

A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE ON ISLAMIC CONCEPTS OF *JIHAD*, *IMAN* AND *ISLAM* IN THE CONTEXT OF MINDANAO PEACE PROCESS

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ABSTRACT

This paper is an excerpt of a full-blown study that the author did on the role of religion in the peace process in Mindanao of Southern Philippines. It attempts to understand and analyze Islamic concepts of Jihad, Iman and Islam and their significance to the problem of armed conflict in Mindanao. Analyses of these concepts is based mainly from the perspective of Islamic liberation theology specifically on the works of Farid Esack, Asghar Ali Engineer, and Fazlur Rahman, whose thoughts on the subject are seen to have more relevance towards development of a contextual Islamic theology of peace and liberation that is reflective of the historical, socio-political, cultural, and economic conditions in Mindanao of Southern Philippines. The study attempts to understand the meanings of Jihad, Iman and Islam and draw out essential and significant theological, ethical, and political principles and values which are relevant to the issues of conflict in Mindanao of Southern Philippines, and the role of religion in the peace process. Based on the principles and values derived from the study of the said Islamic concepts, the study attempts to construct a theological and political agenda that is informed by the historical, social, and political context in Mindanao of Southern Philippines.

Keywords: Christian Perspective; Jihad; Iman; Islam; Mindanao Peace Process

INTRODUCTION

It must be recognized at the outset that Islam is so diverse, that it is hard to speak of one single Islamic interpretation or belief that could represent the different groups and entities of Islam. Within Islam itself, there are divergent groups and factions with different and distinct cultural, ethnic, social, political and theological orientation who share different views and interpretations of the Islam faith in relation to the world and society as taught in the Quran. Hisano Kato (1980) in his book, "The Clash of Ijtihad- Fundamentalist Versus Liberal Muslims" points out differences over interpretations of Islam, some of which are "diametrically" opposed to one another.

Thus, “it is a truism to say that there is no single entity called Islam only the various Islams” manifested in a widely varied geographical, cultural, political and historical milieu (Graham, 1993: 495). This is particularly true in Southern Philippines, where Islam is represented and expressed in and through varied ethno-cultural, political identities, and historical settings. These differing and sometimes conflicting views and interpretations of the Qur’an are not merely products of different ethno-linguistic, political and cultural factors. Mainly, they stem from the unresolved hermeneutical problem that raises the issue of how Qur’anic teachings are to be interpreted and understood both in their original intent and in the current peculiarly complex and pluralistic context.

Traditionalist Muslims stick to the literal, legalistic, and formalistic method of interpreting the Quran which is characteristically rigid, fixed, and inflexible. Over the years, this kind of interpretation is sort of “sacralized” and regarded as the only “valid” and “legitimate” method of interpretation. Any deviation from it may be viewed as an “assault” and “betrayal” of the true intent of the Quran. Thus, it leaves very little or no room for further interpretations (Esack, 1997 & Engineer, 1990).

This position however, is challenged by the more liberal Muslim scholars who believe in the dynamic and contextual reading of the Quran which is more open, adaptable, and contextually relevant. They see the need to interpret, formulate and develop new Islamic theological and political thoughts and actions which are more compatible with existing socio-cultural and political context. This view reflects much the Islamic Liberation theology perspective that insists on the crucial importance of the social context in shaping one’s interpretation, and therefore, one’s expression of religion. Thus, the historical, socio-political, cultural and economic context of the society in which a religion is located is important in shaping the form and scale of its influence.

To understand Islamic hermeneutics of peace and liberation, it is important to go back and understand the socio-cultural and politico-economic situations existing in Mecca before the introduction of Islam. The period before Islam was called a period of *jahilliah* (ignorance) (Khadduri, 1984: 116). The social outlook of the Arabs was very narrow and people were divided along different tribal and ethnic lines, each having its own idol and tribal god. The society was characterized by fierce competition and rivalry among different tribes for economic gains and political power. “There was no concept of humanity beyond one’s own tribe (Engineer, 1990: 11; Ahmed, 1988; Barakat, 1993).” Women were being discriminated and many of them were politically, socially and economically deprived (Engineer, 1990).

The economic scene was quite depressing. The weaker sections of society

were being marginalized and pushed to the periphery of human existence. The economic woes of the poor [*miskin*], orphans and widows, many of whom were reduced to slavery and indignity were “indescribable” (Engineer, 1990: 28). The rich and the powerful on the other hand lived a life of luxury and disregarded their obligations to help and feed the poor. In fact, they had sacrificed and exploited the poor for economic and political advantage (Engineer, 1990: 30).

It was in the midst of such despicable condition that the Prophet Muhammad emerged and launched his war of liberation against all forms of enslavement and oppression. The Prophet was a great activist who worked for the liberation of the oppressed, the poor, the slaves, the needy and the ignorant (Engineer, 1980: 19-28). He fought against the arrogant rulers and elites and all forms of unjust and oppressive systems and practices which were contrary to the teachings of the Quran and the will of God for humankind (Engineer, 1979: 45).

Islam was therefore introduced as a religion of peace and “had been a ‘harbinger’ of change and liberation” (Engineer, 1979: 11). Islam had “emancipated man (woman) from the evils of slavery and degradation. It “liberated man from the tyranny and dominance” of the powerful (Nadwi, 2006: 11). This is quite evident in the life and missionary campaigns of the Prophet Muhammad who put up a strong challenge to the status quo-the rich traders of Mecca who belonged to the leading tribe called Quraysh-who were arrogant and drank with power and greed (Engineer, 1975: 17-18). The Prophet gathered around himself the poor and the oppressed and even the slaves of Mecca in his battle against all forms of exploitation and injustice.

The prophet was a catalyst of change and transformation. His involvement in the struggle for the establishment of a just and humane society is described clearly as follows:

“The Prophet himself did not opt to live far away from the camp of men. He worked and toiled among things just as they are. He did not achieve the glory of the just, except by way of the risk of his life. He only made triumphal entry into Mecca after confronting every danger and after subjected to every taunt of sarcasm. At Mecca he was not merely content to be the preacher of the new faith; he became also the leader of the new city where he organized the religious, social and economic life. He shared personally in the construction of the mosque and dwellings of the emigrants...Charged to deliver a message, he opted for action, because he was convinced that a message can only pass from the realm of life by taking the hard road of involvement” (Talib, 1966: 109-166).

However, the revolutionary element in Islam was toned down a few decades

after the death of the Prophet Muhammad by the vested interests of the ruling elites particularly with the establishment of the powerful Umayyad Empire. The Jihad which was originally enjoined on the faithful only for fighting against *mustakbirin* (the arrogant and the powerful) for liberating the oppressed and the weak had now come to be employed for widening the frontiers and consolidating the power of the Umayyad dynasty (Nadwi, 2006: 25).

The *Ulama* came to support the powerful establishments, emphasized ritual practices and played down social justice in defense of the weak and the powerless. They came to identify themselves with the *mustakbirin* (the powerful and the arrogant) while neglecting the weak and the oppressed (*mustad' ifin*) Islam was then used to legitimize and enforce the maintenance of unjust political and economic systems (Engineer, 1990: 1; Nadwi, 2006: 25). “The history of Islam provides ample evidence of the Ulama having sided with the oppressive establishments in the name of Islam” (Engineer, 1990: 58).

Feudalism has also significantly eroded Islamic values of justice throughout the medieval ages. During this period, Islamic theology got its twist to favor those who were in power and to protect the status quo. “Islamic theology which was so deeply concerned with socio-economic justice for the protection and welfare of the weaker sections of the society such as orphans, widows, poor and needy and the oppressed began to indulge in eschatology and speculative intellectual pursuits which neglect real and existential issues.” Consequently, “Islam lost all relevance to the social context” (Engineer, 1990: 5-11).

Unjust and oppressive practices still continue up to this time when Islam is used as a means to protect the interest of a few at the expense of the weak and oppressed masses. Today, as Engineer observes, “Despite so many talks of Islamization in several Islamic countries, no serious attempt has been made in anyone of them for establishing just socio-economic structures.” Lamentably, “disparities of wealth so fervently denounced by the Quran continue and the upper classes indulge in conspicuous consumption while the poorer sections continue to suffer” (Engineer, 1990: 85-87). It is in this context that Islamic hermeneutics of peace and liberation must be analyzed and understood.

Given the above historical background, it is important to go back and analyze the Islamic concepts of *Jihad*, *Iman* and *Islam* and their importance to current socio-cultural, economic and political realities reigning in Southern Philippines. More specifically, it is important to see how the Islamic values and principles of peace, justice and liberation can be meaningfully employed for cooperative and collaborative efforts among different religious groups which are involved in the Mindanao peace process.

THE THEOLOGICAL AND POLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF *JIHAD*

Jihad literally means, “to struggle”, to “exert oneself”, or “to spend energy or wealth” (Esack, 1997: 106). Etymologically, the term comes from Arabic root *jahada* which means “to strive”, “to endeavor”, “to struggle” which applies to any effort exerted towards a certain purpose, but basically, it connotes an endeavor towards a noble and “praiseworthy aim” (Peters, 1996: 622). The term is used in the Quran to convey varied meanings ranging from warfare, to inner contemplative spiritual struggle, and even exhortations for righteous living. In the Quran, jihad is always followed by the expressions “in the path of God” and “with your wealth and yourselves” (Esack, 1997: 107).

There are three levels of jihad: personal, verbal; and physical. Personal *Jihad* is considered the most important form, the “greater jihad.” This type of jihad, called the *Jihadun-Nafs*, is the intimate struggle to purify one’s soul of evil influences, both subtle and overt. It is the struggle to cleanse one’s spirit of sin. The Qur’an and the Hadith (the collected sayings of the Prophet Muhammad) use the word “*jihad*” to refer to personal struggles. It is basically a call to put “Allah ahead of loved ones, wealth, worldly ambitions and one’s own life. It is a call to strive for righteous deeds and a struggle to live faithfully for the cause of Allah. A well-known tradition (hadith) has Muhammad say on returning from battle, “we return from the little jihad to the greater jihad, the more difficult and crucial effort to conquer the forces of evil in oneself and in one’s own society in all the details of daily life” (Armstrong, 1993: 23).

The second type, verbal *Jihad*, refers to striving for justice through verbal proclamation and non-violent actions. The Prophet Muhammad encouraged Muslims to demand justice in the name of Allah. When asked which jihad is better, he replied, “a word of truth in front of an oppressive ruler.” The life of the Prophet was full of striving to gain the freedom, to inform and convey the message of Islam. During his stay in Mecca, he used non-violent means and used armed struggle against oppressive enemies only when it was inevitable.

In Mecca, the Prophet and his followers were severely persecuted that they were forced to flee to Medina. The Meccans were not satisfied, so, they pursued Muhammad to Medina. Muhammad and his followers were then forced to fight back which resulted to a series of bloody confrontations. Thus, fighting for Muslims became a prescription that was codified in the Quran (Ridgeon, 2001: 3). War had become obligatory for the faithful who were commanded to take up arms to fight the wars of Allah. In that sense, Muslims had to speak the language of peace when there is peace and speak the language of war where it arises (Haykal, 1976: 211). But while fighting and warfare might sometimes be necessary, it is only a minor part of the whole jihad or struggle.

This last type, physical *jihad*, refers to the use of physical force in defense of Muslims against oppression and transgression by the enemies of Allah. Allah commands that Muslims lead peaceful lives and not transgress anyone. If they are persecuted and oppressed, the Quran instructs that they migrate to a safe and peaceful place: “Lo! Those who believe, and those who emigrate [to escape persecution] and strive in the way of Allah, these have hope of Allah’s mercy...” If relocation is not possible, then Allah also requires Muslims to defend themselves against oppression by fighting against those who fight against them: “To those against whom war is made, permission is given [to defend themselves] because they are wronged and verily, Allah is Most Powerful to give them victory.” War is permitted in Islam as long as it is for the cause of stopping an aggressor, aiding truth, and achieving justice. Thus, it is used against all social evils that corrupt, degrade and violate human dignity and freedom.

As it appears, *jihad* has a multiplicity of meaning and has been interpreted differently among different Islamic groups with different and sometimes contrasting theological thoughts and emphasis. For Schleifer (1982: 122), the term could mean the “sacralization of combat” with a view that Allah has decreed *jihad* as a “legitimate institution of warfare to preserve Islam and convey it to people at large and to remove the obstacles in its way” (Al-Lahim et. al., 1995: 48). Consequently, *Jihad* is understood as a call for Muslims to fight against non-Muslims who are viewed “obstacles” in the way of Islam. But even if war and aggression is allowed in Islam, it has certain instructions and limits that must be observed by every Muslim. For instance, Muslims are instructed to fight those who fight them, and not to commit aggression first, as God does not like transgressors: “And fight in the way of Allah, those who fight against you, but transgress not the limits. Truly Allah likes not the transgressors.”

The Quran also instructs Muslims to stop fighting those who wish to cease fighting them, and to accept peace with the enemy who becomes inclined towards peace: “But if they incline to peace, you also incline to it, and (put your trust) in Allah. Verily, He is the All-Hearer, the All-Knower.” Muslims are called to fight only if someone transgresses against them but they are at the same time admonished to fear God and to restrain themselves to this limit. Muslims are also enjoined not to let hatred of some people for past reasons to lead them to transgress against those people or be hostile towards them. They are also instructed to help each other in good and righteous actions, and not to cooperate in aggression and sin, and it reminds them finally of the strict punishment of God to encourage them to abide by these principles.

Against the traditional juristic understanding which gives emphasis on *jihad* as armed struggle or sacred war, Esack equates *jihad* with “struggle and praxis” Given the comprehensiveness of the use of the term *jihad*, he believes that it is “simultaneously a struggle and praxis” towards the realization of peace based on justice (Esack, 1997: 107). Despite its popular interpretation as a sacred armed struggle or war, Esack argues that the term *jihad* was “always understood by Muslims to embrace a broader struggle to transform both oneself and society” (Esack, 1997). *Jihad* therefore has both personal and social dimension that seeks to transform and liberate not only individuals but also communities, structures and institutions from the evils of greed, selfishness, exploitation and oppression.

Esack maintains that justice is “the central objective of *jihad*,” therefore, “*jihad* is a war against injustice for it seeks to destroy and eradicate unjust structures and systems” (Esack, 1997). The Quran establishes *jihad* as the path to establishing justice and praxis as a way of experiencing and comprehending truth. Therefore, the faithfuls are enjoined not to abandon the struggle towards its realization.

Engineer observes that while *jihad* could mean “striving” or “fighting” which in some occasions might call for war or armed struggle, it is never meant for “promoting one’s own interest or the interest of any establishment; it must be for promoting the cause of the oppressed and the weak” (Engineer, 1990: 6; Khadduri, 1995). *Jihad* in that sense is “to be primarily waged either for protecting the interests of the oppressed and the weak or to defend one’s self against aggression” (Engineer, 1990: 7). The interest of the weak and the oppressed is central to the teachings of the Quran so that the faithfuls are called to fight for the cause of the poor and the oppressed without fail:

“And how should you not fight for the cause of Allah, and for the weak among men, women and children who are crying: Our Lord! Deliver us from this city of the oppressors. Oh give us from your presence some protecting friend! Oh send us from Your presence someone to help us!”

A *mujahid* (one who strives, fight for the right cause) is highly esteemed in the Quran and one who receives favor from God: “Those of the believers who sit still, other than those who have a (disabling) hurt, are not on an equality with those who strive in the way of Allah with their wealth and lives.

Taken from its broader context, *jihad* has a liberationist element that liberates individuals from the evils of greed and selfishness that breeds manipulative and exploitative practices. It is striving in the path of God, the way of justice. It is

striving in the work of justice, for the liberation of the poor and the weak, from unjust structures and systems of oppression. Arrogance of power, negation of justice, oppression of the weak, suppression of legitimate aspirations of the common people, concentration of wealth and political power and everything that promotes unjust and exploitative actions and practices are to be fought against because they negate the dignity of human life and resist God's will for humankind. "The emphasis is Jihad for liberation not jihad for aggression" (Engineer, 1990: 8-10).

Despite the popular view of *jihad* as "war" or "armed struggle," a thorough study of this key Islamic theological concept shows that it has transformative and liberative character that liberates individuals and societies from selfishness, greed, and arrogance towards the realization of justice and peace. *Jihad* has to be understood in an "emancipatory way as an offensive against destructive civilization and must be established as a strategic plan to empower civil society." In that sense, religion must be understood in an "emancipatory way to accelerate democracy and civil society. Religion in this respect does not become a "political shield" that protects the interest of the status quo but one that liberates, siding with the weak and empowering society" (Madjid, et. al., 2006: 116).

Jihad as understood from its liberationist character as struggle and praxis towards the realization of peace and justice provides a new way of looking at the role of Islam in the whole Mindanao peace process. It suggests alternative ways of achieving justice and peace far beyond simple armed struggle and violent approaches which proved to be costly and ineffective. *Jihad* as struggle against injustice calls for a different kind of war. It is a war against every form of greed, conceit, and injustice towards the establishment of a just social order which is only made possible through concerted and collaborative peace praxis.

THE ISLAMIC CONCEPTS OF *IMAN* AND *ITS IMPLICATIONS*

Iman is the verbal noun of the fourth form from the root a-m-n. The root suggests "being secure", "trusting in", "turning to", from which follows its meanings of "good faith", "sincerity", and "fidelity" or "loyalty". The fourth form (*amana*) has the double meaning of "to believe", and "to give one's faith". Its primary meaning is "becoming true to the trust with respect to what God has confided in one by a firm believing with the heart; not by profession of belief with the tongue only" (Lane, 1980: 1-7). It is also used in the meaning of "trust" in the sense that, one feels secure upon trusting something.

The term with different variations appears 244 times in Quran. Most frequently

recurring is the expression, “O those who have *iman*’ of which there are 55 instances. While the term is used essentially with reference to the followers of Muhammad, in 11 instances it refers to Moses and his followers and in 22 instances to other prophets and their followers (Esack, 1997: 118). It is used in the Quran in the sense of being at peace with oneself and in the sense of contentment, “security from external threats”, and in the sense of “depositing something with someone for safekeeping.” In its fourth form (*amana*), the verb is usually followed by the particle *bi* which means, “to have faith in”, “to recognize”, “to trust” (Esack, 1997: 118). The object of this “having faith” or “recognition” is God. The connection between faith and security implies the idea that those who have faith will attain peace and security (Esack, 1997). “*Iman* is an act of the heart, a decisive giving up of oneself to God and His message and gaining peace and security and fortification against tribulation” (Rahman, 1983: 171).

Iman can be defined in various ways (such as, “affirmation”, “verbal testimony”, “belief or righteous conduct”), but in its entirety, it is something more than just mere recognition and verbal testimony. It signifies values and qualities that must be lived out and exemplified in one’s life and conduct (Razi, 1990: 124). And so, those who have attained unto *iman*’ are admonished to “remould their lives in a particular direction, to orient themselves away from the various wrongs in society and towards God” (Esack, 1997: 120).

Mu’min can be defined under three levels or category namely: The essentially spiritual/personal; the socio-religious; and the socio-economic dimension (Esack, 1997: 121). Possessors of these characteristics are “the truly faithful”, “believers in truth”, and “blessed by God.” “There is a binding connection between *iman* and righteous deeds” (al-Tabari, 1954: 178). “*Iman* has to result in obedience” *Iman* is not attained until this obedience is attained and this is only accomplished when the inherent qualities are fulfilled. The connection between *iman* and righteous deeds is well founded in the Quran where the phrase “those who have *iman* and who do righteous deeds” occurs no less than thirty- six times (Esack, 1997: 121). Thus, *iman* is intrinsically connected to righteous deeds. Rahman shares the same conviction and concludes that “the separation of faith from action is totally untenable and absurd situation” (Rahman, 1983, 171). In the same vein of thought Izutsu points out that “the strongest tie of semantic relationship binds *salih* (righteousness) and *iman* together into an almost inseparable unit: and just as the shadow follows the form, wherever there is *iman*, there is *salihat* (righteous deeds)” (Izutsu, 1966: 204).

This idea goes against the traditional interpretation which defines *iman* in a

much narrow sense as the rituals reified by Islam (Esack, 1997). While *iman* as used in the Quran is in some instances connected to religious rituals, this is not always the case. There are numerous instances where the reference is made to *iman* as righteous conduct and truthful living whether in a general or specific sense. Faith bears good deeds. “Faith in a righteous and just God implies an undying commitment to the dignity and freedom of His people” (Esack, 1997). One who has *iman* must be “trustworthy, must strive for peace and security, and must himself have faith in all the good values of life-struggles toward the attainment of a just society” (Engineer, 1990: 12).

The term *iman* has been popularly used by some Muslim groups to emphasize reified Islam and promote religious exclusivism and superiority to the exclusion of “Others.” Regrettably, as Esack observes, “in many instances *iman* is no longer viewed as qualities that individuals may have, instead, it has now been regarded as the entrenched qualities of groups, bordering on ethnic characteristics”. Contrary to the popular exclusivist notion that confines *iman* within the reified Islam, Esack argues that “the term has significant pluralistic meaning that promotes interreligious solidarity and seeks to advance peoples’ liberation from all sorts of discrimination and other forms of oppression (Esack, 1997: 115). In other words, where there are individuals and groups of people (regardless of their religious affiliation), working for justice by defending the rights of the weak and the oppressed against their oppressors, *iman* is there. After all, *iman* is not mere acceptance and conformity to certain religious beliefs or systems. It is living out God’s command to do what is just for the promotion of life and harmony of all humankind.

‘Abd al-Ra’uf (1967: 98) insists on a “sociological appreciation of *iman*” In his view, *iman* which means “to become secure” or to “render security” has a sociological dimension taking into account its socio-historical background. For instance, historically it was noted that “Fear of insecurity was the major stumbling block against the faith in the early days of Islam.” To combat insecurity is “to create a social group in which members are closely knit together in a common bond” and where members are accountable to one another (Rauf, 1967: 98). A *mu’min* in that respect is someone who has both an inner deep personal conviction as well as social faith commitment. *Iman*, being deep personal response to God suggests that it cannot be confined within a particular socio-religious community such as Islam. Such attempt would be “a denial of the universality of God Himself” since “the Quran explicitly recognize the *iman* of those outside the socio-religious community of *mu’minun*” (Esack, 1997: 125).

Social justice in Islam is rooted in man’s faith (*iman*). Man’s belief in God entails

a sacred duty to do justice. There is no gap between faith and action. Faith and action must go together, for “one cannot exist without the other” (Naqvi, 1981). No one could rightly say he (she) has faith in God if he (she) neglects actual deeds of justice. Viewed from this perspective, faith has liberative character that transforms and liberates individuals and communities from the human pitfalls of selfishness, pride and arrogance. Thus, liberation and peace are rooted in people’s faith (*iman*) to God.

The peace process in Mindanao demands faith (*iman*) that produces praxis—not beautifully crafted theologies and dogmas. Peace demands action. The different religious organizations involved in the peace process must become tangible indicators of a strong and active faith (*iman*) that works, not just “paper organizations” with no genuine existence apart from organizational names with a set of approved plans, constitutions, and bylaws. Religious values and principles must not just remain as signs and symbols of faith. They must find concrete expressions in praxis that promotes justice and peace.

The challenge for the different religious actors in the Mindanao peace process is how they are supposed to relate faith in concrete terms and how they could become witnesses and bearers for God in an unjust society. Their task is not only to examine the socio-economic structures that create and entrench oppression, but also to examine their roles in response to them. Peace statements and religious dialogues will do nothing unless they are supported with actions designed to eradicate social injustice which is endemic in the current socio-political and economic system in Philippine society.

Farid Esack maintains that “Any religiosity which fails to see the connections between poverty and the socio-political structures which breed and sustains poverty and injustice but then hastens to serve the victims is little more than an extension of those structures, and therefore complicit in the original crime”. He observes that religions in many cases are guilty of playing “Santa Claus”, giving pieces of bread to the little ones who knock on their doors (Esack, 2013: 93). Charity works will do very little to solve the problem of poverty in Mindanao. There is a need to discover the forces in society that cause the problem and to work towards their eradication.

THE CONCEPT OF ISLAM

The word Islam is derived from the root, ‘s l m’ which means *salam*, i.e., peace. The meaning of the word as peace is based on the Quranic teachings that states: “And the servants of the Beneficent are they who walk on earth in humility, and when the ignorant *jahilum* address them, they say, Peace, *salaman*.” From

the infinitive of *aslama*, Islam means “to submit”, “to surrender”, “to fulfill or execute” (Esack, 2013: 93; Lewis, 1988). The term also means, “reconciliation”, “peace” or “wholeness.” As a verbal noun, the term appears only eight times in the Quran, whereas its foundation verb, *Aslama*, appears twenty-four times. (Esack, 2013: 130). Like any other Islamic theological concepts, the term Islam is subject to different views and interpretations. Obviously, there is a tension between the traditional interpretation which puts so much emphasis on the reified and institutionalized aspect of Islam, and the more radical view that puts emphasis on the active and dynamic aspect of Islam.

The traditional particularist-exclusivist perspective is based on several Quranic verses which refer to Islam as the only *din* acceptable to God. For instance, the Quran describes Islam as “the perfected religion” established by God’s choice for the community of Muhammad and the completion of His favor upon it. Those whose “breasts had been opened to Islam” are described as “following a light from his (her) Lord.” Whoever goes in search of a religion other than Islam, it will never be accepted of him [her], and in the life to come he [she] shall be among the losers”.

Taken from an exclusivist perspective, these Quranic teachings seems to suggest the superiority and singularity of Islam as the only true and acceptable religion (*din*) to God. It also follows that the only expression of religiosity that is acceptable to God is Islam which is often understood in its institutionalized and reified sense.

Among the well-known proponents of this traditional view are Al-Tabari who gives emphasis on the external aspect of Islam and insists that Islam requires the “act of joining the group who calls themselves Muslims” and on a personal level, an act of surrendering oneself to God by strict and rigid observance of Islamic laws and rituals (al-Tabari, 1954: 212). Ibn Arabi who insists that “the only true *din* (religion) is one that Allah has prescribed for Himself” implying that any religion other than Islam is false; Al-Zamakhshari who argues that “Islam is the religion according to God and all else is not *din*”; and Al-Razi who puts emphasis on the personal meaning of Islam which calls for “submission and obedience, entry into peace and purifying all service for God” This interpretation is more concerned with the interpretation of religion (*din*) as a form or systematic and institutionalized religious life which gives emphasis on “personal conduct, standard of behavior, customs, observances of certain religious rituals and practices” (Esack, 2013: 128).

The more radical interpretation is based on the idea that the term *din* as it is seen in the Quran does not frequently suggest “institutional religion” or personalized submission although some meanings may have such

implications. Radical view contends that while the exclusivist interpretation of Islam leads to the affirmation of the superiority of Islam over other faiths, “the universal underpinnings of the term Islam, in Quranic teachings lead one to the understanding that the text embraces all of those who submit to the will of God” (Rida, 1973). This embrace Rida concludes, includes the religious “Other” along with “the diversity of some of the obligations and the forms of practices in them, and with which they have been enjoined (Rida, 1973).” This view is based on Quranic teachings that recognize God’s presence and activity in other religions. Ra’uf explains that the infrequency of the use of Islam in the Quran suggests that it is concerned “not so much with the metaphysical and static thinking but with the active and dynamic meaning of the term” (Rauf, 1967: 94).

Openness, respect and tolerance towards other religions are some of the important liberative elements in Islam. The Quran makes it clear “there is no compulsion in religion.” Muslims are exhorted not to abuse those who call upon besides Allah lest they abuse Allah through ignorance. The Quran also teaches that a believer should show equal respect to all the prophets for they all believe in Allah and His angels and His books and His messengers. The Quran declares unequivocally that paradise is not the monopoly of any religious group. Whoever does what is just and what is good, whoever submits himself (herself) entirely to Allah, he (she) has his (her) reward from the Lord.

From the view point of history, Jane Smith observes that while it can be recognized that in some levels and contexts, particularly in the early Meccan period, the *din* of Islam is part of the reified Islamic belief systems, it is evident that “this was not the primary reference for their understanding of Islam as *din*” (Smith, 1975: 229). The same observation is corroborated by Cantwell-Smith who insists that while Islam as *din* “could conjure up the idea of Islam as a reified entity, this was by no means the only, and indeed the primary interpretation”. He concludes that in the Quran, whenever the word Islam is employed, it is “in a manner where it can be, and in many grounds almost must be, interpreted, not as the name of a religious system, but as the designation of a decisive personal act” (Smith, 1991: 109).

Rida commenting on the weakness and limitations of a “personalized” concept of Islam maintains that “this intensely personal submission of individuals to God and the universal spirit, in which all religious communities partake, bears no relationship to conventional Islam” (Rida, 1973). Moreover, he argues that while the essence of *din* has not changed, there were changes in the usage and application of the term in various periods in the history of Islam. The same observation is shared by Haddad who maintains that while the early

Meccan period seemed to emphasize the formal and personal dimension of Islam as *din*, it is shown that in the last part of the Meccan period there was an identification of the unchanging *din* with the “community of Abraham” and “the straight path,” and from this period onwards, the emphasis was shifted from personal to communal level. This leads on to the Medinan period when the emphasis on *din* as personal commitment is switched to the use of the term for commitment in the collective sense (Haddad, 1974: 119).

The problem with the particularist interpretation is that, it reduces *din* to a mere set of norms and beliefs and confines it within the reified and formalized parameters of a religious system. It espouses the idea that the only true Islam is reified Islam. A more objective analysis of the meaning of Islam however suggests that both the personalist sense and group sense are contained in the Quran. “Both senses must therefore be acknowledged in any attempt to make space for the one within the other: the importance of personal submission within the framework of group identification as well as the possibility of personal submission outside the parameters of the historical community of Islam” (Esack, 1997: 132).

Farid Esack captures the meaning of *Islam* in the following statement:

“The Quran portrays a Muslim as someone who submits to a divinity beyond, and more abiding, than that Muslim and beyond reified religion. God is *akbar* (greater than) any conception of Him or any form of institutionalized or non-institutionalized service to Him. It is to God that the Quran persistently requires *Islam*” (Esack, 1997).

One of the distinguishing features of Islam as pointed out by Engineer is “humility and peace as opposed to arrogance, animosity and war” (Engineer, 1990: 150). A careful examination of Quranic teachings would show that peace and humility are central to the Prophet’s mission. The usual and common Islamic greeting “*as salamu ‘alaykum*” (peace be upon you) is a constant reminder that Islam is for peace, not otherwise. Believers are also enjoined to address Allah with the word peace in accordance with the teachings of the Quran: “Their greeting on the day they shall meet Him will be, “*Salam*” [Peace]! And he has prepared for them a generous reward.” Paradise is described as a place where there is no vain or sinful talk but only the saying, Peace, Peace!

Salam connotes safety and peace. So, when a Muslim says *salam*, he/she gives news to the other person that he confers peace on him/her and he/she wants to make peace with him/her. *AlSalam* means God Almighty thus, when someone says *salam* it means, God is your caretaker or the one who watches over you (Lashin, 1970: 223).

Islam does not necessarily mean institutionalized religion or adherence to a specific system of belief and religious practice. The “surrendering of one’s self to God” which is the basic meaning of Islam does not only happen within the bounds and parameters of Islamic religion. It could happen anywhere at different times, contexts, and historical circumstances outside of the reified community of Islam. Islam understood as a verb rather than as a noun suggests that submission to God requires not merely confession but complete obedience to His will by doing what is right and what is just.

The Qur’an regards non-Islamic belief system as “religion” and attributes a religious significance to them. Moreover, instead of focusing on its own truth claims and evaluating all religions in reference to itself, the Qur’an proposes that the basis for action should be common or universal truths that are also accepted by the other religions. Theology in that sense, must concern itself with reflection which seeks to “express the content of a particular faith (faith of an historic community) in the clearest and most coherent language available” (Fakhry, 1983; Pailin, 1986: 39).

The Quranic view of Islam as a universal and all-encompassing concept of surrendering oneself to God provides a strong theological and political basis for a cooperative and collaborative action that goes beyond religious-institutional parameters and boundaries, as well as sectarian, ideological and organizational interests. As shown in the study (chapter 3), these narrowly defined organizational goals have significantly hampered peace-building efforts in Mindanao. Along this line, Farid Esack proposes the idea of “a ‘new Muslim’ who is adamant to a stagnant, and fossilized Islam that is confined to a set of rituals that are mere motions” and meaningless (Esack, 2013: 1-2). In his view, there is a need to develop a “meaningful and socially relevant Islam which is committed to social justice, individual liberty, and the quest for the Transcendent who is beyond all institutional, religious and dogmatic constructions, an Islam that challenges us to examine our faith in personally and socially relevant terms” (Esack, 2013: 1-2).

MAIN CONTEXT: ISLAM, A RELIGION OF PEACE, JUSTICE, AND LIBERATION

Historically, there is much evidence to prove that Islam arose to challenge and change the oppressive dominant status quo in favor of the oppressed and the exploited-the weaker sections of the society and the marginalized. As shown in the study, the theme of liberation and peace occupies a central place in Quranic teachings as exemplified in the three Islamic key theological concepts discussed above. The Quran lays emphasis on social justice in all aspects of

life. Social justice and equality are central to the Islamic vision of peace.

The Quran presents a universal and all-encompassing God, the God whose own unity (*tawhid*) is reflected in the oneness of His people, and the God who liberates His people from all forms of enslavement and oppression. The Quran also condemns all forms of exploitation and unjust dealings. It clearly denounces those who unjustly accumulate their wealth and use their power to exploit and oppress the poor and the powerless.

From the perspective of Islam in that sense, true religion is one that liberates and works towards the attainment of peace. Peace, means liberating and freeing humankind from injustice and servitude to other human beings. Peace is not based on a vague and undefined desire for peace but rooted in the Quranic vision of peace based on social justice and liberation of the marginalized and the oppressed. A contextual reading of the Quran would reveal that God is in the struggle for justice and freedom. Thus, a theology that accommodates and supports the structures and institutions of oppression is unscriptural and runs counter to the teachings of the Qu'ran.

Islam is ideally a religion that promotes peace and understanding among people of all faiths, and it strongly prohibits all forms of violence and aggression against all peoples regardless of their faith or race. God is the source of peace which is made possible through the execution of justice and equality among all men (women). This understanding of God provides a powerful motivation and framework of values on which promotion of justice, freedom, equality and restoration of human dignity must be pursued. It calls for a development program and policies that provide greatest benefit to the weakest and poorest sections of the society.

From the liberationist perspective, Islam does not protect the status quo and all the vested interests that go with it. "It is not passive reflection based on static medieval- oriented theology that reduced Islam to mere sterile spiritualism but a theology that is translated into concrete action, human projects achieved historically" (Engineer, 1990: 206). It means giving the marginalized masses their rightful place in determining their destinies and in achieving their aspirations. There can be no justice and peace unless the weaker and marginalized sections of society are excluded and deprived from participation in the struggle for a just and humane society.

The Islamic concept of the Oneness and Universality of God and human familyhood, provides a strong theological basis against pretended supremacy or presumptuous exclusivity. God is not confined to any religion or favors any particular nation, race, or culture. The wisdom behind dividing people into

tribes and nations is nothing more than the creation of variety, so that they may come to meet each other in an atmosphere of mutual respect and cooperation, and not for the promotion of hostility and difference. Sharing and caring and competing only for righteous deeds and holy virtue, competing for the benefit of the masses and individuals and seeking the pleasure of Allah who is the Lord of all, and who watches this brotherhood (sisterhood), protects it and calls all his servants to practice and establish it (Maududi, 1976: 19).

Action is based on the consciousness that God sees every person's conduct. Seeking God's pleasure is the mainspring of economic action. It is under the influence of a firm belief in the Divine Presence that affirms the equality of all men and women before God, about the poor having a right in the rich man's wealth because all wealth belongs to Allah, about a rich man's obligation to "spend in moderation because he is a trustee not an owner of his wealth, about man being essentially a free agent with definite social responsibilities to discharge to satisfy the demand for social justice" (Naqui, 1994: 15).

The main call for Islamic religion is to establish a just social reality. The evaluation of any act or statement should be measured according to whether or not it accomplishes the desired social reality. In Islam, acting for the cause of God is synonymous with pursuing justice. Islamic teachings reject oppression and injustice on interpersonal and structural levels (Abu-Nimer, 2008: 12). Islam must be understood as the religion of humanity for it carries the message of freedom and liberation towards social transformation. Islam is present in the face of humanity and is oriented to the needs of humanity (Abu-Nimer, 2008: 117). Al-Naim rightly observes that religion is not human abstraction. It is what human beings make out of it. It is what the believers believe and do. Thus, worshipping God, means having a "profound concern for humanity's needs and problems". Here, religion serves as a "locomotive to free men and women from the shackles of oppression" (Na'im, 2002: 30). Islam is a religion of "solidarity and peace" (Madjid, et. al., 2006: 45).

Peace-building in Islam involves protecting human rights and dignity, promoting equality among all people. Addressing conflicts through Islamic values and principles is an important resource in resolving the conflict in Mindanao. The principle of one *ummah* or community can be utilized to motivate conflicting parties to come to an agreement, achieve unity, gain strength, and be empowered by working together. *Ummah* can be used to mobilize unity and support against all forms and structures of oppression. It can be used as a collaborative approach to life's challenges, assist in social and political mobilization and can be harnessed in collective actions for socio-economic development and peace-building.

The Islamic concept of community (*ummah*) also calls and demands for a participatory approach in resolving the conflict in Mindanao which requires among others, consensus, consultation, and input that includes the large majority of the grassroots and marginalized masses, to hear their sentiments and aspirations, and in the process come up with a unified socio-political and economic agenda that would be beneficial to all. Engineer, emphasizing the value of consensus and mutual consultation points out that the Quran lays due emphasis on *Shura* (consultation) thus indicating that the nature of Islamic polity is not autocratic but democratic in spirit (Engineer, 1980: 1).

Whether Islam truly lends values and ethical principles that can be harnessed towards the establishment of a just and egalitarian society which is free of exploitation is beyond question. What is needed is sincere commitment to work for the realization of this vision. The question is how and who will do it? Engineer believes that, what is required of in the realization of such a just order, is courage of conviction and a strong sense of commitment to human values (Engineer, 1980: 205). Consequently, one needs to ask, will Muslim leaders who are keen to proclaim freedom and independence for the Bangsamoro people in Mindanao give up ambitious self-power-seeking efforts for their own ends and commit themselves to an Islamic vision of a just and egalitarian society? If they do, and with the participation of the deprived masses, then Islam will perhaps become a powerful moral ideal and an instrument for the eradication of unjust system and the development of a political program that could enhance freedom, economic development, and peace for Mindanao.

Farid Esack argues that the concept of solidarity in Islam goes beyond Muslim community alone. The *ummah* must be taken to include believers outside of Islam because all those who believe in God are members of this community. He insists that the universal community under God has always been a significant element in Muslim discourse against tribalism and racism (Esack, 1997; Esack, 1998). On the same vein of thought, Nasr also asserts that from the perspective of Islam, *ummah* (community) “implies all of human collectivity held together by common bonds that are themselves the foundation of social, juridical, political, economic and ethical links between its members (Nasr, 2002: 161). Thus, Christians and Muslims in Mindanao could establish collective and collaborative approaches that aim to address the needs and aspirations of the marginalized masses, to establish covenants, agreements, to resist structurally unjust arrangements, and support the legislation of laws that promote justice and equality among all human beings. If God’s will and His command is to establish a healthy society here on earth by sharing and partaking of life, then Muslims and Christians will have to take it as a serious project to work on.

CONCLUSION

This study on Islamic concepts of *Jihad*, *Iman* and *Islam* provides new insights on how Islam can play a significant role in the Mindanao peace process. *Jihad* as understood from its liberationist character as struggle and praxis towards the realization of peace and justice provides a new way of looking at the role of Islam in the whole Mindanao peace process. It suggests alternative ways of achieving justice and peace far beyond simple armed struggle and violent approaches which proved to be costly and ineffective. The Islamic concept of *Iman* shows that faith is liberative. It transforms and liberates individuals and communities from the human pitfalls of selfishness, pride and arrogance. The peace process in Mindanao demands faith (*iman*) that produces praxis- not beautifully crafted theologies and dogmas. Peace demands action.

The different religious organizations (Christians and Muslims alike) involved in the peace process in Mindanao must become tangible indicators of a strong and active faith (*iman*) that works, not just “paper organizations” with no genuine existence apart from organizational names with a set of approved plans, constitutions, and bylaws. Religious values and principles must not just remain as signs and symbols of faith. They must find concrete expressions in praxis that promotes justice and peace.

The understanding of *Islam* as a universal and all-encompassing concept of surrendering oneself to God provides a strong theological and political basis for a cooperative and collaborative action that goes beyond religious-institutional parameters and boundaries, as well as sectarian, ideological and organizational interests. It calls for a unified and collaborative work between Muslims and Christians in Mindanao to work together for the realization of a just and humane society.

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