Mennonite Central Committee
Peace Office Publication
October–December 2009
Volume 39, Number 4

Peace Office Newsletter

Bridge Building and Education—Indonesia

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Thanks to Victor J. Sensenig for compiling this issue of the *Peace Office Newsletter.*

Engaging the Secular and the Sacred in Indonesian Education

by Victor J. Sensenig

Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) began working in Indonesia in 1948, and education has been a priority of the program from the beginning. In the 1950s, following independence, the national education system saw a massive influx of uneducated children, and the government scrambled to train hundreds of thousands of teachers. Nationalists saw education and literacy as the key to national development and modernization, but anti-Western feelings ran high, fueled by fears of imperialism. But the educational landscape in Indonesia has changed dramatically in the last six decades. The New Order regime, led by President Suharto and born out of the anti-communist massacres of 1965–66, opened the country to foreign investment and resolutely aligned Indonesia with the United States-dominated "First World." By the 1990s, the literacy rate had risen to ninety percent, and elementary school enrollment was nearly universal. Indonesia has nine years of partially state-funded compulsory education and boasts a handful of globally-ranked universities.

Despite these substantial advances, engagement with Indonesian education remains a high priority for MCC Indonesia, and this *Newsletter* issue takes a closer look at some places where crucial interfaith bridge-building is occurring. The contributors to this issue offer striking and disparate perspectives. It seems to me that any discussion of interfaith and cross-cultural relationships and education in Indonesia requires an understanding of both the secular and the sacred—the nature of the dominant school culture as well as the increasingly crucial role that religion plays in the education system.

At the heart of the Indonesian educational system is a monument to apparent peace called *Pancasila*. Formulated by the nation's first president, Sukarno (1945–1967), *Pancasila* is the state ideology in five short points: "civilized humanity," "social justice," "national unity," "democracy rooted in unanimity," and "belief in one God." Essentially, *Pancasila* can be, and has been, made to mean anything. Under Suharto's more recent thirty-three-year rule, *Pancasila* became the means to abolish politics. The endlessly flexible *Pancasila,* in this era, positioned the state on what Richard Lloyd Parry calls "a denial of ideas and imagination."[1]

All national educational systems transmit the ideas of the nation and serve often-hidden political ends. But citizenship "education" in Indonesia has substantially altered the educational process, and has contributed to a dominant school culture that often stifled real learning and undermined opportunity for all but the most privileged. The teaching culture of Indonesia has tended to reduce learning to the transmission of a painstakingly-culled curriculum and has cast innovative pedagogy as a threat to job security. Self-awareness, critical thinking, and social action are often overshadowed by the barrage of platitudes, flag rituals, and indoctrination that make up the school day. Respect for social order disallows engagement with structurally-rooted problems of endemic corruption, corporate appropriation of public

resources, and racism. This does not imply that international agencies like MCC come in with solutions to these deeply-rooted problems. Rather, reform-minded educators here who are interested in peace-building in education must offer alternatives, even alternatives that question the imperatives of stability and consensus.[2]

After the fall of President Suharto in May 1998 and the end of New Order strictures, Islamic education saw a resurgence and demanded accommodation in the national education system. Religion permeates all corners of Indonesian life, and religion classes are required in all schools, private and public. But the contest between secular and social worlds became particularly heated in the burgeoning and diverse Islamic school sector. Roughly 13 percent of Indonesian students attend Islamic schools, including boarding schools *(pesantren)* and day schools *(madrasah)*,[3] but a significant number of Muslims also attend private Christian schools—about 40 percent of the students at the Protestant (Kristen) university where I taught are Muslims.

Values-based, tradition-oriented Islamic education offers resources for educational reform, catering to many of the most impoverished families in the nation and voicing creative resistance to the excesses of globalized capitalism from the standpoint of traditional morality. Islamic organizations, often based in universities, engage in strengthening civil society and responding to disaster and involuntary poverty. Other Indonesian Muslims have used religious symbols to bolster popular support. A minority have also succumbed to various ideologies of intolerance and violence, but interfaith bridge-building in Indonesia reveals that Christians have much to learn from Indonesian Muslims about constructive engagement with fellow believers tempted by the idea that change requires violence.

Notes

1. Richard Lloyd Parry, *In the Time of Madness: Indonesia on the Edge of Chaos* (New York: Grove Press, 2005), p. 116. See also Niels Mulder, *Mysticism in Java: Ideology in Indonesia* (Amsterdam: Pepin Press, 1998) on *Pancasila* as a sacred heirloom which "supersedes particular religions and political ideologies" and becomes the basis for subjugation of individuals by the state, pp. 95–97.

2. See Henry A. Giroux, *Theory and Resistance in Education: A Pedagogy for the Opposition* (New York: Bergin and Garvey, 1983), for a summary of how critical theorists have opposed "all theories that celebrated social harmony while leaving unproblematic the basic assumptions of the wider society." p. 8.

3. Elisabeth Jackson and Lyn Parker, "'Enriched with knowledge': modernisation, Islamisation and the future of Islamic education in Indonesia," *Review of Indonesian and Malaysian Affairs* 42 (2008), pp. 21–53.

Victor Sensenig, a graduate student at Pennsylvania State University, taught at Satya Wacana Christian University in Salatiga, Indonesia. His MCC term ended in June 2009.

Religion, Violence and Peacebuilding: Scenes from a University Classroom

by Paulus S. Widjaja

Last year in Dhaka, Bangladesh, when I was invited by Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Bangladesh to teach an intensive course on peacebuilding to the students of the University of Development Alternative and the University of Dhaka, I met a young man who tried to convince me that God does not exist. This, of course, is not a new story. What interested me in that conversation, however, was the reason behind his rejection of the belief in God. He said that he does not believe in God because he is disappointed with people who claim themselves "religious," and yet do harm to others and are involved in many kinds of violence. Thus, in his opinion, there is no use in being religious. In fact, it is harmful because it is one's adherence to the belief in God that often drives one to inflict harm on others.

We might say that what the young man of Dhaka told me is complete nonsense. But if we are honest in seeing the reality of our world, we have to admit that what he said is at least partly true. Many religious people have in fact done a lot of terrible things in the world. People fight, inflict harm and even kill others in the name of God and their own version of belief in God.

On the other hand, we might equally ask, is it true that religion is inherently bad? Does it indeed cause people to fight and kill each other? What is the root of the problem and what is the dynamic within it? In order to answer those questions I would like to share a few insights from my experience in teaching a course on Religion, Violence, and Peacebuilding at the Center for Religious and Crosscultural Studies of Gajah Mada University, Jogjakarta, Indonesia. This is the oldest and one of the most prestigious public universities in Indonesia. The students in this course come from various religious backgrounds, including Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, and Hinduism. In what follows I share a few of the lessons that I learned.

1. The Hijacked Religion

Some people, like the young man I met in Dhaka, believe that religion *per se* is the main source of religious violence. When we look at the sacred texts of all big religions in the world we do find violent stories, instructions, and metaphors that can easily be used to justify the violence done by religious people against those who are considered the enemies, the infidels, and the sinners.

This becomes the more crucial because religion, by its nature, provides a powerful context for the cultivation of religious militancy that can easily turn into extremism. First, religion provides a strong motivation for people to join in since religion offers an all-embracing product that human beings need. Religious people can literally pray for just anything—from prosperity, to physical and mental healing, to a happy life, to a good career, to a right spouse, to eternal life, etc. And when people get what they need *and prayed for,* then a strong loyalty to their religion is naturally born. Within that dynamic, when religious people compete with each other to recruit people to join in their camp, they are ready to do harm to and abolish other religious groups.

Religious people can literally pray for anything.

My students and I found, based on our observation of what often happens in religious conflicts in Indonesia, that religion *per se* cannot be blamed as the source of violence. Religion turns into violence only when religion is hijacked by politicians and used to chase after their own political and economic interests. It is not a secret that many political parties in Indonesia intentionally provoke religious sentiment in order to get votes from religious people. For example, they bring up the issues of abortion, pornography, religious education at schools, the spread of religious sects, the Israel-Palestine conflict, and speak about such issues as if they are entirely religious issues. In that sense, religion has been used to cover up underlying political and economic interests. These politicians know very well that they can effectively persuade people to flock around them by framing political and economic issues as religious ones.

Religion turns into violence only when religion is hijacked.

To make it worse, a kind of favoritism in Indonesian politics that gives privileges to the majority religion has inspired and encouraged religious people to compete for political power. When being in the majority in politics means there is no problem in building religious buildings, and that being in the minority means there are many hurdles in doing the same thing, then religious people are encouraged to fight each other in order to get

that political power. It is this dynamic that can easily drag religion into violence.

2. The Cosmic War

Religion can also become a source of violence when it repeatedly promotes the idea of cosmic war to its adherents. Religious people learn to believe that there are two antagonistic forces in the universe, the good and the evil ones, that are inherently in opposition.

My students of whatever religion admit that this cosmic war idea is being preached in the churches, mosques, temples, viharas, and other religious precincts.

There are three crucial points that we have to take into consideration here. (1) Religious people believe that the war is cosmic in nature. Therefore the war determines the identity of each human being who lives in the world. Faced with that war, one has to choose whether one belongs to the good or the evil force. The war, in turn, determines one's dignity and is therefore directly related to one's basic need. For this reason one is willing to die in order to win the war, because winning is the ultimate sign that one is on the "right side." (2) In the cosmic war it is believed that one's own eternal life is at stake. Therefore people are willing to do just about anything to win the war. (3) The war is also believed to finish only at the end of time. Therefore as long as the world is still moving, all human beings have to engage in that war.

Spirituality has to do with our faith-based journey to find the meaning of life.

When religious people are influenced by this cosmic war idea, they will naturally see themselves as belonging to the good force that God leads. And it is just a matter of time to point their fingers at other groups of people as belonging to the evil force that they have to fight against and even abolish. Violence naturally follows. And the more religious people see that the war will not be over soon, the stronger the drive within them will be to believe that they are indeed living in a cosmic war that has to be won.

Religious peacebuilding should be understood as peacebuilding work that is strongly grounded in spirituality.

All of my students, of whatever religion, admit that this cosmic war idea is being preached over and over again in the churches, mosques, temples, viharas, and other religious precincts. And they admit that this idea has helped religious people maintain the tension between different religious groups in Indonesia. That cosmic war idea has encouraged Christians, for instance, to believe that they belong to the good force against Moslems. This tension becomes the more problematic when Christians believe that God is on their side and therefore they see other religious groups as God's enemies. Moslems also, under the influence of the cosmic war idea, can easily believe with all their hearts and minds that they are the representatives of the good force on earth that have to fight against other religious groups.

3. Spirituality and Religion

When we speak about religion and violence, it is important to distinguish between religion and spirituality. Spirituality has to do with our faith-based journey to find the meaning of life. But, as it becomes organized, spirituality eventually becomes religion. In this sense, religion is nothing more than an organized spirituality. When spirituality becomes religion, religious people will naturally speak about who has the authority to determine which direction they should pursue in their journey to find the meaning of life. They also speak about which interpretation of the journey and of the meaning of life is the true and right one. They speak about who can be in and who must be out, that is, about group membership. This is the time when religious people may compete with each other. When that competition is between people of different religions, violence often follows.

When we speak about religious peacebuilding, it should be understood more as peacebuilding work that is strongly grounded in spirituality rather than just another organizational activity of religion. It is as spirituality-based action that religious peacebuilding becomes most significant. First, religious peacebuilding is able to address the spiritual aspects of a conflict such as forgiveness, sin, and repentance. This aspect is very important in Indonesia where many identity-based conflicts happen. Peacebuilding works in such a conflict should not focus merely on the social-political-economic aspects of the conflict. They should focus on the spiritual aspects of the conflict as well. Second, religious peacebuilding also brings a moral dimension to a conflict. As such, the solution that religious peacebuilding work brings into a conflict can be more comprehensive. One of the hardest challenges during reconciliation between Christians and Moslems in Poso, Central Sulawesi, several years ago was precisely the issue of the theology of justice and reconciliation. Reconciliation could be achieved only after both Moslems and Christians could accept the idea that retributive justice should be replaced by a restorative one, and that forgiveness has to be offered *before* reconciliation, not the other way around.

4. Imagination

A lot of my students, whatever the religion to which they belong, when confronted with the issue of violence and peacebuilding, will

respond that violence is something that has been so ingrained in human life that we can do nothing to prevent or stop it. Many of them feel hopeless and powerless when they see the reality of violence in the world. In their opinion, human beings seem destined to fight each other and there is nothing we can do to change this destiny.

But imagination can be a powerful drive against fatalism, and the acknowledgment of the power of imagination is very important. When religious people are disillusioned and frustrated by the reality of the world they live in, many tend to look backward instead of forward. They try to find and imitate the golden era in the history of their religious group. This creates a sort of romanticism, with the danger that the religious people come to believe that all the problems in the world will vanish should that golden era be revived again. And they may resort to violence in their romanticism.

It is to overcome such a romanticism that imagination is important. While romanticism tends to look backward, imagination invites religious people to look forward. The intention is not to relive past history, but to construct a future where people from different religious groups can live side by side without exterminating each other.

5. The Emptying of Self

Our exploration of various religions brought us to the discovery that all major religions in Indonesia—Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, and Buddhism—actually have a kind of self-emptying theology that becomes very important and instrumental in peacebuilding. Within this theology we can bring peace in the world only when we are willing to empty ourselves from our own pride and lust. Peacebuilding is not something we can do while we are busy protecting, keeping, and fulfilling our pride and lust. Peacebuilding even demands vulnerability, that is, our willingness to be open and wounded.

We must realize that every human relationship is an open one. There is always the possibility for conflict in that relationship, even in a very intimate one. It is true that we may end up by being happy, but it is equally possible that we may end up by being hurt. Therefore we need to let ourselves be vulnerable by emptying ourselves of our pride and lust. We have to open our arms so that we can make space for others, but when we open our arms we become vulnerable. Therefore, the true struggle related to any kind of human relationship is actually not against other people, but against our own selves. That is why Moslems believe in *jihad,* Christians believe in kenosis, Hindus believe in *ahimsa,* and Buddhists believe in *tapa*—the theology of self emptying.

Many feel hopeless and powerless when they see the reality of violence in the world.

6. Gender Issues

People in a patriarchal society like that of Indonesia often think that women are weak creatures that need to be protected by men. Some of the male students in my class once said that if a bad person should come to their house and try to do harm to their wife, they as husbands will not hesitate to use violence in order to protect their beloved wife. But the whole class was shocked when some of the female students interrupted the discussion and asked the male students: "Who said that women have to be protected?"

The female students clearly were offended by the idea that women have to be protected by men. The issue at stake is not that women do not want to be protected by men, but that the patriarchal mindset always undermines the agency of women, as if women could not live unless the men protected them.

Imagination invites religious people to look forward.

The discussion became tense when the male students argued that they would not hesitate to engage in violence, including murder if necessary, because they cannot stand to see their wives brutalized. But the female students argued back, "Who will actually undergo a lot of suffering after such an incident, you or we?" The female students rightly pointed out that it is the husbands who are usually vulnerable and cannot accept such an incident. Not because the husbands necessarily feel sorry about what happens to their wives, but because they actually feel ashamed and disgraced by such an incident. It is their ego they are trying to protect, not their wives. It is the society's judgment of them as men who fail to protect their women that hurt them the most, not the suffering that is experienced by their wives.

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Peacebuilding demands vulnerability.

Monotheism and Modernism: The Peace Work of Religious Studies

by Elaine Swartzentruber

The students are very well versed in their own religious traditions.

We are engaged in a kind of peace work, hoping that knowledge and understanding might lead to dialogue and co-existence.

My students concentrate their studies on inter-religious dialogue, religion and local culture, or religion and contemporary issues.

As we begin our class the tension in the room is palpable. The course is World Religions, in which we are studying the six "approved" Indonesian religions—Hinduism, Buddhism, Chinese Religions, Catholicism, Protestantism and Islam—with the addition of Judaism, without which I think neither Christianity nor Islam can be understood. Today we will discuss Judaism. The students—roughly half Christian, half Muslim, almost all Indonesians—are very well versed in their own religious traditions. They have studied their religion since kindergarten and many hold undergraduate degrees in Christian theology or Islamic jurisprudence. Some are lecturers in Christianity or Islam at the post-secondary level. But none know much about Judaism. The Christians know the Old Testament, to which Jesus is the fulfillment. The Muslims know the Qu'ranic versions of the stories of creation and of Abraham and his son Ishmael. Centuries of Christian anti-Semitism and the conflict in Palestine hang heavy over our heads. Yet we muddle through, working our way into the tensions and voicing our reservations, hoping to gain an understanding of Jewish ethical monotheism, historical trajectories, religious practice and contemporary reality using the tools and methods of Religious Studies. Our goal goes beyond acquisition of academic knowledge. We are, I think, engaged in a kind of peace work, opening ourselves to learning about the "Other" with whom we have political, social and cultural disagreement or animosity, hoping that knowledge and understanding might lead to dialogue and co-existence.

I am seconded by Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) to teach this class as a faculty member at the Center for Cross Cultural and Religious Studies (CRCS) at Gadjah Mada University in Yogyakarta. CRCS, begun in 2000, is the only Master's-degree-level Religious Studies program at a public university in Indonesia. It claims as its central vision "the development of a democratic, multicultural and just society in Indonesia" through careful use of both religious studies and cultural studies to examine and understand the complexity of Indonesian religious expression and its position and role in public society. Students, most of them Muslim, come to CRCS from across Indonesia, and occasionally from other countries. While here they concentrate their studies on inter-religious dialogue, religion and local culture, or religion and contemporary issues. They leave here with multi-disciplinary tools of analysis, contextualization and understanding of religion and culture. Some will go on to further study in America, Australia or Europe; some will work for inter-faith Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). Most will go on to teach in religiously-based educational institutions or programs, taking the cross-cultural and cross-religious approach they've learned here beyond the university setting.

My role as an MCC service worker here is to be a responsible member of the faculty, to teach, to mentor and advise students, to serve on committees, to pursue my own scholarship, and to model a kind of Christian discipleship that holds nonviolence, ethical service and justice as core values. This has long been my vision of my vocation as a professor of religion, but here I am in a very different context than in the United States. Teaching the modernist, academic tools of religious and cultural studies—some of which I chafe at from an anti-colonialist perspective—carves out important spaces in the highly religiously and politically charged Indonesian context for passionate rational discussion. We can discuss issues of otherness, active peacemaking and embodied justice in ways I've not encountered in twelve years of university teaching in the USA. We rarely get to firm answers, as is the case with religion and culture everywhere, but here we can and do make our way through the tensions and glean bits of understanding.

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Inter-Religious Dialogue in the Framework of Formal Graduate Level Studies

by Mohammad Iqbal Ahnaf and Lawrence Yoder

Two remarkable graduate programs in religious studies are housed in the Graduate School facilities of Gadjah Mada University, a large secular state university in Jogjakarta, Indonesia. One is a master's level program of Gadjah Mada University itself, called CRCS (Center for Religious and Cross-Cultural Studies).[1] The other is a Ph.D. program called ICRS (Indonesian Consortium for Religious Studies).[2] This program is jointly owned and operated by three universities, Gadjah Mada State University,[3] Sunan Kalijaga State Islamic University and Duta Wacana Christian University, all of Jogjakarta.

The teaching faculty and the students in both programs are from different religions. Most of the students are Muslims, and the second-largest number are Christians. These programs use English as the language of instruction and are also open for international students. A relatively small but significant number of students of other countries participate.

Teaching in such a context requires some adjustment. The Christian director of ICRS, Bernard Adeney-Risakotta, explains that in this program the policy is to avoid making "normative religious statements," that is, statements of the truth claims of a particular religion.

Personal religious conviction is left aside in classes, but the policy is more about emphasizing historical and empirical approaches in studying religion rather than suppressing personal conviction or belief. Most students at CRCS and ICRS are practicing believers. Personal sharing of faith takes place outside classes. There is a mosque in the school's building and some Muslim students of CRCS and ICRS frequently deliver sermons *(khutbah)* there in Friday prayers. Some occasions outside class, such as *buka puasa bersama* (shared dinner to break fasting), allow students to express their beliefs and shared prayers. Indeed many students are religious leaders such as church ministers or teachers in a *pesantren*—an Indonesian Islamic boarding school.

An Islamic university, a Christian university and a secular university jointly run ICRS and its programs. This combination reflects the openness and trust shown by both religious-affiliated and non-religious-affiliated universities. The significance of CRCS and ICRS lies in the fact that the vast majority of educational institutions in Indonesia implement the policy of mono-religious classes. Providing religious classes in all schools at all levels has been the government policy for many years. Religious classes in schools divide students on the basis of their religious affiliation. The system is therefore explicitly exclusive. And when other religions are taught, they tend to be taught from the perspective of a particular religion. This model can strengthen polarization based on religion. At ICRS and CRCS students study religions *together*—the ones that they themselves embrace, as well as others.

Zainal Abidin Bagir, executive director of CRCS, differentiates the concepts of "religious" and "religiously-literate." The dominant model of "religious" studies is to inculcate faith in combination with studies of other religions. In contrast, the historical and empirical studies of religions carried out in CRCS and ICRS see religions equally as a human phenomenon in a more objective manner. In his view, in contrast to normative religious education which tends to focus on truth claims, the historical study of religions generates "religious literacy" and neutralizes "a-historical views" of religion that see all aspects of religion as sacred and unchanging. He believes that this neutralizing potential encourages genuine inter-religious relations, not mere surface harmony.

CRCS and ICRS promote inter-religious relations beyond the level of *kerukunan*—the policy of the Suharto era that encouraged limited tolerance between religions while maintaining the view that religious affairs are a sensitive issue. Such an approach thus prevented deep inter-religious engagement. We think that the importance of this vision by CRCS and ICRS is that dialogue focuses on the empirical, not the theological, aspects of religion. Students discuss how religions are understood, believed and practiced by their followers.

Resources for further reading

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An Islamic university, a Christian university and a secular university jointly run ICRS.

The historical study of religions generates "religious literacy."

CRCS is exploring local practices of inter-religious co-existence.

Even though CRCS and ICRS operate at the educational level, Bagir also offers what he calls "engaged religious study," referring to attempts to connect studies of religion with the need to engage the actual issues that confront societies. For this purpose, CRCS has conducted several focus group discussions and workshops on issues dealing with the relations between religions and issues of bioethics, ecology, and social injustice.

In the last few years, CRCS also has promoted the concept of "civic pluralism" that refers to the actual practice of religious harmony in societies. In addition to discussion of the concepts of pluralism that is dominated by Western literatures, CRCS is exploring local practices or traditions of inter-religious co-existence. It is hoped that such a conception of indigenous pluralism or civic pluralism will deliver more effective messages for the improvement of inter-religious relations in Indonesia.

Studying religions together encourages the development of bonds between people of different religions.

In relation to the reality of religious radicalism, the challenge to CRCS and ICRS is to present objective views on religions without being skeptical. Much of the literature on pluralism tends to minimize the unique differences between religions in an effort to emphasize commonalities between them. Often this leads to the view that all religions are basically the same. Such a view is often regarded as offensive, especially by the conservative segments of religious communities. It is however important to emphasize that the fear that comparative studies of religion in these institutions will reduce students' religious conviction or even lead to religious conversion is not true. According to our observations, no students or graduates of these programs have changed their original religious affiliation. The challenge in studying religion at an academic level is to be critical without being skeptical.

People rarely have the opportunity to learn about the difficulties and traumas that people of other religions have experienced.

One of the most important roles of CRCS and ICRS is that they produce "transformed" religious leaders. Since many students of these institutions are scholars and religious leaders who come from different areas in Indonesia, after they graduate they will multiply the pluralist values of CRCS and ICRS in the local environments where they live and work.

Studying religions together encourages the development of bonds between people of different religions, whether faculty or students. It leaves people with a treasury of daily interactions with persons of other faiths, and encourages in them the realization that they will often discover remarkable people and incur rich rewards when they reach and relate across religious divides.

It is also true that many people have been wounded or have suffered because of the actions of people of other religions. Sharp negative feelings arising within oneself or in another person suggest that some traumatic inter-religious experience lurks beneath the surface. Sometimes people bearing such wounds of trauma need someone to help them through the processes of healing. But a significant reality is that people rarely have the opportunity to learn about the difficulties and traumas that people of other religions have experienced. Traumas experienced in past generations often live on in the telling and retelling of the stories within each religious group separately. Graduates of CRCS and ICRS are important resources that can help people of such communities find freedom from and live beyond the sad experiences of the past.

Notes

1. CRCS website: http://www.crcs.ugm.ac.id/

2. ICRS website: http://www.icrs.ugm.ac.id/en/

3. Website: http://www.ugm.ac.id/eng/

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Western Philosophy and Islamic Higher Education: A Different Kind of Peace-building

by Phil Enns

While I am a Christian teaching at an Islamic university, I don't regard myself to be doing inter-religious dialogue or bridge-building. The university explicitly asked for a Christian who was strong in his/her faith and so I initially took this to suggest an interest in exploring religious issues. In reality, I have been asked to refrain from any discussion that might be considered proselytizing and the courses assigned to me have had nothing to do with Christianity. Instead, I have been asked to teach Western philosophy. I don't mind teaching Western philosophy but I thought it odd that, after asking for a Christian, the university had me teaching anything but Christianity.

After being at the university for some time, I have a better understanding of my situation. One reason is quite simple. My university is an institution designed to educate and train Muslims within the Islamic faith, and so there isn't much support for the teaching of Christianity by a Christian. However, I have been asked several times to comment on what Christians think regarding particular issues. On these occasions, I will give the best answer I can. I will speak as a Christian when asked to do so, but I understand that my university is an Islamic institution and my role is to contribute to the education of Indonesian Muslims.

This situation, however, leads to an obvious question: Why invite a Christian if there is no intent to have them teach material related to Christianity? I suspect the answer is complex but includes at least two elements. First, the cultures of Indonesia are rich and ancient, with a long history of the mixing of religions. With an indigenous religion in place, a progression of Hindu, Buddhist, Chinese, Muslim and Christian influences have left Indonesia overwhelmingly Muslim, but with an acceptance of other religions. This pluralism is enshrined in the politics of Indonesia through an official philosophy that acknowledges one God and the religions of Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, and both Catholic and Protestant Christianity. The Indonesian government, however, does not recognize the absence of religious faith. I suspect that my university, being a state institution, wanted to ensure that whoever Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) sent would be someone that strongly identified with one of the official religions of Indonesia. I conclude that my university does not see my Christian faith primarily as a resource for promoting dialogue or bridge-building, but rather as a necessary qualification for teaching at an Indonesian state university.

The second reason that my university asked for a Christian is, I suspect, related to the material they have me teaching. As I teach, whether it is introductory courses to undergraduates in the Islamic Theology department, or doctoral courses on democracy and religion to teachers of Islamic law and philosophy, the most common objection I encounter is that the material represents secularism. I teach my undergraduate courses with Indonesian colleagues from the university. In one course, my colleague would occasionally add the qualification that the course material was Western, followed by an Islamic account of the matter. His qualification was not that the material was Christian, and therefore a religious challenge, but rather that it was secular and therefore a challenge to religious belief itself. Or, in my courses on democracy, I will regularly be challenged with the accusation that liberal democracy is a Western tool for undermining religion, primarily Islam. As a Christian, I represent in my person the possibility that Western thought does not necessarily represent the secularization of thought. I am not expected to articulate how I can reconcile my Christian faith to the subject matter, but rather to show how Western thought is open to religious belief and, more specifically, Islam. Again, the expectation of my university is not that I will develop religious dialogue or bridge-building, but rather to use my Christian faith as a means for opening up to students the possibility that Western thought is not incompatible with Islamic faith. It seems to me, then, that my university is less interested in the details of my Christian faith, and more interested in the fact that I am a Christian. For this reason, I don't think that in my teaching I am directly engaging in religious dialogue or bridge-building.

Having said this, I do strongly believe that I am engaged in a different kind of peace-building. For all its weaknesses, there is some truth to Samuel Huntington's thesis that there is at least the perception of a clash of civilizations between Islam and the West.

I will speak as a Christian when asked to do so.

A progression of influences have left Indonesia overwhelmingly Muslim, but with an acceptance of other religions.

The most common objection I encounter is that the material I teach represents secularism . . . and is therefore a challenge to religious belief itself.

As a Christian, I represent in my person the possibility that Western thought does not necessarily represent the secularization of thought.

My impression is that some of my Muslim students believe there is a fundamental conflict between Islam and Western values and ideas. Part of my purpose for teaching at the university is, therefore, aimed at overcoming this perception and creating the possibility that Western thought is not antithetical to Islam. For example, I am working closely with another colleague to teach a course on critical thinking to students whose studies are focused exclusively on the Koran and Hadiths. Our hope is that they will find the material useful in their studies and appreciate that Western thought can exist peacefully alongside the Islamic sciences. In teaching Western philosophy, our hope is that future Muslim leaders here in Indonesia will be more open to seeing that Western thought offers up some wisdom that might be useful for Indonesian Muslims and society in general, rather than as only threatening to religious belief. By overcoming the perception of only violence between the West and Islam, and offering up positive, constructive accounts of Western thought, I believe that my relationship with the university is one that aims at peace-building.

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I also strongly believe that the philosophical material I cover in my courses promotes peace-building. For example, when I am discussing the relationship between democracy and religion, I structure my lectures around questions like, "What is the best way for a society to organize itself given the fact that its citizens hold incompatible religious beliefs?" In the class I then discuss how democracy is an answer to this question, and whether it is the best answer so far. Here in Indonesia, religion is very much part of political life and often a source of conflict, so for my students this discussion is not theoretical but very real and relevant. Or, in my undergraduate courses we will trace the various philosophical responses to the question "of what the good life is comprised." Again and again, as we examine the thoughts of various philosophers, the students will discuss what kind of life is a good life, and the activities which can lead to such a life. The discussions we have in class lead me to be confident in believing that the very act of teaching philosophy at this Islamic university is an activity of peace-building.

I don't think I am engaged in religious dialogue or peace-building. I do, however, believe that in my teaching and the philosophical material I cover, I am working with my university in promoting peace-building. This peace-building is not overtly religious as it would be if it were aimed at building peace between people of different faiths. However, it is peace-building in the sense that I am a Christian working within an Islamic university trying to build peace between Indonesian Muslims and the West.

Phil Enns is an MCC Service Worker teaching at the Sunan Kalijaga State Islamic University in Jogjakarta, Indonesia.

Singing Peace

by Christy Reed

Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) has worked in Indonesia's easternmost province of West Papua for 20 years. At the invitation of the Theological Seminary of the Evangelical Church in the Land of Papua (GKITP) MCC seconds educators in English and Theology to local educational institutions. The intention is to build capacity among indigenous Papuan young people who are preparing to be leaders in church and in society. Lecturers teach from a perspective committed to the dignity and integrity of their students, and from a commitment to Biblical peacemaking. But peace is not an easy word in this context.

In an English class, when a young student from the coastal region was asked to write a simple sentence about peace, he wrote "Peace is freedom." One young woman wrote "Peace is no war," and drew a picture of a land of mountains and sea unadulterated by multi-national mining companies. Peace is not an easy word.

Imagination, creativity, and laughter are tools used by Papuans themselves to express their humanity. One example is songs. Students write their own songs, perform songs in chapel, and succeed in singing what they could never say. One young man rarely came to class, but spent most of his time inebriated. He believed himself to be incapable of

appropriating the English language to express his soul. But when he was invited to sing, he proved to be a leader. He showed up early for class, dressed in his preaching best, singing louder than any other student!

Christy Reed, a graduate student at Regent College, Vancouver, British Columbia, taught at I. S. Kinje Theological Seminary in Abepura as an MCC Service Worker until 2008.

On being patient as we build bridges

In the United States and Canada people expect fast fixes and quick results. Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) service workers and the constituency which supports them want visible results from the service workers' endeavors during their short 1–3 year assignments. There needs to be a visible impact and there is little patience when that does not happen.

In contrast, because building inter-faith bridges of peace often first requires building relationships, it may not happen quickly. In fact, a major feature of the peace work in Indonesia is the slow pace required for the painstaking small steps toward mutual understanding—lots of meetings, lots of greetings, lots of training, lots of repetition, lots of practice. Because of the slow pace, quick results in the short term often seem imperceptible.

This slow process may seem surprising because Indonesia—a secular state with six officially-recognized religions—has a high level of inter-religious tolerance, yet there is still much conflict that is attributed to religion. But too often conflict that is blamed on religion has other roots. As in many other parts of the world, religious differences have been used to legitimize conflict that originates from other causes, such as conflicting economic interests, economic inequality, political disagreements. An example of an economic rather than religious cause of tension could be the construction of new high-rise apartment buildings. When these structures (1) are for the rich, (2) are not within the contexts of the local neighborhoods, and (3) will not have cultural connections to the local way of life, then it is not surprising that they are resented. And if one religious or ethnic group appears to benefit from the project, that frustration can easily slide into religious conflict.

Many of the articles in this *Newsletter* illustrate that there are a variety of ways that work in education is intended to promote peace. MCC also works as a partner with groups that are intentionally inter-religious to support a variety of training activities to promote peace because the roots of conflict and violence are often intertwined. The International Crisis Group has noted that one of the necessary ingredients for dismantling networks of violence is to help provide ex-combatants with a broader social circle. Job training and practical, constructive work in an inter-faith setting has the potential to broaden the world view of those who participate. Vocational training for both women and men in fields such as automotive repair, computers or electronics may address some of the causes of conflict and violence. Acquiring economic skills can be important if that enables persons to work for an adequate income and thereby provides an alternative to choosing a culture of violence as one's identity and meaning.

Conflict-transformation training courses help diverse participants learn new ways to better manage conflict, in both personal and organizational contexts. Generally, the training intends to build the participants' awareness of conflict, rather than to teach them to become experts. The participants will work at reducing prejudice, bias and mistrust in their daily lives. Much peace work that bridges inter-faith tensions happens quietly and unofficially in local people's homes, through messages, and in hospitality.

Any of these trainings may help the participants learn a language that they never used before—the vocabulary of togetherness, solidarity and logical thinking. This can be significant if it enables them to communicate with people outside their own group and in a gentler, less confrontational way. Learning and using different language can also indirectly change their ways of acting and thinking from a culture of violence to a culture of dialogue.

In Indonesia, building bridges of understanding and peacemaking is not often quick nor always predictable, and requires many small steps—again and again and again and again.

—Editor

Because building inter-faith bridges of peace often first requires building relationships, it may not happen quickly.

Acquiring economic skills can be important if that provides an alternative to choosing a culture of violence as one's identity.

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The *Peace Office Newsletter* is published quarterly by the Mennonite Central Committee International Program Department. Editor is Lawrence Rupley. Consulting Editors are Amy Erickson and Alain Epp Weaver. Opinions expressed in this newsletter reflect those of the authors and not necessarily those of Mennonite Central Committee.

Additional subscriptions welcome—see address below. To keep paper and energy waste at a minimum we ask you to inform us if an address should be changed or if a name should be dropped from our mailing list. Telephone: (717) 859-1151. Printed in the U.S.A.

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