



**SILENCE AS A STEP TOWARD THE PROCESS OF LISTENING
AND ITS CENTRAL ROLE FOR INTERRELIGIOUS RELATIONS:
A REFLECTION IN THE BACKGROUND OF THE PLURALITY
OF INDONESIA**

O silêncio como passo para o processo de escuta e seu papel central nas relações inter-religiosas: uma reflexão no contexto da pluraridade da Indonésia.

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ABSTRACT: This article is developed by drawing from the Indonesian context. The country is characterized with its plurality, in terms of religion, belief, language, culture, and ethnicity. I start reflecting on the discourse of silence by exploring the rituals practiced by the Hindus in Bali and a number of Muslims in Java. An effort is then made to elaborate it from a philosophical perspective in which silence can be understood as the beginning of listening. The further elaboration, from a theological perspective, is worked out by focusing on the figure of Mary, the Mother of Jesus, through whom silence with listening can be regarded as a way to live out the faith that seeks for understanding and wisdom. Finally, I put it on the circumstances of interreligious relations. Here, being silent for listening can be considered as a sort of culture that requires certain conditions, some of which are the readiness to deal with internal tensions and the capability to listen through the inner ear of the heart by way of discernment.

KEYWORDS: Silence. Listening. Faith. Understanding and Wisdom. Interreligious Relation.

RESUMO: O presente artigo se desenvolve a partir do contexto da Indonésia. Esse país é caracterizado por sua pluralidade em termos de religião, crença, língua, cultura e etnia. Começo a refletir sobre o discurso do silêncio, explorando os

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rituais praticados pelos hindus em Bali e por vários muçulmanos em Java. Faz-se então um estudo disso a partir de uma perspectiva filosófica na qual o silêncio pode ser entendido como o início da escuta. Em seguida, elaboro o tema a partir de uma perspectiva teológica, na qual se focaliza a figura de Maria, a Mãe de Jesus, na qual o silêncio na escuta pode ser considerado como forma de viver a fé que busca a compreensão e a sabedoria. Finalmente, coloco a questão das circunstâncias das relações inter-religiosas. Nestas, o silêncio na escuta pode ser considerado como um tipo de cultura que requer certas condições, algumas das quais são a prontidão para lidar com tensões internas e a capacidade de escutar através da audição interna do coração por meio do discernimento.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Silêncio. Escuta. Fé. Compreensão e sabedoria. Relação inter-religiosa.

Silence as Presented in Certain Religious Rituals in Indonesia

Bali is one of the thousands of islands in the Indonesian archipelago whose majority of its population are Hindus. This is worthy of note, due to the fact that Indonesia is one of the largest Muslim countries in the world. The government of Indonesia does recognize a number of religions and beliefs other than Islam, namely: Christianity, especially Catholicism and Protestantism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, and Local Religions.¹

One of the religious rituals celebrated by the Balinese Hindus is *Nyepi* which means 'being in silence'. As a day celebrated to mark the New Year in the Hindu calendar system, so-called Śaka (DOWSON, 2000, p. 283),² *Nyepi* is exceptional because, on the one hand it is labelled as a feast day, but on the other hand it is a day of intense silence. As such, the calendar system of Śaka was adopted from India. However, unlike the Hindus of India who commemorate the New Year of Śaka with unquietness, such as those in Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu or Kerala, the Balinese Hindus celebrate it by way of tranquillity.

Nyepi is observed as a most important part of the ritual series along with three other, namely *Melasti*, *Tawur Kesanga* and *Ngembak Geni*. The ritual of *Melasti* is the ceremony of prayer on the seashore to wash out all the

¹ As of December 31, 2021, the Indonesian population reaches to 273.87million, with 86.93% Muslims, 7.47% Protestants, 3.08% Catholics, 1.71% Hindus, 0.74% Buddhists, 0.03% Confucians, 0.05% the followers of Local Religions. Viva Budy Kusnandar, "Sebanyak 86,93% Penduduk Indonesia Beragama Islam pada 31 Desember 2021", 12 February 2022. Available: <https://databoks.katadata.co.id/datapublish/2022/02/12/sebanyak-8693-penduduk-indonesia-beragama-islam-pada-31-desember-2021>.

² The Śaka era commenced in 78 CE.

bad things in the past and to acquire sacred water from the sea which is believed as the origin of life. In this ceremony, people also clean sacred objects from the temples. *Tawar Kesanga* is the ceremony to appease the evil spirit called *Batara Kala* through offerings with the hope that it will not create any trouble. *Ngembak Geni*, literally meaning 'one may light a fire', is celebrated on the belief that, after performing *Nyepi*, one has reached out the state of inner purification. This ceremony is completed with a visit to the families, neighbours and relatives for exchanging forgiveness.

Those four rituals are celebrated in a few days with different phases. Being the third phase, the ritual of *Nyepi* is observed for 24 hours, starting at 05.00 a.m. in the morning until 05.00 a.m. the next day, with four elements – called the *catur bratha* of silence – that is to say: *amati geni*, *amati karya*, *amati lelungan*, and *amati lelanguan*. The first element means the abstinence from fire or the restriction of using light, the second, from any work, the third, from any travel, and the fourth, from any entertaining occasion (ARSAWATI, 2018). In performing the *catur bratha* of silence as a whole, the Balinese Hindus also need to make efforts to perform fasting (*upawasa*), to practice sleep restriction (*jagra*), to build a concentration of heart and mind (*dhyana*) and to raise prayers (*arcana*).³

By referring to Victor Turner's viewpoint which was in fact developed from Arnold van Gennep's thought on the rites of passage (GENNEP, 1960, p. 11)⁴ one could say that *Nyepi* serves as a ritual that refers more to the liminal or transition. The two rituals performed before *Nyepi* – namely *Melasti* and *Tawur Kesanga* – refer to the preliminary or separation. Meanwhile the ritual carried out after *Nyepi* – namely *Ngembak Geni* – refers to that of postliminal or incorporation. According to van Gennep, liminal means transitional (1960, p. 53) or in Turner's terminology, 'betwixt and in-between' (1967, p. 93-111) which literally means in a midway position, neither one thing nor the other. *Nyepi* is regarded as the liminal ritual because, by celebrating silence, one is placed to experience a transition from an outer purification to the inner one, in which one becomes situated in a bridge between two identities, betwixt and between 'what is' and 'what can or will be'.

Three fundamental faith constructions are firmly held by the Balinese Hindus, specifically: *tattwa*, *upacara* and *etika*. *Tattwa* means a basic belief, whereas *upacara* stands for ritual as the expression of *tattwa*, and *etika* as the manifestation of *tattwa*. For this, the ritual of *Nyepi* can be understood as a sort of celebration that plays a role as a way to make self-purification

³ The Editor of Wahana News, "Ritual Nyepi di Bali, dari Melasti hingga Ngembak Geni", 14 March 2021. Available: <https://wahananews.co/daerah/ritual-nyepi-di-bali--dari-melasti-hingga-ngembak-geni/0>

⁴ A complete scheme of the rites of passage includes preliminary rites (rites of separation), liminal rites (rites of transition), and postliminal rites (rites of incorporation).

and self-offering through which the Balinese Hindus will be able to find the practical guide for reaching the real truth. In Rig Veda, such signification is summarized in a terminology *mokshartham jagadhitaya ca iti dharma*, or the path of rightness (*dharma*) to achieve spiritual freedom (*moksa*) and worldly well-being (*jagadhita*).⁵

Nyepi or being silent is therefore celebrated not without meaning, because the various self-sacrifices (*tapa-yadnya*) that are exercised in this ritual are believed to lead the Balinese Hindus at the point in which they can listen to the realm of the inner self and the realm of the universe in the firmament of the divine power, in such a way that the spiritual happiness and worldly well-being are attained on balance. As such, spiritual happiness and worldly well-being themselves are the valuable points of *tattwa*. This belief also corresponds to the Hindu cosmology which emphasizes the harmony between the *bhuana agung* and the *bhuana alit*, between the macrocosm and the microcosm.

The ritual of *Nyepi* celebrated by the Balinese Hindus as a sort of acculturation between Hinduism and the local wisdom in the occasion of the new year can also be found in the Javanese ritual called *Mubeng Beteng*, that is to say 'the counter-clockwise circumambulation around the palace walls' (SUSANNE, 2014, p. 145). The latter ritual shows a form of acculturation between the religion of Islam and the Javanese local religious conviction (PONIMAN, 2019, p. 8). In fact, the first day of the first month in the Javanese calendar, known as Suro, corresponds to the same day of the first month in the Islamic calendar, called Muharram (RICKLEFS, 2001, p. 54-55).⁶

The ritual of *Mubeng Beteng* celebrated by a number of Javanese Muslims is performed by circumambulating around the palace fortress in a quiet atmosphere. In doing so, they are not allowed to speak to anyone or in a Javanese term *tapa bisu* – meaning the abstinence from speaking – as an opportunity for being thoughtful and reflective about the lifecycle, God's mercy, and the natural phenomena around. Clearly, a number of Javanese Muslims also put on emphasis on the harmony of the microcosm and the macrocosm.

By reflecting on the certain rituals celebrated in Indonesia, specifically *Nyepi* in Bali and *Mubeng Beteng* in Java, one can argue that 'being silent' should be understood as primarily not closing the mouth, but opening the ear of the heart for listening to the voice of the inner self, the nature and the divine. At this point, some Indonesians would call to mind an expression stated by a

⁵ *Dharma* and *moksha* are part of the four aims of human life (*purushatha*). This is stated clearly in *Kitab Sarasamuscaya* (*the Book of Sarasamuscaya*), that was written in 9th-10th centuries by Bhagawan Wararuci in Sanskrit with a translation in Kawi or Old Javanese language. In the 1st article (*sloka*) it is said: "Human being from this moment should also strive untirelessly to understand the nature of 'path of rightness' (*dharma*), 'wealth' (*artha*), 'desire' (*kama*), and 'spiritual freedom' (*mokhsa*)".

⁶ The current system of the Javanese calendar was inaugurated in 1633 CE as a hybrid Javanese-Islamic lunar calendar. Previous to this, the Javanese had used the Śaka calendar.

local philosopher commonly associated with the field of education and leadership, Ki Hadjar Dewantara (d. 1959), that is summarised in the dictum *neng, ning, nung, nang* (SAPDI, 2022, p. 654). *Neng* is an abbreviation for *meneng* which means being quiet in a very attentive way for listening actively. *Ning* stands for *wening* which means being clear in the heart and the mind, *nung* for *hanung* pointing to the greatness of heart and soul, and *nang* which is a short form of the word *menang* with a connotation of working for victory in a direction to self-conquest. By being silent, listening to the heart, clearing the mind with the greatness of the soul, according to Ki Hadjar Dewantara, one will be able to achieve a thorough self-conquest in high regard for the other. Such dictum is in fact very close to the expression stated by one of the religious guardians (*wali*) who spread Islam to Java, Sunan Drajat (d. 1522). By using the terms *hening, heneng* and *henung* (SUNYOTO, 2017, p. 310) – which is arguably comparable to *wening, meneng* and *hanung* – the notable *wali* develops a conception on how one should build an attitude in relation to oneself, the nature and the divine.

1 Being Silent for Listening

“Silence is not the absence of sound but the beginning of listening,” said Salomé Voegelin (2010, p. 83). It is the act of listening as a process born out of the inner sounds within a soul. It is believed that the presence of sounds does not come from outside the self, but from within the self. To Voegelin, listening itself is the deep revelation of silence, inasmuch as ‘silence reveals to me my own sounds: my head, my stomach, my body becomes their conductor’ (2010, p. 83). Therefore, the centre of the presence of sounds is considered to be found within the self, by suggesting that what exists in the self becomes the source to which one is driven to listen and pay attention, in a way that it becomes audible to oneself. To be silent in the absence of anything outside the self does not mean that one will not be able to catch anything, because there is always something within the self that is asking to be communicated outside the self. In the process of listening, it is thus necessary for anyone to be attentive to the self.

In silence, various things are brought together and united as something universal in a unique way, to such an extent that, according to Henry David Thoreau (d. 1862), ‘silence is the universal refuge, the sequel of all dry discourses and all foolish acts, as balm to our every chagrin, as welcome after satiety, as [after] disappointment....’ (KELLER, 1977, p. 51). Silence accommodates all that can be revealed in sound and non-sound format, as John Cage’s famous argument, ‘silence is not acoustic; it is a state of the mind, a turning around’ (CAGE, 1991). One may also say that silence is a sort of unvoiced sound that cannot be measured or be identified, as if it were ‘the chatter of the ghosts’ (TOOP, 2010, p. vii). Both voiced and

unvoiced sound are two sides of the same coin; they exist as a single phenomenon. Silence with its endless space will open up a condition that makes possible for the ears to give reactions and make responses with attentiveness and awareness.

To paraphrase Miguel Isaza, one could say that silence is an activity, a verb, not an object, not 'something', not a word even, but a process or experience that leads to anything (ISAZA, 2014). Silence is dynamic or an experience that leads to some immeasurable forms. It is undoubtedly something inseparable from the world and, in a new way, connected to it. It is a way that allows us to exist in connection to everything, in such a manner that one has a deep awareness of the environment around and the world outside. Since long ago, silence has even become a profound way of listening and connecting to the universe; it leads to a contemplative activity in which one is aware of things that is commonly ignored. Silence is an experience accompanied by a passion for building relationships in which one has awareness that there is nothing unconnected.

According to Voegelin, 'silence is the suspension of language and the condition of its production urged on by noise' (2010, p. 108). Through the celebration of silence in *Nyepi* or *Mubeng Beteng*, for example, one experiences a suspension after dealing with the outer noises and before liberating as well as purifying the inner things. A new awareness is then reachable. Similarly, in underlining the significance of suspension, George Prochnik asserted (2010, p. 293-294):

Conversely, if I were to hazard a definition of silence, I would describe it as the particular equilibrium of sound and quiet that catalyse the powers of perception..... Silence as a state of expectancy, a species of attention, is a key back into the garden of innocence.

Along with Isaza, one could affirm for sure that any sound will always come from silence and also go away in silence. One can never really see sound, nor name it, nor catch it, because in order to be heard or listened, sound has to fade away. As such, sound requires silence. Just as the activities in daily lives are related to vibration, which are in fact temporary, since they are always present in a dynamic process in order to transcend what seems silent, so is the process of listening. Undoubtedly, listening is an attempt to cultivate silence; and in this case silence may need to be understood first of all not in the sense of unvoiced sound, but rather the source from which all sounds may be able to be caught up. Consequently, the act of listening can also be understood as an attempt to transcend silence in a manner that it will be directed to a conscious condition with a great depth of attention.

In order to be heard or listened, sound must disappear. Silence will establish a condition for the ears to be able to capture the nature of sound as such. For this, listening in itself is silent. Peter Szendy said that 'someone

listening does not make any sound; or else, if he does, it is only secondary (leaning over, for example, or moving around) and not *as a listener*. Listening *as such* is thus *silent*, it cannot be heard' (2008, p. 141).⁷ 'To listen', as Isaza highlights, is 'to make silence', 'keep silent', 'remain silent', which leads to a deep state of awareness or a state of attentive listening.

The appropriate way of listening is to make any activity remain quiet so that one can be aware of the voiced or unvoiced sound. This does not point out to any attempt to take distance from the daily lives, for example by going to a remote area although this is not unhelpful either. What is put on emphasis here is certainly not listening as an activity by design, but a way by nature to make things remain silent in a daily routine when one is walking or working or doing other activities. It is a way to make silent an inner attitude, a way to listen in order to connect with any voice in the innermost layers. Silence helps to create a condition for being able to listen and in turn to understand as well as capture the deepest signification.

To be silent does not mean primarily not to speak up, but to listen in order to be conscious of any sound. This also means to be as quiet as possible, in such a manner that the mind starts to get out of unnecessary things. One needs to be silent because the real sound is found in the deep silence of mind. By being silent, one is aware of what will be communicated by the surrounding environment. It is a condition where sound is freely listened on its implicated equanimity. Silence needs to be responded to with an attitude of listening to nothing in order to find the sound of everything. There is always sound and there is always the silence that opens space for that sound. "If we keep the silence, we find the sound," Isaza affirmed (ISAZA, 2014).

Silence will no doubt lead to the spirit of listening. The attitude of listening is made possible due to the presence of silence as a result of the inner attitude. Listening is in itself an art. For this, one also needs to learn about the art of listening for making oneself present, emptying oneself and giving a deep attention. It is a process directed to things outside of oneself, in the presence of other things. It is a precious sapience, because it is not clearly visible and its fruit is not noticeable immediately, while the present culture tends to have appreciation only for what is clearly recognizable.

Silence leads to a way of putting the inner ear of the heart for reaching things outside of oneself. It is somehow comparable to an act of praying, about which Jalâl al-Dîn Muḥammad Rûmî (d. 1273) said, "When the lips are silent, the heart has a hundred tongues" (BALDOCK, 2005, p. 20). In addition, Rûmî also maintained (VAUGHAN-LEE, 1999, p. 20).

Make everything in you an ear, each atom of your being, and you will hear at every moment what the Source is whispering to you, just to you and for you,

⁷ In the citation, the italic is original.

without any need for my words or anyone else's... Listen, and your whole life will become a conversation in thought and act between you and Him, directly, wordlessly, now and always.

Listening is a way of paying attention; without attentiveness there will be no act of listening. Without the act of paying attention one may receive sounds or voices but in fact not understand the real meaning of what is received, not realize its significance. The act of listening through a deep attention will allow acceptance of what is received to be imprinted into consciousness. Therefore, listening requires both attentiveness and distinction, as we have to differentiate between the voices of the ego and those of heart. The words of the ego belong to duality, whereas the words of the heart carry the imprint of oneness. The heart embraces a polarized incongruity, whereas the ego takes sides.

True listening is a matter of having a willingness to build 'dialogue,' meaning to enter into another person's life. Many inappropriate listeners cannot be there for someone else because they keep their door of heart too locked into themselves. For them, everything has to be filtered through their own experiences and concerns. Listening will lead to empathy which also means to open the heart for knowing oneself and at the same time the other. Listening is an act to make the other belong to 'me'. Martin Heidegger (d. 1976) argued that the German word for 'to belong to' (*gehören*) incorporates the verb *hören*, meaning 'to hear or listen'. For this, 'to be in the order of Being' would mean a readiness to be one who has a willingness to hear or listen. Heidegger stated (PATTISON, 2013, p. 133).

To 'belong' [to be one who listens] here still means to be in the order of Being. But man's distinctive feature lies in this, that he, as one who thinks, is open to Being, face to face with being; thus man remains referred to being and so answers to [literally: 'speaks out from' or 'corresponds to': *entspricht*] Being, and he is only this. This 'only' does not mean a limitation, but rather an excess. A belonging to Being prevails within man, a belonging which listens to Being because it is appropriated to Being.

2 Scriptural Signification of Silence and Listening: Learning from Mary

In doing a theological reflection on the discourse of silence and listening, one could learn from the religious tradition of Islam and Christianity about the figure of Mary, the mother of Jesus. For Muslims, the narrative story on Mary (Arabic: Maryam) is mostly found in the chapter (*sûrah*) XIX of the Qur'ân under the name Mary (Q.S. XIX: 16-35)⁸. The chapter begins

⁸ The English translation follows Yusuf Ali. <https://quranyusufali.com/19/>

with an account of the birth of Jesus (Arabic: *Îsâ*), and the missions of some earlier prophets. Consisting of 93 verses, this chapter is regarded by Muslims as comprising God's Word revealed in Mecca. Regarding the context, it is believed that this chapter was revealed before the migration of the Prophet Muhammad's companions to Abyssinia. It took place in the time period of Muhammad's residence at Mecca, nine years before the Hijrah (i.e. 622 CE).

The reflection can focus on the verse saying, "I have vowed a fast to (God) Most Gracious, and this day will I enter into no talk with any human being" (Q.S. XIX: 26). According to the Qur'anic commentary written by Ibn Kathîr (d. 1373), as one of the most popular commentaries among the Muslims, by referring to Anas bin Malik (d. 712), it is said that the expression "I have vowed a fast (*shaûm*)", means 'a vow of silence'. The expression "I enter into no talk with any human being" would mean to communicate 'by signalling with gestures, not a statement by speech; this is so that she does not negate her oath itself'⁹. It indicates that God had commanded Mary to observe the fast of silence and not to speak to any human being. The appearance of a woman carrying a child without a husband and claiming that the child does not come from a man, despite the presence of several witnesses, for sure would not be accepted as true (IBN KATHÎR & IBN 'UMAR, 2002, p. 32-34). Thus, Mary did not need to say anything with regard to Jesus the child. She was instructed not to speak to the people, because they did not believe in her, and there was no benefit of speaking with them.

In the belief that God knows the best, Mary followed what was commanded to her. It is God's responsibility to answer the critics. Her case would be taken care of and her proof would be established. The rehabilitation of her name through the explanation of Jesus, while he was still a child (*shabiyyâ*)ⁿ in the cradle (*fi-l-mahd*)¹⁰ became the most powerful testimony to her chastity. God made evidence of this extraordinary happening with a similar extraordinary event, namely the words stated by Jesus Himself. As the servant of God, Mary who was fasting and keeping silent then took her child and brought him to her people. She referred all speech to Jesus who was in her arms. Furthermore, Jesus who heard the talk of the people declared, "Verily I am an all-loving servant of God. He will give me a gospel according to His statutes, and He will also make me a prophet to convey His teachings to the children of Israel" (Q.S. XIX: 30).

Mary observed the fast of silence not primarily in the sense of closing the mouth, but opening the inner ear of her heart by listening to what God commanded to her and letting her son, Jesus, give the right explanation.

⁹ Concerning the commentary on Q. XIX: 26, see, *Tafsir Ibn Kathir Surah Maryam*, the verses 24-26, with English Translation. <https://www.wordofallah.com/tafseer>.

¹⁰ The Qur'an, XIX: 29, "They said, 'How can we talk to one who is a child in the cradle?'"

The fast of silence performed by Mary was ‘an act of worship and the wisdom thereof’¹¹. One could also say that, in the context of the Qur’ân, in relation to the narrative story on Mary, silence has led to the process of the listening of the heart on account of faith that seek for wisdom. In sum, being silent for listening is here related to faith seeking wisdom.

A similar signification can be grasped from the narrative story of Mary in the Gospel of Luke. One may point out two verses, namely Luke 2:19 saying “As for Mary, she treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart” and Luke 2:51 saying “...His mother stored up all these things in her heart.”¹² In Luke 2:19, in accordance with the revelation made to her, through the surprising and amazing things she encountered, Mary was more deeply struck with the tidings of the shepherds. Consequently, Mary kept all the utterances of the shepherds. As for in Luke 2:51, Mary is described to be thoughtful much upon the sayings she heard, though she did not perfectly understand them.

By referring to Meyer’s New Testament Commentary, the verb used in Luke 2:19 signifies ‘keeping a high mind’ (*alta mente repositum servare*).¹³ Correspondingly, Fitzmyer said that the verse means ‘tossing them together in her heart’ (1981, p. 413). As for in Luke 2:51, the verb points out a sense of ‘storing up’ or ‘treasuring’, or according to Fitzmyer, ‘cherishing’ (1981, p. 446). After all, those two verbs in Luke 2:19 and 2:51 can be understood inasmuch as Mary kept or put together all what she heard within silent heart and interpreted them to herself.

The value of Mary’s silence is especially a wise capacity for listening and remembering as well as embracing in a single gaze of faith the mystery of God’s word that became flesh and the events of Jesus’ kenosis in the earthly life. No question, Mary experienced an uneasy *struggle for it, and yet it had made her inner closeness to God become more mature*. At this point, Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI said (2012, p. 37-38),

She must continue along the path that leads to many dark moments – from Joseph’s dismay at her pregnancy, to the moment when Jesus is said to be out of his mind (Mark 3:21; John 10:20) right up to the night of the cross.

It can be imagined, through the two verses Luke 2:19 and 2:51, that Mary was silent to listen what was stated to her. According to Llenos and John Cabrido,¹⁴ the expression ‘keeping all the things and pondering them in her

¹¹ The Editor of Islamweb.net, “Maryam and Zakariyya – Fasting and Not Speaking”, 20 April 2008. <https://www.islamweb.net/en/fatwa/107168/maryam-and-zakariyya-fasting-and-not-speaking>

¹² The translation of the Bible follows the *Jerusalem Bible* version.

¹³ The Editor of Biblehub.com, “Luke 2:19”. <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/luke/2-19.htm>

¹⁴ Generoso Llenos and John Cabrido, “And Mary Kept All These Things, Reflecting on Them in Her Heart: A Study on Luke 2:19, 51”. https://www.academia.edu/9310143/And_Mary_Kept_All_These_Things_Reflecting_on_Them_in_Her_Heart_A_Study_on_Luke_2_19_51

heart' would explicitly or implicitly include a lack of understanding on the matters at hand. It is summarized up in Luke 2:50, in which it is said that 'But they did not understand the statement which He spoke to them'. The verse is related to what is mentioned previously, that Mary asked Jesus, "Son, why have You done this to us? Look, Your father and I have sought You anxiously," (Luke 2:48) and Jesus answered, "Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?" (Luke 2:49). As Luke suggested, one can find here a contrast between Jesus's own comprehension and the parent's lack of understanding of what Jesus said (FITZMYER, 1981, p. 444). In relation to Mary, however, the fact that she had a lack of understanding does not stop her from her willingness to comprehend more.

It should be noticed that the word 'heart' in the semitic context, according to Llenos and John Cabrido, is comparable to 'mind', as the faculty of consciousness and thought through which a human person enables to be aware of the world and to think as well as to feel. It is related to the act of knowing, perceiving, thinking, reasoning, speaking to oneself, imagining, remembering and listening to one's conscience. It is also inseparable from the process of discernment, in such a way that there are expressions in the Scriptures like a 'discerning heart' and a 'listening heart', as found for example in the book of Kings about Solomon's Wisdom.¹⁵

The expression 'keeping all the things and pondering them in her heart' would point out to the signification of a faith that seeks understanding or in Latin *fides quaerens intellectum*. As a term that is usually associated with Anselm (d. 1109), it has a notion that one begins with faith and from there moves on to further understanding. In response to many things that go beyond her understanding, Mary preferred to be silent and listen attentively through her inner ear of the heart in order to know more clearly and understand more deeply.

3 Being Silent for Listening: A Challenge to Interreligious Relations

From the narrative stories on Mary in the scriptures, both the Qur'ân and the Gospel of Luke, one can learn that silence would be a step toward the process of listening and discerning through which one can make response more wisely and understand more deeply. It is surely a challenge for the believers living in a plural society like Indonesia. How can one build a

¹⁵ Cf. 1 Kings 3:9-28. Generoso Llenos and John Cabrido, "And Mary Kept All These Things, Reflecting on Them in Her Heart: A Study on Luke 2:19, 51". On the verse 9, the *New International Version* (NEV) says 'a discerning heart to govern', whereas the *Jerusalem Bible* version says 'a heart to understand how to discern'.

willingness to develop a culture of listening in a way that there is an open-heartedness to have a respect for diversity by means of knowledge and wisdom? A comprehensive discussion is definitely necessary for this.

First of all, one needs to be aware of the faith paradigm in every religion. This can be explained with the concept of language game as elaborated by Ludwig Wittgenstein (d. 1951) in his book entitled *Philosophical Investigations* (VU, 2002, p. 73-92). Concerning various kinds of game, Wittgenstein said in that book, no. 66, "For if you look at them you will not see something that is common to all, but similarities, relationships, and a whole series of them at that." (2009, p. 36^e). Moreover he also argued in the same book, no. 567, that 'after all, the game is supposed to be determined by the rules!' (2009, p. 159^e). As such, religions are comparable to games with their specific 'rules'.

Wittgenstein's concept of language game was adopted and developed by George Lindbeck in the scope of theology, even if Lindbeck himself admitted that 'those more knowledgeable in Wittgenstein might not approve it' (1984, p. 24). In addition, by referring to Clifford Geertz (d. 2006), Lindbeck argued that religion is not only 'language-like', but also 'culture-like'. In terms of theology, language game and cultural outlook can be understood as 'faith paradigm' about which one can regard it as the lens of worldview to attain a comprehensive significance about fundamental aspects of reality. In *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*, Lindbeck also affirmed that 'there are numberless thoughts we cannot think, sentiments we cannot have, and realities we cannot perceive unless we learn to use the appropriate symbol system' (1984, p. 36). Accordingly, one cannot understand the theological matters brought in an interreligious encounter without understanding the faith paradigm held by the partner of dialogue. This is certainly very challenging.¹⁶

Lindbeck's reflection on religion as elaborated above and its consequence to interreligious relations seems in line with the argument brought up by Fletcher. In Fletcher's mind, persons of different religions cannot expect to connect with one another on the basis of some universal religious experiences common to all religions (2007, p. 542). He stated more that an attempt to reach genuine understanding of multiple religious outlooks requires a level of engagement. It should take place in terms of language, doctrine, praxis, and culture. The faith paradigm of a religion plays an

¹⁶ For examples, concerning the concept of revelation, in the Catholic Church, it would refer to Jesus Christ. In 'Dei Verbum' (art. 2), it is affirmed: In His goodness and wisdom God chose to reveal Himself and to make known to us the hidden purpose of His will (see Eph. 1:9) by which through Christ, the Word made flesh, man might in the Holy Spirit have access to the Father and come to share in the divine nature (see Eph. 2:18; 2 Peter 1:4). In Islam, however, the concept of revelation would refer to the Qur'ân as the verbatim Word of God. Then, on the concept of sin, Christians accept the doctrine of original sins, whereas for Muslims, everyone is born sinless.

important role not merely as the foundation of 'the language game', but also the very lens through which persons view the world. In fact, every religion has its own faith paradigm, and the gap between religions is somehow unbridgeable. For this, genuine understanding of the outlook of the person belonging to another faith cannot be attained by an external observer (FLETCHER, 2007, pp. 536-538). An effort to reach such genuine understanding is indeed stimulating, although it is not impossible either. Again, any attempt to comprehend the faith paradigm of a system of belief to another one is very challenging. Distortion can occur easily.

A similar opinion was raised by Henri Le Saux. He maintained that one needs to try as far as possible to reach in the very depth to the religious experience of the other. He strongly emphasizes that, for a fruitful result, people who involve in interreligious relations need to reach in the very depth of themselves to the experience of the partner of dialogue, liberating their own experience from all the gradual accumulations. A big effort should be made in such a manner that 'my brother can recognize in me his own experience of his own depth' (SAUC 1981, p. 214). According to Henri Le Saux, people who involve in dialogue must try to make the religious experience of the partner of dialogue their own, as far as possible, to personalize in their own depth, beyond their own concepts. With the help of the signs or the symbols available in their tradition, they must try to go beyond the expressions used by the partner of dialogue.

In response to those viewpoints, one should call to mind, as underlined by Fletcher who brought up Didier Pollefeyt's argument, that religious systems are not auto-referential, but refer to a divine reality experienced as 'outside' or 'beyond' the linguistic system (2007, p. 542; KNITTER, 2003, p. 181). To paraphrase his arguments, one can say further that, due to this external reference, people coming from different religious traditions can enter into interreligious relations by sharing one another about how they experience and express this 'outside' or 'beyond' from various viewpoints.

It is at this point that a sense of respect to diversity becomes a necessity. Here one needs to nurture the spirit of willingness to be silent for listening. Just as Mary who had to confront the utterances of the shepherds and her son Jesus that went beyond her understanding, similarly in interreligious relations, people can stand facing various things that are not always understandable according to their own faith paradigm. Therefore the culture of opening the inner ear of the heart is undoubtedly crucial.

The discourse that has been pointed out above can be confirmed from my personal experiences, one of which takes place through my commitment in some interreligious activities including my involvement to accompany the students who follow learning courses and class sessions, either an intra-curricular or co-curricular or extra-curricular programs,

as well as trainings. Any attempt to build an encounter with people coming from different religious background is always challenging. One experiences a feeling of being brought into a discomfort zone. Feelings of being threatened also arise to the surface, because some essential points of faith that are held by people involving in an encounter have been brought into question. Prejudices as the product of bias-perceptions, or stereotypes, or unreasonable judgments that may lead to a misconduct can come up easily. One cannot deny that the *tabula rasa* does not seem to apply here. People tend to make reactions by shielding from all that create negative impressions and to confront them with innumerable objections. Too often, one leaps before looking or speaks before hearing or listening. Spontaneously people will try as much as possible to defend their personal convictions and in turn will give a counter 'attack' against the belief held by the partner of dialogue. When it is asked about the value, they possibly will give a response that the points of faith held by the partner of dialogue has no benefit at all, or is useless, or a waste of space.

People should not forget that the attitude of being respectful to various diversities, including that of faith background, becomes valuable not only for external reasons. Accordingly people cannot only say for example that, because people live together in a plural society, they need to keep the esteem and harmony as well as peace. The importance of the respect to diversity is actually due to internal reasons as well. People need to build an attitude of awareness and acceptance of both similarities and differences that exist among human beings as part of the consequence of a development toward faith maturity. For this, as Fowler argues in *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning*, it is necessary for people who have a mature age to reach a faith maturity on the basis of universal values for the common good. At this point, to borrow the statement expressed by the late Pope John Paul II, one needs to comprehend interreligious encounter as 'an indispensable step along the path towards human self-realization; the self-realization both of *each individual and of every human community*' (JOHN PAUL II, 1995).

As already highlighted, in the process of interreligious relations, people may come across a kind of shock, because the world-view, forms of thought, theological language, symbol, and ritual, with which they confront can be totally different from what they have in mind. They can experience an internal tension, between a mixture of fascination and antipathy. They realize a double standard as well. In dealing with their own faith, people will tend to see the things in the domain of their belief by holding a parameter based on the perspective of 'what ought to be', while with the things in the domain of the partner of dialogue, on the perspective of 'what is'. For example, Christians will tend to say that Christianity is based on the value of love, while another religious tradition is wrongly

regarded as laying on violence. Here, a way of seeing things is not put on balance at the same level.

The internal tension is however not meaningless. By taking into account all that come to pass, people can be led to a new awareness. People start learning to see something different as significant. Accordingly, they will be able to take distance from a spontaneous tendency in making a negative reaction to what is different from their own. They will start listening and learning about many aspects and take them into consideration on balance. By this, they will develop serious thoughts and raise critical questions to themselves, such as that people would begin to question: 'Is it possible for me to find the presence of God and experience a personal encounter with Him in the midst of the brothers and sisters whom I meet in the daily life, including those who have different faith background? Is it possible for me to experience an inner transformation through an encounter with them, and cultivate a responsibility for the realization of the common good (*bonum commune*)?' Pope Francis rightly confirmed, "Theology after *Veritatis Gaudium* is a kerygmatic theology, a theology of discernment, of mercy and of welcoming, in dialogue with society, cultures and religions for the construction of the peaceful coexistence of individuals and peoples" (FRANCIS, 2019).

People are challenged to take into account the convictions held by the partner of dialogue at depths as well as to evaluate critically their own faith in light of the other. As such, an internal tension could lead to either a total rejection or a profound search or a strong motivation to go in a greater intensity. People could realize that an immersed reflection on another belief could bring them to the new values of which they might not be aware before. Through their internal tension, people become accustomed to listening through the inner ear of the heart and using a discernment as well as treasuring the valuable signification of a diversity. By this, it can be presumed that people can reach a new awareness of how to respond to the various aspects of reality. Accordingly, a wider horizon of knowledge will be grasped. A more prudent or wise mental attitude can be expected to grow as well.

On this discourse, one could call to mind the discussion on the relationship of human cognition and faith reflection as elaborated comprehensively by Bernard Lonergan (d. 1984). In his works, *Insight* and *Method in Theology*, he maintained that in such a process of cognition, one will follow a process of dealing with experience, understanding and judgment. The process has to do with some steps, from an encounter with reality, to a critical inquiry, toward a practice of reflection, and ends in a decision on the way to praxis. These steps reveal a set of *modus operandi* in which one transcends oneself and relates to what is present outside oneself (BERTATO, 2015, p. 106). Lonergan gave more clarifications by pointing to the eight functional

specialties whose elements are: research, interpretation, history, dialectic, foundation, doctrine, systematic and communication (OGILVIE, 2001, p. 119-129). A process of understanding related to transcendental reality, according to him, will not keep apart from the attempt to put together all the matters of fact and to give explanation on them, by taking into account the whole series of things connected with them, without discounting what seems to be in paradox. In addition, the process also includes a way of dealing with the supporting belief system by bearing in mind the authorized principles and a mode of transferring into an understandable formulation, in such a manner that the end result can be conveyed and communicated to other people.

By taking into consideration Lonergan's theological thought on the discourse about interreligious relations (LOCKLIN, 2008, p. 2) one could identify some stages, namely: the encounter with real facts, the presence of an internal tension with numerous questions, the attempt of listening through the inner ear of the heart, the practice of reflection and discernment, the search for valuable meanings, and the cultivation of wisdom. All these stages are directed to a fruitful outcome that has an effect on social well-being.

In this manner, one could also remember about John Dunne's concept of 'passing over' and 'coming back' (DUNNE, 1972, pp. ix-x). The term 'passing over' can be understood as a shifting of standpoint, a going over to the standpoint of another culture, another way of life, another system of belief. Then, concerning the term 'coming back', it refers to an equal and opposite process of 'passing over', in which one comes back from a way of 'going over' and return with new insight to one's own culture, one's own way of life, one's own system of belief. In other words, 'passing over' would also mean a way of dialoging, whereas 'coming back' would point to a way of reflecting on the impacts given by the partner of dialogue on one's own faith. By this, one will experience a mutual enrichment and transformation.

One cannot deny that interreligious relations seem to be like a double-edged sword. The late Jean Cardinal Tauran (d. 2018) once said that interreligious dialogue is a challenge and at the same time a risk.¹⁷ To paraphrase the Cardinal's argument, one can say that the significance of interreligious relations is to get to know each other, to take notice of the belief held by the people involved in dialogue with respect and to allow oneself to be enriched by the positive aspects of their belief. By this, the people who involve in dialogue will be led to a process of deepening their personal

¹⁷ Tauran's address was presented in the opening of the academic year at the Pontifical Theological Department of Southern Italy in Naples. Jean-Louis Tauran, "Interreligious Dialogue: a Risk or an Opportunity", in *Pro Dialogo*, Bulletin 130, (2009/1), p. 33-40.

faith and concurrently bear witness to their faith. At this point, what is regarded as 'risk' can become relative. Again, the believers who take part in interreligious relations will be challenged to exercise his reason and under its light is encouraged to deepen their own faith.

Final Remarks

In living in a pluralistic society, people are challenged to live out their faith in the presence of the other faith. People are expected not only to stop at tolerance. Tolerance and listening are not exactly the same thing. Tolerance can take place as a passive response to an under pressure situation. Listening is something different. Although it often looks inactive, because it needs silence, it will always require a willingness to be engaged actively. Being silent for listening is for sure active and engaged. By being silent, one is ready to listen, and in turn is willing to understand as well as to act. Dietrich Bonhoeffer (d. 1945) expressed (2015, p. 75):

The first service that one owes to others in the fellowship consists in listening to them. Just as love to God begins with listening to His Word, so the beginning of love for the brethren is learning to listen to them. It is God's love for us that He not only gives us His Word but also lends us His ear. So it is His work that we do for our brother when we learn to listen to him.

Silence and listening are certainly requisite in terms of interreligious relations. It is also emphasized by Pope Francis in his reflection on a Samaritan woman (John 4:5-42). According to the Pope, Jesus Himself developed an attitude of listening and dialogue with a Samaritan woman, by sharing to her the gift of God along with the mystery of His communion with the Father. With this, Jesus opened up her own identity and 'His divine listening to her human heart opened that heart to accept in turn the fullness of love and the joy of life' (FRANCIS, 2019). Here the Pope raised a term 'theology of welcoming as theology of listening' about which he pointed out that the experience of dialogue arises from listening and it then produces communion to such an extent that 'dialogue as a theological hermeneutic presupposes and involves conscious listening' (FRANCIS 2019).

A process of encounter with people coming from various diversities, including faith background, will finally bring to a challenge on how to deepen one's own faith, to live it out and to communicate it as well as to formulate it in the context or the circumstance where one lives. The late Pope John Paul II affirmed, "Genuine dialogue leads to inner purification and conversion, and it is only such a spiritual renewal which will save the world from further widespread sufferings" (JOHN PAUL II, 1992). In line with this idea, Jacques Dupuis (d. 2004) also maintained that the

same God speaks in the heart of the people who involve in religious relations, and in fact the same spirit is at work in them. It is the same God who calls and challenges them through one another, by means of their mutual witness (DUPUIS, 2004, p. 137). People are called to build the culture of being silent for listening in order to be aware of God's spirit who lives inside every believer and reveals the truth. It consequently becomes for each other a sign that leads to God. Thus Dupuis stated (DUPUIS, 2004, p. 137),

Neither on one side nor on the other does it tend to the conversion of one partner to one's own religion. Rather it tends toward a deeper conversion of each to God. The proper end of the interreligious dialogue is ultimately the common conversion of Christians and the members of other religious traditions to the same God...

Interreligious relations in the culture of mutual listening will give a room for sharing and transforming the rich religious values to other believers. Its priceless process lies in the fact that the people who involve in that activity would empty themselves for the other. It takes place in the same manner as Jesus Christ who emptied and humbled Himself, due to which He was then exalted and glorified by God (Phil. 2:5-8). The kenosis of Christ itself has at least two meanings, that He voluntarily accepted the limitations of becoming a human being, and that His glory was hidden from the people. The way of kenosis leads to a pilgrimage in which one recognizes the need to walk with others, even those who are very different.

As a conclusion, one can confirm that being silent for listening can play a role as an essential part in building interreligious relations. The rituals observed by the Balinese Hindus and a number of Javanese Muslims in Indonesia could offer an inspiration on how people could make efforts to develop the culture of silence for listening toward a deep understanding and a sound wisdom. Mary who has been admired with a great honor in the Christian and Muslim community can be a guide for responding to such a challenge.

The process of being silent for listening toward a deep understanding and a sound wisdom, in turn, becomes a kind of pilgrimage with Jesus as model, He who 'increased in wisdom, in stature, and in favor with God and with people' (Luke 2:52). In addition, the pilgrimage in a manner of listening through the inner ear of the heart can also be a way to become more mature as a person, or in John Powell's expression 'fully human fully alive' which is then put as the title of his book. It has been measured by the norm of meaningfulness at depths, that is a willingness to share and respect others through a constructive vision for humanity.

One could not deny that the presence of the other faith in interreligious relations can go beyond one's own faith paradigm. For this, in order to

have a deep knowledge and a sound wisdom, one needs to take into account a number of steps, especially: the willingness to experience the reality in accordance with the context, the ability to manage the internal tensions, the capability to make critical considerations, the readiness to make a profound reflection, the keenness to develop a culture of discernment, the availability to search for meanings, and the courage to make decision as well as judgment for the common good.

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