**Summary**

Jesus is the central figure in Christianity. Thus, Christians must be totally committed to Jesus. There are two aspects to Christian commitment to Jesus that interact dynamically: first, the life and stories of Jesus that are spoken of in the Gospels and in church teachings; and second, the concrete experiences of daily life in culture, society and intellectual perspectives. These two aspects interact continually to develop Christian commitment to Jesus that is contextual to cultural, social and religious life.

Since the beginning of the 20th century, Asian churches have conducted studies about how to present Jesus that are appropriate with the context of Asian society. These efforts are the results of the development of the theological method that is termed “contextual theology”. In contextual theology, the social, religious, and cultural contexts of the local population receive the primary attention in the development of Christian theology and Christology. The Asian churches developed a Christology that took into consideration the context of the local population. The social situation, culture and patterns of thought of Asian societies became the primary – however not the only – considerations in developing presentations of Jesus.

Several Asian theologians who have developed Christologies by carefully considering the Asian context, include Aloysius Pieris, Choan-Seng Song, Stanley Samartha, Jung Young Lee and Kosuke Koyama. They placed the contexts of poverty and religious plurality as the basic primary considerations for presenting Jesus. In the context of religious plurality, Aloysius Pieris developed a Christology by considering Buddhism, which is the religion of the majority of the population in Sri Lanka, where Pieris lived. Pieris presented Jesus as the “poor monk” (rahib miskin). The term rahib (monk) is very familiar and easily understood by the Sri Lankan society. Similarly, Kosuke Koyaka worked with the context of Buddhism in Thailand. Meanwhile, Choan-Seng Song and You Jung Lee developed Christologies in China where the influence of Confucianism and Taoism framed of their Christologies.

Meanwhile, in several countries where the majority of the population is Muslim, such as in Malaysia and Pakistan, several Christian theologians developed thoughts about Jesus in accordance with the context of Islam. Malaysia is the Muslim country that is closest and shares the same roots with Indonesia. Malaysia has enforced the shari’ah law. A Christian theologian in Malaysia, Batumalai Sadayandy, presents Jesus as a “neighbor who becomes a mediator for other people”. The concept of the “neighbor” is based on the presence of Christians in Malaysia who are neighbors with Muslims. A good neighbor must be able to serve as a mediator for other people. Meanwhile, another Malaysian theologian, Ng Kam Weng, defends Jesus” divinity. For Kam Weng, Jesus” divinity cannot be compromised because it is the foundation of Christianity. If it is not acknowledged, then the recognition of Jesus as God and the Saviour is only a meaningless designation. Kam Weng adopted an approach to classical Christology that strongly defended the identification of Jesus with God as the basis of Christianity. Although approaches to Christology that consider the contextual presence result in variable presentations of Jesus, this does not impair the belief that Christ is an incarnation of God.
The majority of the population in Pakistan is also Muslim. It has the second highest number of Muslims after Indonesia. Like Malaysia, Pakistan also enforces the shari’a law. David Emmanuel Singh is a Christian theologian in Pakistan who has developed a Christology in the context of Islam. Singh is aware that in a society in which the majority of the population is Muslim, the development of Christian theology must consider Islamic theology. In view of this, Singh adopts the Islamic concept of the “perfect man” for his presentation of Jesus. After studying Islamic literature, Singh found that Islam has the concept of an individual whose life manifests in perfect goodness and in perfect relation to God. This person is called the “perfect man”. With this as his departure point, Singh presents Jesus as the “perfect man” with an additional aspect, that is, the divine nature of Jesus’ goodness and morality. Christianity believes in the “perfect man” as “God-for-us”. Meanwhile, Alexander Malik uses the concept of the Greatness of God (Allah hu akbar) as his departure point. For Malik, Jesus is the manifestation of the greatness of God from the moment of his birth.

Indonesia, also an Asian country, has also contributed to the development of contextual thought about Jesus. Several contexts, such as poverty, religious plurality and culture, have been considered in the development of local Christologies. Of these three contexts, the cultural context has received the most attention. This is understandable because the cultural context is the primordial perspective for an individual more easily identifiable. The second context that has been considered is poverty, however, only a few theologians focus on the context of poverty. The notable exception is a Catholic theologian, J. B. Banawiratma, who has consistently adopted this perspective.

With the increase in tensions between Muslims and Christians in Indonesia, which has been signified by the enforcement of several regulations that have been considered to be discriminative against Christianity, and at the same time with the increase in efforts to encourage dialog between Islam and Christianity, this writer chooses to focus on the context of Islam in developing thoughts about Jesus in Christian theology. Indonesia has the largest Muslim population in the world. 80% of 230 million Indonesians are Muslim. Christian encounters – including social, religious and theological encounters – with Islam cannot be avoided. Throughout the period of Reformasi (beginning in 1998 until the present time), conflicts between Muslim and Christian segments of the population have risen dramatically, including issues of restricting the building and destruction of churches by various social Muslim organisations. Meanwhile, sensitivity towards Islam in regions where there is a Christian majority has also risen. There are a variety of reasons for this that cover not only social and political issues, but also the inability to accept different theological perspectives as reasonable and the inability to see similarities as the basic foundation for living together in society. In actuality, intense encounters between Christianity and Islam should encourage development of Christian theology and nurture a healthy dialog between the two religions.

The tension in the encounters between Islam and Christianity often arise during discussions about Jesus, or the prophet Isa, as he is called in the Qu’ran. Muslim and Christian theologians often discuss Jesus because both the Bible and the Qu”ran focus on the figure of Jesus/Isa, albeit from different perspectives. This difference resulted in tension and the emergence of a debate between apologists. This results not in dialog, but a debate to counter the arguments of the opposing theology. Popular books are filled with the debate between apologists. From the
Christian side, there are two names that stood out in that debate in the 1980s, Hambran Ambri and Yusuf Roni. These two Christian theologians adamantly participated as apologists in arguing for the truth of Christian teachings about Jesus and at the same time claiming that the Islamic perspective is not true. Despite their enthusiasm, the defensive apologetic position does not play a significant role in developing healthy dialog.

Beginning in the 1990s, a dialogue that respected Islamic theology as a partner in developing Christian theology emerged. Theologians such as J.B. Banawiratma, Gerrit Singgih Stanley Rambitan, and A.A. Yewangoe began to propose theological concepts, particularly about Jesus, in the context of encouraging dialog with Islam. Amongst these theologians, Banawiratma was quite active. Initially, Banawiratma departed from a cultural context. He presented Jesus as a guru, teacher, in the Javanese tradition. This is understandable because the cultural context is the context that is most easily accepted. It was only after several decades that Banawiratma shifted to focus to the context of Islam. In this context, Banawiratma proposed that the concept of Jesus as the Word of God could be equated with the Muslim understanding of the Qur’an. In Islam, the Qur’an is recognized and revered as the Word of God in the form of a book. The Qur’an is holy; it is the concrete form of the presence of God. Similarly, for Christians, Jesus is the Word of God who takes the form of a human being. As a human, Jesus” presence is a concrete sign of God’s presence. With this understanding, Banawiratma hopes that Muslims can more easily understand Jesus as he is perceived by Christians.

Several Islamic theologians, including Syafaatun Almirzanah of the State Islamic University Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta and Zuhairi Misrawi, a theologian from Nahdlatul Ulama, have placed Jesus in a revered and highly respected position. They represent Islamic theologians who demonstrate that respect towards Isa/Jesus as found in the Qu’ran can be shown without demeaning or renouncing the Christian theological position. For Almirzanah, the understanding of Christian theology about the Trinity is not based on a Christian misunderstanding of Jesus’ teachings. The Trinity is the Christian way of becoming familiar with God as it is processed in human thought. In this way, the Christian statement of their theological understanding of Jesus is a part of this process.

This study focuses on theological considerations about Jesus as a kurban. In Indonesian, there are two meanings of kurban. First, kurban is something that is intentionally offered as a sacrifice for specific purposes. Usually this is an object or animal that is sacrificed as part of a religious ritual ceremony, for example, oxen are kurban in the Idul Qurban ceremony. Second, kurban is an animal or person who experiences an accident or is wounded as a result of a particular action or event, a victim. Both of these meanings are glossed in Indonesian as korban. For example: She is a korban/victim of a traffic accident. This study will use the first meaning of the word kurban.

In the Qu’ran, kurban means “sacrifice”. One of the legendary stories found in the Qu’ran is the story about the sacrifice of Ishmael. God commanded Ibrahim to kill his son, Ishmael, and offer him as a sacrifice to God. This act of devotion, however, was halted just moments before it was completed. To commemorate Ibrahim’s act of devotion, Muslims celebrate the day, Idul Kurban, as one of the main religious holy days. On this day, Muslims slaughter animals, such as goats or oxen, as kurban that are offered to God and then the meat is distributed to poor people. In
Indonesia, the Idul Kurban celebration is not only a ritual religious celebration, but it has also become a ‘social celebration’, as the people who are involved in the commemoration are not just those who donate the kurban and the poor people who receive the meat, but also the non-Muslim residents in the neighborhood who are also given a share of the meat as a sign of social solidarity. Some of the meat is eaten together in a shared meal of invited guests.

As seen in the offered sacrifice of Ishmael by Ibrahim, the concept of kurban as a sacrifice can be applied not only to animals, but also to people. In Islamic theology there are people “who sacrifice themselves” in their journey to God (shahid); people who undergo suffering because they choose to uphold their commitment to God’s way to defend their faith or to strengthen the social life of the community. It is believed that the people who die in the shahid journey will enter heaven. According to Mahmoud Ayoub, it can be said that these people are conducting jihad because they are willing to suffer and even die to carry out God’s will. The term shahid then has assumed the meaning of a martyr as it is understood in the Christian tradition to indicate people who sacrifice themselves for God’s way. Thus, shahid and martyr share the same meaning.

In Indonesia, the term mati shahid, or “shahid death”, has become popular since the conflict between the Muslim and Christian communities in Maluku because it is associated with jihad. A part of the Muslim community propose that fighting against Christians in Maluku is a jihad so that death in war will be called “shahid death” and the one who dies fighting will enter heaven. The connotations then of “shahid death” and jihad are violent and terrifying. In actuality, jihad does not refer only to fighting with physical violence in defending God’s way, but it also refers to the act of living without violence, overcoming passions, and devoting one’s life to God’s way. The images of people who are conducting jihad are not only those who wield weapons and act violently against their enemies, but also those who are gentle who restrain their passions and diligently follow God’s way.

In Islamic theology, a person who becomes a martyr or who undergoes ‘shahid death”, can assume the role of mediator (intercessor) who stands before God and humanity. In the Qu’ran, the mediator is called the shafa’a. The shafa’a is a person who serves as a mediator between two people or two groups of people who have a problem and bring peaces to them. The shafa’a can also be a devout person who died a “shahid death” while serving as a mediator for humans before God. A prophet can become an intercessor for humanity. The Qu’ran (sura 12:97-98) tells of Yusuf (Joseph) who became an intercessor for his descendents for the redemption of their sins. In the Islamic tradition, the prophet Muhammad is also an intercessor. Similarly, very devout people can also be regarded as holy. In Indonesia, members of Nahdlatul Ulama, one of the largest Muslim organisations in the country, also believe that holy persons can become intermediaries between humans and God, particularly in asking for God’s good will. Thus, on certain days the followers of Nahdlatul Ulama make pilgrimages to the gravesites of holy people to pray.

Almost all Islamic theologians agree that Jesus did not die on the cross. The refusal of Islam of the Christian perspective of Jesus’ death is based on the theological understanding that it is not possible that a messenger of God would die in such a merciless way as it is written in the Christian holy book. God surely will help and save each of His messengers. According to the
Qu’ran, it was not Jesus who died on the cross, but another person who resembled Jesus. This is the work of God to help and save Jesus. In this way, Jesus would not be embarrassed in the presence of the Jewish people. The explanation that the person who was crucified was someone who resembled Jesus is found in the Qu’ran, *sura* 4:157: “And because of their saying: We slew the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, Allah’s messenger – They slew him not nor crucified him, but it appeared so unto them; and lo! Those who disagree concerning it are in doubt thereof; they have no knowledge thereof save pursuit of a conjecture; they slew him not for certain”.

Nonetheless, the Qu’ran does not deny that fact that Jesus as God’s messenger suffered. Jesus’ arrest and trial demonstrate his suffering. Based on this perspective, there are a few Islamic theologians who agree that Jesus was actually crucified and taken to heaven by God. In one Sufi tradition there is the opinion that the experience of suffering is the experience of the mystic Jesus. It is actually through suffering that Jesus achieved the peak of his mystical experience as God’s messenger.

Christianity places faith in Jesus as God’s messenger who suffered because he sacrificed himself for devotion to God’s way and to follow God’s will. In the Bible, the tradition of *kurban* is rooted in the Old Testament. The concept of sacrifice is not new for the Isrealites and the Semitic people of that time. In the Old Testament, Israel practiced several kinds of ritual sacrifice. First, there were burnt offerings or holocaust (Hebrew, “ōlā); second, grain offerings (Hebrew, *minhah*); third, sacrifice of well being/fellowship offering (Hebrew, *zevah syelamin*); fourth, purification offerings (Hebrew, *hatta‘r*); fifth, guilt offerings (Hebrew, “*asham*).

This study develops the basic concept that Jesus’ entire life in the world was a form of suffering. Jesus undertook his sacrifice not only at the moment of his crucifixion at Golgotha, but ever since he “emptied himself” and was born as a human, assuming the role of a servant (Philippian 2:6-7). For Paul, Jesus as the Word of God did not reside quietly in glory with God. Paul viewed the event of Jesus “emptying himself” as a form of Jesus lowering himself to be born as a human. This means that ever since came into the world, Jesus humbled himself. This is one form of suffering that Jesus undertook. Then, Jesus again humbled himself when he was baptised by John the Baptist, during which Jesus underwent a baptism of remorse, or confession of sins. In this act Jesus humbled himself as other humans who need to show remorse in the presence of God.

In the Gospels, Jesus sees his own sacrifice as a “ransom for many” (Mark 10:45, Matthew 20:28). This statement refers to the tradition of sacrifice in the Old Testament. Jesus placed himself in the context of those sacrifices. A “ransom for many” is a form of sacrifice. The image of the suffering Servant of God, such as that found in Yesaya 53:10-13, is called to fore. This means that Jesus is committed to his sacrifice in the image of the suffering Servant of God. Jesus’ willingness to suffer as a sign of his devotion as the Servant of God is important. The value of his sacrifice is very meaningful because of his willingness to undergo all consequences involved.

However, the question is: Is Jesus’ self sacrifice in the context of a sacrificial cult? Indeed, the answer is ambiguous. On the one hand, the sacrifice in the context of the redemption of sin emerges very strongly in the Bible, for example in Hebrews, where Jesus is seen as the priest
who sacrifices himself for the redemption of sin. However, on the other hand, Jesus’ sacrifice is spoken of in the Gospels in the name of social solidarity, justice and truth in the Kingdom of God. Jesus’ life is the model for living in accordance with God’s will, and bringing about the Kingdom of God, that is love, justice, truth, and peace. Thus, Jesus’ sacrifice cannot be separated from the realisation of the vision of the Kingdom of God that Jesus’ life modeled.

In that vision, God works continuously to renew creation. This is what is called *creatio continua*. Christianity believes that to believe in Jesus means to follow him in death and resurrection. Thus, Christians are also resurrected to continue Jesus’ work to bring trust, justice, love, and peace to the world. Through continuing Christ’s work, Christians also participate in *creatio continua* with God.

Christianity celebrates Jesus’ sacrifice through the Eucharist. In the Eucharist, Christians eat bread and drink wine in rememberance of Jesus’ sacrifice. Because the Eucharist celebration is a commemoration of Jesus’ sacrifice, it has an ethical meaning. The commitment of Jesus’ sacrifice does not emerge in the ritual meal, but is present in daily life. The ethical demands embodied in the commemoration of Jesus’ sacrifice emerge in the defense of the poor and the marginalised, and the nurturing of a broadening dialog with other religions, especially Islam in Indonesia. The spirit of reconciliation and forgiveness that is embodied in Jesus’ sacrifice and commemorated in the Eucharist is greatly needed in Indonesia.

It is hoped that Muslims will be more willing and able to accept an image of Jesus as the *kurban* that undertakes *jihad* by committing to live in God’s way rather than the image of a superior Jesus who wants to defeat people of other faiths. There are several implications related to a presentation of Jesus as a *kurban*:

First, the idea of the *kurban* can provide a theological concept regarding the attitude of sacrificing one’s self for the needs of many people. In Indonesia, the principle of self-sacrifice for the good of many people has almost been lost in the face of a growing sense of individualism and the interest to save one’s self. There seems to be more occurrences of the sacrifice of many people for one individual’s needs.

Second, the image of Jesus as a *kurban* provides an image of solidarity with other people. Jesus suffered and was crucified, not for himself, but for the salvation of other people.

Third, the image of Jesus as a *kurban* demonstrates the meaning of forgiveness and peace. Jesus did not ask for revenge, and did not order his disciples to save him. Rather, Jesus forgave the people who crucified him. This act serves as a perfect example of forgiveness. Not only that, but Jesus’ mission to spread the news of the Kingdom of God led him to walk the path of peace, not violence.

Fourth, Jesus’ sacrifice reveals the idea of someone who sacrifices himself then becomes a mediator. Christians see Jesus as a mediator between God and humankind, as well as a mediator who demonstrates how humans can live in peace.