



QUEST FOR A THEORETICAL BASIS OF MUSLIM-CHRISTIAN UNDERSTANDING

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The search for a coherent theoretical basis of Muslim-Christian understanding is fundamental to the resolution of conflict that has remained a national concern. The emergence of various revolutionary groups in the Muslim South has reinforced the need for inquiry into the ideological roots of the movements.

Three perceived paradigms have been articulated to explain the rationale of the Muslim-Christian struggle. The Marxist-Leninist paradigm tends to attribute the roots of Muslim-Christian conflict to colonialism and neo-colonialism after 1946. The approach of "Political Islam" which contextually goes back to the 17th century rationale of Islamic movements in *darul-islam* tends to attribute the Muslim revolutionary struggle to the need to revitalize the Muslim community in the face of challenges from modern changes introduced by Westernization. The dialogical alternative which has gained some adherents in the University of the Philippines seeks to de-emphasize religious differences and to promote mutual contact and desire for dialogue over common concerns and interests. The last approach offers a practical basis for bringing together parties in conflict and presents bright prospects for improving Muslim-Christian relations and understanding. But notwithstanding this optimistic perception, there remains some doubts that the dialogue movement can achieve declared goals because the unexpressed motivation of old, traditional Christian missions and evangelism still remains a pillar of Christian ideology tempered only by cultural accommodation and respect encouraged by Vatican II and liberal democracy.

ONE CONCERN THAT HAS OCCUPIED THE ATTENTION OF THE country is the continuing search for a more enduring basis of Muslim-Christian relations. Despite the breakthrough in the peace process which ended 20 years of the MNLF struggle, there is still the need for more security beyond the cessation of hostilities between the major Muslim rebel group and the government. The remaining factional movements which have not been brought to the MNLF peace process suggest certain unresolved issues. One of these is related to ideology which transcends concrete demands for socio-economic benefits or progress. The lingering violence associated with the splinter groups raises the question: What can be done to finally bring the Mindanao peace process to its desired goal? One imperative that must be given serious attention is the search for a theoretical basis of Muslim-Christian understanding. In this regard, three paradigms have emerged:

THE MARXIST-LENINIST PARADIGM

Since the end of colonial political rule in 1946, the radical approach to national problems, including that of the Muslim community, tended to attribute the roots of conflict to colonialism and neo-colonialism. The years of intellectual ferment generated by radicalism have produced one of the enduring contributions of the nationalist movement to theory essentially influenced by the Marxist-Leninist paradigm. It has definitely added a distinct vocabulary to nationalist literature which has become a convenient and ready reference for articulation of issues that concern the minorities, oppressed, exploited and poor in society.

It was not difficult for the Moro National Liberation Front after 1968 to adopt the radical vocabulary to present the basic issues of the

Muslim armed struggle. The series of publications and declarations of the movement are rich in references to the radical paradigm. Even the eventual split in the movement into three factions did not obliterate the theoretical influence of radical thought as seen in subsequent literature of the various factions. The theoretical phenomenon is not different from that of the Muslim world where social ferment has continued to inspire different varieties of social regimes or systems in Africa, the Middle East and Asia. But the collapse of the communist structures as a result of the Soviet ferment has resulted in a number of Muslim states seeking new paradigms to justify either total independence or real autonomy from Russian control. Adding to these new stirrings, the old fundamentalist movements seeking a return to the conservative Islamic paradigm provide a new synthesis in the process of ideological reformulation of the Muslim struggle.

The Philippine Muslim Community (Ummah) has not been freed from similar ferment. While still sporting the vocabulary of Marxist-Leninist literature, the Filipino Muslim intellectuals have begun the search for a new paradigm to address the nagging problem of the Muslim struggle. They are no longer satisfied with the old Marxist-Leninist theoretical model that has since 1946 been represented by, at least, three perceivable patterns which can be conveniently labeled as the Soviet, Maoist and Filipino forms, with the latter increasingly becoming attractive to those seeking a more indigenous-based paradigm. The latter imperative is in a sense an effort to liberate Philippine radicalism from its long bondage to Soviet or Maoist thought. The Muslim struggle has recently seen this change in its own quest for a paradigm. This is subsumed in what is articulated as "Political Islam".

THE IMPERATIVE OF POLITICAL ISLAM

"Political Islam" is usually associated in contemporary usage with a more radical approach to the Muslim struggle to revitalize Islam. But the movement in its various forms dates back to different periods of

Islamic history from the Wahabist movement in Arabia in the 17th century to the Madhism of the late 19th century associated with Muhammad Ibn. Addullah in the Sudan. Political Islam has evolved significantly into an ideological assault on Westernism in Islamic thought. The armed component has only been restructured to increase the movement's capacity to achieve better results by acquisition or creation of technologically effective weaponry.

In the Philippine Muslim struggle, we see the ideological transformation being projected initially in some form of pseudo-Marxist declaration, in the rhetorics of fundamentalist activism such as used by several groups with different names pursuing similar goals. It is, however, in the UP Diliman academic-intellectual ferment that we see some serious critical thinking along the possible use of Islam as a new paradigm to attain Marxist-Leninist revolutionary goals in the Philippines. The attempt is even projected not only to apply to the Muslim struggle but also to the rest of the struggles of the masses in the Christian and other non-Christian communities. Involved in the integration of "Political Islam" are Muslim professionals and writers. While the new ideological ferment is welcome intrusion into the too ideologically rigid Marxist-Leninist tradition in the UP Diliman radical sector, there is some concern that the direction of Political Islam in the Philippines may just duplicate the models of similar phenomena in the Greater Ummah where it has created serious dislocations and divisions that tend to add to the centuries of ideological frictions between the Sunni and Shiite traditions. There is also the obvious dependence of Political Islam on foreign theoretical models that have precisely disabled Muslim states or countries in their search for unity and peace. In effect, Political Islam to succeed in the Philippine Ummah must derive essential rationale from the character and realities of Filipino Muslim societies, not from borrowed cultural experiences.

It is the fear of the "unindigenized political Islam" that tends to sustain the psychological barrier in Muslim-Christian relations. The

reactions to the results of the MNLF-GRP peace talks, particularly to the creation of the SPCPD, from both the Muslim and Christian sectors illustrates the perceived fear. It is in this context that there is a growing advocacy of approaching the imperatives of the Muslim struggle thru a more political preliminary process which is referred to in various literatures as the “dialogical alternative”.

THE DIALOGICAL ALTERNATIVE

While dialogue is not ideology, it is, nevertheless, vital to ideological ferment and formulation. In the Philippines, this process to achieve Muslim-Christian understanding began about ten years ago and crystallized in the Silsilah Dialogue Movement in Zamboanga City. It has continued to grow in both people involved programs or projects initiated. Two years ago, it entered the UP Diliman ideological process with the organization of the Movement for Muslim Christian Dialogue (MMCD) which has attracted a growing number of Muslims and Christians from the faculty, employees and students who believe in dialogue or who are concerned with the state of Muslim-Christian relations in the country.

An alternative to rigid ideological advocacies, the dialogue movement aims at the modest goal of seeking venues, opportunities and activities, especially spiritual, intellectual and social in nature, where Muslims and Christians can meet and interact without religious fears, anxieties and problems. The rationale of such a movement, as expressed in its various literatures, lies in the need to first eliminate the psychological barriers established by centuries of mutual distrust and prejudice.

What, however, remains ambiguous in the dialogue movement is whether or not it goes beyond the meeting between two different personalities. The question of eventual ideological confluence has become intriguing. From the Christian perspective largely founded on the principles of Vatican II, the dialogue process is premised on the need to

change cultural attitude, not to achieve theological acceptance. Clearly, this fundamental change in the Christian attitude towards Islam provides optimism in the quest for Muslim-Christian understanding.

But optimism is somewhat diluted by some misgivings and doubts that dialogue can meaningfully achieve the declared goals. The unexpressed motivation of old, traditional Christian missions and evangelism, Catholic or Protestant, still remains one of the unaltered pillars of Christian ideology. It is difficult to conceive that Christianity can ignore the soteriological imperative of missionary work without negating the very essence of the Great Commission Christ gave to the eleven disciples in Galilee as recorded in Matthew 28:18-20. What is only obvious is the sustained effort to moderate the impact of evangelism by respect for cultural aspirations and traditions.

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