

Bridge

Bridging Theology and the Cultures of the World

Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley
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Indonesia Immersion

Stuffed Fish and Calamari for Breakfast

ALSO Profiles in Ministry

Historic Symposium in Shanghai

Journal Reflections from the SOA Protest

BRIDGE SPRING 2008

STUFFED FISH AND CALAMARI FOR BREAKFAST



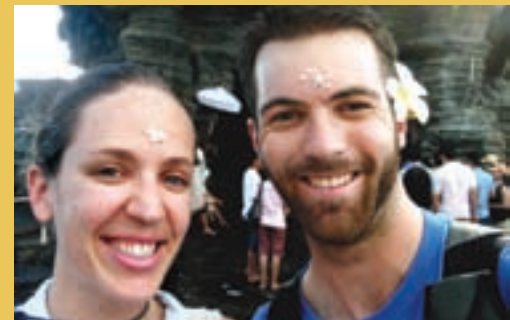
INDONESIA IMMERSION

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EACH JANUARY INTERSESSION TERM, STUDENTS AND PROFESSORS FROM THE JESUIT SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY PARTICIPATE IN AN IMMERSION TRIP TO STUDY AND EXPERIENCE FIRSTHAND THE CULTURAL CONTEXTUALIZATION OF THEOLOGY. PROFESSOR THOMAS CATTOI REPORTS ON THE IMMERSION TRIP TO INDONESIA THIS YEAR WHERE THE GROUP ENGAGED IN INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE.



THIS PAST JANUARY, JIM REDINGTON, S.J. AND I LED A GROUP

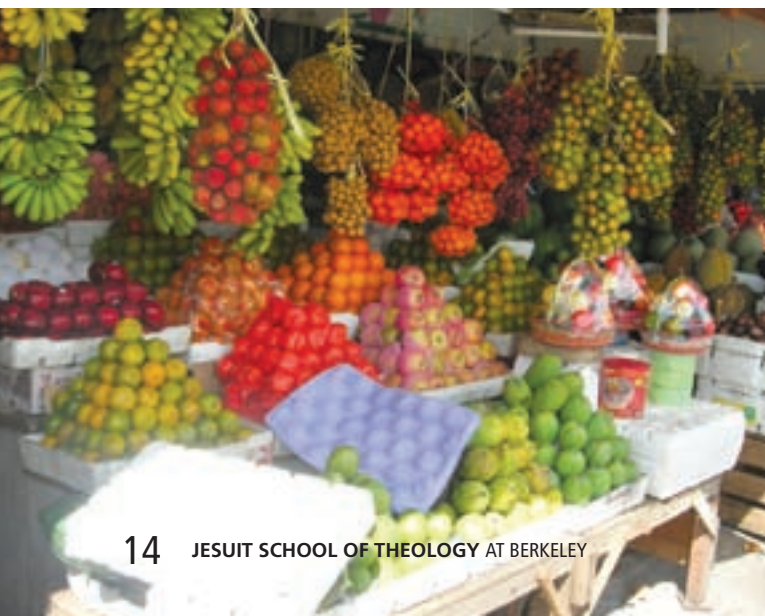


of 10 Master of Divinity students — Joseph Riordan, S.J., Phillip Cooke, S.J., Dat Tran, S.J., Michael Smith, Annie Selak, Erin Bishop, Rose Mary Moore, Gina Jenkins, Roselle Ruperto, V.D.M.F., and Su Fern Khoo, V.D.M.F. — taking part in an immersion trip to Indonesia. While Jim had already led a similar immersion in 2006, this was my first foray into what is not only the fourth largest country on earth, but also the largest Islamic nation in the world. The Jesuit School of Theology group was privileged to enjoy the hospitality of the Jesuit community of Sanata Dharma University in Yogyakarta, who hosted us for two weeks in the dormitory of their old campus and provided us with abundant (and often surprising) food throughout the duration of our stay (many students remarked they will miss the stuffed fish and calamari served for breakfast at 7 A.M.).

The city of Yogyakarta, where we were based for the greater part of the trip, is located in central Java, and is effectively the academic capital of Indonesia, hosting a number of state, Islamic, and Christian universities. The local Jesuits were able to arrange a number of talks with speakers from some of these institutions, enabling us to gain a better understanding of the complex multi-religious reality that is Indonesia today, where different Islamic movements vie for supremacy, while co-existing with different Christian denominations as well as a number of other religious traditions. Our group was also blessed with the constant presence of Tom Michel, S.J.,

an American Jesuit who is a member of the Indonesian Province of the Society of Jesus and has spent over 20 years working in Rome fostering inter-religious dialogue. His lectures on Islam offered an invaluable entrée into a religious tradition that is far more sophisticated and diverse than its usual presentation in the Western media.

Indeed, the reality of Indonesian Islam is an excellent example of this diversity. More than half of all Javanese Muslims are known as *abangan* (nominal Muslims), and follow a local, largely syncretistic form of Islam that accommodates earlier beliefs in the power and omnipresence of the spiritual world. The Sultan who, much to the surprise of Western visitors, still rules over the city, is a key figure in the religious life of many local Muslims, who view him as a political, but mainly as a spiritual leader. This more tolerant form of Islam is opposed by the so-called *santris* (strict Muslims), who argue for a purification of religious practice according to the Arab (especially Saudi, or *wahabi*) model. Our visits to two different *pesantrens* (Islamic boarding schools) evidenced the huge differences within the Indonesian Islamic community. At the first school, we were forced to take part in a rather confrontational debate on the divinity of Christ and the nature of our faith; at the second, the headmaster and the teachers were eager to tell us all about the academic success of their students, some of whom had returned from exchange programs in Alaska and Massachusetts. The Indonesian Jesuits and theology students who accompanied us on these visits helped us negotiate these differences, which are part of their everyday life, but are often very difficult for outsiders to appreciate in their full import.



PHOTOGRAPHS: PREVIOUS PAGE: top to bottom: (1) A plate of Indonesian snacks, accompanied by hot tea, were presented everywhere we traveled (EB); (2) Dressed in sarongs, the Jesuit School of Theology group ascends the hill towards the Hindu temple of Besakih on the festival of Diwali, the triumph of dharma (MS). THIS PAGE: top to bottom: (1) Erin Bishop and Michael Smith wear the fresh rice and tropical flowers they received after a Hindu blessing at the natural fresh water spring of Tanah Lot shrine on the coast of Bali (EB); (2) Traditional fruit stand in Yogyakarta. (EB)



Another highlight of the trip was the excursion to the parish of Sumber, on the slopes of Mount Merapi, where Fr. Kirjito, a priest known to the Yogyakarta Jesuits, works with the local villagers and inspires them to persevere in their traditional way of life despite the constant threat of natural disaster and environmental devastation. Fr. Kirjito seems to be a man for all seasons, ready even to exorcise on the spot one of the dancers who had been possessed by a spirit during a traditional dance. Indeed, there were not a few surprises. During this extended outing, Jim Redington, S.J. managed to kill a poisonous frog with a broom, but further details are probably covered by the seal of the confessional.

After waking up every morning at 4 A.M. at the sound of the *hazan* (the Muslim call to prayer) for about two weeks, we moved to Bali for the last few days of the trip. On this fabled island, Hindu temples and statues abound. So do tourists, souvenir shops, and sacred monkeys, which are eager to take possession of whatever innocent trusting visitors are carrying on their person. Our local guide was a member of the Carmelite Third Order, and was actually rather perplexed by our interest in “demonic” Hindu practices.

All in all, this was an extraordinary experience. I hope, God willing, to be able to lead yet another group of students to Indonesia in January 2010. ■



THIS PAGE: top to bottom: (1) Daily fresh palm offerings at the Besakih temple on Bali during the festival of Diwali (EB); (2) Volcano Mount Merapi viewed from the Buddhist monument Borobudur (EB); (3) Banners of dried rice and palms decorate virtually every street corner on Bali during Diwali (EB); (4) Jesuit School of Theology group with Indonesian companions and artists at a cultural center near the Catholic parish of Sumber; the instruments in front compose the gamelan, the traditional Javanese orchestra (MS). Photographs by Erin Bishop (EB) and Michael Smith (MS).