

INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE: A THREAT TO AQÔDAH OR PLATFORM OF DAÑWAH?

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Even though it has been practiced for a few decades ago, inter-religious or inter-faith dialogue is still alien in this country. This trend could be due to popular misgivings on inter-religious dialogue among Malaysian society especially the Malay Muslim. Backlashes against inter-faith organisations, objections of the establishment of *Jawatankuasa Mempromosikan Persefahaman dan Keharmonian Antara Penganut Agama* or JKMPKA, the seize of Bible, the banning of the use of *kalimah AllÉh* by non-Muslim and many other gestures that indicated the exclusive attitude of the Malay Muslim towards other religions in this country. This kind of attitude becomes a major impediment in the development of inter-religious dialogue. However, a case study conducted on few *daÑwah* organizations such as Islamic Propagation Society International (IPSI), *Institut Kefahaman Islam Malaysia (IKIM)* and Islamic Information Services (IIS) reported that these organizations have made inter-religious dialogue part of their *daÑwah* methods (Arfah, 2013). The aims of this paper therefore are twofold: First, examining the Malay Muslim attitude towards other religions in general and towards inter-religious dialogue in particular and; second, exploring the role of inter-religious dialogue in dissemination of Islamic messages as practiced by these organizations. In order for a dialogue to become a medium of *daÑwah*, there is a need to clarify the misunderstanding of Malaysian society especially the Malay Muslim towards inter-religious dialogue and to develop a systematic and established design of inter-religious dialogue that is more appealing to the society at large.

Keywords: Inter-religious dialogue, *aqÉdah*, *daÑwah*, Malay Muslim, dialogue design

Introduction

Inter-religious dialogue in Malaysia is still marginalized even though it has been implemented for more than a decade ago by Muslim as well as non-Muslim organizations. Poor participation from Malaysian society especially the Muslim community may be due to lack of understanding of what inter-religious dialogue is all about, its significance in multi-ethnic and multi-religious society and its role in *daÑwah*. Some might argue that the exposure to other religions would become a threat to the Muslim's faith or *aqÉdah*. The following discussion will explore the inter-religious issues and Muslim's attitude towards others, dialogue as medium of *daÑwah* as stated in the QurÉn and *daÑwah* organizations involve in dialogue.

Inter-religious Issues and Muslim's Responses

Most of inter-religious issues that were raised in Malaysia revolved around the status of Islam as a religion of the federation as stipulated in article 3(1) in Federal Constitution and the inculcation of Islamic values in public sphere. Even though the freedom to religious exercise has been guaranteed in article 11, the dominance of Islamic cultures and values in this country has invited discontentment among the non-Muslim community. 1980s witnessed the mushrooming of Islamic programs and institutions which increased the sense of insecurity among the non-Muslim.

Among the major Islamic programs that were executed by the government during that time were Establishment of Islamic Banks, Islamic Pawnshops, Islamic Insurance and an Islamic Economic Foundation in 1981; Establishment of an International Islamic University Malaysia in 1983; and Declaring that the status of Islamic judges and courts was to be on par with their counterparts in the civil judiciary in 1988 (Hussin Mutalib, 1993).

A research conducted by Abdul Rahman Embong (2001) suggests that 1980s as a dark period for inter-ethnic relations due to the emergence of Islamic resurgence movements and the expansion of Islamic cultural and values in public space. Among the concerns that are raised by the non-Muslims are; they afraid that Malaysia will turn into a theocratic state which will further limit the freedom to exercise their religions; it will strengthen the Malay position; the restrictions over the construction of their places of worship and cemetery land; the prohibition on the use of certain Arabic-derived Malay words such as *AllÉh*, *Íalah*, *bayt AllÉh* and *KaÑbah*, the prohibition on the publication of Bible in Bahasa Malaysia; educational system which focuses on Islamic education and not their own religious educations; overflow of Islamic programs in the national media; and freedom of conversion for the Muslim (Ahmad F. Yousif, 2004).

The Islamic programs are supposed to champion the notion of moderate Islam in the context of the multi-cultural setting of Malaysia (Yeoh, 2007). However, lack of information about the programs, their contents and implementation gave rise to misunderstanding and protest among non-Muslims since they feared these trends would undermine their cultural and religious values. Inter-religious dialogue that took place during the 80s also served as one of measures to curb the misconception (Khairulnizam Mat Karim & Suzy Aziziyana Saili, 2008). However, poor and unsystematic design of dialogue rendered its ineffectiveness in providing explanation for the Islamisation process.

The persistent Islamic development and lack of medium to explain about it make the inter-religious issues seem will never fade away. The non-Muslims relentlessly perceive that they will lose the freedom to exercise their religions if Islam continues to be granted the special position in the constitution and in this country. If the non-Muslim get the real picture about Islam, they should not feel intimidated if Islamic values and practices are imposed in this country since Islam does promote the freedom of religion and never deny the rights of others to perform their religious rites and rituals.

Things get more complicated, when Islam as a universal religion is conflated with Malay ethnicity as stated in article 160. This article is significant since it serves as an identity marker for the Malay. There are three pillars in this article: Islam, *bahasa* (Malay language) and *raja* (aristocratic government of the sultans) (Shamsul, 1997). The protection of these three pillars including Islam is crucial in order to protect Malay ethnicity. Any perceived threat towards Islam is considered as a threat to the Malay. As

Shad Saleem Faruqi (2004:81-82) has put it, “Any attempt to weaken a Malay’s religious faith may be perceived as an indirect attempt to erode Malay power.”

The special position of Malay and association of this ethnicity with Islam in this country produces ethnocentric and exclusive Malay generation. This caused most inter-religious issues or matters were treated with ethnocentric and rigid attitude. The issues of “*Kalimah AllÉh*,” Bible in Bahasa Malaysia and the issue of *murtad* for instance were technically ‘solved’ with raids. Recently, Bible Society of Malaysia premise was raided by religious authorities to seize the copies of Bible in Bahasa Malaysia. A Hindu wedding ceremony was also raided in order to investigate the allegedly Muslim bride. This kind of approach, with no room for dialogue, often deteriorating instead of resolving the issues. This is totally different with the Islamic approaches in engaging with the non-Muslims.

Dialogue and *daÑwah*

The Qur’Én provides several dialogic methods in dealing with the non-Muslims. Among those verses are:

﴿قُلْ يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ تَعَالَوْا إِلَى كَلِمَةٍ سَوَاءٍ بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكُمْ أَلَّا نَعْبُدَ إِلَّا اللَّهَ وَلَا نُشْرِكَ بِهِ شَيْئًا وَلَا يَتَّخِذَ بَعْضُنَا بَعْضًا أَرْبَابًا مِّنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ فَإِن تَوَلَّوْا فَقُولُوا اشْهَدُوا بِأَنَّا مُسْلِمُونَ﴾

“O People of the Book! Come to common terms as between us and you: That we worship none but Allah; that we associate no partners with him; that we erect not, from among ourselves, Lords and patrons other than Allah. If then they turn back, say ye: Bear witness that we (at least) are Muslims (bowing to AllÉh’s will).” (Qur’Én, 3: 64)

﴿ادْعُ إِلَى سَبِيلِ رَبِّكَ بِالْحُكْمَةِ وَالْمَوْعِظَةِ الْحَسَنَةِ وَجِدْهُمْ بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ هُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِمَنْ ضَلَّ عَنْ سَبِيلِهِ وَهُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِالْمُهْتَدِينَ﴾

“Invite (all) to the Way of thy Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching; and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious: for thy Lord knoweth best, who have strayed from His Path, and who receive guidance.” (Qur’Én, 16: 125).

﴿وَلَا تَسْتَوِى الْحَسَنَةُ وَلَا السَّيِّئَةُ ادْفَعْ بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ فَإِذَا الَّذِى بَيْنَكَ وَبَيْنَهُ عَدَاوَةٌ كَأَنَّهُ وَىٌّ حَمِيمٌ﴾

“Nor can goodness and Evil be equal. Repel (Evil) with what is better: Then will he between whom and thee was hatred become as it were thy friend and intimate.” (Qur’Én, 41: 34)

﴿اذْهَبَا إِلَىٰ فِرْعَوْنَ إِنَّهُ طَغَىٰ ﴿٤٣﴾ فَقُولَا لَهُ قَوْلًا لَّيِّنًا لَّعَلَّهُ يَتَذَكَّرُ أَوْ يَخْشَىٰ﴾

“Go, both of you, unto Pharaoh. Lo! He hath transgressed (the bounds). And speak unto him a gentle word, that peradventure he may heed or fear.” (Qur’Ēn, 20 :43-44)

﴿وَلَا تُجَادِلُوا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ إِلَّا بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ إِلَّا الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا مِنْهُمْ وَقُولُوا ءَامَنَّا بِالَّذِي أُنزِلَ إِلَيْنَا وَأُنزِلَ إِلَيْكُمْ وَإِلَهُنَا وَإِلَهُكُمْ وَاحِدٌ وَنَحْنُ لَهُ مُسْلِمُونَ﴾

“And dispute ye not with the People of the Book, except with means better (than mere disputation), unless it be with those of them who inflict wrong (and injury): but say, ‘We believe in the Revelation which has come down to us and in that which came down to you; Our Allah and your Allah is one; and it is to Him we bow (in Islam)’.” (Qur’Ēn, 29: 46)

These verses clearly indicate that Islam promotes the use of gentle words and wisdom in the course of *daŊwah*. If the message of Islam was rejected then just let them live their own way since AllĒh said in Surah *al-KĒfirĒn*:

﴿قُلْ يَا أَيُّهَا الْكَافِرُونَ ﴿١﴾ لَا أَعْبُدُ مَا تَعْبُدُونَ ﴿٢﴾ وَلَا أَنْتُمْ عَابِدُونَ مَا أَعْبُدُ ﴿٣﴾ وَلَا أَنَا عَابِدٌ مَّا عَبَدْتُمْ ﴿٤﴾ وَلَا أَنْتُمْ عَابِدُونَ مَا أَعْبُدُ ﴿٥﴾ لَكُمْ دِينُكُمْ وَلِيَ دِينِ﴾

“Say: O ye who reject Faith, I worship not that which ye worship. Nor will ye worship that which I worship. And I will not worship that which ye have been wont to worship. Nor will ye worship that which I worship. To you be your Way, and to me mine.” (Qur’Ēn, 109: 1-3)

In several other verses, AllĒh reminds the Muslims that their responsibility is only to convey the message of Islam to the non-Muslims and not to compel them to become believers.

﴿وَلَوْ شَاءَ رَبُّكَ لَأَمَنَّ مِنَ فِي الْأَرْضِ كُلَّهُمْ جَمِيعًا أَفَأَنْتَ تُكْرِهُ النَّاسَ حَتَّىٰ يَكُونُوا مُؤْمِنِينَ﴾
 “If it had been thy Lord’s will, they would all have believed,- all who are on earth! Wilt thou then compel mankind, against their will, to believe!” (Qur’Ēn, 10: 99)

﴿فَذَكِّرْ إِنَّمَا أَنْتَ مُذَكِّرٌ ﴿٢١﴾ لَسْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ بِمُصَيِّرٍ﴾

“So remind, you are only one who reminds. You are not a dictator over them.” (Qur’Ēn, 88: 21-22)

﴿فَإِنْ حَاجَبُوكَ فَقُلْ أَسْلَمْتُ وَجْهِيَ لِلَّهِ وَمَنِ اتَّبَعَنِ وَقُلْ لِلَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ وَالْأُمِّيِّينَ ءَأَسْلَمْتُمْ فَإِنْ أَسْلَمُوا فَقَدِ اهْتَدَوْا وَإِنْ تَوَلَّوْا فَإِنَّمَا عَلَيْكَ الْبَلْغُ وَاللَّهُ بَصِيرٌ بِالْعِبَادِ﴾

“So if they dispute with thee, say: ‘I have submitted My whole self to Allah and so have those who follow me.’ And say to the People of the Book and to those

who are unlearned: ‘Do ye (also) submit yourselves?’ If they do, they are in right guidance, but if they turn back, Thy duty is to convey the Message; and in Allah’s sight are (all) His servants.” (Qur’Ēn, 3: 20)

These verses have shown that Islam teaches the tactful dialogic method in dealing with the non-Muslim. Dialogue therefore is not something alien in Islam since it is one of *daĒwah* methods.

Organizations Involve in Dialogue

In Malaysia, there are few organizations that respond to the dialogic approach to *daĒwah* such as Institut Kefahaman Islam Malaysia (IKIM), Islamic Propagation Society International (IPSI) and Islamic Information Services (IIS). This sub-topic discusses the background of these organizations, the main goals in implementing inter-religious dialogue and the organizational dialogue designs. The design of dialogue was categorized into four types of dialogue as suggested by Zúñiga and Nagda (2001). The four types are: collective inquiry; critical-dialogic education; conflict resolution and peace building; and community building and social action.

Institut Kefahaman Islam Malaysia (IKIM)

Organization Background

Institut Kefahaman Islam Malaysia or commonly known as IKIM was officially established on February 18, 1992 as a response to different kind of threats against the Muslim’s faith for instance certain deviant teaching sects that use the name of Islam (*Institut Kefahaman Islam Malaysia* [IKIM], n.d.).

Goals in Implementing Inter-religious Dialogue

The main goals of IKIM are to convey accurate Islamic understanding through research activities, seminars, workshops, forums, consultations, training and publications. Inter-religious dialogue is also one of IKIM’s methods to achieve these goals. Among the issues tackled by this institution are strategic issues, globalization, the implementation of Islamic economy and legislation system, inter-religious relations, bioethics, human rights issues and so forth (IKIM, n.d.).

Dialogue Design

Inter-religious dialogue through the lens of IKIM is a formal interaction as occurs in seminars, forums, talks or public lectures. IKIM does not consider informal interaction, that we experience in everyday life such as in the market, workplace, school and many more as dialogue even though some people identifies this as ‘dialogue of life’ (M.S. Badron, personal communication, December 29, 2010). Two types of dialogue have been identified in IKIM’s inter-religious dialogue model which is community building and critical-dialogic education.

Community Building

IKIM organizes programs that focus on universal values or common issues that are the concern of every religious community such as social issues, ethics, morality and *akhlĒq* (disposition). For this reason, most of IKIM’s models of dialogue can be

described as the community building type of dialogue (M. S. Badron, personal communication, December 29, 2010).

Among the seminars that reflect the community building spirit was a two day seminar “*Peranan Agama dalam Menangani Masalah Sosial*” (The Role of Religions in Dealing with Social Problems) held on December 8 to 9, 2010 (*Institut Kefahaman Islam Malaysia* [IKIM], 2010a). The dialogue program that was attended by participants from diverse religious and ethnic backgrounds took the format of a seminar which is commonly practiced in the academic world. There were four sessions altogether (two sessions a day) with different moderators for each session. There was a single theme for each session with three to five speakers presenting papers related to the theme.

Among the speakers were the late Muhammad Uthman El-Muhammady who spoke on “*Fahaman dan Penghayatan Prinsip Beriman kepada Tuhan dalam Islam*” (Understanding and Actualization of the Principle of Belief in God in Islam) and Othman Mustapha who spoke on “*Peranan Institusi dan Organisasi Keagamaan Menangani Masalah Sosial di Malaysia*” (The Role of Religious Institutions and Organizations in Dealing with Social Problems in Malaysia). Among the non-Muslim speakers were Bala Tharumalingam (Hindu representative) John Gurusamy (Christian representative) and Sarjit S. Gill (Sikh representative).

Critical-dialogic Education

Other than community building type of dialogue, IKIM also actively organizes few seminars and intellectual discourses on religion that aim to increase inter-religious understanding. Based on this educational goal, this inter-religious dialogue is categorized under the critical-dialogic education type of dialogue. An example of critical-dialogic education type of dialogue implemented by IKIM is “A Multi-cultural Understanding of Filial Piety” held on February 17 to 18, 2009 (*Institut Kefahaman Islam Malaysia* [IKIM], 2009).

This dialogue adopted an almost similar design to the community building dialogue model entitled “*Peranan Agama dalam Menangani Masalah Sosial*”. The only difference is this critical-dialogic education dialogue included discussion sessions among participants. There was a total of five sessions, with the first day of the seminar covering two sessions, while the second day covered three sessions. Among the topics discussed was “Respect for Parents and Filial Responsibility” which was the topic for session two.

The invited speaker for that seminar was Mother Mangalam the President of The Pure Life Society. Other than a speaker, there were also four discussants invited to discuss the topic in detail; Kumaran Syberamaniam (University of Malaya), Fatimah Chan Abdullah (Desa Creative Foundation), Master Chin Kung (Amitabha Societies) and John Gurusamy (Inter-faith Network). A question and answer session followed the presentation and discussion. A summary of IKIM’s dialogue type and its design can be found in Table 1.

Table 1
IKIM's Dialogue Design

Type	Community Building	Critical-dialogic Education
Design		
Theme/topic	Ethical and moral issues (e.g., "Peranan Agama dalam Menangani Masalah Sosial")	Universal values e.g. "Religion and Pluralistic Coexistence: The <i>Muhibah</i> Perspective"
Setting	IKIM's grand Hall	NA
Participant	Public audience	Experts and leaders
Moderator/speaker	3 to 4 different speakers, 3 to 4 different moderators for 3 to 4 different sessions (different sub-topic for each session)	1 moderator, 1 speaker and 3 three discussants
Format	Seminar	Intellectual discourse
Duration	2 days seminar (December 8-9, 2010)	Half day (9.30 a.m. to 12.40 p.m. on November 2, 2010)
Ground rules	NA	NA
Evaluation	Evaluation form	NA
Activities	None	None

Note. NA= Not available

Islamic Propagation Society International (IPSI)

Organization Background

IPSI was established in 1989, devoted to disseminating the ultimate Islamic message of *tawhîd* (Islamic Propagation Society International [IPSI], n.d.a). The main approach applied by IPSI to achieve this goal was the comparative religion approach. This include promoting the reading of the Qur'ân with translations to facilitate understanding, non-Muslim guided mosque tours, public lectures delivered by prominent Muslim scholars, and the printing booklets authored by Ahmed Deedat, Abu Ameenah Bilal Philips, Gary Miller, Zakir Naik, Imran Hussein, Yvonne Ridley, Daniel Zainal Abidin and others (IPSI, n.d.b).

Goals in Implementing Inter-religious Dialogue

IPSI's goal in implementing inter-religious dialogue is to eradicate negative perceptions and sentiments about Islam through dialogue. Apart from that, inter-religious dialogue is also aimed at improving inter-religious relation in Malaysia. Dialogue is the best platform for achieving these goals because it can attract non-Muslims to its program through its multi-religious approach (K. Abdullah, personal communication, October 25, 2010).

Dialogue Design

Most of IPSI's programs such as public lecture, mosque tours, free Islamic classes, distribution of Islamic literature, and inter-religious dialogue can be described as critical-dialogic educational.

Critical-dialogic Education

Inter-religious dialogue is conducted on a regular basis with the collaboration from University of Science Malaysia (Penang Campus) students. Normally, in its inter-religious dialogue programs, IPSI will also organize an exhibition to promote its inter-religious dialogue program. IPSI usually adopts the format of a seminar or forum to discuss selected topics with invited speakers representing major religions in Malaysia which are Islam, Christianity, Hinduism and Buddhism.

Based on the forum format, each speaker will be given twenty minutes for his presentation or explanation on a given topic. Once the speakers are done with their presentations, a question and answer session takes place followed by a concluding speech by the speakers.

The question and answer sessions during programs organized by IPSI differ from those of other programs as the IPSI sessions are prolonged and more extensive allowing the audience more opportunities to clear doubts by seeking acceptable explanations. During the question and answer session, the participants are allowed to ask any question as long as they observe the guidelines provided at the beginning of the dialogue program. Among the guidelines are; the participants must stay professional, agree to disagree, never ask sensitive or offensive questions, or questions related to theology (K. Abdullah, personal communication, October 25, 2010). Table 2, shows a summary of the IPSI dialogue design.

Table 2
IPSI's Dialogue Design

Type	Critical-dialogic Education
Design	
Theme/topic	General topic. For instance peace, happiness etc. Not focusing on theology
Setting	Big hall (e.g., USM hall)
Participant	Students and public Majority non-Muslim
Moderator/speaker	3 to 4 speakers with 1 moderator
Format	Seminar
Duration	Few hours at night (normally 8p.m.-11p.m.)
Ground rules	Participants were reminded by the moderator from the beginning to observe the dialogue ethics
Evaluation	Non-systematic observation
Activities	Exhibition

Islamic Information Services (IIS)

Organization Background

Islamic Information and Services Foundation (IIS) is another a non-profit *dañwah* organization dedicated to spread information on Islam; countering misinformation and misconceptions about Islam; carrying out *iñlÉÍ* (reform); providing a platform for *dañwah* activities for Muslims; offering courses on Islam; providing services for reverts and potential reverts; conducting *dañi* training; providing services that are beneficial for community development; organizing programs that appeal to the Muslim youth and promote Islam as a multi-racial and cross-cultural way of life (Islamic Information and Services Foundation [IIS], 2006).

Another significant *dañwah* activity initiated by IIS was the “Hotel *Qur’Én* Project.” This activity managed to distribute the *Qur’Én* with English translations at renowned 5 star and 4 star hotels in peninsular Malaysia (S.K. Kalkulal Govindji, personal communication, January 24, 2011).

Goals in Implementing Inter-religious Dialogue

IIS believes that inter-religious dialogue is one way to convey the Islamic message to people of other faiths. Inter-religious dialogue also provides an opportunity for Muslims to increase their knowledge about other religions and about Islam as well. Thus inter-religious dialogue also applies when striving to strengthen the Muslim’s faith. Some might argue that the exposure to other religions can pose a threat to the faith of a Muslim, but IIS holds to the promise of *AllÉh* as stated in the *Qur’Én* (*al-Baqarah: 256*) that the falsehood will never override the truth (S.K. Kalkulal Govindji, personal communication, January 24, 2011).

Dialogue Design

Due to its various *dañwah* activities, IIS has adopted a variety of inter-religious dialogue designs including the common designs found in other organizations and also some unique designs. Among these various designs, some main designs have been identified and classified into different types.

Critical-dialogic Education

Some of IIS inter-religious dialogues are distinguished from other organizations dialogue design since it focuses on dialogue few religions only. For instance dialogue between Islamic and Buddhist groups only, or dialogue between Islamic and Hindu groups only rather than gathering three or four different religious groups for dialogue. An example of this type of dialogue design was a program entitled “Sowing Seeds of Understanding and Harmony.” This was an inter-religious dialogue between Muslims and Buddhists community. It was conducted on May 8, 2010 at Hang Tuah Room, Mines Wellness Hotel in Seri Kembangan.

This dialogue program was divided into two major sessions, one in the morning and the other in the afternoon. The participants made up of a delegation from the Buddhist Institute Sunday Dhamma School (BISDS) representing Buddhist Maha Vihara (BMV) and a delegation from IIS. The Buddhist speaker was represented by Suthoda Thero from Buddhist Maha Vihara while Muslim speaker was represented by Shah Kirit Kalkulal Govindji from IIS.

The presentation session was followed by question and answer session. The first session was adjourned for lunch at 1 pm. The second session started at noon which

focused on future collaboration between Buddhists and Muslims as in the previous successful dialogue experience with Hindu Sanggam. The dialogue finally settled on four future plans which were the initiation of religious talks, visits, youth programs and the conducting of special question and answer programs (Islamic Information and Services Foundation [IIS], 2010).

Conflict Resolution and Peace Building

IIS is also actively involved in organizing closed dialogues with different religious groups such as the closed dialogue with Hindu Sanggam in August 2008. This dialogue was no open to the public since it involved the discussion of sensitive issues concerning Hindu-Muslim relations in this country. For this reason, this type of dialogue can best be described as conflict resolution.

This dialogue was jointly organized with the Allied Coordinative Committee of Islamic NGOs (ACCIN). This two day ground breaking dialogue was participated by Hindu and Muslim representatives and leaders. During this dialogue sensitive issues that affected both religions were discussed openly, yet professionally. Among the concerns raised were the issue of cemetery land, the conversion to other religions (whether to Hinduism or Islam), and the demolition of Hindu temples.

This dialogue sought to clarify any misunderstandings that can give rise to polarization. At the end of this dialogue the Muslims and Hindus reached agreement on certain issues and were ready for future collaboration. This dialogue had also included some leisure activities such as sailing and a chess competition (S.K. Kalkulal Govindji, personal communication, January 24, 2011). Table 3 summarized two types of dialogue frequently organized by IIS and its design.

Table 3
IIS’s Dialogue Design

Type	Critical-dialogic education	Conflict Resolution
Design		
Theme/topic	Theological (e.g., “Sowing Seeds of Understanding and Harmony”)	Sensitive issues (Dialogue with Hindu Sanggam)
Setting	Conference room (Hang Tuah Room, Mines Wellness Hotel, Seri Kembangan)	NA
Participant	Leaders (Muslim and Buddhist representatives)	Leaders (Muslim and Hindu representatives)
Moderator /speaker	1 speaker representing each religion	Leaders (Muslim and Hindu representatives)
Format	Seminar	Closed dialogue
Duration	1 day	2 days
Ground rules	Briefed by the moderator	NA
Evaluation	NA	NA
Activities	None	Leisure activities (sailing, chess)

Note. NA= Not available

Conclusion

Based on the aforementioned discussion, there are few important points that can be highlighted. First, as a Muslim living in a highly diverse society like Malaysia, we should change the way we handle inter-religious issues and the way we engage with non-Muslim. It is a blessing that we born as a Malay Muslim and living in a country which granted Islam a special rank and status. But that does not mean that we can portray our exclusive and ethnocentric attitude towards the non-Muslim. This is totally in contrast with Islamic principle which considers Islam as a mercy to the whole world not to certain ethnics or races.

﴿ وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ إِلَّا رَحْمَةً لِّلْعَالَمِينَ ﴾

And We have sent you (O Muhammad) not but as a mercy for the `Alamin

Islam has endorsed the dialogic method in dealing with non-Muslim as mentioned above. Even if they reject the call to Islam, we should never imposed any harsh or improper words towards them. Even in facing the Pharaoh, AllÉh has reminded the Prophet Moses A.S to use gentle word. (Qur'Én, 21 :107)

﴿ اذْهَبَا إِلَىٰ فِرْعَوْنَ إِنَّهُ طَغَىٰ ﴿١٠٦﴾ فَقُولَا لَهُ قَوْلًا لَّيِّنًا لِّعَلَّهُ يَتَذَكَّرُ أَوْ يَخْشَىٰ ﴾

“Go, both of you, unto Pharaoh. Lo! He hath transgressed (the bounds). And speak unto him a gentle word, that peradventure he may heed or fear.” (Qur'Én, 20 :43-44)

Second, inter-religious dialogue has never become a threat to one's *aqÉdah* otherwise the three *daÑwah* organizations (i.e. IKIM, IPSI and IIS) will never use inter-religious dialogue part of their *daÑwah* methods. Instead, it could be the best platform for *daÑwah* since it is the platform where people from different religious and ethnic background get together. The question whether, will Muslim be influenced by other religion does not arise in the first place. As mentioned in the Qur'Én (*al-Baqarah*: 256):

﴿ لَا إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ قَدْ تَبَيَّنَ الرُّشْدُ مِنَ الْغَيِّ فَمَن يَكْفُرْ بِالطَّاغُوتِ وَيُؤْمِن بِاللَّهِ فَقَدِ اسْتَمْسَكَ بِالْعُرْوَةِ الْوُثْقَىٰ لَا انفِصَامَ لَهَا وَاللَّهُ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ ﴾

There is no compulsion in religion. Verily, the right path has become distinct from the wrong path. Whoever disbelieves in Taghut and believes in Allah, then he has grasped the most trustworthy handhold that will never break. And Allah is All-Hearer, All-Knower (Qur'Én, 2: 256)

Other than proves that Islam promoting freedom of religion, this verse also emphasizes that, those who have faith in AllÉh will never easily go astray since the truth will always prevail.

Third, in order to make inter-religious dialogue more effective, dialogue practitioners or organizations should consider evaluating their own inter-religious

dialogue models. Zúñiga and Nagda (2001) have offered the four-stage dialogue model as well as some practice principles as a guideline for the dialogue practitioners. This model is worth considering in making dialogue more successful in achieving its goals. Table 4 shows the different types of dialogue with different application of dialogue stages.

Table 4
Types of Dialogue and Applications for Each Stage

Types	Collective inquiry	Critical-dialogic education	Community building and social action	Conflict resolution and peace building
Stage				
Setting the environment	Build a container for dialogue for safety and trust issues to emerge. Develop group consensus.	Develop guidelines for dialogue. Build relationship.	Discuss, clarify and set ground rules. Share personal beliefs and experiences about race and race relations.	Orient group members. Decide to engage in dialogue.
Developing a common base	-Explore beliefs and assumptions leading to public suspension of judgments. Dialogue about personal, work related or general topics.	Develop a common language. Explore multiple social identities, commonalities and differences.	Ask what the state of race relation in our community is. Ask what the nature of the problem with race is.	Map and name problems and relationships. Explore and clarify issues and group development.
Exploring questions issues, conflict	Increase suspension of judgment and trust. Inquiry and creativity flow. Explore personal, work related or general topics.	Explore issues of conflict and social justice. Explore in/out group dynamics and issues.	Ask participants about the main changes they would like to see in the community. Ask what kind of public policies can help.	Continue clarification of issues. Probe relationships to choose direction for change. Build scenarios-experience a change in the relationship.
Moving from dialogue to action	Assess experiences. Explore transfer of learning and skills into daily life.	Plan action. Envision and seek opportunities for action. Build alliances.	Ask what participants will do as individuals and with others to make a difference.	Plan action. Act together to make change happen. Monitor and evaluate.

Fourth, before we conduct inter-religious dialogue more actively, there is a need to increase the Malaysian society's understanding about inter-religious dialogue. Malaysian generally and the Muslim's community particularly are still unaware and being pessimist about inter-religious dialogue.

The objections of the establishment of *Jawatankuasa Mempromosikan Persefahaman dan Keharmonian Antara Penganut Agama* (JKMPKA) for instance is an indicator of the immature and negative attitude of society towards inter-religious dialogue. Previous researches (e.g., Haslina Ibrahim, 2011; Azrinah Abdul Rahah, 2009) reported that former participants of dialogues, members of NGOs and university students have demonstrated a better level of understanding towards inter-religious dialogue compared to other respondents. Efforts especially from the government are necessary to ensure the understanding about inter-religious go beyond NGOs and higher education institutions.

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