

Preaching the Good News in the Islamic Context
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I am a friar living in Indonesia where we have the most number of Muslims in the world. Islam in Indonesia is not just the dominant religion but Islam is the most influential element that shapes the country's culture and politics. Preference for Islam is considered the usual way of doing things. That is just the way things are done for most of the people and those in the minority have just to accept the way it is. A classic example is the case of Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, known popularly as Ahok. Ahok is a Christian politician of Chinese descent. He was the vice-governor of Jakarta, the nation's capital, in tandem with Joko Widodo, fondly called Jokowi. When Jokowi was elected the republic's president, Ahok assumed the governorship of Jakarta. He continued the program of reform and clean government of Jokowi with his own leadership style which many find brutally honest and straightforward. He was non-traditional in the way of his governance, unlike many leaders who in the effort to please all sectors are unable to implement reforms and ambitious infra-structure plans, he was able to deliver services to the ordinary people only dreamt of before. His accomplishments and way of doing things have fascinated people beyond Jakarta. This is another presidentiable in the making. The Muslim political elite were very much threatened by this thought. To have a Christian governor for the capital city is already very hard to accept. To have a Christian president in a country that prides itself to have the most number of Muslims in the world is utterly unthinkable for them. (For Filipinos to have a Protestant president is already very unusual indeed, having a Muslim president of the Philippines is also unthinkable at least for the present time.) Thus, the conspiracy among the powerful politicians in, connivance with the judiciary, arose to cook up a case of blasphemy against him. They simply played the Muslim card. Radical groups, such as groups aligned Al-Qaeda, ISIS and other terrorist organizations with their narrow interpretation of Islam are just too willing to enter into the picture with their fundamentalist propaganda and their ability to sow terror among the people. Eventually, Ahok got convicted and jailed. But among the minority, followers of the non-Muslim religions and the silent majority of moderate Islam, there is still that fervent hope that Ahok's political career does not end in jail. Someday, he will rise again.

I have to emphasize that constitutionally Indonesia is *not* a Muslim State, such as Malaysia, Brunei, and Saudi Arabia. Muslim states apply Shariah Laws. The Republic of Indonesia is founded on the Five State Principles called *Pancasila*. The first principle upholds belief in God and not belief in the God of a particular religion. There is no public persecution based on religion in Indonesia. During President Soeharto's era, that is after President Soekarno, all militant groups were suppressed and became the target of persecution. There was no true democracy under Soeharto just like during the time of Marcos after he declared martial law. When Soeharto's regime ended, the militant groups resurrected, and until now their numbers continue to grow, particularly among Muslim adherents. Muslim politicians have used these radical militant groups to their advantage, especially when confronted with non-Muslim or non-religious and liberal political rivals.

President Jokowi inherited this problem of the past. He needs to confront this increasing militarization of fundamentalist groups. There are a number of generals who never stop on eyeing on the presidency considering that previous presidents have come from their ranks. Jokowi's predecessor, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono was himself from the ranks of the military. It was common knowledge that when his own son, Agus, ran for governorship of Jakarta, Yudyono used these militant groups and he was perceived as the mastermind behind the smear campaign against Ahok that eventually ended him in prison. Why are these groups successful in swaying the minds of the masses? These fundamentalist Muslim groups are influenced by a number of popular preachers. They are both fiery and funny in their preaching. Capitalizing on the growing economic frustration of the masses and learning from the Muslim clerics of Afghanistan and Iraq, they held successful campaigns of indoctrination both demonizing and poking fun at non-Muslim believers. They have a popular appeal. Whereas before Muslims and non-Muslims lived in harmony. It was normal that Christians visit Muslim neighbours during Idul Fitri and vice-versa, Muslims celebrate with Christians during Christmas. These popular preachers have been known to issue a *fatwa*, forbidding Muslim to even say "Merry Christmas" to their Christian friends and neighbours. Suddenly, the Indonesia that we know as tolerant, is not anymore.

The latest survey presented during the meeting of Major Superiors attended by our Vicar of the Provincial to Indonesia, Edmund C. Nantes, O.P. showed the rising problem of radicalization. Indonesia, erstwhile called by Pope Benedict as the most tolerant, most open Muslim nation in the world is slowly being intolerant. The Wahid Institute in a study published in 2016 had the following findings:

1. 59.9% of Muslims said that there are certain groups that they particularly hate. Those hated groups are non-Muslims, Chinese and the communist. 92,2% of the 59,9% said they do not like that someone from the hated groups to be their leader in society. 82,4% of the 59,9% even said they do not like those hated groups to be their neighbours. There is a growing desire to live in an Islamic village.
2. Only 7.7% (11 milion of Indonesian Muslims) who would like to use violent as a means to achieve their goals.
3. The local government officials are the people who usually court the radical groups to support their campaign. They usually issue local ordinations which are so discriminative to please the Muslim majority to the disadvantage of minorities.

What has put Indonesia in this current state of affairs?

First, it is due to the totalitarian regime of Soeharto. Professor C. Geertz teaches that there are three types of Muslims in Indonesia. *Santri* (the clerical type: very devout Muslim), *Priyayi* (the aristocratic type: the educated or intellectual Muslim) and *Abangan* (the nominal Muslim). Soeharto is a nominal Muslim, an *abangan* type. He does not really care much about the Sharia Laws. His is a brand of Islam that has accommodated many indigenous traditional Javanese ways. All that Soeharto cared about was his grip on political power! If a group posed a threat, even if it was a Muslim group, that was suppressed. Now that he is gone, these various militant groups return with a vengeance.

Second, when these radical groups become influential, politicians court them to gain voters. They are the ones who finance their activities and turn a blind eye to their blatant disregard for the plurality of Indonesian society, safeguarded by the constitution, in order to advance their political ambition.

Third, the militant clerics and popular preachers easily sway the mind of the masses because of the general ignorance of Muslims about their own beliefs coupled with a large sector of the population which still experience income inequality. The followers of the militants are usually

coming from the most marginalized segment of the Muslim society. They are deprived of economic and educational opportunities. They are made to believe that by applying strictly the Shariah Laws, prosperity will come for all. This is the will of Allah! We should be faithful to Allah and achieve this goal by all means, including violence against all non-believers of Islam.

Evangelization?

When I am asked by the organizers to dwell on the topic of “preaching the Good News in an Islamic context,” I am once again led to reflect on the ministry of dialogue that I have been pursuing since I returned to Indonesia to establish our presence. I ponder these questions: “Is dialogue possible in this situation? Should I continue this ministry of dialogue?” What is evangelization and dialogue in the context of Indonesia? Many such questions come into my mind. May I share the following realizations:

First, if we want to preach the Good News, then, we have to focus on educating the people. For Dominicans, to educate is to evangelize, and to evangelize is to educate. The word education, we all know, comes from the Latin word, *educere*, which means to bring forth. The Republic of Indonesia was born out of the concept of pluralism and tolerance, based in the belief that God unites us all and not divide. Indonesia is for all ethnic groups and religions. The official national motto of Indonesia is “Bhinneka Tunggal Ika. The phrase is Old Javanese and is translated as "Unity in Diversity." Education in Indonesia can “educate”, bring forth something that is already within the national consciousness: while being different we all can live in harmony as one people. Malays, Papuans, Dayaks, Chinese, Balinese, Flores people are not less and not more than Indonesian as the other ethnic groups. The first native Archbishop of Indonesia, Soegijapranata SJ, considered also as one of the founders of the Indonesian nation, is proud to promote the axiom: “100% Indonesian. 100% Catholic!” Education as evangelization is the best and long-lasting way to eradicate sectarianism and intolerance. Jesus Christ preached love for all and accepted all peoples. He remonstrated his disciples for wanting to call down fire on the Samaritans. One of his best examples in his Gospel are Samaritans.

Second, education is for all. Catholic schools in Indonesia do not discriminate against Muslims. We do not just accept them, we can go all the way to even offer scholarship to truly deserving Muslims who have the potential to become good leaders. Let them experience the best ideas of the Christian mind and let them experience the context of the minority. When they graduate and become successful, they understand how it is to be in the minority and eventually exert effort to do something when those in the minority are discriminated and their rights trampled. Our partners in CRID, the Center for Research in Inter-religious Dialogue in Indonesia. They too are people whom we have given scholarship in the Philippines to enrol in UST and in Silsilah. They are our defenders. They open doors to us that otherwise would remain shut because we are non-Muslims.

Third, we have to engage in the economic struggle of the people. The option of the poor cannot just remain a slogan. It cannot be denied that most of those who are wealthy in Indonesia are ethnic Chinese and mostly Christians. Works of charity and action to promote justice and peace go hand in hand with the task of evangelization. As soon as we established the Rumah Santo Dominikus we also established the credit union, *Bahtera*, where both Christians and Muslims can hand in hand work towards economic development. In modest ways such as this can the Church gain the respect and trust of Muslims.

Fourth, explicit proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ remains a vital part of evangelization. Harmony among peoples does not mean giving up one’s core belief in Jesus as our Lord and Saviour. Catechetical instruction should be strong in our ministry. We do not just aim to increase the number of Catholics in Indonesia but we want to have quality Catholics who know and

live their faith. In Indonesia, to be a Catholic one must attend at least nine months of catechumenal formation before one can be admitted for baptism.

Fifth, the ministry of dialogue is essentially the art of friendship. In friendship we do not speak much about doctrine but it is more a sharing of life: drinking coffee together, sharing a cigarette, going on a trip. Simple acts of kindness and sharing can form long standing friendships. Can you count among your friends any Muslim? A friend is a person who can stand by you no matter what happens. Many times we are saved due to our Muslim friends. With friendship, we can do a lot of networking and collaboration to advance our mission of evangelization in a Muslim country. Jesus made friends with various types of people, and especially remarkable with tax collectors, prostitutes and Samaritans.

Last, but not the least, our mentality as Christians needs conversion too. We tend to be indifferent or even close our minds to the situation and sufferings of our Muslim brothers and sisters. We do not care because they do not belong to us. During this time of mass migration in the world because of the flight from terrorism among radical fundamentalist Islam, it takes a lot of courage for many European nations to keep their boundaries and their doors open. How much more can we take so that our way of life is not swallowed by the newcomers. Once again, we see the rise of Neo-nazis and far-right groups. Violent radicalism has also taken root among many Christian groups. This development invites us all to guard against the temptation to fight violent radicalism with equally virulent taking up of arms. The war on drugs in this country has gone to terrible proportions. Violence has always terrible consequences. “No dialogue, no peace. Know Jesus, know dialogue, know peace.”

The Dominican friars in Indonesia belong to the Dominican Province of the Philippines. The rich educational tradition of our Province has much to contribute to Indonesia. The Philippines which is the most predominantly Catholic country in Asia is involved in the most predominantly Muslim country in the world! Our Dominican heritage unites us in our common desire to evangelize through education. This special means of evangelization is much needed in Indonesia at a time when radicalism is on the rise. The Good News has become even more relevant than ever before. In Kalimantan, the local church has a dream. Second to Flores, Kalimantan has the most number of Catholics in a predominantly Muslim country. In this area bigger than the Philippines there is not a single Catholic university. From time to time we can hold public forums for dialogue where a thousand or so participants may attend. But the presence of a Catholic university is the most stable and effective way of doing dialogue leading to evangelization among Christians and Muslims as well. Muslims have long recognized the value of Christian education. Even wealthy Muslims choose to enrol their own children to Christian schools. These are potential leaders of tomorrow. Let us take an active part in building the local church in Kalimantan that is educated, open to dialogue and progress.

I am pretty confident that through these five points, evangelization can make a big difference in Indonesia, especially in Kalimantan.