the 90th saw a growing discrimination against Christians, relations nevertheless slowly intensified, very much supported by Abdurrachman Wahid whose influence within the Muslim community still grew and who adamantly rejected Suharto's pro-Islam course. During the 90th visits by Catholic and Protestant ministers at pesantrens, "live-ins" by Christian students at Islamic places and the other way around became more frequent. Our Catholic bishops all do now know "real" Muslim leaders closely, there is, for instance, a personal friendship between Cardinal Julius Darmaatmadja and the NU leader K. H. Hasyim Muzadi and with the former head of Muhammadiyah, Prof. Dr. Ahmad Syaffii Ma'arif. Many Catholic parish priests have built up relations with local Muslim leaders, although at the grassroot level much more has still to be done. It was most astonishing that these relations did not suffer during the more than three years of brutal civil war among Christians and Muslims 1999-2002 in Central Sulawesi and the Molukkas.

Now the initiative to these dialogues does no longer come primarily from the Christian side. Especially after the first Bali bombings in 2002 Muslim students, f. i., invited non-Muslims to a common prayer for the victims of the bombing. Hasyim Muzadi, the head of NU, founded a “National Morality Forum”, headed by himself and Cardinal Darmaatmadja, where the heads of the most important Indonesian religions were included. This forum, for instance, visited Ambon, place of the worst Christian – Muslim atrocities, where they met with both sides. Only 10 hours after the terrible Christmas bombings in 2000 (later it was found out that they were perpetrated by people connected to the Bali bombers) a group of high profile Muslims invited Christians and Muslims. We formed an “Indonesian Peace Forum” that went to the highest authorities of the country demanding that the bombings should be thoroughly investigated (they weren’t).²¹ In the East Javanese city of Malang, some years ago, a fundamentalist evangelical group had a private ceremony cursing the holy Qur’an. News got out and there was a real danger of anti Christian riots all over East Java. But Church authorities immediately contacted the NU leadership. They took things into their hand, demanding that those who broke the law should be brought to justice

²¹ Among us was Benny Bikki, the brother of the Muslims leader Amir Bikki killed in the Tanjung Priok massacre 1984, as was Hidayat Nur Wahid, leader of the Salafi leaning Justice and Welfare Party (PKS).

and besides this, everybody be quiet. And everything stayed quiet. It is a fact that Christians facing a problem with Muslims often do not go to the police but to NU.

Relations have improved so much that Christian groups: Youth, students, a parish council when they organize a “seminar”, for instance on political ethics (“what attitude should we take towards the upcoming elections?”, “pluralism and democracy”, “human rights”), also invite representatives of the other religions. When Catholics in the provincial city of Tanjung Pinang invited me to talk about what challenges the nation, and particularly the Catholics, were facing in Indonesia, not only did the (female) Muslim Lord Mayor open the seminar, but Muslim organizations were also invited and did attend.

Dialogue also happens at the very level of local people. For instance, all big cities in Indonesia are organized (according to the Japanese system) in districts, sub-districts and local blocks (comprising about sixty families). On the block level, at National Day (August 17) and other occasions all are invited to have a “togetherness”, the men squatting in a circle while the women prepare food. Short formal speeches are given, usually about harmony among us transcending religious borders

and how we cope with the problems of a big city.²² In this way all get to know effectively that there are members of minority religions among them and that they are fully “one of us”. A very well accepted form of dialogue is called “silaturahmi”, “making acquaintance” by appealing to Muslim friendliness. For instance, the local Catholic parish priests, together with some lay members of the community visit an important Muslim personality around his parish. Such a visit is quite easy. One visits and says, one wants to silaturahmi, f. i. the new parish priest wants to introduce himself as the leader of the local Catholic community. He might ask how relations with the Muslims are, ask that if there are problems please always to contact him. Such visits never are refused and in 75% of the cases lead to positive personal relations between the people involved.

4. INTELLECTUAL AND THEOLOGICAL DISCOURSE

There are a substantial number of dialogues going on among Indonesian intellectuals about moral-political questions. Indonesia has traveled thru a history full of difficulties, facing greatest problems, and always coming out a little bit

²² I myself am regarded as one of the “elders” of our RT which consists mostly of Muslims and have to give a little speech. In this way I got befriended with Pak Amien, the keeper of the big mosque close by.

better. Thus things to talk about abound: National identity, the crucial, partly tragic points in the nations history, including terrible violations of human rights, the questions of Islam (brought up by Muslims), democracy, liberalism, social justice, humanism, revolution and legality, state and religions, is there an Islamic state?, republicanism, amendments of the constitution, neo-liberalism, globalization, socialism, national sovereignty versus internationalization, Indonesian versus local culture, position of the Javanese (who are politically and culturally dominant) in Indonesia, religious freedom, proselytism ("kristianisasi").

In all these dialogues – at universities, seminars specially organized by academic or political organizations, at events organized by the state or business or by students (under Suharto often clandestinely) – intellectuals of all religions meet and participate without any differentiation. One gets involved, often deeply emotionally, in these national and human questions. This framework also has the implication that these questions are not treated from a narrow religious or sectarian-dogmatic view – although such view might be brought into the discussion by participants, - but because of common human and national values.

A special kind of dialogue that has developed over the last 30 years, not least thru the influence of Abdurrachman Wahid,

is the dialogue of “pluralist” or “liberal” Muslims and Christians on how to face fundamentalism and how to develop Islam and Christianity as a religion of the 21st century. There is a kind of intellectual brotherhood between “progressive” Muslims and Christians where they try to defend themselves against attacks by fundamentalist. The fact that the Catholic Church in the Second Vatican Council declared that not baptized people can go to heaven and that Catholics should respect and even value positively all positive elements in other religions are well known and admired in Muslim intellectual circles – especially since the big majority of Indonesian (Calvinist) Protestants believe that only baptized people (very often: only people of their sect) can be saved. Catholic and Muslim open-minded intellectuals and theologians often feel that they really share the same values and communicate with each other with ease, much easier than with their own respective fundamentalists. There is very often an easy understanding between Catholic²³ and Muslims theologians and sometimes it is self-ironically called “dialogue between the converted”. These dialogues influence respective academic teaching. At

²³ Of course, Protestants also take part. But the difference between Catholics, having shaped by Vatican II, and Protestants, very often hardline or evangelically tending although trying to open up, is quite obvious and commented on by Muslims. Since quite some time Protestants use “shalom” as greetings among Christians, as an identity pointer like “asalamalaikum ...” among Muslims, but this has not really got hold among Catholics.

the Islamic State University in Jakarta and Yogyakarta hermeneutics are taught (and decried by hard liners as Christian subversion), Muslim use words like theology, f. i. "theology of liberation" ("teologi pembebasan" which is much admired among Muslim intellectuals) or "theology of development" ("teologi pembangunan"), or "spirituality" ("spiritualitas") are used (while, at the same time, many Christian key terms have been taken over from Islamic Arabic).

III. WHAT TO DIALOGUE ABOUT?

1. THE LETTER OF THE 138

What lessons could we learn from these Indonesian experiences? Muslim-Christian dialogue depends, of course, on who is involved and what one wants to achieve by. The letter of the 138 is an offer of a dialogue on a very deep level, a dialogue that enters the deep convictions and values that united us. This dialogue is so extremely desirable precisely on the level of the letter of the 138: Religion to religion. It can show that, otherwise than was traded thru the centuries, both religions do share convictions, truths, about God and that we humans should respect and accept each other in a positive. That is all but natural. It is a break thru which makes it possible for both religions to see each other positive, not in the shallow way of secular culture where "we should accept each other

and not allow religion to separate us.” This is a most serious break thru because the 138 speak before God.

Of course, it also shows that dialogue about questions of aqidah are no suitable matter for dialogue. If the situation is right, sharing about what one’s belief means for oneself can be a liberating experience, but a dialogue about whether Jesus is Lord or the Qur’an really God’s revelation just is not possible. These central beliefs are not to our disposition. It is different from dialogue between Christians of different confessions, for instance about what is essential for the Church or what sacraments would mean. Christians are united in their belief in the triune God and on their holy scripture. We have, it seems, to accept humbly that we differ irreconcilable on essential beliefs about God and we must leave it over to God. But these differences make the statements in the letter of the 138 the more relevant, namely that we both know ourselves to be in obedience under the one God and that God demands that we respect and love each other.

2. OVERCOMING DISTRUST

The situation is different when dialogue is meant to overcome distrust and fear of each other. This is the situation in most countries where Christian minorities live among Muslims. There the most important goal of inter-religious dialogue

is to get to know each other. Thus, to lose the feeling that the other is something alien, to be mistrusted, a little bit sinister, potentially dangerous. What one talks about is not important. Small talk, or general attestations of good intention, of some commonly owned values, could be the beginning. In Indonesia this the fundamental rule for all communication on grassroot level. You never come directly to the point.²⁴ Thus, after being friendly with each other, one leaves, but one has brought over what one wants in the first place, f. i. opens regular channels of communication. Next time you come together you meet like old friends and slowly they creep into a relationship where they can mention more difficult things.

3. CULTURE AND POLITICAL IDEALS

In Indonesia culture and nationalism are the great uniting factors. Both are Javanese, both are Ambonese, thus "religion should not separate each other". Commitment to political values can deeply unite people from different religions. In Indonesia, the strong determination to end Dutch colonial rule and establish a free, just and prosperous Indonesia united peoples

²⁴ Indonesians love it if one does not come to the point at all - of course under the assumption the point is something a bit embarrassing or difficult or slightly unpleasant. High school of Indonesian communications most appreciated if one can come to the point while seemingly only talking generalities.

of different ethnicities, ideologies, and religions. Thus, in Indonesia the political dimension was highly instrumental in having the Christian communities accepted by the huge Muslim majority. Indonesian Christian played a significant part in the independence war 1945-1949. The fact that Christianity came with the colonialists up to this day never is played up, even by Muslim hardliners.

Thus it is extremely helpful when religion is not the only emotional anchor. Later Indonesian intellectuals, without differentiating according to religion, got involved in questions like national unity, social justice (its absence), democracy, political repression, violation of human rights, perceived moral degradation, poverty, all kind of discriminations, corruption, narcotics, pornography, the challenge of the culture of consumerism.²⁵ Thus what traditionally in Catholic philosophy would be called "the common good" of the Indonesian people is what, in Indonesia, unites people of different religions, on all social and cultural levels, in common goals and values, feel

²⁵ I am often invited by Muslims to speak about questions of political ethics: democracy, human rights, religious pluralisms, our state philosophy of Pancasila, democratic reformation, corruption, leadership, but also capitalism, neo-liberalism, globalization and its impact on religions. I had several times to speak about "Islam and democracy", "Islam and human rights", conflict between religions.

themselves as one and thus makes them overcome their religious tensions.

4. HUMAN RIGHTS, RELIGIOUS FREEDOM AND PLURALISM

For Christian minorities, the questions of human rights, specifically of religious freedom, and of pluralism are of crucial importance. Indonesia can look on a tradition of 64 years of almost uninterrupted, often enthusiastic discourse and controversies, and with considerable progress. Today Indonesia is a functioning democracy, where all rights contained in the UN Declaration on Human Rights from 1948 have been integrated in the amended constitution now in force in Indonesia. It may be added that all post-Suharto governments had dedicated support by Islamic parties.

Such not always the situation. But the divide was not on religious, but on cultural lines. Java-based political parties – the “Sukarnoists” – were from the beginning skeptical towards “Western,” “liberal” democracy, while the Sumatra- and Western-Java based strongly Islamic Masyumi and the (small) Socialist Party, together with the small Catholic and Protestant parties were staunch defenders of “real” democracy. Thus, the widely held discussion whether Islam is compatible with democracy seems strangely out of place in Indonesia. Now, after 51 years of authoritarian regimes (Sukarno’s

“guided democracy” and Suharto’s “New Order”) there is an almost 100% national consensus that Indonesia must be a democracy.²⁶

The discussion about human rights developed on the same lines. A Constitutional Assembly had already, in 1958, before it was dissolved by Sukarno, ratified, unanimously (!), more than twenty human rights in the process of writing a new constitution, about twenty others were still in the process and 16 others were marked for later treatment. But since 1945 the “Javanese” political wing has disparagingly put human rights as “Western individualism” in opposition to Eastern collectivism and the insistence on rights in opposition to social justice. As was the ideology of the Suharto when human rights talk could bring one into prison and only a few dared clearly to come out in favor of human rights²⁷. Thus, the opponents of human rights in Indonesia were not Muslim voices (it was the military and the Javanese adherent of a so called integralistic state). In 1998, only a few months of the fall of

²⁶ The only bigger, but non-political Muslim organization rejecting democracy is Hizbuth Tahrir. Besides them, only former military and old Sukarnoists (including some of the family of the late president Sukarno) still grumble about democracy

²⁷ Among the now rector of Jakarta’s Islamic state university Prof. Komaruddin Hidayat, of course Abdurrachman Wahid, but the now Indonesia’s Foreign Minister Hassan Wirayuda.

Suharto, when Muslim politician had their greatest political influence, the whole 1948 declaration of the UN was given constitutional status, the only dissenting voices being the mentioned old time (Sukarnoist and Suhartoist) groups. It is noteworthy that the famous Cairo declaration of Human rights is unknown in Indonesia, except for a few experts, and never played any role in the human rights discussion.

But there was a problem. The 1945 constitution indeed contained the right to freedom of religious belief and worship, although in a truly short formulation. Two times (1958 and 1968) the full text of § 18 of the Declaration of the UN could not make it, because Muslim politicians rejected it. But since 1999 the full § 18 has been put into the “amended” Constitution. In fact, there had been ongoing, sometimes heated discussions, with, on the one hand, Christians resolutely rejecting pressure from the Suharto government to accept a statement to the effect that missionary activity should not be directed towards people “already having a religion” (meaning belonging to the officially recognized religions), Muslims on the other hand accusing Christians of proselytism. These positions still exist, but there has been considerable progress, also because of patient dialogue and discourse among intellectuals. The big Christian Churches (but not some evangelical groups) accept that proselytism is a misuse of religious freedom, while even

more conservative Muslim would accept that if a person seriously, after deep consideration and not under any pressure, came to the conviction that God calls her into another religion, this should be accepted, although with pain in the heart (in fact, change of religion was never restricted in Indonesia). Thus the crucial point of religious freedom is the freedom to convert, and this freedom will be acceptable if no proselytism is involved. In my opinion – which is, maybe not precisely in these words, agreed upon by the Indonesian Catholic Church – a person has a right not to be pestered in her religious convictions and habits. Thus, approaching people, even polity, and asking them to consider another religion is, ethically not acceptable. Mission should be done (and must be done, it belongs to the commands Jesus gave the Church) solely by becoming “witness to the Gospel”, thus by our Christian way of living, communicating, acting in society, doing our job. If then a person comes and wants to know “the reason of your hope” (1 Pe 3, 15), we can explain our faith and guide the person should she want it on the way to enter the Church thru baptism. These things are dialogued about among Christians and Muslims in Indonesia, and this dialogue is very fruitful. It surely has implication for the understanding and practice of missionary work (and is, therefore, especially for more evangelical Protestants, often not yet acceptable).

The sharpest controversy was about pluralism. This discussion goes to the heart of the identity of the monotheistic religions. It was kindled by some Muslim adherents of pluralism whose position was influenced by (the Muslim thinkers) Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Frithjof Schuon, but also by the positions on pluralism of the like of Paul Knitter and John Hick (some of whose books have been translated into Indonesian).²⁸ Their position could be summarized as the assertion that no religion should claim exclusive truth for itself, that all religions were similarly true and not true since they all were valid expressions of the transcendent religiosity of humans. This “pluralism” is often opposed to “exclusivism” (we have exclusively the whole truth and only who shares our belief can go to heaven) and “inclusivism” (we have the full truth but adherents of other beliefs will also be saved; the less rigid inclusive position – as is held by the Catholic Church – claims the

²⁸ See for instance Paul F. Knitter, *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Toward the World Religions*, Maryknoll NY, Orbis Books 1985; H. Hick, *A Christian Theology of Religion: The Rainbow of Faiths*, Westminster: L John, 1995; also: Paul F. Knitter/John Hick, *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness. Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*, Maryknoll NY, Orbis Books, 1987. To Raimundo Pannikar see *Intrareligious Dialogue*, New York, Paulist 1978. For an Islamic pluralism see: Seyyed Hossein Nasr, 1995 *The Need for a Sacred Science*, London: Routledge; Frithjof Schuon 1984, *Transcendent Unity of Religions*, London, Theosophical Publishing House.

full truth for itself but acknowledges elements of truth in other religions).

In 2005 the semi-official Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI) issued a number of fatwas against modernistic tendencies within Islam, one of them condemning pluralism. After harsh criticism from many Muslim intellectuals MUI explained themselves. They did not refer to other religions in Indonesia – against their existence MUI had nothing – but against teachings (by Muslims) that all religions were the same and adherents of all religions could go to heaven.²⁹ Now the word “pluralism” is usually reserved – as it should – for a social attitude, namely the cheerful acceptance of the fact that among us live people of different faiths, acknowledgment of this fact, together respect towards these others, readiness to work together with them for the benefit of society; we even might,

²⁹ Against my intention I got personally involved. During a long, good discussion with Dr. Adian Husseini – known as Muslim hardliner – we had touched pluralism. Correctly he reported (in an Islamic newspaper and the internet) that I rejected pluralism (in the sense of Hick/Knitter) and adhered to “inclusivism”. Thus, when attacked MUI answered that even Father Franz Magnis-Suseno condemned pluralism, and I had to make my position clear. Now, following Benedict XVI – I reject the name pluralism for the position of Hick/Knitter (if all religions essentially are the same, where is the plurality?) and call this position – which I reject – “relativism”. My experience with “normal” (not specifically intellectual) Muslims is that the following wording always gets full consent: Our Christian and Islamic beliefs have many things in common, but there are irreconcilable differences which we must humbly accept, and we leave the final question of truth over to God.

then, be able to learn something for our own faith from others. There is a broad consensus in Indonesia that such pluralism is essential for the existence of Indonesia (the most plural country of the world). Nevertheless, the fatwa of MUI gave the word pluralism a bad after taste for normal Muslims which is quite regrettable.

The real problem now under hard and controversy discussion has arisen from the case of Achmadiyah (and other local Islamic sects). Achmadiyah lived since 1928 peacefully in Indonesia, but in 2005 their premises were attacked by mobs incited and lead by vigilante groups of Fron Pembela Islam (FBI, "Islamic Defense Front"), their mosques and sometimes also personal property were destroyed and in some places, they had to leave their villages and now live in camps. Police did only protect the Achmadis against direct bodily violence, the state remaining silent. While progressive, liberal Muslim groups immediately strongly condemned the attacks, moderate mainstream Muslims (which would have spoken out against attacks on Christians) remained silent.³⁰ The

³⁰ A Government decree in 2008 (SKB Tiga Menteri of June 11, 2008) finally allowed them to practice their kind of Islam within their own circle, but they are forbidden to out themselves in any way. MUI and Muslim hardliners demanded that Achmadiyah stop calling themselves "Islam"; would they declare themselves as another religion (f. i. "Achmadiyah") they would be left in peace, same as the Bahais who can freely practice their beliefs.

distinction that a religious authority has the right to proclaim what is within one's religion and what not (thus that MUI had the right to declare that Achmadiyah was outside Islam), but that such a community still has the right to live and worship according to what they believe is the way of God has not yet really taken root.³¹ Thus religious freedom, even tolerance, within Islam itself is still a far shot. Here should be mentioned that some 16 years ago the Protestants wanted to have the Jehovah Witnesses banned in Indonesia.

The controversy around Achmadiyah has brought into focus another extremely important object of dialogue: Rejection, on principle, of violence on religious grounds. There is a growing consensus among Indonesian intellectuals that violence on religious ground can under no circumstances be justified. Of course, this is only one instance of the ethical principle that conflicts may not be solved by force or violence. In Indonesia, with her background of immense violence during her more than 60 years of history, this consciousness is growing. But it has to be repeated and again, because society - this

³¹ I personally always bring this distinction up with a Muslim public, knowing quite well that not only I have to face deep antipathy, if not real hatred, for Achmadiyah, but the immediate reaction – the moment I touch on this subject; they have to listen, only later they can say something – of 'this is an internal Muslim controversy, what the heck does this Catholic think meddling in inner Islamic affairs. But almost always I can get the decisive point over and, at least, make the audience think about it.

is a cultural trait - tends to resort to violence when a certain span of tolerance for diversity is felt to be exceeded. Their dialogue on all social levels and in the appropriate form will slowly lead to change, thus to greater tolerance. In Indonesian language - understood by all - we must remind ourselves unceasingly to behave always in a civilized way.

TWO CONCLUSIONS

A first conclusion: Inter-religious dialogue, and certainly Christian – Muslim dialogue, depends on the participants. There is the “dialogue between the converted,” not at all to be ridiculed. Although different in their core beliefs, they really understand and appreciate each other, because they unite in deep rooted values, not on a merely humanistic basis, but because of their beliefs. They not only strengthen each other against the animosity of the “not yet converted,” but they radiate their values to those spiritually closer to them and thus will have a longtime effect within their communities. Then there is dialogue and discourse between open minded, mainstream intellectuals of different religious intensity and orientations. These dialogues, informally taking place the whole time within the many NGOs, formally in the many seminars, or when students invite speakers, lead to political, social, and cultural openness, to the breaking down of prejudices. Even

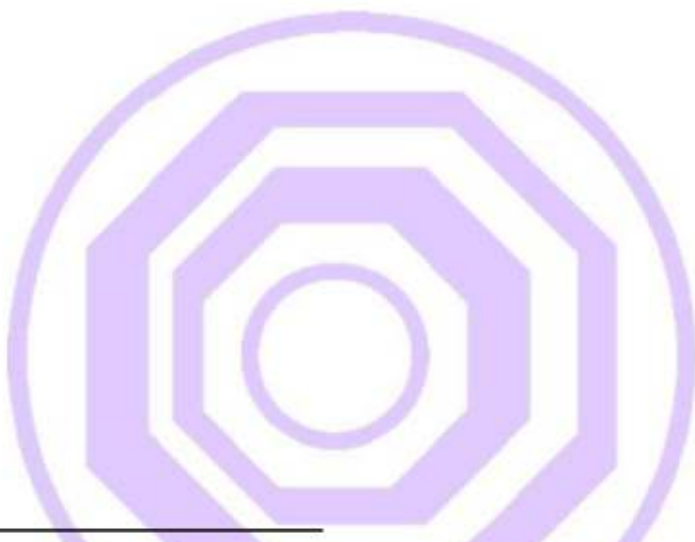
friendly encounters, silaturahmi, with unbending hardliners might have long positive effects.

The second, most crucial point. If we look what really are the deeper values that make inter-religious dialogue succeed – meaning: coming to a better understanding, increasing tolerance – then there are two human core values that always stand in the background: Kindness and sympathy, and justice and fairness. People know deep down that hatred is bad and are ready, if approached in the right way, to let their sympathy have its way. And people know that they must be fair and just. People open because their hearts are deep down good and because they will not keep up attitudes they realize are not fair or not just.

These two virtues make possible what Rawls³² would call overlapping consensus. Their explicit values and normative ideas might be far apart, but deep down they know they should never close their hearts, and they should change what is not just. We all know how central both values are for Islam and Christianity. Thus Muslim – Christian dialogue should always proceed from these virtues. Only real, hopeless

³² See John Rawls 1993, *Political Liberalism*, New York: Columbia University Press; and also, his last book: *Justice as Fairness. A Restatement*, Cambridge, Mass./London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press 2001.

extremists close their hearts completely to the hearts that call for compassion and we should never give up even on them.³³



³³ What makes potential terrorists so difficult to bring back is that they, because of security reasons, have broken all contact, even with ideologically close allies. They cannot be approached; nobody can involve them in a discourse. Thus in Germany in the 70th the Bader Meinhof Gang had, because police was on their heels, broken all contact even with their former leftist co-ideologues and finally lived in a completely unreal world, had completely unrealistic ideas about German society (f. i. that they only needed some prodding to revolt). In Indonesia the police applied with some effect the same mechanism. They treated convicted terrorist relatively mildly and brought relative hardline Muslims teachers to dialogue with them. Some of them realized that terrorism was wrong. One of them wrote a very effective book of how he got rid of his terrorist ideals (Nasir Abbas 2005, *Mem-bongkar Jamaah Islamiyah. Pengakuan Mantan Anggota Jamaah Islamiyah*, Jakarta: Grafindo).