

**AN HISTORICAL BACKGROUND ON THE COMING
AND SPREAD OF ISLAM AND CHRISTIANITY
IN SOUTHEAST ASIA**

by

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An all too common feature of history has been the spread of such externally-introduced cultural institutions as religion. In Southeast Asia, for instance, the spread of Islam and Christianity had served to induce the peoples in the region to conceive of themselves as part of wider human communities, thus transcending the limitations of race, language, region and geography. Yet, paradoxically, Islam and, to a lesser extent, Christianity had provided those very elements of identity which played a large part in the struggle of the Malay peoples against foreign domination.

Some Theoretical Considerations on the Spread of Islam

The initial contacts between the Muslims from "above the winds" and the native peoples of Southeast Asia were made possible by the participation of the latter in the international trade that extended from the Arab lands to China. This participation increased and became more marked at the end of the ninth century.

In 878, on account of the massacre of large numbers of Muslims in Khan-fu (Canton) by a Chinese rebel leader as well as the deterioration of the political situation and increased piracy in the area, thousands of Muslim merchants, mostly Arabs and Persians, fled to Kalah (Kedah or Klang) in the western coast of the Malay Peninsula. This port settlement then became a major entrepôt of the Arab trade and, for some time, its farthest eastern stop. From Kalah, some Muslim traders settled in nearby places like Palembang. Arab trade in Southeast Asia soon became more organized and noticeable. Actually, a local trade began to flourish. It was probably due to this that Borneo and, subsequently, Sulu came to be known to Muslim traders. Even after they were again allowed to visit Chinese ports during the second half of the tenth century, Kalah retained its importance to the Muslims. By then Muslims had settled in such places as Champa and Leran in Eastern Java. At that time, the dominant religions in the area were Hinduism and Buddhism mixed with the local animistic beliefs and spirit worship practiced by a great majority of the inhabitants.

At the end of the thirteenth century, a Muslim principality was born in Samudra-Pasai, in the north of Sumatra, aptly known to Malays later as the "gate-way to the Holy Land (Mecca)". At the same time, if not slightly later, Treng-ganu and Patane began to evince Muslim characteristics by having Muslim chiefs.

Of far reaching consequences to the spread of Islam in the Islands of Southeast Asia was the establishment of the Malacca settlement around 1400. Its founding chief, who was of Palembang origin, consequently embraced Islam. Tradition contends that this conversion was due to a marriage alliance with a Pasai princess as well as to the proddings of Muslim traders who had it within their power to enrich the infant principality.

Not long after, Malacca, due to its favorable maritime position, grew into a most favored entrepot as well as a center for Islamic studies and teaching. Contacts with Malacca led Brunei's ruler to become a Muslim around the second quarter of the fifteenth century. From Malacca, teachers of Arab descent and with possible Sufi inclinations sailed to Java to spread the Faith. Missionary

activities became more prominent during the reign of Sultan Mansur Shah (1458-1477), who was a patron of Muslim scholars and studies. It was during his rule that Ternate chiefs became Muslims.

Around the first quarter of the sixteenth century, Madjapahit in central Java, a center of Hindu culture, yielded to a coalition of Muslim chiefs from some Javanese coastal principalities.

During the last quarter of the thirteenth century, simultaneous with the birth of the Muslim principality in the north of Sumatra, Sulu had its share of Muslim settlers. In less than a century, Sulu as well as parts of North Borneo became the center of activity of Muslim missionaries who were, in all probability, Sufi-oriented. They were, in any case, aided in their labors by the descendants of those Muslims who had come earlier.

Around 1390, due to political disturbances in Palembang and coincident with the elimination of the last vestiges of the Shri-Vijayan empire, there ensued an exodus of Sumatran nobles to other parts of the Malay world. A Sulu tradition narrates how a Sumatran prince with a group of ministers or learned men arrived at Buansa, Sulu, married a local girl and established a principality. This prince, called Rajah Baguinda, and his followers might have been part of this exodus. Furthermore, tradition says that a certain Sayyid Abu Bakr arrived in Buansa where he later on married a daughter of the Sumatran prince. This Sayyid is a historical figure and his tomb still exists in Sulu. He is credited with the establishment of the Sulu sultanate, an event calculated to have taken place around 1450. Tradition loves to recount how he taught Islam, built schools, converted the inhabitants of the interior of Jolo island and extended the frontiers of the sultanate by his charismatic personality, learning and gentle manners. All the sultans and royal datus of Sulu claimed to be his descendants. Again, if traditions are to be believed, and they do contain a great deal of truth, it was during Sayyid Abu Bakr's rule that Mindanao was visited by a few saintly Muslims. On this detail, traditions vary. One maintains that they came from Malacca; while others say that one of them was a brother of Sayyid Abu Bakr. They are reported to have left descendants.

In a sense, it can be contended that, the introduction of Islam and its subsequent spread in Sulu represent, in capsule form, a process which was repeated in other parts of the Indonesian islands. First was the peaceful arrival of Muslim traders. Mixing with the local population, they raised families and formed communities within a larger native society. Then came Muslim teachers to strengthen the Faith among the local Muslims as well as to spread Islam further. Soon local chiefs began to embrace the Faith, to be followed by their people. However, once the chiefs and their followers had declared for Islam, they themselves began to spread it to other areas, not in all cases without the possibility of some coercion.

Many alternative but complementary explanations have been propounded to explain the expansion of Islam in Southeast Asia. Some sociologists have emphasized that many Indonesians, especially those belonging to the humbler strata, readily accepted Islam in order to emancipate themselves from an oppressive caste system since Islam postulates the equality of all believers before Allah. Others have pointed out that the chiefs had become Muslims because of their need for political and economic alliances which could easily be provided by the Muslim traders. And once these chiefs embraced Islam, many of their followers, out of traditional habits of obedience, followed likewise. Religiously-inclined thinkers would like to speculate that the simple doctrines of Islam were, *per se*, attractive to the kind of religious mentality found among the masses of the Indonesians. Some of them would point out that Islam, as propounded by the teachers, who were mystically-inclined in many instances, fitted well into the religious patterns already existent among these people.

All of the above, however, do not deny that numerous Muslim marriages, on the part of the traders, generated communities of the faithful, which, on account of some of the above factors, could have served as bases for the spreading of Islam. From a more general and theoretical point of view, it is also possible that the nature of the international trade at that time could have effected certain changes in the Indonesian islands as well as in Sulu such that they created a spiritual vacuum which Islam readily filled. Actually, the advent and expansion of Islam in a great part of Southeast Asia is such a complex phenomena that one single theory may not suffice as an explanation. Probably, a combination of all the above theories, expressed in a more systematic and general form, would be closer to the truth.

The Rise of Brunei and the Advent of Islam in the Philippines

In 1511, an event of far-reaching consequences to the slow but steady expansion of Islam in the islands of Southeast Asia, took place. Blocked in their attempt to reach sources of spices in the Moluccas by the Muslim-ruled land mass from Morocco to the Balkans, the Portuguese sailed around the southern coast of Africa and arrived in Arabian waters. After establishing a few strong points in Asia and defeating a Muslim fleet at Dui in 1509, they reached Malacca in 1511 and succeeded in capturing it, thus jeopardizing the centuries-old Muslim primacy in the Southeast trade. Nevertheless, Portuguese expectations to fully control the spice trade did not materialize. They did not have enough men and, furthermore, they often alienated the native populations. Moreover, on account of the Portuguese monopoly in Malacca, Muslim traders commenced to patronize other ports like Pasai which soon began to rival Malacca. Many Javanese ports grew at the expense of Malacca. Also, Brunei began to develop itself as a center, taking over Malacca's former influence on the Moluccas and the Philippines.

"First pepper, then souls" was the principle which guided the adventurous Portuguese. This meant that the Portuguese had first come to monopolize the spice trade, and then extirpate Islam in the region. But this double aim of the Portuguese had to contend with three factors: that Islam had already been associated with the aristocracy of many principalities, that Islam had already begun to serve as a source of identity to a vast majority of the inhabitants and that the Portuguese were viewed as intruders and a danger to the existing profitable trade relations. Added to these factors was the displaced Malaccan aristocracy and their allies who were still able to harass the Portuguese. As a modern scholar had viewed it, the Portuguese opposition to Islam and the trade controlled by Muslims provoked the latter to accelerate their own missionary work and local trade activities. The further Islamization of some parts of Java, Makassar, the Philippines and the Moluccas, can be explained by this view.

As suggested above, the rise of Brunei as a trading center may be a consequence of Malacca's fall to the Portuguese. Due to its flourishing trade, Brunei began to be a naval power and commenced to establish trading posts in places as far as the present site of Manila. The founding of the Bornean settlement in Manila probably took place around the 1520's. Brunei's predominance in Philippine trade remained unchallenged until the arrival of the Spaniards in Philippine waters in 1565. Brunei's trade had so flourished that a time came when the Portuguese were constrained to come peacefully to Brunei to gather products from Makassar and the Moluccas.

At the wake of Malacca's fall to the Portuguese, a scion of the Johoro aristocracy, who was related to Malacca's sultans, arrived in the eastern part of Mindanao to found a principality. On the basis of genealogical calculations as well as the fact that the Kingdom of Johoro was not established till after 1511, it can be calculated that this event took place around 1520. Coming with a group of sea-faring people from the Straits, this redoubtable prince created a principality and, by means of a few marriage alliances, he was able to introduce Islam in Mindanao. Here again can be seen an event with causal connections to the fall of Malacca to the Portuguese.

The Onset of Christianity in the Philippines

When the Spaniards arrived in the Philippines in 1565, at least three sultanates were already established in the South. Manila, too, was a thriving Muslim commercial settlement ruled by Muslim chiefs of Bornean descent. Actually, the royal houses of Brunei, Manila and Sulu were related by marriage alliances. The Spaniards came at a time when Brunei was progressively gaining predominance in the islands with Islam securing a foothold here and there. In the early 1600's, Spanish officials perceptibly observed that had the Spaniards not come when they did, all the settlements (*barangays*) in the islands would have become Muslim or at

least have Muslim chiefs. At the time of the coming of the Spaniards, nearly all the peoples in the Visayas and Luzon were still in the level of spirit worship and animistic beliefs, although a general belief in a Supreme Being was generally held.

Spain came to the Philippines with a clear dual purpose: to Christianize the inhabitants and increase the territorial domains of the Spanish Monarch. While colonizing the natives, the Spaniards saw to it that Brunei's power in the islands was eliminated. Their interference in the internal dynastic squabbles in the Brunei royal family in 1578 and 1581 was intended to contain Bornean activities, both religious and commercial, in the islands. However, Spanish initial victories in Borneo were not followed by colonization.

By the beginning of the 1600's, except for the Muslims in the South and the pagans in the interior mountains of the large islands, most of the inhabitants of the Philippines had been Christianized. A great number of them, with their traditional chiefs, were clustered in towns. Within hearing distance of church bells, they lived under the watchful eyes of the Spanish friars and soldiers. With the passage of time, the colony was divided into provinces and bishoprics, and the Christianized natives, called *Indios*, were provided with two forms of identity – that of a Catholic and that of a subject of the Spanish King. They were studiously isolated from the Muslims and other peoples of Southeast Asia, except when they were needed to serve as soldiers to extend the frontiers of the Spanish Empire.

The Moro Wars and the Muslim-Christian Struggle for SEA Supremacy

Both as a matter of state principle and necessity to secure their colonial frontiers, the Spaniards never spared efforts to convert the Muslims into Catholicism and to transform them into docile subjects. The series of wars, covering more than three centuries, which these aims generated, ended only in 1898 when Spain relinquished its sovereignty in the Philippines to the United States.

In the early few years of the seventeenth century, the Muslims were strong enough to entertain the intention of competing with the Spaniards for the control of the Visayas. But most of the time afterwards, they were mostly in the defensive, battling a series of Spanish expeditions whose recruits were composed mainly of native Christians. It was in this century that the *moro-moro* plays were instituted. A sort of morality play, the *moro-moro* depicted the wars between the Muslims and Christians, with victory falling to the latter. The play usually ends with either a Muslim sultan or prince becoming a Christian or a Muslim princess falling in love with a Christian warrior and hero. Intended to instill a crusading spirit among the Christian natives, these plays created an image of the Muslims as ugly, fierce, bloodthirsty, piratical, faithless and thoroughly unreliable individuals. These plays were frequently staged up to the eve of the Japanese occupation of the Philippines in 1942.

Quite a number of Spanish expeditions in Mindanao and Sulu during the seventeenth century were instructed to enslave Muslims, destroy their sea craft, burn their plantations and depopulate their settlements. In the next century, when peaceful and diplomatic means failed to induce the Muslims to become part of the Empire, total war was declared on some of them to the extent of branding Muslim prisoners and sending them to the oars. The nineteenth century had its share of destruction. Many islands were depopulated, although, at this time, the official policy was no longer to Christianize the Muslims, but rather to transform them into Spanish subjects.

Actually, not a few priests had recommended that Spanish officials help their missionary endeavors on the ground that as Christians the Muslims would be more inclined to be docile and loyal to Spain. However, at the end of the last century, the need to conquer the Muslims was dictated more by the fear that the Muslims would conspire with other European powers who were casting covetous eyes over the Spanish colony than by the need to Christianize them.

But all the destruction was not one-sided. The depredations caused by the Muslims on Christian settlements were violent and fearful. Some of them disrupted all economic life. Tens of thousands of Christians were captured for the slave market in Sulu or Makassar to end up in Dutch and other plantations. Such extensive destruction was aggravated by the fact that the Christian natives were prevented by the Spaniards from bearing arms for fear that they might be used against them; thus the Christian natives were normally left defenseless and helpless. Whereas, during the seventeenth century, the Muslims in the Philippines were, at intervals, aided by Borneans and Makassar warriors; by the nineteenth century, these allies had fallen under the control of other Europeans. This situation forced the Muslims in the Philippines to depend solely on their resources and to do their best to maximize them.

However, the above conflicts as well as their relative isolation from the rest of the Islamic world led the Muslims in the Philippine South to develop their native, as well as reinforce their Islamic, institutions. True enough, their isolation from the orthodox centers of Islam prevented the further enrichment if not the development of their religion along more orthodox lines. But noteworthy was that their Islamic consciousness was intense enough to serve as an element of identity and as a basis for the growth of nationalist sentiments. Islam, as it were, sanctified their patriotism and struggle.

Unlike those of the Spaniards, the results of Portuguese missionary activities in the Malay Peninsula and elsewhere in Southeast Asia were limited. Initially, missionaries under Portuguese patronage were successful in establishing a mission in Malacca and in the Moluccas. In the latter, however, the greed and rapacity of Portuguese officials nullified the work of the missionaries and caused enraged

Muslims to capture the Portuguese Ternate fort in 1574. Missionary activities in Brunei also failed.

In Malacca, the fall of the city to the Dutch in 1641 spelled the beginning of the persecution of Catholics in the area. Public worship among Catholics was first prohibited and then the religion itself, thus constraining Portuguese families to sail away to Java or India. Yet even if the Dutch had brought their Protestant religion and antipathy to Catholicism from Europe to the Indies, they, themselves, had no interest in propagating their version of Christianity in Malacca. They simply wanted to hold the famed city to prevent it from becoming a rival of their principal port town of Batavia.

In 1795, the British occupied Malacca, which, after a brief occupation by the Dutch, was then returned to them in 1824. The British primacy in the Peninsula during the nineteenth century, however, did not witness any vigorous Christian missionary activity. Nevertheless, earlier, in the last two decades of the preceding century, there were a few private schools run by missionary societies of the Church of England. They were then followed by Catholic missionary schools. Not a few Chinese who studied in such missionary schools became Christians. This is one explanation why it is calculated that about eighteen out of every thousand Chinese in Malaya are Christians. But, in general, the Islamic manifestation and its steady development in Malaya were left untouched by the British.

Dutch Supremacy and the Isolation of Muslim Indonesia

The arrival of the Dutch in the Indonesian islands and the establishment of their headquarters and chief trading post in Batavia in 1619 signalled the beginning of the economic interdependence between Indonesia and the Netherlands. Although the Dutch presence initially spurred some acceleration of Islamic activities among some Indonesians, they, the Indonesians, slowly found themselves cut off from relations with other Muslims. Moreover, the Dutch, in places where they wielded coercive powers, prevented the growth of Islamic institutions, especially on the political level, which would have more or less developed had the Indonesians been left alone. This two-pronged approach by the Dutch toward checking the spread of Islam proved effective in obstructing the instillment of the Islamic values among the Indonesians.

Initially, the Dutch, to some extent, supported Christian missionary activities. Indeed, there was a genuine antipathy to Muslim rites and practices as revealed by a Church order in 1643 which demanded that Islamic rites and schools as well as the practices of the Chinese and pagans be prohibited. However, Christian missionary activities were not allowed to operate freely. It was only as late as 1890 that Christian missionary schools got some government support. Dutch

colonial administrators were not as interested in religion as they were in commerce. Actually, they were often irritated by clerical demands at home as to what they ought to do. The East Indian Church was the only officially recognized church for many years until 1927. One reason why Protestant missionary activities were viewed with some neutrality by Dutch administrators was that they feared that missionary activities would inevitably attract a resurgence of Muslim fears and a possible counter-fanaticism. Possibly, this fear explains why missionaries were not allowed to proselytize in traditionally strong and conservative centers such as Acheh and Bantem. In other areas, the missionaries needed official permission. Moreover, the Dutch government saw to it that Protestant and Catholic missionaries labored in different areas to prevent sectarian conflicts between them; then Dutch missionary activities were normally successful among pagan tribes like the Bataks of Sumatra and, later on, the Torajas in Celebes.

The Rise of Liberalism and the Philippine Nationalist Struggle

The Philippine Revolution in 1896 and 1898, which was initiated in the Tagalog region of the Philippines and which then spread to other regions was, to a large extent, motivated by liberal ideas first enunciated in Europe. These were secular in character and direction.

As it were, the Christian natives wanted to form themselves into a national community that was neither religious in spirit nor colonial in character. It is a belief of many historians that one of the causes of the Revolution was the abuses of the friar religious corporations or the ecclesiastical predominance over affairs of the colony. However, the revolutionary leaders, many of whom were strongly anti-clerical and members of Masonic lodges, had to contend with a population that was loyal, not to the Spanish character of the Church, but to their own Christian religious principles and rituals. Thus it was expedient for these leaders to encourage the formation of a national Church that was to remain Catholic but divorced from the control of a Spanish hierarchy. The constitution approved by the Revolutionary government in 1899 originally provided for the principle of the separation of Church and State. But so bitter was the opposition of the native clergy as well as that of many of their parishioners that this provision was temporarily suspended, and one which provided for the maintenance of parish priests by municipalities requiring their services was added. In effect, regardless of the secular bias of many of the intellectual leaders of the Revolution, it was not easy to entirely disregard the religious sentiments of a great part of the ordinary supporters of the Revolution.

The leaders of the Revolution, too, failed to get the support or even the verbal sympathy of the Muslims in the South. From their perspective, the Muslims inferred that the elimination of the Spaniards would only signify the ascendance

of a Filipino Christian government. More than ever, they were determined to keep their traditional way of life, political and social system and Islamic beliefs. Since their historical contacts with the Christians of the North had been invariably one of conflict and antagonism, the Muslims preferred not to involve themselves.

The Americans, after a series of bloody wars, were finally able to pacify the different Muslim groups in the Philippines, but not without guarantees of religious freedom and a program of reconstruction, education and sanitation. But like the Spaniards, they did not encourage the Muslims to maintain intimate contacts with other Muslim groups either in Southeast Asia or the Arab world. In spite of some pressure from clerical groups at home, American official policy was not to get involved with any Christian missionary activity among the Muslims.

However, it was under the American regime that many settlers from Christian provinces were encouraged to migrate to Mindanao. This policy was pursued with greater energy by the succeeding commonwealth government established in 1935. This policy which to Muslims constituted an intrusion into what they claimed to be their traditional lands became an ingredient, among others, that continue to contribute to the mounting tension in Muslim areas up to the present. Although, at the beginning, Christian and Muslim communities had lived together in amity, succeeding political and economic rivalries were to cause tensions, if not actual conflicts, between them. It is this situation that the present government of the Philippines is trying to solve by bold programs.

The Islamic Revival and the Indonesian Nationalist Movement

In the last few decades of the nineteenth century, Dutch colonial policy was to encourage the application of *adat* or customary law among the various Indonesian groups, while limiting the further implementation or sway of Islamic religious law. Yet, certain religious activities like the establishment of Qur'anic schools and the *haj* were allowed to increase that kind of orthodoxy which does not constitute a threat to colonial rule. Clearly, these policies were meant to limit Islam's institutional hold over the rural areas and to regulate the contacts of the local Muslims with the outside Muslim world. However, it was not possible to completely prevent modern Islamic ideas from filtering into the colony. The *haj* itself became the vehicle for the entry of such ideas. Moreover, methods of communication with different Islamic countries became more accessible. From all these, a reaction to Dutch official policies emerged. Many religiously inspired Indonesian societies were formed.

One of the earliest of these was Sarekat Islam which was founded in 1912. This organization aimed to purify Muslim doctrines from indigenous religious accretions, upgrade the teachings of Islam and adapt them to the needs of a modern world. On account of its program and the dedication of its organizers, it was able

to greatly stimulate religious thinking and activity. In time, it began to represent Islam as a force against Dutch rule, the economic power of the Chinese, the increasing activities of Christian missionaries and other local practices that were alien to Islam. Whereas Christianity was opposed as the religion of the foreign colonizers, Islam was offered as an instrument of solidarity for Muslims and for welding diverse peoples of different regions and languages, even those with diverse historical developments into one cohesive group. Although in 1925, Sarekat Islam lost large segments of its membership on account of Dutch reaction, poor administrators, internal bickerings and sympathy of many of its members with the rising Left, its mark on other organizations and the nationalist movement was indelible.

Another organization, the Muhammadiyah, which was non-political in its conception, was founded in 1912. It aimed to intensify Islam among the Indonesian Muslims while bringing its message to others. Learning effectively from Christian missionary techniques, it established orphanages, schools, clinics, etc., while propagating simultaneously ideas of a pure and progressive Islam. It took a firm stand against Communists and Christian missionaries, a position that could not help but generate political implications. More specifically, in asserting its principle that Islam was superior to Christianity, toward which it had a pronounced antipathy, its members could not help but resent Dutch colonial rule which was administered by Christians.

The Nahdatul Ulama, founded in 1926, although an Islamic movement, was established precisely to moderate what it considered the too dangerous modernistic tendencies of the other Islamic organizations. Propounding an Islamic way of life, in accordance with its own lights, it was led to go against government policies which appeared to it as sheer interference in Muslim family life and law. In some way, its existence prevented the formation of a united Islamic front.

Persantuan Islam established in 1923, noted for some of its fundamentalist teachings and polemics against Christianity, also had its influence on Indonesian Muslims. Like other Muslim organizations, it stood for the preservation of Islam, considering the Christians as a grave threat to Islam.

It is difficult to deny that the above organizations and their like helped not only to generate a more sophisticated Islamic consciousness, at least among its members, but also to influence the nationalist movement in Indonesia. It is enough to recall that the Muhammadiyah, and Persantuan Islam, to some extent, provided recruits to the Masjumi party, and that the Nahdatul Ulama today still claims a large membership. The fact is that there are still many Muslims today who believe that Islam had provided for some of the elements that contributed to the nationalistic struggle and had initially served as a rallying point for independence. Others even insist that Sarekat Islam was the first genuine nationalist organization. All of this is not to deny the fact that not a few Christians helped in the

formation of the Republic. But it is equally true that the Christian population of the Moluccas had supplied many of the recruits for the Dutch Army that resisted the Indonesian movement for unity and independence.

The Quest for Islamic Relevance and Identity in Modern SEA

Much had been written by some Western scholars regarding the superficial understanding of Islam by a great majority of Muslims in Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines. But this view is itself superficial. As long as individuals consider themselves Muslims, feel that they belong to the Muslim *umma* or community, believe that Islam still has a function in solving social problems, contend that Islam still has a function in solving social problems, contend that Islam had enriched their lives and consider that they are different from non-Muslims, who can say that they are not Muslims?

However, all of these is not to deny that a function of the *'ulama* or learned men as well as Islamic organizations is and has been to refine the knowledge of Islam, internalize it further among the faithful and bring it up to a higher level of consciousness. On the social level, what is presumably desired by the Malaysian, Indonesian and Filipino Muslims is to preserve the integrity of their community as a Muslim community. This has nothing to do with whether they all have to know Arabic fluently, know the whole Qur'an by memory or know all the subtleties of the Holy Law – although these are all desirable qualities. The Malaysians fear that the strengthening and increase of non-Muslims with enormous economic resources among them will put their community at a disadvantage in their own land. The Muslims in the Philippines fear that the loss of their traditional lands by the influx of Christian settlers will lead to their dispersion as a community and result in a corresponding loss of their Islamic identity. Muslim Indonesians fear that their numerical superiority will erode and they feel that the rest of their brethren need further sophistication in the knowledge and practice of the Faith.

All these fears explain their deep resentment of Christian missionaries in their midst. It is a resentment that is similar to that which they have toward Communists or persons with secular ideas among them. Moreover, Muslims who know what they are and what their Faith signifies, believe strongly that their moral values and ethical standards are in no manner inferior to those of other religions. They maintain, too, that Islam has within it enough principles that can accommodate further ideas leading to a fuller and more creative life in a modern world.

Toward a Peaceful Muslim-Christian Policy of Coexistence in SEA

The above brief and unavoidably superficial historical narration and interpretations reveal the undesirable fact that throughout a large part of the history

of the Malay peoples in Southeast Asia, there had been tensions if not outright confrontation between two competitive cultures with their votaries fearful of each other. It is a fear accompanied by resentment and, thus, an obstacle to nation-building. The solution does not lie in that kind of secularism that advocates that the world view of Christians and Muslims must give way to a social system where the religious sentiment must be eliminated. This type of secularism, which is a materialistic one, is unrealistic because as long as man is possessed of an intellect he will have spiritual aspirations. It is also self-defeating for it makes man poorer in his view of nature, life and destiny. But secularism in the sense that political integration leave intact the integrity of religious communities within their own spiritual climates, while encouraging cultural diversity, a sense of tolerance and mutual appreciation, might still reduce tensions in a society.

At present, one of the major causes of tension is the presence of Christian missionaries in predominantly Muslim areas. It is a presence that affronts the pious and the learned among the Muslims since it suggests that their religion is inferior and their moral principles reprehensible.

Muhammad Rasjidi's paper entitled "The Ethical and Social Demands of Islam for a Modern Society," with special consideration for the Muslims in Indonesia, read by him in an international seminar held in Tokyo, Japan, in October 1968, points out clearly and dramatically the nature and dangers of such a situation. Even if, hypothetically speaking, some allowance is made for some possible exaggeration in Rasjidi's paper, the fact that it is believed widely by many Muslim intellectuals and is still being reprinted or quoted extensively in Islamic journals or reports, presents a warning fraught with serious implications. A main point of Rasjidi is that converting people in this modern world by means of economic and social inducements, in a manner taking advantage of their weakness, is an unreligious if not an anti-religious activity. This point, of course, does not cover those cases of conversions where an individual, by means of his studies or intellectual inquiries, comes to see that Light which Allah in His Mercy had seen it proper for him to see.

The Islamic attitude here is clear. The People of the Scriptures, that is, those with sacred texts, are not subjects for Islamic conversion in a manner involving any form of coercion. The Qur'an asserts explicitly that salvation is not the sole monopoly of Jews, Christians or Muslims. Thus, regarding the Christian and Muslim communities, what might be necessary is that they should not put obstacles on each others way for an intensification of their own religious beliefs and practices. Indeed, a truly religious spirit manifests itself when different religious communities provide opportunities to make each other delve deeper into their own religious resources.

All religions are like the different spokes of a wheel with a common hub

from which they all radiate. This hub, symbolically speaking, represents the belief in Allah or a primordial covenant where Man accepts Allah as his Lord and Master. The historical accretions to this belief or covenant, theological elaborations, differing or elaborate rituals and, above all, the power structures or organizations that accompany or justify all these, is what leads the spokes to become more distant from each other. As it were, in developing a direction further away from the hub, they alienate themselves from their Source as well as from each other. What is imperative is to return to the hub, for this is what is shared by all religions. Whereas the unsympathetic eye can only see the differences among them, the eye of love perceives the common core of them all.