

## **Dialogue of Life: An Experience in Leeds Community**

Khadijah Mohd Khambali @ Hambali  
University of Malaya, ijamh@um.edu.my

### **Abstract**

Inter-religious dialogue among different ethnicity and social background is a unique experience especially for those who newly become a part of community in certain place. The dialogue of life among Leeds community begins when the different of ethnicity and social meet each other and share their daily life activities together. Through the process of dialogue which occurs in daily life interaction, the Leeds communities not only have a chance to know their counterparts but also have an opportunity to be closed contact with different faiths community. The interaction between the various communities with various faiths is significant to help enhance understanding in a structured manner through various activities and events as offered such as by Leeds Cultural Community Center, Leeds Grand Mosque as well as a mechanism to build a social integration among the community.

**Keywords:** *dialogue of life, inter-religious dialogue, different faiths*

### **Introduction**

November 2013, I will spend my six months on sabbatical study leave in University of Leeds, United Kingdom. I spent time among Leeds community where the communities are Christians, Muslims, and Hindus, Buddhist, Sikhs and others. This paper discusses the Leeds community to correlate the relationship and strengthening the brotherhood of various faiths of community either those who are Christians, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhist, Sikhs and others through the process of dialogue which we called as Dialogue of Life. This writing is based on my experience within Leeds community since November 2013 until April 2014.

### **The Concept of Inter-religious Dialogue**

Interreligious dialogue, also referred to as interfaith dialogue, is about people of different faiths coming to a mutual understanding and respect that allows them to live and cooperate with each other in spite of their differences. The term refers to cooperative and positive interaction between people of different religious traditions, (i.e. 'faiths') at both the individual and institutional

level. Each party remains true to their own beliefs while respecting the right of the other to practice their faith freely. Interfaith dialogue is not just words or talk. It includes human interaction and relationships. It can take place between individuals and communities and on many levels. For example, between neighbors, in schools and in our places of work - it can take place in both formal and informal settings.

Basically, dialogue is a process of conversation through speech.<sup>1</sup> It is a reciprocal relationship in which two or more parties endeavor to express accurately what they mean, and listen to and respect what the other person says.<sup>2</sup> Dialogue began when one faith first became aware of the other.<sup>3</sup> Dialogue has taken on many meanings, but Leonard Swidler<sup>4</sup> points out that dialogue is a two-way communication between persons who hold significantly differing views on a subject, with the purpose of learning more truth about the subject from the other. This implies that inter-religious dialogue is a conscious process which involves a deliberate intention of interaction and learning. Hence, inter-religious dialogue aims to influence the participants not to remain static in cocoons but to come out of their shells and to discover the means by which they can improve in themselves and in their mutual relationships.<sup>5</sup>

In multi-religious context, dialogue refers to “all positive and constructive inter-religious relations with individuals and communities of other faiths which are directed at mutual

---

<sup>1</sup> Charles Kimball, “Towards a More Hopeful Future: Obstacles and Opportunities in Christian-Muslim Relations,” *Muslim World* 94, no.3 (2004): 377-385.

<sup>2</sup> Patricia Martinez, A Case-Study of Malaysia: Muslim-Christian dialogue and Partnership, Possibilities and Problems with Suggestions for the Future, in Simon, W. Thomas & Azizan Baharuddin (ed). *Dialogue of Civilizations and the Construction of Peace* (Kuala Lumpur: Pusat Dialog Peradaban, Universiti Malaya, 2008).

<sup>3</sup> Martin Forward, *Inter-Religious Dialogue: a Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oneworld Publication, 2001).

<sup>4</sup> Leonard Swidler, “Understanding Dialogue,” in Rebecca Kratz Mays (ed). *Interfaith Dialogue at the Grassroots* (Pennsylvania: Ecumenical Press, 2008).

<sup>5</sup> Matthew C. Ugwoji, “Interreligious Relations and Solidarity: Contextualization of the Vision of Francis Cardinal Arinze for Religious Education in Nigeria” (PhD Thesis, Fordham University New York (ProQuest), 2008).

understanding and enrichment in obedience to truth and respect for freedom” (Michael Fitzgerald, <http://www.sedos.org/English/devfitz.html>). It is because dialogue promotes positive perception on the others. It is explained by Francis Cardinal Arinze that inter-religious dialogue is a meeting of mind and heart between followers of various religions. It is a walking together towards truth and a working together in projects of common concern. Only through dialogue, we can increase our understanding and decrease prejudice and negative perceptions on the others. Sheila Harvey Guillaume, emphasizes that the more we can gain knowledge of ‘the other’, the more we increase the opportunity to better understand each other.

Although man is classified according to his own ethnic, cultural and religious activities, yet he is created by the same and the Only One God.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, in Islamic point of view, all human beings are brothers who descend from the same parents, Adam and Eve. This argument supported by some verses of al-Qur’an as highlighted by Fatmir Mehdi Shehu:<sup>7</sup>

Surah *al-Nisā’*: 1 (“O mankind! Reverence your Guardian-Lord, who created you from a single person, created, of like nature, his mate, and from them twain scattered (like seeds) countless men and women;...” And in Surah *al-A’raf*: 189, “It is He who created you from a single person, and made his mate of like nature, in order that he might dwell with her (in love).” And “O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female....” Surah *al-Hujurat*: 13.

In order to show this brotherly affiliation, man must engage himself in a friendly religious communication or conversation, which enables him to come closer to the others, and as a result to solve the modern crises. Such kind of religious conversation that is called “inter-religious dialogue” has been practiced by members of different religious traditions from time to time and from one generation to another. Although such religious conversation used to be practiced before by many people, as a notion, it came into existence only by the end of the nineteenth century, where many

---

<sup>6</sup> Fatmir Mehdi Shehu, *Nostra Aetate and Inter-Religious Dialogue: an Islamic Perspective* (Selangor: International Islamic University Malaysia Press, 2008).

<sup>7</sup> Fatmir Mehdi Shehu. *Nostra Aetate and Inter-Religious Dialogue: an Islamic Perspective*, 90.

religious authorities and individuals in an explicit form by the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), held in Rome by the Catholic Church. This does not ignore the fact that the meaning and practice of such notions did exist before this council. It is of a great importance to mention here the place known as *Karakorum*,<sup>8</sup> where on 30 May 1254 the scene of the first world inter-religious conversation in modern history took place between representatives of the East and West. This religious dialogue that lasted for a whole day was staged by the great Khan, and there were four groups of people involved: the Latins (the Catholic Christians), the Nestorian Christians, the Buddhists and the Muslims. The theme of this religious conversation focused on God's being.<sup>9</sup>

Inter-religious dialogue can be an ongoing process or means to an action or an end in itself. For the purpose of discussion, this paper means inter-religious dialogue as a process in which people at grassroots level are engaged in interacting, discussing and exchanging views, beliefs and ideas in their daily activities as they come across people of other faith in their jobs or business or otherwise. Hence, the purpose of inter-religious dialogue in this context is to increase understanding between religious communication and thus to remove ignorance about each other.

Dialogue can be seen in variety of forms. Diana Eck<sup>10</sup> identifies six types of dialogue; parliamentary dialogue, institutional dialogue, theological dialogue, dialogue in community or dialogue of life, spiritual dialogue and inner dialogue. Parliamentary dialogue refers to the large assemblies created for interfaith discussion. The earliest example was the World Parliament of Religions convened in Chicago in 1893. These types of meetings have become more frequent under the auspices of multi-faith organizations such as *the World Conference on Religion and Peace* and *the British-based World Congress of Faiths*. Institutional dialogue includes both the organized efforts by particular religious institutions, and in

---

<sup>8</sup> *Karakorum* was the Mongol capital of the time when the great inter-religious debate or conversation between the followers of different tradition took place.

<sup>9</sup> Fatmir Mehdi Shehu, *Nostra Aetate and Inter-Religious Dialogue: an Islamic Perspective*.

<sup>10</sup> Diana Eck, What Do We Mean by Dialogue? No. 11, *Current Dialogue*, December, 1986.

Southeast Asia, governments of nations that initiate and facilitate various kinds of dialogue. In terms of institutions, this type of dialogue seeks to establish and nurture channels of communication between various religious communities. This category encompasses much of the work carried out through the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Vatican, *the World Council of Muslims for Inter-religious Relations* and others. Although institutional inter-religious dialogue is a very important aspect of interfaith encounters, it is also beset with the problems of history and evangelization (for Christians) and *da'wa* (for Muslims). The dilemma has been that of maintaining faith on the one hand and interreligious outreach on the other.

A theological dialogue refers to particular elements found in interfaith encounter as well as the larger process of reflection among Muslims, Jews, Christians, Buddhists, Hindus and others. It includes structured meetings in which theological and philosophical issues are the primary focus of discussion. While, spiritual dialogue is concerned with deepening spiritual life through interfaith encounter. This type of dialogue does not struggle overtly with theological problems or issues between communities of faith. Rather, it is designed as a means to nourish, expand and develop spirituality or the spiritual dimension of religious life. On the other hand, inner dialogue takes place in each of us. It is operative in various dialogical encounters as well as in our process of thinking and reflection. It is intimately bound up with growth and change at the development of one's religious perspectives. It takes place in our minds and hearts when we read the scriptures of another religious tradition, or when we hear their call to prayer.

### **Dialogue of Life as a New Paradigm Shift in Interreligious Dialogue**

Dialogue in community or dialogue of life is inclusive categories that encompass most of the unstructured interaction between people of different traditions. These takes place in markets and on street corners, at times of festivals, in the course of civic or humanitarian projects, and at times of community or family crisis. This sort of dialogues takes place as people in communities think together about violence, militarism, or economic depression.

These dialogues happen spontaneously or of organized, concentrate on practical issues of common concern. Unfortunately, these spontaneous dialogues are rarely recognized and celebrated for their value, and organized community dialogues are more often precipitated by a problem or crisis.

The conceptual meaning of the dialogue of life is further discussed by Cardinal Arinze, a president of *Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue* (PCID). At the conference of Christian-Muslim relation in Pattaya, Thailand which involved the participants of ASEAN countries, Arinze argued that in order to live in peace and harmony, to remove discrimination and to build up their societies together, instead of engaging in rivalry, allowing tensions to build up, or even outright conflict, it is necessary for Christians and Muslims to meet each other in a climate of deep mutual respect and esteem. Hence, in his speech as quoted by Douglas Pratt<sup>11</sup> Arinze states that:

“the four forms of dialogue that had emerged as the de facto standard Catholic understanding, namely the dialogue of life, wherein participants live and work together and enrich one another through faithful practice of the values of religion, without the necessity of formal discussion; the dialogue of action, or social engagement, which aims at cooperation for the promotion of integral human development and for the liberation of people; the dialogue of religious experience, wherein rooted in their respective traditions, partners in dialogue share their spiritual patrimonies, for instance with regard to prayer and meditation, faith and the ways of searching for God; and discursive dialogue, or the dialogue of theological exchange, in which specialist experts from both sides of dialogical encounter exchange information on their respective religious beliefs and heritages and reflect together how the actual problems of humankind can be faced.”

The concept of dialogue of life as mentioned above implies that it is a form of interreligious dialogue that is within the reach of anyone who lives or interacts with believers in a different religion. This statement further described by Matthew Ugwoji<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> Douglas Pratt, “The Vatican in Dialogue with Islam: Inclusion and Engagement,” *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 21, no.3 (2010): 258.

<sup>12</sup> Matthew C. Ugwoji, “Interreligious Relations and Solidarity.

that dialogue of life is an interreligious relationship at the level of the ordinary relational situations of daily life: family, school, place of social or cultural contact, village meetings, workplace, politics, trade or commerce. When neighbors of differing religions are open to one another, when they share their projects and hopes, concerns and sorrows, they are engaging in dialogue of life. They do not necessarily discuss religion, but they draw on the values of their different beliefs and traditions. Further, this kind of dialogue implies concern, respect and hospitality toward the other. It leaves room for the other person's identity, modes of expression and values.

Similarly, for Cyprian Ubaka<sup>13</sup> describes that this type of dialogue is an informal one where people express their views, share their joys and sorrows and discuss their problem freely. They do this to learn from one another as well as to establish a loving relationship with one another. It is interesting to note that even at this level some form of discussion on one's relationship with God takes place. This is because people are basically religious, and matters of religious interest form part and parcel of their daily discussion. While, Volker Kuester<sup>14</sup> describes that the dialogue of life takes place in the concrete living-together of people with different religious background. Often, the borderlines of adherence to a religion go right through traditional large families or town communities. The people experience the rites and festivals of the various religions when they are with their family or neighbors, and sometimes take part themselves. Even in urban situations, such experiences are possible. This religious living-together does not necessarily demand detailed knowledge of the principles of the other religions in question. The dialogue of life aims at a good living together. It is therefore, getting to know each other regardless any religion and interact with the other in daily life activities is part of the process of dialogue of life.

---

<sup>13</sup> Cyprian Ubaka, "Inter-religious Dialogue at the Grass Root-Methods and Prospects," in Hypolith A. Adigwe (ed). *One God, Many Religions: Let us Talk* (Onitsha: Thonik Prints Production Ltd., 2003).

<sup>14</sup> Volker Kuester, "Who, With Whom, About What? Exploring the Landscape of Inter-Religious Dialogue," *Exchange* 33,no. 1 (2004): 73-92.

This is further explained by J. Mark Hensman<sup>15</sup> that the dialogue of life, on the other hand is of different in nature. It was always there. It was unearthed, recognized acknowledged rather than constructed. It is about how people live: alongside each other, against each other. They rub shoulders. It is sometimes concretely, sometimes abrasively. The dialogue of life can be messy. It does not easily fit into agendas. It simply happens. Matthew Ugwoji<sup>16</sup> goes on to describe that dialogue on this level is a way of breaking down cultural biases and prejudices. It is a way of getting to know people of other faiths on human level. This form of engagement will lead to next identities as dialogue of collaboration where adherents of various religions cooperate for the promotion and human development and liberation in all its forms. This form of dialogue is exemplified in social concerns inspired by religious motives, such as in the study and execution of development of projects and in initiatives to foster justice and peace. This reasoning will constitute good grounds for peaceful coexistence.

In this respect, the concept dialogue of life can be understood as a form of inter-religious dialogue which involves the engagement of diverse religious society. It emphasizes the elements of living together, daily life interaction, getting to-know-each other and strives together for living harmoniously beyond the religious differences. Hence, dialogue of life is a broad concept, its definition vary according to the discourse and depends on the nature of participants and the subject that they discuss together. It is a form of inter-religious dialogue at the grass root level and aim at common concern of people living together that is culturally diverse in their daily life activities.

It is therefore, the dialogue of life differs from any other kinds of interreligious dialogue that formally conducted by religious elites on the discussion of theological aspects. The difference is further explained by Fatmir Mehdi Shehu:<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> J. Mark Hensman, "Beyond Talk: The Dialogue of Life as the Locus of Non-Verbal Interreligious Dialogue," *East Asian Pastoral Review* 36, no. 3 (1999): 323-337.

<sup>16</sup> Matthew C. Ugwoji, "Interreligious Relations and Solidarity.

<sup>17</sup> Fatmir Mehdi Shehu, *Nostra Aetate and Inter-Religious Dialogue: an Islamic Perspective*, 75.



“In a daily conversation between two or more people with different views regarding the nature of material well-being as well as the nature of the Ultimate being, the principles of respect and understanding of one another’s opinions and views remain crucial. However, the daily conversation that takes place between individuals differs from religious communication that runs in inter-religious dialogue between two complete different mindsets that aim to the religious claim of a common Ultimate Truth, that is, God. In this sense, interreligious dialogue is more advanced than the daily conversation. The former takes place according to the official arrangement, while the latter runs on individual bases and is unofficial, i.e., when a Muslim lives next to a Christian fellow, and they share a daily conversation related to their daily life as well as to their common religious values found in their traditions.”

The above statement explains that dialogue of life is one of the component in inter-religious dialogue operates at the grass roots level. It emphasizes on non-elite participants who discuss any matters pertaining not only on religious issues but also the other theme of social issues. This kind of inter-religious dialogue provides different method from any structured dialogue which is normally conducted in round table discussion. It can be said that dialogue of life is a spontaneous interaction occurs in daily life activities in any venue at any time. However, the dialogue of life still have its similarity with any other kinds of dialogue. It is because any forms of interreligious dialogue either at structural level or daily life interaction, the aim is promoting mutual understanding, building bridge, inculcating tolerance and enhancing respect with the others who are different in religious affiliations. Therefore, the dialogue of life is a new paradigm shift of religious communication nowadays that is necessarily aim for enhancing unity and promoting positive interaction within the diverse religious society. Such an effort can be seen through the social and religious activities as been through by Leeds community, United Kingdom.

### **Leeds Community**

Leeds is a city in West Yorkshire, England, the principal settlement in the City of Leeds metropolitan district. (Leeds City Council: 2009). In 2011 Leeds main urban subdivision had a population of 474,632, (Census Built-Up Area: 2011) while the City of Leeds had an estimated population of 757,700 (Population Estimates for England and Wales, Mid 2011) making it the third largest city in the United Kingdom. The 2011 census showed that the West Yorkshire Urban Area had a population of 1.8 million, (LeedsCityRegion.gov.uk) whilst the Leeds City Region, an economic area with Leeds at its core, had a population of 3 million. (Globalization and World Cities Research Network: 2011).

Historically in the West Riding of Yorkshire, the history of Leeds can be traced to the 5th century when the Kingdom of Elmet was covered by the forest of 'Loidis', the origin of the name *Leeds*. The name has been applied to many administrative entities over the centuries. It changed from being the appellation of a small manorial borough, in the 13th century, through several incarnations, to being the name attached to the present metropolitan borough. In the 17th and 18th centuries Leeds became a major centre for the production and trading of wool. Then, during the Industrial Revolution, Leeds developed into a major industrial centre; wool was the dominant industry but flax, engineering, iron foundries, printing, and other industries were important. From being a compact market town in the valley of the River Aire in the 16th century Leeds expanded and absorbed the surrounding villages to become a populous urban centre by the mid-20th century.<sup>18</sup>

Today Leeds is ranked as a gamma world city by the Globalization and World Cities Research Network; (The Story of English Towns: Leeds. 2009. London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge) and is considered the cultural, financial and commercial heart of the West Yorkshire Urban Area. Leeds is served by three universities, with an estimated student population of 45,100, and has the country's fourth largest urban economy. After London, Leeds is the largest legal centre in the UK, and in

---

<sup>18</sup> Burt and Grady, *The Illustrated History of Leeds* (N.pl.: Breedon Books, 1994).

2011 its financial and insurance services industry was worth £2.1 billion, the 5th largest in the UK, with over 30 national and international banks located in the city. It is the leading UK city for telephone delivered banking and related financial services, with over 30 call centres employing around 20,000 people.<sup>19</sup>

The majority of people in Leeds identify themselves as Christian and as well as other religions such as Islam, Hindu, Buddha and others. The proportion of Muslims in Leeds is average for the country. Mosques can be found throughout the city, serving Muslim communities in Chapeltown, Harehills, Hyde Park and parts of Beeston. The largest mosque is Leeds Grand Mosque in Hyde Park. The Sikh community is represented by Gurudwaras (Temples) spread across the city, the largest being in Chapeltown. There is also a colourful religious annual procession, called the Nagar Kirtan, into Millennium Square in the city centre around 13–14 April to celebrate Baisakhi – the Sikh New Year and the birth of the religion. It is estimated that around 3,000 Sikhs in Leeds take part in this annual event.<sup>20</sup>

Leeds has the third-largest Jewish community in the United Kingdom, after those of London and Greater Manchester. The areas of Alwoodley and Moortown contain sizeable Jewish populations. (leedscityregion.gov.uk: 2011) There are eight active synagogues in Leeds. The small Hindu community in Leeds has a temple (*mandir*) at Hyde Park The temple has all the major Hindu deities and is dedicated to the Lord Mahavira of the Jains. Various Buddhist traditions are represented in Leeds, including: Soka Gakkai, Theravada, Tibetan, Triratna Buddhist Community and Zen. The Buddhist community (*sangha*) comes together to celebrate the major festival of Wesak in May. There is also a community of the Bahai Faith in Leeds.<sup>2122</sup>

In Leeds, Jewish, Muslims, Christians, Sikhism, Hindus, Bahai, Buddhist and others live on the same streets; use the same shops, buses and schools. Normal life means that we come into

---

<sup>19</sup> Unsworth and Stillwell, *Twenty-First Century Leeds: Geographies of a Regional City* (Leeds: Leeds University Press, 2004).

<sup>20</sup> Burt and Grady, *The Illustrated History of Leeds*.

<sup>21</sup> Burt and Grady, *The Illustrated History of Leeds*.

<sup>22</sup> Unsworth and Stillwell, *Twenty-First Century Leeds: Geographies of a Regional City*.

daily contact with each other. Dialogue therefore, is not just something that takes place on an official or academic level only – it is part of daily life during which different cultural and religious groups interact with each other directly, and where tensions between them are the most tangible. This is refers to dialogue of life.

### **The Process of Dialogue of Life an Experience among Leeds Community**

Dialogue of life as experienced by Leeds community can be described as a process in which people at the grassroots level engage in interacting, discussing and exchanging views, beliefs and ideas in their daily activities. Dialogue of life begins through the process of socialization, interaction and encountering the others in workplaces, schools, markets at any places and any time. The elements of interaction and encountering the other are closely often relate to an aspect of love, friendship or just contact with someone from the faith in question. Hence, the daily activities among society will then attract the interest of the others to know more about the difference and the uniqueness of certain religions. This process occurs in everyday activities which is best described as dialogue of life in multi-faith society.

Dialogue of life is significantly related to the inter-religious relation as experienced by every single community or society which always lives together. It is because this community or society is individuals who have close contact with all individuals from multi-faith society.

The interconnection between the process of dialogue of life within Leeds community can be categorized into three main themes; dialogue of life due to the factors of curiosity and respect, solidarity and self-awareness.

#### **i. Curiosity and Respect**

In my experience within Leeds community who met regularly to volunteer across the city and to live within their religious traditions inspire them to work for a better world. My experince noticed that everybody in Leeds community try hard to take care of each other. This command is in all our religions and following its imperactive is our only chance for survival as a human race.

Every single person who Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist and others has different stories and experience in life. But we all agreed that our different stories and experiences in living together had not only increased our understanding of each other traditions, but also strengthened our sense of belonging, inheritance, and identity within our own respective traditions. This is all about curiosity and respect which telling 'our life' and the people who lived within. The different personalities and traditions get along within community and living respectfully.

Early February 2014, I went to Bradford for Interfaith Week. Christians, Muslims and Jews had been side by side in the Bradford Centre for a day of exhibitions, information, singing, prayer and demonstrations of worship.

The major event has been opened by the Lord Mayor of Leeds at 11am and began with singing by children from Allerton Cofe Primary School followed till 2.00pm by singing from other faith schools including New Horizon, Meanwood Cofe Primary and Brodetsky schools. From 11am to 4pm, I also got the opportunity to experience prayer led by Muslims, Jews, Christians, Hindus and other faith communities of Leeds. Each of the faiths had displayed about their beliefs and people to discuss and explain them. This shows that curiosity and respect to each faiths create to the culture of dialogue. The spontaneously dialogue had occurred during this 'Interfaith Week'. This is so called as Dialogue of Life.

The event has been organized by Leeds Faiths Forum with nine of the different faith communities in Leeds such as Leeds Cultural Community, Leeds Grand Mosque meeting the public in the Bradford Centre.

"We aim to show that a better society is possible if we understand one another and work together," said event organiser, Revd Canon Charles Dobbin, Chair of Leeds Faiths Forum and Church of England Vicar from Moor Allerton, Leeds during his speech.

Later on, I spent my time for three hours with Mrs Anne who is a devout Catholic on 5<sup>th</sup> April 2014. We discussed on topic Jesus and Mary regarding to our beliefs. Before our discussion finish, Mrs. Anne remind me my time for 'Asr (evening) prayer. After I performed my praying, we continue our discussion. At the end of our discussion, we come to the positive attitudes that will help to

create the culture of dialogue, and thus contribute to the culture of peace. Meaning that, we should be inclined to start with that quality which is at the basis of all learning i.e. curiosity. It is healthy curiosity that pushes everybody constantly to ask 'why', 'Why our neighbour is different from us? Why are they praying? Why are they celebrating a feast? How do they celebrate? All the curiosity is never ending but it will lead to an attitude of respect, as the values in other religions become clearer.

Respect can then lead to admiration. There are certainly features of Islamic life and worship that provoke admiration: the emphasis on the family, the importance given to the prayer, fasting and alms-giving.<sup>23</sup>

## **ii. Solidarity**

Another attitude is that solidarity, a willingness to give and receive help, a readiness to work together on behalf of humanity. This spirit can be seen in the founding of associations that bring together Christians, Muslims, Jewish, Buddhists, Hindus and others, for example to take care of the handicapped. The spirit of solidarity can be shown by cooperating humanitarian relief, and there is surely a need of such cooperation at the present time. It could take the form of upholding basic human values.<sup>24</sup>

## **iii. Self-awareness**

My neighbour asked me about 'hijab' and who should wear 'hijab' and why Muslim women should cover their hair. When I explained to him, he really thanks me. He also tries to understand my beliefs as well as my culture about clean and pure. This is because he wanted to know why he had to take off his shoes every time he enters Muslims' house or mosque. Dialogue of life was occurring spontaneously.

My landlord, Mr Mike Finn always gave me a text before he enters my house and gives me time for wearing 'hijab'. He told me that he tries to know what are Islam and Muslim. He gives his respect to our beliefs.

---

<sup>23</sup> Michael L. Fitzgerald and John Borelli, *Interfaith Dialogue: a Catholic View* (Ashford Color Press: Great Britain, 2006).

<sup>24</sup> Michael L. Fitzgerald and John Borelli, *Interfaith Dialogue: a Catholic View*.

Based on the experiences within the Leeds community, the preliminary conclusion is that curiosity and respect, solidarity and self-awareness took place due to the process of dialogue of life that correlate the relationship between the communities especially Muslim-non-Muslim friends. This can be analyzed from daily life interaction in the form of mingling with friends and getting marriage with the Muslim-non-Muslim spouse. It is also through the method of observation on daily life activities on conducive surrounding of multi-faith culture with the constant call to prayers that eventually opens the hearts of the converts to know more about multi religions. Besides that, befriend with Muslim gave the opportunity for the converts to access some Islamic reading materials on the stories of prophets and Islamic history. All of these factors become a push factor to new Muslim to have self-awareness to search for the truth offered by the other religions and verse versa for other multi-faith believers.

The daily life interaction as experienced by new Muslims or other faith shows that the dialogue of life began at the pre-conversion stage. It can be seen from a situational dialogue based on the concept '*li ta'ārafu*' (getting to know each other), which is a model of inter-faith relation as stated by al-Qur'an in Surah *al-Hujurāt* (49:13). The principle of '*li ta'ārafu*' or getting to know each other recognizes brotherhood ties between Muslims. While getting to know non-Muslim refers to *al-Ṣulh* (peace) with the purpose of building and fostering peaceful co-existence.<sup>25</sup> This principle of knowing each other is also an important element in the model of Muslim-Christian relation suggested by Jane. I Smith<sup>26</sup> through the concept of '*getting to know you*'. Through anthropological approach, Merryl Wyn Davies<sup>27</sup> stated that

---

<sup>25</sup> Andek Masnah Andek Kelawa, "Hubungan Muslim dengan Non-Muslim Menurut Perspektif al-Qur'an," in Abdul Ghafar Hj. Don, Berhanuddin Abdullah, Zulkiple Abd. Ghani. (pynt). *Dakwah Kepada Non-Muslim di Malaysia: Konsep, Metode dan Pengalaman* (Bangi: Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 1998).

<sup>26</sup> Jane I Smith, *Muslims, Christians and the Challenges of Interfaith Dialogue* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

<sup>27</sup> Merlyn Wyn Davies, *Knowing One Another – Shaping an Islamic Anthropology* (Saling Mengenal: Membentuk Antropologi Islam, trans. Mohd Sahari Nordin & Norsita Lin Ahmad (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1992).

'*Knowing One Another*' is a dialogue process that creates introductory relations between human beings.

The dialogue of life is one of the form of inter-faith dialogue that involves all parties (or anyone) who live together and display the interaction between believers of different faiths. It is a form of inter-relationship that happened at the level of interaction often faced in daily life. Volker Kuester<sup>28</sup> explains that the concept of dialogue of life happens based on four characteristics of life; the first is living together whether at the neighborhood context or a multi-religion family. Second, dialogue of life does not require deep understanding of the other faiths. Third, the strong intention among society to live harmoniously together. Fourth, consensus between adherents of different religions motivated by desire and good will and dialogue takes place in a number of series.

Based on the activities and events among Leeds community, it is evident that the four characteristics of dialogue of life forwarded by Volker Kuester<sup>29</sup> color the dialogue of life in Leeds multi-religious society. The process of dialogue of life through knowing the others and inter-mingling together eventually led the Leeds community became familiar with the daily practice of various faiths in Leeds.

This social phenomenon is further described by Ahmad Sunawari Long<sup>30</sup> that the dialogue of life happens when the members of a community try to live beyond the borders of their cluster. They live openly and neighborly, share the sadness and pain without being restricted to discuss issues pertaining to the scope of religion. The members of the society live side by side in a neighborhood or village and cooperate together regardless any religious adherents. In this aspect, dialogue begins with encountering the others in daily life interaction. Moreover, dialogue of life is not similar to dialogue of discourse that has a structured method according to certain format, agenda, procedure and participant. In contrast, the method of dialogue of life is to

---

<sup>28</sup> Volker Kuester, "Who, With Whom, About What? Exploring the Landscape of Inter-Religious Dialogue," *Exchange* 33, no. 1 (2004): 73-92.

<sup>29</sup> Volker Kuester, "Who, With Whom, About What? Exploring the Landscape of Inter-Religious Dialogue.

<sup>30</sup> Ahmad Sunawari Long. "Dialog antara Agama-agama Pra-syarat Persefahaman antara Agama-Agama," in Jaffary Awang et al, *Agama dan Perpaduan Kaum di Malaysia*. Bangi: UKM, 2003.



focus on the dialogue that involves life experience and tells the story of religious narrative that display shared values.

Based on the definition of the concept of dialogue of life that is closely related to daily interactions of adherents from different religions, dialogue in the context of multi-religious society is not only demanding tolerance for the harmonious living together but also affects the conduct of influencing each other and prone to mutually learn from each other. Relatively, there will be individuals who will be 'exposed' and 'affected' with this social phenomenon which will eventually led to the religious transformation of that individual. Based on the study by Ali Kose<sup>31</sup> on the phenomenon of new converts in Britain, it shows that the early exposure of new converts to Islam started at the pre-conversion stage when they met and mingled closely with Muslims. Through interaction, their Muslim friends whether consciously or not will display or highlight the Islamic lifestyle and identity through daily activities such as five daily prayers, *halal* diet, and good conduct with others irrespective of religion. The process of socialization will indirectly attract the attention of friends from different religions to know and learn about something that is different from their previous religious experience.

Relatively speaking, the point of view within the community level will change based on its direct involvement in the dialogue of life; dialogue as it encourages them to gain better understanding of the others. This clarifies that dialogue of life is not meant nor intend to change a person's religion; rather the dialogue creates a space for an individual to get closer to a new transcendence and form a new understanding as well as purifies prejudices, misconceptions and doubts which existed previously. This means that the above discussion explains the concept of dialogue of life and it is not limited to just explain the meaning of it but also includes the process of the dialogue based on the experiences which also includes of attitude, conviction and truth. This is because the two concepts display the elements of 'encountering the other' and 'interaction' which shape the thread of knowing each other and sharing among the adherents of different faiths. It is also in the phenomenon of dialogue of life people engage in daily

---

<sup>31</sup> Ali Kose, *Conversion to Islam: a Study of native British Converts* (London: Kegan Paul International, 1996).

interaction in a space not bound by time and place, as well as the projection of conducts in religious life practices that are different and considered unique and outstanding.

This situation does not only display a dialogue that is intellectual but also touches the heart and feelings. This phenomenon is obvious in the context of inter-religious relation in Leeds's society which is then integrated in the sharing of the roots; speaking the same language or assents, although they are not originating from the same state, sheltered in the same family ties, sharing the different culture and creating interaction in the same socio-economy field at the same place which is called Leeds Market (agro weekly market). Based on the similarities that existed and shared in daily interactions, this phenomenon has shaped the social framework of interaction and communication between religions form the network of dialogue called the dialogue of life.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the study shows the Leeds community carrying out its function in religious and social activities of various ethnicity and faiths. These activities are the platform to promote dialogue of life in community level and strengthen the brotherhood among Leeds community whether those are Muslims, Christians, Hindus, Buddhist, Sikhs and others. It is because only through the cultural and social activities, the Leeds community able to interact closely with the others and see the real picture of various faiths and cultural in their daily practice. It will help the Leeds community to be familiar with the teachings of various faiths not only in the form of verbal communication as they gain from the religious activities but also in the non-verbal communication through the process of socialization. Therefore, the concept of dialogue of life and dialogue is related with each other as the two concepts engage in the elements of interaction and encountering the other.

Most importantly, Leeds community; who are able to apply the models of dialogue of life in its effort to tighten the thread of brotherhood among the various faiths community. They are able to generate harmonious relations with other ethnics outside the scope of community activities as they understand that religions are everybody beliefs despite the differences in cultural background,

religion, identity and so forth. The Leeds community has proven that the dialogue of life among the Muslims came about naturally and ‘feelingly’, transparent and smooth and able to strengthen the ties of unity in Leeds. The experience of Leeds community in preserving the dialogue of life among the various community and society is hopefully able to become the model for NGOs and other bodies in terms of their courses and support activities.

### **Bibliography**

- Ahmad Sunawari Long. “Dialog antara Agama-Agama Pra-syarat Persefahaman antara Agama-Agama.” In Jaffary Awang et al. *Agama dan Perpaduan Kaum di Malaysia*. Bangi: UKM, 2003.
- Andek Masnah Andek Kelawa. “Hubungan Muslim dengan Non-Muslim Menurut Perspektif al-Qur’an.” In Abdul Ghafar Hj. Don, Berhanundin Abdullah, Zulkiple Abd. Ghani. (pynt). *Dakwah Kepada Non-Muslim di Malaysia: Konsep, Metode dan Pengalaman*. Bangi: Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 1998.
- Burt and Grady. *The Illustrated History of Leeds*. N.pl.: Breedon Books, 1994.
- Davies, Merlyn Wyn. *Knowing One Another – Shaping An Islamic Anthropology* (Saling Mengenal: Membentuk Antropologi Islam. Trans. Mohd Sahari Nordin & Norsita Lin Ahmad. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1992.
- Diana Eck. What Do We Mean by Dialogue? No. 11, Current Dialogue, December, 1986.
- Fatmir Mehdi Shehu. *Nostra Aetate and Inter-Religious Dialogue: an Islamic Perspective*. Selangor: International Islamic University Malaysia Press, 2008.
- Fraser, Derek. *A History of Modern Leeds*. England: Manchester University Press, 1982.
- Forward, Martin. *Inter-Religious Dialogue: a Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oneworld Publication, 2001.
- Haddad, Yvonne Yazbeck. “The Quest for Peace in Submission: Reflections on the Journey of American Women Converts to Islam.” In Nieuwkerk, Karin van Nieuwkerk (ed). *Women Embracing Islam*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006.
- Hensman, J. Mark. “Beyond Talk: The Dialogue of Life as the Locus of Non-Verbal Interreligious Dialogue,” *East Asian Pastoral Review* 36, no. 3 (1999): 323-337.

- Hermansen, Marcia. "Muslims in the Performative Mode: a Reflection on Muslim-Christian Dialogue," *The Muslim World* 94, 3 (2004): 387-396.
- Kimball, Charles. "Towards a More Hopeful Future: Obstacles and Opportunities in Christian-Muslim Relations," *Muslim World* 94, 3(2004): 377-385.
- Kose, Ali. *Conversion to Islam: a Study of native British Converts*. London: Kegan Paul International, 1996.
- Kuester, Volker. "Who, With Whom, About What? Exploring the Landscape of Inter-Religious Dialogue," *Exchange* 33. 1 (2004). 73-92.
- Lewis, Rambo. *Understanding Religious Conversion*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993.
- L. Fitzgerald, Michael and Borelli, John. *Interfaith Dialogue: a Catholic View*. Ashford Color Press: Great Britain, 2006.
- Martinez, Patricia. A Case-Study of Malaysia: Muslim-Christian dialogue and Partnership, Possibilities and Problems with Suggestions for the Future. in Simon, W. Thomas & Azizan Baharuddin (ed). *Dialogue of Civilizations and the Construction of Peace*. Kuala Lumpur: Pusat Dialog Peradaban, Universiti Malaya, 2008.
- Mohd Syukri Yeoh Abdullah & Osman Abdullah @ Chuah Hock Leng. "The Problems of Mu'allaf in Malaysia," *Islamiyyat Journal of Islamic Studies* 24 (2003): 65-84.
- Pratt, Douglas. "The Vatican in dialogue with Islam: Inclusion and Engagement," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 21, no.3 (2010): 245-262.
- Roald, Anne Sofie. *New Muslims in the European Context: the Experience of Scandinavian Converts*. Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2004.
- Smith, Jane I. *Muslims, Christians and the Challenges of Interfaith Dialogue*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.
- Swidler, Leonard. "Understanding Dialogue." In Rebecca Kratz Mays (ed). *Interfaith Dialogue at the Grassroots*. Pennsylvania: Ecumenical Press, 2008.
- Ubaka, Cyprian. "Inter-religious Dialogue at the Grass Root-Methods and Prospects." In Hypolith A. Adigwe (ed). *One God, Many Religions: Let us Talk*. Onitsha: Thonik Prints Production Ltd., 2003.

- Ugwoji, Matthew C. "Interreligious Relations and Solidarity: Contextualization the Vision of Francis Cardinal Arinze for Religious Education in Nigeria." PhD Thesis, Fordham University New York (ProQuest), 2008.
- Unsworth and Stillwell. *Twenty-First Century Leeds: Geographies of a Regional City*. Leeds: Leeds University Press, 2004.
- Zebiri, Kate. *British Muslim Converts: Choosing Alternative Lives*. England: Oneworld Publications, 2008.

