




## The first hijrah: Remembering the migration of the followers of the prophet Muhammad to Ethiopia as an effort to reduce intolerance in Indonesia

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### DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.30995/kur.v9i2.756>

### Article History

Submitted: August 02, 2023

Reviewed: August 13, 2023

Accepted: August 30, 2023

### Keywords:

Christian-Islam relation;  
first hijrah;  
reducing intolerance

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**Abstract:** Due to increased extremism and conservatism, Christian-Islam ties in Indonesia have deteriorated in recent years. The real impact of these events is intolerance in numerous facets of Indonesian life. This article aims to analyze the migration of followers of the Prophet Muhammad to Ethiopia as a joint event between the two major religious communities in the world, namely Islam and Christianity. This event contains meaning and value that show the good relations between the two Abrahamic religions since Islam first arrived. This study uses a qualitative-historical method by looking at and comparing several written sources, such as Binsar J. Pakpahan's theory about the theology of remembrance, as a reference in explaining the historical situation that occurred. The results of this paper show that remembering past events can be used to reduce extremism, conservatism, and intolerance.

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## Introduction

As a country that upholds divine values, the increasing radicalism and Islamic extremism in Indonesia set a bad precedent for inter-religious relations in Indonesia. These extremist groups regard his teachings as a form of absolute truth, and those who differ from them are enemies. The Indonesian people seem to have forgotten the long history of the relationship between Islam and Christianity in Indonesia, which has occurred since this country defended against the colonialists. This situation led me to engage in this conversation from a long historical angle. Most books that were born in their capacity to ward off intolerance and radicalism talk about the stories of former combatants or those who have been involved in acts of intolerance. For example, *The Islamist* (2017), *Engineers of Jihad* (2016), and *The Forbidden Face* (2013) reflect on changes in understanding that were once radical-closed to more open people.

In this article, I will offer another way to rebuild the relationship (and also peace) that was damaged due to intolerance and radicalism by exposing a significant historical event, namely the *hijrah* of the followers of the Prophet Muhammad. The *hijrah* event is one of the important events in Islamic history. This first *hijrah* occurred when some of Muhammad's followers fled from Mecca to Ethiopia (Abyssinia), which a Christian king led then. They were

greeted with great hospitality and friendship. Through this important event, I would like to remind that Muslim-Christian relations, especially in Indonesia, can continue to improve.

The main question for this research is what values can we take from the story of The Followers of Prophet Muhammad and the Ethiopian Christian leader as an effort to bridge and counteract the radicalism and Islamic extremism movement in Indonesia? This study will use qualitative research methods using a literature approach and, as much as possible, conduct brief interviews with several Muslim and Christian figures. Of course, the theories I will use talk more about historical events. What is important and interesting to mention is the theology of remembering as an attempt to form an imaginative experience that bridges the past and present story. I also use Binsar J. Pakpahan's theory regarding the theology of remembrance. The focus of the research will begin by showing the symptoms of radicalism and extremism in the course of history to the present in Indonesia. And then, this paper will lead to the historical events in Ethiopia between the followers of Prophet Muhammad and the Christian King of Ethiopia. From there, the phenomenal synthesis of experiences with Islam and Christianity will provide an appreciation for the diverse life in Indonesia.

The writers employ a descriptive research method, which is also a library research methodology paired with information from trustworthy news sources, to collect data relevant to the contents of this work. This study aims to solve research concerns with Islamic-Christian connections, specifically the migration of followers of the Prophet Muhammad to Ethiopia. This study's primary sources are journals, books, other research results, and official mass media reports. In this scenario, writings and theories from many figures' points of view contribute to explaining the phenomena at the center of the inquiry. Articles are divided into sections to achieve their objectives. The first section discusses cases of intolerance, extremism, and conservatism in Indonesia, the second section discusses historical data on Prophet Muhammad's journey and the migration of Prophet Muhammad's followers to Ethiopia, and the third section discusses the importance of remembering a past event using Binsar J. Pakpahan's memory theology approach. The final section offers conclusions that can be used and developed about the relationship between Islam and Christianity due to the historic encounter between the Prophet Muhammad's followers and the King of Ethiopia.

## **Some Cases of Intolerance and Extremism in Indonesia**

In the last 20 years, Indonesia has entered an era of reform. In this era, the claim of being a democratic country is increasingly felt as freedom of expression, association, and the press increases in middle-class society. The increase in democratic values has also been accompanied by various unfortunate events and incidents, including the cases of bombings by extremists and Islamic-based radicalism. On October 12, 2002, Bali was rocked by an extreme bomb terror. More than 200 people died, and more than 200 others were injured by bombs that exploded at three locations in Bali.<sup>1</sup> Identification carried out by the Indonesian police revealed that the perpetrators of the bombing belonged to the terrorist group *Jamaah Islamiyah*, which is linked to Al-Qaeda in the Middle East.

The bombing on M.H. Thamrin Street in Central Jakarta, also known as the Sarinah bombing, occurred on Tuesday, January 14, 2016. The incident shocked the capital following a previous terror bombing at the JW Marriot Hotel in Kuningan, South Jakarta, in 2009. In addition to the bombing terror, there had also been exchanges of fire between the perpetrators

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<sup>1</sup> Detiknews. 2022. "Tragedi Bom Bali 12 Oktober 2002: Pelaku, Korban, Kilas Balik Kejadian". Detik.com, <https://news.detik.com/berita/d-6343324/tragedi-bom-bali-12-oktober-2002-pelaku-korban-kilas-balik-kejadian> (Accessed on 1 October 2022).

and the police at that time. On January 14, 2016, at around 10:30 a.m., the first bomb exploded at the Starbucks branch in Gedung Cakrawala. After 20 minutes, it was the turn of the Sarinah police station, which was attacked by a bomb. Three terrorists were killed, and one policeman was injured in the explosion.

I believe that the essence of Islamic teachings is not violence. We cannot deny that the Semitic religions have a history of violence in their holy books. However, we must also recognize that many violent events are not perpetrated only by these Abrahamic religions. All human societies are violent in one way or another. When we speak of religious violence, we do not mean only the violence from religious people. Religious violence is characterized by violent acts committed by religious people as spiritual, informed, legitimized by a religious vision, and designed to achieve specific religious goals.<sup>2</sup>

James D. Chancellor emphasized in his writings that religiously motivated violence is not just about who does it but what drives them to do it. According to public discussion, many of the terrorists in Indonesia who commit terrorist acts, such as suicide bombers, believe they are given a place in Allah's paradise with an angel as their wife. This condition has undoubtedly entered the realm of the vision and purpose of the religion that is taught, as well as a profound indoctrination process that is not carried out in a short period so that it can change the minds of others and cause them to follow orders and sacrifice themselves in acts of terror.

If we refer to psychological theories in general and the theory of stages of terrorism initiated by Fathali Moghaddam (2003), the search for identity and social meaning of the self is the first entry point for a person's participation in the world of terror, which is very long. Many of them, especially in Indonesia, were brainwashed by terrorist leaders from abroad with promises and guarantees that they would have a better life if Islam came to power.<sup>3</sup> The doctrine *Islam must not be defended with words alone* is deeply embedded in their consciousness. For them, the enemies of Islam are omnipresent, which is why every Muslim must equip himself with a muscular physique and self-defense expert. If the situation demands it, they must be ready to answer the call to defend the truth. Sumanto Al-Qurtuby notes that, in contemporary Indonesia, some grassroots Islamist actors and ordinary religious radicals who engage in violence are primarily driven by and for religion to erect a religious identity or to enter Heaven after death.<sup>4</sup>

Aside from extremism that took many lives, incidences of conservatism from hard-line Islamic fanatics have also colored Indonesian national and state life. Consider the instance of Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, also known as Ahok, who was charged and later convicted of blasphemy in 2016. These religiously intolerant people pass judgment on Ahok. As Indonesia prepares for its presidential election in 2019, supporters of the incumbent candidate, Joko Widodo, and his opponent, Prabowo Subianto, are sharply divided. Those who support Prabowo are frequently linked with radical, conservative, and intolerant masses. This polarization even accused Joko Widodo of being anti-Islam and an enemy of Islam.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> James D. Chancellor, "Islam and Violence," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 8, No. 1 (2004): 42-44.

<sup>3</sup> Gazi & Ikhwan Lutfi, *Laporan Penelitian Kolektif Dari Orang Biasa Menjadi Teroris: Telaah Psikologi Atas Pelaku Dan Perilaku Teror*, Jakarta: Lembaga Penelitian (Lemlit) UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, 2011, 38-42.

<sup>4</sup> Sumanto Al Qurtuby. "Pacifying the Radicals: Religious Radicalism, Islamist Militancy, and Peacebuilding Approaches In Contemporary Indonesia.", *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* Volume 24, Number 1 (2019): 2-3.

<sup>5</sup> The Jakarta Post, "Now right time for 'cebong' and 'kampret' to forgive each other" <https://www.thejakartapost.com/academia/2019/06/01/now-right-time-for-cebong-and-kampret-to-forgive-each-other.html>. (Accessed on 2 November 2022).

During the Covid-19 pandemic, these acts of intolerance from conservative and extremist parties will continue. Several cases identified throughout 2020 include: On September 13, members of the Huria Kristen Batak Protestant congregation (HKBP) of Serang Baru City were harassed during worship; On September 20, a group of residents of Graha Prima Jonggol refused to worship the Bogor Pentecostal Church; On September 21, Christians in Ngastemi Village were prohibited from worshipping by a group of people; On October 2, there was a ban on worshipping the GSJA Kanaan Church House of Prayer congregation in Nganjuk Regency.<sup>6</sup> At Christmas 2021, there will be several acts of intolerance and persecution by some Muslims. In Tulang Bawang, Lampung, a group of residents came to the church opened for Christmas service without coordinating with the parties involved. In Jambi, Christians celebrate Christmas before a sealed church because the permit has not yet been completed. In 2022, several cases of intolerance were reported in Jakarta schools, such as a teacher at Public High School 58 in East Jakarta who forbade his students to elect a non-Muslim student council president. Allegations against this intolerant action arose after a screenshot of a teacher's racist instructions was circulated in a WhatsApp group. At Public High School 101 West Jakarta, a resident complained that non-Muslim female students have to wear the *hijab* on Fridays.<sup>7</sup>

## The Prophet Muhammad

Philip K. Hitti, in his phenomenal book, *The History of Arabs*, mentions the Prophet Muhammad as a particular and perfect person, no one regarded by any section of the human race as the Perfect Man has been imitated so minutely.<sup>8</sup> It is not an exaggeration to see that the tremendous influence the Prophet has created today is real. Prophet Muhammad was born in Mecca in the year 571 AD. He came from a family of noble Arabs, namely the Bani Hashem of the tribe of Quraish, a tribe believed to preserve the Kaaba built by the Prophet Abraham and his son (Ismail).<sup>9</sup>

At the age of forty, while he was contemplating in the cave of Hira, the angel Gabriel appeared to him on the 17<sup>th</sup> of Ramadan in the year 611 AD and delivered to him the first revelation of Allah (Qur'an Al'Alaq 96: 1-5), recite in the name of your Lord. The latter created, created man from a clot of congealed blood. Recite: and your Lord is Most Generous, who taught by the pen, taught man what he did not know. These are the verses of the Quran Kareem initially revealed. The verses did not command the Prophet Muhammad to call people to religion and did not inform him that the Prophet is the Messenger of Allah. However, these verses indicate something extraordinary that Prophet Muhammad was unaware of. Therefore, he immediately returned to his house trembling; moreover, Jibril hugged him tightly several times, then let go and told him to read, as mentioned above.<sup>10</sup>

In short, after Prophet Muhammad received the revelation from Allah, he started Islamic Da'wah back in Mecca.<sup>11</sup> In the first three years after the Prophet Muhammad was sent, the Da'wah was performed secretly. The da'wah was performed orally, e.g., through advice,

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<sup>6</sup> ITS NEWS. "Toleransi Beragama Indonesia: Bagaikan Gajah di Pelupuk Mata" <https://www.its.ac.id/news/2021/09/25/toleransi-beragama-indonesia-bagaikan-gajah-di-pelupuk-mata/> (Accessed on 25 October 2022).

<sup>7</sup> Kompas. "Aksi Intoleran di Sekolah Jakarta, Guru Larang Murid Pilih Ketua OSIS Nonmuslim hingga Paksa Siswi Berjilbab", Kompas.com, <https://megapolitan.kompas.com/read/2022/08/11/08400201/aksi-intoleran-di-sekolah-jakarta-guru-larang-murid-pilih-ketua-osis?page=all> (Accessed on 25 October 2022).

<sup>8</sup> Philip K. Hitti, *History of the Arabs*, Edisi X, New York: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1974, 120.

<sup>9</sup> Jamil Ahmad, *Hundred Great Muslims*, Jakarta: Pustaka Firdaus, 2000, 2.

<sup>10</sup> A. Syalabi, *Sejarah dan Kebudayaan Islam I*, Jakarta: Pustaka al-Husna, 2003, 74.

<sup>11</sup> Badri Yatim, *Sejarah Peradaban Islam*, Jakarta: Rajawali Press, 1993, 19.

warnings, etc.<sup>12</sup> Because Prophet Muhammad performed many successful da'wah, the leaders of the Quraish began to try to hinder the Prophet's da'wah. The greater the number of the Prophet's followers, the more formidable the challenge posed by the Quraish became. They considered Prophet Muhammad and the teachings he propagated a threat to their position. The Quraish exerted pressure and even tortured some of the Prophet's followers who had just converted to Islam.<sup>13</sup>

Based on Allah's earlier command to spread the teachings of Islam to others, Prophet Muhammad began to take active steps to find solid foundations for his apostolate. The Messenger of Allah did not find these in Mecca due to tremendous pressure from the Quraish. Prophet Muhammad's move from Mecca to Yathrib (Medina) marked a new chapter in his journey as a prophet, messenger, and political leader.<sup>14</sup> However, before they reached Medina, some of Muhammad's followers had made a rather long journey to an entirely new area. It was done to avoid persecution by the Quraish for those who had just converted to Islam. Their destination was Abyssinia<sup>15</sup>, a kingdom ruled by a Christian king.

## Prophet Muhammad's Followers Went to Ethiopia

An Ethiopian Christian community existed in Mecca, the birthplace of Muhammad at the time, and Muhammad probably enjoyed a friendly relationship with Ethiopians from his early childhood. According to Ibn Qutayba (± 267/889), the nurse of Muhammad was an Ethiopian Christian named Umm Ayman. Another Arab Writer, Baidawi, mentions that there were Ethiopian Christians in Mecca before Muhammad received his call and that they were conducting their service publicly and loudly. Thus, we know that Muhammad already had interactions with Ethiopian Christians.<sup>16</sup>

As I mentioned above, the Muslims began to receive a lot of persecution from the Quraish. The series of persecutions started late in the fourth year of Prophethood, slowly at first, but steadily accelerated and worsened day by day and month by month until the situation got so extremely grave and no longer tolerable.<sup>17</sup> Makkah, in the month of Rajab in the seventh year before the Hijra (SH)/615 AD, while stifling darkness, eleven men and four women of the Prophet's companions crept out of Makkah. Two boats floating in the harbor of Shuaibah were ready to take them to land to escape the wrath and barbarity of the Quraish. The country they went to was called Abyssinia and is now known as. The Companions migrated to Abyssinia on the advice of the Prophet Muhammad. It was the first *hijrah* process that the Muslims went through before emigrating to Medina. The friends who emigrated to Ethiopia included Usman bin Affan, his wife Ruqayyah, the daughter of Prophet Muhammad, and other close friends.<sup>18</sup>

Usman bin Maz'un led the friends' journey to the land of Ethiopia. After wading through the wild waves of the Red Sea, the Prophet's fifteen companions eventually became stranded in Ethiopia, led by a king named Negush, whom the Arabs called Ashama ibn Abjar. They

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<sup>12</sup> Ira M. Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies*, Jakarta: Raja Grafindo Persada, 1999, 34-35.

<sup>13</sup> Bernard Lewis, *The Middle East*, translated by Abd. Rachman Abror, Pontianak: STAIN Press, 2010, 79.

<sup>14</sup> Umi Sumbulah dan Wilda Al Aluf, *Fluktuasi Relasi Islam- Kristen di Indonesia*, Malang: UIN Maliki Press, 2015, 22.

<sup>15</sup> Abyssinia is another name for Ethiopia. Initially, this area was part of the Aksumite Empire which was later transformed around the thirteenth century into the Kingdom of Ethiopia under the Solomon Dynasty.

<sup>16</sup> Sergew Hable Sellassie, *Ancient and Medieval Ethiopian History to 1270*, Addis Ababa: United Printers, 1972, 181.

<sup>17</sup> Safiur- Rahman Al-Mubarakpuri, *The Sealed Nectar: Biography of the Noble Prophet Muhammad*, Riyadh: Maktaba Dar-us-Salam, 1996, 99.

<sup>18</sup> Safiur- Rahman Al-Mubarakpuri, 1996, 99.

received warm hospitality and kindness from everyone. Then, the Tigray Province's northern city of Negash was given to them by the King of Ethiopia.<sup>19</sup> The immigrants were safely in Aksum, where the King and the people hospitably received them. There, they lived a quiet life. No one disturbed them because of their beliefs, and they continued to practice their religion tranquility.<sup>20</sup>

After three months had elapsed, the immigrants in Ethiopia heard that the Quraish had stopped persecuting the Muslims in Arabia following an agreement between the former and Muhammad. Moreover, it was said that the Muslims and pagans prayed around the Ka'ba together. Encouraged by this news, they decided to return home. But when they arrived in Mecca, they found that the situation had changed again. Muhammad had withdrawn his concessions, and Quraish had resumed their oppression." After consulting with one another, they decided to enter the city and, if conditions grew worse, return to Ethiopia. Fortunately, they found Mecca-friendly men who gave them protection.<sup>21</sup>

The favorable conditions under which the first immigrants lived in Aksum attracted more oppressed followers of Muhammad to Ethiopia. This second wave of migration from the first session of *hijrah* was continuous. At intervals, men, sometimes accompanied by their wives and children, crossed the Red Sea and arrived at Aksum. The second group's leader was Ja'far B. Abu Talib, a cousin of Muhammad. The total number of immigrants to Ethiopia was 107, eighty-nine men and eighteen women. Eleven women belonged to the Quraish, and seven were from other tribes. They were safely ensconced there and were grateful for the protection of the Negush; they could serve God without fear, and Negush had shown them every hospitality.<sup>22</sup>

When the Quraish knew the Muslim refugees had found peace and relief from persecution, they planned to discredit Islam by disrupting the harmonious relations the immigrants had enjoyed in Ethiopia. To this end, they sent two representatives to Ethiopia, Abdallah bin Abu Rabiah and Amr bin Al-As bin Wa'il. They brought many gifts for the King, the bishops, and other dignitaries. These two men were chosen mainly for their ability to negotiate with eloquence. The Quraish instructed them to persuade the King to expel the immigrants from Ethiopia and send them back to Arabia with the two ambassadors. When the envoys arrived in Aksum, they asked for an audience with the King, which they received. At the same time, they began distributing gifts among the nobles and generals and attempted to gain their support by saying: "Some foolish fellows from our people have taken refuge in the King's country. They have forsaken our religion and not accepted yours but have brought in an invented religion that neither we know anything about. Our nobles have sent us to the King to get him to return them, so when we speak to the King about them, advise him to surrender them to us and not to speak to them."<sup>23</sup>

After hearing the explanations from the Quraysh ambassadors, King questioned the refugees about their religion. First, he inquired why they had abandoned the faith of their fathers. Ja'far b. Abu Talib answered: O King, we were a barbarous nation, worshipping idols, eating carrion, committing shameful deeds, killing our blood-relations, forgetting our duty towards our neighbors, the strong amongst us devouring the weak. Such was our state until

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<sup>19</sup> Sergew Hable Sellassie, *Ancient and Medieval Ethiopian History to 1270*, Addis Ababa: United Printers, 1972, 182.

<sup>20</sup> Sergew Hable Sellassie, 1972, 182.

<sup>21</sup> Sergew Hable Sellassie, 1972, 182

<sup>22</sup> Sergew Hable Sellassie, 1972, 183

<sup>23</sup> Sergew Hable Sellassie, 184.

God sent us an apostle, from amongst ourselves, with whose lineage, integrity, trustworthiness, and purity of life. We were acquainted. He summoned us to God to believe in His unity, to worship Him, and to abandon the stones and idols our fathers and we had worshipped in His stead. He commanded us to speak the truth, be faithful in our trusts, observe our duties to our kinsfolk and neighbors, refrain from forbidden things and bloodshed, commit immoralities and deceits, and consume the property of orphans and from slandering virtuous women. He ordered us to worship God and associate no other with Him, to offer prayer, give alms, and fast. So, we trusted in his words and followed the teachings he brought us from God. Wherefore our countrymen turned against us and persecuted us for trying and seducing us from our faith, that we might abandon the worship of God and return to the worship of idols.<sup>24</sup>

On further questioning by the King on what they believed about Jesus Christ, Ja'far proceeded to quote some passages from the Qur'an about Jesus Christ: "Verily - Christ Jesus, son of Mary, is the apostle of God and his word which he conveyed into Mary and a spirit proceeding from him." And when the King asked him about Mary, he recited the Qur'an 19, 16-34, which is copied from the Gospel of Luke 1: 47-55: "And my spirit hath rejoiced in God, my Saviour." When the Emperor heard that, he wept so that his beard was wet with his tears, and his bishops wept with him until their books were wet with their tears. Then said the Negush to them, certainly this and that which Moses brought emanate from one Lamp, Go, for by Allah I will not suffer them to get at you, nor even contemplate this. The envoys returned to their country, and in retaliation, the Quraysh intensified the persecution of the Muslims and applied economic and social sanctions.<sup>25</sup>

The motives for the *hijrah* of the followers of Muhammad have been interpreted in several ways. It has been said that the reason was: a) to avoid hardship and persecution in Mecca, which could have damaged the mission of Muhammad; b) to avoid apostasy, which could have decreased the number of his followers; and c) to engage in trade which was essential for the success of Muhammad's mission since the Quraysh controlled trade in Mecca and there was scant opportunity for the followers of Muhammad. Lastly, it has been suggested that they immigrated to secure military assistance from Aksum. However, from the results of the immigration, the motives were religious and moral.<sup>26</sup>

These refugees were indeed well-received in Aksum and could practice their faith freely. Requests from the Meccan authorities to deliver them back were refused. The tolerant attitude of the Ethiopians gave rise to a new genre of Arab literature extolling the virtues of the Ethiopians. The practical effect was that on the authority of the Prophet himself, Ethiopia was not to be seen as a target for jihad. Undoubtedly there is an economic side to the story: Aksum was in decline, and the trade from and to the empire was less attractive than that in the Middle East, to which the attention of the Islamic conquerors was directed.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> J. Trimmingham Spencer, *Islam in Ethiopia*, London: Oxford University Press, 1952, 45.

<sup>25</sup> Sergew Hable Sellassie, *Ancient and Medieval Ethiopian History to 1270*, Addis Ababa: United Printers, 1972, 185.

<sup>26</sup> Sergew Hable Sellassie, 1972, 185.

<sup>27</sup> Jon Abbink, "A Historical-Anthropological Approach to Islam in Ethiopia: Issues of Identity and Politics," *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, Volume 11, no. 2 (1998): 111.

## Remembering History as an Effort to Strengthen Christian-Muslim Relationship in Indonesia

In this section, I will analyze and formulate how memories of history can be used to make changes in the present and the future. The argument is the remembrance of history (and also the story in the past) can be used as a basis for the life of the nation and state in Indonesia to fight radicalism, extremism, and terrorism. Binsar Jonathan Pakpahan's ideas on the theology of memory will be employed to create a suitable synthesis in this phase of the examination.

Binsar Jonathan Pakpahan is an academic and pastor of the Lutheran church in Indonesia and one of the Indonesian theologians who spoke about the memory of the past. His book, *God Remembers Towards a Theology of Remembrance as a Basis of Reconciliation in Communal Conflict*, is one of the first academic books published in the Netherlands as a result of his dissertation. In this book, Pakpahan deals with one of the most significant conflicts in his church, the HKBP. The six-year conflict (1992-1998) affected both perpetrators and victims. Pakpahan's writing offers a bid for reconciliation in the HKBP community conflict through a new terminology within his church, the Theology of Remembrance.

The theology of remembrance built by Binsar J. Pakpahan is an attempt to remember painful conflicts in the past as a basis for mutual reconciliation.<sup>28</sup> In this view, Pakpahan emphasizes bad memories, whether conflict, violence, or distressing events. Bad memories in the past are recalled and discussed so that a sense of togetherness emerges to create shared memories toward forgiveness. For me, if Pakpahan can use the bad memories of the past every day to create a shared space as a community of reconciliation, why don't we use memories of an extraordinary historical event on a regular basis to make peace? Moreover, in this section, I emphasize that the shared memory of a beautiful historical event can also be used to create a bridge to common peace.

Good memories do not have to be directly felt by a community to create a space for peace. For example, when a Muslim remembers the incident of Prophet Muhammad receiving Revelation from Allah in Goa Hira, no Muslim alive today has experienced the event firsthand, but when they hear, process, and think about the event, they are moved to follow what Prophet Muhammad ordered. Likewise, with a Christian, no Christian living today has ever attended the last supper that Jesus and the disciples offered. However, when they hear Holy Communion in church, they remember the words of Jesus and are faithful and obedient to Jesus' commands. So, most of our religious life today is, in fact, a memory of sound events that happened in the past. We remember and then practice it today as a religious community.

Then, moving from this understanding, can we use the memory of the *hijrah* of the followers of the Prophet Muhammad to Ethiopia on an everyday basis to build a bridge between Christianity and Islam which in the last few decades seems to have been damaged due to cases of extremism, radicalism, and terrorism. I would say the state of interfaith life in Indonesia is getting worse. Although this lousy condition is only seen in a few areas, these areas are generally densely populated and have become the pillars of the state. The situation is further exacerbated by the many religious leaders who continue to ignite and fool the people without wanting to build peace with different people. Reflecting on this, can remembering past events be used as a bridge to communal peace?

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<sup>28</sup> Read Binsar Jonathan Pakpahan, *God Remembers: Towards a Theology of Remembrance as a Basis of Reconciliation in Communal Conflict*, Amsterdam: VU Press, 2012.



In his book, as quoted by Binsar J. Pakpahan, Paul Ricoeur, a French philosopher in the 20th century, introduced the concepts of happy memory and forgetting.<sup>29</sup> Memories of happiness take place in mnemonic ways: reminding, reminiscing, and acknowledging memories of happiness happen; hence, it brings good to one who remembers it. This thing prepares us to remember without mourning over it because we recognize happiness. Meanwhile, happy forgetting moves parallel to memories of joy. Happy forgetting occurs when we acquire happy memories; because of this understanding, we want to remember some things and other events or circumstances.<sup>30</sup> in this paper, I offer a happy memory and not just forgetting the memory.

The *hijrah* carried out by the followers of the Prophet Muhammad from Mecca to Ethiopia is a happy memory when we remember it now. The King of Ethiopia, sometimes known as the Negush and perhaps one of the last rulers of the Aksum Empire, was known as a just and honest man. He is a Christian with deep religious beliefs. The Prophet Muhammad believed his followers would be well looked after if they migrated to a Christian country. After a long struggle out of Mecca, the followers of the Prophet Muhammad arrived in Ethiopia. The followers of the Prophet Muhammad received help from King Negush. They were treated well at that time so that they could stay away from the threats that kept coming from the Quraysh in Mecca. When messengers from Mecca came to bring back the Muslims from Ethiopia, the Negush King refused.

Many Muslim and Christian people still never know about this very slick story. People prefer the journey from Mecca to Medina as the first *hijrah* of Muslims. Indeed, it was a significant event that marked the beginning of the development of Islam as a great religion in history. However, it is also essential to know about the incident of the Prophet Muhammad trying to save his people and telling them to go to Ethiopia. It is what I want to emphasize. I remind Muslims that since ancient times, even at the beginning of the birth of Islam, Muslims have had good relations with Christians. The Muslims had the direct protection of the King of a Christian Empire at the time. Won't this incident inspire and cause a feeling of happiness in a Muslim when he hears it?

For Christians, I want us all to know about this event. Events that we may never have witnessed because we are often arrogant about the stories of the past that happened. Long before our situation today, a Christian king in Ethiopia practiced what Jesus taught: love. He accepted Muslims as friends and treated them well. The dialogue between the followers of the Prophet Muhammad and the Negush king also shows us that existing differences are not a big problem if we can sit down together and talk and listen to each other.

I certainly realize that current biases often disrupt memories and memories from the past. However, I once again reiterate through this paper that I want to bring back the memory of the friendship of the followers of the Prophet Muhammad and the Negush King as a collective memory that will inspire every listener, both Muslim and Christian, to create a bridge to peace. Therefore, it is essential to have a shared story as a medium to bridge the existing differences. We need to tell one another stories. It is perhaps the only basis for recognizing and yet transcending our differences. It is the only basis for gaining an understanding of both

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<sup>29</sup> Binsar Jonathan Pakpahan, *God Remembers: Towards a Theology of Remembrance as a Basis of Reconciliation in Communal Conflict*, Amsterdam: VU Press, 2012, 6-10.

<sup>30</sup> Binsar Jonathan Pakpahan, 2012, 7.

ourselves and the hopes and fears of others. It is the sole basis on which different stories, memories, and histories can emerge as the basis for an inclusive nation-building exercise.<sup>31</sup>

A shared story gives us an everyday basis for moving forward along the bridge to peace. At this time, through this article, I open, offer, and want to build the bridge through the story of the first *hijrah* of the Muslims. So, this historical event is not just general knowledge for predominantly Muslim Indonesians. Make our memory of this extraordinary event a new bridge, replacing or adding to the existing bridge in reaching the point of peace. By remembering this event, we are not only living the values of friendship in the past but giving new energy to the life of the nation and state.

In remembering this hijrah's event, we must also get the right source. Speakers should come from two religions, talk in a constructive and not tendentious narrative to one religion, and tell the chronology as clearly as possible. The Indonesian people must remember that many events and stories in the past showed peace between various religions, especially Christianity and Islam. The desire to embrace each other between historical reminders as a nation should be emphasized. These memories can bring joy and create a bridge to peace.

## Conclusion

One of the founders of the Indonesian nation and the first president of Indonesia, Soekarno, once stated, "Never forget history." This expression is very well known to the people of Indonesia, although the actions of irresponsible persons often degrade its meaning. This paper offers a new perspective in dealing with difficult situations with increasing tensions from radicals and extremists. A view by remembering the *hijrah* of the followers of the Prophet Muhammad to the Kingdom of Ethiopia, a Christian kingdom, as a bridge to ward off and embrace extremist ideas among the Indonesian people. I think this perspective is appropriate because remembering is a present process, both individually and communally, that leads us to learn from past events to create a peaceful and better future.

## Acknowledgments

I am grateful for Dr. Razi Quadir, who supervised me to finish this article. Especially for his support of books and articles about the Islamic community. My thanks to all my friends who helped me to review this article.

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<sup>31</sup> Charles Villa-Vicencio, "Telling One Another Stories", in Gregory Baum & Harold Wells (ed), *The Reconciliation of Peoples: Challenge to the Churches*, Geneva: WCC, 1997, 115.

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