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SUMMARY

The people of Indonesia consist of various ethnicities, traditions, cultures, and religiosities. On the one hand, this multi-heterogeneity is a grace and a blessing of God for the people of Indonesia. On the other hand, however, the existing differences, including the difference of belief, often lead to a tense relationship between religious communities. The strained relationship between Muslims and Christians in Indonesia is indeed caused by several factors, such as the historical setting right from the beginning, the missionary character of the two faiths, their theological exclusivism, and various political interests of certain individuals or groups, which sometimes treat religion as an instrument for achieving their objectives. Besides all those, the differences of doctrine or teaching also contribute to the worsening of the relationship between the two faiths that is not so harmonious. One doctrinal issue that often arouses disputes between them is the doctrine of God and Christology. Generally, any doctrinal dialogue is regarded as taboo, and therefore, usually avoided.

This study is an experiment of doctrinal conversation in searching for a new understanding of Jesus' person based on exegetical analyses of two passages of the New Testament and the Qur'ān, namely the hymn of Christ in the letter to the Colossians 1:15-20, and the hymn of Jesus in Sura Maryam 19:16-40. From the Christ-hymn of the letter to the Colossians, we try to acquire a clear picture of the understanding of the early Christian community about Jesus, and from the hymn of Jesus of Sura Maryam, we try to understand the Qur'ān's perception about him. By digging out the accounts of Jesus of both scriptures, we hope to understand the Christian and Muslim basic scriptural perceptions about him, and perhaps find some misunderstanding of the two communities about Jesus, which deviates from the perceptions of their scriptures. Starting from our scriptural-exegetical analyses, we can explore the possibilities for developing a common perception for the two communities of today about Jesus, or, at least, we may have the possibility of reducing the acuteness of the differences in their perspective on him.

We realize the fact that, on the one hand, the Christians and the churches in Indonesia are generally very strict in maintaining the doctrinal legacies of their 'mother' churches, i.e. the reformed churches in Europe that are closely related to the reformed symbols, which doctrinally do not move too far from the ecumenical symbols of the churches. They maintain the doctrine of the Trinity, which teaches that God the One consists of three persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. These three are one and have the same essence. Their Christology, which constitutes a derivation of the teaching of the Trinity, explains that Christ was one of the persons of the Trinity, who had in

himself two natures: divine and human. He was a God-man, the God who assumed a human form.

On the other hand, although there are in Indonesia several Islamic traditions and schools (*madhhabs*), basically all Muslims have the same doctrine of the *tawhīd* (the oneness of God). This is obvious from several Islamic writings that are still extant, both those of international and those of national (Indonesian) Muslim writers, or those of traditional and those of modern times. For Muslims, God is the absolute one; nothing can be considered equal to Him. He entirely differs from any other being, and cannot be identified with any human being or other creation. God did not beget, nor was He begotten. Based on their strict teaching of the oneness of God, Muslims find it hard to understand the Christian doctrine, which teaches that Jesus is a divine Son of God. For them Jesus is a prophet, a human being like other prophets. The Qur'ān even strongly emphasizes that he is a prophet sent specially for the children of Israel. Indeed, Jesus' specialty among the prophets is also acknowledged – that is clear from the titles applied to no other prophets but him. Nevertheless, he is only human, not a divine being.

Starting from our exegetical analysis of the Christ-hymn in the epistle to the Colossians, we find and see that the Christological conception of the early Christian community cannot be set apart from the monotheistic idea of the Old Testament. The early Christian interpretation of Jesus was developed based on the Judaic understanding of God, Who always intervened and acted within history. The early believers' acquaintance with God did not result from their intellectual effort to conceptualize the being of God, but rather from their experiences and full comprehension of the acts of God Who always worked actively throughout history. They knew God not only through His prophets, messengers, and servants, but also through various forms of His revelations. The presence of God that they experienced was sometimes personified as the presence of an angel, the Spirit of God, the power of God, or the Wisdom of God. All these expressions were used to convey their comprehension of God's manifestations or revelations of Himself to humankind.

Therefore, in order to understand the personifying expressions they used, we must locate them in the framework of the Judaic-monotheistic idea of God. The attributes applied to Jesus in the hymn of Christ should not be understood literally, but metaphorically, in the framework of the Judaic-monotheistic way of thought. The early Christian community saw that God the One, Who acts through all history, was now acting and revealing Himself through the person of Jesus. In this regard, what needs to be emphasized is the revelation of the will of God and the manifestation or realization of His work through Jesus, not a doctrinal conceptualization of the nature of Jesus. Through him men can know the invisible God and His will. In this role and

position Jesus is therefore called the 'image (*eikōn*) of the invisible God' (Col. 1:15).

Actually, the Qur'ān's account of Jesus does not differ too much from such an understanding. QS Maryam 19:16-40 insists that even though Jesus is revered and praised, he is only human. In vv. 16-33 of this Sura, we find that the extraordinariness of Jesus is told flowingly in a positive tone. Afterwards, however, in order to preserve the absolute oneness of God, the account is then followed by a polemical passage (vv. 34-40) that heavily emphasizes the humanity of Jesus. It is quite possible that at first this passage was addressed to the contemporary Arabian polytheism, but it was later also directed towards the Christian faith, which believed in Jesus as one of the persons of the Trinity. According to this Sura, Jesus confirmed himself that he was a messenger of God. God made him His prophet in order to convey His word, and reveal His will to humankind.

Indeed, Jesus' pre-eminence among the prophets is also mentioned in this Sura. There we are told that he was born from the Virgin Mary by the power of God without the intervention of a father. As had happened also to Adam, Jesus came into being because of the word of God, 'Be', and he was. Moreover, with God's permission, Jesus performed a miracle when he was still an infant. He was able to speak since he was in the cradle. Besides, although without description, he was called in the Qur'ān a 'sign' and a 'mercy' from God unto men (QS Maryam 19:21). In this instance, what needs to be put forward by the designation 'sign' (*āyat*) is Jesus' role as a deliverer of the guidance from God to humankind. He was not only a 'sign' from God, but also a 'mercy' from God unto men. Unfortunately, in what sense Jesus was to be a 'mercy' for humankind and how he performed this role, the Qur'ān gives no further explanation. The only expression that may have a parallel meaning to this title is his saying that God made him blessed wherever he might be (QS Maryam 19:31), and that salvation (*salām*) would be on him wherever and whenever he was, "So peace is on me the day I was born, the day that I die, and the day that I shall be raised up to life (again)" (QS Maryam 19:33). The other characteristic of Jesus that is mentioned in Sura Maryam is his kindness and piety. It is said in v. 34 that God had made him kind to his mother, and not overbearing or miserable. In this instance, his piousness was also to be a 'sign' from God unto men, in the sense that all men are called to imitate him. They are called to observe his guidance, teachings, and examples.

Observing closely the titles applied to Jesus by the New Testament and the Qur'ān in the light of the hymn of Christ of Colossians and the hymn of Jesus of Sura Maryam, we have three concluding notes. *Firstly*, both the New Testament and the Qur'ān revere Jesus. Both acknowledge Jesus' pre-eminence among the prophets and messengers of God. This is clear from the fact that there are titles, which are applied to him but not to other prophets, such as '*eikōn*' (image) or '*āyat*' (sign) of (from) God, 'word' of (from) God,

'spirit' of (proceeding from) God, and 'Messiah'. *Secondly*, we find that all of Jesus' titles are closely related to his role and function before God and men. We may say that what both the New Testament and the Qur'ān want to express by those titles is Jesus' functional role before God and men. Although all Jesus' titles are concerned with his role, and cannot be used apart from one another, functionally we can group them into two categories, namely his '*honorific titles*' (such as 'Word of God', 'Spirit of God', and 'Son of God'), and his '*ministerial titles*' (such as 'Messiah', 'Servant', 'Prophet', and 'Sign' of God). His honorific titles are the titles that are applied to him especially with regard to his honoured position before God and men, while his ministerial titles are the titles that are applied to him especially with regard to his ministry. *Thirdly*, to speak of Jesus' role, which is reflected in his titles, means to speak of God's communication to humankind. Through Jesus God communicates Himself and His will to humankind. Therefore, to speak of Jesus' role also means to speak of God's guidance which Jesus revealed through his teachings and examples. Thus, instead of debating his person, it would be better to follow his guidance, to imitate his life, to observe his examples, and to set foot on his pathway.

Apart from the common perception that Christians and Muslims may develop together, it should also be acknowledged that there are still between them different doctrinal perspectives concerning God and Christology. Therefore, in order to bridge the gap, they need to develop dialogical encounters, wherein they can sit together equally with readiness and openness to understand each other, and even to give and take from one another. They should be realistic and accept that a single reality can be seen from different points of view. In consequence of that, they must have the courage to carry out doctrinal dialogues, instead of avoiding them. Without such courage, they can never reach an authentic dialogue. Furthermore, it would be better for them to put more emphasis on the many possible similarities rather than on some acute differences. In connection with Jesus, apart from their different interpretation of him, both faiths acknowledge that all the titles, which their Scriptures apply to him, reflect his unique relationship with God. In his unique relationship with God, Jesus bears witness to the truth of God, so that there is nothing wrong in calling him the 'unique witness of God.' Since Jesus is the witness of the truth of God, he is, therefore, properly called the '*eikōn*' or '*āyat*' of God. He is the real icon, the real champion, and the ultimate example for humankind.