

Muslim-Christian Goodness of Life as a Philosophical Perspective

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Abstract

Being Filipinos delving into philosophical discussions necessitates expanding the majority Christian viewpoint that crosses religious affiliation into the Muslim viewpoint as well. In Mindanao, particularly where Filipinos are a blending of Muslims, Christians, various Indigenous People's communities, and mestizos of genetic and/or cultural hybridity of human identification even extend to various others for further consideration while in the paper the focus is on Muslim-Christian understanding of the notion of goodness of life. Philosophizing in this locality can expand the horizon of Filipinos who philosophize outside of Mindanao. A philosophical perspective needs to understand the ongoing blending of the Muslim and the Christian. Their practices manifest meaning of goodness of life as in their articles of faith, *iman* in Islam for existence of Allah and life after death, while the Decalogue and sacrament-generated reaching out to neighbors in Christianity may find differences, and yet philosophically bridging similar good aspirations, as supported by the philosophical stance of Emmanuel Levinas exploring the summons on the being of the 'I' towards the other for pursuing originary goodness. Similar notions of a creator god emulated in living out love and mercy build up valuing primordial goodness of life itself so that the differently religious other's life is inviolable. Philosophizing in both religions as expressed in their major tenets deduces the rational human recognized in the other that brings about a philosophical perspective for the Filipinos that leads to averting violence by bringing about peace.

Keywords: Muslim-Christian as Filipinos, goodness of life, philosophical perspective, dialogue, peace



INTRODUCTION

As a teacher of Philosophy courses as well as various general education courses among students in Mindanao, the philosophy scholar has integrated in writing this article his own personal experiences to reflect on the essential notion of goodness of life among Muslims and Christians, since the local setting of blending of Muslims and Christians among the students, such as in the classroom learning experiences, has awakened that form of awareness that the majority perspective of viewing realities of life in Mindanao is a blending of Muslim and Christian. We likewise immediately offer a caveat to this nascent philosophical perspective that there are even more minority perspectives that intersperse with this coming from some indigenous persons who tend to adapt themselves to the majority stream as well of the locality. However, the scope and limitation of this article cannot explore further into this equally interesting theme, as the discussion dwells on the immediate majority nascent perspective that needs to understand the ongoing blending of the Muslim and Christian notions of goodness of life for our wider awareness of our utilized philosophical perspective of reality. The indigenous people's and the aforementioned hybrid communities' viewpoints as well need recommending for further study after this one on Muslim-Christian perspective. Thus, for the objective of making focus on this specific notion of Muslim-Christian goodness of life, we leave a reserved and open space for further study of inclusion as well of the various minority communities, that can be as daunting as a task as this current study in this paper.

Philosophical Problem of Muslim-Christian Religious Views of Goodness of Life

We inquire philosophically on the meaning of goodness of life that prevails in Islamic and Christian religions. How do their practices manifest such meaning of goodness of life? Why is a philosophical understanding of such ongoing blending of the Muslim and Christian notions of goodness of life important for us as Filipinos engaging in philosophical discussions? Further on the scope and limits of this paper, the philosophy scholar takes up the role of an immediate experiencer that then allows him to offer what he peruses as essentially relevant to the discussion. There is no promise of a completely exhaustive presentation of information that could be dealt with in separate papers altogether

for some readers' interests on facts and figures pertinent to the themes emerging. A main paper purpose is to invite the reader to engage in exploring further by himself/herself the engaging philosophical questions that could be surfaced along the flow of the philosophical discussion. Unearthing of jewels of insights on the nascent theme for further philosophizing hopefully might arise through this paper. The philosophical stance of Emmanuel Levinas comes in helpful for the philosophy scholar as he has deemed such philosophy supportive of an exploration of the being of the other that summons the being of the 'I' towards pursuing and living out originary goodness.

Muslim-Christian Shared Beliefs in Eternal Life

Islamic religious belief functions for philosophical discussion as foundational framework for our current discussion of perspective of living in reality. We can find two articles of faith in Islam that teach that the aim of Allah or God for creation is belief, *iman*, as belief in existence and oneness of Allah (Qur'an 3:2) and belief in the life after death for the righteous (Qur'an 2:130).¹ Islam views creation as out of nothing. "Theologians in Islam had broadly insisted that the Qur'anic notion of a creator god was one who produced the cosmos ex nihilo in time."² The human being, in coming from nothingness in Islamic belief, can oppose God. "What 'opposition' they exhibit comes to light, rather, as the dynamic motion of creation and re-creation, perdurance and annihilation, manifesting and veiling – all of which are amenable to the *mizan* (balance) as their regulating principle."³ Rationally understood from the hitherside, as in the explication of Emmanuel Levinas in *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, human reasoning has reached such point of viewing reality to the extent that we can glean that humans are moral servants of one God. Knowing who God is can help clarify religion's moral intent. "To know Allah in the best way is only possible through His Names and Attributes. It is possible to see that in some

1 Risale-I Nur Institute of the Philippines, *Islam: Fundamentals of Faith*, Istanbul: Han Basim Yayin, 2016, pp. 2-5; 105-110.

2 Sajjad Rizvi, "Mir Damad in India: Islamic Philosophical Traditions and the Problem of Creation," in *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 131, No. 1, 2011, p. 12.

3 Anthony Shaker, "Man, Existence and the Life Balance (*Mizan*) in Islamic Philosophy," in *Journal of Islamic Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 2, 2015, p. 153.

Islamic sources, the divine names are also considered as attributes.”⁴ Attributes of Allah were traditionally gathered throughout the Qur’an. “The attributes of Allah are three kinds: A. As sifaatul Waajibaat. Positive Attributes i.e. Attributes that Allah essentially possesses. B. As sifaatul Mustahiilaat. Negative Attributes i.e. Attributes that Allah does not and cannot possess. C. As Sifaatul Jaa-izaat. Possible Attributes that Allah may possess or may not possess.”⁵ Attributes of Allah open to reflection on human existence, such as Eternal, Oneness, Power, Wish, Knowledge, Life, Hearing, Sight, Speech. Some negative attributes that Allah does not possess are Non-existing, being created, Weakness, Ignorance.⁶ Examples are given of possible attributes of Allah. “Allah may give a reward to those who are doing good, or He may not give it. Allah may punish those who are doing wrong, or He may not punish them.”⁷ Seyyed Hossein Nasr mentions names of majesty and the rest are of beauty. “The Names of Majesty include the Just, the Majestic, the Reckoner, the Giver of Death, the Victorious, and the All-Powerful, and those of Beauty, the All-Merciful, the Forgiver, the Gentle, the Generous, the Beautiful, and Love.”⁸ We can argue that knowing the Names of Allah or God would bring the believer into following the goodness that these express. As in Levinas, pursuing the call of the Infinite Other when lived, pursues goodness beyond oneself.

Knowing also the way that in Christianity God revealed Himself in the Bible as experienced by the believers through the prophets and definitively in Jesus Christ would bring the believer to follow the way that God leads one to live a good life with others in society. “Then God said, ‘And now we will make human beings; they will be like us and resemble us.’”⁹ Human beings were created by God with rationality. “Our holy mother, the Church, holds and teaches that God, the first principle and last end of all things, can be known with certainty from

4 Risale-I Nur Institute of the Philippines, *Islam: Fundamentals of Belief*, p. 29.

5 Ustaz Iljas Ismail, *Fundamental Teachings of Islam*, Manila: Islamic Da’wah Council of the Philippines, 1984, p. 3.

6 Ibid., pp. 4-6.

7 Ibid., p. 6.

8 Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Heart of Islam: Enduring Values for Humanity*, New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2004, p. 5.

9 *The Bible*, Today’s English Version, Genesis 1:26-27.

the created world by the natural light of human reason.”¹⁰ God revealed Himself to Moses. “God said, ‘I am who I am. You must tell them: ‘The one who is called I AM has sent me to you.’”¹¹ God is an ultimate presence of goodness as manifested in loving human beings. “Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. And God showed his love for us by sending his only Son into the world, so that we might have life through him. This is what love is: it is not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the means by which our sins are forgiven.”¹² The continued presence of God is in the Holy Spirit as sent by God the Father and God the Son Jesus Christ, as Christ Himself said. “I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, who will stay with you forever. He is the Spirit, who reveals the truth about God.”¹³ The Trinitarian Persons in Oneness of God keeps humans capable of loving. “But the Spirit produces love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, humility, and self-control. There is no law against such things as these.”¹⁴ The merciful attribute of God is meant to be followed by the Christian. “Be merciful just as your Father is merciful.”¹⁵ We can find the principle in Levinas that self-sacrifice for the different other is exemplified in mercy, as emulating Christ’s self-sacrifice on the cross and eventual resurrection. God who is good in both Islam and Christianity and who brought human beings and other living beings into life, as well as Being the Creator of all sets the way of living for us humans according to what we rationally discover in our religious beliefs. Since life that God endows humans comes from God, then life must mean goodness. Humans henceforth strive to preserve and sustain life.

Muslim-Christian Promotion of Human Life

Philosophically deliberating on what happens after death in the two religious belief systems brings out the direction of human

10 Pope John Paul II, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997, no. 36.

11 *The Bible*, Today’s English Version, Exodus 3:14.

12 *The Bible*, Today’s English Version, 1st Letter of John 4:8-10.

13 *The Bible*, Today’s English Version, John 14:16-17.

14 *The Bible*, Today’s English Version, Galatians 5:22-23.

15 *The Bible*, Today’s English Version, Luke 6:36.

life directed towards goodness as well. Belief in the afterlife as Islam's second article of faith follows from death and the last day for all of humanity. "Having faith in the Hereafter gives humanity hope and strength to endure the burdens of worldly life."¹⁶ This moves life on earth to be directed as a good life. Whereas, in Christianity, in the endtime, there will be resurrection of the dead. "We firmly believe, and hence hope that, just as Christ is truly risen from the dead and lives for ever, so after death the righteous will live for ever with the risen Christ and he will raise them up on the last day."¹⁷ The goodness in the life of a human being follows from the goodness that life itself is a given from God the creator. "This obviously includes a right to life, 'to keep one's body whole' (by denying others a right to injure me), to 'personal liberty' and (normally) to conduct my own life as master of myself and of my acts"¹⁸ [notations in original]. We are affirmed in the philosophy of Levinas of the infinite goodness of human existence: "To understand being is to exist."¹⁹ That very being that the human there existing experiences points to that goodness of life's originary meaning and direction.

While religion as a belief system sets a way of living one's life and also understood with moral meaning of goodness, it is human beings who assent to it. Human beings are the ones rational who are agents who can initiate how to live goodness according to such a belief system. Levinas values human freedom in the exercise of rationality while responding to the Infinite Other. Yet, philosophical notions of human freedom and rationality could stand opposed to following of God's will as pre-known by the all-knowing God. Our philosophical questions then also could have theological bearing in the probing of

16 Muhammad Adil Khan Afridi, "Al-Dunya and Al-Akhirah (Worldly Life and Life After Death)," in *The Islamic Worldview: Selected Essays*, edited by Md. Yousuf Ali, Darul Ehsan, Malaysia: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2017, p. 232.

17 Pope John Paul II, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 989, See also *The Bible*, Today's English Version, John 6:39-40.

18 William Sweet, "Human Rights, Social Responsibilities, and the Preservation of Cultures," in *Christianity, Culture, and the Contemporary World: Challenges and New Paradigms*, edited by Edward Alam, Louiaize, Lebanon: Notre Dame University Press, 2009, p. 23.

19 Emmanuel Levinas, *On Thinking-of-the-Other, Entre Nous*, Translated by Michael Smith and Barbara Harshav. New York: Columbia University Press, 1998, p. 2.

belief involved in the questions of how human beings indeed are living good lives. An article of faith in Islam is belief in destiny, *qadar*, that nothing happens without the knowledge and permission of Allah. It is expressed that Allah knows everything. "He knoweth what is before them and what is behind them; and unto God shall *all* things return."²⁰ This is similar in the all-knowing God in Christianity. "God's almighty power is in no way arbitrary: 'In God, power, essence, will, intellect, wisdom, and justice are all identical. Nothing therefore can be in God's power which could not be in his just will or his wise intellect.'"²¹ Since human beings are God's creation, then the all-knowing God has the ultimate knowledge of all including humans as on them are bestowed distinctive qualities as God's *khalifah* or vicegerent on earth. "As the recipients of these distinctive qualities from Allah the Almighty, man (the human) is placed on the highest pedestal in the hierarchy of creations. Some of these distinctive features are; Man has been created in the best forms (94:1-4), provided with creative intelligence (2:31-34), given the power of speech and freedom of choice (55:4, 76:3)."²² The power of God over Creation, however, would not remove the free will of the human being to make one's decision in one's life. "Not being a person, human being cannot have proper dignity, since dignity is limited to beings which are not only substances but also are endowed with reason and free will."²³ Levinas speaks of the face-to-face dialogue of beings as individually human. Feelings also are involved in these qualities as connected to loving. "The particular qualities of feelings, which were outside the nature of Angels, were put by Allah into the nature of man (the human). Man (The human) was thus able to love and understand love, thus plan and initiate, as becomes the office of vicegerent (2:31)."²⁴ There is a pull to immanence from the transcendental direction of religion. "Human

20 *The Koran*, [or Qur'an], Original English Translation by J. M. Rodwell, New York: Bantam Dell, 2004, 32:70.

21 Pope John Paul II, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 271.

22 Mohammad Abbas Abdul Razak, "Foundation of Islamic Ethics," in *Ethics and Fiqh for Everyday Life*, edited by A. Latif Razak, Darul Ehsan, Malaysia: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2017, p. 1.

23 Piotr Jaroszynski, "Ontology against Personalism," in *Divus Thomas*, Vol. 121, No. 3, Sept.-Dec. 2018, p. 232.

24 Mohammad Abbas Abdul Razak, "Foundation of Islamic Ethics," in *Ethics and Fiqh for Everyday Life*, Edited by A. Latif Razak. Darul Ehsan, Malaysia: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2017, p. 3.

subjects self-transcend all the time, often unwittingly. In this light solicitude is the real grounding for attention to the intrinsic goodness of each and every subject.²⁵ We are in the face of the other human being as our immediate concern calling for our attention of goodness in meeting the needs of other human beings.

As a belief expression of one's religion, "Islam is founded based on physical and spiritual cleanliness. It accumulates in itself all the overt and covert merits of all the former religions."²⁶ Islamic belief acknowledges the goodness of other religions, particularly those that went before it in human experience, as Judaism and Christianity. "However, if he (she) does not feel sorrow over disobeying even one of them, but instead boasts about this state of his (her), he (she) will not have believed in the Prophet; he (she) will lose his (her) iman and become a kafir (disbeliever)"²⁷ [corrections mine/notation original]. If belief is assented to in connection with one's religion, as Islam for Muslims, the members of Islam would respect the previous ones' members too for their religions of Judaism and Christianity. It is when the reward of what is termed as eternal life, as continuation of life after death, as in the religious belief, is made exclusive to one religion, then the potential of conflict in the relationship can begin. Rather, we can see that a continuation of goodness across Judaism, Christianity and Islam can open potential for dialogue. Hence, in Christianity, the essence of religion was transformed by Jesus Christ from defined limits of membership to Judaism and eventual baptism in Christianity, into a good life that transcends confines of religious parameters. Gentiles who were regarded as foreigners in Israel were religiously and culturally turned away and belittled by the Jewish predominant religion in Christ's social milieu at that time. However, non-Jewish Samaritans and Gentiles were praised by Jesus for their good deeds and reformed lives thus belonging to life after death, as in the belief system.²⁸ There is no

25 Pamela Sue Anderson, "Pure Reason and Contemporary Philosophy of Religion: The Rational Striving in and For Truth," in *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, Vol. 68, 2010, p. 103.

26 Hakikat Kitabevi, *Islam and Christianity* (Istanbul: Waqf Ikhlas Publications, 1992), p. 31.

27 Ibid., p. 30.

28 William Phipps, *Muhammad and Jesus: A Comparison of the Prophets and Their Teachings*, New York: Paragon House, 1996, pp. 150-151.

force of violence but respect for freedom of the person to believe. This could be disputed whether there is no sense of concern for people to believe in Christ and His teachings. Yet, Jesus is establishing a universal Fatherhood of God by extending love of all people in an unconditional way as God loves humanity. The loving goodness is essential to Christ.²⁹ Asymmetry in responsibility emerging from the I in Levinas, thus, is not by imposition of one's religion on the other for membership but respects freedom.

We can find in our religions of Islam and Christianity practices that can bridge each religion's member to the religiously other human being when we pursue understanding their meaning which could be expressed differently but finding essential similarities when probed philosophically. Levinas sees actions, as prayer, as the living out of meeting with the face of the Infinite Other. Religious pillars in practice of Islam are to perform *salat* (prayer), as prescribed by Islam; to fast; to go on *hajj* (pilgrimage); and to give *zakat*, a special kind of yearly alms of charity given by the rich to the poor Muslims.³⁰ Islam as a way of life involves prayer. "Islam has always defined itself ritually as being focused on the 'Five Pillars.'"³¹ The real enemies of Islam are defined. "It is understood that the man (human) who prevents them or any other Muslim from learning their religion and from worshipping by the use of torture or deceit, is an enemy of Islam, a kafir (disbeliever)!"³² [notation mine] Moral definitions of lives not lived in a good way are mentioned. "But those who cheat others, those who disobey their parents or superior, those who rebel against authorities and their government, in brief, those against the commandments of Allahu ta'ala and those who deprive others of their rights or deceive others for their own advantages will never be forgiven unless they are forgiven by the owners of those rights."³³

29 Ibid., pp. 152-155.

30 Kitabevi, Hakikat, *Islam and Christianity*, Istanbul: Waqf Ikhlas Publications, 1992, p. 31.

31 Andrew Rippin, *Muslims: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices*, London: Routledge, 2012, p. 264.

32 Kitabevi, *Islam and Christianity*, p. 34.

33 Ibid.

We, then, find the religious practice of Islam as directly related to other human beings in the way a Muslim member lives following God. One prays five times in a day with which one renews one's faith and purifies oneself from sins. Before prayer at the mosque, one performs ablution or purification washing. The Imam leads at congregational prayer. The pillar of practice of fasting is done in the month of Ramadan, from dawn to sunset. The spiritual aspect is given importance. "The situation of a fasting Muslim may reach a stage that he (she) thinks like someone who has no need in this world more than to achieve the pleasure of Allah"³⁴ [correction mine]. In addition, the Muslim thinks of the poor others. Fasting "reminds the wealthy of the poor ones and their conditions so that their hearts may have sympathy for them and know that they are living in the favour of Allah and therefore should increase in gratitude to him (Allah)"³⁵ [notation mine]. The pillar of *hajj* is pilgrimage to Meccah. "One who intends to do *Hajj* should repent to Allah in order that his (one's) soul can be free from filth of sins."³⁶ There is cooperation and equality experienced in the *Hajj*. "The Muslims gather from all parts of the world at one place, wearing one garment and worshipping One God; with no difference between the leader and the led; the rich and the poor; the white and the black."³⁷ *Hajj* is prescribed to all Muslims who can afford it at least once in one's lifetime. The pillar of *zakat* or *zakah* is almsgiving. "Paying *Zakah* when it is due is a quality of generosity, magnanimity, altruism, philanthropy, and compassion. It also means freeing oneself from traits of stingy, avaricious, and valueless people."³⁸ Life directed to the hereafter was evident in the simplicity of life of Muhammad. "It was only by observing his way of living and the painfully low level of material comfort that prevailed in his household that they felt what was meant by considering the life after death to be the real existence."³⁹ This, thus, balances inequality of

34 Muhammad bin Abdullah As-Suhaym, *Islam: Its Foundations and Concepts*, translated by Abdur-Raafi Adewale Imam, Riyadh: Darussalam Islamic Books, 2006, p. 171.

35 Ibid.

36 Ibid., p. 172.

37 Ibid., p. 173.

38 Ibid., p. 170.

39 Syed Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi, "Hadith—Its Relevance to the Modern Times," in *Hadith and Sunnah: Ideals and Realities*, edited by P.K. Koya (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 2008), p. 283.

resources. “Allah has promised great reward to those who fulfill their financial and material obligation towards the poor and the needy.”⁴⁰ Other Islamic teachings include good values. “Islam recommends using of perfume and outward adornment; it forbids filthy behaviours like adultery and fornication, consuming alcohol; eating dead animals, blood, and pork flesh, and enjoins eating of lawful good things. It also prohibits wastefulness and extravagance.”⁴¹ Their religious practices connect with the immanence of life as Levinas sees as manifestation of the Infinite Other in experience.

In Christianity, human goodness of life can be pursued through the Decalogue or also known as the Ten Commandments as given by God to Moses for the covenant of the relationship between God and His people. “Worship no god but me. Do not make for yourselves images of anything in heaven or on earth or in the water under the earth. Do not bow down to any idol or worship it, because I am the Lord your God and I tolerate no rivals.”⁴² No other creation is above the utmost importance of God, such as money usually through bribery and graft in some social institutions. “Observe the Sabbath and keep it holy.”⁴³ This ensures regularity of relationship of humans with God. “Respect your father and your mother, so that you may live a long time in the land that I am giving you.”⁴⁴ The level of respect from the children towards their parents is to honor them, and not to revere them as if they are equal God. “Do not commit murder. Do not commit adultery. Do not steal. Do not accuse anyone falsely. Do not desire another man’s (human’s) house; do not desire his wife, his slaves, his cattle, his donkeys, or anything else that he owns”⁴⁵ [correction mine]. These are the commandments built on the more direct relationship in the family, then with the third party as in Levinas extends to the society and the state. Dialogue on moral goodness of life can clarify ways of living of religions’ members.

40 Abdul Hamid Mohamed Ali Zarourm, “Justice (‘Adl) in Islam,” in *Ethics and Fiqh for Everyday Life*, edited by A. Latif Razak (Darul Ehsan, Malaysia: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2017), p. 36.

41 As-Suhaym, *Islam: Its Foundations and Concepts*, p. 209.

42 *The Bible*, Today’s English Version, Exodus 20:2-5.

43 *The Bible*, Today’s English Version, Exodus 20:8.

44 *The Bible*, Today’s English Version, Exodus 20:12.

45 *The Bible*, Today’s English Version, Exodus 20:13-17.

Moreover, in Christianity, the highest form of prayer is the Eucharist. “The Church was born of the paschal mystery. For this very reason the Eucharist, which is in an outstanding way the sacrament of the paschal mystery, *stands at the centre of the Church’s life*”⁴⁶ [italics original]. The self-sacrificing love of Christ to die for the sinners is the ultimate expiation from sin through His passion, death, and resurrection. Baptism in the symbol of water pours the presence of the Trinitarian God upon the Christian. “What Jesus wants to give us is ‘living’ water, symbolizing the revelation of a God who is a Father and who is love – the Holy Spirit, the divine life he came to bring.”⁴⁷ This sacrament with Confirmation and the Eucharist, among the seven as prayer forms in Christianity leads the Christian to others. “With people of other convictions and different cultures, the Word of God has emphasized all those human aspects of Jesus who, by sharing every suffering of humanity, invites people to collaborate together in order to bring relief to those in need.”⁴⁸ Sacraments are kinds of Christian prayers and liturgies that put into effect what are believed in, such as forgiving and healing at penance, anointing of the sick, vocation to care for humanity at ordained priesthood or marriage. The kinds of vocation to consecrated life and lay single blessedness participate in the priesthood with fulness in the bishop, in their baptism. Forgiveness of sin is one highlight, as in the sacrament of reconciliation or penance. The Christian forgives others who trespass against oneself, as God Himself is a merciful God who delights in the sinner who transforms into goodness rather than die because of sin, such as self-centeredness in the use of resources intended for the good of humanity but stolen in graft for instance, or murder for one’s self-advancement in power. Various other forms of prayer are novenas, rosary, stations of the cross, recollections, retreats, devotions, and personal prayers. Fasting is a practice particularly in Lent for penitence. “In the first place, Holy Mother Church, although it has always observed in a special way abstinence from meat and fasting,

46 Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia De Eucharistia*,: *On the Eucharist in its Relationship to the Church*, Vatican City: Editrice Libreria Vaticana, 2003, no. 3, www.vatican.va/holy_father/special_features/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_20030417_ecclesia_eucharistia_en.html.

47 Fr. Fabio Ciardi, OMI, “Dialogue which Rebuilds Fraternity,” in *New City*, Vol. 51, no. 1, January 2015, New York: New City Press, 2015, p. 20.

48 Maria Voce, “The Basis of Every Dialogue,” in *New City*, Vol. 47, No. 8, August 2012, New York: New City Press, 2012, p. 17.

nevertheless wants to indicate in the traditional triad of ‘prayer-fasting-charity’ the fundamental means of complying with the divine precepts of penitence.”⁴⁹ The meaning of almsgiving presents human stewardship of the world’s goods. “To come to their aid is a duty of justice even prior to being an act of charity.”⁵⁰ Pilgrimage is optional and devotional for the intentions also of praying to become closer to God and of serving one’s neighbor as oneself as its fruit. On Holy Thursday, the Filipino custom of *Bisita Iglesya* is also an extended prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. Processions of saints and the liturgical year of seasons depict journey of life unto infinity. While there are differences, the similarities with Christianity are also emerging, such as in intending equality and social justice as part of the meanings and purpose of religious practices. Dialogue on these can bridge what seemingly are different in these practices, that in Levinas, actions as in prayer reach out to doing good to the other.

Dialogue as Living in Goodness towards the Interreligiously Other

How can members of these religions move beyond oneself to be good to the different other, while engaging in dialogue between them? An emphasis in Levinas is to seek out the different other who is weak and suffering in poverty or injustices in society, whether such could be caused by the different other or by oneself. It is the Qur’an that guides the human person to live a spiritual life as a Muslim in one’s ways of eating, clothing, speaking, marrying, outward cleanliness which affect one’s spiritual life.⁵¹ There is submission as servant of Allah. As human beings are basically free, this freedom is a capacity to do good and live a good life for other human beings. “Allah looks only at the heart and the intention and not at the individual’s status and wealth. It

49 Pope Paul VI, *Paenitemini: On Fast and Abstinence*, Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1966, Chapter III, C, www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost_constitutions/documents/hf_p-vi_apc_19660217_paenitemini.html.

50 Pope Benedict XVI, “Message of His Holiness Benedict XVI for Lent 2008,” Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2008, no. 2, See also *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2404.

51 Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, *The Philosophy of the Teachings of Islam*, London: Islam International Publications Limited, 1996, p. 8.

is a guidance from the Lord of humanity to all human beings. It is the mercy for all humankind.”⁵²

In Christianity, God created humans to love them as He desires that they would have a loving relationship with Him. Yet, a loving God would allow characteristics of the beloved humans that deserve His love as, “it must be free, and it must be a relationship between two people who are in some way equal.”⁵³ Unconditional love of God for humanity could be expressed as in the philosophizing in Levinas of offering oneself in sacrifice for the good of the Infinite Other. “In modern times, with the help of course of the Greco-Roman tradition, Judaeo-Christianity sought answers to one of its defining problems – that of the suffering of the just – in secular political institutions designed in part to protect those vulnerable to unjustified suffering.”⁵⁴ Yet, freedom and equality can be found in the purpose of the origin of love of God for humanity. Love then would “not mean grabbing, possessing, hoarding, keeping for oneself.”⁵⁵ Dialogue can provide support for the different other in addressing sin as an absence of a loving relationship with God and one’s neighbors as oneself.⁵⁶ Dialogue also addresses evil not to happen when freedom is guided to turn away from evil deeds, such as graft, stealing, ecological destruction, human weaknesses causing corona virus pandemic, murder, and persecuting other humans by tyranny, as in Nazism.

Life as an inviolable right of every human being is a duty of everyone, as Levinas guides us to respond to the call of the Infinite Other. According to Levinas, religion as both transcendental and immanent in purpose would closely see to it that life of the other is safeguarded as also the inherent meaning of religion itself to promote

52 Md. Yousuf Ali, “Characteristics of Islamic Worldview,” in *The Islamic Worldview: Selected Essays*, Darul Ehsan, Malaysia: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2017, p. 107.

53 Pierre Riches, *Back to Basics: The Essentials of Catholic Faith*, translated from Italian by Susan Leslie, New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1984, p. 41.

54 Michael Fagenblat, “‘Fraternal Existence’: On a Phenomenological Double-Crossing of Judaeo-Christianity,” in *Is There a Judeo-Christian Tradition?*, edited by Emmanuel Nathan and Anya Topolski, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016, p. 187.

55 Pierre Riches, *Back to Basics: The Essentials of Catholic Faith*, translated from Italian by Susan Leslie. New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1984, p. 73.

56 Riches, p. 91, See also *The Bible*, Today’s English Version, Matthew 22:36-40.

life of all, even of members of another religion. In Islam, human rights are upheld as innate which includes primordality of one's right to life. "The punishment for those who kill innocent human beings is the death penalty in Islam: O you who believe!"⁵⁷ There is respect for the value of human life. "Again, the Qur'an gives a great importance to the life of a human being irrespective of his/her belief."⁵⁸ This is beyond religious affiliation. "We read in the Qur'an: 'Whoever kills a human being, except as a punishment for murder or other villainy in the land, shall be looked upon as though he (she) had killed all mankind (humankind); and whoever saves a human life shall be regarded as though he (she) had saved all mankind (5:32) (humankind)'"⁵⁹ [notations mine]. But there is a provision to pay blood money instead when the kin forgive the murderer. "The Holy Qur'an contains general statements on the rights of human beings, some of which are shown below: 'O believers, be your securers of justice, witnesses for God. Let not detestation for a people move you not to be equitable. Be equitable, that is nearer to God-fear.'"⁶⁰ In more recent times, however, there is an attempt to moderate the severity of punishments in some civil states where the majority are Muslims. Where chopping off the hand of a thief was traditionally the punishment for those convicted for stealing,⁶¹ now poverty is recognized as a common concern deriving from the Qur'an as well. "And in their wealth and possessions (was remembered) the right of the (needy), Him who asked, and him who (for some reason) was prevented (from

57 Muhammad Adil Khan Afridi, "Maqasid Al-Shari'ah," in *Ethics and Fiqh for Everyday Life*, edited by A. Latif Razak, Darul Ehsan, Malaysia: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2017, p. 209.

58 Osman Zumrut, "Current Contributions of Religions to World Peace," in *Muslim and Christian Reflections on Peace: Divine and Human Dimensions*, edited by J. Dudley Woodberry, Osman Zumrut, and Mustafa Koylu, Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2005, p. 86, See also The Koran, [or Qur'an], 5:32.

59 Ibid

60 Mehol Sadain, "The Concept of Human Rights in Islam and Its Relevance to the Movement for Self-determination by the Muslims in the Southern Philippines," Quezon City: University of the Philippines Institute of Islamic Studies, 2005, occasional paper no. 15, p. 7.

61 Muhammad Adil Khan Afridi, "Maqasid Al-Shri'ah," in *Ethics and Fiqh for Everyday Life*, Edited by A. Latif Razak. Darul Ehsan, Malaysia: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2017, p. 215.

asking)”⁶² [notations in original]. Basic human rights to necessities of life are equally promoted for all people. “And do good – to parents, kinsfolk, orphans, those in need, neighbors who are near, neighbors who are strangers, the companion by your side, the wayfarer (ye meet), and what your right hands possess: for Allah loveth not the arrogant, the vainglorious.”⁶³ Muslims seek peace with other people. “So fear Allah and pursue *islah* (i.e. happiness, peace and order) among yourselves.”⁶⁴ A Pakistani Islamic scholar is cited by Sadain: “The emphasis on duty creates unity among human beings, because it is built on the idea and the sentiment of sympathy – sympathy in the sense that in fulfilling our duty we have always to do some positive good to someone in the world.”⁶⁵ We can deduce that peace in Islam is the attitude of sympathy as being united with all of humanity.

In Christianity, every human being is endowed naturally with human rights as religion’s purpose to meet in society. “Respect for the human person proceeds by way of respect for the principle that ‘everyone should look upon his neighbor (without any exception) as ‘another self,’ above all bearing in mind his life and the means necessary for living it with dignity.”⁶⁶ Social authority of governance ensures the common good to go between various particular interests, “but it should make accessible to each what is needed to lead a truly human life: food, clothing, health, work, education and culture, suitable information, the right to establish a family, and so on.”⁶⁷ Christianity opens itself to dialogue with other religions, as Islam, for mutual understanding of a common pursuit of goodness in God. “Thus, the Church considers all goodness and truth found in these religions as ‘a preparation for the Gospel and given by him who enlightens all men (humans) that they

62 *The Holy Qur’an*, translated by Abdullah Yusuf Ali (Brentwood, MD: Amana Corporation, 1989), 51:19.

63 *Ibid.*, 4:36.

64 Mehol Sadain, “The Concept of Human Rights in Islam and Its Relevance to the Movement for Self-determination by the Muslims in the Southern Philippines,” Quezon City: University of the Philippines Institute of Islamic Studies, 2005, Occasional paper no. 15, p. 9, See *The Holy Qur’an*, surah 8, verse 1.

65 *Ibid.*, p. 10.

66 Pope John Paul II, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1931.

67 *Ibid.*, no. 1908.

may at length have life”⁶⁸ [notation mine]. Peace in Christianity is a vision of humanity. “Peace must come from a vision of the human being, and of humanity as a family – a vision that only religions can give.”⁶⁹ Peace means the status of well-being of humanity because one’s rights are met and respected.

CONCLUSION

Muslim-Christian Philosophical Perspective for Shared Goodness of Life

We, therefore, can find goodness of life in the Muslim and Christian belief systems as a philosophical perspective of reality that we can together pursue by enhancing understanding of our differences in expressions of a rather bridged relationship between ourselves as Filipinos. With human rationality as acknowledged as inherent in our createdness by a God or Allah whose attributes or names that include love and mercy set as foundational for our ways of living together relating for the good of the religiously other. Respect for life is meant to be lived while in our earthly existence as both human beings so that if we pursue a life hereafter as eternally good, then we can begin that goodness emanating from our shared lives while we live and share our earthly dwelling place. Violence leading to murder of the differently other hopefully can be thwarted when we pursue further studies of this shared philosophical perspective of the goodness of life itself that we see in the religiously other human being. The place of indigenous people along with various other minority communities including their hybridity as well is worth exploring as a recommended further study in a wider view of dialogical relations among us Filipinos.

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68 Ibid., no. 842.

69 Roberto Catalano, “To Discover All the Beauty in Humanity,” in *New City*, Volume 50, No. 2, February 2014, p. 13.

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