An Interreligious Learning Program In Indonesia

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Abstract

Indonesia is a pluralist society in which mission can be understood by the act of witnessing to another faith. This enables one to practice one's faith in a more authentic way and to contribute to the common good. The inter-religious studies program at the University of Sanatan Dharma, Yogyakarta, Indonesia, does not depend solely on books and lectures but also involves actual experiences such as direct encounters, personal relationships, and direct participation. This approach to inter-religious studies has been inspired by Ignatian pedagogy, which consists of the following five steps: context, experience, reflection, action, and evaluation. The Ignatian approach provides a methodological framework for transmitting knowledge without disregarding the significance of vision, values, diverse ethical frameworks and interpersonal encounters. The Ignatian approach also facilitates a process in which one acquires deeper understanding of another cultural-religious tradition by the readiness to experience the beauty of another cultural-religious tradition and, subsequently, to appreciate one's own tradition in a new way.

***Keywords**: Plurality, Openness, Respect, Interreligious, Encounter, Ignatian Pedagogy*

Introduction

The Catholic Church in Indonesia may be considered relatively young. While Catholics often take pride in tracing their origins to the late sixteenth century (Phan, 2011) most notably with the arrival of Francis Xavier in the Moluccas in 1546, a continuous and stable ecclesial presence was established only in the mid-nineteenth century (Aritonang, 1995). This raises the pertinent question as to whether the spirit and significance of mission among Indonesian Catholics has remained consistent from the sixteenth century through to the nineteenth century and to the present day.

David Jacobus Bosch (1929–1992), in his magnum opus *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (1991), explains how the understanding of the Church's mission has undergone a series of paradigm shifts throughout history. Drawing on the approach of Thomas Kuhn — who introduced

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the concept of 'paradigm shifts' in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962) — Bosch applies this concept to missiology, to show that the mission of the Church is not static but rather dynamic, contextual, and continually evolving in response to changing times, challenges, and theological perspectives. In relation to missiology, a paradigm shift refers to a change in the theological framework and missiological practice that was dominant during a particular period in the history of the Church. When an existing paradigm can no longer adequately address the challenges of the time, it enters into crisis, prompting the emergence of a new paradigm.

Bosch identifies seven major paradigms in the history of Church mission, each of which has its own distinctive characteristics (Bosch, 2001): (i) mission as the continuation of Jesus' ministry and the early Church, (ii) mission in the context of apologetics and conversion, (iii) mission as the political and cultural expansion of the Church, (iv) mission as Church renewal and internal proclamation of the Gospel, (v) mission as a 'civilizing mission' in which mission was entangled with imperialism and cultural domination, (vi) mission as an institutional project, (vii) mission as dialogue and contextual engagement. Regarding the last paradigm, mission is understood according to practices such as solidarity, inter-religious dialogue, social justice, and liberation.

One of the most vital and urgent dimensions of mission to be reflected upon, especially in a pluralistic society like Indonesia, is the concept of 'mission as witness to people of other living faiths' (Bosch, 2001). In this perspective, mission is not primarily about spreading the Gospel for the purpose of increasing Church numbers but rather about bearing witness to the truth of God revealed in creation and above all, affirming through testimony that God's plan of salvation encompasses all people and upholds the dignity of human diversity.

Some Challenge

The majority of Indonesia's population is Muslim. Within the framework of 'mission as witness to people of other living faiths', the Catholic Church in Indonesia is challenged to reflect on several important questions: (i) Does the presence of people of other faith traditions have an impact on Catholics in a way that enriches their understanding of faith in the incarnate Jesus Christ? (ii) Does the presence of people of other faith traditions help the Catholics to live out their faith in a more authentic and deeply-rooted fashion? (iii) Does the presence of people of other faiths inspire Catholics to embody and express the values of their faith for the greater common good?

The first question is related to the way by which Catholics understand their faith. In this regard, one may recall a significant statement issued by the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, FABC (https://fabc.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/FABC-Papers-96.pdf). Asian theologians recognize that they cannot separate themselves from the Universal Church. Rather, they remain

united with the universal Church while continuing to be firmly rooted in the Asian context. Are Catholics willing to make a journey together along the path of synodality and dialogue? They recognize that Asian cultures are not merely 'mission fields' but offer rich significance and value. The encounter between the Church and Asian cultures can, in fact, give a positive contribution and theological renewal to the entire Church. This reflects the reality that mission is not a one-way movement but rather a mutual exchange of giving and receiving.

History itself provides evidence that the theology and practice of the early Church was transformed through its encounter with Greek philosophy and its worldview. In a similar way, Asian cultures today could potentially enrich the Christian understanding of faith through their distinctive symbols, values, and wisdom traditions. For this to take place, the Church needs to be inclusive and open. Another important factor is humility and the willingness to listen. Asian theologians themselves continue to strive to understand the religious traditions within their own cultures through dialogue with people of other faiths. Catholics have gained valuable insights from theological reflections presented from a Western perspective. However, they must also learn from theologians who have present their ideas from an Eastern perspective by their experience of encounter with people of other living faiths.

The second question concerns the way that Catholics articulate their faith. The challenge is to express and celebrate their faith by engaging the rich cultural and religious traditions present in their own society.

Furthermore, the third question pertains to the way Catholics live out their faith. They are called to express their faith in a manner that responds to the pluralistic situation of the Asian context. Indeed, the Asian context, including Indonesia, is worthy of special attention. In addition to its predominantly Islamic environment, Indonesia is also characterized by its youthful population. According to data from 2016, the average age in Indonesia is 28.6 years. Interestingly, while Indonesian youth are identified among the happiest in the world, surveys also indicate that they are increasingly concerned about the future and particularly with concerned about extremism and terrorism.[2] What efforts has the Catholic Church in Indonesia undertaken to respond to the challenges mentioned above?

[2] The survey found that Indonesian youths are ranked the highest in relation to emotional well-being, with 40 percent of them not thinking about their problems too much, and not feeling anxious, bullied, unloved or lonely. Up to 22 percent of Indonesian youths said they feel they get enough sleep, exercise regularly and devote enough time to rest and reflection. However, they are a generation that has pessimistic attitude coming from worries regarding the future, such as extremism and terrorism, as well as conflicts and war. https://www.thejakartapost.com/youth/2017/02/13/indonesian-youths-among-happiest-in-the-world-survey.html See also, https://www.sjesjesuits.global/media/2021/02/PJ_126_FRA.pdf

The Response of Theological Education

Various solutions have indeed been proposed to address these challenges, one of which is the need for education. The challenge of radicalism has, to some extent, already infiltrated the education system itself.[3] Hence, the role of higher education institutions must not be overlooked. In this regard, the Department of Theology at Sanata Dharma University in Yogyakarta, also known as Wedabhakti Faculty of Theology, must accept some significant responsibility to respond to such issues.

The Faculty itself presents a vision and mission that corresponds closely to the challenges outlined above. According to its vision statement, Wedabhakti Faculty of Theology seeks to be an ecclesiastical faculty of excellence in philosophical and theological studies, firmly grounded in reality and rooted in the Catholic tradition which, through a critical, contextual, and dialogical approach, aims at contributing to the dynamic life of the Church and the dignified life of the nation in the context of pluralism. The mission statement goes on to mention several points, one of which is the need to accompany and form young students and future leaders of the Church to become competent in their ministry. This is to be achieved by cultivating contextual theological research, so that the Christian faith may take deep root in, and be enriched by, Indonesian culture in the midst of global challenges. The mission statement also emphasizes active participation in movements of social empowerment, particularly within Indonesia's plural society.

The question arises: What concrete efforts can Wedabhakti Faculty of Theology undertake to respond to these specific challenges through theological education? I intend to explore and elaborate on this question further in due course. But first I will explore this issue within the framework of one of my fields of academic formation, namely inter-religious studies. More specifically, I will discuss it by drawing on my teaching experience in various educational centers, such as the Department of Theology at Sanata Dharma University, the Islamic State University, the Center for Religious and Cross-Cultural Studies – all of which are located in Yogyakarta – as well as from various training programs offered in different cities in Indonesia.

Paradigm Shift in Interreligious Studies

It has been observed that the development of inter-religious studies, particularly in the area of Christian-Muslim studies, has gone through several identifiable stages. The first stage is characterized by a polemical-apologetic

[3] West Java tops the list, with 46 violations, followed by Aceh with 36 cases and Jakarta with 23, making them the most intolerant provinces. Confirming a recent finding from a survey by the Religious Affairs Ministry, the institute found a smaller number of violations in places where Muslims were the minority. East Nusa Tenggara and West Papua recorded the least number of violations, with only one case, each, during the year. http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2016/02/24/survey-finds-rise-faith-based-intolerance.html

approach in which the study of other living faiths is conducted primarily with the aim of defending one's own religious doctrines, often through systematic argumentation and discourse. This approach may also involve questioning the doctrines of other faiths exclusively from the perspective of one's own religious framework, without seriously engaging with or considering the paradigms of the other faith tradition in its own right.

The second stage is marked by a tendency to engage in in-depth study of subjects related to people of other living faiths primarily from a purely academic standpoint, which means that it is conducted as an armchair exercise. While academic research and inquiry can undoubtedly broaden one's intellectual horizon, such an approach may remain confined to theoretical or book knowledge, lacking sensitivity to the real-life context and lived experience of others.

The third stage is characterized by the realization that theoretical knowledge must be complemented by experiential understanding. In this stage, one conducts analytical and systematic study of matters concerning other living faiths, while also engaging in non-academic, person-to-person encounters that foster deeper human connection and mutual understanding.

According to Dupuis (Dupuis, 2004), understanding another person's religion is not merely a matter of learning about its doctrines, rituals, history, or traditions. If it stops there, one will only touch the surface. Intellectual knowledge or external information alone is insufficient for a true understanding of another's faith. Genuine understanding requires a deeper and more empathetic approach. Religion is not simply a system of thought but a lived experience. Therefore, one must strive to understand another's religion from within, by stepping into the shoes of the believer, as it were. This calls for an inner disposition and sensitivity that is not content with simply comprehending what the other believes but endeavors to experience *how* they believe and *how they express* their faith in daily life.

This process requires a form of self-identification with the existential experience of the other. One becomes aware of the need to imagine or to encounter the realities, hopes, fears, and spiritual dynamics of another from within their own world. One cannot overlook the fact that every religion shapes its adherents' worldview about what is considered sacred, true, and meaningful. Thus, one begins to train oneself to see the world through the lens of its followers, even if only in an approximate way. This is part of a hermeneutical process, namely to enter into another's horizon of meaning. The culmination of this process is the ability to grasp the religious identity of another from the internal perspective of the believer, rather than from the outside, and certainly not by accepting stereotypes.

Again, each religion is not merely a belief system, but also a way of being and a mode of living out one's life in this world. Each religious tradition arises out of profound existential questions concerning the meaning of life and suffering, and

salvation. In order to reach the perspective of the believer, one must try to immerse oneself in the spiritual yearnings and existential quests that animate him or her, rather than imposing one's own questions upon the framework of their religion. In fact, a genuine way to know another religious tradition is to engage in a kind of pilgrimage into the inner and spiritual world of the other.

One may also recall the insights of Dunbar. In his view, approaching people of other 'living faiths' and 'religious traditions' should be done in a certain manner. According to him, there are four essential conditions (Dunbar, 1998) that must be met in order that these efforts become meaningful and effective rather than remaining merely ceremonial as a formality.

First, inter-religious dialogue must take place between human beings in a face-to-face encounter. It is thus not simply a question of institutions, documents, or theoretical frameworks but requires genuine engagement, direct encounters, and honest relationships between individuals in the form of interpersonal communication.

Second, meaningful dialogue is rooted in the reality of religious difference. Dialogue is not aimed at developing uniformity or weakening one's own faith commitment. It is precisely in the encounter with differing beliefs that mutual understanding and enrichment can occur. Dialogue should take place between individuals who are deeply rooted in, and committed to, their respective traditions.

Third, a mutual attitude of respect and openness are fundamental. Without this, dialogue risks becoming a debate or mere argument and nothing more than a casual social conversation. What is required is an active willingness to learn and grow through encounters with those who have a different viewpoint.

Fourth, inter-religious dialogue should contain and explore substantial religious meaning, both explicitly, through discussions about God, worship, sacred texts, and so forth and implicitly, through the sharing of life experiences shaped by faith.

Dunbar also emphasizes that inter-religious dialogue should not be limited to 'descriptive accounts' of other religions or to 'normative teachings' or to 'academic and theoretical approaches' on how one should relate to them. True understanding of dialogue does not come solely from books or lectures but also from real experiences that involve direct encounters, personal relationships, and actual participation that are born from firsthand involvement, from real 'immersion' with others, and from reflecting deeply on that experience so that these experiences penetrate the heart and shape genuine attitudes.

The Theological Basis of Interfaith Experience

The role of personal experience deserves special attention, particularly in light of the insights offered by Ignatius of Loyola (1491–1556) through his *Spiritual Exercises*. As a spiritual guidebook rooted in Ignatius' own personal journey of faith, the *Spiritual Exercises* contain profound insights into how one might live faithfully in response to God. One of these insights is found in the meditation known as the 'Contemplation on the Incarnation' (*Spiritual Exercises*, Nos. 101–109), which highlights the affective response of the Divine Reality towards the complex and often troubling condition of humanity. St. Ignatius underscores the theological importance of engaging in concrete social realities since in Christ, God has entered into human history and enacted redemption within the world. Thus, one's experience as a follower of Christ, particularly in a context like Indonesia, cannot be separated from encounters with people of other living faiths. These encounters call for a path of self-renunciation and humility in witness.

Another significant insight comes from the meditation called 'The Three Degrees of Humility' (*Spiritual Exercises*, Nos. 165–168). In this context, one is invited to live out the spirit of *kenosis*, or self-emptying, with humility and openness. One is reminded of the passage in Matthew 25:31–46, where God reveals Himself in the guise of the hungry, the poor, the thirsty, and the sick. This passage challenges every believer to recognize God's presence in every person, regardless of their social situation or religious background.[4]

'The Contemplation to Attain Divine Love' (*Spiritual Exercises*, Nos. 230–237) offers yet another profound insight. We are reminded that God seeks to draw human beings to Himself through and within all things. Hence, we could learn to recognize the presence of God in everything and in every person including those who belong to different faith traditions. This raises a deeply existential question: Can we really find God among our brothers and sisters who follow a faith that is quite different from our own? More specifically, can Christians in general and Catholics in particular find God in those who do not profess faith in Christ?

The lives of Charles de Foucauld (d. 1916) and Louis Massignon (d. 1962) provide inspiring examples of how personal faith can be developed, deepened, and shaped within an environment marked by another religious tradition. They lived among Muslims and their genuine encounters with Muslims awakened their faith in Christ. The invitation to 'find God in all things' ultimately means that our daily

[4] It also corresponds to an Islamic Prophetic Tradition: "(God will say) 'O son of Adam, I asked you for food but you did not feed Me.' The person will say: 'My Lord, how could I feed Thee when Thou art the Lord of the worlds?' (God) will say: 'Didn't you know that a servant of Mine asked you for food but you did not feed him, and were you not aware that if you had fed him you would have found him by My side'?" *Ṣaḥîḥ Muslim*, Ḥadîth 2001: No. 4661 & 1172.

experiences and encounters with people, regardless of their religious background, can become moments of discovering God's presence and God's action in real life.

In light of these experiences and reflections, we can say that Indonesia could be understood as a sacred space where God is present. Its context of religious and cultural plurality deserves profound respect and provides deep theological significance. It confirms the argument of Dupuis (Dupuis, 2004) that religious pluralism should not be seen merely as a reality to be endured or pragmatically accommodated. Pluralism does not refer simply to external realities, but is an essential aspect of God's dynamic plan. A negligent attitude toward religious diversity would fail to understand the deeper spiritual and theological meaning of religious plurality. Moreover, the existence of other religions need not be perceived as a threat to the integrity of Christian faith. In fact, pluralism should be understood not as an obstacle for mission but as a challenge and opportunity that will enrich and expand the very meaning of mission itself. It is a gift and task of divine grace. As a 'gift', pluralism offers opportunities for growth in faith and in human relationships. As a 'task', it challenges Christians to respond actively and creatively in the light of their faith.

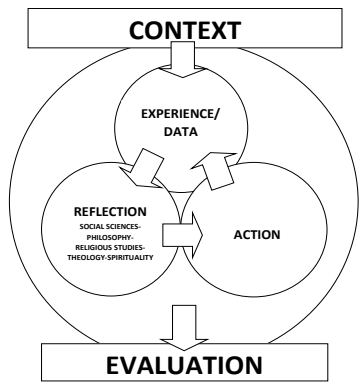
Abrahamic faiths declare that God, from the very beginning, has taken the first step to encounter humanity. This faith is the foundation for an appreciation of diversity as part of the dynamics of God's relationship with humankind. God never limits Himself to a single mode of communication but reaches out and fosters communion in ways that are more suitable for each cultural, linguistic, and historical situation. The initiative always belongs to God who is already present even before humanity becomes capable or conscious of seeking God. This fact is in accordance with the understanding of 'prevenient grace', in the sense that grace precedes all human effort. Thus, religious diversity is far from being an obstacle to Christianity but is rather a call to build bridges, to engage in dialogue, and to encounter the face of God at work beyond the boundaries of institutions, rituals and doctrines.

Ignatian Pedagogy

No one would deny that education can serve as one of the most effective responses in cultivating a culture of openness and respect. Education is not simply about knowledge acquisition or final outcomes, but about the transformation of individuals who are open to personal change, ongoing reflection and commitment, toward greater awareness, compassion, and responsible action in the world. As such, education is closely connected to the concept of pedagogy. Yet, pedagogy itself is not merely a technique for transmitting knowledge but refers primarily to a relational process and an accompaniment in which educators serve as companions for learners on their journey toward becoming intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually integrated persons. Pedagogy is thus an art that encompasses values, visions, ethical frameworks, and human relationships.

Ignatian pedagogy offers a distinctive approach as a way and a method of learning developed from the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius of Loyola that consists of a dialectical process involving experience, reflection, and action. In addition, Ignatian pedagogy is not only rooted in a specific spiritual and humane vision but seeks to incarnate those values in daily reality by means of five essential steps (http://www.sjweb.info/documents/education/pedagogy_en.pdf), namely: (i) context through which educators understand the unique circumstances and background of each learner, (ii) experience through which educators provide space for learners to engage with reality in a direct and meaningful way, (iii) reflection through which learners are encouraged to develop their own personal interpretations and insights, (iv) action through which educators motivate learners to engage in praxis based on their reflection and understanding, (v) evaluation though which educators asses the personal growth and the effectiveness of the learning process. Hence, Ignatian pedagogy with its five steps — context, experience, reflection, action, and evaluation — offers a methodological framework for the theory and practice of inter-religious studies that emphasizes interpersonal encounter. Within this framework, the five elements of Ignatian pedagogy can be further illustrated as follows:

Figure 1: *Five Elements of Ignatian Pedagogy*



I. Context

This first point refers to the background of those involved in the learning process. In the case of Indonesia, the context is particularly complex since it is characterized by a rich tapestry of cultural and religious traditions. The religious history of the country cannot be understood solely through the lens of Islam. One must also acknowledge the significant contributions of other religious traditions—especially Hinduism, Buddhism, and even indigenous belief systems—which have all played crucial roles in shaping the nation's spiritual and cultural landscape.

II. Experience

The second point pertains to the existential experience and the various phenomena encountered within one's context. Experience unfolds in daily encounters with neighbors and people in the public sphere. On the one hand, there is the observation that Indonesians with their diverse religious backgrounds are usually able to coexist harmoniously without forming isolated ghettos. On the other hand, one must admit that not all Indonesians are able to live in a pluralistic society. This issue becomes especially relevant when one considers that many students in Wedabhakti Faculty of Theology, for example, come from the eastern regions of Indonesia which is characterized by its religiously homogeneous environment in which people are accustomed to live among fellow Christians, albeit with different denominations. It is therefore not surprising that, at the start of their inter-religious studies course, some students respond with scepticism when asked in a survey about the relevance or benefit of such a course. Even after residing in Yogyakarta—a city known for its religious diversity—there is no guarantee that they will have had sufficient opportunities to engage meaningfully with neighbors belonging to different faiths.

III. Reflection

Reflection involves the effort to expand one's horizon of knowledge by acquiring informative content. It also serves as a means to deepen one's understanding by engaging in analysis and synthesis from various perspectives. One becomes aware of the historical origins of other religious traditions, including the profound insights of their founders and thinkers. Students are encouraged to conduct library-based research on various religious traditions by delving into their core concepts, doctrines, and philosophical and theological viewpoints.

Equally indispensable is the need to listen to the voice of other living faiths. Students are therefore encouraged to study the wisdom and ideas of influential religious leaders, philosophers, theologians, thinkers, and scholars from diverse religious backgrounds.[5] Due to the limited time available in class sessions, however, each student is asked to focus on one figure and they are given the opportunity to present the results of their research in the classroom. The list of available figures may vary from one academic year to another, allowing both teachers and students to continually broaden their horizons.

[5] Here are some inspiring figures whose ideas have been discussed in my Interreligious Learning Program: Adi Shankara, Nagarjuna, Ramanuja, Lao Tse, Martin Buber, Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik, Dalai Lama, Alexander Berzin, Mahatma Gandi, Ram Mohan Roy, Al-Ghazali, Ibn Taymiyya, Said Nursi, Fethulah Gulen, Sayyid Ahmad Khan, Abdurrahman Wahid, Kyai Ahmad Dahlan, Theodorus Abû Qurra, Thomas Aquinas, Roland Williams, Menno Simons, etc.

IV. Action

The fourth step takes students to action. It calls them not to remain at the level of conceptual reflection but to 'translate' insights into concrete praxis, through live-in experiences, exposure or immersion programs, and visits to communities of other faiths. This step also functions as a means of verifying or falsifying what has been learned during the time of reflection. Here, the Ignatian principle of *agere contra* is applied, which asks students to challenge themselves by engaging with communities that they might not naturally choose, thereby stepping beyond their comfort zones. This step provides the opportunity to become more familiar with the beliefs and practices of other religions, whether through special courses, direct involvement, shared projects, or training programs aimed at promoting broader inter-religious encounter.

From time to time, I try to identify communities of other faiths as potential locations for such immersion experiences[6] as part of my attempt to expand networks and deepen inter-religious relationships. The number of students assigned to the location of each immersion is given careful consideration. If the group is too large, some students may withdraw or remain silent; if the group is too small, they may feel the lack of mutual support when challenges arise. The key objective is to ensure that students have the opportunity to wrestle with unfamiliarity and discomfort in meaningful ways.

Adequate preparation is indispensable before entering into an immersion program. Students are asked to think of activities in which they can engage during the live-in experience. Three types of activities are usually encouraged. The first involves intellectual engagement such as discussion sessions. The second aims at emotional or affective connection like sharing personal stories. The third consists of physical or practical activities such as playing sports together or working on a community project like gardening.

The dynamic of inter-religious encounter during immersion programs is not always free of tension. I recall an occasion when the small group faced a particularly difficult situation. The group spent a night at an Islamic boarding school, which happened to be hosting hundreds of Muslims from other cities at the same time. During a public session, the religious leaders and lecturers challenged the group with numerous questions, which often tended to become a theological debate. The atmosphere during that session was clearly not conducive for a fruitful dialogue. Fortunately, however, the group was able to visit a different Islamic boarding school located just fifteen minutes away by car. Here the group experienced a reception marked by warmth and openness from both staff and students.

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[6] Through immersion, both in the intra-curricular programmes and the extra-curricular programmes, we have so far succeeded in building a network with more or less 20 communities of believers in different cities. Those communities consist of various religious backgrounds.

V. Evaluation

The fifth step enables students to draw meaningful lessons from the entire process. This step consists of two parts. In the first part, which involves an evaluation of the immersion experience, each student is invited to share personal experiences of consolation and desolation. Each student is encouraged to engage in self-critique as well as theological reflection by drawing on the Scriptures and relevant documents from both the universal and the local Church.

The second part entails a broader evaluation of the learning process. Students are expected to synthesize and analyse their insights, particularly those emerging from the interplay between theory and practice. As a final project, each student is required to write a ten-page paper, which is discussed in an oral session lasting about fifteen minutes with the teacher. This final evaluation does not only assess the student's understanding but also provides the teacher with the opportunity to learn from the insights generated by the learners themselves.

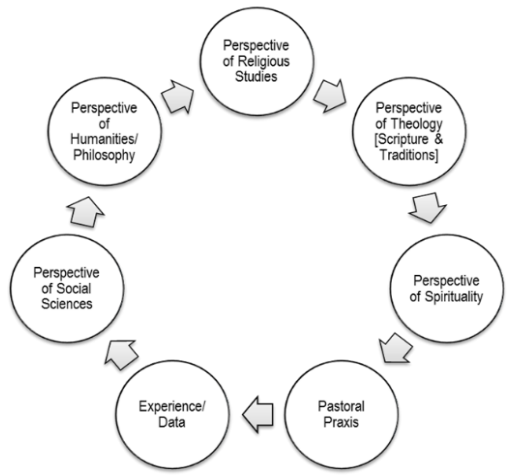
The methodology and materials designed to facilitate encounters with people of other living faiths as outlined above can be adapted, with slight modifications, for use in extra-curricular programs. I do this through various training initiatives and inter-religious training programs on different levels for participants from across Indonesia. Additionally, I offer an international program called the Asia Pacific Theological Encounter Programme (APTEP), designed for university students from other countries such as the Philippines, Australia, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam.[7]

It is important to emphasize that the goal of all these activities is to facilitate a theological program that will assist students to become more authentically themselves by learning from others. Borrowing from Terrence Merrigan's perspective, this kind of theological education can be described by the phrase: '*e pluribus unum*', which could be translated as 'developing unity in spite of diversity (Merrigan, 2000). This idea is based on the belief that "in genuine, open-ended dialogue, all the dialogue partners are called to grow into a deeper understanding of their own identities. Of course, becoming authentically oneself also involves, among other things, learning to live with one's own limitations" (Merrigan, 2000, p. 35).

[7] The length of the training programme varies; the shortest spends only 3 days, and the longest, takes time 1 month (3 weeks of class sessions and 1 week of immersion). Once the live-in took place for two weeks in an Islamic boarding school in a rural area in Central Java. Another time the live-in took place one week in an Islamic boarding school in a historical town of Nahdatul Ulama in East Java, and another more time in a city of Jakarta. Cf. the video in *Youtube*: www.youtube.com/watch?v=p_zFyn5OusU&feature=youtu.be
www.youtube.com/watch?v=73XIzPhbeIY&feature=feedu

In the light of further reflection, the framework of Ignatian pedagogy, with its five integrated steps, may be further developed and adapted. One possible formulation could be as follows.

Figure 2: *Possible Formulation*



Learning from J.W.M. Bakker SJ (1916-1978)

In developing this learning process, I have drawn inspiration from the work of Jan Bakker, a Dutch Jesuit missionary who taught for many years in the Department of Theology at Sanata Dharma University, Yogyakarta. Although I never had the opportunity to meet him personally, I have learned a great deal from the materials and works written by him and about him, which can be found in the St. Ignatius Library, Yogyakarta. Jan Bakker gave lectures on inter-religious studies and prepared several handouts on topics such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and what he referred to as *autochthonous* or indigenous belief systems, which exist throughout Indonesia [the *Nusantara*]. Although he wrote books on these themes, he was not only engrossed in library research but also emphasized the importance of field research. For example, he took his students to visit Hindu and Buddhist temples. Tragically, Jan Bakker had a heart attack and died while explaining the history of a Hindu temple near Yogyakarta.

I have reflected on his methodological approach and became aware that he recognized the limitations of lecturing on inter-religious studies by drawing solely on written materials. He was undoubtedly aware that one could not fully understand religious traditions merely by reading about them and was convinced of the importance of engaging directly with people of other living faith. He tried to encourage his students to view the religious context of Indonesia as a kind of *locus*

theologicus or the domain of theological reflection (Bakker, 1972). It was also evident for him that engaging with people of other faiths demanded deep commitment to one's own belief system. He cautioned against the tendency to blend or dilute the essential aspects of different religions in the name of interfaith openness (Subagya, 1979).

Some Points for Consideration

No one would deny that the concept and approach outlined in the methodological framework above still requires further development. Some limitations can be identified here. The first limitation pertains to students or participants in the training program. It is true that students and participants were deeply impressed by their experience of concrete encounters with believers from other faiths during the immersion. They also stated that the materials delivered in the preparatory sessions were not insignificant or irrelevant. However, many of them reported that their immersion experience, though short, was more inspiring than the experience of listening to lectures.[8] There was even a tendency among some students or participants to reduce the learning process in inter-religious studies to the immersion step alone. Some even considered the immersion process to be the find goal of the process when it is merely a means to reach the goal.

I am often asked: "Why do we not choose a community of hardliners or radicals for the live-in immersion experience?" Some people are of the view that building relationships with hardliners would solve all our problems. However, the vision of dialogue and non-violence is not accepted by hardliners. Conversely, we cannot tolerate the violent approach of such groups. If we attempted to build relationships with hardliners, we might be accused of betraying our core vision – namely, that of dialogue and non-violence. We might even risk losing the trust of our more moderate friends.

Another question concerns the impact of these live-in immersion experiences. Will this method of engaging with communities of other believers make it possible for us to eliminate violence in the name of religion? Searching for a response to such questions, one could reflect on what Cornille wrote in her book: *The Im-Possibility*

[8] After participating in the APTEP 2011, some participants from the Philippines were asked, "How do you think this experience and knowledge or understanding gained will inform your mission or service in Mindanao - the Philippines? How do you feel you can use this in returning to Mindanao?" Here are their answers: (i) The knowledge and understanding that I gained as well as my beautiful experiences that I had with the Muslims in Indonesia will always be useful in my future approach and attitude towards Muslims here in Mindanao. (ii) We have also a good number of Muslim brothers and sisters in the Philippines particularly in Mindanao. And Christians as the majority are exhausting all our ways and means to be in dialogue with them, to be in harmony with them and to be in communion with them. And having joined the APTEP programme, I feel like joining those who are promoting this dialogue of life, dialogue of experience and dialogue of beliefs and cultures in order to give flesh of all my awe and wonder experiences here....

of Interreligious Dialogue (Cornille, 2008). In her view, many people turn to dialogue in the hope of fostering understanding and reducing violence. But their dialogue efforts often fail because they do not spring from theological virtues such as humility, commitment, interconnection, empathy, and hospitality. Cornille even goes on to say that the absence of these virtues may lead to the pessimistic conclusion that constructive dialogue between religions is, in the end, impossible. We need not be surprised that some students or participants in the training program become pessimistic and conclude that inter-religious dialogue is either impossible or futile. One must not be overly ambitious. Referring back to the survey quoted from www.thejakartapost.com at the beginning of this article, one could say that the most important aspect of the process is to encourage students to step outside their comfort zones.

The next challenge is to find a suitable community of other believers for the immersion experience. Not all communities that we approach to take part in an immersion program are ready to give a positive response. On the other hand, the inter-religious encounter program has been reported in several magazines and newspapers and I have often heard rhetorical questions from members of the community where the live-in immersion program had taken place: "Why don't we organize a similar program?" In fact, I have received many invitations to engage in activities related to inter-religious encounter.

Some time ago, I accompanied a group of Jesuit trainees for two weeks in an Islamic boarding school where we experienced an interesting and dynamic process. For the first week, the trainees and the students of the Islamic boarding school engaged in formal conversations. They spoke in Indonesian and covered topics such as family, hobbies, and personal interests. During the next three days, the conversation became less formal and was conducted in the Javanese language, though still at the highest level of formality (*kromo inggil*). By the final four days, they were communicating in the lowest level of Javanese formality (*ngoko*), discussing serious topics like religious life, the spirituality of non-violence, and the value of chastity. Use of the lowest level of Javanese formality (*ngoko*) was a sign that the exchange had become more relaxed. But it had taken some time to reach this level of communication. On one of the last days, the Muslim students of the Islamic boarding school expressed an unexpected wish to visit a Catholic house about twenty minutes from the boarding school.

Conclusion

I have noticed several stages or levels by accompanying students and participants through a learning process of encountering people from other living faiths. Firstly, encountering something new—especially when related to a religious tradition can be challenging. It seems that the idea of a '*tabula rasa*' cannot apply here. No one can escape certain prejudices that are already formed since childhood.

Second, the absence of a '*tabula rasa*' in relation to another religious tradition is often replaced by a double-standard aapproach. By this I mean the tendency to view one's own religious tradition through the lens of 'what ought to be' while judging the other tradition through the lens of 'what is'. Third, an encounter with a new religious tradition can result a kind of test because the worldviews, thought-patterns, theological language, symbols, and rituals that one encounters are often radically different from what one is accustomed to. This realization can lead to a tension characterized by a mixture of fascination and repulsion. Fourth, this internal tension can facilitate a deeper engagement with another religious tradition and an evaluation of one's own tradition in the light of the other. Further, this internal tension may result either in a total rejection or a deeper exploration and a desire to learn more. Engagement with and reflection on another religious tradition can uncover new values that one might not have been aware of previously.

Fifth, the new horizon one gains from encountering another religious tradition will have an impact on one's own faith development. In *Ut Unum Sint* (par. 28), Pope John Paul II writes that dialogue is 'an indispensable step along the path towards human self-realization… both for the individual and for every human community'. Sixth, in the dynamic of encounter, people from various religious traditions and faith backgrounds will be challenged to deepen their own faith, to embody it in daily life, to communicate it meaningfully, and to articulate it within their own specific context. The purpose of dialogue is not simply to transfer religious information or knowledge but to develop a safe environment that will result in mutual enrichment and transformation. In the process of dialogue, we experience a deeper understanding of the divine mystery as we continue the pilgrimage of our lives.

Crossing religious boundaries is indeed a challenge and a risk. It is part of the challenge to 'go to the frontiers'. As pilgrims, we are called to undergo a process of 'passing over'. John Dunne says that the process of 'passing over' is a shifting of standpoint, a going over to the standpoint of another culture, another way of life, another religious tradition. It is followed by the corresponding process of 'coming back,' that is, returning to one's own culture and one's own religious tradition with a new vision (Dunne, 1972, pp. ix-x).[9]

[9] A similar idea is stated by Dupuis, "There can be no doubt that the Christian identity must be preserved in its integrity in the process of dialoguing and entering into dialogue with the other religious traditions. The affirmation of the Christian identity need not be made in isolation from other religious traditions. Affirming the Christian identity is best done in an open dialogue with the other religious traditions and in full recognition of God's active presence in them by way of revelation and saving deeds." (Dupuis, 2004, pp. 131-132).

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Links

- Prakosa, Heru. (2021). L'intégrisme religieux dans l'Islam l'Indonesie comme point de référence.
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