

ACADEMIC STUDY OF INDONESIAN ISLAM A Biographical Account, 1970-2014

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Abstract

In the humanities, including religious studies, personal factors often play a role in the selection of topic and methodology of research. This autobiographical sketch gives an overview of a long career in the study of religion in Indonesia, from the selection of the topic for doctoral research, through various jobs and academic projects until some work written in a period of retirement. The author's background of liberal Catholicism with much interest in non-official popular religiosity, has influenced an approach in Islamic Studies and a selective attention for the boundaries between official and more popular religiosity, for literary and artistic expressions rather than for rigid doctrinal traditions. This history is told from field work to pesantren education in the early 1970s, the variety of Islamic history of Indonesia in the 1980s, until a major work in three volumes on the Catholic traditions of Indonesia in the period 1990-2010.

[Dalam ilmu humaniora, termasuk studi keagamaan, faktor-faktor pribadi sering mempengaruhi pemilihan topik dan metodologi penelitian. Uraian biografis ringkas ini menggambarkan perjalanan panjang sebagai peneliti agama di Indonesia, mulai dari pemilihan topik riset disertasi, melewati beragam pekerjaan dan proyek-proyek akademik, sampai dengan beberapa karya yang ditulis sesudah pensiun. Latar belakang penulis sebagai penganut Katolik liberal dan banyak tertarik pada keberagaman populer non-resmi, mempengaruhi pendekatan dalam pengkajian Islam dan perhatian khusus pada batas-batas antara agama resmi dan agama populer, pada ungkapan-ungkapan sastra dan seni daripada tradisi-tradisi doktriner yang kaku. Kisah ini berangkat dari pengalaman penelitian lapangan di lingkungan pendidikan pesantren pada tahun 1970an, kemudian serpihan-serpihan

sejarah Indonesia pada tahun 1980an, sampai dengan penulisan tiga jilid buku penting tentang tradisi-tradisi Katolik Indonesia pada tahun 1990-2010.]

Keywords: Indonesian Islam, approach in Islamic studies, Indonesianist

A. Introduction

Academic writing on religion is quite different from religious poetry. Academia asks the character of impersonality, objectivity, a basis of facts and the possibility of control by sources and other people. In social anthropology we have the difference between emic (insider) and etic (outsider) observations. But observers, also academic observers are not impersonal machines. They have their own background, prejudices, and through their background and education they are trained to observe certain facts sharper than others. They are also trained to use frames and terminologies for describing their findings. Therefore they write inevitably in a personal way about their subject. In the analysis of the history of science of religion, the historical background of the authors must always be given attention. Rather than deny this influence and proclaim the impossible ideal of an impersonal objectivity, the fact of personal biography must be taken into consideration.¹ This article gives an analysis of a specific researcher of Islam in Indonesia against his personal background.

B. 1967-70: The Dream of Professor Jean Houben in Nimegen

I was born on 16 January 1942 in a very pious Catholic family in Breda, the Netherlands. I entered the world as a child number ten of a family that would count finally twelve children. That was the Catholic community until the mid-1960s: big families, frequent (daily!) attendance of church services, educated at a Catholic primary school, Catholic newspaper, Catholic political party and denominational trade unions. Only in the later 1960s there was more openness to other sections of society and personal happiness became more important than the unlimited reproduction that was so stimulated by the Catholic clergy before.

I entered a minor seminary at the age of twelve. Here a sound education was given, qualifying for a high standard grammar school with

¹ See Jacques Waardenburg, *Classical Approaches to the Study of Religion: Aims, Methods and Theories of Research* (The Hague: Mouton, 1973).

much emphasis on five foreign languages: Latin, Greek, French, German, English. Then I continued my learning process at a major seminary for philosophy and theology. In 1967 I switched to Nijmegen University for the MA studies, where I concentrated on Arabic and Islam. We were only a small group of students: only three specialized in Arabic and Islam and two of them still wanted to concentrate in Semitic or Old Testament studies. They considered Hebrew as their most important language and culture, and took Arab and Islam only as secondary.

The most important professor was a Jesuit Priest, Jean Houben (1904-1973), who had for a long time lived in the Middle East and had taught at Jesuit Universities in Beirut and Baghdad. He was a fine scholar of Islamic philosophy. He loved the thinking of Ibn Sina and Ibn Rushd (1125-1198). As a Catholic he had his roots in the theological tradition of Thomas Aquinas (1125-1274). His dream was that all Christians should unite in their acceptance of the doctrines of Aquinas and then Catholicism, Protestants and Orthodox should be united again. When all Muslims, Sunni and Shi'a, should keep to the doctrines of Ibn Sina and Ibn Rushd, there would not only be harmony among Muslims, but even between Christians and Muslims.

For Professor Houben the dialogue and harmony of Christians and Muslims was a matter of philosophical thinking. This philosophical thinking was most strongly represented in the early Muslim tradition of Mu'tazila, later with Ibn Sina and Ibn Rushd, in Christianity at the scholastic thinking of Thomas Aquinas: when the two should recognize their common origin and basic ideas, there should be peace and harmony between all Muslims and all Christians. Houben seldom mentioned the Prophet Abraham as a person who could unify the two religions (according to the agenda of the French scholar of Arab and Islam, Louis Massignon). Houben had not much affiliation with the idea that Christianity and Islam can be seen as two major religions which continue the heritage of the Jews and especially the Prophet Abraham. Not Abraham, but Aristotle and Neo-Platonic thinking were for him the most interesting links between Muslims and Christians.

For Houben the essence of Islam could be found in philosophy and what is called *kalām*. That is the philosophical wording of God as the Single Being, the Creator, the Judge at the End of Times. *Taşāwvuf* or Islamic mysticism was also an important item for him. *Shari'a* or the Muslim way of life, Muslim Ethics, or Muslim Law (depending on how to interpret or understand *shari'a*) was not a subject of his courses

or research. *Ḥadīth* was also seldom mentioned. In fact it was nearly absolutely neglected. Qur'anic studies were very important and Houben who had learnt Arabic in the Middle East liked to pronounce or even to recite the Qur'an in a very careful way, like a teacher of *tajwīd*, before giving the translation. He liked to repeat that we should learn to appreciate the beauty of the Arabic language of the Qur'an. Only after I had entered the world of *pesantren* I realised how important *Ḥadīth* is for daily life and for proper study of Islam.

In Nijmegen Professor Arnulf Camps taught the history of Christian-Muslim relations under the label of Mission Studies or Missiology. Camps was close to daily reality. His dissertation had been about the small group of Jesuits who had been at the court of Mughal ruler, Emperor Akbar (1556-1605). Akbar was a Muslim who ruled over a majority of Hindu people. In his court there were Buddhists, Parsis, Hindus, the small group of Catholics, besides Muslim '*ulamā'*', but finally the emperor opted for a new religion, *Din Ilahi* as the official religion of the government. His new place of prayer was some kind of a huge tent with five pillars, because there were five basic doctrines in his religion. In the period of debates about *asas tunggal* to give Pancasila a stronger position in Indonesian society, I mentioned the *Din Ilahi* several times as example of a civil religion, planned and designed from above. After Akbar died also *Din Ilahi* disappeared. This can be compared with the period of Reformasi after the abdication of Soeharto: also in the first decade of the 21st century there was not much talk about Pancasila. However, I have the impression that it starts now again.

Camps was not really interested in the 'theology of religions' in general. Pluralism, exclusivism, inclusivism: it were theoretical constructs for him, too much generalising about 'Islam' versus 'Christianity' or even 'Christianity' versus all other religions. He was interested in concrete encounters of persons, not of systems.

C. Grounded Research: from the Written Information to Concrete Encounters

I had my first real encounters with Muslims from March 1970 on, when I could make use of a fellowship to do research in Indonesia for six months (these six months became a full year, because living in *pesantren* is so cheap!). I had already learned some grammar of Indonesian and quite a few words, while still during my MA in the Netherlands. In my

first week I went to book shops and mosques to practise my Indonesian. I loved the *kuliah subuh*, the very early course in Qur'an and *ḥadīth* in the Mujahidin Mosque in Bandung, beginning at 05.00 AM. I took a bicycle from my hosts in Bandung, the Holy Cross Fathers at Jalan Van Deventer 16, to the mosque. It was cool, nice, and quiet at that time of the day. Approaching the mosque I could hear already from a great distance the loudspeaker. But when entering the large mosque, there were only one or two persons, reciting the Qur'ān. From a distance one would have the idea that there was a crowd already waiting in the mosque! After 30 minutes there was a circle, a *ḥalaqa* with some 5 or 6 people. They were listening to an explanation of a Persis leader (*Persatuan Islam*, a quite strict orthodox, reformist organization, began by A. Hasan Bandung in the 1930s). I joined them, sitting in the uncomfortable position, *sila*, and tried to follow the discussion. The city of Bandung was always quiet and cool at that time of the day.

During my study in Nijmegen I had followed courses of anthropology and methodology of field research. But this was mostly concentrated on traditional tribes, on people who communicated only in oral traditions and had no written sources.² Only in Indonesia I read more studies on the theory of *Grounded Research* that was quite popular at the time and fit to be used by all kind of researchers. *Grounded Research* does not begin with a theory or hypothesis, but it looks for data, facts, documentation that is gathered in various ways (interviews, observation, *participant observation*, reading of contemporary documents and historical studies, as well as the first application of several theories). Only after the collection of many data, a more general hypothesis should be formulated that could result in a more universal theory or general overview of the field that was under research. I did not use much statistic material (although later in the historical approach somewhat more) and never used questionnaires.³

² Some scholars reproached Clifford Geertz that he used only interviews in his book on *Religion of Java* and no written sources, as if Javanese society was a community of illiterate people. See Nakamura, *The Crescent Arises Over the Banyan Tree: A Study of the Muhammadiyah Movement in a Central Javanese Town, C.1910-2010* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS), 2012), p. 198.

³ Schlegel 1986 was quite popular in Indonesia. The psychologist James Peacock has written a book on the differences between Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, in James L. Peacock, *Muslim Puritans: Reformist Psychology in Southeast Asian Islam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978). This was a quite effective use of questionnaire, not so common in the study of Indonesian Islam. A project under supervision of Carel *Al-Jāmi'ah*, Vol. 53, No. 2, 2015 M/1437 H

One short remark of Wilfred Cantwell Smith has been quite important for me in my research. Smith gives an important role to what he calls 'key persons'. In the history of theology we choose key persons as those who have decided the directions of development in religious thinking. In the selection of interviews the key persons give us the most important information, although we also select from their information.⁴

Professor Arnulf Camps, the supervisor of my doctoral dissertation, called his methodology 'maieutical' after the Greek word for midwife, *maieia*. This methodology in fact does not differ much from that of grounded research: we have to look first to the facts, the reality must be seen as a clear process and we must wait until we understand its dynamics. After seeing the facts we draw conclusions about the driving factors in the process of reality. The researcher must be able to watch, listen, must make notes and start soon with formulations about what finally will be the result of his research.⁵

In the PhD research of the period 1970-1971, I started with visits to various *pesantren*. I had always to address first the *keiai*, the true leader of such an Islamic boarding school. In the end, as the last *pesantren*, I visited Darussalam in Gontor, where Imam Zarkasyi was the decisive leader. I was there first during one week and returned later for a full three months period. At the 'intake' talk in Gontor I explained, as I did elsewhere, that I was a Catholic researcher and had interest in other religions, but had no plan for conversion. In Gontor I not only asked permit to stay in the *pesantren* and to follow the classes, but I asked also whether I could join the mosque or *salat* prayers. Zarkasyi was quite surprised, because it was not a normal request. We had a long talk about adherence to a religion, about the content of the prayers. I told him that I liked to read the Qur'an and to listen to the recitation. I added that Christians really do believe in one God and recognise that God is the sustainer of His creation and guides the history of mankind. I could argue that Muhammad was a great Prophet and that God had a purpose with his mission, also for faithful Christians who sometimes also consider him a prophet. For me it was more natural to take the ablutions (*wudu*) and join a Muslim prayer than

Sterkens from Nijmegen University is now under way about the mutual perceptions of Christians and Muslims in Southeast Asia.

⁴ Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Islam in Modern History*, 6th edition (New York: Mentor Books, 1959), pp. vi–viii.

⁵ More on him in Arnulf Camps and Vefie Poels, *Pelgrim En Missioloog: Levensweg van een Nijmeegse Hoogleraar: Autobiografische Aantekeningen* (Nijmegen: Valkhof Pers, 2006).

join the singing of ‘Halleluja’ and ‘Praise the Lord’ of the Pentecostal or Charismatic Christians. The seven verses that I found in the first sura *al-Fātiḥa*, are in meaning very close to the basic Christian prayer ‘Our Father’. Both prayers start with praise of God as Creator of the Universe and then turn towards a supplication that we may follow the right way of living, besides a recognition of the weak side of human beings. In this debate with Zarkasyi it became also clear that I found some things difficult in Islam, especially the detailed commands of the *shari‘a*, like for cleaning teeth, taking a bath, or about *ḥalāl* food. In the Catholic church such details had been softened or even stopped by the recent Vatican II Council. As a result of this talk I was permitted to join the *salat* prayers, but I received also the warning that I should be serious about the precise details of the ablutions (because Pak Zarkasyi had the impression that I was quite easy with the interpretations of precise rules).⁶

In my period of study in Gontor, I met again Ibn Rushd, but as a different person than I had seen at Nijmegen University. It was not the philosopher who was the favourite thinker of Professor Jean Houben, but in Gontor it was the specialist in comparative studies of *shari‘a*, in the great work *Bidāyatul Muḥtabid*, a work of comparison between the important schools of Islamic law that was the major book (at that time) for the study of *shari‘a* and *fiqh* in Gontor. Ibn Rushd compared the schools and then often took a personal conclusion. Sometimes he also ended with an open end and wrote *wa Allāhu a‘lam bi-ṣṣawāb*: God knows the answer, but we do not precisely know the only true possibility and therefore people are free to take their own way. The Qur’an is an absolute source, but *Ḥadīth* are often contradictory and may become topic of debate and discussion. Through this open way of learning the pesantren of Gontor has produced liberal leaders for Indonesian Islam like Nurcholis Madjid, but also Salafi leaders like Ahmad Baasyir.

When I left Pesantren Gontor after a stay of three months, there was a ceremony in the great meeting hall. Pak Zarkasyi asked whether I would allow him to pray for me that I should become a true and full Muslim. I consented also because the real meaning of the word *Muslim* is someone who really surrenders to the will of God, and that is also for

⁶ For the result of this research on Pesantren see Karel A. Steenbrink, *Pesantren Madrasah Sekolah: Pendidikan Islam dalam Kurun Moderen* (Jakarta: LP3ES, 1986). and Karel A. Steenbrink, “Almarhum yang Mukarram Pak Zarkasji: seorang Pragmatikus dalam pembinaan Pesantren”, in K.H. *Imam Zarkasyi di Mata Umat*, ed. by K.H. Misbach (Gontor Press, 1996), pp. 900–4.

Christians a beautiful qualification.

I wrote my dissertation in the period 1971-4. Much later it was partly translated into Indonesian (1986) with the help of Dr. Abdurrahman in Yogyakarta. I left the more theoretical last chapter out of the translation. As a book it was extremely successful because it became obligatory reading in Islamic teaching training colleges and the faculty of education (*tarbiyah*) at IAIN. I gave it during a visit to the son of Kiai Zarkasji in Gontor. Later I heard that they were somewhat disappointed with my work on pesantren in general. I did not write in a very specific way about Gontor, did not praise their institution as the leader in an important movement, and uttered doubts about the future of the institution, or about the importance of (so much) religious education for modern Indonesia. Apparently the questions and concerns of a Western researcher are not identical with the strategies and goals of the objects of the research.

1. 1978: *The Dream and Vision of Mukti Ali and Harun Nasution*

In 1978 I was asked to be the coordinator for a program of study leave in Leiden, the Netherlands, for nine senior lecturers at IAIN, Institut Agama Islam Negeri (State Academy of Islamic Studies) in Aceh, Medan, Jambi, Jakarta and Yogyakarta. Mukti Ali was at that time Minister of Religions in Jakarta and he had several reasons for this project of study-leave. He wanted to increase the quality of the IAIN that had started in the 1960s. He saw that in nearly all disciplines students wanted to stay at Western universities, in Europe, America or Australia. In economics there was a 'Berkeley Mafia' that was quite strong in the first decades during the New Order of General Soeharto. In the Netherlands there were already fellowships for law and the humanities, especially anthropology and literature/linguistics. Mukti Ali was not happy with the idea that the Muslim world should be considered as identical with the Middle East. He had pursued studies in Pakistan and Canada. In fact he found the facilities and open discipline for study in Montreal, at McGill University, very important.⁷

At that time there were already several graduates from McGill who had a high position in the Ministry of Religions and some already talked about a 'McGill Mafia' within the Ministry. Besides Mukti Ali there was the secretary general Timur Jaelani, Murni Jamal as a senior advisor, and

⁷ See also A. Mukti Ali et al., *Agama dan Masyarakat: 70 Tahun H.A. Mukti Ali* (Yogyakarta: IAIN Sunan Kalijaga Press, 1993). My contribution is here on pp 201-216.

Professor Harun Nasution as rector of the Jakarta Syarif Hidayatullah IAIN. Harun Nasution had stayed quite long in McGill, 1962-1968 for his MA and PhD studies. He had been a Masyumi member, active in the foreign service. After Sukarno had banned Masyumi, Nasution could no longer be active in the civil service and so this foreign study was quite convenient for him. In Montreal he had come into contact with some weird new doctrines or theories, like the *Theology of the Death of God* (1966: Altizer) and Harvey Cox who wrote *The Secular City*, where the decline of institutional religion is seen as a kind of inevitable progress in religion and in fact something that should be seen as positive, in line with Christian values. Nasution wanted to send more students to the West, but they should also be prepared in a good way, so that they could have their sound opinion about these modern developments in the West.⁸

The IAIN lecturers from Indonesia had a joint programme of confrontation with modern methodology and with ideas about religion in general and Islam more specifically, even about the history of Islam in Indonesia. Out of nine participants five finally could later finish a doctoral dissertation that they had started in Leiden in 1978-9, in a cooperation of an Indonesian and a Dutch supervisor (Ibu Chalidjah Hasanuddin, Burhanuddin Daya, Muhammad Chatib Quzwain, Alfani Daud, Husnul Aqib Suminto). In fact, I was the youngest of the whole programme, although I had to function as their coordinator, supervisor and in many respects also as their teacher.

2. 1981: *Turmoil at the IAIN Syarif Hidayatullah in Jakarta*

After the program in Leiden, I was invited to become a guest or visiting lecturer in the field of orientalism in Jakarta. With my wife and two little boys of 4 and 6 years old, I arrived in March 1981 in Jakarta and was placed in one of the houses for staff on the campus of the IAIN. It was at that time called Rumah VIP, Wisma Sejahtera. It was a convenient place, but these houses have since long been demolished for the new buildings of the UIN Jakarta. There were at the time some 4000

⁸ More on Harun Nasution in Panitia Penerbitan Buku dan Seminar 70 Tahun Harun Nasution, *Refleksi Pembaharuan Pemikiran Islam: 70 Tahun Harun Nasution*. (Jakarta: Panitia Penerbitan Buku dan Seminar 70 Tahun Harun Nasution bekerjasama dengan Lembaga Studi Agama dan Filsafat, 1989). My contribution here on 149-164 (on the Master's Thesis about Masyumi). See also Thomas J.J. Altizer and William Hamilton, *Radical Theology and the Death of God* (Harmondsworth, Ringwood: Penguin Books, 1968). and Harvey Cox, *The Secular City: Secularization and Urbanization in the Theological Perspective* (Stuttgart: Macmillian Company, 1965).

students. Like usual in human organizations there was some rivalry and animosity between groups and faculties. Usuluddin was considered as a liberal and progressive faculty with a Western orientation. On the other extreme there was the faculty of *Syariah*, more orthodox and closer to the great institutions of the Middle East, like al-Azhar and the universities of Mecca and Madinah. This same division I found later in Yogyakarta where there was a dangerous road to be crossed between the western location of the faculty of *Syariah* and the eastern of the *Usuluddin*. In Jakarta some people were of the opinion that Harun Nasution did not give enough attention to the idea and study of *shari'ah* or even gave too modern and liberal interpretations in this field.

There was a group of young students and staff who were also close to Dawam Rahardjo and the magazine and research institute LP3ES. Dawam Rahardjo had much sympathy for the ideas of the Latin American theology of liberation and for someone like Paolo Freire. He called this applied social science and applied theology. He once called for a meeting with few people of his own staff, Harun Nasution, the Catholic priest and philosopher Kees Bertens, and my person. Dawam proposed in a long expose that he wanted to develop some kind of Islamic Applied Theology. This should not be about the doctrine of God, which is the subject of Usuluddin and *kalam*, but a study of how to live religiously in society. However, this should not be based upon the traditional rules of *shari'ah*. In fact this is what he later did with his magazine *Ulumul Qur'an* and his book *Ensiklopedi al-Qur'an*. Immediately after Dawam stopped with his exposition of the ideas, Harun Nasution gave a short but harsh answer: 'this is the field of *shari'ah* and I am no specialist in *shari'ah* and therefore will not join the programme.' Bertens and I explained that in Christianity there is a philosophical approach to ethics and also that social science should be taken more seriously in religious studies, especially for social ethics. But in some way Harun Nasution did not like to become involved in a program like this. Maybe he knew already better than I did that there was a suspicion of Communism connected to Theology of Liberation. Somewhat later there was a priest in Singapore taken to prison for subversive activities under the label of Theology of Liberation and there were some problems in Indonesia as well. Mangunwijaya never would use the terminology, but rather talk about theology of development, because liberation was considered a Communist and Development the

proper New Order terminology.⁹

Already in the first month of my stay in Jakarta I was invited to give a talk for the academic meeting of the staff, the lecturers. At that occasion I talked about the new radical theories of Qur'anic interpretation as had developed in the Western world by John Wansbrough (*Quranic Studies*). Wansbrough was already known as a scholar of Jewish studies, Torah and Talmud, but also someone familiar with the Qur'an and Arabic. His theory basically had as starting point that the Qur'an is the final redaction of a large number of prior versions with small differences which were spread in the Muslim world during the first century after the death of the Prophet Muhammad. The various stories and sections may have had slightly different wordings in cities like Mecca, Madinah, Kufa, Damascus and Basra. This could explain why many sections of the Qur'an have passages that are nearly similar: they all were put together in the final text of the Qur'an, that according to him was only composed about the end of the Ummayyad period.¹⁰

Wansbrough also argued that the first verse of Sura 17, mentioning the *isrā'* or the nightly journey of the Prophet before his ascension in Jerusalem, was the result of a later addition. Initially this verse (like three other verses about a nightly journey) was about the Prophet Moses who left Egypt in during the night, crossing the Red Sea. It is also quite curious that verse 2 of Sura 17 speaks about the Prophet Moses.

These theories of Wansbrough were not really welcome to many of my colleagues at the IAIN of Jakarta and they were taken as the opportunity to attack the liberal policy of Harun Nasution by nominating someone like me at the IAIN.

Some opponents of Harun Nasution had talked about this issue with a journalist of the prominent weekly *Tempo* and a journalist wanted to write an article about it. There was even a photographer who made a picture of me, teaching in a classroom, from a position outside the classroom (this was still the time before air conditioning and we always had open windows). I was also called to Lapangan Banteng, to the Ministry, because even Minister Alamsjah had heard about this case. I had a long talk with Anton Timur Djaelani who was very quiet, happy to see me, supported my project, but also gave me a warning that I should

⁹ Y.B. Mangunwijaya, *Politik Hati Nurani* (Jakarta: Grafiasri Mukti, 1997), pp. 40–4; about *teologi pemerdekaan*.

¹⁰ See John Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 67–9.

be careful 'because you know that there are rumours about you from people who do not like the policy of the IAIN as we have planned it'. A short time later I was interviewed by a journalist from *Panji Masyarakat*, a middle of the road Muslim weekly, about my person, ideas and work. I told this journalist that the situation of religion in European countries is very weak and sad, all religious activities diminish and the influence in social life and politics is weakening. But in Indonesia I saw an awakening of all religions. Not only in Islam, but also among Hindus and Christians. Harun Nasution took contact with the editor of *Tempo* and the article about the conflict within the IAIN of Ciputat never was published. In fact in the 1980s and 1990s Salafi Muslims continuously attacked the IAIN as a liberal monster or at least as an infiltration of Western ideas.¹¹

For me this event was a good lesson. I worked in a somewhat delicate position: I had to remain faithful to my own principles and to academic integrity, but I had also to be cautious that the project should not become a failure and that my work permit and visa in this country would not be withdrawn. Indeed, my position had some risks, but also many favourable conditions: I worked and lived in Indonesia, but with a Dutch salary, paid by the Dutch government (as a development worker) and this was much better than that of all my Indonesian colleagues. I never felt envy or suspicion from my Indonesian colleagues, but they definitely realised the differences.

3. 1982: *A History of Indonesian Islam in the 19th Century*

At the Jakarta IAIN I had to give a course on the development of modern Christian theology (within the department of comparative religion) but also 'orientalism' or Study of Islam in Western Countries, in the faculty of *Ushuluddin*. This was all on the level of BA studies. In 1982 Harun Nasution opened a preparatory course for the Masters' Degree, the beginning of a graduate school. Pak Harun asked me about the course that I liked or was able to give. I suggested him that I should give a course on Indonesian Islam in the 19th century. He was somewhat surprised and even disappointed. He was happy with the Dutch sources

¹¹ See also Yudian W. Asmin, *Pengalaman Belajar Islam di Kanada* (Yogyakarta: Titian Ilahi Press, 1997); Nurcholish Majid and Edy A. Effendi, *Dekonstruksi Islam: Mazhab Ciputat* (Bandung: Zaman, 1999); Martin van Bruinessen, "Divergent Paths from Gontor: Muslim Educational Reform and the Travails of Pluralism in Indonesia", in *On the Edge of Many Worlds: Festschrift Karel Steenbrink*, ed. by Freek L. Bakker (Zoetermeer: Meinema, 2006), pp. 191–201.

which I could amply use from books and from the documents I had found in the National Archives in Jakarta, but he did not have a positive idea about the 19th century. For him the most interesting period would be either the arrival of Islam in Indonesia and the process of conversion of Indonesian peoples towards Islam, or the twentieth century when in 1912 Muhammadiyah had been founded as a Reformist organization. There is still uncertainty about the first arrivals of Islam. A national seminar in Medan in 1963 had ‘decided’ (nearly ‘promulgated’) that ‘Islam arrived in Indonesia straight from Arabia in the 7th century’. As if an academic debate could be ended with a majority decision! More research on this process was and still is needed. Besides, Harun was proud of the development of Islam in the twentieth century, especially the Masyumi (the topic of his Master Thesis at McGill) and he liked the thinking of Muhammad Abduh and his influence in Indonesia (the topic of his Doctoral Dissertation), but why should I ask attention for the 19th century? For him this was a weak period in the history of Islam with many deviations from good doctrine and practices. I had another agenda: for the 20th century there were already standard books like the one by Deliar Noer (1973) on Muslim Reformism and of Alfian about Muhammadiyah (1969), with a classical book by Boland (1971) about the period 1945-1970. The 19th century was and is heavily understudied. But in the colonial archives and other Dutch sources there is much material available for this period and that is my speciality.

During the preparation for the course on the 19th century I saw a great difference between the material of the National Archives and the academic libraries. The National Archives have many reports of officials and the police. Islam was closely observed and researched in case of problems, difficulties and revolts. Islam was first considered here as a problem and a possible danger and the archives usually have this kind of material: *kiai* or religious teachers who were too popular, mosques that were visited by too many people, ‘fanatic’ or lively religious life, it was all a reason for distrust and serious security measures. Several very important religious leaders from Java have been sent in exile to places like Makassar, Menado or Ambon for the simple reason of being too popular, having many followers and thus being a danger for law and order.

But there was also another stream of information: for the islands of Java and Madura, the nomination of *penghulu* of heads of major mosques, was the responsibility of the colonial government, besides the *Al-Jāmi’ah*, Vol. 53, No. 2, 2015 M/1437 H

control of the finances of mosques and the religious courts (for cases of divorce, marriages, inheritance).

In the libraries and the academic books a quite different face of Islam in Indonesia is presented: here we had the writings of the great scholars, learned treatises and emotional poetry, Qur'anic studies, books of Islamic Law. From the collection of manuscripts of Leiden University I brought microfilms with the poetry of Penyengat, the small Malay Sultanate on the island just south of Singapore. These were the writings of Raja Ali Haji and some of his family and friends, written in the second half of the 19th century. They are seen as examples of the perfect, pure Malay language. The students had to work on manuscripts, look after variants between several manuscripts, they read Malay in Arab script (Jawi) and had to study poetry, quite different from the more theoretical books. All sources I gathered (with the students) on the 19th century quickly were put together in a book that was published in 1984 by Bulan Bintang under the title *Beberapa Aspek tentang Islam di Indonesia abad ke-19*. It was the first book I wrote after my doctoral dissertation of 1974 and the first also written directly by me in Indonesian.

Initially I had given the book a very different title: *Paderi, Penghulu dan Penjual Jimat*, with a subtitle indicating that it would give aspects of 19th century Islam in Indonesia. The three central words of the original title should indicate (1) *Paderi*, the political role of Muslim leaders; (2) *Penghulu*, the technical religious studies of the Muslim clerics; (3) *Penjual Jimat*, popular religion in contrast to the official religion of the clerics. In fact I considered the three dimensions as more or less separate and quite distinct elements of one larger system. I am not so happy with the grand theories like the *santri-abangan-priyayi* theory of Clifford Geertz or the *mystic synthesis in Java* of Merle Ricklefs, but I consider the global religions as quite loose religious systems with many local, individual, and social variations.¹² But the publisher, Bulan Bintang, a group of pious Sumatran business people in Jakarta, asked Professor Rasjidi to write a preface for the book. Rasjidi found the book interesting and important and suggested that it indeed should be published, although he also saw some deficiencies. 'It is a nice presentation, but within this plate of *nasi goreng* (fried rice) there are also some small stones'. He did not like that *jimat* or amulet sellers should

¹² Clifford Geertz, *The Religion of Java* (Glencoe, Ill: Free Press, 1964); Merle Calvin Ricklefs, *Mystic Synthesis in Java: A History of Islamization from the Fourteenth to the Early Nineteenth Centuries* (Norwalk: EastBridge, 2006); M.C. Ricklefs, *Polarizing Javanese Society: Islamic and Other Visions, 1830-1930* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2007).

be seen as part of the true Muslim community. Also in the description of fighters for Islam like Prince Diponegoro, the Paderi wars and the struggle for freedom in Aceh he did not like the socio-political elements and motivations of the Muslim parties: he considered them true martyrs and fighters for their true faith. In my opinion they also made abuse of violence and credulity of the population: *right or wrong my country!* This would later be a warning by the Catholic priest Mangunwijaya, stating that nationalist or religious sentiments should never be used to silence critical analysis of social events in the past or present.¹³

As to the amulet sellers, I defended that popular religion in all global religions is part of the great traditions. Of course reformist faithful do not like it. But there was at IAIN always a contrast between defenders of 'normative' against 'real' Islam. In the Western academic tradition a researcher should not too easily join any current that considers itself as 'normative' and makes the other side heretic or deviant. Finally, the book was printed without important changes and it sold also very well, thanks to the Ministry of Religions that put it on the list for all who wanted to become teacher of religion. Jacques Waardenburg suggested that I should translate it into English for his series in Berlin, but I had other things to do and maybe it will be one of the things I may do after all my present duties have been finished.

4. 1985: *Sir, Why Do You Not Convert to Islam?*

I had begun with my course on the Development of Theology in the Modern Christian World in Yogyakarta, probably in the academic year 1982-3 when I went monthly to Yogyakarta for two or three days of courses. After I had given the course three or four times, I developed it into a book that was one of the first to be published by the IAIN Sunan Kalijaga Press with a preface by Prof. Mukti Ali.¹⁴ In this course I stressed the variations within Christianity, geographically and in historical and social development. Some of these branches or denominations were criticized by me, others praised. Although I was myself born in the Catholic tradition, I had also critical remarks on the Vatican and on the Pope.

In this course I gave comparisons with Muslim developments and judged elements of Islam as quite positive. Therefore once a student

¹³ Mangunwijaya, *Politik Hati Nurani*, p. 87.

¹⁴ Karel A. Steenbrink, *Perkembangan Teologi dalam Dunia Kristen Modern* (Yogyakarta: IAIN Sunan Kalijaga Press, 1987).

asked me in class: ‘Sir, why do you not become a Muslim?’ My answer was that I had some friends and colleagues who indeed embraced Islam, most of them because of a marriage. But I saw how they were pampered in their new community: one even received a free ticket for the hajj pilgrimage to Mecca. But they were recent converts, *mu'allaf*, and could not be critical in their new religion. They had to remain silent and just accept the full 100% of their new religion. So, I preferred to remain a critical Catholic, rather than a tame or meek recent convert. Anyway, it is still quite uncommon to be an atheist in contemporary Indonesia. A religious label is a quite important indicator of one's identity. And I retained my label of being a ‘liberal Catholic’.

There is still another anecdote to be told about religious conversion. There was in Yogyakarta at the time a group of Western artists who joined the planning for a new Arts Academy. One of them was an English musician whose duty it was to find methods that tourists would stay longer in Yogyakarta to see performances of music (and theatre, dance). In this period he had fallen in love to a West-Javanese singer. Once he came to my office at the IAIN and asked whether I could inform him about the proper way to formally convert to Islam. I told him that in contradiction to the Christian practice (where candidates for baptism have to follow courses between 6 months up to two years), converts to Islam only have to recite the confession of faith in front of two witnesses and then have the obligation to study their new religion more in depth later. He was happy with the answer, because his marriage with the Sundanese singer had been planned for the coming week and the family wanted that he should become a Muslim before. He had done serious readings of some books on Islam, and therefore I found it appropriate to bring him to the imam of the Campus Mosque. The following week the ceremony of formal conversion took place and I also received an invitation to be present. The imam urged him to repeat the formulas he read for him: ‘herewith I repudiate and leave Christianity and enter Islam, *ashadu an lā ilāha illā Allāh...*’. I had already noticed that there was a short list with a few names of people to give an address or *sambutan*, among them also my name. So, I had some time to think about a reaction.

My first reaction to the ceremony of conversion was that to the best of my knowledge it is not necessary to renounce Christianity in order to become a Muslim. One may accept Islam as a correction towards Christianity, but basically Jesus is seen as a true and good Prophet and those who really follow him should be respected. I found the formula

used by the imam towards Christianity as only negative and so not in line with the respect that Muslims should show for a fellow religion. But further, I praised the new convert because he had been an inactive Anglican, had read much about religion and Islam and now showed that he realised that religion is important in life and that he could better take it serious also for the success of his marriage.

A report of this event was published in the Yogyakarta newspaper *Kedaulatan Rakyat* and in the weekly *Suara Muhammadiyah*. It was read by fellow-Dutch people in Yogyakarta, the Jesuits of Kolsani and Sanata Dharma University. Some of them criticised me for cooperating in a ceremony of conversion from Christianity to Islam. To my defence I quoted the interpretation of the word *muslim* by Nurcholies Madjid: *Muslim* with a capital is someone who surrenders to the will of God, accepts life as a sign of his great design, while *muslim* in small letters is just a member of a religious denomination.¹⁵

5. *A Nightly Visit with Some Tablilan at the Grave of Sunan Bayat*

Eine kleine Nachtmusik [literal translation is: ‘a small concert for the late evening’] is a well-known composition of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. It is not so complicated, not overtly emotional or sensational. It is a calm and nice piece of music for the late evening. But quite different is the music sung at the compound of the grave of the Muslim saint Sunan Bayat, about 10 km from Klaten, a town East of Yogyakarta. Every Friday that is in the Javanese calendar also a Legi evening (once in five weeks, so *Jumat-Legi*) the hill with dozens of graves is full with many people: Javanese Muslims, Chinese, Javanese Catholics: all denominations are welcome here. There is not a fixed liturgy, no formal leader. The first pilgrims arrive at about 05.00 PM, but it becomes only somewhat crowded when dark has fallen at about 08.00 PM. The first time I went to this place, I asked my Muslim colleague at the IAIN of Yogyakarta, Chumaidy Syarif Romas, to join me in my car, because I was not certain about the road, and did know little about the ceremony there. Chumaidy is a quiet and gentle man, who likes to communicate, easy in laughing, and he has

¹⁵ In an academic style this story is reworked in Karel Steenbrink, “Kun je als katholiek ook moslim zijn? Ontmoetingen met moslims in Indonesië”, in *Mijn Plaats is geen Plaats. Ontmoetingen tussen wereldbeschouwingen*, ed. by Marcel Poorthuis and Vinod Bhagwandin (Kampen: Klement, 2003), pp. 51–66; Karel A. Steenbrink, “Problems and Perspectives of Conversion in recent Catholic Theology”, in *Bekehrung und Identität. Ökumene als Spannung zwischen Fremden und Vertrauten*, ed. by Dagmar Heller (Frankfurt: Otto Lembeck, 2003), pp. 134–51.

joined me several times to difficult locations. When we had arrived at the entrance to the site, we saw a row of women sitting, apparently to sell something that was wrapped in banana-leaves. I asked what it was that they were selling and it appeared to be incense in quite big pieces, and flowers. The women told me that I should need these things above at the grave on top of the hill. I wanted to buy a package, but then Chumaidy warned me: 'we come here for observation only, not for participation. You should not buy these things.' I answered him, that I was a Catholic from a family where pilgrimage is a favourite tour for holidays. Chumaidy had been national chairman of the HMI, *Himpunan Mahasiswa Islam*, a Muslim students' union that was close to Muhammadiyah and definitely reformist, against popular religion. They do not like what they call *keburafat, takhayyul* or superstitions. But we Catholics like to see and visit graves.

At the beginning of the great compound of the graves, there was a small mosque, where about twenty people were sitting for tahlilan, chanting in a quite disordered way, very loud, Arabic texts but with heavy Javanese accent, not really a well trained choir, but really somewhat in disorder: Ya Rahman, Ya Rahim, Ya Ghafur, Ya Latif, many of the beautiful names of God. Chumaidy said quietly: Muhammadiyah has forbidden these practices of prayer for the dead. Then we entered a debate about the proper strategy of the great religions with such popular rituals. The Catholic Church initially did not recognise the miracles and apparitions in Lourdes, given to some uneducated teenagers who came with marvellous stories. For some decades it was forbidden, but the devotion continued and could not be stopped. Finally the bishop saw that it was impossible to halt this new practice and he followed the old saying: *if you cannot beat them, join them!* The bishop gave in, tried to take control what not could be abolished and step by step this place of popular religion came under the control of official religion. That is the mechanism how the great religions work. Sometimes they go the path of reform and read again the old books and remove elements of religion that are no longer accepted by (many) in their community. But it can also go the other way round: new elements are practised, forbidden, but after a period of protests they are welcomed and included in the whole development of the religions. In fact it is possible to talk in a comparative way about the different strategies that show clear similarities between the great religions.

Professor Rasjidi was hard against aliran kepercayaan, but Mukti Ali once stated in the early 1980s that exactly a hard strategy of Reformist

exclusivism had created so much new spiritual movements.

6. *Some Fellows whom I Met in this Journey of Academic Work: Thomas Michel, Alex Soesilo Wijoyo, Alfons Subardi, Bruinessen, Meuleman, Beck, and others*

Until the 1990s there was little interest in the Christian churches to study Islam. Father Zoetmulder was trained in Arabic and Javanese as preparation for a study of Islam in Indonesia. Like Hendrik Kraemer, he wrote a dissertation on Javanese Muslim mysticism, but then switched to the study of Old Javanese, pre-Islamic literature. He has become a great scholar, internationally renowned for his discovery of the old Javanese treasure, but lost for the study of Islam.

Thomas Michel is some kind of a *world citizen*. He was born in St. Louis, USA, 1941, entered a seminary and was ordained as a Catholic priest of the St. Louis diocese. In 1967 he came to Yogyakarta as a teacher of English at the Teachers Training IKIP Sanata Dharma. His status was that of a native speaker. Archbishop Darmoyuwono had met the bishop of St. Louis during Vatican II sessions in Rome and had asked for help for his Jesuit University in Yogyakarta. Thomas Michel worked together with Jesuits, and entered the Jesuit order in Yogyakarta. In the 1970s he began his studies of Arabic and Islam in Chicago and in 1978 he defended his PhD Dissertation on Ibn Taimiyya with Fazlur Rahman in Chicago. This was about *Al-Jawmāb al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, a work written in 1387 by Ibn Taimiyya against the ideas of a Bishop in Syria/Turkey, Antakya, the old Antiochia. The Bishop who was answered in this treatise had written himself in 1150: so slow is the process of Muslim-Christian relations sometimes.¹⁶ Thomas Michel began teaching in Yogyakarta/Kentungan, but soon had also a job at the Asian Bishops' Conference in Bangkok. Later he became also active in the Vatican Department for Relations with other Religions and at the head office of the Jesuits in Rome. As a *dosen terbang* or part-time lecturer he gave his courses in Yogyakarta, but he could not really support the development of Islamic studies among Catholics in Indonesia.

From Thomas Michel I here want to retell a short story about his experiences as a Catholic lecturer in Islamic Studies. Michel once wanted to meet in person the traditional leaders of Muslim boarding schools, *pesantren*, in Madura. He started his motorbike, drove to Surabaya, then

¹⁶ See for this dissertation Thomas F. Michel, *A Muslim Theologian's Response to Christianity: Ibn Taymiyya's al-Jawab al-Sabih* (Delmar, N.Y.: Caravan Books, 1984).

took the ferry to the island of Madura and during one week he visited one *pesantren* after the other. He had made no appointments, just addressed the *keiai* at the first place but was welcomed at all places. He stayed in the *pesantren* and had lively talks with their leaders. This was the same as I experienced in 1970-1971 during my field research in the world of *pesantren*. When he returned to his religious community in Yogyakarta, his fellow-Jesuits were very happy that he had returned safely and said, that they had prayed every day for his health and safety, because Madura is known as the 'Sicily of Southeast Asia', a violent region, where murder occurs quite often. Michel also wanted to talk about his spiritual exchange and the ideas of the religious leaders, their work and their life, but his fellow Jesuits were already happy to see him back and after listening to his travel stories, they were not interested at all in his religious adventures.

The Indonesian Jesuits have sent Alex Soesilo Wijoyo to America for a study at Columbia University in the early 1980s until the mid-1990s. The result was a fine dissertation on the writings of Nawawi al-Banteni who stayed from 1840 until 1897 in Mecca and wrote a Qur'an commentary in Arabic that is still reprinted. But after this dissertation Alex returned to Indonesia and was no longer active in Islamic studies. He turned to his great hobby and quality: the internet. The homepage of Mirifica.net for the Catholic Church in Indonesia, the homepages of most dioceses were designed by him, but unfortunately he was not available for teaching in seminaries. Instead, in Jakarta, the Jesuits preferred to hire qualified Muslim to teach at the Drijarkara school of Philosophy.

The Franciscans sent Alfons Suhardi to Cairo, for a study of Arabic, but he was already somewhat older and in Cairo he stayed in a community that was not really favourable for his Islamic Studies. But in recent years this situation has changed drastically with scholars like Dr. Bertolomeus Bolong, Dr. Philipus Tule, Dr. Heru Prakoso and others, united in ASAKKIA, the Association of Christian Islamologists in Indonesia.

There are Islamologists in very different style. Some are more linguist (like Dick van der Mey, lecturer at UIN Jakarta), some work more in the tradition of comparative religion like Herman Beck, who became between 1989-1991 my successor in Yogyakarta. Martin van Bruinessen (working on the 'Dutch position in Yogyakarta' between 1991 and 1994, but already active in Indonesia since the early 1980s) is a true social scientist. Institutions like UIN, Universitas Muhammadiyah and national centres of the Nahdlatul Ulama like to cooperate with non-Muslim scholars and institutes. A high quality journal like *Studia Islamika*

has in nearly all issues also non-Muslim international scholars as authors. The Muslim identity is not only defined by Muslims themselves, but also by fellow travellers and other observers who want to understand their values and dreams.

7. *Why Do these Orientalists so much Research about Dissidents, Heretics, Marginal Muslims?*

The Catholic identity of my parents was very strong, but also diverse. My father (working at the fiscal department) was for many years financial administrator in the parish where we lived. He did also management for aid to poor people. He liked a good management of parishes, richly decorated churches, pompous church services with good choirs, a large number of altar boys and luxurious outfit for the clergy. My mother found the pomp and long services in the church too complicated. They took also too much time, because she had the care for a family with twelve children. She always found reasons not to attend church services: she suffered from headache when sitting in such a crowded place. She had her own small liturgy: after going to the market she would go to a side-chapel of the great cathedral. On her own she would sit for five or mostly ten minutes at the statue of Mary, burn a candle and say her private prayers. Scholars of religion would define this difference between my parents as that of official versus popular religion, or sometimes as high church versus low church identity. She liked her pilgrimage to Rome and Lourdes, but also the Catholic places of pilgrimage that were in her neighbourhood.

We find the same reality also in Islam: there are Muslims who learn (sections of) the Qur'ān by heart, study the books of *fiqh*, but some also go to sellers of amulets, depart for pilgrimages to holy graves. I went through a process of study of the formal Catholic doctrines, but as a private person, I always liked the religion that is not so well organised, the more adventurous, sometimes malicious, sometimes good incentives for renewal. These 'low church' people also support the local tradition against (Christian and) Muslim international doctrines. A foreign researcher who works on Indonesian Islam is often interested in the local variants of international Islam.

Indeed, the practice of *salat* is identical in mosques, worldwide. When I was teaching at McGill, 1992-1993, there was a Friday prayer in a free space of the great restaurant for students. After lunch the Muslim students prepared a place for their prayers: cleaning the floor, putting a *Al-Jāmi'ah*, Vol. 53, No. 2, 2015 M/1437 H

carpet on the floor and the Sunni and Shi'a students (the latter a good group of 'young ayatollahs' from Iran with their heavy black beards) prayed together. I once attended a Maulid celebration, with an American Muslim preacher, interacting with the audience in the style of Baptist preachers, no Hallaluyahs, but many times *Alhamdulillah* or *Astaghfirullah*. Sometimes a row of Shi'a people would stand up and sing a short praise for the prophet. Just one minute and then the preacher would continue with his sermon in English.

In order to show the local character of Islam, more attention must be given to conflict than to routine. The Greek philosopher Herakleitos already formulated that *polemos panton pater*, there is no change without conflict, war is the father for everything. Outsiders like to see change, a process of renewal and they have less interest for quiet stability and continuity in a religion.

8. 'Tuhan Kita Tak Tertidur' *and* 'Kitab Suci atau Kertas Toilet'

In order to improve the quality of IAIN lecturers, Mukti Ali had begun in the late 1970s with weekly lectures and debates on Friday evening (*Malam Sabtu*), probably after he had finished his duty as Minister of Religions and returned as a professor to the IAIN. Lecturers were urged and stimulated to give reports about their research or studies or about topics they taught in their courses. I also gave several times speeches at these meetings. Mukti Ali and people close to him were proud that in 1988, after ten years, it had never happened that a week had been without such an academic meeting, even not during Ramadan or in periods of the great Muslim holidays. I still remember a paper with the title: *Tuhan Kita Tak Tertidur*, or 'Our God does not sleep'. The title had been taken from Qur'an, Sura al-Baqara, verse 255:

God, there is no god but He,
The Living, the Everlasting.
Slumber seizes Him not, neither sleep.

This is one of the best known verses of the Qur'an. It has frequently been used for calligraphy and it decorates the houses of many Muslims.

In formulations this verse is very close to Psalm 121:2-4

My help comes from the Lord
The Maker of heaven and earth.
He will not let your foot slip,
He who watches over you will not slumber,
Indeed, he who watches over Israel

Will neither slumber nor sleep.

In the old pre-Christian and pre-Muslim temples of the Middle East, from Egypt to Iraq, in Syria and Libanon, the monumental structure switches from big halls, through mid-size places to a very small room in the front of the temple. In the back, the largest halls are for common people, smaller rooms are for priests only, while the inner and smallest place is the dwelling of the divinity. It is usually a dark room, where little light and virtually no noise can enter. Why is the dwelling of the gods so small and dark? Some scholars suggest that the gods like to sleep. This is in line with 1 Kings 18:27, where the Prophet Elijah suggest that the priests of Baal should shout louder: ‘Surely he is a god! Perhaps he is deep in thought, or busy, or travelling. Maybe he is sleeping and must be awakened.’

This verse, however, also can be given another interpretation: we should remember the debate about the day of rest, Sabbath, the seventh day for the Jews. God created heaven and earth in six days and took rest on the seventh day and therefore the Sabbath should become a day of rest for humans also. However, is taking rest identical with sleep? God is eternally keeping the world in existence and may rest, but does not sleep.

Since the beginning of my Islamic studies I have been fascinated by the many similarities between Bible and Qur’an. I used this kind of similarities also during my farewell or valedictory lecture in Yogyakarta, 8 July 1988 on ‘Nuruddin Ar-Raniri and the Christians’ with another naughty title: *Kitab Suci atau Kertas Toilet*. The title refers to a passage in a work by Raniri where he asks whether it is allowed to take ablutions (*nudhu*) with paper, if no water is available. Can one also use paper that has the text of the Hindu drama of Indra? Or the Torah, the Gospel? ‘You may use this paper, because the Hindu story is pagan and the Jewish and Christian copies of Torah and Gospel are not the original ones, they deviate from the original. However, when the word Allah has been written on these pages, you should not use it.’ That is a quite rude statement by Raniri. But in his other works Raniri is very positive about Jesus and also about the apostles and sometimes about Christians in general. In the end of the valedictory speech I compared my situation with Jacob who had worked for seven for his uncle Laban in a foreign land (like I had worked seven years in a foreign country, Indonesia). My concluding words were then:

Maybe there are some people in this honourable audience who think: well,

Steenbrink has now already worked during seven years on the Campus of the IAIN, and in a true Darul Islam, Abode of Islam, but he has not yet truly accepted Islam as his religion. He only has received Lea, the oldest daughter, not the younger and prettiest one. Yeah, probably he has to return once again, for another period of seven years. Or should we rather remind this verse of the Qur'an that also mentions the prophet Jacob: (*Al-Baqarah*, 2:136)

Say you: We believe in God and
in that which has been sent down on us
and sent down on Abraham, Ishmael,
Isaac and Jacob, and the Tribes,
and that which was given to Moses and Jesus
and the Prophets, of their Lord; we
make no distinction between any of them, and
to Him we surrender.

The last phrase is in Arabic: *wa nahnu labu muslimūn*, and that sounded from my mouth also quite good for these IAIN people.

9. Do not Think that Specialists, Scholars of Islam or any Academic Can Change this World!

Only a few days after the terrible event of 9/11 in the year 2001, I left for a seminar in Indonesia: 25-27 September 2001 in Jakarta, organised by the Center for Languages and Cultures, IAIN Jakarta. After that conference I went for several days to Palembang for some guest lectures. At the airport I met Dr. Din Syamsuddin. I knew him since 1981-3 when he was finishing his Bachelor Studies in Jakarta. He was one of the Jakarta students and young lecturers who were close to Dawam Rahardjo. I was a supervisor for his thesis on peace studies, where he had used much material from Groningen University, where war basically was seen as something caused by the difference between poor and rich. The solution should never be war, but economic assistance: help the poor to become rich or at least to live a good and prosperous life and so the problem of war could be solved. Of course, it is not that easy to solve human problems, but it should really help.

In 2001 he also had finished his study of political science in the USA and had become general chairman of the Majelis Ulama, mentioned above as MUI. He was the responsible chairman of a *fatwa* of MUI that stated that Indonesian Muslims should support other Muslims when they would be attacked by other nations. In this case there was the threat of an

American attack on Afghanistan, because it gave protection and shelter to Usama bin Laden. If the Americans in fact should attack that Muslim country the Muslim solidarity or *ukhuwa islamiya* should request that the Indonesian Muslims should support their Afghanistan brothers and sisters with a *jihad fi sabilillahi*. We had a debate. I mentioned the position of the Pope John Paul II, who had planned a visit to Kazakhstan, immediately after 9/11 and did not postpone, but went as scheduled (arrival on 22 September 2001). John Paul II stated in Kazakhstan that the crisis or conflict between (some) Muslims and (some) Christians should be solved by dialogue and negotiations not through weapons and war. Therefore not a call to jihad, but a call for dialogue and political talks should have been more appropriate. Din did not agree. First, there is the Islamic doctrine that violence may be used as self-defence, when attacked by enemies. And this should be maintained. Second, Din had held many dialogues with church leaders, but these talks were not efficient, they were without result, because they had no long term effects. Christian leaders continued to steal sheeps, to seek converts or what is called *Kristenisasi* of Indonesia. They had already put aside US\$ 100 million for the conversion of Minangkabau and this led already to 100 recent Christian converts in that strongly Muslim region. Also in the Moluccas could he notice a new initiative for conversion. Dialogue was a nice business for academics and peace activists, who could give fervent speeches and inspiring although unrealistic sermons. They are naïve people who do not understand politics. The social and political reality is different. Also the IAIN is an institution that has no direct link with the concrete world.

Din did not consider his own position as extreme: that was a Western prejudice, created by people who want to attack Islam. At that moment there had been already 'sweeping' actions by groups who visited hotels in Surakarta to see whether there were American tourists in these places. This was done by FPI, the Muslim Defence League who were not bothered by the police. Immediately after this the stream of tourists stopped and Indonesian rupiah was down 10%: inter-religious relations are part of social and political reality.

10. Exchange is Our Mission

In Western universities study of religion is often divided in two departments: theology and 'religious studies'. There has been already since a long time a debate about the qualifications for this dichotomy: theology has been considered as 'subjective, participating' the perspective *Al-Jāmi'ah*, Vol. 53, No. 2, 2015 M/1437 H

of the insider, while science of religion or religious studies is defined as more objective and non-committed, even 'the outsider'. Theology is often also seen as related to one specific religion, its doctrine and even some specific denomination. In the Netherlands we have a (government subsidized) Protestant Theological University and a Faculty of Catholic Theology (part of Tilburg University), besides an Islamic University of Rotterdam. There are many problems involved here: a study of religion that is 100% 'objective, independent' is not feasible, while a study of theology that is closely related to one denomination only, certainly is not a critical academic discipline, nor a creative one.

In the more traditional theological discipline there has been a division in 'systematic theology' (where doctrines are confronted with philosophical terminology and methodology) and 'positive theology' where historical, linguistic, and sociological methodology is used (most for study of text like Scripture and for church history). When I pursued my theological studies in Nijmegen, I was part of the section missiology, or mission studies. This concerned the study of the history of Christian mission, the expansion of this world religion, but also the methodology to communicate religion in other contexts. There was once the dream of many Christians that the whole world could become dominated by Christians. In fact there are still conservative Christians who dream of a complete global domination. In my country this is now considered by most Christians as a wrong way of imperialism. The vision of Qur'an Al Ma'idah 5:48 is much more realistic: *If God had willed, He would have made you one nation; but that He may try you in what has come to you. So be you forward in good works; unto God shall you return, all together.*

Therefore the discipline of missiology has been renamed since the 1990s into 'intercultural studies' and the chair to which I was nominated also. In reality this worked in two directions: (1) research about the development of Christianity outside Europe, especially in Africa and Asia; (2) research about the relations between Islam and Christianity, in doctrine, history and concrete developments. Our journal is called *Exchange* and its slogan is: *Exchange is our mission.*

D. Concluding Remarks

- Science of religion in its many fields of interest uses the methodology of the humanities and social sciences. In this academic tradition the old texts are analyzed, old practices and doctrines described and

the meaning of life, as is contained in previous and contemporary traditions of believers, is articulated, compared and put in a theoretical schedule. the methodology and terminology of social sciences is used to describe religious organizations, leadership and its role and function in society. Islamologists here have no specific methodology different from other scholars in the humanities and social science.

- In the study of literature it has always been a debate whether there is something like good and bad literature. Of course, we recognise that there are books written in a good style and construction, and also bad books. But it has always been impossible to formulate precise criteria for these qualifications. In medicine and science it is different: there is good and bad food, good and bad medicines and they can be identified much easier than good or bad literature, let alone good or bad religion. Most will agree that Augustine and Al-Ghazali have a deeper understanding of religion than Billy Graham or A.A. Gym, but it is difficult to formulate this in a binding, convincing way.
- For the science of religion it is per se not important whether research is carried out by adherents of a specific religion, by another religion or rather by atheists. People who see religion as a negative element in human society, will experience difficulties in finding an honest and balanced judgment about religious development. But also people who have a biased idea about one specific and privileged religious denomination may also experience such difficulty.
- Science of religion may also have practical purpose and ambitions. It may help religious people in finding new rituals and spiritual meaning in a changing society. It may be useful in finding harmony between religions. But scholars of religion should not hope for a decisive influence: usually religious leaders have their own strategies and interests and often do not like to read or hear the critical voices of people who write lengthy books.¹⁷

¹⁷ This text is based on an Indonesian presentation that first was written for the opening session of ASSAKIA, *Asosiasi Sarjana Islamogi Kristen Indonesia* in Kupang, December 2013 in Kupang, Indonesia. It was later revised in an Indonesian presentation for the *International Conference of the Study on Indonesian Islam: Tribute to Karel Steenbrink and Martin van Bruinessen*, of 17-18 November at Universitas Islam Negeri, UIN in Yogyakarta. The Indonesian text is published as “Otobiografi seorang Islamolog Indonesia 1970-2012”, *Gema Teologi*, vol. 38, no. 2 (2014), pp. 193-224.

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