Meeting of the group Jesuits Among Muslims (JAM).

UTC Trawas, Surabaya, Eastern Java, Indonesia

7 - 11 August 2017

The group "Jesuits Among Muslims" brings together from five continents, Companions who have a mission among Muslims and have the desire to reflect and share their experience together.

Working in different sectors (intellectual, social or pastoral), they are meeting every two years, in order to reflect together and with lay and Muslim partners, upon their experience and work among Muslims. They also find in these encounters the opportunity to share their experience, with the joys and sorrows it entails and the issues that inhabit them, and to discern with the help of other Companions how to move forward in a given situation.

After meeting frequently around the Mediterranean, especially in various countries of the Middle East, this last decade has seen them meet in Rome (2011), New Delhi (India, 2013), Keur Moussa (Senegal, 2015) and, this summer in Trawas (Surabaya, Java, Indonesia, 2017).

1. Islam in Indonesia

Consisting of thousands of islands, Indonesia, like most countries in Southeast Asia, has an extreme diversity of ethnicities, languages, cultures and religious traditions. With about 150 million inhabitants, Java, the island on which we met (and the one where the Society is most involved in Indonesia), is the most populous island in this country (nearly 60% of the 260 million people inhabiting the archipelago) ... and in the world! Like most other islands, it has seen many cultural and religious traditions coming one after the other and borrowing one from the other: indigenous traditions, Hinduism and Buddhism (especially from the 8th century), Islam (from the 15th century) and Christianity (from the 16th century), all of them producing original syntheses. The main languages of the island are the local language (Javanese) and Bahasa Indonesia, the official language of the entire archipelago, which ranks sixth among the most widely spoken languages in the world.
In order to govern this country inhabited by such a diversity of traditions, the Indonesian state relies not on aggressive secularism or on the *Shari’a*, but on what constitutes an average path, namely the *Pancasila*, five principles articulating the philosophy of the state, including that of democracy and that of a "belief in a divinity which is unity". The religions officially recognized are Islam (87.2% of the population), Protestantism (7%), Catholicism (2.9% mainly concentrated in Florès and Timor), Hinduism (1.7% mainly concentrated in Bali), Buddhism (0.7%) and Confucianism (0.2%). Indonesia is therefore the country with the largest number of Muslims in the world (nearly 230 million people).

Arriving in Indonesia through Sufi brotherhoods and trade, Indonesian Islam is itself plural. Tradition says that Java has been converted to Islam by nine Sufi "saints" called the *Wali Sanga*, and Sufism is part of the lives of today's Javanese as we experienced it during our stay, the air resonating not only of the call to prayer, but also, in some places, of the *dhikr*, a rhythmic repetition of the name of God. From the beginning of the 20th century, however, reformist movements, such as the *Muhammadiyah* founded in 1912, called for returning to the teachings of the Qur'an and the Sunna, beyond local traditions, and defended the free interpretation by opposition to the imitation of the ancients, following the Egyptian reformer Muhammad Abduh. The second Muslim movement in Indonesia, *Muhammadiyah* currently claims some thirty million members and has an extensive network of mosques, schools and hospitals.

In response to these modernist movements, the *Nahdatul Ulama*, founded in 1926, more rural, aims to promote traditional Islam (called *Islam Nusantara*) in harmony with local traditions. For example, in their mosques, the call to prayer is preceded by a call made on a traditional drum (the *bedug* of the traditional Java percussion orchestra called *gamelang*), and on the movement logo are nine stars representing the nine *Wali Sanga*, the founding Sufis of Javanese Islam. It also promotes a living together between the different traditions. It is still today the most important Muslim movement in Indonesia, claiming nearly forty million members. It also has a network of mosques and schools and is particularly known for its network of Islamic boarding schools, called *pesantren*. We visited one during our meeting.

Alongside these movements, however, smaller Salafi and Wahhabi movements have emerged over the decades, especially from the 1980s. Here too, as we had seen earlier in our previous meetings in India and Senegal, the influence of Saudi Arabia is felt. As one of our hosts, Sydney Jones, explained to us, although Indonesia does not want the expansion of these movements that tend to generate intolerance in a mixed population, it is sometimes under pressure. For example, while Indonesia wishes to increase its quota for the pilgrimage to Mecca, Saudi Arabia asks it in exchange to authorize the founding of an Islamic university that it would finance... Small movements wishing to apply Islamic law by force, or even a radical extremism close to al-Qa’ida or Daesh are also present, as well as the millenarian movement of *Hizb al-Tahrir*. There is also an insidious development of political Islam, in opposition to the traditional Indonesian nationalism based on the *Pancasila*, which feeds on local corruption and populism. The controversies that marked
the election of the governor of Jakarta, the arrest of Ahok, the former governor, a Chinese and Christian candidate (double tare!) for blasphemy last May, are a sign of this. It is difficult to know the evolution of political Islam in the country. We will have to wait for the 2019 elections, as one of our speakers, Father Magnis Suseno, said to us.

The fight against radicalism is one of the priorities of the Society in Indonesia, with ecology and the fight against poverty, explained P. Petrus Sunu Hardiyanta, his Provincial. This first priority is becoming more and more important as we witness the beginning of a tightening of identities, as the rector of Sanata Dharma University said to a few of us in Yogyakarta. Indeed, as an example of this, Islamists have recently asked that Jesuit University to remove the presence of a girl wearing a hijab from her presentation photo, which it refused to do. With nearly 350 Jesuits, more than 60 scholastics in formation, present mainly in Java, (with a small presence in Sumatra and Papua), the Indonesian Society is a young Province, to whom we wish all the best to meet the challenge of living together in this diverse country, with its partners of all faiths.

2. JAM Meeting

Our meeting took place in the east of Java, in Trawas, in the shadow of two of the many volcanoes of the island, in the thriving nature of the Training Center of the University of Surabaya (UBAYA), in a region that saw the birth of the Nahdatul Ulama. The twenty-one of us gathered together from four continents, from the 7th to the 11th of August, in order to know more about an Islam than many of us knew little about, and to reflect upon and share our experiences. We were invited to do so by the Province of Indonesia, especially by Heru Prakosa, Father General’s counselor for relations with Muslims, and by Greg Soetomo.

1. We began our meeting by interacting with a few local speakers who introduced us to the situation of the country.

Among these we shall first mention Prof. Azyumardi Azra, from the Islamic State University Syarif Hidayatullah of Jakarta, who presented his vision of the dynamics at work in the contemporary Muslim world, comparing Indonesia to the rest of the Muslim world, especially the Arab world, highlighting how, in his view, Pancasila, democracy and a strong Muslim civil society have protected the country from the evils that have affected the Muslim world as a whole. Before him, Haula Noor, a doctoral student from the same university, presented her research on the importance of family traditions in the transmission of the jihadist ideology.

Father Magnis Suseno, a German Companion who came to Indonesia in 1961 and a recognized intellectual in Indonesian society, gave us a history and analysis of the relationship between Muslims and Christians in Indonesia. He concluded by highlighting
the risk of rampant corruption and populism as a cause of a renewed Islamization of the country, also showing the role played by secular universities (not Islamic universities), in the development of fundamentalism that fills the void. He also urged Christians to respect the feelings of the majority by avoiding unnecessary provocations by some of them, particularly some from eastern Indonesia, in which fundamentalist movements are also found.

Sydney Jones, Director of the Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict in Jakarta, described the different types of Muslim radicalism in South East Asia (violent extremists, moralists defending the application of Shari’a by force, Salafi - Wahhabi, and millenarians). In particular, she drew our attention to the rebellion in Mindanao in the southern Philippines. From a status of local conflict to a major Daesh center, it now attracts to the region jihadists who dream of realizing the Muslim paradise on earth, which has consequences for the surrounding countries, including Indonesia.

2. Then, in a second phase, we took a day to visit some important places of the region.

One group visited the Sunan Ampel Islamic State University in Surabaya, where they met with Prof. Masdar Hilmy, who shared their difficulties with less tolerant currents of thought within the university, while another group met the current leaders of a pesantren near Jombang. Established by Hasyim Asy'ari, the founder of the Nahdatul Ulama and grandfather of Abdurrahman Wahid (nicknamed Gus Dur, first elected president of Indonesia after Suharto in 1999), buried there, and beside the tomb of whom we attended by chance to a moving dhikr session. This pesantren today welcomes more than 1,000 internal students, either for a "classical" program of Islamic sciences, or for a mixed program including also sciences and letters. There we had a relaxed meeting (a silaturrahim), full of humour, with the leaders, in the image of the relations that this group wishes to establish with all the components of Indonesian society.

In the afternoon, we left Islam for a short time and visited in Trowulan the remains of the ancient capital of the Hindu kingdom of Mojapahit (13th - 16th century), a civilization from which is drawn not only the emblem of Indonesia, the eagle Garuda (which gave also its name to the national airline), but also the motto which appears under this emblem, namely: "although divided, it is one." In the evening, after mass in a local parish, we discovered in the darkness, in Mojokerto, on the way back, a gigantic statue of a sleeping Buddha, all this testifying to the diversity of influences in Javanese culture.

3. In a third phase, each of us shared in turn his own activities and context, the reflections they lead to, and some perspectives for the future.

Jean-Marc Balhan presented the fecundity but also the precariousness of the current Jesuit presence in Ankara (and that of the local Church as a whole), and questions about its long-
term viability. It is also with these last concerns that Juan Carlos Pallardel and André Yuniko presented the Jesuit mission in Pakistan in an intervention where they also insisted on the precariousness of Christians at all levels, the fragility of the local Church and, in the field of Islamic Christian relations, the importance of developing a pole of reflection and research. In general, these interventions raised the question of how best to help fragile churches and the Companions who serve them at the periphery of the "big provinces" of the Society.

Felix Körner, Laurent Basanèse and Jaume Flaquer mostly presented their teaching and research activities in the institutions in which they work: in Rome (Gregorian University) for the first two of them, and in Barcelona for the third one. We noted here the unfortunate closure in 2012 of the Institute for the Study of Religions initiated by Dan Madigan and then continued by Felix, within the Gregorian University, which welcomed academics and students of other religious traditions. With other perspectives, Laurent, in 2015, was entrusted in this same institution with the direction of a new "Center for Interreligious Studies" whose objective is to clarify the questions of the relations between Christianity and the others religions, whether it be Islam or Asian religions and cultures. Jaume presented his reflections on the different types of reform in Islam and on radicalism, his main question being: is Islamic radicalism, the Islamization of a prior radicalism or a radicalization of Islam? (both, in fact!). At this academic level, the question that was mainly discussed was about how and in what form the JAM group could contribute more to training and research.

After that we moved on to India. Joseph Kalathil told us in a moving way about the development of his many initiatives in the service of reconciliation between the Indian and Pakistani populations, towards a peace that the majority desires but to which it is put obstacles for political reasons. Victor Lobo presented to us the many interreligious activities he has initiated in the city of Bengalore: reading in common of texts belonging to different traditions (which looked like the Scriptural Reasoning method developed in Cambridge), interreligious retreats, pilgrimages and celebrations and many other activities. Victor Edwin presented to us the consequences of the current development of the Hindu fundamentalist movement on the life of the Muslims.

In other countries, Gil Donayre, a young Filipino priest who, after studying Arabic in Cairo, is preparing to continue his training in Germany, has explained to us the troubled situation in Mindanao and all its ambiguities, while Purhastanto, a young Indonesian, introduced us to the history of the evolution of Islam in Japan and his own mission in that country. Tyolumun Kinga-Upaa, a Nigerian currently preparing a doctoral thesis at SOAS (London), explained the origins of the Boko-Haram movement in his native land. Jesus Leon Blanco explained to us the current situation of Islam in Algeria and the main role of the Jesuits in this country, namely to offer places of meeting and opening.

Finally, our Indonesian companions shared their activities in different fields. Ismartono, offered us a theological reflection on his work of welcoming Indonesian migrants returning
from countries where they were traumatized, Hariyanto, his activities within the Indonesian Conference on Religion and Peace (ICRP) defending the minorities, and Didik Chahyono, his interreligious activities in his parish in Samarang. Angga, scholastic, shared the story of his conversion of Islam and his vision of the recent history of Indonesian society through that of his family. Greg Soetomo presented his work on the development of guidelines for Christian Islamic dialogue for the Asia-Pacific Conference of the Society of Jesus, while Heru Prakosa, who had invited us to Indonesia, concluded the exchanges by explaining the project “Asian Journey for Reconciliation for Peace”, implemented by the regional group of Jesuits Among Muslims in Asia (JAMIA).

4. In a fourth phase, after the end of the meeting, several of us stayed for a few more days in the country, especially in Yogyakarta (Jogja), where they were welcomed into the scholasticate community of which Heru is the director of study. It was an opportunity for us to deepen our knowledge of the country, the Church, the Society and local cultures. At the cultural level, we visited the Buddhist temple of Borobudur and the Hindu one of Prambanan, we attended a traditional musical and choreographic presentation of the Ramayana next to this last temple, and went to the Kraton (the Palace of the Sultan of Jogja, which is also a conservatory of traditional Javanese culture). These activities gave us the opportunity to further deepen our knowledge of the plural culture of the Javanese. At the ecclesial level, we met Companions in the community, visited some works of the Society (a university, the theologate, a garden of interreligious art, a cinema studio) and attended a Sunday youth mass gathering two thousand of them, a small part of the eleven thousand people who attend the Jesuit parish every weekend. This has persuaded us of the vigor of the Church and of the Society in this country. Felix, meanwhile, concluded his stay in Indonesia by giving a seminar at an Islamic university in that city.

5. In conclusion, this JAM meeting in Trawas, Indonesia, was an opportunity for many of us to discover an important place of contemporary Islam where several Companions of our group work, and thus encourage communion among us.

The Javanese and Indonesian synthesis, marked by the traditions that preceded Islam in the region, is particularly original. However, the dynamics at work within it are quite similar to those we have observed during our last JAM meetings in India or in Senegal: tensions and changing alliances between nationalism (an integrating or an excluding one), a traditional local Islam marked by Sufism, reformist movements in line with Muhammad Abduh, Salafi and Wahhabi movements supported by Gulf countries (often sources of intolerance and tension between different social groups), and radical fringes most often linked to al-Qaeda or Daesh, advocating violence, all this in a context where some politicians use religion for populist purposes or as a remedy for social illnesses such as corruption, exclusion or inequalities.
This is why, in our next meeting, which we plan to organize in August 2019 in one of the countries of the Middle East, we would like to deepen our knowledge of these dynamics at work all around the world. One possibility would be to look at the Gulf countries: the dynamics that inhabit them, their foreign policy and their consequences on the life of Muslims in the countries in which we live and work.

2018 will also see the twentieth anniversary of the one and only meeting of the “Young Jesuits in Islamic Studies” group, which took place in Istanbul thanks to Tom Michel and Christian Troll, in which most of the participants at the time are now the “old members” of our group. For them, it was a landmark and founding event, confirming them in their mission in relation to Islam and Muslims. It is time to think of the next generation, as our group now includes a few of these “young Jesuits”, not to mention those who, currently outside of it, are interested in this apostolate or are already sent for such a mission by their superiors: they feel relatively isolated and often in search of interlocutors. That is why we plan to conclude our next JAM meeting with a meeting of a new “Young Jesuits in Islamic Studies” group which will be particularly aimed at them.

Jean-Marc Balhan SJ, PRO, Ankara