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The Role of Universities and Theological Centers in Facilitating Interfaith Dialogue for Peace Building

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A Personal Odyssey into Interfaith Dialogue

My interest in Islam as a faith started when I went to Silliman University in Dumaguete City for my primary theological degree. There it was my fortune to study under Dr. Peter G. Gowing, an American missionary professor whose lectures and books opened me to the horizon of another world—the world of the Moros with their colorful culture, cherished faith and traditions.² My then hazy acquaintance of the Moro people gave way to a more positive and intense understanding of and involvement in the Moro people's struggle in the southern Philippines. After finishing a graduate degree in theology in 1973, I accepted a teaching assignment in Southern Christian College, Midsayap, Cotabato. Cotabato is one of the predominantly Muslim provinces of Mindanao. At that time, the Muslim-Christian conflict had been intensifying not only in Cotabato but also in other Muslim dominated provinces.

My stint in Cotabato since then served as an empirical verification (through fora, exposures, dialogues, involvement in rural development programs in Muslim communities) of what our SCC "Educational Credo" states: "... seeking a life of faith, learning and action that will develop people into becoming intellectually competent and honest, morally and ethically sensitive, creatively aware and responsible to the needs, aspirations, and realization of a just, free, and responsible social order."³ My personal odyssey into a sympathetic understanding of the Moro struggle, Islamic faith and history, fits into our college's institutional goal, as it seeks to foster dialogues with Muslims as part of our discerning God's mission in the context of the southern Philippines.

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² Among the important books on Muslim faith published by Peter G. Gowing are: *The Muslim Filipinos* (Manila: Solidaridad Publishing House, 1974); *The Muslim Filipinos—Heritage and Horizon* (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1979); *Understanding Islam and Muslims in the Philippines* (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1988).

³ Melanio L. Aoanan, *Ecumenical and Prophetic: The Witness of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines* (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1998), 134.

I would like now to focus on what our institution (Southern Christian College and the people involved in it) have been doing all these years in the “confidence-building mechanism” between Muslims and Christians in Cotabato. Our college is run by the United Church of Christ in the Philippines, founded in 1949. Our academic programs operationalize the dreams and aspirations of the founders in establishing a college devoted to the cause of Christian education, the development of Christian character and training of leaders who will strengthen democratic institutions, understand the problems of rural life, the relations of soil and soul to social well-being and social institutions, the importance of rural social organizations and the sense of dignity in working with hands.

Looking back on the very risky, almost suicidal, decision that I took way back in 1973, when I brought my whole family into the midst of war-torn Cotabato, makes me realize the sense of the “Abrahamic faith” which is very necessary in the bridge building mission of our Christian institutions. At that time, we in the administration and personnel of SCC demonstrated that sense of Abrahamic faith in the reaching out to the victims of war atrocities. At that point in time, just the courage of being there was itself an eloquent testimony to one's faith and utter dependence on the God of history who shapes and directs the destiny of peoples. While classes were suspended for more than one month because of the full-scale war, the whole SCC campus became the only safe ground where the Muslim non-combatants could seek refuge. Thus, our campus became an evacuation center.

Organizing people to maintain their human dignity amid a situation where their very lives are threatened is no mean accomplishment. Campaign for food assistance, medicines, relief goods, safe drinking water, sanitation in waste disposal, etc., were some of the thousand and one concerns which have to be attended to. Fortunately, for us in SCC, we have a community extension program whose personnel became the cadre of Christian army seeking out to bind the wounds, feed the hungry, clothe the naked, cure the sick, regardless of whether one is a Muslim, Christian, military or civilian. More significantly, these committed Christian people helped maintain and preserve the sanity and civility in the midst of flared-up hatred and prejudice that led to senseless killings. Making sense of our existence in the midst of a senseless situation is one purpose of human existence.

Reflecting on the meaning of our institutional work, we could liken it to a concrete task of building a bridge of mutual understanding, love and friendship. For instance, when a group of Moro rebels kidnapped two of our community extension workers (an agriculturist and a driver), Christians and Muslims worked together for their immediate release. The next day they were released unharmed. Second, our work is like constructing a sanctuary where care, compassion and protection is made available to the entire community. This was shown when the SCC campus was made available as the only safe refuge for the Muslim evacuees at the height of the Cotabato war. Third is the building of a human fortress (*kutang tao*) where struggle for justice, peace, freedom and self-determination of people is nourished.⁴ This was proven when a group of SCC students and faculty, together with Muslim farmers and barrio people held a mass rally to protest the arbitrary detention of 28 Muslims at the military headquarters in Cotabato City.

⁴ Melanio L. Aoanan, *Spirituality for the Struggle* (Quezon City: Ecumenical Council for Theological Education by Extension in the Philippines, 1988), 35-36.

It is not surprising, therefore, that while SCC is a United Church-related college, such a connection does not at all deter Muslims and other Tribal Filipinos from enrolling. About 10% to 12% of our student population each year are Muslims. Most of them are drawn to our college through the Cultural Communities Scholarship Program. For indeed, it is very difficult for them to pursue college education without substantial scholarship assistance.

Our curricular offerings provide opportunities for both Christians and Muslims to study seriously the common religious heritage found in the Bible and the Qur'an. It is through these that both faculty and students formally wrestle with fundamental issues of faith and life, history and culture, that contribute to a more meaningful human co-existence. To show our desire of making Muslim culture and religion become an important part of extra-curricular activities, Moro dances, songs, musical instruments, and architectural motifs, are highlighted during school programs and celebrations. In fact, through the Muslim Religious Youth Organization (MYRO), of which I was the faculty adviser, we worked out an arrangement to have separate Baccalaureate Service for graduating Muslim students. It had to be separate from the Christian service that is held in the Church. For the Muslims, we held it at the Simbayan Center, a multi-purpose building with a prominent Moro architectural motif. This is done to respect the religious convictions and sensibilities of the graduating Muslim students, their parents and other relatives. Another significant program that promotes Muslim-Christian interfaith dialogue is our Exposure Program during the month of Ramadhan. This will be elaborated later in this paper.

From 1975 to 1982, I became professor at Silliman University (Dumaguete City) and subsequently as chair of the Philosophy and Religion Department. I got involved as a faculty adviser to the Iranian Islamic Students Association (IISA) at Silliman University. These were the years when we had close to a hundred Iranians studying at Silliman. This was also the time when the Iranian revolution led by Imam Khomeini was so intense. As a campus organization, we sponsored group study and prayers, seminars and open forums on the political and religious developments in Iran until the triumph of the revolution in 1979. These personal involvements with Muslim students led me to search for deeper insights into the Islamic faith and spirituality as practiced by Muslim Filipinos. Then I came across Prof. Gowing's survey on Muslim Filipinos. He suggests: "There is a need for a thorough-going research into Muslim Filipino religion and spirituality." He raises relevant questions worth pursuing today in the Philippines:

What is the religious literature used or produced by Muslim Filipinos? ... What about Mosque organization and Mosque architecture and construction? ... How does Shariah operate among Muslim Filipino groups as over against adat-law? ... What has been the impact of the Foreign Muslim teachers from Indonesia, Pakistan, Arabia, Egypt ... on Philippine Islam? What has been the role of Muslim Filipino returnees from Islamic study centers abroad? What about the place of and other Islamic religious schools in Muslim society?⁵

⁵ Peter G. Gowing, "How Muslims Are Muslim Filipinos," in *The Muslim Filipinos* (Manila: Solidaridad Publishing House, 1974), 130.

This paper does not attempt to respond directly to the multi-faceted and urgent questions that Gowing raised. That will need extensive fieldwork. This paper focuses on the significance of *salat* or ritual prayer and *sawm* or fasting, two of the five pillars of Islam, as pathways towards strengthening Muslim-Christian solidarity.

Aside from the introduction and concluding statement, the article is divided into three parts. First, a brief elaboration of theological presuppositions. Second, a discussion on the significance of *salat* and *sawm* as praxis of spirituality in Islam. Third, a modest proposal on how *salat* and *sawm*, as praxis of spirituality, can become practical ways towards promoting solidarity among Christians and Muslims in the Philippines.

Initial Theological Affirmations

First of all, the advocacy of Muslim-Christian interfaith dialogue and solidarity in the Philippines is imperative not only due to the actual tensions and conflict in the region but primarily due to the self-understanding of both communities of faith. Both Islam and Christianity, aside from being monotheistic, affirm the dual structure of human existence as inter-acting and comprehending (in relation to God and with other beings). This means we can, and do encounter God through actualizing God's will in our lives, and inter-acting with others, and also comprehending partially God's nature and mystery. This partial understanding of God needs to be translated into words and communicated in order to be enriched and also to establish human community.

Secondly, both Islam and Christianity need to maintain the essentially communal and dialogical nature of our understanding of God, and to keep it dynamically open and alive. This dynamic freedom and openness is necessary to enrich each community of faith and establish a wider human community.

Thirdly, as a Christian who accepts the fundamental insights of the 16th century Reformation, I affirm that God's Word remains free in relation to particular community of faith. This is to safeguard the truth that God is the Sovereign Lord not only of the Church but also of the whole creation. Because God's Word is free, through our interfaith dialogue we must be open to the new breakthroughs whenever and wherever it pleases God. Thus, we must maintain the sense of humility, openness, responsiveness, and responsibility within the limits of our respective communities of faith.

Insights into Islamic Spirituality

I read an important book on Islamic spirituality. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, in the introduction to the volume, affirms that "spirituality in Islam is inseparable from the awareness of the One, of Allah, and a life lived according to His will."⁶ The core of the Islamic faith is the principle of unity (*al-tawhid*); and Islamic spirituality in all its plurality is determined by

⁶ Seyyed H. Nasr (ed.) *Islamic Spirituality: Foundations*, Vol. 4 (New York: Crossroads Publishing, 1987), xv.

tawhid. "Spirituality is *tawhid* and the degree of the spiritual attainment achieved by any human being is more other than the degree of his or her realization of *tawhid*."⁷

There are two major sources of spirituality in Islam, says Seyyed H. Nasr. These are the Qur'an and the 'inner' substance of the Prophet. Since Islam embraces all aspects of human life, both the outward and the inward, Islamic spirituality is nothing but the realization of unity (*tawhid*). In this paper, I would like to stress the ritual practices of Islam that lead to inwardness and the world of the spirit.

The Arabic word for spirituality is *ruhhanayah*. It is derived from *ruh* or spirit. Spirituality concerns what God has revealed or what God has commanded (Sura 17:85). As such, Islamic spirituality "possesses inwardness and interiority, and is identified with the real, permanent and abiding rather than the transient and passing." Furthermore, it evolves "a sense" of the presence of the *barakah* (grace and blessing) which flows in the veins of the universe and within the life of man to the extent that he dictates himself to God.⁸

In short, the essence of Islamic spirituality is to realize the principle of unity as expressed in the Qur'an and exemplified in the life of Prophet Muhammad. Throughout more than 1,300 years of Islamic history, the spirituality has rejuvenated and produced "countless men and women of saintly nature who have fulfilled the goal of human existence and brought joy to other human beings."⁹

Two of the five pillars of Islam, which deepen our understanding of Islamic spirituality, are ritual prayer (*salat*) and fasting (*sawm*). The practice of ritual prayers was borrowed by Prophet Muhammad from the Jews and Christians in Arabia.¹⁰ The importance of ritual prayers in Islamic piety and spirituality was prescribed by Muhammad himself in the Qur'an. Several verses attest to this. Here are some:

"Fulfill your devotional obligations ... and you find God" (Sura 2:110).

"Piety lies in believing in God ... observing your devotional obligations" (Sura 2:177).

"... perform your act of prayer befittingly, and praying at fixed hours prescribed for the faithful" (Sura 4:103).

"Observe the service of prayer, from the sun's declining from the meridian, to the darkening of the night, and the recitation at dawn" (Sura 17:78).

It is clear from the above verses that ritual prayer (*salat*) is central in the devotional life of the Muslims. It is obligatory, i.e., "a regulated ordinance of Islamic religion." The practice of five daily prayers, as indicated in the above Qur'anic verses, was based on two popular legends. The first is that when Muhammad ascended to heaven, Allah imposed fifty daily

⁷ *Ibid.*, xvii.

⁸ *Ibid.*, xviii.

⁹ H. A. R. Gibb (ed.) *Shorter Encyclopedia of Islam* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1961), 491.

¹⁰ Ahmed Ali, *Al Qur'an: A Contemporary Translation* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1988).

salats on the community. Nabi Musa (Moses) heard of it and told Muhammad: "Return to thy Lord for the community is not able to bear this." So Allah changed it from fifty to twenty-five *salats*. But Musa believed that twenty-five daily prayers would still be too much for the community. Again, he sent Muhammad back to Allah until the number was reduced to five. Another widely held tradition why there are five daily prayers is that the Angel Gabriel came down five times in one day and performed the *salat* in Muhammad's presence and the latter on each occasion imitated the angel.¹¹

There are three prerequisites for a valid *salat*. The first is the ritual purification by washing of the face, hands, head and feet with water. Once purification is done, the believer is ready to perform the *salat* and the reading of the Qur'an. The second prerequisite is the proper covering of the body. For females, the entire body must be covered except the face, hands and feet. The third requirement has something to do with the place. It must be clean, tranquil, and free from any distraction. Prayer rugs are often used but are not absolutely necessary. The worshipper must face the *Qiblah*, which indicates the precise direction of Mecca.¹²

The *Sura't Al-Fatiha* is also a very significant aspect of ritual prayers. *Fatiha* is the opening chapter of the Qur'an. According to Mahmoud M. Ayoub, *Fatiha* has a significant place in Islamic spirituality. First, it is an essential element in liturgical worship. As such, M. M. Ayoub claims that the *Fatiha* is being recited at least 17 times in the five daily prayers. Second, the *Al-Fatiha* is a formula of supplication, i.e., a source of divine blessing and an expression of praise and thanksgiving to God. As such, it is used to "begin every venture, to seal agreements and relationships, and to mark birth and death."¹³ Allahbakh Brohi says the *Sura't Al-Fatiha* "sets forth the essence of the prayer, if not the whole of Islamic religion itself. It is the quintessence of the whole of the Qur'an."¹⁴

M. M. Ayoub examines the *Sura't Al-Fatiha* verse by verse and suggests that its significance in Islamic spirituality parallels that of the Lord's Prayer in Christianity. He states: "Like the Lord's Prayer, the *Al-Fatiha* constitutes the essential element of liturgical worship... Again, like the Lord's Prayer, the *Fatiha* has been regarded not only as a prayer of supplication and praise but also as a wellspring of divine grace and blessing (*barakah*) which the pious can internalize and make their own through repeated recitation."¹⁵

The first line of the *Fatiha* is "In the name of God, the All-Merciful, the Compassionate." This is known as the *Al-Basmalla* or the invocation. It is comparable to the Christian formula "In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit." The importance of the *Basmalla* is attested to by the following statement: "All branches of knowledge are contained in four sacred books: the Torah, Psalms, Gospels, and the Qur'an. The knowledge contained in the

¹¹ Gibb, *op cit.*, 491.

¹² Keith Crim, *Abingdon Dictionary of Living Religions* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1981), 577.

¹³ M. M. Ayoub, "The Prayer in Islam," in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, XLVII, No. 4 (December 1979), 635.

¹⁴ Allahbakh Brohi, "The Spiritual Dimension of Islam," in Seyyed H. Nasr (ed.) *Islamic Spirituality* (New York: Crossroads Publishing, 1987), 132.

¹⁵ Ayoub, *op. cit.*, 639.

first three is all contained in the Qur'an. The knowledge of the Qur'an is expressed in the *Fatiha*, and the *Fatiha* is contained in the *Basmalla*.¹⁶

Islamic tradition affirms that performance of the five daily *salats* secures entrance into Paradise. It is said that on the day of the final reckoning, the performance of *salat* is the consideration of the first importance: "The first thing to be dealt with is the *salat*; if this point is in order, the person has attained bliss, if not then the person is lost."¹⁷ In short, *salat* should be performed devoutly, wholeheartedly and with concentration because as Ibn Sina said, it is "an intimate conversation with God." Ibn Sina further wrote that the "essence of *salat* is the recognition of God in His existence." He then asserted that "a man in prayer is in intimate conversation with his Lord.... Those who are in this state of mind are spiritually in the presence of God as they gaze upon the deity in a real vision."¹⁸

Let us now expand our understanding of Islamic spirituality by discussing the significance of fasting (*sawm*). According to Zafar Ishaq Ansari, *sawm* or fasting is part of "an act of worship that consists of religiously intended abstention from eating, drinking, and sexual intercourse from dawn till dusk."¹⁹ The original Arabic word *sawm* means "to be at rest." The practice of fasting seems to have been appropriated by Muhammad from the Jews and Christians whom he encountered. It is believed that Muhammad introduced the practice of fasting to his followers in 622 CE. He himself fasted and enjoined his followers to do the same on the 10th day of the month of Muharram. The Qur'anic injunction for the practice of *sawm* is in Sura 2:183-185. Fasting is commanded on the believers so that they "might become righteous." The number of days in the month of Ramadhan is fixed by the Qur'an. In Muslim understanding, fasting is "a means of fostering piety, of celebrating the glory of God, and of thanking Him for revealing the Qur'an as a guide for [humankind] and the clear signs for guidance and judgment."²⁰

The practice of fasting during the month of Ramadhan has special significance in Muslim religious life. It is obligatory for anyone who has reached the age of puberty and is still in full possession of his/her senses. Those who are traveling, women who are pregnant, nursing or menstruating, and those who are sick are exempted from fasting, but they have to make up for it at a later date. The elderly and the incurably sick are totally exempted from fasting. Fasting begins when "the white thread of dawn appears" and continues "until the night falls" (Sura 2:187). It is a widespread practice following the Qur'anic prescription that those who fast should eat before dawn and again after sunset, and they could break the fast with a light meal or *iftar*. They have to take the light meal hurriedly because the sunset prayer (*maghrib*) is performed immediately after twilight.

Like food, sexual intercourse is allowed after sunset and before the break of dawn. The Qur'an says: "You are allowed to sleep with your wives on the nights of the fast. They are your dress as you are theirs. God is aware you are cheating yourself, so He turned to you

¹⁶ Ayoub, *ibid.*, 640.

¹⁷ Gibb, *op. cit.*, 498.

¹⁸ Gibb, *op. cit.*, 499.

¹⁹ Zafar I. Ansari, in *Encyclopedia of Religion*. Vol. 13, Mircea Eliade, ed. (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1987), 90.

²⁰ Ansari, *ibid.*, 91.

and pardoned you. So now you may have intercourse with them, and seek what God has ordained for you" (Sura 2:187).

Let us now assess the importance of fasting as held by Muslims through the ages. The noted Muslim reformer Al Ghazzali observed that "the high esteem in which fasting stands with God" is twofold. First, "fasting is a passive act and no one sees men fast except God." Second, fasting is a "means of defeating the enemy of God, because human passions, which are the Shaitan's [Satan] means of attaining his ends, are stimulated by eating and drinking."²¹

There is a widespread belief among Muslims today that fasting, especially during the month of Ramadhan, "is the most fitting atonement for sins committed in the course of the year." No wonder, the practice of fasting is widely observed among Muslims. They have a tradition that a person who practices fasting has a more pleasant scent before God than that of any perfume. It is also believed that a person who fasts is highly honored in Paradise; he or she enters by a special gate and meets God and receives heavenly joy.²² With these promises of heavenly reward, and the inner assurance of one's intimate relationship with God, Muslims have a vibrant and sustained praxis of spirituality that we can only envy as Christians.

Salat and Sawm: Pathways to Muslim-Christian Solidarity

After discussing the theoretical and practical significance of ritual prayer and fasting, let me now propose that these two pillars of Islamic faith could be effective instruments for promoting the bond of Muslim and Christian solidarity or what a Spanish Muslim, Khalid Duran, calls "Chrislamic" solidarity.²³ Duran cites examples of Muslim-Christian cooperation "born out of a very simple necessity" amid the backdrop of "centuries of futile enmity." These samples of synergistic efforts "resulted in the birth of a new symbol, illustrating unity of purpose of the two religious communities."²⁴

This new symbol is a white flag bearing the Red Crescent and the Cross. Duran cited two noteworthy experiences of Muslim-Christian cooperation. First is the experience of some 200 medics from France who "spent about a year with the Afghan resistance in a country ravaged by the Soviet occupation forces." Afghanistan with an entirely Muslim population "has always shown a repellant attitude toward every thing foreign." But the Afghan were deeply touched by the "sacrificial spirit" of the young French volunteers who risked their lives during "every moment of their sojourn in the 'liberated areas' sharing the sufferings of a people subjected to the most savaged aggression of our times." Hashint Zamani, a poet of the Afgan resistance, describes this experience as "a new page that has been opened in Muslim-Christian relations."²⁵

²¹ Gibb, *op. cit.*, 506-507.

²² Gibb, *ibid.*, 507.

²³ Khalid Duran, "Muslim-Christian Cooperation," in Hans Kung & Jurgen Moltmann (eds.) *Christianity Among World Religions* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1986), 22-28.

²⁴ Duran, *ibid.*, 22.

²⁵ Duran, *ibid.*, 24.

Another significant effort towards Muslim-Christian relations was spearheaded by the Mission Academy of Hamburg University in Germany. This is noteworthy because the work has something to do with the Moros, “a suppressed Muslim minority in the southern Philippines.” Staff of the Mission Academy endeavor “to preserve Moro literature and traditions”, making them available to the media, thus helping the Moros maintain their identity. Due to these efforts, the Moros have developed a new consciousness that their struggle for freedom is not a war between Christianity and Islam. Rather, their collective struggle is a popular resistance against a corrupt regime (the then Marcos dictatorship) that was just as anti-Christian as it was anti-Muslim.

The important realization that the “Moro problem” in the Philippines is not a conflict of religions (Christianity vs. Islam) has motivated enlightened leaders of both groups to embark on efforts at mutual understanding and cooperation. In these efforts, we must listen to the Second Vatican Council’s declaration [“The Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions”] that Christians, whether Roman Catholic or Protestants, should look upon Muslims with “sincere respect” because their monotheistic faith “often reflects a ray of that Truth which enlightens all [peoples].”²⁶ Moreover, Vatican II declares that the Muslim “submit wholeheartedly even to God’s inscrutable decrees, just as did Abraham, with whom the Islamic faith is pleased to associate itself. Though they do not acknowledge Jesus as God, they revere him as a prophet. They also honor Mary, the virgin mother of Jesus; at times they call on her, too, with devotion. Consequently, they prize the moral life, and give worship to God especially through prayer, almsgiving and fasting.”²⁷

Although these efforts will not settle important theological differences, they will sail forth amid tumultuous ocean of human suffering and will continue to deepen humanitarian commitment for the defense of human rights. It is at this point, I believe, that the praxis of Islamic spirituality such as *salat* and *sawm* could open the way towards a confidence-building mechanism between Christians and Muslims that will lead to a bond of “Chrislamic” solidarity.

Let me describe here a program (“Muslim-Christian Dialogue Exposure”) which I personally facilitated in my capacity as a college chaplain in Southern Christian College, in Midsayap, Cotabato. This was a part of a series of activities we call “Duyog Ramadhan”. The word “duyog” means “to accompany”. As a program, therefore, it is an expression of solidarity on the part of Christian Filipinos with Muslim Filipinos. It was a unique educational campaign to build and deepen Christian awareness and understanding about Muslim Filipinos—their faith and culture—and together discuss the practical issues of life such as socio-economic and political struggles, cultural and religious practices, our common hopes and aspiration for a wholesome and harmonious coexistence.²⁸

The activity started with a two-day live-in retreat which included orientation into the purpose of the program, getting to know the participants and facilitators, sharing of

²⁶ Walter M. Abbott, S.J. (ed.) *The Documents of Vatican II* (New York: Association Press), 662.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 663.

²⁸ For a detailed description of this program see my book, *Strengthening Muslim-Christian Solidarity* (Davao City: SCC MIND Series No. 1, 1992), 32-37; 48-51.

perceptions and experiences regarding Muslim-Christian relationship, lecture presentation on the national situation, the history of the Moro struggle, the meaning of Ramadhan and the practices of ritual prayer and fasting, etc. After the two-day intense encounter, participants were brought to different Muslim villages for exposure for two days. A pair of Muslim and Christian participants stayed with a Muslim family for 24 hours or more, to be part of the family, as it were. The pair joined the family activities, particularly in the observance of fasting and ritual prayer. And since the family members were fasting, there are no heavy chores except sitting or lying down on the floor and engaging in conversation. By evening, the pair joined the family in going to the Mosque as the whole village community came together to celebrate *Id-ul-Ftr*, a religious service to break the fast with a community feast (*buka*). The following morning the participants came back to the college campus for a half-day evaluation and sharing of significant insights gained from the experience.

Without exception, all Christian participants shared many positive impressions of their Muslim hosts as well as the whole village celebration and feast. The religious devotion and ethical practices of Muslims are quite similar to Christian practices. This was the discovery of the Christian participants. Of course, for most of the Christian participants, it was their first experience of the practice of fasting. This experience brought them to a deeper appreciation and understanding of the poverty situation for majority of the Muslim villagers. The realization among the participants was that the poverty situation was one that makes the majority of the Muslims and Christians share the struggle for liberation and freedom. In short, there is a realization of the oneness of the struggle against poverty.

It is at this juncture that the deep well of spiritual resource of both faiths becomes a powerful weapon for the common struggle against poverty. There is the discovery of spiritual strength which is abundant, and yet latent, in both Christian and Islamic faiths. This latent spiritual resource is waiting to be tapped for the building of a more peaceful, harmonious and productive 'Chrislamic' bond of solidarity.

Concluding Remarks

Thus far, we have recognized the urgent need for a serious study of spirituality among Muslim and Christian Filipinos. We have suggested that ritual prayer and fasting have been of central importance in Islamic spirituality through the ages. Muhammad prescribed their observance as works of piety as attested by the Qur'an. We have described their theological and practical significance and they could be used as effective instruments in promoting a wholesome Muslim-Christian relationship.

The annual celebration of Duyog Ramadhan promoted by theological centers and universities has contributed to the confidence-building mechanism among Muslim and Christians in Cotabato (Central Mindanao). It has promoted stronger bonds of 'Chrislamic' solidarity forged with the realization of three factors. First, the discovery that the so-called Muslim-Christian conflict in Mindanao (which has now spread in major population centers throughout the country) is not really a war between the two communities of faith—Islam and Christianity. Second, the discovery that both Christians and Muslims could draw from their respective wellsprings of spiritual resources, particularly the practice of *salat* and

sawm. Third, and more significantly, the discovery that we are not only drawn closer by our shared poverty but by the unity (*tawhid*) which we find in God, the All-Merciful and Compassionate One! Our nearness and intimate conversation with God through the praxis of prayers and fasting lead us to establish the bond of 'Chrislamic' solidarity that could restore the landscape of peace, harmony and prosperity to our beloved yet blood-stained Motherland!