

JESUS AS A HISTORICAL MAN  
BASED ON ODDBJØRN LEIRVIK'S THOUGHTS:  
Interreligious Dialogue between Islam and Catholicism

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**Abstract:** This article discusses Jesus anthropologically and his implication as well as historicity in the Islamic context. In Islam, Jesus is called 'Īsā al-Masīh. In this article we discuss Jesus in the Quran and the Hadith, the anthropology of Jesus in Islam, the miracle of Jesus in the Islamic context, the Christian polemic against Islam in the Middle Ages and the dialogue and peace between Christians and Muslims. The method employed is content analysis of relevant primary and secondary data. The data collection method uses library research to explore various reference sources. The primary and secondary data obtained are then analyzed using a qualitative approach. The result is that the figure of Jesus based on Oddbjørn Leirvik's thought can be used to promote harmony and peace in religious relationships, and it is very relevant to Indonesian context. The awareness of the figure of Jesus based on Islamic and Catholic teachings is essential to promote harmony especially in Indonesia.

**Keywords:** Jesus in Islam; Jesus in Catholicism; interreligious dialogue.

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## Introduction

In the history of humankind, Christianity has recognized Jesus as Lord and Allah. However, according to other religious teachings, Jesus is considered to be a human or a prophet. Some religions that recognize Jesus as such in history or their holy books are Judaism and Islam. In the Islamic context, Jesus is often referred to as 'Īsā al-Masīḥ. This is reflected in the naming of the celebration of the birth, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ in the Indonesian calendar, which uses the designation of 'Īsā al-Masīḥ. However, recently, the Indonesian government has changed the designation of 'Īsā al-Masih to Jesus Christ.<sup>1</sup> The change of this designation cannot be separated from the plurality respected, which is, of course, accompanied by dialogues and studies about who Jesus is in Indonesia.

The issue of this research is the understanding of Jesus according to Islamic teachings. It needs a serious study to historically explain Jesus Christ. From theological perspectives, Jesus Christ cannot be accepted by all religions, especially Islam, since the figure of Jesus is controversial. Islam still associates Jesus as a prophet whose views and Christian faith differ between his life stories and his teachings. This study explores the figure of Jesus related to history and testimony in the Islamic context.

Sensitive problems arise when one tries to understand the figure of Jesus from various perspectives. The author chooses a point of view from Islam due to the importance of starting a dialogue between Christianity and Islam in understanding Jesus in Indonesian context. Certainly, Islam has its own views of who Jesus really is. Religious issues and differences become debates, giving rise to national life disharmony. That which is upheld is the spirit of respecting different opinions since it will bring peace. Specifically, peace becomes a means of communicating who Jesus is for Christians and for Muslims. For the author considers the figure of Jesus to be good, in this dialogue it is hoped that the author can understand Jesus in depth in a different context.

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<sup>1</sup> Tim Redaksi CNBC Indonesia, "Ini Alasan Pemerintah Ubah Isa Almasih Jadi Yesus Kristus," *CNBC Indonesia*, September 17, 2023, <https://www.cnbcindonesia.com/news/20230917105043-4-473107/ini-alasan-pemerintah-ubah-isa-almasih-jadi-yesus-kristus>. Accessed on February 6, 2024.

Further, the author explores who Jesus is in Islamic teachings and tradition, with the result that in this article Christian readers are invited to understand Jesus in the Islamic context, and in turn Muslim readers are more accepting of Jesus from an academic perspective based on qualitative research relying on many sources that explain Jesus historically in human life. For this reason, the author examines Jesus Christ in the Quran as well as Hadith and also explores the anthropology of Jesus, the miracles of Jesus, Christian polemics against Islam in the Middle Ages and dialogue and peace between Christianity and Islam.

In this way, Jesus Christ will be known more widely in the Islamic context. To understand Jesus in the Islamic context will lead readers to know more about who Jesus was historically. Thus, religious peace can be realized among religious leaders and their followers by providing dialogue. For this reason, the author needs to explain the figure of Jesus in the Islamic context.

### **Jesus Christ in the Quran**

The elucidation of Jesus in the Quran is taken from authors such as Leirvik who provide historical summaries as well as Christology in the context of the Qur'an, as well as grammatical and literary understanding of Jesus in the Quran. Here Leirvik is trying to establish a portrayal of Jesus explicitly based on the Quran and highlight who Jesus is within it.

Regarding the sensitive issues that will be discussed, Leirvik believes that to emphasize dialogue, it is necessary for those who want to dialogue to have a comprehension of the side of the interlocutor. Leirvik emphasizes that in terms of theology, Christianity may reject Islam's depiction of Jesus because it has differences. Continuing to dialogue in this context can result in sarcasm and debate due to differences in theology. As one who tries to come to know Christ through the eyes of another religion, it is important to emphasize that objectivity must be a priority in religious studies. In this research, the background needed to understand Jesus is that of pluralism.

Pluralism can also help to save religion and mission development. Among other aspects, religious values have

evolved into global ethics. Religion can use this global ethics to critique science and fashion modern existence.<sup>2</sup>

Jesus Christ in the Quran is mentioned with the name 'Īsā al-Masīh.<sup>3</sup> The portrayal of Jesus' life is summarized in Leirvik's understanding that *kalimah* (word) and *rūḥ* (spirit) are two expressions that describe Jesus, where the words "*kalimatuhū*" (His Word) and *rūḥun minhu* (a spirit from Him) are frequently used expressions. Moreover, the Quran also tells that Jesus was born from Mary, mentioned in the Quran (Q.S. 'Alī 'Imrān [3]: 45). The personality of Mary described in the Quran indicates that God protected her in her chastity and honor towards men inasmuch as Mary was obedient to God.<sup>4</sup> Leirvik asserts that in sura Maryam it is said that the spirit of God is a perfect person, who guided Mary, who at that time left her family home to a place in the East. There are also other references from two sources (Q.S. 21: 91 and Q.S. 66: 22), which state that God's breath is breathed into Mary.<sup>5</sup> In Christian teachings, what is meant in question is the Holy Spirit. The concept of God's breath expressed by Leirvik is different from the Holy Spirit.

In the Quran it is recorded that Jesus was born under a date palm where God had provided water and ripe dates (Q.S. 19: 22-25). After the birth of Jesus, Mary brought her child back to those who accused her of being impure, so the infant Jesus spoke from Mary's cradle while she was defending herself. It is stated that Jesus was a servant of God who was given the Holy Scriptures and appointed as a prophet, and God protected Jesus and Mary throughout their lives from birth to death.

In Islam, Jesus was a prophet, and God would defend him, leaving an imprint of God's protection on Jesus and Mary's lives. Jesus is shown as a figure who was obedient to God's will because of His protection and being one of God's messenger. In Q.S. al-Mā'idah [5]: 110, it is said that Jesus accepted God's teachings and the Book, Wisdom, the Torah and the Gospel. The Gospel referred to in the Quran is the Gospel as a book, not the views of Christianity, in which the Gospel is Scripture that tells the story of Jesus. Hence, in the

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<sup>2</sup> Havis Aravik and Choiriyah, "Islam dan Pluralisme Agama," *Mizan: Jurnal Ilmu Syariah* 4, no. 2 (2016), 298.

<sup>3</sup> Oddbjørn Leirvik, *Images of Jesus Christ in Islam* (London: Continuum, 2010), 23.

<sup>4</sup> Fahad and Sholihul Huda, "Isa al-Masih menurut Al-Qur'an dan Injil," *Al-Hikmah: Jurnal Studi Agama-Agama* 2, no. 1 (2016), 2.

<sup>5</sup> Leirvik, *Images of Jesus Christ*, 21.

Quran, Jesus receives the Gospel from God. In addition, there is a thing emphasized by Leirvik that Jesus is the truth of the Torah, and Jesus is said to be a person who feared and obeyed God as well as the Laws.

Leirvik's view regarding Jesus' power as a messenger is reflected in the understanding that according to the Quran, Jesus is indeed considered a messenger or prophet who set an example by submitting to God. The wisdom obtained comes from God, because for Muslims, the highest truth is God, thereby God being paramount in Jesus' mission as a prophet and as God's messenger.

The difference between the prophethood of Jesus and Muhammad, according to Leirvik, lies in the fact that Jesus is the one who is called *rūḥun minhu* (a Spirit from Him), which is mentioned in Q.S. al-Nisā' [4]: 171 along with the word *kalimatuhu* (His Word). Besides, it is known that in the Islamic teachings, Jesus is considered to be the Spirit of Allah (God's Spirit). Meanwhile, the designation for Muhammad is *rasūl Allāh* (God's messenger).<sup>6</sup> Leirvik quotes Ali Merad's viewpoint that Christ is not part of God and that he was not killed. Christ was no ordinary man.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, in terms of God's saying to Jesus, "O Jesus, I shall take thee and raise thee unto Me," (Q.S. 3: 55), it is interpreted that Jesus was not crucified, but this question should be explained by the idea of the verse which clearly states that God put Jesus to death and then raised him.<sup>8</sup> Leirvik's view of Jesus as a *rūḥ Allāh* and of the crucifixion of Jesus is confirmed by Hidayat, which proposes a way of thinking in extracting historical evidence and interpretations from Muslim exegetes. It is maintained that Jesus was not crucified on account of the confirmation of the replacement theory in the verses Q.S. al-Nisā' [4]: 157-159, stating *wa lakin shubbiba lahum*, which means "but it appeared so unto them."<sup>9</sup> However, Hidayat does not focus too much on the polemic, stating that Jesus was not crucified. Instead, Jesus' crucifixion is explored from historical sources by Mahmud Yunus, Mara ber Serapion, Thalus, Phlageon and Flavius Yosephus.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 23.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Taufik Hidayat, "Sejarah Penyaliban Yesus dalam Islam dan Kristen," 150.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 145.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 166-175.

From the explanation above, it is clear that the figure of Jesus along with his mother and his phenomenal birth has no significant differences between Islam and Christianity except that Jesus was born under a date palm. The Islamic view is not totally in line with Christianity. However, respect for Jesus as a prophet called 'Īsā al-Masīḥ is still significantly maintained because of the miracles during Jesus' childhood. Muslim exegetes regard Jesus as sublime since they see that God appointed Jesus after his death. In the Islamic context, there are different interpretations of Jesus concerning the crucifixion as depicted in the Quran and its interpretations. The difference arises due to different interpretations based on interpretive sources that emphasize the context of the existing text. Therefore, understanding Jesus as a respected prophet is possible, because in that view, a great prophet cannot be dishonored. This is what makes the term "*shubbihā*" related to Jesus' crucifixion appear, that Jesus did not experience crucifixion. As a consequence, there are those who argue that someone replaced Jesus in the crucifixion.

### Jesus Christ in Hadith

The discussion about Jesus in Hadith cannot be separated from the Quranic perspective. Islam maintains the belief that the Prophet 'Īsā did not die, and his body and soul were elevated to God because there was another person in his likeness.<sup>11</sup> However, the profound picture of Jesus as the Prophet 'Īsā must be addressed historically based on Hadith. Hadith is a collection of the sayings and actions of the Prophet Muhammad as a pathway being a reference to be followed by definitive Muslims.<sup>12</sup> The Hadith perspective on Jesus relates to sayings clarifying, inter alia, the relationship between Muhammad and Jesus, Jesus' appearance, the descent of Jesus and specific merits of Jesus.<sup>13</sup>

In sayings clarifying the relationship between Muhammad and Jesus, in the book of *al-Wafā'*, it is said that Jesus will rise between 'Abū Bakr and 'Umar. According to al-Ṭabarī, Jesus, at his second coming, will tarry on the earth for as long as God will, approximately

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<sup>11</sup> Siti Khozinatul Khoirot, *Penyaliban Isa Al-Masih dalam Al-Qur'an (Studi Pemikiran Kontekstual Abdullah Saeed)* (Jember: IAIN Jember, 2021), 3.

<sup>12</sup> Leirvik, *Images of Jesus Christ*, 36.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 37.

for forty years. He will die, and Muslims will pray for and bury him.<sup>14</sup> The connection between Muhammad and Jesus can be seen in the way several Muslim scholars interpret the hadith which emphasizes that Muhammad felt close to the Prophet Isa. This is manifested in Muhammad's command that there be unity in respecting Jesus in the context of his resurrection. The concept of resurrection is also a core part of the Christian faith because Christ's followers have a theology centered on the resurrection. What is interesting concerning Islamic tradition is the fact that Islam states that Jesus will come a second time. This issue needs attention because both Christianity and Islam mentions Jesus' second coming. Apart from that, there is also a relationship between Jesus and Muhammad which lies in the idea that it will get a double reward if one believes in Muhammad and 'Īsā al-Masīḥ.<sup>15</sup>

Prophet Muhammad said that Jesus and himself were brothers in faith but had different mothers, and there was no a messenger between Jesus and Muḥammad.<sup>16</sup> The Hadith further emphasizes that Muslims are aware of the fact that the two prophets had a special position, and such Hadith can be a guide in understanding 'Īsā al-Masīḥ. However, if viewed from opposing perspectives, there will be no compatibility between Islamic and Christian understandings of Jesus due to theological differences. From the Islamic perspective, Jesus is considered a prophet. In interreligious dialogue on Jesus, it is difficult to unify the theologies of each religion. After all, the differences are vast and can also give rise to debate. However, in this research, the portrayal of Jesus is based on Hadith which looks more at the future depiction of Jesus. In addition, it is delivered that Muhammad had a close relationship to Jesus even though he did not live at the same time as Jesus. The Hadith in question also discusses the origins of Jesus, including the fact that Jesus came from a mother, which is in accord with what the Quran tells.

Jesus' appearance is also depicted in the Hadith. He is a fair complexion and red-faced, like coming out of a bath, of medium height with long hair, not too curly or straight, making him beautiful, fair and pure. The Hadith also touches upon the issue that Jesus will

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 38

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

descend on the white minaret in Damascus, pursuing al-Dajjāl (anti-Christ) and killing him.<sup>17</sup>

Based on the predictions of Jesus' descent, the core expectation of Jesus' second coming affirms that he is a Muslim and will rule according to Islamic law. Jesus would do away with specifically Christian symbols and allow Islam to rule society. Islamic power will bring prosperity, justice and peace after defeating al-Dajjāl and the enemies of God. In the Islamic context, Jesus' rule refers more to a government model such as an Islamic kingdom based on Islamic law. Jesus' power will provide world happiness for many people through prosperity, justice and peace, which is the hope of many people. The relationship between Jesus and Islam is closely related to the resistance against al-Dajjāl who will fight Jesus. After al-Dajjāl is defeated, purification will occur on earth and prosperity will result from nature. According to the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad, Jesus will come down to earth, get married, have children and stay on earth for 45 years.<sup>18</sup>

The Islamic perspective that Jesus will be married is different from the Christian perspective, so there is an implied indicator that the figure of Jesus in the Christian context is not the same as Jesus in Islamic teachings. Nevertheless, if the idea of the historicity of Jesus is reconciled for the sake of dialogue, then this concept of marriage should not be used by Islamic scholars. It is important to remember that this statement is a legend, as expressed by Leirvik. The concept of marriage is a natural thing in the context of Muslim life. Historically, additional evidence may be needed to explain that Jesus will have children because the Prophet Muhammad himself did not tell about this.

As for Jesus and al-Mahdī, Jesus who comes the second time will be faced with a different situation with al-Dajjāl and Jesus' resistance. In fact, this will turn into a conflict between the Arabs and the people of the East, with al-Mahdī's coming from the West. Al-Mahdī is only considered a figure who resembles Jesus, not Jesus himself, but a symbol of victory in the Islamic world in which al-Mahdī becomes a figure between prophethood and Jesus, which is then understood in the eschatological context. While Jesus is also an eschatological figure, al-Mahdī has a different role from Jesus.

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 39.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 40.

However, in some places such as Sudan and Pakistan, al-Mahdī in the literature is depicted as similar to the second coming of Jesus.

As regards Jesus' acts, he never made any mistakes. Jesus is God's messenger who brought truth coming from God. The truth brought by Jesus cannot be denied since the Prophet Muhammad has stated it, and as mentioned above, Jesus is his brother in faith. The Quran states that Jesus has the same position as Muhammad, that is, as a servant and prophet. Islam views Jesus as a prophet whose goodness and truth were revealed to many people. Hence, Jesus is also called a Muslim.

### **Anthropological Jesus in Islam**

As for the history of Jesus in the Islamic world, he is recognized as a prophet, as discussed above. The historical comparison between the Bible and the Quran has given rise to polemics owing to differences in understanding who Jesus really is. In other words, issues related to the life of Jesus involve polemics between understandings of Jesus in Islam and Christianity. In Islam, Jesus is considered more as a prophet who brought a message from God, while in Christianity, Jesus is believed as the incarnation of God. However, to achieve reconciliation in interreligious dialogue, the idea of miracles and Jesus' status as the son of Mary can be a middle point that can reduce tension or polemics in thinking about Jesus.

The miracles of Jesus discussed in the next point aim to consider and harmonize Jesus' actions. In discussions that examine Jesus from an Islamic perspective, emphasis is placed on the humanity of Jesus, both from a spiritual and ethical perspective, as a messenger of God. However, according to Leirvik, in Islamic theology, there is no emphasis on the anthropological dimension of Jesus because it is not considered or considered irrelevant. Meanwhile, the anthropological dimension reflected in Jesus gives the impression that Jesus and Muhammad are the embodiment of the Perfect Men.<sup>19</sup> Even though in Islam Jesus is regarded as a man, the Catholic tradition still maintains the belief that Jesus has two natures, namely, man and divine. Shellenberg propounds the idea that Jesus has two natures, divinity and humanity.

... 1) unconfused (*asunkutos*), with no mixing of the two natures, which remain distinct even while they are in

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 234.

communion; 2) unchanged (*atrepots*), in the sense that the deity is not transmuted into humanity, nor humanity into deity; 3) indivisible (*adiairetos*), unable to be divided – the personal union is never at any point split apart; 4) inseparable (*achoristos*), undissolved through eternity, perpetual.<sup>20</sup>

Of course, Jesus as a truly human being is associated with both strengths and weaknesses, such as Jesus' experiencing suffering in the context of Christianity. However, such differs from the Islamic theological perspective which prioritizes the prophethood of Jesus and his miracles. This distinction does not prevent respect. In Indonesian language, Jesus is called 'Īsa al-Masīḥ. Most Catholics in Indonesia do not accept that name because according to them Jesus is not 'Īsā al-Masīḥ due to different theological interests. Nevertheless, such differences actually enrich our perspective especially for the sake of interreligious dialogue. Therefore, to understand Jesus, one must refrain from selfishly expressing a debate about Jesus' humanity because he is understood differently by both Christianity and Islam. However, Jesus' nature must be maintained that Jesus in Islam is a prophet, and in Christianity he is God. To deepen Leirvik's thoughts about such a polemical topic, conflicts between Christians and Muslims in the Middle Ages will also be discussed briefly in the following discussion.

### **The Miracle of Jesus Christ in Islamic Context**

Before examining the polemics about Jesus, it is significant to know that in Islam Jesus is also described as having miracles. Even when still a child, Jesus spoke from the cradle to defend his mother, who was about to be stoned as she was considered adulterous. It is also told that Satan was not able to touch Jesus as told in the Hadith, and Jesus could make empty jars full.<sup>21</sup> The miracles Jesus showed were like Jesus' stories in the Bible (in the Catholic context), such as casting out demons, raising the dead and rising from the death. Both Islamic and Catholic traditions establish that Jesus has miracles.

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<sup>20</sup> Jacquelyn B. Shellenberg, "The Person of Jesus Christ: The Essentiality of His Nature within Christianity," *The American Journal of Biblical Theology* 22, no. 18 (2021), 4.

<sup>21</sup> Leirvik, *Images of Jesus Christ*, 59.

## **Christian Polemics against Islam in the Middle Ages**

Polemics that arose between Islamic and Catholic traditions are often related to conflicts that emerged due to differences in religious symbols. After Muhammad's death, Islamic power succeeded in conquering Byzantium, and as a result, several Islamic kingdoms destroyed the Catholic symbols. It occurred owing to a combination of spiritual differences and political interests. Leirvik, referring to Goddard's opinion, states that the conflict was triggered by competition due to social differences and the need to maintain a unique Islamic identity. Besides, confrontation also arose due to differences in theological views, which caused Nestorianists in the Middle Ages to convert to Islam.

In the current context of pluralistic life, a competitive attitude does not accord with the spirit of religious life, especially between Islam and Christianity. It is important to avoid embedding violent dogma in the understanding of Jesus. Although understanding of Jesus may vary in religious communities, when Muslims and Catholics apply the principles of peace in their acts, the awareness that Jesus is a peaceful figure can bring peace into religious life. Christ is recognized as a figure of peace, bringer of miracles and a prophet who conveys truth in human life.

The polemic is one of the results of many differences of opinion which can cause religious tension and can even lead to major disasters such as war.<sup>22</sup> War often has a religious background, in addition to group differences, because many events in people's lives are related to religion and trigger divisions. However, as individuals who understand the figure of 'Īsā al-Masīḥ in Islam, we can reflect on seeking wisdom because Islam and Catholicism have a strong relationship with Jesus as an important figure in their respective doctrines.

In the Indonesian context, good understanding of Islam and Catholicism can generate an attitude of brotherhood, as seen when Jesus was considered a brother in faith by Muhammad. It is important for those—who are sensitive to differences of both Islamic and Catholic perspectives—to understand who Jesus really is in their religion and tradition. The biggest challenge in religious dialogue is the existing differences that can encourage groups to behave narrowly

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<sup>22</sup> Syamsuddin Arif, "Interfaith Dialogue' dan Hubungan Antaragama dalam Perspektif Islam," *Tsaqafah* 6, no. 1 (2010), 157-158.

and fanatically, even to the point of ridiculing other people who are considered different.<sup>23</sup> However, such acts should not be strengthened because dialogue efforts that are not based on understanding of other groups can lead to hate speech. Different backgrounds can also trigger an uproar of affronting and slandering each other, so that it is important to learn the figure of Jesus. The relevance of this research is its ability to improve and refine people's thinking and reflection as well as bringing individual religious contexts, both Islamic and Catholic, so that they are more educated about the figure of Jesus. Hence, intensive dialogue and further knowledge about Jesus are effective for opening minds and creating peace between religious groups.<sup>24</sup>

### **The Dialogue and Peace between Christians and Muslims**

Dialogue is an illustration of human beings who appreciate and prioritize unity in diversity. In Indonesia, dialogue is the appropriate means since Indonesia is based on Pancasila, one of which is democracy guided by the inner wisdom in the unanimity arising out of deliberations among representatives. In addition, dialogue is essential because, based on Indonesia's religious diversity, the understanding of religions is needed to build brotherhood. The characteristic of Indonesian Islam is *rahmatan lil-'ālamīn*, which means an Islam that is friendly, peaceful, merciful and calm.<sup>25</sup>

As regards the geographic condition, Arab is not the same as Indonesia which has a distinctive culture. Indonesia has various cultures in each place. Islam did not originate from Indonesia, so the characteristics of Islam in Indonesia have customs and traditions originating from Indonesia itself. In the beginning, Indonesia's original religion was animism-dynamism, afterwards was Hinduism-Buddhism, followed by Islam, thus being the religion of most of Indonesia's population. Local wisdom in Indonesia brings practical model into Islam, and Islam in Indonesia has a distinct identity which is more tolerant of diversity. However, Jesus in Islam, i.e., 'Īsā al-

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<sup>23</sup> Suraiya IT, "Mutual Respect and Dialogue is a Challenge for the Future of Diversity in the Globalization," *Jurnal Substantia* 15, no. 1 (2013), 129.

<sup>24</sup> Khotimah, "Dialog dan Kerukunan Antarumat Beragama," *Jurnal Usbuluddin* 27, no. 2 (2011), 223.

<sup>25</sup> Hanum Jazimah Puji Astuti, "Islam Nusantara: Sebuah Argumentasi Beragama dalam Bingkai Kultural," *INJECT: Interdisciplinary Journal of Communication* 2, no.1 (2017), 30.

Masīḥ is understood unlike Catholics' Jesus, considering the fact that when dialogue with several Muslim brothers and sisters, the author found that Muslims will only know Maryam (Mary), not the name of Jesus. Indeed, most already know who 'Īsā al-Masīḥ is in the Quranic context. Muslims get to know 'Īsā al-Masīḥ from an ustad or religious teacher, but in the context of dialogue and of introduction to the figure of 'Īsā al-Masīḥ, of course, the religious teacher does not mention 'Īsā al-Masīḥ as Jesus recognized by Catholics.

The danger of the Arabization process or of identifying oneself with Middle Eastern culture is that a Muslim is uprooted from his cultural roots. Moreover, Arabization does not necessarily suit needs. Indigenization is not an effort to avoid the emergence of resistance from local culture, but this culture is preserved instead.<sup>26</sup>

The concern expressed by Astuti above regarding Islamic identity highlights that Islam cannot be separated from the cultural context in which Muslims live. Culture has benefits in affirming the values of nonviolence. According to Leirvik, the Quran emphasizes the importance of peace, with the belief that surrender to God will bring stability to society and create an ideal Islamic society. The hope for peace is highly sought after by various religious groups, including Muslims and Catholics who live side by side.

This article emphasizes the importance of understanding that Jesus is a prophet who brought truth in the Islamic context, and that Jesus has played an important role, bringing Islam and Catholicism together.<sup>27</sup> Even though there are differences in teachings and views in respect of Jesus, at least establishing the understanding that Islam is *rahmatan lil-'alamin* (mercy for all entities) is a key to practicing peaceful Islam. Getting to know 'Īsā al-Masīḥ or Jesus means knowing more about his name as well as background and more means following his good example, because Muhammad has considered Jesus his brother in faith.

However, to achieve peace, Muslims must stay away from evil, because they have a solid understanding of Islamic teachings and instructions from the prophets, especially Muhammad who conveys

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 31.

<sup>27</sup> Joseph Lumbard, "Kata Bersama: Apa yang Sama?" in *Kata Bersama antara Muslim dan Kristen*, edited by Waleed el-Ansary et al., trans. Hadrianus Tedjoworo (Yogyakarta: Gadjah Mada University Press, 2019), 242-243.

these teachings through Hadith. Dialogue is essential for peace since every religion aims to achieve happiness spiritually, emotionally and physically. However, the existing challenges, especially in assessing radical situations, will add to the chaos which causes peace in pluralism to be disrupted. The Prophet 'Īsā al-Masīḥ, who is one of the main figures and examples of living peacefully, has an inspiration that can inspire people, and the message from God has come down to humankind so that they can develop the virtues of life. To understand prophetic figures does not stop at getting information about the person; it requires testing to create peace. Teachings that display hatred are not the peace-loving teachings of Islam, especially in the cultural context of various regions in Indonesia. Existing diversity is not an obstacle for the nation's founders saw the potential for religious communities to live in mutual tolerance. In this regard, Muhammad has set an example for Muslims so that the goal of harmony or peace can be achieved.<sup>28</sup>

Global ethics will not be understood if society continues to witness wars taking place and puts pressure on human values. Chaos continues on account of endless competition. As we already know, religious polemics can cause great destruction and suffering. In the Islamic context, the figure of Jesus is considered a helper or the Messiah sent by God to help people and convey His message. Thus, the presence of Jesus in the Islamic context is interpreted as a helper and bringer of peace, who inspires humans to imitate his goodness and piety. Goodness grows because of example, and 'Īsā al-Masīḥ is considered a noble example.<sup>29</sup>

It is important for society to recognize role models who bring peace. There are many works in the fields of *tafsir*, *ilm al-kalam* and *fiqh*, which are sources of knowledge about Islam. These classic writings not only offer historical insight, but also provide guidance for Muslims. Regarding 'Īsā al-Masīḥ, Muslims have made a significant contribution in developing methods for recognizing the historicity of Jesus. This is reflected in poetry written in Iran, Pakistan and the Arab world, where Jesus is included as part of the study. The approach to the historicity of Jesus in the Islamic context adds to the richness of

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<sup>28</sup> Armia, "Kesatuan Agama-Agama dan Kearifan Perennial dalam Perspektif Tasawuf," *Al-Tabrir* 13, no 1 (2013), 130.

<sup>29</sup> Yoo Jeong Jae, "Jesus according to Ibn al-Arabi and Christian Scholars" (MA thesis., The American University in Cairo, Cairo, 2013), 27-28.

literature for Catholic students who want to understand Islam more deeply. There is an opinion among Muslims that the story of 'Īsā al-Masīḥ is only important for the Islamic religion, but this is not true. In Christian or Catholic theology, the history of Jesus is studied in detail from various sources. The mention of Jesus in the Islamic context, therefore, has important value for Catholics who want to highlight the diversity of religious understanding. This is because differences in understanding will give a unique dimension to the figure of Jesus.

Theological studies about Jesus are now open to other religious groups that want to dialogue between religions and exchange knowledge academically, so the goal of world peace is not a mere theory. It has to be built with the awareness that different religious followers need to learn from the Book of each religion. With this awareness, various religious groups and communities will work in harmony. Many communities are trapped in a cycle of hostility fueled by hatred, which hinders peace efforts. Indifference towards vulnerable groups, both Islamic and Catholic groups who are victims of injustice, only worsens the situation and is contrary to the teachings of peace. The Quran itself emphasizes the importance of peace clearly.

The message of peace in Q.S. al-Nisā' [4]: 86 is divided into three: the command to give a greeting, and to respond with a greeting that is better, or to return it equally. Here it can be understood that the implementation of the message of peace in the Quran is related to spirituality, that is, an effort to give a sense of security accompanied by the intention to gain God's content, and is related to humanistic issues, namely, that human beings as a whole have the right for peace in spite of their social status.<sup>30</sup>

The message conveyed in Islamic teachings proves that studying figures and teachings is very important. Even if we do not find a figure like 'Īsā al-Masīḥ discussed in this article, Islamic teachings are rich, pay attention to moral goodness and uphold spiritual values. To understand 'Īsā al-Masīḥ requires a commitment to experiencing spirituality, such as following the teachings of Muhammad.

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<sup>30</sup> Ahmad Tri Muslim HD, *Pesan Perdamaian dalam Al-Qur'an (Kajian Tablili terhadap QS. Al-Nisa' [4]: 86)* (Makassar: UIN Alauddin, 2017), xvii.

According to Mona Siddiqui, Leirvik emphasizes the importance of dialogue in the context of modern developments. However, the debate that has emerged in Islamic thought still faces obstacles in harmonizing views on the crucifixion of Jesus. This is due to the belief that God's will for the Prophet 'Isā al-Masīḥ does not allow His messenger to be insulted through the cross, because the crucifixion is considered a reprehensible act both morally and theologically. This point of view is reflected in Jewish and Islamic perspectives, where a noble prophet could have not experience a shameful death on the cross.<sup>31</sup>

In his writing, Siddiqui goes on to refer to the thought of Muhammad Iqbal, highlighting that views of Jesus in the Christian world are often dark and full of criticism.<sup>32</sup> The differences in theological views between Islam and Christianity show that discussions about Jesus will not be easy to reconcile, given that the two have different theological approaches. However, the aim of this dialogue is not to find similarities, but rather to understand the uniqueness of each teaching and view, so that when there is an official forum discussing religion or Jesus, thinkers should not be trapped in *ad hominem* debates.<sup>33</sup> Healthy dialogue about Jesus must be built on respect for differences, while considering historical and theological aspects that can enrich the understanding of Jesus for many who value the interests of their respective religions.

Although this dialogue will cover subjects such as Maryam in the Quran who has similarities to Mary in the Christian Bible, differences in views and beliefs will remain. A critical approach to these differences is not to debate, but to understand the shared context and themes in a deeper way. According to Bormans, there are several things that can be the basis for constructive dialogue or discussion, including acceptance of each individual, a shared understanding of respect for each other's beliefs, cooperation in sharing and living side by side and the courage to take risks and be

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<sup>31</sup> Mona Siddiqui, *Christians, Muslims, and Jesus* (New Haven: Yale University, 2013), 228.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, 241.

<sup>33</sup> Gumilar Irfanullah and Hasse J, "Dialog Sufistik: Membangun Relasi Antaragama yang Konstruktif," *Ilmu Ushuluddin* 3, no. 1 (2016), 72.

responsible.<sup>34</sup> Some ideas cannot be forced into dialogue, such the common belief as the miracle at the birth of Jesus.<sup>35</sup> It is important for many people to understand these principles in order to address differences in background.

In dialogue, the main goal is not to reach agreement, but to gain deeper understanding. It is important to pay attention to the concept of understanding the uniqueness of each religion, both Catholicism and Islam. Islam gives Jesus a genuine prophetic status, as a teaching Semitic figure.<sup>36</sup> However, as Cragg quotes Baillie, the teaching of the Incarnation gives a deeper dimension to the prophecy.<sup>37</sup> Islamic teachings cannot be enforced by any party or teaching, so the concepts and teachings of the Catholicism regarding Jesus will be different from Islam's. Nevertheless, dialogue about Jesus between Islamic and Catholic teachings can take into account the context of plurality in Indonesia.<sup>38</sup> That is to say, to understand the principles of each religion is necessary to be simplified by emphasizing that Islamic teachings about Jesus emphasize the prophetic aspect. In contrast, Christology and understanding of the Incarnation of Jesus is more open.

In fact, there has also been a discussion about who Jesus is in a Catholic context and who Jesus is in an Islamic context because, in 2011, researchers received a question about whether Jesus was really crucified in Catholic teachings. This question is quite profound, although the answer was simple at the time, which is based only on limited knowledge. However, when we understand Cragg's opinion, which quotes the bland statement of Ata al-Rahim, that Jesus can be understood historically and the Church makes it independent of Jesus, many people are confused by the mythology about Jesus.<sup>39</sup> Ata al-Rahim understands the concept of the Church's teaching about Jesus beyond what is written in the Bible, where Jesus has become a faith,

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<sup>34</sup> Maurice Bormans, *Guidelines for Dialogue between Christians and Muslims by Pontifical Council for the interreligious Dialogue*, trans. R. Marston Speight (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1990), 31-34.

<sup>35</sup> Kenneth Cragg, *Jesus and the Muslim: An Exploration* (London: Oneworld, 1999), 278.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 285.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 287.

<sup>38</sup> Taslim HM. Yasin, "Prulaisme Agama Sebuah Keniscayaan," *Jurnal Substantia* 15, no. 1 (2013), 142-143.

<sup>39</sup> Cragg, *Jesus and the Muslim*, 286.

not just a teaching. However, as Catholics who understand the Islamic context, differences are not a problem since in dialogue it is on the intellectual level due to the fact the theology of each religion is communicated as an informative delivery. One of the things that enables dialogue between Islam and Catholicism about Jesus is the context of plurality. Moussalli states that the legitimacy of pluralism, differences and diversity is present in the Quran.<sup>40</sup>

In respect of society, it is important to note that there cannot be one opinion, given the diverse opinions and views. *Shūrā* (consensus) is one of the methods used to resolve diverse opinions in society.<sup>41</sup> History records the use of *shūrā* in dealing with different opinions when the Ottoman constitution was implemented. This constitution was first promulgated in 1876, then suspended in 1878, but reinstated in 1908, becoming the starting point for resolving the problem.<sup>42</sup> This shows that diverse opinions is normal in a society. *Shūrā* can be a means of resolving problems or conflicts in a society, because it provides space for various views to be heard and considered fairly. When we look at the context of the Islamic and Catholic worlds, we can see historical moments that show that plurality has become part of the international worldview. In Indonesia, Gus Dur (Abdurrahman Wahid), who is known as the father of pluralism, has influenced religious views. The aim of the idea of pluralism championed by Gus Dur and the GUSDURian community is for the welfare of humanity, which is reflected in political attitudes and actions.<sup>43</sup>

Yūsuf al-Qarḍāwī, quoted by Moussalli, states that Islam has the nature of tolerance towards other religions. We can historically see that tolerance in Christianity in the past was sometimes lower than in Islam.<sup>44</sup> Tolerance in diverse people is very important, especially in Indonesia which has a multicultural society. In one family, there exist a Muslim husband and a Catholic wife. When there is a religious activity at church on Sunday, the Muslim husband accompanies his

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<sup>40</sup> Ahmad S. Moussalli, *The Islamic Quest for Democracy, Pluralism, and Human Rights* (Florida: University Press, 2001), 86.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 104.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 109.

<sup>43</sup> Robby Aditya Putra and Ramadiva Muhammad Akhya, "KH. Abdurrahman Wahid (1940-2009) dan Dakwahnya di Indonesia," *Al-Mishbab* 16, no. 1 (2020), 143.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, 154.

Catholic wife. In a small scope, it can be used as an example. It can be an inspiration for other people to practice tolerance.

In addition, it is necessary to know that Sufi doctrine also provides insight. Some aspects of Sufi teachings that are interesting to know to deepen our understandings are the doctrine of humility, sincerity, love, gratitude and patience.<sup>45</sup>

Humility is the essence of the heart that directs itself to God, making it possible to understand invisible things through the heart. By doing contemplation, humility can be considered as a path to perfection to achieve God's content, beyond religious boundaries.<sup>46</sup> The author sees that humility encourages individuals to act according to God's will. Concerning the Indonesian context, humility can be achieved by respecting other people and other lives.<sup>47</sup> Humility is also related to the principles that regulate human actions so that they are based on goodness and do not harm other people so as to gain God's content. It is also found in the teachings of Jesus, since he taught many people about humility. Jesus says blessed are the humble for they will inherit the earth, and blessed are the pure in heart for they will see God (Matthew 5:1-12). Sufi teachings and the written Bible show how important it is for humans to carry out the commands of each religion because there is an element of goodness that is the basis for pleasing God as stated in Islam and being able to see God as stated in Catholicism.

Sincerity refers to an act taken without the intention of increasing feelings of pride, but solely as a form of devotion to God.<sup>48</sup> The Sufi concept teaches that sincerity is act with no coercion, and every sincerity taken will be recorded by angels and not influenced by satanic temptations.<sup>49</sup> If one still seeks recognition or praise for their good deeds, then his or her sincerity is doubtful. In the Catholic context, sincerity is emphasized in 1 Timothy 1:5, "But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith." In interfaith dialogue, similar principles of each religion must be used as a source of inspiration to bridge differences. Sincerity

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<sup>45</sup> Abū Bakr al-Kalābādhī, *The Doctrine of Sufis*, trans. A. J. Arberry (London: Cambridge University, 1935), vi-vii.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 88.

<sup>47</sup> Moussalli, *The Islamic Quest*, 5.

<sup>48</sup> Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 93.

<sup>49</sup> al-Kalābādhī, *The Doctrine of Sufis*, 90-91.

can strengthen tolerance between religious communities because the main value is explained in the teachings of each religion. Religious diversity, hence, should not be an obstacle to harmony in life, but rather be a way to enrich understanding of religious values that are similar.<sup>50</sup>

It is said that love is the culmination of a person's inner feelings. It is closely related to the feeling a person has for the one he loved. However, Sufi writings show greater depth, stating that love for God lies within the heart, a love that is not dependent on the pleasure of the other. It is said that the Prophet teaches that love is complete surrender without conditions and limits, which means love is unconditional. In Catholic teachings, love means loving God with all our heart, soul and strength, and loving our neighbor as loving ourselves (Matthew 22:36-40). Dialogue between Islam and Catholicism regarding the teachings of love will not be hindered if they are understood in their respective contexts and if both have a reconciling teaching.

Gratitude means that a person acknowledges the Benefactor and acknowledges His divinity. The following is a quote from Abū 'Alī al-Rūdhabārī,

To all my members had a tongue  
To laud Thee for thy bounteous care  
Each anthem would new bounties bear  
And Thy whole praise be never sung.<sup>51</sup>

In Catholicism, gratitude has a central role in the Lord's prayer, which is represented by the phrase "let your name be glorified" (Matthew 6:9-15). It reflects the appreciation given to God for His abundant goodness as proof of His love for humans. Thus, the act of glorifying God becomes a manifestation of deep gratitude. Gratitude also reflects the act of compassion found in Islamic and Catholic teachings. This act grows from an appreciation of gratitude which directs one not to hate, oppress or demean others. By maintaining and developing a sense of gratitude, one is directed to become good individuals and respect others.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Media Zainul Bahri, "Dialog Antariman dan Kerja Sama demi Harmoni Bumi," *Refleksi* 13, no. 1 (2013), 87.

<sup>51</sup> al-Kalābādī, *The Doctrine of Sufis*, 91.

<sup>52</sup> Ali Jum'ah, "Kata Bersama antara Kami dan Kalian: Motif dan Implikasi," in *Kata Bersama antara Muslim dan Kristen*, edited by Waleed el-Ansary et al., trans. Hadrianus Tedjoworo (Yogyakarta: Gadjah Mada University Press, 2019), 51.

Patience is a happy blessing when one seeks help from God and is patient with God's commands in the sense that one must be patient and obedient to the commands faithfully. Patience is based on prayer.<sup>53</sup> In Catholic teachings, patience is directed toward God and others. It is said in Psalm 40:1, "I waited patiently for the Lord; he turned to me and heard my cry." Moreover, with reference to others, it is stated in Proverbs 19:11, "A person's wisdom yields patience; it is to one's glory to overlook an offense." It can be deduced that patience is part of Islamic and Catholic teachings with the result that the human being relationships with God and others based on patience helps to be close to God.

## Conclusion

From the discussion above, the views propounded by Leirvik can be directed towards the understanding of Jesus as a figure who evokes a spirit of mercy, faith and non-violence. The chief crux is to overcome the lack of understanding about Jesus. Religion is indeed an important aspect of life, but it is crucial to remember that the main religious doctrine is a teaching that prioritizes goodness. To understand Jesus, as explained in this article, injects insight that Islam has a figure named 'Īsā al-Masīḥ who inspires through his miracles and good behavior.

The discussion about Jesus or 'Īsā al-Masīḥ in this article shows the importance of learning from Quranic figures to realize the importance of religion in bringing peace. The significance of character that is in accord with Islamic teachings is the key to creating peace and will increase understanding and wisdom, especially in the context of pluralism. Jesus, as a figure who has been examined in both theology and anthropology, is a source of inspiration and of teaching about peace. The positive things from his teachings help us develop a way of life conforming to ethics. Ethically, Jesus has taught teachings in line with Islam. He has brought an example to Muslims and will bring peace, in accord with the teachings passed down by Muhammad.

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