ROLE OF RELIGIOUS LEADER IN INTERFAITH DIALOGUE TOWARDS CONFLICT RESOLUTION: A MUSLIM ANALYSIS ON CHRISTIANITY’S PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this paper is to examine the role of Christian religious leader in implementing interfaith dialogue towards conflict resolution from Christianity’s perspective, be it Internal Dialogue (Intra Dialogue) or External Dialogue (Inter Dialogue). This paper is part of a series entitled “Role of Religious Leader in Interfaith Dialogue towards Conflict Resolution: An Islamic Perspective”, where it is a comparative study between Islam and Christianity. Research will include the perspective of the Roman Catholic Church in the Second Vatican Council and other church group perspective such as Orthodox, Protestant and Anglicans in The World Council of Churches (WCC). Basically, the Christian religion is very concerned on the fundamental principles of relations between religious diversity which includes two important aspects of justice and tolerance, respect for each other in the context of different religious beliefs, as well as opening possibility for communication and dialogue. Among the details highlighted by Christianity is; (1) the importance of open communication and dialogue with non-Christian religions including intra dialogue involving Christians themselves, (2) encouragement to respect others (3) to promote friendship (4) to promote a sense of togetherness and (5) rejection of prejudices and (6) rejection of hostility (antagonism) to fellow humans. All these is the basic information needed to be conveyed by the Christian Religious Leader to their followers through Intra dialogue in order to enhance mutuality, understand the importance of developing communication and social relationships between those of different faiths. While for the Christian religious leaders, they viewed that dialogue involving religious leaders, whether formal or informal, will serve as platform to address issues of justice, peace, humanity, and social ethics among others. In addition, dialogue directed towards conflict resolution is also part of their agenda to build good relations with non-Christians, especially the Muslims.

Abstrak

Objektif utama kertas kerja ini adalah untuk meneliti peranan ketua agama Kristian dalam melaksanakan dialog antara agama ke arah penyelesaian konflik daripada perspektif Kristian sama ada bersifat Dialog Dalaman Komuniti (Intra Dialog) mahupun Dialog Luaran (Inter Komuniti). Kertas kerja ini juga adalah rentetan daripada kertas kerja yang bertajuk “Role of Religious Leader in Interfaith Dialogue towards Conflict Resolution: An Islamic Perspective”, di mana ia adalah satu kajian perbandingan di antara Islam dan Kristian. Penelitian akan meliputi perspektif Roman Catholic...
Church iaitu di dalam Second Vatican Council dan perspektif kumpulan gereja lain iaitu Orthodox, Protestant dan Anglicans di dalam The World Council of Churches (WCC). Pada dasarnya agama Kristian amat mengambil berat prinsip-prinsip asas hubungan antara berlainan agama yang merangkumi dua aspek penting iaitu aspek keadilan dan toleransi dan menghormati antara satu sama lain dalam konteks berlainan fahaman agama serta membuka ruang komunikasi serta berdialog. Di antara perincian Kristian terhadap aspek-aspek tersebut adalah seperti (1) kepentingan membuka ruang komunikasi dan berdialog dengan agama selain Kristian (non-Christian religion) termasuk melakukan intra dialog iaitu dalam kalangan masyarakat Kristian. (2) Meningkatkan sikap hormat- menghormati (respect), (3) memupuk sikap persahabatan (friendship), (4) memupuk sikap kebersamaan (togetherness) dan (5) menolak sikap prejudis (prejudice) dan (6) menolak permusuhan (antagonism) sesama manusia. Semua perkara ini merupakan informasi asas yang perlu disampaikan oleh Ketua Agama Kristian kepada masyarakatnya melalui Intra Dialog agar dapat meningkatkan kefahaman, memahami kepentingan dan membina komunikasi serta hubungan sosial di kalangan masyarakat berlainan kepercayaan. Manakala di peringkat pemimpin agama Kristian pula, platfom dialog antara sesama pemimpin agama sama ada secara formal mahupun tidak formal turut diberi perhatian seperti isu keadilan, keamanan sejagat, kemanusiaan, etika sosial dan pelbagai lagi. Di samping itu, isu yang melibatkan dialog ke arah penyelesaian konflik turut menjadi sebahagian agenda dalam membina hubungan baik terhadap masyarakat bukan Kristen terutama masyarakat beragama Islam.

Keywords: Interfaith Dialogue, Religious Leader, Conflict Resolution, Christianity.

1. Introduction.

Religious Leader were known as High-level Religious Leader or Faith Leadership which refers to the group of religious leaders holding high positions in their religions, be it Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism and others, with their own religious educational background (Special Report 2004: 3). Generally this group has the potential to influence policy and law makers such as government, and societies in the wider context. They also function as mediators of conflict resolution. They were the representative in dialogue during interfaith conflict or interfaith dialogue programmes, during the time of the conflict, post-conflict, as well as dialogue directed towards reconciliation. Among examples of religious leaders supposedly involved in dialogue aiming to resolve conflicts are the Muftis for Islam, Rabbi for the Jews and the Priest for the Christian. (Khairulnizam Mat Karim, Khadijah Khambali and Suzy Aziziyana Saili 2012:2). Without suitable representative, this would rendered a failure in materializing the objectives of dialogue (Khairulnizam Mat Karim 2005:167). In this matter, Kamar Oniah Kamaruzaman, a well-known scholar of comparative religion in Malaysia attest,
“Since in interfaith dialogue the positions of the religions on certain issues are to be discussed, it is therefore imperative that the dialogue partners and participants be among those who are competent, knowledgeable and committed to their religions. This is to avoid misrepresentation of the religions, which will be disadvantage to both the religions and the dialogue audience. Disadvantage to the religion because the religion will be misunderstood by the partners and participant if it is poorly explained, and thus will be a disservice to the religion. Disadvantage to the dialogue partners and participants because they will receive inaccurate and false information about the religion and consequently, their perception on the issues in discussion will be erroneous”. (Kamar Oniah Kamaruzaman 2010:131).

Thus in view of the authors, the above characteristics are supposedly expected from religious leader. In this paper the authors begin discussions first with the concept of religious leader, and later delve into their roles as emphasized by the religion of Christianity.

2. The Concept of Religious Leaders from Christianity’s Perspective.

(a) Religious leaders – Christianity’s perspective

The Bible (John 10:11) describes religious leaders or religious leadership as shepherds, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep, “one who guides, provides protection and care for a group of people under the leadership (organizational members). (Hayford, J.W 1994:175-186). Hence without them, people will be left astray and without guidance.

According to Western scholars and researchers, there are a number of definitions of religious leaders or religious leadership. However, the characteristic that distinguishes between religious contexts, particularly in Christianity is that it emphasizes the divinity aspect. For instance, a religious leader is a person, “with God-given capacity and God-given responsibility to influence a specific group of God’s people toward His purpose for the group” (Clinton, J.R 1993:213). In addition it is also defined as, “someone who is called by God to led; leads with and through Christ like character and demonstrates the functional competencies that permit leadership to take place”. (Barna, G 1997:25). Other Western scholars defined religious leaders (including the spiritual guide or spiritual leaders) as those who have the ability to influence others through their personality which was irradiated or interpenetrated and empowered by the Holy Spirit (Holy Spirit). (Sanders, JO 1998:20)

From the given definitions, the authors observe that Christianity in dealing with religious leaders, tend to focus to someone who has the nature of a guide, especially religious matter and a role model to his community. Moreover, the selection of religious leaders also emphasis theological aspiration, effort, interference, power and provision of God (the initiative of God or God’s consent). (Gangel, K.O 1994:147-173).

3. The Role of Religious Leaders from the Christian perspective: Christian Community

The Bible stated several roles intrinsic of religious leaders, also termed as shepherds:

First: Religious Leaders is someone who follows Christ and inspires others to follow Him as well. This was described in the Bible (1 Corinthians 11: 1), "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ". (The Bible:
998), meaning that all religious leaders should lead the group or person under his leadership as role model or notable example.\textsuperscript{vi}

Second: Religious Leaders must owned the soul and character to nurture and nourish followers with spiritual feed of God’s words so as to produce a competent Christian. The Bible described this (Deuteronomy 8:3), “...Man does not live by bread alone, but that man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the LORD”. (The Bible: 159), similar with the analogy of a shepherd feeding a herd of goats with lush grass so that they become healthy and fertile.\textsuperscript{vii}

Third: Religious Leaders should cultivate the feeling of love and compassion while addressing the burden and problems inflicting community especially to the marginalised groups. In addition, they need have sympathy to the uncertainty and deviation in the community, especially the Christian owned and persevere in facing a world inundate with challenges and impediments. As the Bible put it (Ezekiel 34:16), “I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I bind up the crippled, and I will strengthen the weak, and the fat and the strong I will watch over”. (The Bible: 745).

Fourth: Religious leaders should provide guidance in the call towards truth and rid of deviation by showing the true path and to discipline those who strayed from the teachings of Christianity. One’s attitude should be in tandem with principles found in Holy Scripture. The Bible said, (Galatians 6:2), “Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ” (The Bible: 1015). If religious leaders fail to perform his responsibility, then they fail to spread love and courtesy to their people, as the Bible put it (Proverbs 3: 12), “for the LORD reproved him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delight”. (The Bible: 549).

Fifth: Religious leaders should serve as protector. Those protection does not cater only the physical aspects, but most importantly is safeguarding the beliefs of those adherent from deviant teachings, insufficient teachings of Christ from unclear and unverified sources. The Bible put it,(Matthew 7: 15), “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves”. (The Bible: 840).

Western authors have concluded discussion on role of religious leaders as follows:

“\textit{under the plan God has ordained for the church, leadership is a position of humble, loving service. Church leadership is ministry not management. Those whom God designates as leaders are called not to be governing monarchs, but humble slaves; not slick celebrities, but labouring servants. Those who would lead God’s people must above all exemplify sacrifice, devotion, submission, and lowliness.}”\textsuperscript{viii}


In this section the authors wish to elaborate the role of the Christian religious leaders in encouraging mutual inter-religious relations between the Christian and non-Christian communities, particularly Muslims. Should correct information concerning how the Christian supposedly build inter-faith relation not conveyed to a fellow Christian, then good relation with the Muslims is unfeasible. This will also thwart inter-religious dialogue and hence religious problems or conflicts will prolonged. Therefore Christian religious leaders should play their part in educating their community concerning the basic principles of relationship between religions as advocated by Christianity which generally include aspects of toleration, understanding and love. (Ghazali Basri, 1998:301-304, Mohd Foad Sakdan 2005:381-385).

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The following descriptions are based on the perspective of the Roman Catholic Church, of the Second Vatican Council and other churches including the Orthodox, Protestants and Anglicans of the World Council of Churches (WCC). The authors wish to describe the basics of good inter-faith relation between Christian and non-Christian communities, having Muslims as its special focus, related discussion will include a long and intricate historical explanation. Consequently, the authors only highlight significant matters which is directly connected to how religious leaders are expected act in tandem with the basic relationship between religions as encouraged by Christianity itself.

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First: Christianity recognizes the existence of other religion aside it, particularly Islam and the Muslims, and at the same time, provides medium for a budding inter-faith relations. (Charles Anthony Kimball 1998: 62-66, Mahmut Aydin 2002:22-27). In a declaration known as Nostra Aetate, depicted by the Second Vatican Council includes matters with regards non-Christian religions. This declaration is the starting point of relationship involving Catholic Church with non-Christians. For the first time in history the Catholic Church initiated talk addressing the non-Christians, Muslims especially as an entity the church respects. This has then paved the way for the Christian community to organize and conduct dialogues. In this matter, the Catholic Church asserts that:

"The Church has also high regard for Muslim. They worship God who is one, living and subsistent, merciful and almighty... They strive to submit themselves without reserve to the hidden decrees of God, just as Abraham submitted himself to God’s plan... they await the day of judgement and the reward of God following the resurrection from the dead. For this reason, they highly esteem an upright life and worship God, especially by way of prayer, alms-deeds and fasting"(Charles Anthony Kimball 1998:64)

"The Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions. She regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth enlightens all men"

WCC during its meeting in Jerusalem in 1960 held under the theme, "The Word of God and Living Faiths of Men" had discussed several approaches and open communication involving Christians and Muslims. In this meeting, the assertion was made that building relationships with Muslims is based on mutual respect, fostering of friendship, promoting sense of togetherness and the urgency to reject prejudice and antagonism (Douglas Pratt 2009:22). In addition, four matters was agreed during those meeting and has become major policy or direction for the Christians to associate with the Muslims. The four matters are (1) responsibility of the Christians to understand and to know the Muslims, (2) to meet Muslims in a meaningful way, (3) to communicate effectively with Muslims" and (4) the church understanding of “unity “concept (Douglas Pratt 2009:22).

Second: The Catholic Church also promote unity and friendship (the Unity of Humankind and
fellowship) reaching everyone irrespective of religion, ethnicity, colour, race and others. The Catholic Church confirmed:

“In our time, when day by day mankind is being drawn closer together, and the ties between different peoples are becoming stringer, the Church examines more closely her relationship to non-Christian religions. In her task of promoting unity and love among men, indeed among nations, she considers above all in this declaration what men have in common and what draws them to fellowship” (Nostra Aetate, 1.1)

The WCC emphasized human solidarity in the “Kandy Consultation 1967”, agreeing that humans were gathered and underwent universal history together. This should have enhanced the awareness on responsibilities and similar expectations for better future.

The role of promoting unity and solidarity as their sole responsibility and to have positive attitude towards non-Christians, since God is the creator of mankind and mankind was created by that one God. In addition they are also of the view that human is created from God’s image (The Bible: 1). The Church then reached to their followers (Christians in general) that they need to treat others with respect and courtesy since their relationship with God is dependent on their relationships with fellow human (including the Muslims). (Mikka Ruokanen 1992:50-51). The Catholic Church said;

“In her task of promoting unity and love among men, indeed among nations, she [the Church] considers above all in this declaration what men have in common and what draws them to fellowship” (Nostra Aetate: 1.1)

The 1967 Kandy Consultation also documented the belief that human are created in the image of God (Mahmut Aydin 2002:97).

Third: Rejection of discrimination of religions, ethnicities, races and skin colour;

“ We cannot truly call on God, the Father of all, if we refuse to treat in a brotherly way any man, created as he is in image of God. Man’s relation to God the Father and his relation to men his brothers are linked together that Scripture says: “He Who does not love does not know God”. “No foundation therefore remains for any theory or practice that leads to discrimination between man and man or people and people, so far as their human dignity and the rights flowing from it are concerned”. (Nostra Aetate: 5:1-3)

The Bible elucidate this matter in 1 John 4:7-11,

“Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God. And he who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God; for God is love. In this the love of God made was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins. Beloved, if God loves us, we also ought to love one another” (The Bible: 1067)

Fourth: The Catholic Church espoused that all religions symbolizes human endeavour in seeking the truth - God. Therefore both moral and religious aspects inherent in religions serve as means or tool in achieving Salvation“;
“One is the community of all peoples, one their origin, for God made the whole human race to live over the face of earth. One also is the final goal, God. His providence, His manifestations of goodness, His saving design extend to all men, until that time when the elect will be united in the Holy City, the city ablaze with the glory of God, where the nations will walk in His light”

Fifth: The Second Vatican Council issued several positive statements in accepting various Islamic theological concepts:

1. Muslim Doctrine of God: The Council of Catholic Church of the Second Vatican Council accepts that Islam is a monotheistic religion having Allah as the only God, was documented in Nostra Aetate and Lumen Gentium:

“The Church regards with esteem also the Moslems. They adore the one God, living and subsisting in Himself; merciful and all-powerful, the Creator of heaven and earth, who has spoken to men…” (Nostra Aetate 3:1)

“...But the plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator. In the first place amongst these three are Mohammadens, who, professing to hold the faith of Abraham, along with us adore the one and Merciful God. Who on the last day will judge mankind...” (Lumen Gentium 16:1)

This signifies that the Catholic Church officially accepts that Muslims worship Allah and not Muhammad. Besides, it also acknowledged the concept of Oneness of God (Tawhid) as the pillars of faith in Islam with reference to terminologies in al-Quran as the Merciful, Almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth (Mahmut Aydin 2002:28, George F. Malean 2001:42).

The Catholic Church also discussed the attributes of Allah with special reference again made to terminologies found in al-Quran, aimed at eradicating misinterpretation that would invoked the Muslims anger mistakenly arise from those erroneous interpretation. Those interpretation includes al-hayy al-qayyum (God is Living and Subsistent), al-Rahman al-Rahim (God is Merciful) and al-Qadir ‘ala kulli syai’ (God is Almighty) (Mahmut Aydin 2002:29, George F. Maclean 2001:42).

They (church) acknowledged that Allah is the only judge worthy to mankind during the Day of Judgement, referred in al-Quran as “mālik yaum al din” and acknowledged Muhammad as the Messenger of Allah in conveying His message to all human (Mahmut Aydin 2002:29-30).

2. Our Common Father Abraham (George F. Maclean 2001:42): The Church recognized that Muslims are members of Abrahamic Faith where they strive to worship Allah as Abraham did. With this acceptance, Muslims are an equal counterpart of the Christians since Abraham is the father of all believers. The document reads:

“...The adore the one God, living and subsisting in Himself; merciful and all powerful, the Creator of heaven and earth, who has spoken to men; they take pains to submit wholeheartedly to even His inscrutable decrees, just as Abraham...” (Nostra Aetate 3:1).

“...the plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator. In the first place amongst these three are Mohammadens, who, professing to hold the faith of Abraham.” (Lumen Gentium 16:1)
(3) **Muslim Veneration of Jesus and Mary** (George F. Maclean 2001:42): In the declaration of Nostra Aetate, the Catholic Church mentioned:

“...Though they do not acknowledge Jesus as a God, They revere Him as a prophet. They also honour Mary, His virgin Mother; at times they even call on her with devotion”. (Nostra Aetate 3:1)

In this respect the Catholic Church had responded positively by not criticizing the Muslims though they regards Jesus only as a Prophet, unlike Christianity which recognizes his divinity. The church also venerated Muslims for honouring Mary since in Christianity, Mary occupies elevated status. Those who honours her is revered by the Catholic Church (Mahmut Aydin 2002: 33). The authors believed that this view was expressed in Nostra Aetate where the Church accepted truth and nobility of religions other than Christianity. Other views concerned that:

“...by praising the Muslim perception of Jesus the council may want to show that Islam may reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men, although its teaching differs in many ways from the Christian teaching” (Mahmut Aydin 2002: 33).

“...the council statement on Muslims ‘esteem of Jesus means that although the eminent identity of Jesus recognised in the Christian world is absent in Islam, the historical figure of Jesus and his relevance to God’s plan of salvation are not totally ignored” (Mahmut Aydin 2002: 33).

Therefore it can be conclude that the church appreciation to the Muslims’ glorification of Jesus and Mary is a common ground for creating positive relations involving Christians and Muslims (Mahmut Aydin 2002: 34).

(4) **Eschatological Beliefs of Muslims**: In Nostra Aetate declaration, the Catholic Church acknowledged that the God of the Muslims, Allah is the “Master of the Day of Judgement” (mālik yaum al-dīn);

“...they await the day of judgement when God will render their desert to all those who have been raised up from the dead” (Nostra Aetate 3:1).

The church also recognised several concepts of hereafter in Islam as “resurrection”, “day of judgement’ and “retribution”. They also acknowledged differences of this concept as the source of reference for Islam is the Quran, while Gospel is the source of reference for Christianity. Aspects of similarity is seen in the fact that all humans are judged according to their deeds (Mahmut Aydin 2002: 34, George F. Maclean 2001:24).

(5) **Religious and Moral Life of Muslims** (George F. Maclean 2001:42): The Catholic Church had shed light to religiosity and life of the Muslims, as recorded in Nostra Aetate:

“Finally, they value the moral life and worship God especially through prayer, almsgiving and fasting” (Nostra Aetate 3:1)
The church insisted that it is desirable for the Christian to praise Muslims for their good conduct in life in accordance with God’s commandments of prayer, zakat (almgiving) and fasting. The church viewed these as deeds that will be rewarded in the hereafter (Mahmut Aydin 2002: 35). Additionally, the church acknowledged that Muslims is known by their characteristic of faithfulness, obedience to God, and prioritize God’s rights over human rights (Mahmut Aydin 2002: 35).

(6) Salvation of Muslims: With regard to the possibility of Muslims, the church stated:

“But the plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator. In the first place amongst these there are the Mohammedens, who, professing to hold the faith of Abraham, along with us adore the one and merciful God” (Lumen Gentium 16:1)

They (church) enlists Muslims in the concept of God’s plan of Salvation. To them, this will contribute in building the Church’s relationship with Muslims. The church believed that Muslims are entitled for Salvation due to their belief that God is the Creator of all things, hence acknowledged Muslims as believers of God (Mahmut Aydin 2002: 37).

It is clear that the six theological concepts put forward by the catholic church is their effort to foster relationship with the Muslims, by providing guidelines of understanding in terms of social justice, moral value, peace and freedom (George F. Maclean 2001:42-43). Nostra Aetate documented this:

“Since in course of centuries not a few quarrels and hostilities arisen between Christian and Moslems, this scared synod urges all to forget the past and to work sincerely for mutual understanding and to preserve as well as to promote together for the benefit of all mankind, social justice and moral welfare, as well as peace and freedom”. (Nostra Aetate 3:1)

Sixth: In Lumen Gentium it was stated that everyone is entitled for Salvation though the church remain as an important tools in achieving Salvation (Lumen Gentium 14:1, Mahmut Aydin 2002:40). It emphasized that good attitude is sufficient for God’s acceptance of, “at all times and in every race, anyone who Fears God and does what is right has been acceptable to Him (God)” (Lumen Gentium 9:1). The Vatican commented,

“Those who, through no fault of their own, do not know Christ or his Church, but who nevertheless seek God with sincere heart, and moved by grace, trying their actions to do his will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience-those too may achieve eternal salvation”(Charles Anthony Kimball 1987:66)

In the Kandy Consultation organized by the WCC in 1967, it stated that the concept of Salvation is accessible to everyone, be it Christians or non-Christians. The report stated that Salvation is universal and materialize only through Jesus Christ. The concept of Salvation is extended to all mankind through Jesus Christ. The Kandy document reported that:

“God’s love and purpose of salvation extend to all mankind, of every century and creed. He saves the world in and through Jesus Christ. Salvation in Christ has often been too narrowly understood. Through the Spirit, Christ is at work in every man’s heart, though as yet His kingdom remains a hidden rule” (Mahmut Aydin 2002: 96)
Seventh: In Ad Gentes, xvi the Christians was encouraged to respect, love, know their neighbours and thus be prepared for dialogue with non –Christians (Mahmut Aydin 2002: 43). It stated;

“(The Church) wishes to enter into fraternal dialogue with those who are working for peace...Christians ought to interest themselves, and collaborate with others, in the right ordering of social and economic affairs...They should, further share in the efforts of those people who, in fighting against famine, ignorance and disease, are striving to bring about better living condition and bring about peace in the world” (Charles Anthony Kimball 1987:67-68)

Eighth: Encouragement for the Christians to further strengthen inter-religious dialogue and understanding of its importance in the relationships with non-Christians, especially Muslims. The last section of the Second Vatican Council’s declaration, wrote among others (Mahmut Aydin 2002: 84);

1. Encouragement for face to face meetings with the non-Christians in improving understanding and toleration.

2. Encouragement for the Christians to learn theological aspects of Islam objectively. xviii

3. Encouragement to form study groups with the Muslims, to discuss important matters related to religions as to avoid misinterpretation and to have friendship and confidence in one another.

4. Encouragement to the Christian organizations in inviting Muslim religious leaders for information-sharing, understand Islam and clarify issues of concerned.

5. Encouragement to pursue Dialogue of life as the basis of inter-religious dialogue between those experienced in inter-religious dialogue with society, based on mutual acquaintance, harmony and toleration among people of different faith.

6. The Second Vatican Council pointed out that there was an association of the proclamation, mission and dialogue. This declaration tries to adapt the theological aspects of Christianity to other religions in the context the church evangelism. xix The church emphasized that life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is the main and most important medium for Christian and non-Christians in attaining Salvation. To ensure that Salvation is achieved by all, Christians or non-Christians, there is need for the proclamation of Gospel to the non-Christians. The best approach in the view of the church is to invite non-Christians to accept what is described in the Gospel through inter-religious dialogue.

The authors viewed that the first five encouragements given by Catholic Church in developing relations between Christian and non-Christians community, especially with Muslims is well-intentioned and noble. However the sixth encouragement will stifle the implementation of dialogue considering that the aim of Gospel proclamation will result in the mistrust of others, Muslims particularly, since to them dialogue is a method of proselytizing Christianity. To the authors, the sixth encouragement had foiled the overall principles of sincere dialogue; as mutual understanding and mutual trust. There are alarming number of Muslim scholars questioning the integrity of inter-religious dialogue initiated by the Christians (John Azumah: 2002).

Further observation on the effort or of WCC to interact with non-Christians and the Muslims in particular, the authors found that the focus and approach is through the use of dialogue. This will
either be that the focus of the dialogue is part of missionary agenda and evangelization” until finally the adoption of mutual understanding and awareness on practical and social issues and rejection of generalization of dialogue as Christian agenda. To avoid negative perception towards dialogue organized by WCC, in 1992, they issued a document containing brief statement relating to "Issues in Christian-Muslim Relations". There are four main focuses in the document, (1) Christian-Muslim Encounter (2) On Understanding Islam and Muslims, (3) Some Issues in Christian-Muslim Relations, (4) Living and Working Together. The WCC developed new concept of understanding and dialogue which was specified into the following:

“Dialogue is not only conversation [dialogue of ideas] but is also an encounter between people [dialogue of life]. It depends on mutual trust, demands respect for the identity and integrity of the other and requires a willingness to question one’s own self-understanding as well as openness to understand the others on their own terms” (Mahmut Aydin 2002: 127)

In the second part of the document, they prioritized "common values" such as (1) justice in society, (2) providing for people in need, (3) love one’s neighbours, and (4) living together in peace. The third part of the assertion focused on the promotion of dialogue over issues affecting pluralistic society to enable them to live in peace and harmony. Among the emphasized issues are, (1) human rights, (2) ethnicity, (3) citizenship, (4) application of Islamic law, (5) woman issues, and (6) issues of Islamic Da’wah and Christian Mission. (Mahmut Aydin 2002: 127-128).

5. The role of religious leaders in a pluralistic society - Conducting interfaith dialogue among religious leaders.

In addition to the eight points discussed previously, religious leaders should understand an important points of the basic principles of relation between religions, thus play their part in building rapport, tolerance, respect and love towards the Muslims particularly its religious leaders. Among those are:

Christian Leaders must first willing to work together with the non-Christians, particularly Muslims. Through the Declaration Nostra Aetate, the Catholic Church encouraged the Christians to recognize, preserve and promote the spiritual, moral and good practices inherent in every religion through collaborative efforts described as, "The Church, therefore, exhorts her sons, that through dialogue and collaboration with the followers of other religions, carried out with prudence and love and in witness to the Christian faith and life, they recognize, preserve and promote the good things, spiritual and moral, as well as the socio-cultural values found among these men (Nostra Aetate 2:3). The church proposes three approaches in partnering with the non-Christians;

(a) Implementation of religious dialogue or discussion: In this approach, the authors are of the opinion that the Christians, especially their religious leaders must first understand the fundamentals of inter-religious dialogue before undertaking or participating in it. This is because without those fundamental knowledge and understanding of inter-religious dialogue, most likely it will fail to achieve its intended objective and turn into debate and subsequent fighting between religions. The basic concepts of inter-religious dialogue must be understood by religious leaders includes: (1) definition of inter-religious dialogue, including intra-dialogue, (2) its purpose, (3) its principles, (4) methodology, (5) guidelines and (6) regulations. Inter-religious dialogue is an important mechanism in conflict resolution.
(b) Establishment of cooperation in non-religious issues such as justice, world peace, humanitarian, social ethics and others.

(c) Engagement in respective intra-dialogue in order to enhance understanding of own religion. The church assert not to invite people of other faith to convert to Christianity but instead, to share experiences and information related to their religion in the context of giving understanding (Mahmut Aydin 2002: 27).

6. Conclusion.

Studies conducted to the sources of Christianity, namely the viewpoints of Roman Catholic Church of the Second Vatican Council and other World Council of Churches members as the Orthodox, Protestant and Anglicans, it was found that Christianity emphasizes the importance of a budding relationship with non-Muslims, having Muslims as their focal attention. The intention to build relationships with non-Christian society as suggested by Christianity should be clearly explained by the Christian’s Religious Leaders to their fellow community so that prejudice, distrust and hostility taking place throughout the history of religions between Islam and Christianity can be abolished once and for all. In the context of the responsibility supposedly of religious leaders, Christianity anticipated its clerics to do dialogue in an effort to achieve effective communication and budding relationship with other religious leaders, aside of having dialogue to resolve conflict apparent in a plural society, especially one with the Muslims.

Following the above discussion, it can be said that there is an urgent need for every Christian religious leader to participate in Intra Dialogue. Within Intra Dialogue, those religious leaders need to elucidate and to persuade their followers not only to understand, but at the same time practice ordain of their religious texts in matters of toleration, understanding and accepting differences in an objective manner. In addition, each Christian cleric need to build up social relationships and ongoing communication / on daily basis, which does not only limited in solving conflict. This may also be classified as Day-to-day Dialogue, viewed as basis to further establish good relations and rid of misunderstanding and prejudice amongst religious leaders and the society.
References.


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2 Lecturer at College of Foundation and General Studies, Universiti Tenaga Nasional (UNITEN), Malaysia. Research area: History & Civilization, Modern History (Europe, Asia & Middle East) and Civilizational Dialogue.
The Nostra Aetate Declaration has also been referred from the "Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christians", mentioned as part of the Second Vatican Council's initiative in encouraging dialogue and interaction with communities of faith and ideology. As a platform for Christian and Muslim dialogue, this declaration is called the "Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions" or more commonly known as "Nostra Aetate", formally announced by Pope Paul VI on October 28, 1965, written in 6 pages, and divided into 5 parts. The first part emphasized the concept of “the oneness of the human family” or “the unity of the human race” to strengthen relations with non-Christians. Second: The Catholic Church recognized the beliefs other than Christian’s faith, including its religious guidance, practices, rituals and so on. To the Catholic Church, these would eventually lead to peace and will bring people of every religion to the right path. Third: The declaration is aimed at opening possibility for dialogue between Christians and Muslims and further acknowledged the Muslims as honest and humble servant. Fourth: Special emphasis given to the relationship with the Jewish people. Fifth: The emphasis on rejecting discrimination towards race, nationality, skin colour and others. The aim of the Declaration of Nostra Aetate viewed by Christian scholars as, “The Purpose of the Declaration is not a complete exposition of these religions [non-Christian religions], nor of their discrepancies among themselves and from the Catholic religion. This council rather intends through this declaration to show that there is a bond between man and religions which is meant to be the basis of dialogue and of collaboration. Therefore, greater attention is paid to those things which unite us, and are helpful in a mutual approach.” Further information in "Ibid., Charles Anthony Kimball, "Striving Together In The Way of God:”, p. 62-66; Mahmut Aydin, “Modern Western Christian Theological Understandings of Muslims Since The Second Vatican Council", pp. 22-27.

Declaración Nostra Aetate, 2.2... (Full reference is made to the Appendix of the “Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, Nostra Aetate, Proclaimed by His Holiness, Pope Paul VI on October 28, 1965”. This appendix was included in Mahmut Aydin's research “Modern Western Christian Theological Understandings of Muslims Since The Second Vatican Council” "Ibid., Appendix 1). The Nostra Aetate Declaration has also been referred from the Declaration on The Relation of The Church To Non-Christian Religions Nostra Aetate Proclaimed by Holiness Pope Paul VI, on October 28, 1965 in http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html, 15 Jun 2012. (Information relating to Nostra Aetate will further be refereed as Nostra Aetate, and understandably obtained from the above-mentioned website).

Kandy Consultation in 1967, was organized by WCC in Sri Lanka bearing the theme "Christian Dialogue with Men of Other Faiths." This meeting was attended by members of the Christian theology including the Protestants, Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic. The purpose of this meeting was to discuss attempt in making inter-religious dialogue as new platform for Christians and non-Christians relations. This meeting was the held following the success of WCC meetings in New Delhi in 1961, Mexico in 1963 and in Broumma in 1966. During the meeting in Broumma, 30 theologians of the Protestant, Orthodox and Roman Catholic debated regarding the clash involving Christians and Muslims. Among the main purpose of the meeting was to find the possibilities of mutual co-operation with the Muslim community. In addition, this group anticipated that the Division of World Mission and Evangelism of the WCC held dialogue between Christians and Muslims as means of promoting interfaith dialogue and mutual co-operation. At the closing of the meeting, participants agreed that there is a need to reject prejudice, doubt and fear, and further promote mutual understanding. For more information, please refer to Mahmut Aydin, “Modern Western Christian Theological Understandings of Muslims Since the Second Vatican Council", pp. 96-97.

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John 10:11, p. 933.(Further elaboration on Bible interpretation above and following will be referred to: The Bible, (1980), New York: American Bible Society (containing the Old and New Testaments Revised Standard Version). The meaning of shepherd is referring to those responsible as shepherd of sheep. Goats are among other animals regarded as dumb or stupid. Therefore, if left unchecked, these animals will go strayed, disoriented and confused, subjected to wild animals and unable to unite with its group. Therefore they require a shepherd, without which they will be helpless.


The Second Vatican Council is the current effort of the Roman Catholic Church, shedding light to perspective and a new understanding of the conduct of the church. Among those are, a more organized new perspectives involving relationship with non-Christian Religions. There are 3 out of 16 official documents which illustrate the Catholic Church’s relationship with non-Christians. Those documents are (1) Nostra Aetate, (2) Lumen Gentium and (3) Ad Gentes.

World Council of Churches(WCC) composed of the followers of the Christian communities from all continent, coming from different racial and ethnicities of the Eastern and Oriental Orthodox, Anglicans, Baptists, Lutherans and the Reformed (Protestants). A lot of effort was put up by WCC as part of its initiative in encouraging dialogue and interaction with communities of faith and ideology (World Council of Churches is further refereed only as WCC).

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xiv In the Old Testament, salvation referred to various meanings. Among meanings found in Samuel 2: 18 (the prospect of saving “enemy”), “Now then bring it about; for the LORD has promised David, saying, ‘By the hand of my servant David I will save my people Israel from the hand of the Philistines, and from the hand of all save my people Israel from the hand of all enemies’.” Psalms 51: 14, refers this as saving from sins, “Deliver me from blood guiltiness, O God, thou God my salvation and my tongue will sing aloud of thy deliverance.” Isaiah 38:20, is a reference to the curing of diseases, “The LORD will save me, and we will sing to stringed instruments at the house of The LORD”. In New Testament, Romans 3: 22-24, it referred to the attainment of peace and deliverance from sin granted by God through Jesus Christ, “The righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction; since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus”. Please refer to The Bible, pp. 269, 492, 618 and 979.

xv Nostra Aetate, 1.2. Mahmut Aydin in his analysis towards this declaration expressed the similarities between the Declaration of Nostra Aetate 1:2 and the New Testament (Revelation 21 and 22). Its explanation is related to the goals and vision of men in reaching truth and their belief in the hereafter or that the eschatological concept does not exist in one nation alone, one that claimed by many Christian theologians. In their view God may exist in one figure or that he has his distinct way of saving mankind but it can be in various manner. Therefore, the Christians should accept as true and valid what is written in the scriptures of non-Christian religions and civilizations. This may be referred to footnote no.80 in Mahmut Aydin, "Modern Western Christian Theological Understandings of Muslims since the Second Vatican Council", pp. 253-254.

xvi The second document from Second Vatican Council which highlighted the importance of togetherness with the church, acceptance of the Gospel, connecting to Jesus Christ in attaining salvation. All information on Lumen Gentium used in this studies are obtained from Dogmatic Constitution of The Church Lumen Gentium Solemnly Promulgated by His Holiness Pope Paul IV, on November 21, 1964 from http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html, June 15, 2012. (From here onwards, the Lumen Gentium document is written as Lumen Gentium only).

xvii The third document of the Second Vatican Council was about the emphasis on the relationship between the Christians and Muslims. Statements in this study is obtained from the Decree Ad Gentes on The Mission Activity of The Church in http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651207_ad-gentes_en.html, June 15, 2012. (Further referred as Ad Gentes).

xviii This has path the ways for the Catholic Church to discuss several theological aspects of Islam such as Muhammad S.A.W as the true messenger in Islam and that al-Qur’an is the revelation from God, which was denied by the Council of Father in the Second Vatican Council.

xix Further information concerning the proclamation, mission and dialogue, please refer to Mahmut Aydin, “Modern Western Christian Theological Understandings of Muslims since The Second Vatican Council”, pp.74-83.

xx This was stated during World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh in 1990. In Mahmut Aydin’s words, “It is that in that time the idea of “interreligious dialogue” came out as part of a new missionary strategy for approaching followers of other faiths in the rapidly changing circumstances of the post-war world, in which the collapse of colonialism made the traditional missionary methods increasingly ineffective”. Please refer to Mahmut Aydin, “Modern Western Christian Theological Understandings of Muslims since the Second Vatican Council”, p.90.