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Calvinism and Islam

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Editorial

For three weeks in August, I was on holiday in The Netherlands. It struck me that there was no day without Islam being a news item. My country is obviously struggling with the place this religion has in society. One of the political parties with a high level of coverage in the media is the *Partij voor de Vrijheid* (Party for the Freedom) led by Geert Wilders. This party has a very radical anti-Islam standpoint. Mr. Wilders wants, for example, to have the Koran banned as an illegal book; public presence of Islam tightly controlled by the authorities; and every effort made to keep the number of Muslims immigrating to The Netherlands low. It is impossible to ignore this radical opinion in Dutch society. Mr. Wilders' party is too influential for that. It was second in the results for the European election and in polls about a Dutch general election the party also does well. If there were to be elections now it could well be that they would be the second party in Parliament. The other political parties vary in their reactions but some try to accommodate negative opinions of Islam as well. It can be said that The Netherlands has a problem with Muslims and as such with Islam. In Western Europe this is not unique but still the situation in The Netherlands may be more problematic than anywhere else.

The Netherlands today can by no means be regarded as a Calvinist country the way it was in the 17th century. That was the time when–either thanks to or despite (opinion differs on this) the dominance of the Reformed faith–The Netherlands was a safe haven for immigrants, among them many Jews. There was a degree of tolerance that made this possible. There was also a high degree of integration into society of many of the newcomers. Other immigrants lived very much on their own, keeping their presence in Dutch society low profile.

History does not repeat itself and the situation of the 17th century has little similarity with the present situation. It would however be interesting to see how Dutch Calvinism played its role in the 17th century with so many immigrants coming into the country. But that is not the theme of this edition of *Reformed World*. Nevertheless, it is because of the situation in The Netherlands and because of the Calvin anniversary year that the authors for this edition of *Reformed World* were asked to reflect on Islam against the background of Calvin and Calvinism.

It is obvious though that Islam plays no explicit role in Calvin's writings and that it would be difficult to write a book about Calvin and Islam in the same way as recently has been done about Luther and Islam.[1] Therefore, the authors of this edition of *Reformed World* have developed the theme "Calvinism and Islam" in an implicit rather than explicit way. The joint focus is on the position of Jesus in the Islamic tradition and on seeking a sense of proximity between Christianity and Islam. Two of the five articles are written from within, or focusing on, Indonesia as the country with the highest number of Muslims in the world. Two other articles offer a more general introduction to interreligious dialogue with Islam.

The fifth article is, strictly-speaking, outside the theme. It is about Calvin in Havana. On Reformation Day this year, the Presbyterian Church in Cuba will unveil a bust of John Calvin in one of Havana's public parks. The World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) has been involved in this project and it is interesting to hear how Calvin "integrates" into Cuban society.

It has been noted that the period between the publication of editions of *Reformed World* is longer now. That is true. WARC's Executive Committee has decided that from this year on there will be three instead of four editions per year. The decision was made for financial reasons but is also consistent with efforts to ensure high- quality editorial content.

Last but not least, this edition includes for the first time the names of the members of an editorial advisory board. This too was a decision taken by WARC's Executive Committee. We are grateful to the members of this board for their willingness to accept this position. Their involvement is a matter of ongoing discussion within the board itself but WARC hopes that these eminent scholars will help guarantee the quality of this publication.

Douwe Visser

[1] Adam S. Francisco, Martin Luther and Islam: A study in Sixteenth Century Polemics and Apologetics, Leiden 2007.

"Who Do You Say That I am?"
The Christological Question Yesterday and Today

Paul E. Capetz

Recently in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), a controversy over christological doctrine has arisen that has prompted calls for a list of "essential tenets" to be drawn up to which ministers and candidates for the ministry would have to subscribe. The particular occasion for the recent controversy is the increasing awareness of living in a religiously plural world and the question whether all persons must convert to Christianity as a condition of their salvation. This essay argues that liberals and conservatives in the American church are unnecessarily polarized on account of an insufficient attention on the part of both to the history of christological discussion. Moreover, the nature of a genuine Reformed theology includes both a conservative emphasis upon being grounded in tradition and a liberal emphasis upon a willingness to revise tradition. Suggestions are made for how to approach the contemporary issues facing the church today in a manner that is faithful to this understanding of Reformed theology.

Introduction

According to Mark's gospel, Jesus asked his disciples: "Who do you say that I am?" Peter's response, "You are the Christ," has been reaffirmed by Christians throughout the ages as their basic confession of faith (Mk. 8:29). With this confession the church first emerged onto the stage of ancient history as a distinctive religious movement proclaiming that Jesus is not only the longed-for messiah (Greek: "Christ") of Jewish expectation but also the saviour of humanity who fulfils the religious longings of the non-Jewish peoples (Rom 1:14, 16). Yet Christology was a problematic topic for the early church on account of Jesus' execution; indeed, the idea of a crucified messiah was an oxymoron[1]. Immediately following upon Peter's confession, we read of a dispute between Peter and Jesus over precisely what it means to be the messiah. Apparently, Peter didn't like the idea of a suffering messiah and took Jesus to task for suggesting such an outrageous thing (Mk. 8:31-33). This raises the question of what Peter actually meant by his original Christological declaration. Even though Peter's answer to the question of Jesus' identity has been paradigmatic for Christians, as soon as the confession of faith in Jesus as the Christ had been made, controversy over its proper interpretation broke out. Apparently, the question and the answer to it have never been easy or simple matters.

[1] The apostle Paul captures well how odd the early Christian message appeared to his contemporaries: "We preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles" (1 Cor. 1:23).

Complicating the controversy are the related issues of scripture's authority, the status of the church's creeds and confessions, and also the meaning of Trinitarian doctrine. Moreover, whatever we say about Christ has its counterpart in a doctrine of salvation (soteriology); our beliefs about the "person" of Christ are systematically related to our beliefs about the "work" of Christ (to use the distinction of traditional dogmatics). One sees this inter-relation in the current debate: suggesting that non-Christians might be saved apart from faith in Christ (a soteriological proposal) calls into question certain ideas about the absolute uniqueness of Jesus (a Christological claim). It thus appears that the controversy over Jesus' person is just the tip of the iceberg and that underneath it are a host of theological problems which are difficult to sort out, let alone resolve.

Clearly, these issues are urgent because the United States is becoming religiously more diverse. In recent decades immigrants from all over the world have brought religious traditions to our shores with which most Americans hitherto have had no personal contact. Reformed Christians who live in Africa, Asia, or the Middle East are no doubt more experienced than we are in addressing the challenges posed by a multi-religious culture. But Presbyterians in the United States are surely not alone in having to face disputed questions about how best to understand our basic Christological confession. For that reason, I shall use our example to illustrate a larger point about the nature of theological reflection in the Reformed tradition. While Reformed Christians face different challenges in their respective particular contexts, we share a common tradition that funds our theological reflection and is worthy of our sustained attention.

Historical Theology and Contemporary Challenges

One characteristic of theology in the Reformed tradition is that we are obliged to do our thinking in the company of those who have gone before us. That's why creeds and confessions are an important aspect of our churches: we interpret scripture *with* the aid of the interpretations of others, such as the church fathers, the Protestant Reformers, and many more. But–and this is an equally important characteristic of Reformed theology–we are open to the revision of our doctrines, creeds, and confessions in the light of a better understanding of scripture and the gospel to which it bears witness.[2] A genuine Reformed theology always works between two poles: a conservative pole, since we are not allowed to dismiss the past and a liberal pole, since we are not imprisoned by the past. Seen in this

[2] According to the *Book of Order* of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the confessions may not be "ignored or dismissed." Nonetheless, "the church... is open to the reform of its standards of doctrine." *Book of Order*, Part II of the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) (Louisville: Office of the General Assembly, 1989), G-2.02000.

light, it is to be expected that tensions will inevitably arise between those who lean more toward preserving the tradition and those who lean more toward revising it. But this should not preclude real dialogue from taking place since Reformed theology is always a conversation between past and present for the sake of the future.

Yet, sadly, such conversation has broken down in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). To liberals it seems as though conservatives inhabit the worldview of seventeenth-century theology before the challenges of natural science and the historical-critical method had made traditional doctrinal formulations problematic. Conservatives often view liberals as standing outside the Reformed tradition altogether since their views seem to have more in common with the Enlightenment than with the Reformation.

The discussion between liberals and conservatives can only move forward with an adequate historical understanding of our Reformed tradition. That's why here I want to focus primarily on the *historical* development of the Christological question in the hope that we might have a bit more light and a little less heat in our debates. While I do not have a Christology of my own to propose, my hope is that the exposition will at least make clear the issues to be addressed in any responsible revision of the church's doctrine in a manner which is faithful to the twin poles of Reformed theology.

The Presuppositions of Classical Christology

Although the church's classical Christology was formulated in the fourth and fifth centuries, the groundwork for it was laid in the second century. The church then needed to clarify how the new revelation of God in Christ was related to the old revelation of God to Israel. There were two challenges on this front, both of which were internal to the Christian community itself. First, Marcion argued that the gospel was antithetical to the Torah of Judaism. Here was a radicalizing of Paul's distinction between faith in God's grace and works of the law. Grace means forgiveness and mercy, he argued, whereas works have to do with justice and righteousness. The merciful deity disclosed by Jesus is not the commanding God of Judaism. Hence, Marcion proposed that the church set aside the Jewish canon of scripture and formulate its own canon.[3]

The second challenge came from the Gnostics who also argued that the deity worshipped by the Jews was not that revealed by Jesus. Unlike Marcion, however, the Gnostics claimed that the world's creator was a stupid and evil deity since matter is antithetical to everything

[3] See the classic study by Adolf von Harnack, *Marcion: The Gospel of the Alien God*, trans. John E. Steely and Lyle D. Bierma (Durham, North Carolina: Labyrinth Press, 1990).

spiritual.[4] By contrast, the deity taught by Jesus is a purely spiritual principle that stands opposed to this material world in which our souls are trapped. The Gnostics were repulsed by the physical body with its origins in sexual intercourse, its needs to eat and to defecate, its vulnerability to sickness, and its ultimate decomposition through death. In their view, the redemption received through Jesus is a release from this evil material world and with it the complete separation of body from spirit. One Christological consequence of this theology is "docetism" (meaning "to appear"). Docetism teaches that Jesus wasn't really a human being since he only appeared to be human; otherwise, he wouldn't be able to save us from this prison-house of the body and its connection with the material world if he, too, were a fellow-prisoner.

In response to Marcion, the church emphatically embraced the scriptures of the synagogue as the first part of its own biblical canon. From now on, the "Old Testament" became the indispensable presupposition for understanding those writings bearing direct testimony to Jesus (the "New Testament"). This was no mere editorial decision but reflected, rather, a momentous theological affirmation that the deity revealed by Jesus is none other than that proclaimed by Moses and the prophets. God's justice and God's mercy are not antithetical principles, as Marcion had suggested. With this decision to retain the Jewish scriptures, the church affirmed that Christianity's relation to Judaism is characterized more by continuity than by discontinuity. Similarly, in response to the Gnostics, the clear implication of this decision was the affirmation that the creator is the same deity as the redeemer. As a result, the material world is not to be despised. Instead, the world is affirmed as good because created by God who is good (Gen. 1:31). As Augustine later said, whatever has being is good simply as such (*esse qua esse bonum est*).[5] Sin does not result from the body's opposition to the soul and salvation is not release from an evil material world. Redemption is, rather, the restoration of creation to its original wholeness. Accordingly, docetism is rejected and Jesus is affirmed as a real human being (1 Jn. 4:2-3). And the final consummation includes the resurrection of the body since God redeems not simply the soul but the entire person, body and soul. Here again, we see the inter-connections between doctrines of Christ's person and his work.

The responses to Marcion and the Gnostics set the foundation for "orthodoxy" in contrast to "heresy". The pivotal figure here was Irenaeus who articulated what became known as

[4] Good introductions to Gnosticism may be found in Hans Jonas, The Gnostic Religion: The Message of the Alien God and the Beginnings of Christianity, 2nd rev. ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963) and Kurt Rudolph, Gnosis: The Nature and History of Gnosticism, trans. Robert McLachlan Wilson (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1983).
[5] Augustine, *Confessions*, Book VII, 12 , trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin (New York: Penguin, 1961), p. 148.

the “apostolic” tradition.[6] According to him, the orthodox faith is based on the apostolic tradition which is identified by three hallmarks: an apostolic canon of scripture, an apostolic rule of faith, and an apostolic succession of bishops.

The New Testament is the apostolic canon since its writings were believed to have been authored either by Jesus’ original apostles or by their disciples. So, for instance, the gospels of Matthew and John were accepted as apostolic because it was believed they were composed by the apostles so-named, whereas Mark and Luke were known not to have been among the original twelve but were accepted into the canon nonetheless since Mark was believed to be a disciple of Peter and Luke a disciple of Paul (though Paul, of course, was not one of the original twelve, either, and had to fight for recognition of his standing as an apostle). Everything that eventually found its way into the New Testament canon had to justify itself according to this criterion of apostolicity. The apostolic “rule of faith” (*regula fidei*) was the creedal formulation securing the message supposed to have been preached in common by all the apostles. It was eventually codified in what we now know as the “Apostles’ Creed.”[7]

Finally, there is the apostolic succession. Here the affirmation is made that the bishops stand in a line of continuity with the original apostles of Jesus. Thereby they carry on in an unadulterated way the pure apostolic tradition. The bishops protect the church’s teaching from heresy. They do this by insuring that the Bible is interpreted in accordance with the doctrinal guidelines set forth by the rule of faith.

Taken together, these three (the New Testament, the Apostles’ Creed, and the episcopal succession) guarantee the pure apostolic witness to Jesus as the messiah of Israel foretold by the Old Testament and the saviour of the entire world, Gentiles as well as Jews. This orthodox bulwark against heresy constituted the lasting achievement of the second century. What stands out as noteworthy are two points. On the one hand, there is the crucial affirmation concerning the continuities between the God of Israel and the Father of Jesus Christ, i.e., the redeemer is the creator and the creator is the redeemer. Salvation is not an escape from the world but the fulfilment of God’s purpose for human life in the world. The body is not the source of sin and matter is not evil. These presuppositions are still, in my view, essential to a proper proclamation of the gospel.

On the other hand, these affirmations were defended by an understanding of the tradition’s development that is difficult to sustain today. First, the retention of the Old Testament was

[6] Irenaeus, “Against Heresies,” in *Early Christian Fathers*, ed. Cyril C. Richardson (New York: Collier Books-Macmillan, 1970), pp. 358-97.
[7] *The Book of Confessions: Study Edition*, Part I of the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) (Louisville: Geneva Press, 1999), 2.1-3.

predicated on an allegorical exegesis of the Jewish scriptures according to which their true meaning lies in their witness to Christ. Marcion had insisted upon a literal exegesis of these writings which, he believed, sufficed to demonstrate the incompatibility of the Old Testament with the gospel.[8] But allegorical exegesis was able to overcome these difficulties that a grammatical or literal reading of the text put in the way of its Christian appropriation.[9] One result of this move was the church's insistence that the Jews didn't know how to interpret their own scriptures correctly since they were tied to the letter and did not attend to the spirit (cf. 2 Cor 3:6, 14-15). And although the Protestant Reformers also largely interpreted the Old Testament in a Christological vein, their rejection of allegory set the stage for raising anew the question of the legitimacy of a christocentric exegesis of the Jewish Bible during the era of historical-criticism.

Second, the assumption of orthodoxy is that there has always been a unified apostolic tradition. In such a view, heresy is always a later development, i.e., a distortion of the pure tradition. Today our historical viewpoint is virtually the opposite.[10] We now realize that theological diversity goes back to the very origins of Christianity and that orthodoxy is a later development.[11] This does not necessarily entail that orthodox theology is wrong, only that it has to be defended on other grounds than the usual historical appeal to an uninterrupted tradition going all the way back to the apostles. Moreover, it is no longer assumed that the gospels and other New Testament writings were actually written by the apostles or their immediate successors. So here too, the orthodox view of the tradition no longer suffices to explain how the tradition developed historically. Interestingly, long before the modern historical view of the tradition emerged, Luther came up with a different concept of "apostolicity" in his fight with the Roman Catholics that fits nicely with the more recent outlook: apostolicity is not a matter of standing in a line of succession that goes back to the original apostles but, rather, consists in the correct preaching of the gospel. So, in his view, Pontius Pilate could be considered "apostolic" if he had proclaimed the gospel of free grace

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[8] "Marcion not only rejected the Old Testament as a Christian book; he insisted on a literal interpretation of it in order to emphasize its crudity. It was not a Christian book, and in his opinion no allegorical exegesis could make it one." Robert M. Grant with David Tracy, *A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible*, 2nd rev. and enlarged ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), p. 43.

[9] This is how Augustine was able to overcome his initial aversion to the Old Testament. See *Confessions*, Book VI, 4, pp. 115-16.

[10] For a very perceptive treatment of this issue, see the essay by Robert Wilken, *The Myth of Christian Beginnings* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1980).

[11] For pioneering efforts to sort out these early developments in a genuinely historical fashion, the reader may consult Walter Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*, ed. Robert Kraft and Gerhard Krodel (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971); along the same lines is the collection of essays by James M. Robinson and Helmut Koester, *Trajectories through Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971).

whereas Peter would not be apostolic if he had preached work-righteousness.[12] This was also Calvin's view.

The Christological Definitions

The next major crisis that led to a more precise formulation of the Christological doctrine was the Arian controversy which issued in the "Nicene Creed" (325, 381).[13] Here the question revolved around the interpretation of the prologue to John's gospel: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (Jn. 1:1). Since Jesus is identified as "the Word made flesh" (Jn 1:14), clarifying the relation of the Word to God is a Christological matter. In what sense is the Word the same as God and in what sense is the Word different from God? Arius proposed that the Word was a creature made by God through whom God then made all other creatures. He based this interpretation on Proverbs 8:22 where "wisdom" (*Sophia*) says of herself: "The LORD created me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of old." Wisdom is then characterized as assisting God "like a master worker" in the world's creation (Prov 8:30). The identification of wisdom with the Word is natural since the Greek term for "word" is *logos*, which also means "reason" or "rationality." In John's gospel, the divine reason incarnate in Jesus is said to have created the world: "He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made" (Jn 1:2-3). Hence, Arius identified God's reason with God's wisdom and interpreted the Word as the first creature by reading John in the light of Proverbs.

Athanasius protested against Arius that the Word is co-equal with God or "of the same substance" with God (*homoousion*). There were two reasons for this alternative Christology. First, Christians worshipped the risen Christ and prayed to him in their liturgical celebrations. If the Word incarnate in Jesus is a creature, then Christians were guilty of idolatry. Second, salvation could not be conferred upon a creature by another creature. Therefore, the saviour had to be divine in order to secure the redemption from sin and especially death that was central to the gospel's proclamation. Following Athanasius, the "Nicene Creed" rejects Arianism and insists upon the full divinity of Christ. But this solution led to new problems that had to be resolved.

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[12] "What does not teach Christ is not apostolic, even if taught by Peter or Paul. On the other hand, what does preach Christ is apostolic even if Judas, Annas, Pilate, or Herod does it." Martin Luther, "Preface to the Epistles of St. James and St. Jude," in *Martin Luther: Selections from His Writings*, ed. John Dillenberger (Garden City, New York: Anchor Books-Doubleday, 1961), p. 36.
[13] The Book of Confessions, 1.1-3.

First of all, there is the question of monotheism. If the Son of God (the Word) is co-equal in divinity to God the Father, then aren't there two gods? Or three, once we take account of the Holy Spirit? But if we have a plurality of gods, polytheism has snuck in through the back door after having been kicked out the front door in the second century. Trinitarian doctrine is the attempt to answer this question. The formulation developed by the Cappadocian Fathers explains that God is "one divine nature in three persons." One purpose of Trinitarian doctrine is to hold together the belief in Christ's divinity with the affirmation of the oneness of God (Deut. 6:4).[14] Nonetheless, this has always been a difficult formulation for Christians to understand and to explain. Jews and Muslims have often charged that Christianity is tritheistic and thus no longer a genuine monotheism. This is a very serious charge that we can never take lightly.[15] It is always necessary to explain that the intent of Trinitarian doctrine is monotheistic; but if this is so, then one criterion for testing the adequacy of this formulation is its coherence with the monotheistic presupposition of the Old Testament. And we need not interpret the Old Testament allegorically for it to play this crucial role for Christians. The Old Testament stands in a critical relation to the New Testament for the purpose of insuring that the church's witness to Jesus is constrained by Israel's witness to monotheism.

The second problem had to do with the humanity of Jesus. If Jesus is fully divine, then in what sense is he also human? Earlier, when opposing doceticism, the proto-orthodox church had already insisted that Jesus had a real body of flesh and blood. But after the "Nicene Creed" was accepted, it became an issue whether Jesus' humanity included a rational soul. Here's the dilemma: if Jesus is the Word of God incarnate, then the mind of Jesus is the mind of God. That seems to render problematic the idea that Jesus also had a human soul since there might arise a conflict between the human mind of Jesus and the divine reason of God. Nonetheless, in response the "Chalcedonian Definition" (451) affirmed that Jesus was in every respect "fully human" as well as "fully divine," that is to say, he possessed a rational human soul just as we do.[16] This, too, is a difficult doctrine to comprehend, though we can appreciate the religious motive behind its adoption. If Jesus is to mediate salvation to us, then he must be human in every sense as we are, fully sharing our predicament yet without sin (Heb. 2:10-11, 14-15, 4:15).

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[14] The other purpose, which is perhaps its real concern, is to hold together a complex understanding of God as creator *and* redeemer (contra the Gnostics), as righteous *and* merciful (contra Marcion). See the insightful essay by H. Richard Niebuhr, "The Doctrine of the Trinity and the Unity of the Church," in *Theology, History, and Culture: Major Unpublished Writings*, ed. William Stacy Johnson (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996), pp. 50-62.

[15] In a very good essay, Wafiq Wahba speaks of the problems of correctly articulating the meaning of Trinitarian doctrine in an Islamic culture. "The Ecumenical Responsibility of Reformed Theology: The Case of Egypt," in David Willis and Michael Welker, eds., *Toward the Future of Reformed Theology: Tasks, Topics, Traditions* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), pp. 91-92.

[16] "The Definition of Chalcedon" may be found in John H. Leith, ed., *Creeds of the Church*, 3rd ed. (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1982), pp. 34-36.

At the close of the patristic period, we have two formulations that together make up the classical Trinitarian Christology of the ancient church: God is "one divine nature (or 'essence') in three persons" and the second person of the Trinity is both "fully divine and fully human." This is the end of the road of a very long and complicated development. Although I have certainly not done justice to it in this brief survey, it was important to expound its essential ingredients as we try to understand the contemporary controversy.

Christology during the Reformation

The Reformation of Luther and Calvin did not in any way deviate from these doctrinal affirmations. For their part, the Reformers were more interested in soteriology than Christology since their argument with the Roman Catholic Church was over the meaning of justification, whether it is "by faith alone" (*sola fide*) as the Protestants affirmed or through "faith formed by love" (*fides caritate formata*) as the Catholics believed. With respect to Christological concerns, the Reformers simply assumed their continuity with the ancient formulations. But there was one aspect of their Reformation that left the door open for a reconsideration of the older doctrines. I'm referring to their theological method, to use a modern expression. The Reformers claimed to base their theology on "scripture alone" (*sola scriptura*) and not on "scripture *and* tradition" as the Catholics did. It's not that the Protestants rejected the post-biblical traditions altogether. But they were committed to testing the adequacy of the church's traditions according to the biblical norm in the conviction that "popes and councils can err."[17] If the declarations of councils are fallible, then it should be permissible for Protestants to ask whether the doctrines formulated by the church fathers are sound interpretations of the Bible.

As it turned out, the principle of "scripture alone" proved to be the Achilles' heel of the Reformation, as the Catholics perceived it would. First of all, the German Lutherans and the Swiss Reformed could not agree among themselves regarding how to understand the sacraments in general and the Eucharistic sacrament in particular. Although the Protestants affirmed that the Bible is sufficiently clear to interpret itself apart from tradition (*scriptura sui ipsius interpres*), even such a simple statement as that made by Jesus when he said "This is my body" was open to multiple interpretations. Second, the Anabaptists accused the leaders of the magisterial Reformation of not taking seriously their own commitment to the Bible since they retained the practice of infant baptism which is nowhere attested by scripture. The Anabaptists viewed infant baptism as a vestige of medieval Catholicism that

[17] See, for example, the critical statements regarding the authority of councils found in "The Scots Confession" and "The Westminster Confession of Faith," in *The Book of Confessions,* 3.20 and 6.175.

had yet to be purged by pure biblical teaching. And finally, the beginnings of Unitarian theology are also to be sought here, for the anti-trinitarians argued that, on the basis of the Bible alone, even the doctrine of the Trinity failed to pass muster! Michael Servetus, who was burned at the stake in Calvin's Geneva for his denial of the Trinity, had attempted to convince Calvin that the patristic doctrine was not biblical. But in this respect, the Protestants agreed with their Roman Catholic opponents who were more than happy to see Servetus burned to death for his heresy.

Curiously enough, Calvin's own commitment to the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity was called into question by someone within his own ranks. Pierre Caroli charged Calvin with Arianism, the heresy against which the "Nicene Creed" had taken its stand. Calvin denied it, of course, but when Caroli demanded that he prove his orthodoxy by subscribing to the ancient creeds, Calvin refused. While the reasons for his refusal remain obscure, we need not doubt his sincerity. Calvin always preferred biblical language to the non-biblical formulations of the creeds. But he was not opposed to a non-biblical phrase if it could help to sniff out a heretic!

"Calvin did not want to appear to accord the least importance to tradition in dogmatic questions," and he cites Calvin's words: "we have sworn faith in one God, and not in Athanasius..."[18] Calvin's attitude toward the creeds was respectful but not uncritical. In discussing the authority of councils, Calvin explains:

> "The fact that I shall here be rather severe does not mean that I esteem the ancient councils less than I ought. For I venerate them from my heart, and desire that they be honoured by all. But here the norm is that nothing of course detracts from Christ."[19]

Further on, Calvin sets forth this rule for evaluating the authority of councils:

> "What then? You ask, will the councils have no determining authority? Yes, indeed; for I am not arguing here either that all councils are to be condemned or the acts of all to be rescinded, and (as the saying goes) to be cancelled at one stroke... But whenever a decree of any council is brought forward, I should like [people] first of all diligently to ponder at what time it was held, on what issue, and with what intention, what sort of [people] were present; then to examine by the standard of Scripture what it dealt with– and to do this in such a way that the definition of the council may have its weight and be like a provisional judgment, yet not hinder the examination which I have mentioned."[20]

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[18] François Wendel, *Calvin: Origins and Development of His Religious Thought*, trans. Philip Mairet (Durham, North Carolina: Labyrinth, 1987), p. 54. I have not been able to ascertain which statement(s) Calvin was asked to sign. According to Wendel, it concerned the Apostles', Nicene, and Athanasian creeds. But another scholar says it was only the Athanasian creed. See Anthony N. S. Lane, *John Calvin: Student of the Church Fathers* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 1999), p. 78.
[19] *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, ed. John T. McNeill, Library of Christian Classics (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 4.9.1 (cited according to book, chapter, and paragraph).
[20] *Inst.*, 4.9.8.

So, creedal statements are fallible and are open to criticism in relation to the Bible.

Calvin's position remains ambiguous, in spite of his denials that he is a heretic. The problem with interpreting Calvin's estimate of the Trinity stems from his rejection of "speculation," i.e., wanting to know more about God than is right and proper. Calvin always stressed the practical nature of theology in leading us to a life of piety in service of God's glory. A comment from Karl Barth is helpful:

> Calvin was inclined to regard the Greek dogma as idle speculation in contrast to the practical knowledge that he himself thought he could gain from scripture, and it was only to the extent that the doctrine of the Trinity could be understood as practical knowledge that it seemed to him to be scriptural and acceptable.[21]

Christology after the Enlightenment

The modern world represents a watershed in the history of Christian theology. After the Enlightenment theologians faced problems that had never before been on the theological agenda. The two most notable challenges were posed by historical-critical study of the Bible and the method of natural science. Both of these modern ways of knowing reality (the historical and the scientific) called into question assumptions that had been taken for granted by Protestant and Catholic alike.

Concerning the impact of the modern sciences upon traditional belief it is clear that modern liberal Protestantism have accepted the scientific developments of the past centuries. They have sought new ways to understand the meaning of ideas such as "miracle" and "creation." But this new naturalistic worldview did entail that a different approach to the Bible was called for, one that accepted the Bible as a historical product to be interpreted in relation to the ancient contexts out of which it emerged. The historical-critical study of the Bible has demanded a thoroughgoing reinterpretation of the relation between history and faith and some theologians believe that the challenges posed by history to faith are even more daunting than those posed by natural science.

We can restrict our discussion to the results of New Testament study. Whereas the ancient church understood the Christological question to be, "How can the divine and human natures of Christ be held together in one person?" the modern church asks: "What is the relation between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith?" Most of New Testament scholarship in the nineteenth century was intent upon recovering the historical Jesus behind

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[21] Karl Barth, *The Theology of John Calvin*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), p. 326. Barth then urges that Calvin's assessment of the doctrine be treated with caution!

the Christ of the creeds. And while the quest of the historical Jesus has proved to be much more difficult than many nineteenth-century scholars assumed, we can know some things about Jesus in a historical vein.[22]

We know that the best sources for reconstructing Jesus' message are Matthew, Mark, and Luke. The contrast between Jesus' message as reported in the Synoptic gospels and as reported in John's gospel is sufficiently stark so as to force a choice for the historian. In John's gospel we have the high Christology that became the foundation of the ancient church's creedal affirmations. In the Synoptics, however, Christology is not the content of Jesus' message. There his proclamation concerns the "Kingdom of God" (i.e., God's sovereign rule over the whole of life). Adolf von Harnack put the matter well when he said of Jesus' preaching: "The Gospel, as Jesus proclaimed it, has to do with the Father only and not with the Son."[23] This is a very important historical insight, since it dispels the naïve notion that what the church later taught about Jesus was also taught by Jesus himself. Another way of putting this is: Jesus was a Jew, not a Christian. Rudolf Bultmann captured the profound implications of this insight:

> The message of Jesus is a presupposition for the theology of the New Testament rather than a part of that theology itself....Christian faith did not exist until there was a Christian kerygma; i.e., a kerygma proclaiming Jesus Christ–specifically Jesus Christ the Crucified and Risen One–to be God's eschatological act of salvation. He was first so proclaimed in the kerygma of the earliest Church, not in the message of the historical Jesus, even though that Church frequently introduced into its account of Jesus' message, motifs of its own proclamation.[24]

This should not be taken to imply that the church's Christology is a misinterpretation of Jesus. Indeed, Christian faith stands or falls according to whether our confession of Jesus as the Christ, the anointed One of God, is true or not. But we cannot ignore the historical challenge by assuming that a statement such as "No one comes to the Father but through me" (Jn 14:6) was actually uttered by Jesus himself. The proper question, both historically

[22] The classic treatment of nineteenth-century scholarship on Jesus was written in 1906 by Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, trans. W. Montgomery with an introduction by James M. Robinson (New York: Macmillan, 1961).
[23] Harnack, *What is Christianity?*, trans. Thomas Bailey Saunders with an introduction by Rudolf Bultmann, Fortress Texts in Modern Theology (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), p. 144. More recently, James M. Robinson has written: "Jesus himself made no claim to lofty titles or even to divinity. Indeed, to him, a devout Jew, claiming to be God would have seemed blasphemous! He claimed 'only' that God spoke and acted through him." *The Gospel of Jesus: In Search of the Original Good News* (San Francisco: Harper, 2005), p. xi.
[24] Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, trans. Kendrick Grobel (New York: Scribner's, 1951), 1:3.

and theologically, should be: what is the relation between Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom of God and the church's proclamation of Jesus as the Christ?

My own answer would go something like this: those who have come under the power of God's reign through meeting Jesus begin to reflect christologically. But one does not enter the Kingdom of God through Christology! Persons who have had a redemptive encounter with Jesus (whether long ago through meeting him in the flesh or today through meeting him in the church's proclamation) confess his salvific significance in Christological terms. We know him to be the Christ because he has turned our lives around, from idolatry to the one true God and from self-preoccupation to love of neighbour as self. Through this redemption the bonds of sin are broken and the fear of death annihilated since we now know ourselves as God's children who need not be anxious about anything (Heb. 2:15). Christology, therefore, can only be thought in connection with soteriology. Only those who have been saved by him can confess his significance. Melanchthon said: "To know Christ is to know his benefits."[25]

There are, moreover, multiple Christological interpretations of Jesus' significance even within the books of the New Testament itself. Matthew's Christology is obviously not the same as John's or Paul's. Luther felt this problem of theological diversity acutely when he tried to reconcile what Paul and James had to say about faith and works. This insight into the plurality of theologies in the New Testament is also an established result of historical study of the Bible. This insight, when taken seriously, has significant implications for how we think about ecumenism. If the New Testament suggests different lines of thinking about Christology, soteriology, and other matters, then the fact that there are many Christian churches or denominations is not necessarily the problem it was once thought to be. We can, rather, view the diversity within Christianity itself as a product of the diversity within the New Testament instead of seeing it as a defection from the pure truth of the apostolic period. Note what Ernst Käsemann says in this regard:

> The New Testament canon does not, as such, constitute the foundation of the unity of the Church. On the contrary, as such (that is, in its accessibility to the historian) it provides the basis for the multiplicity of the confessions.[26]

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[25] Philip Melanchthon, *Loci Communes Theologici*, in *Melanchthons Werke in Auswahl*, ed. Hans Engelland (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann Verlag, 1952), 2.1.

[26] Ernst Käsemann, "The New Testament Canon and the Unity of the Church," in *Essays on New Testament Themes*, W. J. Montague (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), p. 103.

We take this assumption more or less for granted today, even if we rarely raise it to the level of conscious reflection. We no longer look upon the pope as the anti-Christ, or think of the Lutherans as wrong in their interpretation of scripture because we have a different view of the Eucharist. At the same time, however, this respect for ecumenism does not lead us to value our own confessional heritage any less. The Reformed tradition, too, selects some things from scripture and elevates them to special significance, such as themes like the sovereignty of God and election, etc. This fact (that we cannot, unlike the Reformers, extract our theology completely from "scripture alone") actually gives us reason to attend all the more to the distinctiveness of our own confessional tradition. We have come back to the Catholic point that scripture does not interpret itself apart from the hermeneutical lens of some tradition or other.

The final insight resulting from historical scholarship on the Bible that is crucial to our discussion is the comparative study of religions. The historical study of scripture demonstrated the close relation of the growth and development of biblical religion to the religions of the ancient Near East and the Greco-Roman worlds. It is impossible to attribute to the Bible a radical independence from its original historical matrix. In numerous ways, the writers of the Bible had much more in common with their neighbours in other cultural and religious traditions than with us. Christianity did not emerge ready-made from heaven but is a product of human history at a particular time and place, i.e., at the intersection of Judaism and Hellenism. This is not to deny that God has been revealed in and through this history, but it does raise the question why God can not also be revealed in other religious traditions that developed in very different historical circumstances such as those in ancient India.[27] And the more we know about these other religious traditions, the more difficult it is for us to believe that our religious tradition contains nothing but truth and goodness whereas the other religious traditions are nothing but errors and vice.

The revolution in our worldview occasioned by natural science and historical criticism cannot be gainsaid. If we are honest, we have to admit that it is no longer possible to do theology exactly the same way as our pre-modern forebears did. But that doesn't mean we can't do it at all or that we must deny everything that was important to them. But how to do theology in a new context is the challenge facing us today.

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[27] "The Confession of 1967" has an important statement in this regard that is worth citing: "The church in its mission encounters the religions of men and in that encounter becomes conscious of its own human character as a religion. God's revelation to Israel, expressed within Semitic culture, gave rise to the religion of the Hebrew people. God's revelation in Jesus Christ called forth the response of Jews and Greeks and came to expression within Judaism and Hellenism as the Christian religion. The Christian religion, as distinct from God's revelation of himself, has been shaped throughout its history by the cultural forms of its environment." *The Book of Confessions,* 9.41.

Confessing Christ Today

The history leading up to our present debates over Christology is a long and complex one, to say the least. Yet gaining clarity on the historical development is just the first step toward moving forward on the contemporary questions of theology. While this essay is not the place to propose a full-blown Christology, I do have some suggestions as to how we might go about addressing the issues now facing us. And my point of reference here will be Calvin since, I believe, there are some important, albeit neglected, themes in his theology that can be fruitfully developed in the present situation.

First, there is the so-called *extra-Calvinisticum*. This refers to that aspect of Calvin's Christology which accounts for his departure from Luther in the Eucharistic debate. While Calvin affirmed that God was truly incarnate in Christ, he did not believe that the humanity of Jesus could fully contain the divinity of the Word. Even after his resurrection Jesus' body remains a human body and, for that reason, it cannot be ubiquitous. Therefore, Calvin could not follow Luther's teaching that the body and blood of Christ are given "in, with, and under" the elements of bread and wine. In other words, even in the incarnation there is more to God than Jesus. Douglas F. Ottati explains:

> Calvin affirmed that God the Son is manifest in the man Jesus, but not encompassed by the man Jesus... Calvin believes that, in Jesus Christ our sure redeemer, God is truly manifest in the flesh (1 Tim. 3:16), and yet he also senses that immeasurable depths of God's omnipotent reign remain hidden and unknown.[28]

This aspect of Calvin's thought should at least caution us about absolutising Jesus. We are not permitted to commit idolatry in the name of Jesus! But this doesn't mean that God is not revealed in and through him. Those of us whose lives have been transformed by the church's witness know that God's Word, spoken to us through Christ, has redeemed us from sin, including the fear of death that tempts us not to trust God.

Second, Calvin believed that the proclamation of the gospel is the usual means of grace by which persons come to a salvific knowledge of God. But we are not permitted to restrict the freedom of God to the church's preaching. God is free to elect anyone for salvation according to the divine good-pleasure. In such cases, God speaks not through the word of preaching but directly to the human heart through the activity of the Holy Spirit. In Calvin's words, preaching is "the ordinary arrangement and dispensation of the Lord which he commonly

[28] Douglas F. Ottati, *Hopeful Realism: Reclaiming the Poetry of Theology* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1999), p. 72. The relevant passage from Calvin is found in *Inst.*, 2.13.4.

uses in calling his people," but Calvin warns against misunderstanding this as "prescribing for [God] an unvarying rule so that he may use no other way."[29] "The Second Helvetic Confession" also states: "We know that God had some friends in the world outside the commonwealth of Israel."[30] Calvin's thought here can free us from worrying about the fate of non-Christians. All persons are in God's hands and God is not restricted to the church when bringing people to salvation. This is not to diminish the church's preaching in any way since we know ourselves called to preach the gospel and to share the story of Jesus with all who do not know God and love the neighbour. But we can no longer assume that only Christians know God truly and love the neighbour authentically. To cite Troeltsch once again,

> Revelation is not limited to Christianity... [This idea] remains an offence only to those who continue to see nothing but darkness in the non-Christian world. But these are the people for whom there will be no true joy in Heaven unless everyone who believes differently burns in Hell.[31]

Finally, Calvin did not think that any doctrinal formulation, however revered by ancient tradition, could be taken as infallible. "Popes and councils can err." Moreover, he did not consider even the sixteenth-century Reformation to be final and definitive. He certainly refused to accept everything Luther said in an uncritical fashion. The Reformation was, for Calvin, an ongoing task: *ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda*.[32] Calvin expressed himself in this way: "Our constant endeavour, day and night, is not just to transmit the tradition faithfully, but also to put it in the form we think will prove best."[33] Transmitting the tradition faithfully, then, goes hand in hand with the readiness to revise it when necessary, casting it in a new form if it serves the gospel. This sentiment surely has to apply to our Reformed confessions as well. They are not absolute, either! But we can (and should) take them as our guides in pointing us in the right direction. This should caution us about the proposal of writing up a list of "essential tenets" to which all persons must subscribe. If Calvin refused to sign such a statement when challenged, so should we! To share the faith of our ancestors

[29] *Inst.*, 4.16.19.
[30] The Book of Confessions, 5.137.
[31] Ernst Troeltsch, *The Christian Faith*, trans. Garrett E. Paul, Fortress Texts in Modern Theology (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), p. 82.
[32] *Book of Order*, G-2.0200.
[33] Calvin, "Defense Against Pighius," in Gerrish, "Continuity and Change: Friedrich Schleiermacher on the Task of Theology", *Tradition and the Modern World*, p. 13.

does not mean being enslaved by all their doctrinal formulations. Theology changes from age to age in response to the pressing questions of the day. The Reformation heritage need not be opposed to the legacy of the Enlightenment if we are to remain faithful Protestants.

Although I don't have an answer to the question how we should understand the various non-Christian religions today, we really don't need to answer that question before moving ahead with theology. It suffices simply to heed the admonition of "The Confession of 1967": we "must approach all religions with openness and respect," all the while recalling "God's judgment upon all forms of religion, including the Christian."[34] This means worrying more about our own relation with God than about somebody else's, and trusting that God's grace is larger than our imaginations can comprehend. Moreover, such a posture need not occasion any doubt whether the revelation of God entrusted to us is adequate. So, when faced with the question Jesus once posed to his disciples ("Who do you say that I am?"), we can affirm with all integrity and without any duplicity: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." The rest is up to God.

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[34] The Book of Confessions, 9.42.

Christian-Muslim Dialogue: The Relationship between Jesus and God

Martien E. Brinkman

Introduction

The relationship between Jesus and God will have to be discussed sooner or later in the dialogue that Christians have with Muslims. Does the Christian affirmation that Jesus is the Son of God actually undermine the affirmation of the unity of Allah, the *tawhid*? Is Allah being related unacceptably with the non-divine, man, and does this amount to *shirk*?

That is the key question I shall confront.

It is essential, in any serious dialogue, to define the Christian perspective of Jesus' with regard to the famous Sura 112, 1-4. It reads: ' Proclaim, He is the One and only GOD. The Absolute GOD. Never did He beget. Nor was He begotten. None equals Him". Based on this Sura, Muslims will be inclined to accuse Christians of *shirk,* the association of Allah with something non-divine. In Islam this is the greatest possible sin, and the only one, according to Sura 4, 116, that is beyond forgiveness.

Jesus in the Koran

The confirmation of *tawhid* in the Koran explicitly denies Jesus' divine status as Son of God and calls this blasphemy. Because Allah has no sons. If he were to have sons, these would have been begotten with a woman and it is not permissible to think in such human terms of Allah (Sura 4, 171; 5, 72-73; 6, 100-101; 9, 30-31; 18, 4-5; 19, 35 and 92 and 23, 91). This explicit denial – cited also from Jesus' own lips (Sura 5, 116), does not negate the idea that the Koran places Jesus in a special position close to Allah. Sura 3, 45 counts him as 'one of those closest' to God. Sura 5, 19 points out to the faithful that, although they often think no preacher or warner has been sent, a preacher and a warner has indeed been sent. Jesus, the son of Mariam (Mary), in the Koran often referred to as *Isa* or *Masih* (messiah), is here called 'our preacher'.

He is a preacher, a prophet, in a long line of predecessors, and he cannot fundamentally be distinguished. He is one in the line from Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, to Jacob and the patriarchs, Moses and the prophets (Sura 2, 136 en 285; 3, 84; 4, 163; 5, 75 en 19, 30). Jesus is no more than a servant, an example to the sons of Israel (Sura 43, 59 and 4, 172). "Only a messenger from Allah", but at the same time he is "His Word" (*kalimah*)

and "His Spirit" (*ruh*) (Sura 4, 171). Jesus is regarded as the one who in his teachings (*indjil*) affirmed what the Torah proclaimed before him (Sura 3, 50 en 5, 46).

Although his virginal birth (Sura 3,47 en 59 en 19, 20-21) and ascension (Sura 4, 158) do put him in an extraordinary category, that does not detract at all from his 'normal' humanity. Like his mother he simply has to eat food to stay alive (Sura 5, 75). The Koran explicitly denies Jesus' crucifixion. Jesus was raised to Allah's glory (Sura 4, 157-158). He was neither crucified by the Jews nor was he killed. Allah protected him against the Jews by raising him to His heaven (Sura 3, 54-55).

'Son of God': identification and differentiation

In John's gospel in particular, Jesus is frequently referred to as Son of God, but a total identification of Jesus with God is always rejected by Jesus himself. He reveals like no other the true face of his Father, but that does not make him identical to the Father.

On the one hand Jesus the son clearly identifies with the Father: "He that has seen me, has seen the Father. Why then do you ask Show us the Father? Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me (John 14, 9). But in the following verse he can also say: "the words that I speak unto you I do not speak myself: but the Father that dwells in me, he does the works through me". Amid a strong identification he points to an important distinction. Earlier in chapter 12 Jesus already referred to this distinction: "For I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak" (John12, 49). It is quite clear therefore that we are dealing with a Jesus whose words obey another, the Father.

Background in the Old Testament

This image of a dutiful 'Son of God', distinguishable from the Father already makes itself felt in the Old Testament.

The expression 'Son of God' is a known expression in the Old Testament that is also used for Kings (II Sam.7, 14; I Chron.17, 13 and Ps.2, 7 en 89, 27-28) as well as referring to all of Israel (Ex.4, 22; Jer.31, 9 and 20 and Hosea 11, 1). The expression can have eschatological, messianic characteristics and refer to the expected 'Kingly Messiah' who is called 'Son of God'.

In Hellenistic culture the phrase was applied equally broadly to the heroes Dionysius and Heracles and philosophers such as Pythagoras and Plato. In the language of the Old Testament the expression points to no more, but also no less, than a special relationship to God, and in the case of the King even a representation of God's relationship to the people.

Clearly the expression never refers to a literal 'begetting' by God of a son with an actual woman (compare Ps.2, 7).

The specifics of Jesus' filial relationship

Within this broad usage of the term 'Son of God' the New Testament adds a new dimension. Jesus contributes to this in no small measure by his own words, speaking of God as father (abba). Apart from the aforementioned Father-Son relationship in the Gospel of John, other gospels also accord Jesus a special position to God by referring to him as 'son'. The Son knows like no other what moves the Father (Matthew 11, 27/Luke10, 22); in the parable of the unjust landowner the crime committed against 'the son' ("the heir") is clearly the worst crime and with regard to knowing when the last day will come, it states that 'even the son' does not have that knowledge (Matthew.24, 36/Mc.13, 32).

All of these facts lead to the conclusion that a strong conscious feeling of being 'a son' determined Jesus' self image, and that his authority to predict the Kingdom of God is based on this awareness.

Theological reflections on Jesus' self image

The personal pronoun 'I' is a good place start to get a sense of Jesus' relationship to God, because with that word he captures his self image. What does it mean when Jesus says 'I'? On the one hand we noted a strong identification with the Father: "He who has seen me, has seen the Father" (John14, 9).

On the other hand Jesus himself at times drew a clear distinction: "For I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it" (John 12, 49).

Both of these nuances can only lead to the conclusion that it is inadmissible to indulge in undifferentiated talk of Jesus as the Son of God. Undifferentiated statements in Christianity that Jesus is God, are as wrong as saying he is not God. The entire history of dogmas in Christianity is a continuous search to avoid making such non-nuanced statements.

This tension can already be detected in the disputes at the famous Council of Chalcedon in 451. The council famously chose the well-known double formula of 'unchanged, unmixed' and 'undivided and inseparable' to describe the position of Jesus where the divine and the human can always be clearly distinguished (unchanged, unmixed), but are also irrevocably bound (undivided and inseparable).

Shared imagery?

After this outline of Christian thinking of Jesus' relation to God, let us return to the imagery the Koran uses when discussing Jesus. The picture painted of Jesus in the Koran in no fewer than 99 verses, confronts Christians with the question of how to put into words the divine proximity of Jesus to God without undermining the monotheism that Christians share with Muslims.

Perhaps the dialogue with Muslims will need to start with a discussion on the understanding of terms such as 'prophet of God' and 'servant of God', both of which Jesus employs in the Koran to describe himself since infancy (Sura 19, 30): "I am a servant of Allah... He has appointed me a prophet". When that is done several nuances are uncovered, I would contend, and these interpretations will ultimately focus on the divine role in Jesus' crucifixion. In the New Testament the following image of Jesus as prophet presents itself:

1. Jesus acted against a background of a certain Jewish pattern of expectations regarding the coming (or return) of a prophet, respectively following in the footsteps of Elijah (Mal.4, 5-6 and Mark 6, 15 en 8, 28); of Moses (Deut.18, 15 en 18 and Acts 3, 22-23 and 7, 37) or the footsteps of an anonymous, peace-bearing prophet in his last days (Jes.61, 1-3; 52, 7 and Mark 6, 15 and 8, 28; Luke 9, 8 en 19 and John 6, 14 and 7, 40 and 52).

2. It seems it is expected that Jesus, like other prophets, will give a sign, but Jesus refuses to give a sign other than to refer to Jonah who spends three days and three nights inside the whale. Likewise Jesus will spend three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. This implicit reference is all Jesus has to say about the matter (Matth.12, 38-42). The expectation of a sign does however keep cropping up (John 30 and also Mark.11, 27-33). Both aspects - the Jewish expectation and the demand for a sign - do not add up to a clear picture. The Jewish expectation is not clearly delineated and the demand for a sign is rejected even as he performs impressive acts, such as feeding the five thousand (Mark 6, 30-44 and 8, 1-10).

3. Jesus himself uses a number of sayings about prophets such as "Only in his hometown, among his relatives and in his own house is a prophet without honour" (Mark 6, 4) and in the beatitudes (Matth.5, 3-12) he appears to refer consciously to the words of the Prophet of the Last Days (Jes.61, 1-3). Many of Jesus' acts such as his exorcisms and healings can also be associated with the prophets of the Old Testament.

4. Can we apply to Jesus - as did John the Baptist - the saying that he is "more than a prophet"? (Luke 7, 26). In particular the story of his transfiguration on the mountain, where Jesus literally leaves Elijah and Moses behind, seems to point in that direction (Mark 9, 2-10).

The above mentioned facts seem to indicate that in his direct circle many considered Jesus to be a prophet, that he thought of himself as being part of that tradition, but also that he saw himself transcending the traditional image of a prophet; he saw himself as the prophet of the last days who announces something truly new. In particular, the parable of the unjust landowner (Mark12, 1-9) that reaches its climax in a crime committed against the Son of the vineyard owner, can be seen as an indication that he thinks of himself as 'more than an ordinary prophet'.

The image of Jesus as 'servant of the Lord' confronts us with exactly the same questions. The book of Acts (4, 23-31) employs the phrase 'servant of the Lord' for both Jesus and David. As messiah, descended from the messianic king David, Jesus is called "your holy servant", who is "anointed" (4, 27). This expression comes very close to the term 'Son of God', after all that is what the messianic king of Israel has been called: "You are my Son, today I have become your Father" (Ps.2, 7). These words from the Psalm are cited literally in Acts 13, 33 and applied to Jesus. Rather than leading us away from the idea of Jesus as God's son, the 'servant of the Lord' leads us straight back to the heart of that discussion.

The same is evident from a second association with 'servant of the Lord' that appears in the New Testament. Apart from the association with a Davidian king who is referred to as 'Son of God', we find a reference to the suffering servant of the Lord (Isaiah 52, 13-53, 12). During the last supper Jesus cites Isaiah 53, 12 and applies this to himself: "and I tell you that this must be fulfilled in me. Yes, what is written about me is reaching its fulfilment." (Luke 22, 37). And when on the road from Jerusalem to Gaza Philip meets an Ethiopian eunuch, who in his chariot is reading a passage from Isaiah 53 about sheep being brought to slaughter, Philip hears him and asks: "Do you understand what you are reading?" He then proceeds to explain that this passage is about Jesus (Acts 8, 26-35).

In short, neither the concept of prophet nor the concept of the Lord's servant bring Christianity closer to Islam. It appears Jesus thought of himself very specifically as the prophet of the last days, and clearly different from the Jewish prophets that came before him. And the expression 'servant of the Lord' comes very close to the meaning of 'Son of God' in the New Testament. Both expressions emphasize Jesus' unique proximity to God. Both meanings are rather different from those in the Koran.

The nabi (the prophet) is a key figure in the Koran. It seems he can be identified as 'he who is sent' (rasul). Prophets generally stand in a long line of tradition. Usually there has been a succession of prophets and the new prophet is called upon to confirm the message of his predecessors. This theme is also a familiar from the Old Testament. On the other hand Islam, unlike the Old Testament, has not further developed the idea of a prophet that is

expected to come in the last days. This seems precluded by the notion of Mohammed as 'the last prophet' or 'seal of the prophets' (Sura 33, 40).

After 'prophet', 'the servant' (abd) is a second key concept. This word is used repeatedly in the Koran to refer to Jesus without giving it a special meaning. It refers in general to the relationship of God and man. In the dialogue between Christians and Muslims the word 'servant' tends to be used to indicate that Jesus was 'only' a servant of God, but no more than that (Sura 43, 59).

Jesus as a sign of divine proximity

The concepts of prophet and servant of the Lord cannot easily be used to bridge the divide between Christians and Muslims. The image of Jesus given to us by the Koran can be used for both a minimalist and a maximalist interpretation. It is clear that, in the Koran, the concepts of prophet and servant of the Lord play a different role from those in the Bible. However, this does not mean that the Koran fails to acknowledge a special position for Jesus. It is questionable nevertheless that this special position - such as expressed in for instance his virginal birth and ascension - can best be expressed by using the concepts of 'prophet' and 'servant of the Lord' as these are interpreted so differently in both religions.

Like others before me I am more inclined to make use of other, less-charged concepts such as the idea of a 'sign' (aya). Jesus then is a sign of divine proximity, an "image (eikoon) of God, the unseeable, is he", says Paul (Colossians 1, 15). In the Koran Jesus is, with or without Mary, frequently referred to as a sign to mankind. Sura 19, 21 speaks of a "sign to the people" and "a mercy because of us". Sura 21, 91 says of Mary and her son that they have been made a "portent for the whole world" and Sura 23, 50 adds that the son and the mother were given "refuge, on a mesa with food and drink".

In the Koran as well as in the New Testament the value of signs (semeia) is not self evident and their meaning can not be easily discerned. The unbelievers will not understand them (Sura 6, 109-111 and Mark 8, 12). Only the believers will understand (Sura 25, 73 and John 6, 26). So signs both reveal and conceal. They cannot be understood without a context. If we fail to discuss Jesus' actual work according to both traditions we cannot hope to discover their meaning. We will fail if we try to do this from the confines of an armchair or a nice conference centre.

The meaning of Jesus' cross

In a wider context we could perhaps also think of the cross as a sign. The cross would then above all be a sign representing substituted suffering. At first glance making this image so central puts it in conflict with Islam, but on closer inspection this need not be the case. The

Koran denies Jesus' crucifixion (Sura 4, 157), but in a different context it does say that substituted suffering is important. It is highly significant that the Koran repeatedly gives testimony of the suffering of the prophets (Sura 3, 146-147).

The best known example in the Koran of 'standing in for another', or 'ransom', is the story of God's test of Abraham when he is asked to sacrifice his son Isaac. The Koran has this to say about this near-sacrifice "We ransomed by substituting an animal sacrifice" (Sura 37, 107). To this day Muslims celebrate this 'substitution' in their feast of sacrifice. It is clear from this story that, in the end, it is God himself who brings salvation.

The theme of substituted suffering at God's instigation through the sacrifice of one's life is therefore not alien to Islam. This idea is not connected to the crucifixion. This lack of connection could have everything to do with the way the Koran recounts in its prophetic stories the fate of the true great prophets. These stories all follow a certain pattern. A prophet preaches God's message, is persecuted, and threatened with death, but in the end God reveals himself as trustworthy and saves the prophet from death. This same pattern is reflected in the way the Koran talks of Jesus. The moment his life is in danger God intervenes and rescues him from his attackers, because God does not abandon the prophets that put their trust in Him.

It is striking that the Koran does not mention Jesus' resurrection. The Koran only recognizes the resurrection at the end of time, on Judgment Day. By ignoring the resurrection the Koran can interpret Jesus' suffering as a sign of the impending 'abandonment', whereas Christians see the resurrection above all as the sign that God did not abandon his prophet. Both religions reach the same conclusion in relation to the cross: He who trusts in God, will not be forsaken. In Christianity, however, Jesus is not saved from the cross, but from death. Saved from death and our 'old Adam'. He is the one that is crucified: old Man.

Conclusions

To me Jesus' role as Son of God, His prophet, servant of the Lord etc do not appear to be the most interesting questions in the Christian-Muslim dialogue. These concepts raise important questions, but I think they do not get to the heart of the matter.

As a Christian I think the crucial question concerns God's own involvement in the work of salvation among us, the people. That is to say: how we, the people, can be resurrected to a new life.

In Christianity a man, Jesus, the Christ, represents that divine bond and represents God for us. At the same time he can be our representative with God. Jesus is as a 'sign' of that double representation that I think is the essence of Jesus' meaning in Christianity.

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REFORMED WORLD

Your ISLAM, My "islam", Our "islam"
Understanding Muslim-Christian Relationship

Nicolas J. Woly

Is it right to criticise other people's faiths based on our own opinion? When followers of one religion commit acts we do not agree with (terrorism, extremism, intolerance, etc), can we simply dismiss their religion as wrong? The answer to these questions is based on the extent of religious knowledge we have. In the instance of Christianity and Islam, it is important to have an accurate understanding of the specific relationship between them. These are two Abrahamic religions, rooted in the same history; "muslims" who practice the meaning of "al-islam". "Al-islam" is defined as "full and total surrender to God", which is, to a certain extent, in accordance with the meaning of Imago Dei. Christianity and Islam may have their own ways of interpreting "al-islam", but taken together they have the chance and the challenge at experiencing being "muslim".

Introduction

Whether we realise it or not, certain world events have caused a significant amount of uncertainty and insecurity to grow amongst us. The World Trade Center tragedy in New York, 11 September 2001; the two suicide bombings in Bali, 12 October 2002 and 1 October 2005; and the suicide bombings of two international hotels in Jakarta, 17 July 2009, are just some of the tragic events that have caused many people to develop an "unjust" attitude towards one of the great world religions, Islam. Why "unjust"? Because the non-Muslim world has discredited and stigmatised Islam, based solely on the assumption that some suspected Muslims (e.g. Osama bin Laden and Noordin M. Top) have been the instigators and intellectual actors behind these inhumane tragedies. In consequence, Islam has become a widely misunderstood religion. A prejudice towards it has arisen, portraying Islam as a religion which oppresses women, advocates violence, terrorism and extremism, is intolerant of other faiths, and promotes *jihad* (holy war) in order to spread Islam by the sword and kill all unbelievers. As followers of religions other than Islam, such an attitude is to declare ourselves guiltless, as if we possess no sinful heritage or have never committed any wrongdoing. But is that really the case? If we are honest, we must recognise that the history of Christianity, as is the case with all world religions and cultures, has its share of dark moments, inflicting harm on the civilised world. As John Hick says; "it seems impossible to make the global judgment that any one religious tradition has contributed more good or less evil, or a more favorable balance of good and evil, than the others".[1]

[1] John Hick, "The Non-Absoluteness of Christianity". From *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness,* John Hick and Paul F. Knitter (editors.). SCM Press, London, U.K., 1988, p. 30.

My aim is not to discuss how Islam is portrayed, but rather to understand and dismantle the religious obstacles created by non-Muslim communities in relation to what Islam stands for. These "religious obstacles" arise from a misunderstanding of other religions and their traditions, based on our own religious viewpoints. So I ask; is it really possible to understand Islam based on our own religious traditions and what Islam says about itself? How should we speak about non-Christian, world or tribal religions? In the Christian religion, is it right to speak about Islam as *vera religionis* from the viewpoint of Biblical faith? How does the Calvinist tradition understand Islam?[*] How do reformed theologians speak about Islam? If Islam is understood as one of the great monotheistic religions in the Abrahamic faith, do Muslims and Christians worship the same God? The list goes on...

While, within the limits of this article, I cannot answer all of these questions, I will however look at the very basic foundation for speaking about other religions (particularly Islam) based on the theme of the human being as the purpose of God. I will also give a short explanation of Islam as a prophetic religion, including the true meaning of "*islam*" and "Islam", and how Christians and Muslims can be involved in honest dialogical relationships. It is helpful that when speaking about Islam, we speak of "togetherness" – Muslims and Christians – which can lead us to speak and to act together.

1. Human beings as the purpose of God

First let me clarify that, when discussing any other religion, it is in reference to how God relates to human beings and how human beings relate to God. In the book *Christian Faith,* by the Dutch reformed theologian Hendrikus Berkhof, he describes the relationship between God and human using the "category of covenant".[2] Berkhof explains that God sees people as they are, particularly as they interact with others based on tradition, culture and nature. God's concern is "mankind, people, each as he is, unique, human".[3] It is this concern that is addressed within human history when God reveals that he wants to make a covenant with people. God seeks to bring every person, in whatever condition, into this relationship and "God wants a covenant relationship with man as he is; yet for the sake of that relationship he cannot possibly leave him as he is".[4] The covenant relationship between God and human

[*] It is a challenge to speak accurately about Islam in accordance with Calvinistic tradition, as the latter submits to the absolute authority of the Bible. The theme "Calvinism and Islam" for this edition of Reformed World therefore be acknowledged as an inspiring piece on the Calvinist understanding of Islam.

[2] H. Berkhof, *Christian Faith. An Introduction to the Study of the Faith,* W. B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1979 (revised ed.), pp. 427, 429. See also George Stroup, *Reformed Reader. A Sourcebook in Christian Theology,* Vol. II. Kentucky, U.S., 1993, pp. 92-93.

[3] *Ibid.,* p. 427.

[4] *Ibid.,* p. 429.

beings means that God has a profound affinity with people; however He also wants people to have a profound affinity towards Him. God's profound affinity towards human beings is based on their turning to God, which means that human beings therefore are the purpose of God's covenant.

Although Berkhof's explanation refers to "The Renewal of Man", we may still use it to ask questions about the relationship of Christianity towards other religions. Does God have a similar covenantal purpose towards non-Christian people? How do other religions fit within the frame of God's covenantal love, especially the Islamic faith which proclaims one God as creator and sustainer of the universe? While these questions are not addressed in the theme of "the human being as the purpose of God", they can be discussed using the theme of "human beings as the image of God".

2. Human beings as the image of God

Berkhof emphasises that the theme of human beings as the purpose of God has "an unusual, even provocative ring in the tradition of theology".[5] This raises the idea that we are perhaps misunderstanding God's purpose, tending towards an anthropocentric approach, rather than a theocentric one. In my opinion, the reason for saying that human beings are the purpose of God is based on the theocentric point of view that human beings are created by God in His image. God therefore has a covenantal relationship with human beings because they are created in His image. This is echoed in almost all of Calvin's works. According to Calvin, God's image within human beings means that all things they desire should conform to what God has bestowed upon them. Therefore, the integrity of human beings depends upon their response to what God has given them as their main identity. This is highlighted in the following exert from Calvin:

> Adam, the parent of us all, was created in the image and likeness of God (Gen. 1:26-27). That is, he was endowed with wisdom, righteousness, holiness, and so by clinging to these gifts of grace to God (28) he could have lived forever in Him, if he had stood fast in the uprightness God had given him.[6]

The idea that human beings are created in the image and likeness of God is seen as God's decision to give them "the gracious bestowal of wisdom, righteousness, and holiness". These are the qualities of humanity, and to possess such qualities, people must be in a covenantal relationship with their Maker (otherwise these qualities could be marred or damaged).

[5] *Ibid.,* loc.cit.

[6] John Calvin, *Institution of the Christian Religion,* trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1975), 20-21, as quoted and explained by J. Faber, *Essays in Reformed Doctrine,* Inheritance Publications, Alberta, Canada, 1990, pp. 228-229.

The question that remains, is how we obtain these qualities? How do these qualities come about in human beings? Calvin insists that human beings consist of body and soul; God's glory can shine forth in the outer self, but there is no doubt that God's image sits within the soul. The image of God is therefore "*spiritual*",[7] and He bestows His image and likeness in the human soul. This means that, firstly, the image of God in human beings cannot be recreated by any other creature or fellow human being, however great or noble they may be. All the qualities of wisdom, righteousness and holiness, which can be possessed by a human being, are bestowed by their Creator. Secondly, by having these qualities, human beings are at all times called to be in relationship with God. This relationship is a covenantal one, meaning that God becomes a part of every aspect of life and is the sole source of these spiritual qualities. This relationship is defined as "full and total surrender to God", which, in accordance with *Imago Dei,* means there is a process of calling and responding. To say "God creates human beings in His image and likeness" is to also say that God is calling His people and, at the same time, human beings are responding to God's calling. In other words, God relates with human beings in a dialectical process.

To this point, I have tried to advocate the reason or basis for speaking about Islam as one of the greatest religions of the world and that, based upon a theocentric approach, we can advocate a peaceful and humanitarian relationship with our Muslim neighbours. Muslims, as fellow human beings, are the purpose of God and created by God in His image and likeness, just as Christians are. With this understanding, we can now speak about Islam from the perspective of "togetherness".

3. Islam as a prophetic religion

How should we speak about Islam from the perspective of togetherness? What kind of togetherness do we have? Do we, Muslims and Christians, recognise this togetherness? What is the implication of expressing this togetherness within our daily lives? Does expressing this togetherness put the exclusive claim of the Christian faith that Jesus Christ is the only Redeemer of the entire human race at risk? If Muslims, as fellow human beings, are recognised as also being the purpose of God, does it mean that Islam as a religion may also be acknowledged as a religion of revelation? If so, what can be done to reduce the "unjust" attitudes towards Islam which have arisen throughout our history[8] and, at present, through the threat of terrorism often carried out in the name of Islam?

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[7] Faber, *op.cit.,* p. 229 (*italic* his).
[8] For an insight into the discussion of the manifold views of Islam, especially until the first half of the 20th century, see, among others, W. A. Bijlefeld, *De Islam als na-christelijke religie,* Den Haag 1959.

I will not discuss these questions in detail, but it should be noted that it is historical and religious fact that Christianity and Islam (and Judaism) follow the line of prophetic and revelatory religious tradition. These questions therefore cannot be considered without acknowledging the background of empirical Christianity and Judaism (as elucidated by the "Tambaram theologian", Hendrik Kraemer,[9] in his classic work *The Christian Message in a non-Christian World*[10]).[11] There is, and always will be, a special link between Christians and Muslims, both historically and spiritually. It is this link that is thought to be able to act as a guiding principle for meetings between these two great religious communities.

> The meeting of Christianity with other great non-Christian religions is, properly speaking, a meeting of strangers, since they have been born in different geographical and spiritual hemispheres without any historical connection. With Islam, the case is very different. Christianity and Islam are acquaintances from the very beginning.[12]

Kraemer does not only see Islam as an historical acquaintance of Christianity, but his understanding of Islam is also strongly influenced by his idea of *Biblical realism*. He believes that Islam "arose in the shadow of Biblical realism", making it "a religion of revelation".[13] Although the concept of Biblical realism[14] cannot be expressed in a single definition, we can however conclude that Islam is a theocentric religion which "takes in a radically serious fashion the fact that God is God, that He is the Absolute Sovereign and the only rightful Lord, with all the consequences that are implied therein for the world, human life and the position of man".[15] The theocentric characteristics of Islam proclaim God as the sole, almighty God, the Creator and the King of the Day of Judgment. This means that Islam also proclaims its prophetic origin.

> (Islam) takes God as God with awful seriousness. God's unity and soleness, His austere sovereignty and towering omnipotence, are burning in white heat within Islam. Whosoever has listened with his innermost being to the passionate awe that vibrates through the well known sentences: Allahu akbar (God is great) and: La sharika lahu (He has no associate) knows that Islam has religious tones of elemental power and quality. The

[9] About him, see, among others, Nicolas J. Woly, *Meeting at the Precincts of Faith,* Kampen 1998, pp 14-16.
[10] London 1938 (third edition Michigan, U.S., 1956). The present writer uses the first edition.
[11] *Ibid.,* p 216.
[12] *Ibid.,* p 354.
[13] *Ibid.,* p 217.
[14] *Ibid.,* pp 61-68.
[15] Cf. *Ibid.,* p 63.

apprehension of the naked majesty of God in Islam is simply unsurpassed. Even in the dry books of kalam (the science of dogma) the theocentric character of Islam is overwhelmingly demonstrated by the fact that their main content is the doctrine of God, His essence and His attributes.[16]

In close connection to the writings of Kraemer, Johan Herman Bavinck,[17] another Dutch theologian (Reformed), presents the idea that Christianity considers non-Christian religions in the context of General Revelation.[18] In this revelation, God takes all humankind into His common grace, regardless of how deeply fallen or how far departed they are. This divine revelation is revealed to human beings through the work of God in nature; and human beings respond to this revelation through their religious and cultural lives, meeting the divine presence every day. God is seeking each person, and through religion, each person responds to God's seeking. It is through religion and the sense of the divine, which is engraved in their hearts, that human beings are able to perceive the revelation of God, Bavinck says (following Calvin's *semen religionis* and *sensus divinitatis*).

We can conclude that the greatest mystery in the history of mankind is the story of God's revelation and the human response to this.[19] The whole history of human religion therefore becomes evidence of God's work. The human response to God's revelation can however be negative as well as positive. It is positive in the sense that religion can be profound and sincere; however it can be negative in the sense that religion can be an escape away from God. In short, the core of human religion is "a relationship" or "an encounter"[20] where God is wrestling with human beings and, at the same time, human beings are responding to God, either positively or negatively. We can therefore surmise that when Muhammad began his prophetic mission for "his" Islam to be the next world religion after Judaism and Christianity, this was the result of God's struggle with human beings at a certain moment in our common history.

In the "night of power" of which the ninety-seventh sura of the Koran speaks,[21] the night when "the angels descended" and the Koran descended from Allah's throne, God dealt

[16] *Ibid.,* pp 220-221 (*italics,* his).
[17] About him, see, among others, Woly, *op.cit.,* pp 56-57.
[18] J.H. Bavinck, *An Introduction to the Science of Missions*. Philadelphia/Pennsylvania, U.S., 1960, pp 227-231. See also *The Church Between Temple and Mosque*. Michigan, U.S., 1982 (2nd ed; 1st ed. 1966), pp 25-34.
[19] J.H. Bavinck, *The Church Between Temple and Mosque*. Michigan, U.S., 1982 (2nd ed; 1st ed. 1966), p. 19.
[20] *Ibid.,* loc.cit.
[21] There is a common belief in the Islamic world that the "night of power" or "night of destiny" (*Arabic: Laylat al Qadr*) was the night when the first sura (chapter) of the Qur'an descended, which is celebrated in the first ten days of the fasting month, the *Ramadhan*. Thus, it is a night in the year of 610 AD, the year when Muhammad began his prophetic mission.

> with Muhammad and touched him. God wrestled with him in that night, and God's hand is still noticeable in the answer of the prophet, but it is also the result of human repression.[22]

Johannes Verkuyl, one of Bavinck's students, describes Muhammad as "undoubtedly belonging to the greats of mankind. He was without doubt a religious and political genius".[23] One could say that Muhammad was indeed one of the most influential religious figures in the world, belonging to "the genre of prophetic figures", who led millions of people to be *imitatio Muhammadi*.[24]

4. Islam as a universal religion

I have, thus far, explained that our apprehension towards Islam is rooted in the fact that the human being is God's purpose, created in His image and likeness. My aim now, in referencing the works of two Muslim scholars, Abu Kalam Azad[25] and Nurcholis Madjid[26], is to present Islam as a universal religion.

Influenced by the theory of Wilhelm Schmidt[27], Azad believes that the unity of God is not the result of any evolutionary process, but that mankind's religious consciousness began with the belief that God is one.[28] The unity of God is the cardinal principle of all revealed religions, whereby the law of nature itself provides the basic evidence. The knowledge that God's hand is at work everywhere is part of human nature; therefore it is against nature to consider the mysteries of the universe while denying the existence of God. The belief in the unity of God is "an inward demand of human nature".[29]

According to Azad, believing in the unity of God leads to the unity of religions, insisting that the primary basis of the Qur'anic message is the unity of religions. God created "*one community*", the universe houses this community, and the world acts as its home. It forms a single family, namely the "family of God" (*ayal-Allah*).[30]

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[22] J.H. Bavinck, *The Church Between Temple and Mosque*. Michigan, U.S., 1982 (2nd ed; 1st ed. 1966), p. 125
[23] J. Verkuyl, *Met moslims in gesprek over het evangelie,* Kok, Kampen 1994 (2nd ed.), p. 156.
[24] *Ibid.,* loc.cit.
[25] About him, see, among others, Woly, *op.cit.,* pp. 248-251.
[26] About him, see, among others, *Ibid.,* pp. 289-290.
[27] Wilhelm Schmidt, *The Origin and Growth of Religion: Facts and Theories*. London, U.K., 1931. See also J. Waardenburgh, *Classical Approaches to the Study of Religion,* Vol. I: Introduction and Anthology. The Hague/Paris, 1973, pp. 264-286.
[28] Abu Kalam Azad, *The Tarjuman Al-Qur'an,* Vol. One: Surat-ul-Fatiha, London, U.K., 1962, pp. 100-104.
[29] *Ibid.,* p. 129.
[30] *Ibid.,* p. 156.

> Men were at first but one community; then they fell to variance; and had not a decree (of respite) previously gone from thy Lord,...
>
> Mankind was but one people; and God sent prophets to announce glad tidings and to warn; [31]

Azad advocates that the unity of human beings is the primary aim of religion. In other words, the unity of human beings is based on the unity of religion. There is not one religious founder who has not emphasised the commitment to a single religion by all mankind.[32] The unity of religion unites the life of the entire human race. This is called "*ad-Din*", "*the* religion", or "*al-islam*", which means full and total surrender to God.

The essential components of *al-islam* are *devotion to God* and *righteous living*. All prophets throughout time have invited mankind to live by these essential components. Such devotees – whether they are Jews, Christians or Muslims – are the true advocates of *al-islam*.

Al-islam is "the way of God", and the way of life for human beings, uniting all communities of mankind.[33] *Al-islam* is the universal path of God's truth, which can appear everywhere, at any time, transcending all geographical and national boundaries.[34]

> God the creator of all beings is one. Human beings created by the one God must be one community. In order to keep their unity, to this one community of human beings must be given one way of life, one religion, namely al-islam. So, when human beings divide themselves, only this religion can remedy the situation again.[35]

According to Azad, the evidence of the deterioration of humankind over time can be seen in the differences in religions. He asks the question:

> If revelation directs all mankind to but one and the same truth, or the founders of different religions have preached but one and the same principle of life, how is it that differences exist between religion and religion, and why is it that one code of law, conduct and ceremonial and ritual is not prescribed for one and all, and why again is the form of worship observed in one religion different from that in another, why does one turn in one direction in prayer and why another in another, and why do the laws in one differ in style from those in another?

[31] Sura 10:20 and 2:213; (all quotations of the Qur'an are Azad's own translations); *The Tarjuman*, pp. 153, 154.
[32] *Ibid.*, p. 155.
[33] *Ibid.*, pp. 163, 176.
[34] *Ibid.*, p. 187.
[35] Cf. Woly, *op.cit.*, p. 264.

Azad believes the answer to this question is rooted in the fact that people tend to depart from *al-islam*.

Azad also believes that the differences in world religions lie not in their intrinsic character, but rather in their individuality. The differences are in ways of worship, customs and religious practices, which vary depending on social and cultural environments. This provides people with an opportunity to comprehend the substance of *al-islam*. Every religion has "to evolve its own ritual as demanded by its environment".[36]

> To each among you have We prescribed a law and an open way. If God so willed, He would have made you all of one pattern; but He would test you by what He hath given to each. Be emulous then, in good deeds.[37]

With an understanding of *al-islam* as the universal religion for all mankind, we should now look at *al-islam* as a common platform for Islam and Christianity, and their communities of Muslims and Christians. Based on the works of the 14th century Islamic scholar Ibn Taimiya (1263-1328 AD), Nurcholis Madjid has drawn a distinction between "common or universal islam" (*al-islam al-'amm*) and "specific islam" (*al-islam al-khashsh*). He defines common or universal islam as an "inclusive faith" or "universal religion" (*ad-din al-jami'*).[38] This comprises the essence of all world religions, particularly "the witness that there is no God save *Allah,*[39] which includes the notion of absolute worship of God and the will to abandon the worship of any other than God".[40] In this form of *al-islam,* the whole universe, whether by nature or self-determination, has to submit to the Law of God (*Sunatullah*), which is essentially the creature's submission to its Creator. Human beings are able to be in the path of peace (*salam*) with God by worshiping Him alone, and with their fellowmen by doing right in their lives. This form of *al-islam* also includes the belief in submissive attitude (*al-istislam*), obedience (*al-inqiyad*) and sincerity (*al-ikhlash*), and the ability to attain salvation (*salamah,*

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[36] *Ibid.,* p. 159.
[37] Sura 5:48; *The Tarjuman,* p. 160.
[38] K. Steenbrink, "Nurcholis Madjid and inclusive Islamic faith in Indonesia" in G. Speelman cs (eds.), *Muslims and Christians in Europe. Breaking New Ground. Essays in honour of Jan Slomp,* Kampen 1993, p. 36. See also K. Steenbrink, "Nurcholis Madjid (1939): Islam as an Integral Part of the Religious Traditions of Mankind" in Anton Houtepen (ed.), *The Living Traditions. Towards an Ecumenical Hermeneutics of the Christian Tradition*. Utrecht, The Netherlands, 1995, p. 132.
[39] It is of interest to note that the word "Allah" is used by both Muslims and Christians in Indonesia.
[40] Nurcholis Madjid, "Islam di Indonesia: Masalah Ajaran Universal dan Lingkungan Budaya Lokal" (Islam in Indonesia: The Problem of Universal Teaching and Local Culture), written as an introduction of his collected essays *Islam Agama Kemanusiaan. Membangun Tradisi dan Visi Baru Islam Indonesia* (Islam, the Religion of Humanity. Towards a New Tradition and Insight of Indonesian Islam), Jakarta, Indonesia, 1995, pp. xiii, xiv.

salamatun). In consequence, those who do not take *al-islam* as their way of life, live outside of the "design of God".[41]

Specific islam is defined as the institutional Islam, which was introduced by the prophet Muhammad as an extension to universal islam. It is an organised religion, and one of the world religions, with millions of believers throughout the world. It is called Islam because Muhammad taught, consciously and deliberately, the "submissive attitude to God". Islam is, however, not the only organised religion pertaining to *al-islam* in the generic sense of the word. "It is not unique and not independent", Madjid insists, "but it comes into being within the chain of other religions of *al-islam,* which have come earlier".[42]

What is therefore the importance of *al-islam* for interreligious relationships, especially between Christians and Muslims? It is the acknowledgment of *al-islam* that should encourage Muslims to understand the reality of religious pluralism. Azad and Madjid both believe that Muslims should accept that Islam, as an organised religion, is one of the revealed religions, and that religious pluralism is under the will of God. The Qur'an even teaches the concept of religious plurality.[43] Furthermore, Madjid writes that "plurality is the order of human communities, a kind of Law of God or *Sunnat Allah,* and that it is God's prerogative to know and to explain in the Next Life, why people are so different from each other".[44] In this form of *al-islam,* the concept of religious plurality places an emphasis on the idea that freedom of existence is provided in all world religions. This freedom is based on the uniting nature of all world religions, namely *al-islam,* providing a common platform. This common platform consists of "belief in the unity of God and the struggle against the tyrannical power".[45] "Tyrannical power", which the Qur'an calls *thaghut* and Azad explains as "forces for mischief and disorder",[46] refers to all forms of religious worship which take away basic freedom, including "compulsion in religion".[47] Furthermore, Madjid insists that "all tyrannical powers are corrupt and this is why the word *thaghut* is repeatedly identified with and explained as an evil or satanic power, even the Satan itself".[48]

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[41] Madjid, "Islam di Indonesia", p. x-xviii.
[42] Madjid, *Islam, Doktrin dan Perabadaban,* p 428. Cf. A. Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur'an. Text Translation and Commentary,* Beirut 1968, p. 145 note 418, and Muhammad Asad, *The Message of the Qur'an,* Gibraltar, Spain, 1980, p. vi.
[43] Nurcholis Madjid, *Islam, Doktrin dan Peradaban. Sebuah Telaah Kritis tentang Masalah Keimanan, Kemanusiaan dan Kemodernan* (Islam, Doctrine and Civilization. A Critical Study on the Problem of Faith, Humanity and Modernity), Jakarta, Indonesia, 1992, p. 184.
[44] Nurcholis Madjid, "Islamic Roots of Modern Pluralism" in *Studia Islamika* 1(1), April-June 1994, p. 73.
[45] Madjid, Islam Agama Kemanusiaan, p. 136.
[46] Azad, *op.cit.,* p. 155.
[47] Madjid, Islam, Doktrin dan Peradaban, pp. 85, 86.
[48] Madjid, Islam Agama Kemanusiaan, pp. 135, 162.

Based on what we have described as the meaning of *al-islam*, the first implication for interreligious relationships is that all followers of world religions – in this case Christians and Muslims – are communities of those who fully and totally surrender themselves to God; *muslims* in the true sense of the word. As *muslims*, and followers of organised religions, Christians and Muslims ought to have an attitude of submission to God alone, and at the same time be in a struggle against all forms of tyrannical power. The generic meaning of *al-islam* is therefore in accordance with being *Imago Dei*. The second implication is that the Muslim attitude towards other religious communities, mentioned in the Qur'an as *the People of the Book*, includes both Jews and Christians. In reference to the Qur'anic statement in Sura 2:62[49], Madjid concludes that "when Muslims, Jews, Christians believe in God, the One and Only God, and they believe in the Last Day (on which day people are held responsible for their deeds before the Divine Judgment, and a time when a man, as an individual, shall be absolutely in relation with God) and in accordance with that belief they exercise righteous deeds, then all of them, so to speak, 'shall be in heaven' and 'exempted from hell'".[50]

Based on the same Qur'anic statement (Sura 2:62), Muhammad Asad (whom Madjid describes as "one of the authoritative interpreters of the Qur'an in modern time")[51] gives his own explanation: "The above passage – which recurs in the Qur'an several times – lays down a fundamental doctrine of Islam. With a breadth of vision unparalleled in any other religious faith, the idea of 'salvation' is here made conditional upon three elements only: belief in God, belief in the Day of Judgment and righteous action in life".[52]

We can conclude that both Madjid and Azad are not in agreement with some Muslim commentators who declare that non-Muslims are unbelievers and shall not be allowed into heaven or released from hell.

5. Let us practice "our islam"

One of the central religious figures for both Christians and Muslims, besides Abraham and the other Old Testament prophets, is Jesus Christ (*Isa al-Masih* in the Qur'an). My question is therefore whether these two religious communities can *learn from* and *listen to* Him as a way of practicing the meaning of *al-islam* together? Could Christians learn from and listen to the Islamic Jesus Christ as proclaimed by the Qur'an? Could Muslims do the same with the Christ of the Christian biblical faith?

[49] "Lo! Those who believe (in that which is revealed unto thee, Muhammad), and those who are Jews, and Christians and Sabaeans – whoever believeth in Allah and the Last Day and doeth right – surely their reward is with their Lord, and there shall no fear come upon them neither shall they grieve" (M.M. Pickthall's translation).
[50] Madjid, Islam, Doktrin dan Peradaban, p. 186.
[51] *Ibid.*, p 183. (Muhammad Asad is an Austrian Jew converted to Islam; his original name is Leopold Weiss).
[52] Asad, *op.cit.*, p. 14, note 50; quoted by Madjid in *Islam, Doktrin dan Peradaban,* pp. 187, 198.

Mahmoud Ayoub,[53] a Lebanese Muslim scholar, has proposed an Islamic Christology. According to Ayoub, Christology is an understanding of the role of Christ within the divine plan of human history, of Christ the man, one of God's servants, but also Christ the Word of God, His spirit, and exalted friend.[54] In Ayoub's work, we see two significant points; firstly, that the Qur'anic denial of the killing of Christ on the cross is a "denial of the power of men to vanquish and destroy the divine Word, which is forever victorious".[55] The Qur'an, Ayoub highlights, is not speaking about a man, but about the Word of God who was sent to earth and who returned to God.[56] Secondly, that the position of Jesus is "the manifestation of the divine beauty and majesty in and through man". This statement should help Christians and Muslims to mutually learn and listen in order to realise how to be fully and totally in submission to God. Furthermore, Ayoub writes:

> ...like the Christ of Christian faith and hope, the Jesus of the Qur'an and later Muslim piety is much more than a mere human being, or even simply the messenger of a Book. While the Jesus of Islam is the Christ of Christianity, the Christ of the Gospel often speaks through the austere, human Jesus of Muslim piety. Indeed, the free spirit of Islamic mysticism finds in the man Jesus, not only an example of piety, love and asceticism which they have sought to emulate, but also an example of a fulfilled humanity, a humanity illuminated by the light of God.[57]

Looking at Ayoub's proposal of an Islamic Christology, we could say that we, as Christians and Muslims, have a great challenge in striving to put into practice the real meaning of *al-islam*, especially in interreligious relationships. We have presented an example from the Muslim and from the Christian perspective; however each of us should carry out the meaning of being good performers of *al-islam* according to the generic sense of the word. In our effort to understand Jesus Christ, it is more constructive when we, together and as practitioners of *al-islam*, do not think of Him in terms of His being, but in terms of His spiritual relation to God. As Christians, we need to hold on to what Jesus Christ has revealed to human beings of God's image and likeness; how to fully and totally surrender to God; and how to be

[53] About him, see, among others, Woly, *op.cit.*, pp. 232-233.
[54] Mahmoud M. Ayoub, "Towards an Islamic Christology: An Image of Jesus in Early Shi'i Muslim Literature" in *The Muslim World*, LXVI (No. 3, July 1976), p. 163.
[55] Mahmoud M. Ayoub, "Towards an Islamic Christology, II: The Death of Jesus, Reality or Delusion (A Study on the Death of Jesus in Tafsir Literature)", in *The Muslim World*, LXX (No. 2, April 1980), p. 117.
[56] *Ibid.*, loc.cit.
[57] Ayoub, "Towards an Islamic Christology", p. 187.

"islam". God, namely the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, has sent Him to show us how to be "muslim" in the true sense of the word; to be a human being who surrenders fully and totally to God the Father, the Father of Jesus Christ. By being *imitatio Christi,* we have to struggle against all kinds of tyrannical powers. As Muslims with *imitatio Muhammadi* and Christians with *imitatio Christi,* we can work together in such struggles, and we should be motivated to do so by our own religious traditions, without letting our differences get in the way. It is through our differences that we, Christians and Muslims, can discover considerably more to allow us to realise the true meaning of *al-islam.*

In conclusion, we should be at peace with our fellow *muslims,* as followers of Islam, the institutionalised *al-islam,* just as we should invite our fellow *muslims* to do the same.

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REFORMED WORLD

Religion and politics in contemporary Indonesia: Responding to political change and redefining religious diversity

Simone Sinn

Although political change has redefined the landscape for religious life in Indonesia, old customs and institutions still have a considerable influence on religious practice. The historical development and religious-focused public debates of recent years, have allowed us to identify two critical areas of change in contemporary Indonesia; an active struggle in religious authority and a redefinition of religious diversity. Through these debates new configurations have emerged within and between religious communities, as well as between the religious and political spheres in society. This article aims to examine the role of religion within this transformation process, and the role of the State with regard to religious matters.

1. Introduction: transformation of political and religious life

In 1998, the fall of Suharto marked the beginning of a new era in Indonesian history. After several decades of autocratic political rule, democratic procedures and institutions took centre stage, leading to a dramatic change in the political landscape. The transformation process that followed is referred to as *era reformasi*, which translates to "reform era" or "reformation era".

Because of the similarity in terminology, theologians may be tempted to draw parallels between this Indonesian experience and the 16th century reformation. The dynamics are however completely different. Five centuries ago, religious change was at the heart of the transformation process in Europe, which led to a significant change in the political landscape. In contemporary Indonesia, it is the political change that has had consequences for the religious landscape. The setting is also different; Europe was very much a Christian continent at the time, but Indonesia today is a majority Muslim country which acknowledges the long-standing presence of other religions.[1]

[1] Official statistics issued in 2005 provide the following figures: of the 240 million inhabitants in Indonesia, 88.5% are Muslim, 5.8% Protestant, 3% Catholic, 1.7% Hindu, 0.6% Buddhist, and 0.1% Confucian (Supas BPS 2005, available at: http://www.rocan.depag.go.id/anggaran/PEMBANGUNAN%20BIDANG%20AGAMA.pdf). The actual configuration, however, varies on the different islands; Bali, for example, is majority Hindu, whereas Flores is majority Catholic.

There is, however, one critical question underlining the religious and political change in both eras. Who has legitimate authority: authority to govern the country and authority to guide religion? In times of transformation, the relationship between the leader and his/her constituency is usually redefined, be it in the political or religious sense. There are many historical and contemporary examples that show, if one of these areas is redefined, the other will also be touched upon. Redefining authority in one area triggers questions in the other, ultimately leading to a redefinition of the relationship between the two.

Since 1998, politics and religion have experienced considerable change in Indonesia, and continue to do so. The public sphere has become more diverse, vibrant and complex. Political scientists, across the world, are fascinated to explore how democracy is developing in this Southeast-Asian country,[2] and how religious communities are responding to that development. They must assess this development in relation to new freedom and struggles over authority, influence, and power. But what effect does this have on religious plurality, interfaith relations and theological teaching? This article explores how Muslims and Christians – the two faith communities that have been the most influential in the archipelago – participate in shaping these.

Historically, the relationship between Muslims and Christians has been shaped by a number of imbalances; access to political and economic power, access to education, different roles relating to colonial power, numbers, etc. Although religious harmony and diversity in unity (*bhinneka tunggal ika*) are two important beliefs in Indonesia, there is also a deep history of competition between these two religious communities. Christianisation on the one hand, and the attempts to establish an Islamic State and implement Islamic law on the other, have contributed to a long-standing conflicting relationship. However, the vision of creating a peaceful yet diverse nation has brought pious and secular Muslims and Christians together in acknowledging their diversity and constructive coexistence.[3]

In order to understand the current dynamics in the religious landscape in Indonesia, we must first explore the setting in which political and religious change take place, by looking at the new, and still existing, limits in religious life in Indonesia. This article will also look at

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[2] See: Marco Bünte and Andreas Ufen (eds.), *Democratization in Post-Suharto Indonesia,* London/New York, Routledge 2009; Azyumardi Azra and Wayne Hudson (eds.), *Islam Beyond Conflict: Indonesian Islam and Western Political Theory* (Law, Ethics and Governance Series), Aldershot, Ashgate 2008; Christoph Schuck, "Islam und die Legitimität von Herrschaft. Erkenntnisse aus der konzeptionellen Heterogenität des Islams in Indonesien für Demokratie und Systemtransformation", *Zeitschrift für Internationale Beziehungen,* 14/1 (2007), pp. 71-100.

[3] Jan S. Aritonang, *Sejarah Perjumpaan Kristen dan Islam di Indonesia,* Jakarta, BPK G. Mulia 2004. This book has provided an important historical overview of the complicated relationship between Christians and Muslims in Indonesia.

Indonesia's concept of *Pancasila* as the basis for religious plurality, and at the distinct struggles for authority over religious matters, including the public debates on religious teaching and morality. Finally, we will explore the redefinition process related to religious diversity, particularly new developments in religious education and the presence of religious communities. The conclusion will provide a summary of the divergent, yet related, religious dynamics in Indonesia today.

2. New space and old limits for religions in Indonesia

2.1. Religious revitalisation

Religion is an extremely important part of Indonesian society, both culturally and politically. Mosques, churches and temples are prominent public places; religious festivals are huge public events; religious education is compulsory throughout all educational levels, including university; the religious section in bookshops is one of the biggest; and a significant number of TV talk shows, soap operas and films feature religious topics. These are just a few examples of the vibrant religious life in Indonesia.

In the last 20 years, a religious revitalisation in the public sphere has taken place. It began in the last period of Suharto's rule, when he provided more freedom to Muslims in order to gain their support. It then accelerated in the *era reformasi,* in which religion has more openly become an economic factor, and new networks and fora have emerged through mass media. Today, religious symbols are used in almost all cultural settings in Indonesia, sometimes blatantly and sometimes less obviously. Traditional rural culture, modern urban culture, popular youth culture and others use religious symbolic language to express and interpret their own realities. Global trends have also had a significant impact on both Islam and Christianity in recent years, influencing religious priorities. For Christianity, John M. Prior and Alle Hoekema highlight that "at the turn of the century evangelical and charismatic concerns have become mainstream"[4]. For Islam, the focus is on the de-contextualisation and re-contextualisation of Muslim religious life in Indonesian society.[5]

[4] John M. Prior and Alle Hoekema, "Chapter Sixteen: Theological Thinking by Indonesian Christians 1850 – 2000", in Karel Steenbrink and Jan S. Aritonang, *A History of Christianity in Indonesia,* Leiden, Brill 2008, p. 812.

[5] See: Ahmad Syafii Maarif, *Islam Dalam Binkai Keindonesiaan dan Kemanusiaan. Sebuah Refleksi Sejarah,* Bandung, Mizan 2009. In trying to analyse Muslim revitalisation, Achmad Munjid recently distinguished between "thick Islam" and "deep Islam". For him, "thick Islam" is an urban phenomenon, where Muslims consciously live-out Muslim identity and develop it in competition to other world views, e.g. secular and Western culture. "Deep Islam", however, is the century-old practice of Islam as a culture and tradition in relatively homogeneous communities. Achmad Munjid, "Thick Islam and deep Islam", *The Jakarta Post,* 16 August 2009. Hilman Latief contested this binary model but agrees with Munjid that deepening and contextualising Islam is needed. Hilman Latief, "Cosmopolitan Muslims: urban vs rural phenomenon", *The Jakarta Post,* 29 August 2009.

2.2. Religion and politics in the *Pancasila*-based state

Beyond the cultural impact, religion also plays an important role in political processes. I will use the following three distinctions in the way religion occurs in political life to demonstrate this:

a) Specific religious matters are a *topic* of political debate (e.g. how to regulate the construction of places for worship)

b) Religion is a fundamental *aspect* of political discourse (e.g. religious arguments and actors were both influential and played an important role in the drafting of the anti-pornography law)

c) Religion is the *basis* of the State and an important part of the ideological foundation of the political community as a whole

We will first look at this last and most fundamental aspect in which religion occurs in politics in Indonesia, followed by the other two in the third chapter of this article.

Article 29 of the Indonesian constitution declares:

"(1) The State shall be based upon the belief in the One and Only God.

(2) The State guarantees all persons the freedom of worship, each according to their own religion or belief."[6]

Religious belief is explicitly named as the basis of the State and, while not being the belief of just one specific religion, it also provides the possibility for a number of religions to coexist. When Indonesia's constitution was promulgated in 1945, the founding fathers agreed that Indonesia was not to be a secular or an Islamic state. *Pancasila,* the State ideology developed by Sukarno and outlined in the preamble of the constitution, represents, in many ways, a middle ground. It proclaims five principles:

1) Belief in one supreme God

2) Just and civilised humanism

3) The unity of Indonesia

4) Democracy

5) Social justice

The first principle implies that the State and each citizen have to acknowledge one religious point of reference. In 1969, a law defined Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism and

[6] Indonesia's Constitution, available at: http://www.indonesia.go.id/id/files/UUD45/satunaskah.pdf.

Buddhism as official religions in Indonesia, and in 2005, Confucianism was added to the list. Until recently, the law insisted that every identity card had to declare a person's "official religion". This legal regulation is not intended as a theological categorisation, nor does it originate in the idea of freedom of religion of the individual; it derives from a political desire to accommodate existing faith communities in Indonesia.

After the fall of Suharto in 1998, the concept of having official religions was questioned. Activists in the pro-democracy movement opted for dropping the concept, pointing out that there are citizens in Indonesia whose world views are not recognised (e.g. atheists, Jews, and followers of primal religions). These latter world views may be recognised by the State as cultural traditions, but they are not seen as standing on an equal footing with the official religions. Muslims, on the other hand, opted for establishing an Islamic state by including reference to Islamic law in the constitution. When the constitutional reform was deliberated in the first years of the *era reformasi,* neither option won the majority. Therefore, in order to balance democratic procedures, some articles of the constitution were amended and new ones included; however *Pancasila* and Article 29 remained to define the basis of the Indonesian State.

2.3. *Pancasila*: strengths and weaknesses

Over time, due to its theoretical misuse under Suharto's rule, the reputation of *Pancasila* as the integrative basis of society has somewhat been lost. This is visible, not only among secular activists and Islamist Muslims, but also among a broad majority in society.

> Unfortunately, however, the Soeharto regime used Pancasila as a tool for repression, and the forced implementation in 1985 of Pancasila as the sole ideological basis of all organizations in the country led to a loss of faith in it as a basis for Indonesian religious pluralism.[7]

Pancasila was no longer seen as the framework that provides space for a number of different world views, but rather as the sole world view to be affirmed. Today, the respective New Order regulations are no longer in existence, but *Pancasila,* as a constitutional concept, still needs to recover from its misuse. It needs to be reinterpreted in order for it to be regarded

[7] Azyumardi Azra, "Religious Pluralism in Indonesia" in: Azyumardi Azra and Wayne Hudson (eds.), *Islam Beyond Conflict: Indonesian Islam and Western Political Theory* (Law, Ethics and Governance Series), Aldershot, Ashgate 2008. p. 117.

once again as a concept that is relevant and viable in the current context. Small religious communities in particular are interested in upholding one basic principle of *Pancasila;* a legitimate space for the coexistence of different religions, with God as the reference point that enables a plurality of perspectives; where there is no distinction of majority and minority religions, whether in the proportionate or legitimate access to power and rights, and irrespective of numbers.

New developments have also shown that the concept of "official religions" has become more flexible, not because of new constitutional amendments, but because of other legal regulations. For example, it is now possible to leave the religious classification section in identity cards blank. However, not all citizens are aware of this and many local authorities do not inform them of it, highlighting this new regulation still needs further attention for it to be truly recognised.

Another interesting development is in marriage regulations. Until recently, before getting married, a couple had to confess one of the official religions in order to have a recognised marriage. However, leaders of other world views are now allowed to perform wedding ceremonies which are recognised by the State.[8] This new marriage regulation can be interpreted as a first step towards the recognition of primal religions.

One issue related to religion and politics in Indonesia, which is still not yet open for public debate, is the historical inquiry into the mass killings of communists and their alleged sympathisers in 1965/66, and the related ideological blinders. *Pancasila* is open to different kinds of religions, but never to the negation of God's existence. The "communist" perspective did not have a place to exist and, consequently, communism as a world view was prohibited and the proponents of it were eliminated. The perception of legitimate diversity has certain borders and these borders have to be defended, where necessary with brute violence, when they are threatened by an opposing party. This attitude has not only had dramatic outcomes in history, but, according to Bernard Adeney-Risakotta, can also be actualised today:

> In the repertoire of Indonesian social responses to apocalyptic fear of the other, the strategy of annihilating the enemy is still a live option. The dramatic end to the New Order Regime of Suharto was followed by the extreme brutality of the ethno-religious mass violence that broke out in Kalimantan, Java, Ambon, North Moluccas and Poso. The violent aftermath of Reformasi witness to the fact that this strategy is still a possibility in Indonesia.[9]

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[8] Undang-Undang Republik Indonesia Nomor 23 Tahun 2006 tentang Administrasi Kependudukan, available at: http://www.setneg.go.idindexphp?option_com.perundangan&id=1575&task-detail&catid-1<emid-42&tahun-2006

[9] Bernard Adeney-Risakotta, "Religion, Violence and Diversity: Negotiating the Boundaries of Indonesian Identity", in Carl Sterkens, Muhammad Machasin, Frans Wijsen (eds.), *Religion, Civil Society and Conflict in Indonesia* (Nijmegen Studies in Development and Cultural Change), Münster, Lit 2009, p. 15.

The potential for violence is still alive in Indonesian society, which is proud of its long-standing experience of peacefully living with religious diversity. *Pancasila* therefore leaves two questions unsolved; how does a religious society peacefully live with the non-religious, and how does a religious society reflect on the darker side of religion, particularly its potential for violence? In the wake of the political change which began in 1998, there is now an urgent need to further examine these questions.

3. Redefining religious authority

3.1. Whose religious teaching?

Religious authority in Indonesia has, to a certain extent, always been pluricentric. It was, and mostly still is, based on the authority of individual religious leaders who pass on their religious teachings and practices to their respective communities. The plurality is seen, for example, in the many kyais; the leaders of *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school) and the surrounding community. For the kyais, their reference point is always the Qur'an and the yellow books (*kitab kuning*), which is taught according to the tradition and profile of their respective school.

A new way of organising Muslim teaching came to the fore when Muhammadiyah, the first Muslim mass organisation in Indonesia, was established in 1912 (a reform movement that had its constituency mostly in urban areas). One of its main concerns was to further develop Muslim educational institutions and include modern sciences in the curriculum. In 1926, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) was founded to create a network among *pesantren*-related Muslims in rural areas. In recent years, both organisations have experienced an internal pluralisation; the inclusion of people who are deeply committed to interfaith cooperation, as well as hardliners who have difficulties in respecting people of other religions. While these are both non-governmental organisations, in 1975, the State-sponsored body, Majelis Ulama Indonesia MUI (Council of Islamic Scholars in Indonesia), was established as an authority on Muslim teaching in Indonesia. Created by Suharto, the organisation has always been heavily influenced by political interests, and consisted of representatives from these two non-governmental organisations in addition to other smaller, more radical groups. In recent years, most fatwas of the MUI have been conservative; however the hardliners seem to be gaining increasing influence.

In 2005, one fatwa triggered considerable public debate decreeing that pluralism, secularism and liberalism were *haram* (forbidden).This was directed against those within their own Muslim constituency, such as the *Jaringan Islam Liberal* (network of liberal Islam) who provided solid Qur'anic argumentation for why openness to other faiths and secular space

was in accordance with Islamic teaching. One of the main criticisms of this fatwa was the fact that the MUI used simplified explanations of these three words, rather than looking at the rich academic discourse that exists in Indonesia and elsewhere. Instead of helping people to discern complicated matters related to pluralism, secularism and liberalism, the MUI simply declared them *haram*. Many people interested in these matters responded by starting a public discourse on the issues, thereby making them even more visible in the public domain. Bettina David concludes:

> The fact that its orthodox fatwas have caused such a rumpus this time is an illustration of a new awareness among the Indonesian public. Different interpretations of religious matters are boldly stated and openly discussed in a way that has rarely been witnessed here in the past.[10]

Although the Indonesian public seem to be generally mature when it comes to MUI fatwas, the same cannot be said of the Indonesian State. For example, in 2005, the MUI declared that the teaching of the Ahmadiyah community was "outside Islam" and that its members were apostates. It stated that the Government was obliged to ban the dissemination of Ahmadiyah teachings and stop its activities. In June 2008, the Government did indeed issue a joint ministerial decree by the Ministry for Religious Affairs and the Ministry for Interior, which banned the dissemination of Ahmadiyah teaching. Before and after this decree, riots by violent Muslim militia attacked Ahmadiyah mosques, Ahmadiyah followers and their supporters. The official intention of the ministerial decree was aimed to stop violence, but the militia saw it as an affirmation of their position.[11] In this instance, the Government used its authority to implement MUI's definition of what is true and false in Islam. A briefing from the International Crisis Group describes the current situation under the Indonesian president, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono:

> Under the Yudhoyono government, then, the MUI has taken on a more influential policy-making role than it ever had in the past, with at least some of its fatwas used as the basis for law enforcement through the attorney general's office or other ministries.[12]

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[10] Bettina David, "Islam in Indonesia. Fatwas against Religious Liberalism", available at: http://www.qantara.de/webcom/show_article.php/_c-478/_nr-325/i.html.

[11] For an analysis of the relationship between fatwa and violence see: Luthfi Assyaukanie, "Fatwa and Violence in Indonesia", *Journal of Religion and Society*, Vol. 11 (2009), pp. 1-21.

[12] International Crisis Group, "Indonesia: Implications of the Ahmadiyah Decree", Asia Briefing No 78, 7 July 2008.

The briefing also examined the types of Islamic groups involved in the MUI, showing that many are linked to hardline or even fundamentalist Islamic teaching. Radical Islamic groups have skilfully used lobbying tools and networking to influence government policies. The briefing warned that this may be even more threatening to democratic procedures than Islamic political parties who are always critically watched.

These developments in Indonesia show that the political change toward democracy not only enabled public discourse on Muslim teaching, but also made way for liberal Muslim reasoning. Radical Islamic groups saw their chance and successfully influenced government policies. Therefore, questions need to be raised in order to clarify how the State relates to matters of religious teaching. In 2000, Robert Hefner called for "the creation of a civilized and self-limiting state", based on his insight that "in Indonesia, the culture of civility remains vulnerable and incomplete if it is not accompanied by a transformation of the state"[13].

3.2. Whose morality?

The new freedoms that emerged in the *era reformasi* not only had an impact on politics and religious teaching, but also on morality. Many Indonesians fear that with the evolution of mass media, moral decay will endanger Indonesian society, and factors such as individualism, materialism and sexual freedom are regarded as great threats. Of lesser consideration, however, is the moral decay that already endangers Indonesian society; pervasive corruption. A number of related MUI *fatwas* have already appeared, with a recent example being the *fatwa* against Facebook earlier this year. This was met with disagreement from many young people across the religious spectrum.

Far more severe, is the impact of the anti-pornography law which was issued in October 2008. For years, there was significant public debate around the many drafts of the law, the first of which was so morally rigid, with even kissing in public prohibited, that it was reminiscent of regulations under authoritarian regimes. Many regulations were consequently dropped from the law, but the broad definition of pornography – anything that can potentially create sexual excitement – remains problematic. Interestingly, this law was opposed by a notable mix of different groups, including human rights organisations, gender activists, tourism boards, artists and liberal democrats, who vigorously rejected it and its definition of public morality. Considering that the regional authorities will define how this law is implemented,

[13] Robert W. Hefner, *Civil Islam. Muslims and Democratization in Indonesia*, Princeton, Princeton University Press: 2000, p. 215.

some observers interpret it as a "gift" to the conservative constituency, just half a year before the parliamentary elections in Indonesia. Critics fear that the law will be used to make an example of certain cases and thereby influence public morality and what is perceived as "normal". It may also lead to further regional laws that will have a negative impact on the already limited freedom of women, who are, for example, prohibited to venture outside the house alone at night. Due to the decentralisation process, so-called shari'a regulations have been issued in a number of districts,[14] with many of them still pending Supreme Court decisions on whether they are in accordance with the constitution.

In order to truly understand the discourse on morality in Indonesia, Bernard Adeney-Risakotta believes that one has to take into account the deep cultural significance of shame in the country. Referring to the distinction between guilt culture and shame culture, as introduced by Ruth Benedict, he explains that guilt cultures emphasise individual freedom and responsibility for action, whereas shame cultures focus on communal responsibility and the importance of fulfilling your role. In a shame culture, the Westernised distinction between public and private does not work, as most intimate matters are deemed to be of high public relevance.

In regard to morality and gender relations, gender mainstreaming (i.e. promoting gender equality) has been adopted as national policy in Indonesia. The women's movement in civil society, and in faith communities, benefits from well-educated women who have pursued advanced academic and theological training. Siti Syamsiyatun believes that Indonesians have launched a "'silent revolution' to reclaim their freedom as responsible members of religious communities and as Indonesian citizens"[15].

4. Redefining religious diversity

4.1. Whose religious education?

In 2003, a new law was passed on the educational system in Indonesia which triggered intense debates among religious communities. Christians were particularly concerned with the first paragraph in Article 12:

> (1) Every learner in an educational unit is entitled to: a. receive religious education in accordance with his/her religion, imparted by an educator who has the same religion; [...][16]

[14] See: Christine Holike, Islam und Geschlechterpolitiken in Indonesien. Der Einzug der Scharia in die regionale Gesetzgebung, Berlin, Regiospectra Verlag 2008.

[15] Siti Syamsiyatun, "Freedom and Responsibility in Islam: A Gender Perspective in Theological and Historical Discourse", paper given on 18 June 2009 in a Christian-Muslim dialogue consultation in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, sponsored by the Lutheran World Federation.

[16] Undang-Undang Republik Indonesia Nomor 20 Tahun 2003 tentang Sistem Pendidikan Nasional, [National law on the educational system]. English translation available at: http://www.depdiknas.go.id/produk_hukum/uu/uu_20_2003_en.pdf

Up until this point, religious education in schools was run by a faith-based organisation and was mostly taught according to the organisation's religion (i.e. in Christian schools Christian education was taught for all pupils, irrespective of their own religion). This was a thorn in the flesh of Muslim leaders who regarded it as a means of Christianisation. Mujiburrahman has shown that Muslim leaders already tried to change this system during the New Order period, but were unsuccessful in achieving this. "Hav-ing realised that they could not prevent Muslim parents from sending their children to Christian schools, the Islamic leaders tried to use the Education Law to force the schools to teach Islam to Muslim students."[17]

Christian schools have always played an important role in the archipelago, through high quality education and Christian religious education. However, for Christians, this new law has become a symbol of their dwindling influence in the public sphere. Although the new regulation has not been implemented everywhere, Christians perceive it as a power struggle between the Muslim and Christian communities. A new sense of being a minority in a majority Muslim country has come to the fore, while the sense of being equal has taken a back seat.

In response to this new law, a number of interfaith activists have called to move beyond mere education of one's own religion, suggesting the introduction of a model of religious education whereby pupils have the opportunity to learn about different religions and consequently become more mature in dealing with religious plurality. There are already a few pilot projects underway which have a more comparative approach or operate with team teaching.

> Adherents of the different religions must not only be educated within the walls of their own religion but must also receive a basic education about other religions and, ideally, share faith experiences with adherents of other religions to come to a better mutual understanding. Hopefully such an education can contribute positively to building a peaceful, harmonious, civil society, where religions do not pose threats to one another but become tools for cooperation.[18]

Public discourse shows that religious education in Indonesia is not just about a child's right to receive religious education according to his/her faith, but about the claims that faith

[17] Mujiburrahman, *Feeling Threatened. Muslim-Christian Relations in Indonesia's New Order*, Leiden/Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press 2006, p. 250.

[18] Kees de Jong, "Religious (Peace) Education as a Means to avert Threats to Religious Harmony in Indonesia", in Carl Sterkens, Muhammad Machasin, Frans Wijsen (eds.), *Religion, Civil Society and Conflict in Indonesia* (Nijmegen Studies in Development and Cultural Change), Münster, Lit 2009, p. 167.

communities have on young people. The plural context requires the bringing together of the individual, the community and the society in the education process. Empowering individuals and communities to be confident, respectful and constructive in their interaction with other faiths is urgently needed. Andreas Yewangoe, chairman of the Council of Protestant Churches in Indonesia, emphasises the importance of faith communities seeing themselves as active agents in civil society.[19]

4.2. Whose presence and visibility?

It has been a long tradition in Indonesia that State authorities are responsible for managing interfaith relations and minimising conflict between different faith communities. Under Suharto's rule, this was conducted in a more authoritarian way. Since the *era reformasi,* it will be conducted in a more democratic way. What this means and how it will serve, however, still remains an open question.

A law on religious harmony has been in discussion for several years; however opposition from various sides meant that the law never saw the light of day. Instead, in 2006, a joint decree was issued by the Minister for Religious Affairs and the Minister of the Interior,[20] with the basic principle that both political and religious leaders have to manage religious harmony for their constituencies. The decree stipulates that the governmental head of each region (i.e. the governor of the province), the head of the county, and the major of the city, are jointly responsible for safeguarding religious harmony. Key issues, such as the official permission and construction of places of worship[*] (i.e. the buildings that visibly embody a faith community's presence), are now regulated in the decree.

The decree also regulates the *Forum Kerukunan Umat Beragama* (FKUB), an interfaith forum of religious leaders for the provincial, county and city level. The forum consists of a maximum of 21 people on the province level and 17 people on the county level, all of whom should be respected religious personalities. The composition is based on the proportions of each official faith community in the region, with at least one representative

[19] Andreas A. Yewangoe, *'Civil Society' di Tengah Agama-agama,* Jakarta, PGI 2009.

[20] Peraturan Bersama Menteri Agama dan Menteri Dalam Negeri Nomor 9 Tahun 2006 / Nomor 8 Tahun 2006 [Joint Regulation by the Minister for Religious Affairs and the Minister for Interior]. Available at: http://www.depag.go.id/file/dokumen/PERMEN906.pdf

[*] A question that is repeatedly raised is why each Christian denomination needs to have its own building, when church buildings are seen as another instrument to Christianise the surrounding community, often causing suspicion from people of other faiths.

of each. According to the decree, the forum is "created" by society, and "facilitated" by the regional government authorities; however, in practice, the government authorities play the most crucial role. While the forum was set-up to help foster good interfaith relationships, its recommendation is also one of the requirements for authorisation to construct a place of worship.

Dynamics within the FKUB depend greatly on the composition of the forum, the competence of the individual personalities, and the delicate interfaith matters that need to be discussed. In best practice situations, the forum significantly contributes to interfaith cooperation and serves the whole community. However, in worst case scenarios, majority-minority relationships enhance power struggles, and freedom of religion depends on the political will of the majority and is not safeguarded as basic human right.

5. Concluding remarks: developing dynamic interfaith relations and solid rules of law

"Feeling threatened" is the title of Mujiburrahman's book on Muslim-Christian relations in Indonesia's New Order. Some would argue that this also characterises the interfaith dynamics in the *era reformasi,* whereby the different debates and power struggles seem to reinforce fear of other religions. In my opinion, this title cannot adequately capture the divergent dynamics of today's society. Religious agents are indeed emotionally stressed and anxious, but they are far less passive than they were under Suharto's rule. I would argue that many have become much more active and the participatory impetus of democracy has spilled over into the religious field. In addition, many are now more confident to openly contribute to public debate, be it Muslim liberals, women activists, progressive educators, small faith communities or neoconservative and reactionary groups. Those who had originally been on the fringes have changed the discourse configuration for the whole society. At the same time, identity politics, power struggles, and new media have increased the competitive character of interfaith relationships, with tensions and conflicting dynamics playing a vital part. As seen in the Ahmadiyah case, violence has also been shown to be an effective tool in influencing the direction of government politics and public discourse.

The State has taken the initiative on several issues and tried to manage the religious field. They interfered in matters of religious teaching and joined hands with the MUI; they tried to shape public morality with a pornography law and, on the regional level, with numerous shari'a regulations; they reconfigured religious education in schools and regulated ways in which religious diversity is defined; and in some areas, they have attempted to do more than just set the rules and are on the verge of reinforcing majority-minority power play. Human

rights and interfaith organisations demand that the State refrains from defining boundaries, but rather builds a solid foundation through rules of law and being firm about the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate means of interaction. Constitutionally guaranteed rights and freedoms are seen as indispensable foundations for a democratic society, and a number of people are calling for a reinterpretation and revitalisation of the *Pancasila* principles. In any case, the equality of every Indonesian citizen needs to be a solid basis on which everybody and every faith community stands, as Olaf Schumann underlines.[21]

In Indonesia, religion has always been an important public matter and it will continue to be so. Conflicting entities are intrinsic to a society where religion is not only public, but also plural, and this needs to be acknowledged by all religious and political agents. However, the ways in which democratic processes and various laws influence this, calls for further analysis. In Indonesian self-understanding, the vision of religious harmony and the motto *bhinneka tunggal ika* (diversity in unity) are often referred to as an integrative thought pattern. How this vision actually operates in concrete interfaith relationships and how it is employed in theological thinking today, also still needs to be examined. Furthermore, more research needs to be conducted into how faith communities in Indonesia bring their particular visions of a "good life" into dialogue with one another, what the driving forces in intra- and interfaith relations are, and how mutual perceptions are shaped. In Indonesia, religious authority and diversity are two contested areas in which new key issues might arise and continue to create public discourse.

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[21] Olaf Schumann, "Öffentliche Verantwortung der Religionsgemeinschaften in Indonesien, dem Land der *Pancasila*", in Christine Lienemann-Perrin and Wolfgang Lienemann (eds.), *Kirche und Öffentlichkeit in Transformationsgesellschaften,* Stuttgart, Kohlhammer 2006, pp. 359-400.

Calvin in Havana?!

Dora Ester Arce Valentín

To walk along the streets of Havana is to experience the soul of Cuban culture. All the ingredients of the Cuban character are present in the city: in its buildings, parks, people, smells and tastes. It is a tangible and real expression of what Don Fernando Ortiz defined as the *ajiaco*[1] of our way of being and doing. The entire history of our nation, all the small sub-worlds and the diverse cultural strata that make up our nation have left and leave their imprint on the city. They are here in some way or other as adorable ghosts that remind us who we are.

Many people have asked us why our Presbyterian-Reformed Church in Cuba's programme to celebrate and reflect on the Calvin Jubilee Year has moved "heaven and earth" to unveil a bust of the Reformer in one of the city's parks. Well, this document is an attempt to respond to the curiosity of many and the scepticism of others who doubted whether it would be possible.

More than anything else, the presence of Calvin in Havana responds to a desire to do justice to his universality, thought and life. If we give flight to our imagination, we can say there is no doubt that a man with the passionate nature of John Calvin would feel at home here if he was able to travel in space and time. And if in the early hours of the morning (perhaps very early as was the Reformer's custom) all the ghosts that inhabit Havana, especially the old part of the city where his bust will be placed, were to get together for a chat, I have not the slightest doubt that he would be as happy in the company of Mother Teresa of Calcutta and Lady Diana as he would with the versatile Agustín Lara and Cirilo Villaverde (writer of Cecilia Valdes) and even that strange Cuban known as the "Caballero de París".[2]

However, the most profound aspects of his thought and life, his commitment to the socially disadvantaged, his audacity, simplicity and austerity, his zeal for justice and honesty when proclaiming the Gospel as a faith-based response and as a way of living totally coherent with his own experience of God, all these ingredients make Calvin a human being who is very approachable and understandable in his historical dimension.

[1] The Cuban *ajiaco* is a soup containing all kinds of vegetables, meat and other ingredients.
[2] The *Caballero de París* was an odd character who walked around the streets of Havana for many years and who died in a psychiatric hospital. He always wore a black tailcoat and carried books and newspapers around the whole city, spending the night in certain areas of the Vedado area of the capital.

There are other more “mundane” reasons related to our history as a national Church for wanting to leave forever John Calvin’s imprint on this cosmopolitan Caribbean city. Our history and therefore our culture owes much to Western Christianity, for good or for ill. One thing is certain – the churches of the protestant tradition, here called “evangelical” without too much use of double standards, have left their imprint on the Cuban character. We believe it is to do justice to our own history, that the people who live in this city or visit it understand, recognise and are aware of the presence of the immense and multi-coloured fan that is Cuban religiosity. They should be aware that we are and feel ourselves to be Cubans, that almost all of us dance well, that almost all of us sing *boleros* and that almost all of us are fans of baseball, but that we are raised on such diversity that we express our sense of transcendency in many different ways and through many different discourses. In particular, ever since our denomination was constituted in a national church in 1967, it has tried to bear a coherent witness to its vision of the mission as the Body of Christ, its theological discourse and its social and ecumenical commitment.

When we announced our autonomy in 1967, we adopted the name of Presbyterian-Reformed Church in Cuba. We wanted to bear witness to our faith in a particular tradition in this great range of faith families that sustain our Cuban character. However, we especially wanted to affirm three things that have been crucial for our work: the reformed Calvinist doctrine, the Presbyterian form of government and the ecumenical connection with the Church of Jesus Christ in the world.

In the midst of a tumultuous situation, to opt for independence from the “United Presbyterian Church in the United States” was a courageous initiative and showed confidence in the constant and supportive presence of the Holy Spirit and in God, the Lord of History. Who could doubt that Calvin, along with many other saints, would bless and applaud our audacity and who could even for a moment believe this was not “predestined”?

Those able to bear witness to this period at first hand tell us of the great passion with which the Presbyterians of Cuba accepted the challenge of giving continuity to the work begun in 1890 under the inspiration of the Cuban men and women who fought for independence from Spain before continuing their work under the guardianship of the Presbyterian churches of the United States.

Those first years of autonomy were marked by enthusiasm, controversy, major shortages of materials and human resources, challenges within the churches and great opportunities to communicate the reality of the Cuban church at international ecumenical meetings as we sought to overcome the isolation that the country’s situation generated in all aspects of the nation’s life, including, of course, the Church.

However, at the same time, it tested our loyalty to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the reformed heritage of the young national Church and demonstrated the political and theological courage of Cuban Presbyterians and the spirit of sacrifice of those men and women who, in the midst of a revolution that was being consolidated with no less tumult, had chosen not only to stay in the country and bear witness to their faith in any circumstance, but also to do so in a church that was clearly Cuban and autonomous from the institutional point of view and that was also striving to be financially autonomous.

That period was certainly not devoid of errors, mistakes and extreme positions, but it could not be otherwise for Calvinists in Cuba. However, the witness of pastors and elders in this period confirm that it was one of the most beautiful pages in the history of Cuban Presbyterianism.

The same tensions that generated different theological positions on the Cuban revolution and the radicalisation of the revolution in a Marxist Leninist direction, under the ideological guardianship of the then Soviet union, with its marked and deformed "scientific atheism", made the Cuban church in general and the Presbyterian-Reformed Church in particular subject to all kinds of crises, of identity, institutional and financial, and a continuous and marked fall in their membership and body of pastoral agents.

However, despite these difficulties, our Church indisputably became an arena for leadership of the ecumenical movement both inside and outside Cuba. There was also a very strong emphasis on raising the biblical-theological level of lay leaders to the extent that a Theological Education Commission was established for them. These were times when, as we mentioned above, a lack of men and women threatened the church's work. In the minutes of our National Assembly in 1972, the Theological Education Commission recommended the following: *"Recognising that ten churches are in a dramatic situation with neither pastors nor applicants for the pastoral ministry, we should once again challenge both adults and young people to make the decision to prepare for carrying out this task"*.

Another interesting aspect of the period was that, in 1974, it was agreed to use the term "presbyter" rather than "reverend" to describe ordained pastors. That same year, it was agreed to give the same ordination to presbyters (pastors) as presbyters (elders), who it was then decided to call "deacons". The difference was in the content of the commission rather than in the ordination

The Cuban church produced materials of a high and remarkable theological level during this decade given the peculiarity of the context and this was an exercise in dealing with times of crisis. Discussions were honest despite the conditions affecting the Church

and at the same time, the Church sort to be an authentic witness for the times in which it was called on to live.

The historical and theological value of these materials is summed up in the Confession of Faith publicly proclaimed by the Presbyterian-Reformed Church in Cuba on 30 January 1977, the first from a Presbyterian Church in Latin America and unique among the Presbyterian and/or Reformed churches in the former socialist countries. The Marxist influence on this Confession of Faith meant it was very controversial inside and outside the church, but it was undoubtedly of great theological and historical value. There is no doubt that it was an honest and urgent attempt to respond to a very particular moment and to do so with a great sense of responsibility and loyalty to a tradition that calls on us, as a Church, to respond by drawing on the history of God when carrying out the mission to proclaim the Gospel and build the Kingdom of God.

So in the Introduction to the Confession, we read:

> "Unlike the Westminster Assembly, which subordinates the spirit of the Confession (and the Catechism), that is, pertaining to the formal expression of faith to the question of the Order, that is, to the Form of Government, we think that the current moment through which the world is living, including our own country, it should be the contrary, and that which pertains to the Order should be subordinated to that which refers to the faith"...

Further on, the Confession continues:

> "Because first we see that the general situation in our century is very similar to the situation in the 16th century, when the Presbyterian or Reformed Christian tradition emerged. Second, we believe that the response of the Church of Jesus Christ to the revolutionary situation of the 16th century under the leadership of John Calvin, was not exhausted in that century, because it was solidly based on the Scriptures as the 'final standard' and did not disdain, in fact to the contrary, it profoundly appreciated the human phenomenon as a unique phenomenon whose intrinsically historic rationality was the first to recognize and consider seriously."

Nevertheless, God always surprises us. The celebrations for the centenary of the Presbyterian Church in Cuba (1990) gave us an opportunity to assess the life of the communities, their human potential and the willingness of a second generation, born and educated in a new society and in an autonomous church, to continue the work that 100 years earlier had been started by a couple of humble and acclaimed Cubans. On the same occasion, we also affirmed our commitment to the society in which God, in his sovereignty, has placed us to

bear witness to our faith in Jesus Christ, especially because Cuba was beginning to experience one of its most profound crises since the revolutionary triumph of 1959.

The economic crisis suffered by our country after the fall of the socialist countries of Eastern Europe shook every sphere of the country's life and led the government to introduce an economic adjustment programme to overcome the effects of this crisis. The following statistics show the extent of the crisis: the country's gross domestic product fell 2.9% in comparison to the previous year and imports fell by 75% between 1989 and 1995. The intensification of a financial and economic blockade by successive United States governments after 1962 added another ingredient to the internal panorama.

As part of Cuban society, the Cuban church also suffered the impact of this moment. A theological reading and response based on the Christian faith were urgent, while Cuba, as a country, strove to face and overcome the effects of the crisis, not only by making a socio-economic and productive readjustment, but also by reorganising the social structure. This had a profound impact on the day-to-day life of Cubans and, therefore also on Church members. So the reorganisation was ethical as well as economic.

The clear consequence of this crisis, and in particular its effect on the Churches and the various manifestations of religion in the country in a general sense was a gradual numerical growth that assumed astonishing proportions in the case of many denominations, including our own. Within a few years, congregations doubled, tripled and even quadrupled in membership. Churches began to activate pastoral vocations, gradually reorganise Sunday schools and activate youth organisations that had been dissolved because of the lack of scope for continuous and stable work. Construction projects were revived, churches were renovated and some new churches were built. In addition, people began to bring their children to be baptised and to ask the church to bless their weddings. In brief, the church reactivated much of the work that had fallen off during previous decades.

In addition, there was a more objective rapprochement between the government and political organisations and the Churches in general. Some of the restrictions on the diaconal and missionary work of the Churches were relaxed. Institutions were called on to contribute to the national effort in order to overcome the crisis and avoid any threat to independence and also to ensure the permanence and build ethical values that were coherent with the new period while remaining loyal to the best of our culture.

These were the years in which the constitution of the Cuban Communist Party was amended in order to allow party activists to practise the religion of their choice. An important change was made to the Constitution of the Republic, involving the replacement of "atheist" state by lay state.

These developments contributed to a public recognition of Christianity as part of the national culture and therefore part of the lives of many Cuban men and women, who like any other sector of Cuban society, were working hard to build a better and fairer society.

Nevertheless, the new period in which the Church found itself also made it necessary to avoid diluting our identity under the impact of numeric growth and to maintain a systematic and increasingly ecumenical programme of biblical-theological study able to respond to the real situation of our communities, especially in the sense of searching for a faith-based response to social work rather than engaging in a dishonest competitive evangelism mutilated by a lack of commitment to the true Gospel of Jesus Christ: the construction of the Kingdom of God and his justice.

The Churches in general and ours in particular continue along the path in these new directions, not always clear about what God wants for the people of Cuba, but certain that He is with us all the time and is inevitably leading us in accordance with His plans for historical reconciliation and redemption. It is from this commitment to the Gospel that we want to bear witness with this bust of Calvin, to be unveiled on 31 October, in one of Old Havana's beautiful parks.

I trust that those people asking why the Presbyterian-Reformed Church in Cuba want ***our own*** Calvin in Havana are now convinced. The sceptics, you are also invited. When all is said and done, this attempt to justify ourselves has been full of good intentions although as my uncle, of Spanish descendancy (and a Batista supporter!), used to say: *the road to hell is paved with good intentions*. So it only remains for me to trust in the love that unites us in Jesus Christ, the Older Brother of all of us.

But if even now, you think that all this effort by so many friends across the world in solidarity with ourselves was unnecessary, then let me give you another reason – it is a passionate response more than anything else. Cubans deserve to have a man of the historical stature of John Calvin in our capital city and there is no doubt that the Reformer deserves his place in Havana.

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The World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the Reformed Ecumenical Council will unite to form a new body: the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC). The Uniting General Council will take place in Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA, in June 2010. The theme of this historic event will be: "Unity of the Spirit in the Bond of Peace". The ground of the uniting assembly will be prepared by a series of theological consultations sponsored by the Geneva *Fondation pour l'Aide au Protestantisme réformé* on "Communion and Justice"; these will take place in 2009 in Switzerland (Europe), Lebanon (Middle East), Brazil (Latin America), Indonesia (South East Asia), Ghana (Africa), Pittsburgh, USA (North America and Caribbean), New Zealand (Pacific) and Korea (North East Asia).

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