


Contemplation and action: Christian and Islamic spirituality in dialogue

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Prayer, meditation and contemplation have long been established as essentials in human life all over the world. Yet, even by a religious devotee, they are regarded in one way or another as insignificant and secondary: what is taken into accounts is just getting things done. Thus, prayer sounds simply as 'saying words', and meditation is an obscure and complicated practice not easily understood. Even if there is any advantage, it is recognised and perceived as totally detached from the life of average people. Contemplative life is indeed sometimes seen as something sceptical. The article challenges the perspective and saying that the absolute principle of prayer is intensifying intimate accomplishment in love, the awareness of God. The authentic goal of meditation is the search and discovery of advanced dimensions in freedom, illumination and love, in intensifying our awareness of our life in God. Besides, people usually consider contemplative life as the opposite of active life and prefer to contemplative life. Using one of the greatest Catholic mystic's perspective, the article shows that contemplative life is not better than active and not vice versa. Both are necessary. In this case, the article also put into a dialogue with Islamic spirituality.

Contribution: This article enriches the current debate on contemplation and action; it also shatters the complains that mysticism, instructs and guides abandonment from worldly interests and introduces what we can called a new mysticism, that is, an 'activist mysticism of dynamised silence'.

Keywords: contemplation; action; Eckhart; Islamic; mysticism; dialogue.

Introduction

'Earth cannot be changed for the better unless the consciousness of individual is changed first. We pledge to increase our awareness by disciplining our mind, by meditation, by prayer, or by positive thinking' (Parliament of the World's Religions 1993:2).

The above declaration echoes the role of spirituality, a function that is profound and imperative and fundamental for the life of individuals and societies. Human beings consist of two dimensions: the spiritual and the material. When they have journeyed over a crisis of alienation from their surrounding and context, they favour to retreat to their religious and spiritual origins. This aspect is substantial, and it is the internal aspect of human beings. This is the place where they will be exposed to a spiritual dimension and encounter with the Deity.

This is an interesting phenomenon. In the conventional debate between contemplation and action, contemporary defenders for the 'contemplative life' have a tendency to argue about it in terms of action and efficacy. Strictly speaking, the ascetics and hermits in their religious monastery are not 'useless', as they are committed and occupied with a very powerful kind of spiritual exercises. They are not unproductive, worthless or inattentive: they are 'getting things done', but in an unnatural, transcendental and esoteric way.

Obviously, there are many who believe this, in the sense that they accept it 'on faith' without quite seeing how it is possible. They accept it on authority without understanding it themselves and without trying to understand it. An example can be seen in the way how the seekers (mystical disciples) have to follow the instructions of their master, *shaykh* or guru. The argument is not one that appeals to them. It arouses a curious malaise, but they do not know what to do about it. They put it away on a mental shelf with other things they have no time to examine.

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Theoretical construction

Dialogue, in this case, interfaith dialogue is possibly one of the most exciting and significant religious issues of the 20th century. It turned to be the topic of the day, from official academic seminars to favourite conversation in the cafes. As any other phenomenon, it happened as a consequence of many factors. One of them, if not the most important, is what Gilles Kepel called the 'crisis of modernity' (Almirzahan 2011:200; Kepel 1993:191).

From certain theological perspectives, the phenomenon of plurality of religion is because of the manifold nature of divine revelation and of its human response in an astonishing variety of different cultures and historical contexts. 'Religions are many and varied and they reflect the desire of men and women throughout the ages to enter into relationship with the Absolute Being' (Pope John Paul II 1986:2).

Based on our own socio-cultural situation, those of us who engage in interfaith inquiry are variously enlightened, bewildered and – in some cases – even shocked – by what we believe as each other's perception and practices. Optimally speaking, we learn that our diverse traditions share some of the same essential values that all of us treasure in our own religions, though articulated in different ways. We also find that we are being challenged to speak about our own religious identities in more and more religiously multiple contexts in terms of where others are; in many ways, attending and inquiring of us as we do so. It means that whether we like it or not *to be religious today is to be inter-religious*. Friedrich Max Muller, the great pioneer of the modern discipline of the history of religions, once famously wrote, 'He who knows one religion knows none', perhaps mainly referring in his own scholarly context to the people who wished to come to be experts in the study of a particular religious tradition. However, now this dictum seems to have significance well beyond the membership of the American Academy of Religion and similar scholarly societies. In today's increasingly religiously plural social contexts, these words imply not only that a failure to involve pluralism is doing self-marginalisation within our own social contexts. They also indicate that, without some understanding of the faith of our neighbour, the religious person (or community) living in a religiously diverse society cannot even understand oneself (or itself).

A person is enriched through the medium of encounter and dialogue. When one 'shares' other's experience, one is challenged to view things as others experience them. Even though we can never understand each other perfectly, we can still understand a great deal about each other.

Dialogue is learning of truths obtained by others and coming back with those truths to enrich our own spirituality. John S. Dunne called it, 'passing over' from one religion and way of life to other's religion that probably may not be the same from our own religion. Then, we 'come back', enriched by new knowledge and perspectives, not only accommodated

and conformed from other religious perspectives but also helpful for developing our own religious perspective (Dunne 1972:xiv).

Crossing paths with other religions does not mean that a person immerses inside forever in other religions, unaware of going out and back to their own religion. This 'passing over' from one tradition to other traditions, from one way of life to other ways of life, needs to be continued by the practice called 'coming back' with a new horizon to our own culture, way of life, and our own religion. It is called 'spiritual pilgrimage'. Thus, 'passing over' here indicates the spirit and bravery to engage in the spiritual pilgrimage to other religions [*wonder land*] and to 'come back' from the pilgrimage to our own religion [*mother land*] with a new interpretation to enrich our own religion. 'A creative dialogue is also possible only if there is a complete openness, and no preliminary assumption that one revelation ... must be the yardstick for all others' (Macquarrie 1964:43–44).

By using the theory of 'passing-over', interfaith dialogue based on Meister Eckhart's sermon thus starts from 'letting go' in order to 'pass over' into other spiritual traditions and to see both the other and the self in a new light. In 'passing-over' one does not simply come to a more excellent understanding of the other, but one joins into an enhancement and significantly unutterable sympathetic understanding of one's own faith. 'A receptive power cannot receive a form unless it is empty and free of other forms – the eye can only see color because it has no color of its own' (McGinn 2001:133). Through 'letting go', participants in dialogue are capable of 'breakthrough' and be transformed by truth. Then, they will 'come back' with new perspective into to their own spiritual tradition as they have been enriched by encountering others.

Today mysticism and mystics, formerly allotted as something that is marginal or additional and secondary, have become fashionable in many academic circles. For example, Tracy (1987) sees in the mystic tradition a means for analogically participating in pluralistic dialogue on religion. Similarly, Hans Kung, in establishing a common understanding with Eastern Religions, has turned to Christian mysticism's negative theology (see Kung & Ching 1989).

An approach to the spiritual form of other religions is better than only limiting to the comparative approach to the other religious doctrines. Spiritual experience approach can find the core of the relationship between various religious tradition, while comparative approach between various formulation of doctrines often finds obstacles that rises from the ineffable differences.

If people understand precisely the many ways in which their faith traditions tolerate and even encourage understanding of the faith experience of religious others, then we will have advanced a context for ourselves in which diversity could be affirmed and celebrated and in which conflict prevention will begin to reduce the necessity for conflict resolution.

Mary and Martha in Luke 10:38–42 (contemplative life and active life)

I will attempt to sketch the main idea of one of the greatest mystic, Meister Eckhart's reflection on Luke 10:38–42 and then to show how Islamic tradition shares such reflection. By means of this comparative analysis, I will be in position to observe some of the mainlines of similarities between these two traditions.

Eckhart's sermon

Eckhart was a biblically oriented theologian. His point of departure is scriptural text. 'The majority of his surviving Latin works are exegetical in character and his numerous Latins and German sermons are also based on biblical texts' (Colledge & McGinn 1981:28). His approach to the bible was based on twofold divisions of senses, 'the more evident sense' and the sense hidden 'under the shell of the letter'. Bernard McGinn said that all classical Christian exegesis is based on such division:

[B]ut Eckhart's understanding on it has special accents. And he was strongly influenced by the great religious thinker Maimonides¹ in the theoretical aspect of his exposition of the hidden meaning. He makes use of 'mystical meaning', 'figure' and especially 'parable' and 'in a parabolical manner' as a way of describing the inner meaning of scripture. (Colledge & McGinn 1981:28)

He does not deny the value of literal interpretation of the scripture, but he always seeks to find a deeper sense. It is so his interpretation of the verses that the article will describe.

Multiple interpretations on Mary and Martha (contemplative life and active life) (Lk 10:38–42)

The story of Jesus' visit with Martha and Mary is well known. The scene describes the visit of Jesus to the home of 'a certain woman named Martha who was busied herself with serving the guest' (v. 38) while her sister Mary 'sat at Jesus's feet and listened to his word' (v. 39). Annoyed with her sister and also with Jesus, Martha appeals for assistance: 'Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her to help me' (v. 40). In reply, Jesus rebukes her for being 'concerned and troubled about many things' (v. 41), and elevates Mary for having chosen the one thing which 'is needful and which shall not be taken from her' (v. 42).²

1. Maimonides, Moses (c.1135/8-1204) was a distinguished Talmudist, philosopher and physician and one of the most illustrious figures of Jewish history. See Eliade (ed. 1987:131).

2. The NRSV translation of the pericope found in Luke 10:38-42 describes Martha in two places as 'distracted' – first in verse 40 ('but Martha was distracted by her many tasks') and second in verse 41 ('Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things'). The original Greek actually uses the verb *perispein* meaning 'to be busy' or 'to take diligent care of' in verse 40 and the verbs *merimnao* meaning 'to be anxious about' and *thorubazo* 'to be troubled by' in verse 41. While it is certainly understandable how one could read a sense of 'distraction' into these verbs, it seems likely that the translators chose to translate these expressions this way because they interpret Jesus as scolding Martha for being 'distracted' from 'the better part' of hearing the word of God. Indeed, it is this interpretation that renders this pericope the *locus classicus* for exalting the spiritual state of the contemplative over that of the active. Given Meister Eckhart's mystical interpretation of this pericope and his rejection of this conventional interpretation, it is important to note that the original Greek need not be understood to be describing Martha as 'distracted'.

These verses have been interpreted in various ways. Many scholars consider them as a story of 'discipleship or the elevation of the word of God over other worldly concerns – even ministry' (Corley 1993:135). Other scholars, the vast majority of interpreters who were concerned with feminist issues suggest that here, like in other passages:

Luke's positive concern for women as members of Christian community can be discerned. Mary seated as a disciple at the feet of Jesus the teacher, embodies the new, unique image of a woman who is allowed to learn from Jesus as a rabbinic student, a role denied to women within Judaism. (Corley 1993:135)³

According to this mindset, Martha is being encouraged to leave behind her traditional role of the hospitable housewife and become a full disciple like Mary. Many scholars, however, hurriedly add that Martha's role is not absolutely excluded by Jesus' remark, nor this meant to be taken as completely denying the validity of traditional women's role. 'She is merely instructed to keep her household concerns in proper perspective' (Corley 1993:136).

Other scholars see that the scene described in Luke 10:38–42 establishes Mary as a patron and symbol of contemplative life, in contrast to her sister Martha who has chosen the active life. This scene of Christ at the home of Mary and Martha provides important material for the medieval debate about the meaning of the passage in Luke, about the relative merits of the two lives and about the relationship between them. It is also 'the subject of controversy beginning with the early Fathers, and the visual representative of it reflect the controversy in a variety of ways' (Couchman 1985:711–719)

This text, like many others in the Gospels, is challenged with textual problem. The shorter reading makes a contrast between Mary and Martha more evident and effectively excludes the more active role of Martha. The longer one, while still elevating the role of Mary, leaves open the possibility that Martha's role might still be practiced – 'a few things' still being necessary, 'one' simply being preferred (Corley 1993:139). Also, Jesus's comment to Martha tenderly advises her, instead of harshly criticising her (Fee 1981:75).

Luke alone tells this story,⁴ and usually, this verse is the '*locus classicus*' in Christian spirituality for contrasting contemplative and active ways (Heffner 1991:118).

According to Susan Racoczy, in the history of Christianity, there are three approaches to this problem. The first is hierarchical, that is, Mary, the pious, prayerful one as the symbol of the contemplative life, is superior to Martha the

3. But this opinion has been criticised by other scholar that 'it is not necessary to denigrate Judaism in order to make the point that Mary is here receiving instruction', especially because there are many evidences that certain rabbis did encourage the education for women, even Torah. Suzanne Fonay Wemple said that in this case Christianity initiated a new era in the history of feminism. 'Accepted as fully equal to men in their spiritual potential, Christian women could transcend biological and sexual roles and seek fulfillment in religious life'. And the scene describing about the visit of Jesus to the house of Mary and Martha in Luke 10:38-42, proclaimed this revolutionary doctrine. See Wemple (1981:149).

4. Many scholars said that this section is heavily laden with Luke's own language and style, but Schweizer believes verses 38-42 contain some 'un-Lukan elements'. Compare Corley (1993:134).

less spiritual as the symbol of active life. This approach can be seen in the writing of Origen, John Chrysostom, Augustine of Hippo, Gregory the Great, Bernard Clairvaux and in the book of *The Cloud of Unknowing*. The second is also hierarchical, but places Martha, the active life as superior to Mary the contemplative life. This approach is of Meister Eckhart and John Calvin. And the third is that of mixed or integration that both Mary and Martha as one life in one person can be found in the teaching of Aelred of Rievaulx, Thomas Aquinas, Francis Assisi and Teresa of Avila (Racoczy 1998:58–59).

Dom Cuthbert Butler (1951) even said that St. Augustine is very certain in asserting ‘the superiority of contemplative life over the active’. Although the contemplative way (the way of Martha) is sublime, but the way of Mary, which is the active way, is greater. While Mary’s part will not be taken from her and does not pass away, yet Martha’s will. According to Augustine, contemplation is the highest act of the human soul, but it seems that he treated a functional conciliation of the two lives on individual. In the end of the verse on Rachel and Lia, he lays down quite definitely that:

[I]t is not proper for one who is capable of administration of ecclesiastical charges, or of the government of the church, to withdraw himself wholly from the active life in order to give himself up to the contemplative. (Butler 1951:163)

This life, which combine the two (mixed), is clearer in his 19th book of *the City of God*. The same was the teaching of St. Gregory. He said that ‘Martha’s part is not blamed but Mary’s is praised’. Like Martha and Mary, both Lia and Rachel, the wives of Jacob also portrayed the two lives. Rachel was beautiful but sterile, so she brings not forth, incompatibly, Lia had indistinct vision, yet fertile, by virtue of the active life. The necessary of the two lives was symbolised by Jacob who, after embracing Rachel, returned to Lia. Although both, Augustine and Gregory, propose the mixed life, yet indeed, as Racoczy said, they seem to say that contemplative life is better.

Meister Eckhart on the story of Mary and Martha, a symbol of reflective and active life

By the late medieval period, the preference toward contemplative life above active life have changed. This can be seen in the way Meister Eckhart interpreted the verse of Luke 10:38 ‘Jesus entered a little castle, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home’, freely:

I have spoken a little verse in Latin, which stands written in the Gospel and says this in German: ‘our Lord Jesus Christ went up into a little castle and was received by a virgin, who was a wife. (DW I, 26)

Meister Eckhart, a Dominican priest, cast Martha as the more perfected and advantageous disciple. Somewhat paradoxical to the literal sense of the text, he portrayed Martha as the ‘happier, freer, and more fulfilled of the two sisters’ (McGinn, Tobin & Borgstadt 1986:338–345).⁵

5. According to Heffner (1991), Eckhart’s interpretation is not ‘so original and anti traditional’.

In the 86th of the vernacular sermons, Eckhart commented on the account on Mary and Martha in the 10th chapter of the Gospel of Luke. As mentioned, the account functioned, in the middle ages, as the beginning for the scholastic theory of the relationship between contemplation and action. Mary is identified as a symbol of the contemplative life while Martha of the active life. The usual interpretation of the story throughout Christian history considers the superiority of Mary’s contemplative stance and is against the activity of Martha. Eckhart reverses this interpretation.⁶ He asserts that Martha is superior to Mary because she is far more spiritually advanced than Mary and is only trying to help her sister progress. Martha asked Jesus for Mary to help her ‘because she loved Mary and wishes to make her more perfect’ (Caputo 1978:204). Colledge & McGinn (1981) stated:

Martha is a type of soul who in the summit of the mind or depth of ground remains unchangeably united to God, but who continues to occupy herself with good works in the world that help her neighbor and also form her total being closer and closer to the divine image. (p. 60)

Thus, according to Eckhart’s interpretation of this story, Martha is the one who is more spiritually advanced because while Mary is a spiritual ‘virgin’ only, Martha is a spiritual ‘virgin who [is] a wife’. In his view of Mary as a spiritual virgin only, Eckhart sees her as spiritually immature. Although she eagerly embraces the life of contemplation – of quiet ‘listening’ to the word of God – she does so by utterly rejecting the world of activity and service, a world involvement in which Eckhart understands to be absolutely essential for Christian life. Martha, instead, not only has attended to the word of God, like her sister, she is also *acting* on this word by serving her guests. Thus, while Mary is only a spiritual virgin, her sister Martha is both virgin (one who undistractedly attends to God’s word in prayer and contemplation) *and* wife (one who takes responsibility and commits oneself to the service of others).

In another sermon on the same verses (*Intravit Jesus in Quodam Castellum*, sermon 2), Eckhart uses the image of ‘a virgin and a wife’ to describe the role of Martha and Mary. Mary personifies virginity and a virgin is one who is genuinely disinterested, clear and lose from all images, free and empty, ready and completely receptive to God. Nevertheless, receptivity alone is not enough, it may continue to be fruitless and unproductive. In order to be fruitful and productive, a virgin has to be a wife. As stated by Sermon 2 and Racoczy (1998):

A virgin who is a wife, free and unfettered in affection, is equally near both to God and to self. She brings forth much fruit and is big withal, no less and no more than God himself is. This virgin who is a wife accomplishes this birth, bear fruit every day a hundred or a thousand-fold – yes, she gives birth times without number ... To speak plainly. She bears fruit out of the ground in which the Father beget his eternal Word. (208–209; 1998:68)

According to Eckhart, Martha, who is older, is fully grown spiritually. She has mastered by her maturity, experiences

6. His interpretation cannot be separated from his historical context, that is, as a critique for quietism and pieticism at his time.

and knowledge, how to be engaged in an active life and at the same time in essential communion with Christ. Martha then is the soul that can be called as virgin but also a wife, is free and disinterested, yet accordingly she is able to work 'without a why'. In this teaching, Eckhart invites listeners to make some presumption, pretending that Mary was entrapped in religious emotion. Thus, as Martha asks Jesus for assistance, it is not out of frustration because a lot of work she has to do but because of endearment. She did this because she loved her sister and want her to be more ideal, as stated by McGinn et al. (1986):

We might call it affection or playful hiding. Why? She realized that Mary had overwhelmed by desire for the complete fulfillment of her soul. Martha knew Mary better than Mary knew Martha, for Martha had live long and well. (p. 338)

It is possible that when Martha appealed to Jesus, it was for Mary's betterment and progression:

It was as though she were saying: 'My sister thinks she can do what she pleases while she sits by you filled with consolation. Let her find out whether this is true, and tell her to get up and leave you'. (McGinn et al. 1986:339)

Martha feared that her sister sits at Jesus' feet more for pleasure and satisfaction than spiritual benefit.

Eckhart's counter-intuitive ranking of Martha above Mary does not mean that he attributes a negative status to Mary the way conventional interpretations attribute a negative status to Martha. She is merely a well-intentioned spiritual neophyte. 'Three things', Eckhart asserts in his 86th sermon:

[C]aused Mary to sit at the feet of Christ. The first was that God's goodness had embraced her soul. The second was ineffable longing: she longed for she knew not what and she wanted she knew not what. The third was the sweet consolation and delight she drew from the eternal words which flowed from the mouth of Christ.⁷

Unlike Christian tradition that interpreted Jesus' word to Martha as a rebuke, Eckhart advocates that the last saying was spoken with kindness and affection where the literal conversation could not carry. Hence, Eckhart as a preacher pitches another job for ascertaining super-contemplative women:

We harbor the suspicion that dear Mary was sitting there more for enjoyment than for spiritual profit. Therefore, Martha said: 'Lord, tell her to get up', because she feared that Mary might remain stuck in this pleasant feeling and would progress no further. (McGinn et al. 1986:339)

As the case may be, that Jesus' reply was not to chastise or scold Martha but only to convince her that Mary, her sister would reach her full potentiality.

Indeed, for Martha, Eckhart has even greater praise. He interprets Martha's critique of Mary's behaviour not as a self-

7.Sermon 86: *Inravit Jesus in quoddam castellum, et mulier quaedam, Martha nomine, exepit illum in domum suam* in McGinn et al. (1986:338).

centred complaint, but rather as an act of compassionate concern for her younger and spiritually less experienced sister. According to Eckhart, Martha asks Jesus to intervene because 'She realized that Martha had been overwhelmed by a desire for the complete fulfillment of her soul' (McGinn et al. 1986:338). As for what appears to be Jesus's chastisement of Martha ('Martha, Martha ...'), Eckhart says: 'Christ did not speak these words to chasten [Martha]. Rather, he responded by giving her the comforting message that it would turn out for Mary as she desired' (McGinn et al. 1986:339). In fact, going even more deeply into mystical aspects of Martha's identity as a 'virgin who [is] a wife', Eckhart says that the reason Jesus addresses Martha by repeating her name twice (v. 41) is as follows:

Why did he name Martha twice? He wanted to indicate that Martha possessed completely everything of temporal and eternal value that a creature should have. When he said 'Martha' the first time, he indicated her perfection in temporal works [i.e. her perfection as a spiritual wife]. With his second calling out, 'Martha', he affirmed that she lacked nothing of all that is necessary for eternal happiness [i.e. that she lacks nothing as a spiritual 'virgin']. (McGinn et al. 1986:340)

It can be inferred that Martha is not the opposite of Mary (action without contemplation). During her activity Martha still could work and preserve her inner silence and unity with God. Caputo said:

Jesus repeated Martha's name twice: 'Martha, Martha,' signifies that Martha possessed unity with God in the ground of her soul, because she loved God and not creatures. But her love of God is not at all hindered by creatures. She is able to be both active and inwardly still. (Caputo 1978:205)

It seems that Eckhart's point of departure for developing this position has been Thomas Aquinas, who taught that:

[C]ontemplative life was higher in itself than active life but that, on earth, where we do not fully possess God but continually strive to possess Him, it is not the active life but the mixed life which is best. The mixed life is the life of action which springs from contemplation. (Caputo 1978:205, 1986:137)

It is obvious that the objective of Eckhart's spirituality is not contemplation; instead it is the accomplishment that contemplation leads. He 'sees the contemplative life as imperfect and immature until it has blossomed forth in activity'. For Eckhart, the active life is a greater religious perfection compared to contemplative life and rapturous union or more precisely it is the habitual union achievable in this life (Kieckhefer 1970:208).

Eckhart's business is to proclaim throughout his work that his hearer's habitual union with God is every bit as good and holy as the ecstatic union stressed in more traditional contemplative literature. (Kieckhefer 1970:224)

Mary and Martha's symbol in Islamic teaching

The foundation of Islamic spirituality is the Qur'an, and Mohammed, the prophet of Islam, is the unerring mentor and model, so that he is the authority for all spiritual leadership

and instruction in Islam. The prophet's *sirah*, *sunnah* and *hadith* build the ship that transfer those who seek to the spiritual life over the water of temporal existence to the sand of that land which immerses in the divine presence (ed. Nasr 1987:64)

Obviously, al-Qur'an shows the parallel teaching of contemplation and action (Mary and Martha's symbol). The Qur'an says that a commitment to God's people is an integral and indivisible part of a commitment to God (Esack 1996:87). The Qur'an links *taqwa*⁸ to caring for others, such as sharing, accomplishing promises and particularly kindness.⁹

The mystical 'traveller' also follows the model of the prophet Muhammad to a certain extent both formal and formless and direct and indirect:

Nobody who studies the life of the Prophet can fail to be impressed both by its spiritual character and by a political and administrative acumen that has been so unusual in the religious leadership of mankind but which was wholly subservient in the Prophet's case to a spiritual vision that he was able to realize. (Rahman 1979:28)

The Qur'an advocated and stressed repeatedly the ideal of love of God. In it, love is 'not the name of pure emotion, only inwardly cultivated, but has a decisively activist tendency' (Rahman 1979:131). However, later on the ascetic pietism encounters a stormy drive and motivation because of the new environment full of luxury and worldly enjoyment occurring in the Muslim community after the establishment of the new empire. Specifically, a severe reaction to the secular life and attitude of the new ruling dynasty of the Umayyads at their palace, the majority of whom behaved in a certain way contradict the simple piety of the four early Caliphs (Rahman 1979:129).

Contemplation in Islam has been forever wed to action. The contemplative life has never been contradictory to correct active life. In fact, it has been combined with a compelling innate impulse to act:

It is this inner unity that made Islamic civilization at the height of its power one of the most virile and active in human history while harboring within itself a most contemplative life. (eds. Ibish & Marculescu 1979:196)

The qur'anic expression on contemplation and action [between al'ilm and al'amal] can be found in its injunction that Muslim should contemplate on God's wisdom both in all created world as well as in transcendence world beyond cosmic reality and act accordingly.

Prayer, in its higher form is contemplative and unitive. It will lead to liberation of the soul from all enslavement and fallibility, which will inspire and motivate to right action.

Without prayer or contemplation, one cannot be in a state of grace or goodness, and without being good one cannot do well.

8. *Taqwa*, have the Arabic root w-q-y, which means 'to ward off', 'to guard against', 'to heed' or 'to preserve'. See Lane (1980).

9. See Qur'an: 92: 5; 7:152-3; 3:76; 7: 52; 3: 172; 4: 126; 5: 93; 16: 127.

Correct action depends on the correct mode of being, which in turn issues from the correct relation with the source of existence through prayer, which in its most exalted mode is contemplation. (eds. Ibish & Marculescu 1979:197)

According to Sufi's doctrine on metaphysics and cosmologies, which is based on the Qur'an, the world was created by God through contemplation. God is to contemplate His own beauty so that he creates the universe. Likewise, in Islamic philosophy, the essential part of the Universe is the outcome of God's contemplation on himself. 'By contemplating Himself the necessary Being [*wajib al-wujud*] brings into existence the first Intellect, the second Intellect, down to the world of generation and corruption in which man resides' (eds. Ibish & Marculescu 1979:198).

The teaching of contemplative life and active life can be seen also in the teaching of the Chishtis.¹⁰ They maintained that the first lesson of Sufism was not related to prayer or organised ritual, but begins with the mastery of the maxim 'Do as you would be done by'. Besides giving advance spiritual discipline:

[T]hey encouraged people to work in trade and commerce as a means of earning their living, and also approved of farming and practicing craft. They insisted that these occupations be followed honestly although they should not interfere with spiritual exercises. (Nasr 1991:135)

Conclusion

To date, there have been accusations about mysticism as a teaching of disengagement or disavowal from the world. They said that mysticism is out of contact with the affairs of every men and women, including the struggle for justice. The discussion above shatters this complaint. Meister Eckhart in this case developed a novel and advance mysticism, named 'activist mysticism of dynamized silence'.

Meister Eckhart is viewed as a remarkable theologian who promotes and maintains, theologically, the potentiality of 'integrating the ontological identity with God without the necessity to leave the world', which mean that for Eckhart 'true contemplation was a Christian action, and this Christian action arises as a contemplative style of life' (Sánchez 2007:119–140).

Beside appearing in his concept of detachment, this teaching of mysticism also is obvious in his sermon, '*Intravit Jesus in Quoddam Castellum*'. It is an interpretation of Luke 10:38–42, which was different from the interpretation of earlier monks. It showed that mysticism is not quietism. Human being can be attentive and interested in many things at the same time upholding the one thing essential. It also means that *God* could be found not only by withdrawal from the world.

Contemplation and action are not opposite terms. *Via contemplativa* and *via activa* have to be united. Contemplation

10. *Chishtis* are the followers of the *Chishtiyah* Order, found in India by Khwajah Muin al-Din Hasan. The *Chishtis* mingled with the common people and did not build *khanqahs* [special place]. Instead, they constructed simple halls with mud walls covered by thatched roofs for their disciples. See Nasr (ed. 1991:135).

is nothing without activities, and all activities should be determined by it. Contemplation and action are intertwined and complementary. This can be found in Islamic tradition, in the example of the way of life of the prophet Muhammad, who is the '*uswah hasanah*' [the excellent model].

Islam has never allowed the contemplative and active lives to be separated and isolated. Coexisting with a tradition from a companion of the Prophet which says, 'an hour of meditation is sometimes better than 1 year of praying' (Suyuti 2016:2/127), is the Arabic proverb saying, 'knowledge (contemplation) minus action is analogous to a fruitless tree' (Nasr 1978:195). Historically, noble Sufis have been titled as scholars, artists, professors, educators and even officials and rulers.

Whereas the largest part of the people inevitably strive to find God in their restless world, without doubt learning from the story of Mary and Martha is necessary. They are sisters of one another, complete each other, and they are the real community. Mary and Martha' symbol inspire and encourage people in the world, that they can have both a profound invocation and energetic life, or in Thomas Merton's words, 'good monks do not of themselves hinder the life of prayer'. No one can live the contemplative life without break; harmony of contemplation and action is needed. And Meister Eckhart represent the exemplar, the prototypical, the representation, the manifestation and the excellent and the masterly outcome of the tradition that combine both the sacred and the profane (secular). They are indeed not, respectively, isolated and autonomous realism. In interpreting the verse above, Eckhart sermons to us about the need to realise and think about the sacred not outside the profane, developing spirituality that is both in and for the world.

From the discussion above, it is also obvious that there are many parallels and similarities between Eckhart's mysticism and Islamic mysticism. This of course does not negate the differences, as Eckhart was coloured by his religious background, as are Islamic mystics.

It proves that the truth is one, but it is hidden under the most diverse appearances. And it is mystics [*sufi*] who discover the hidden. From this discussion, it can be inferred that the diversity is a valuable resource that should be appreciated and respected. The divine sparks are manifested and take place differently from one religion to another.

Indeed, religions are life expressions of the experience of revelation in a specific historical context. Consequently, they are limited by factors of history, culture, language, and so forth. Dialogue is necessary to transcend this limitation.

No expression is ultimately complete and exhaustive, thus, one way to advance in the experience of the fullness is to become more and more enriched by the contributions of complementary expressions. (Vineeth 1994:37)

By encountering a new religion, a hidden jewel of truth is now aroused, and an unprecedented possibility will develop and

become evident. For example, Thomas Merton had a new interpretation of Christian religious experience after his encounter with Buddhism (cf. Merton 1967; Vineeth 1994:37).¹¹

Moreover, spirit-experience is the essential level on which religions meet. Spirit-experience is not something incommunicable, silently experienced, it can be completely discussed and understood although not perfectly expressed (ed. Aykara 1978:177; Van Buren 1993:51). In Islam, according to Nasr (1973:123), it is Sufism in its nature that is qualified to investigate the problem of the hidden unity of all religion.

In the pluralistic world, with the crisis and the lack of peace, partly caused by the failure of religion to share with others that enable them to talk each other, learn from each other, work together, *we find that mystics or Sufis have messages for it. Certainly, mystics have a profound message to mankind in their journey in the world.* They point to the way as an excellent guide.

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11. Knitter (1995) in his dialogical odyssey has the same experiences, when he encountered with Buddhism.

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