TOLERANCE OF ISLAM, CHRISTIANITY, AND HINDUISM IN A PLURAL SOCIETY

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Abstract: The objective of this study is to ascertain and delineate the manner in which the concept of tolerance is understood and practised by the diverse population of Kedungrejo Village, Rowokangkung District, Lumajang Regency. The village community is a society with a high level of plurality, characterised by the coexistence of diverse religious cultures and sentiments. Nevertheless, there is a clear indication of harmony and mutual respect in everyday life. The village community does not view differences as a cause for conflict; rather, they are regarded as a source of diversity and richness. Consequently, the village community engages in activities and pursuits collectively, irrespective of the discrepancies that exist. This study employs a qualitative approach. The research paradigm is phenomenological or interpretive. A qualitative approach is a paradigm of natural research, which entails developing a theory by drawing upon data derived from the real world. The research location was Kedungrejo Village, Rowokangkung district, Lumajang Regency. The findings of this study indicate that all religions espouse absolutist claims, whether Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, or Judaism. Particularist-subjective monotheistic claims are likely to exacerbate inter-religious conflict, particularly when multiple strong and particularistic religious organisations coexist.

Keywords: Plurality, Religious Cultures, Tolerance.

Introduction

One of the fundamental characteristics of reality is pluralism. Although there is a certain degree of universality, the elements in question exhibit a range of characteristics, which render each element distinctive and singular. As a constituent element of reality, human life is also characterised by plurality. The term "human" is a categorical designation for individual organisms that exhibit specific common characteristics, thereby enabling their classification as a distinct species. In addition to being a characteristic of species, pluralism is also evident at the level of sub-species, manifesting in various forms such as race, gender, sexual orientation, belief, ethnicity, nation, and so forth. At the species level, groupings at the sub-species level are based on the shared characteristics of numerous individual organisms. One group can be classified as a race that is distinct from other races, and so on.

Nevertheless, the human individual represents the fundamental unit of classification at the species and subspecies levels, exhibiting intrinsic uniqueness. Conversely, as these individual units also interact in order to meet their individual needs, it is necessary for each unit to be willing to share living space in a peaceful manner. The concept of pluralism is a paradigm that is relevant to the human need to share living space amidst differences. This paradigm requires that pluralism is accepted as a fundamental aspect of human existence, and that this acceptance is operationalised in a tolerant attitude towards differences. This paradigm is becoming increasingly relevant in a human society that is characterised by a variety of characteristics that are not only physical but also mental, and that are not merely innate but also formed.

It is therefore crucial to consider the underlying principles that should inform the construction of this tolerance.[1] The question of whether we must tolerate intolerance or whether all kinds of differences must be respected demonstrates the necessity for an ethical foundation for the paradigm of pluralism itself. However, the increasingly complex character of pluralism today is closely related to

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[1] Suci Flambonita et al., "The Paradigm of Pluralism in Indonesia: Communal VS Legal State," *Technium Social Sciences Journal* 15, no. 1 (2021): 259–65, https://doi.org/10.47577/tssj.v15i1.2245. Bernhard Schütz, "Creating a Pluralist Paradigm: An Application to the Minimum Wage Debate," *Journal of Economic Issues* 55, no. 1 (January 2, 2021): 103–24, https://doi.org/10.1080/00213624.2021.1874786.

modernization. One of the salient features of modernization is the rise of individualism, which can be defined as the individual human awareness of their unique personality. This individual awareness cannot be reduced entirely to the concepts of "collectivity" or "generality."

In the modern era, the differences between human beings are no longer sufficiently understood within the framework of sub-species groups that differ from one another in characteristics such as race, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, religion, nationality, and the like. This is because, at an underlying level, all classifications of human beings are unique to each other. For example, an individual may be classified as a follower of a particular religion due to their shared characteristics with other adherents, which may be distinguished from those of adherents of other religions. However, the unique personality of a religious adherent may impart a distinct meaning to their beliefs and practices, even when shared with fellow adherents.

A comparable phenomenon can be observed in the context of race, gender, ethnicity, nationality, and other sub-species groups, where individuals engage in the construction of the meaning associated with their group affiliation in a manner that is distinct from one another. The pluralism paradigm, which is based on communitarian ethics and which stops at the level of relations between different groups,[2] needs to be revised in order to accommodate the pluralism of modern society, which is increasingly individualistic. What is needed as a foundation for pluralism is a liberal ethic that provides a living space for every individual to live free from threats from other parties, whether those other parties are individuals or groups.

Indonesia is characterised by a high degree of ethnic, religious, racial and linguistic diversity. As reported by Tempo, Indonesia is home to 1,128 ethnic groups, dispersed across 17,000 islands and comprising 633 major ethnic groups. Furthermore, Indonesia is home to 250 distinct religions and beliefs. Additionally, Indonesia is home to 718 distinct local languages. A number of instances of conflict have occurred. One such instance was the *Sampit* Case, which took place in

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[2] John Christian Ruhulessin, "Paradigma Etika Publik dalam Kearifan Lokal Pela," *Jurnal Filsafat* 29, no. 2 (August 28, 2019): 183–205, https://doi.org/10.22146/jf.36344.

2001 and resulted in the deaths of approximately 469 individuals. This conflict, which lasted for ten days, was primarily driven by ethnic and cultural factors. Another notable instance was the Maluku conflict, which resulted in the deaths of 8-9 thousand individuals and the destruction of numerous churches and mosques. Additionally, houses and other properties were also burned, and the conflict was largely driven by religious issues. The 1998 conflict, which was affected by the reforms, was the transition from the New Order to the reform era. This period was marked by a significant loss of life, the burning of several houses, damage to cars and other forms of infrastructure, and the exacerbation of political tensions, which collectively contributed to the outbreak of conflict. Additionally, several other instances of unrest occurred in various locations, including Ambon, West Nusa Tenggara, Situbondo, Lampung, and Java.

In the context of Kedungrejo Village, the community exhibits a strong religious identity while simultaneously maintaining an inclusive and welcoming atmosphere. The community is heterogeneous but demonstrates an attitude of tolerance, characterised by joint social activities while maintaining the normative boundaries of each religion and group (agree in disagreement). This phenomenon can be better understood through the lens of John Galtung's theory, which posits that the problem of peace is akin to a health problem. In order to effectively address this issue, it is essential to employ a comprehensive approach that incorporates diagnosis, prognosis, and therapy.[3] Abed-Kotob posits that the issue of plurality is an issue of Islamic brotherhood. This is based on the assumption that Islam is a universal religion, and that the spirit of brotherhood, openness in social life, and various forms of cooperation should be extended as widely as possible to Muslims and non-Muslims alike.[4]

The interpretation of revealed truth becomes religious truth, which is believed by its adherents to be absolute, essential, and transcendental. This gives rise to conservative, exclusive, and fanatical attitudes whose excesses deny the truth of other religions. The adherents of a religion believe that only their religion is the best, most accurate, and most accepted in the sight of God, and that their

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[3] Charles Webel and Johan Galtung, *Handbook of Peace and Conflict Studies*, 1st ed. (London: Routledge, 2007).

[4] Sana Abed-Kotob, "The Accommodationists Speak:Goals and Strategies of the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 27, no. 3 (August 1995): 321–39, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743800062115.

religion has the highest degree of truth compared to other religions. Furthermore, this conviction engenders the perception that veracity is exclusive to one's own beliefs, and that the veracity of alternative beliefs is not acknowledged, thereby creating the potential for conflict.

To illustrate, in numerous countries experiencing conflict, despite the eventual establishment of a mutual understanding, such as in Lebanon, Muslims were subjected to brutal persecution, despite the existence of social contracts between various religious groups, including Shiite Muslims, Sunni Muslims, Maronite Christians, and Druses. This led to the creation of constitutions, which sought to shape the future of the country in question. The search for solutions to conflicts often leads to the exploration of dialogue as a potential avenue for resolution. However, according to Shihab, actors engaged in dialogue must demonstrate significant commitments, namely, first, tolerance and second, pluralism. Without these two commitments, dialogue actors will be unable to achieve mutual understanding. The phenomenon of mainstreaming religious moderation represents an intriguing area of study. This phenomenon is undoubtedly worthy of further investigation and research. This study raises questions about the concept of understanding tolerance in the context of diverse village communities.

The methodology employed in this study is qualitative. The paradigm is that of phenomenology or interpretive theory. A qualitative approach is a paradigm of natural research,[5] whereby a theory is derived from the data collected from the real world. The research was conducted in Kedungrejo Village, Rowokangkung District, Lumajang Regency. The subjects/informants for this study were selected using the purposive sampling technique, with the aim of ensuring the data to be processed was adequately represented. This was followed by the snowball sampling technique, which was employed in a chain. The method for determining the sample size was to start with a small number, which was then increased in a gradual manner, akin to the growth of a snowball. Consequently, when the researcher conducted an interview with an informant, they

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[5] Corrado Matta, "Philosophical Paradigms in Qualitative Research Methods Education: What Is Their Pedagogical Role?," *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research* 66, no. 6 (September 19, 2022): 1049–62, https://doi.org/10.1080/00313831.2021.1958372.

initially selected one or two individuals. However, given that this initial data is considered incomplete, the researcher sought to identify other informants who possessed a more comprehensive understanding and could provide additional insights that would supplement the initial data provided by the initial informant. The data analysis model employed in this study is the Miles and Huberman model of analysis.[6]

Pluralism in Religion: a Necessity

It is imperative that the study of religious pluralism be more widely understood and that its ambiguous meanings be acknowledged. The term "religious pluralism" is derived from two words: "pluralism" and "religion." For this reason, the author will proceed to discuss both concepts in sequence, commencing with an examination of the notions of pluralism, religion, and religious pluralism. The term 'plural' is defined as denoting a state of multiplicity or a quality of being multiple. In the Contemporary Indonesian Dictionary, the term is defined as denoting a plural nature or condition. This pluralism manifests in social and political systems within society, as documented in the Big Indonesian Dictionary. Pluralism is defined as a condition of a pluralistic society, specifically in regard to its social and political structures. An additional interpretation of pluralism is that it represents a fundamental principle of social and political life. The term 'pluralism' has two distinct meanings. Firstly, it denotes the existence within a single society of numerous groups that adhere to disparate racial or religious beliefs. Secondly, it signifies the tenet that these diverse groups can coexist harmoniously within the same society. From the perspective outlined in point b, the term 'pluralism' is more appropriate when considering the coexistence of diverse groups within a single society. This is because the suffix '-ism' denotes the understanding or principle of community life. In addition to this, the author references the opinions of various scholars who have discussed the concept of pluralism.

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[6] Jessica Nina Lester, Yonjoo Cho, and Chad R. Lochmiller, "Learning to Do Qualitative Data Analysis: A Starting Point," *Human Resource Development Review* 19, no. 1 (March 1, 2020): 94–106, https://doi.org/10.1177/1534484320903890.

Therefore, it can be concluded that pluralism should be understood as a form of affinity.[7]

The existence of plurality in all its forms is an inherent and inevitable phenomenon. This phenomenon reflects a given social reality, or sunnatullah, which describes how humans are indeed created by Him in diversity and difference between one another. This ensures that no single power can deny or attempt to eradicate the reality in question.[8] In recent times, the historical context of plurality has become increasingly complex. This is due to the fact that, in the past, the religious community was situated in locations such as camps, which isolated conflicts arising from external sources. Conversely, the issue of plurality is becoming increasingly complex in the contemporary era, as external influences are perceived to be intensifying and more challenging to circumvent. As posited by Harold R. Isaacs, a group represents an identity whose existence is subject to dynamic shifts. Individuals within the group experience growth, transformation, and advancement, or conversely, decline and even dissolution, in response to the group's increasing vitality.[9]

The issue of pluralism is not solely a matter of religious concern; it also has significant implications for society at large. Given that this phenomenon is an inherent aspect of social reality, it can be considered a universal humanitarian issue. In light of this, Mukti Ali, a prominent figure in the field of religious dialogue, proposes a range of approaches to facilitate constructive engagement across religious traditions. These include forms of dialogue centred on shared life experiences, social activities, religious experiences, collective prayer, and theological discourse.[10] Mukti Ali proposed dialogue for several reasons. Firstly, religious pluralism is a reality. Secondly, there is a strong desire to contact other people. Thirdly, dialogue helps to grow self-confidence when meeting other religions. Fourthly, it increases cooperation in mutual respect, justice, and friendship. Fifthly, it can

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[7] Tasmuji Tasmuji, "Teologi Transformatif Jaringan Islam Liberal," *Teosofi: Jurnal Tasawuf dan Pemikiran Islam* 1, no. 2 (December 1, 2011): 251–69, https://doi.org/10.15642/teosofi.2011.1.2.251-269.

[8] Anang Lukman Afandi, "State and Religious Pluralism (Study of Hasyim Muzadi's Thoughts on Religious Pluralism in Indonesia after the New Order)," *The International Journal of Politics and Sociology Research* 9, no. 1 (June 30, 2021): 19–25.

[9] Harold R. Isaacs, "Group Identity and Political Change: The Role of Color and Physical Characteristics," *Daedalus* 96, no. 2 (1967): 353–75.

[10] A. Mukti Ali, *Ilmu Perbandingan Agama di Indonesia* (Jakarta: Mizan, 1998).

be argued that mankind has only one God. Sixthly, man is *Sabt.* Seventhly, theological reasons that religions can take a positive attitude towards other religions. Finally, dialogue is an act of religion.

Alwi Shihab sets out the limitations of pluralism, defining it not merely as the existence of diversity, but as active engagement with that diversity. Secondly, pluralism is distinct from cosmopolitanism, which is merely a state of being in the same place; there must be a willingness to cooperate. Thirdly, the concept of pluralism cannot be equated with relativism, which posits that the truth is contingent on one's geographical location. Fourthly, pluralism is not syncretism, which involves the creation of a new entity from two or more elements.[11]

The aforementioned differences give rise to societal divisions, which is why pluralism is regarded as a contributory factor in social conflicts. This is due to the narrow religious interests of certain groups and the cultural supremacy of other groups. It is widely acknowledged that awareness-raising initiatives are of paramount importance, and that a tolerant approach is a defining feature of religious life in Indonesia. It is hoped that tolerance will prevent any form of destructive behaviour resulting from the diversity of religious communities. Religion provides a comprehensive guide to living in peace, including a life of tolerance in a pluralistic society. Islam acknowledges the existence of pluralism and respects other religions, including those that are not Islamic.

In order to gain insight into the phenomenon of tolerance in plurality, theoretical studies have been conducted utilising the theory of Johan Galtung. This theory posits that the process of peace and tolerance is built on four fundamental elements, namely culture.[12] During the colonial period, Muslim communities in the archipelago perceived a threat from colonial political policies that facilitated the spread of Christianity. Consequently, during the early post-independence period, suspicions between Muslims and Christians/Catholics were rife. However, the decision of the founders of the Republic of Indonesia, who were also Islamic religious leaders, to establish Pancasila as the foundation of the state can be considered

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11 Alwi Shihab, "Christian—Muslim Relations into the Twenty-First Century," in *Islam and Other Religions* (London: Routledge, 2006).

12 Webel and Galtung, *Handbook of Peace and Conflict Studies.*

an endeavour to create a state system that guarantees religious harmony and pluralism.

Abu Rabi' asserts that, despite the role Islam has played in fostering an ethos of religious pluralism in Indonesia since the country's independence, the potential for the religion to become a social movement that espouses anti-Christian sentiment remains significant. The emergence of various tendencies and patterns of Islamic thought in recent times illustrates the disparate positions that Islam occupies with regard to other religious communities. Consequently, as Rabi' observes, the growth of political and religious aspirations will continue to create opportunities for the development of Islamic social movements, which are unable to uphold the values of tolerance, openness and moderation. Furthermore, this challenge is becoming increasingly evident as post-modern religious discourse develops.[13]

It is widely acknowledged that the Indonesian government has pursued a multifaceted approach to fostering and maintaining inter-religious harmony. This has entailed the utilisation of diverse methods and initiatives, including the facilitation of dialogues between religious leaders and operational religious institutions. These dialogues serve as a conduit for the exchange of ideas and perspectives between these key figures. One of the religious institutions that has been relied upon in the implementation of government programmes is that of religious figures. These figures occupy a prominent position and wield considerable influence within their respective communities, largely due to their possession of a combination of advantageous attributes, including expertise, status, hereditary privilege and so forth. Religious figures often serve as informal leaders within their communities, and it is notable that they are not typically appointed by the government. Instead, their appointment is generally made with the consent and approval of the local community.

The Concept of Understanding Tolerance in the Plurality of Village Communities

The setting of this research, Kedungrejo Village, offers a compelling case study for examining the reality of modern pluralistic

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[13] Ibrahim Abu Rabi, "Christian-Muslim Relations in Indonesia: Five Challenges of the Twenty-First Century," *Studia Islamika* 5, no. 1 (1998), https://doi.org/10.15408/sdi.v5i1.758.

societies. The village's embrace of diversity is evident in its natural environment, which serves as a reflection of the community's harmony. The inhabitants of Kedungrejo Village appear to be undisturbed by the diversity of their surroundings. The presence of differences in political, economic, cultural and even religious views does not impede the achievement of social harmony. The village is home to a multitude of religious groups, including Muslims, Christians, Protestants and even Hindus and Buddhists, each with their own set of beliefs.

Coward asserted that one of the defining characteristics of the contemporary world is religious pluralism. The phenomenon of pluralism is an inevitable aspect of the contemporary world. Humans live in a context of pluralism, which they experience passively or actively, including in matters of religion. Religious pluralism represents a significant challenge for world religions in the contemporary era. Moreover, as Coward notes, each religion emerges within a pluralistic context and develops in response to this diversity.[14] If religious adherents are to comprehend and navigate this pluralism wisely, it will have implications not only for conflicts between religious communities but also for social discord and national disintegration.

Simon posits that no single religion in the world can be said to possess a unified essence, a singular content of enlightenment or revelation, or a unified path of emancipation or liberation. The concept of God is open to a variety of interpretations. The concept of God can be understood in a number of ways, including as Emptiness, Suchness, the One, Nature, or the Many. There is a distinction to be made between the ways in which God reveals himself and our relationship with him, particularly in terms of our attitudes towards harmony and disharmony. There are various interpretations of the most appropriate method for changing our outlook from one that is fatally self-focused to one that is freely God-centred. However, it is possible that such religious discourses and methods can sometimes complement one another, and to a certain extent, complement aspects that still need to be advanced from one another. Nevertheless, at the same time, they can also interfere with and obliterate one another.

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[14] Harold G. Coward, *Pluralism in the World Religions: A Short Introduction* (Oneworld Publications, 2000).

Hick posits that religious pluralism entails the acknowledgement of a shared foundation underlying diverse religious practices and the convergence of world religions.[15] For others, religious pluralism signifies mutual respect between disparate worldviews and the full acceptance of these differences. If the former emphasises individual religious freedom, the latter emphasises the recognition of denominations as distinctive answerers. Hick is, as Soroush asserts, a theologian who defends pluralism and inclusivism.[16]

Nevertheless, it remains unclear why adherents of monotheistic religions are perceived as inherently intolerant and violent. As posited by Rodney Stark, the particularistic-subjective claims of monotheistic adherents – that their religion is the sole true one, that it encompasses a single God – are a significant source of conflict. Stark emphasised the subjectivism of adherents of monotheistic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) who regard other religions with disdain. His research indicated that religious differences in all societies are rooted in social niches, comprising groups of people who share preferences related to religious intensity. When several strong particularistic religions threaten one another, the conflict will be intensified, as well as the level of intolerance.

Implementation of the Concept of Understanding Tolerance in the Plurality of Village Communities

Dialogue occurs naturally in the Kedungrejo village community for the purpose of fostering mutual understanding and solidarity between individuals as members of the same village community. Members of the Kedungrejo village community engage in a harmonious dialogue, which is conducted in a manner that is respectful towards all components of society. This dialogue takes place in various activities organised by the community, including those related to religious rites and cultural practices. One notable example is the *Reog* cultural art community, which is comprised of individuals from diverse religious and cultural backgrounds, including Muslims and Christians.

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[15] John Hick, "Religious Pluralism," in *Routledge Companion to Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Chad Meister and Paul Copan (London: Routledge, 2008).

[16] Abdulkarim Soroush, *The Expansion of Prophetic Experience: Essays on Historicity, Contingency and Plurality in Religion* (BRILL, 2008).

In the village of Kedungrejo, *Musrembangdes* frequently serve as a platform for communication and interaction between community members, with the village administration facilitating these interactions. At the global level, the International Association for the History of Religion held an international congress in Tokyo in 1958, at which Friedrich Heiler from Marburg explained that one of the essential tasks of the science of religion is to provide information about the unity of all religions. He further stated that those who recognise the unity of religion must hold it seriously with tolerance in word and deed.

Heiler's analysis reveals a striking proximity between the various religions, as evidenced by their shared structural, doctrinal, and ritualistic elements. This convergence points to a transcendent quality that transcends the boundaries of specific traditions but remains immanent in the human heart. Consequently, the study of comparative religion represents the most effective barrier against exclusivism, as it fosters love and unity. At the conclusion of his discourse, Heiler likened the significance of comparative religion to that of Helmholtz, the inventor of glasses, who provided assistance to millions of individuals with eye-related issues. This analogy extends to the scientific study of religion as well, as its pursuit of truth has considerable implications for the functional relationship between religions.[17]

Furthermore, it is possible that the dialogue approach has not yielded significant results in resolving inter-religious conflicts thus far. This is because the approach taken is still top-down, rather than utilising a bottom-up dialogue model. This would enable the implementation of harmony dialogues to be evaluated and compared with other models in future. In engaging in dialogue with other religious traditions, regardless of its form, it is essential to cultivate mutual openness, respect, and a willingness to listen to others. These attitudes are crucial for identifying shared principles (*kalimatun sawa'*) across diverse religious traditions, given their distinctive and intricate characteristics.

In the context of dialogue between Islam and Christianity, Hassan Hanafi posits that both traditions possess two distinctive "ideal characteristics" that can be compared. Such dialogue may then

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[17] Gerrie Lubbe, "The Study of Religion and Inter-Faith Dialogue," *Religion in Southern Africa* 7, no. 2 (1986): 27–37.

result in the formation of a common platform. Prioritising the principle of humanism is essential to facilitate comparison between the two traditions, as Islam and Christianity espouse a cosmopolitan view of humanity. This enables the examination of two key dimensions: anthropological and theological. As Hanafi asserts, the relationship between God and man represents a pivotal point in understanding the emergence of unity and division between modern culture and traditional culture, or between Christians and Muslims in the East.[18]

There are a number of reasons why Muslims may be sceptical about engaging in religious dialogue. This dialogue movement is a purely Western Christian initiative, and Muslims perceive themselves as outsiders with no agenda and minimal expectations for achieving anything meaningful through this dialogue. The perception among Muslims that the Christian mission is an additional agenda to colonialism, which Christians often carry out, contributes to distrust of the Christian agenda. This, in turn, gives rise to a fear among Muslims that the dialogue is a disguised evangelistic endeavour. This distrust is further compounded by the global injustice of the West, particularly in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. According to Hans Kung, a key aspect of this dialogue is the necessity for religious individuals to substantiate their beliefs. Despite the numerous differences, Kung asserts that Christians and Muslims must be accountable to God and serve humanity with complete respect for one another.[19]

Seyyed Hossein Nasr offers religious studies with Philosophia perennis because he perceives a need for a reorientation of Western religious studies towards a more nuanced understanding of religion as a multifaceted phenomenon encompassing both religious and sacred forms as well as a divine reality. One notable deficiency in the Western study of religion is the absence of a perspective that can engage with religion in a fair and objective manner. This could be achieved by drawing upon the perennial wisdom that is inherent to the core of all religious traditions. Philosophia perennis represents the

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[18] Hassan Hanafi, "Cultures in Conflicts or Dialogue? Alternative Model," in *Towards the Dignity of Difference?*, ed. Mojtaba Mahdavi and W. Andy Knight (London: Routledge, 2012).

[19] Hans Küng, "Religion, Violence and 'Holy Wars,'" *International Review of the Red Cross* 87, no. 858 (June 2005): 253–68, https://doi.org/10.1017/S1816383100181329.

core of religious knowledge, offering insights into the significance of religious rites, doctrines, and symbols. Furthermore, Philosophia perennis offers insight into the significance of religious plurality and provides a methodology for engaging with other religious traditions without compromising one's own beliefs or the rigour of the academic study. It encompasses a comprehensive examination of religion from a multitude of perspectives, including the study of God and humanity, revelation and sacred art, symbols and images, religious rites and laws, mysticism and social ethics, metaphysics, cosmology, and theology.[20]

For the success of inter-religious or inter-faith dialogue to be assured, it is not sufficient for religious elites alone to possess an understanding of other religions. Nevertheless, it is imperative that this knowledge reaches the most marginalised members of society, those who interact with adherents of other religions on a daily basis. The science of comparative religion and an understanding of other religions is a prerequisite for conducting interreligious dialogue, as it is only through this that such dialogue can be carried out. Indeed, the science of comparative religion is used to facilitate this dialogue, and interreligious dialogue is a medium for understanding other religions correctly and comprehensively.

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Azyumardi Azra identifies a number of models of inter-religious dialogue, which he terms 'tribology'. These include: The first model of inter-religious dialogue is that of parliamentary dialogue, which involves hundreds of participants. An example of this is the World's Parliament of Religions dialogue in 1873 in Chicago. Another

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[20] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "The Significance of Comparative Philosophy for the Study of Islamic Philosophy," *Studies in Comparative Religion* 7, no. 4 (1973).

example is the series of dialogues organised by the World Conference on Religion and Peace (WCRP) in the 1980s and 1990s. The second model is institutional dialogue, which involves representatives of various religious organisations. This form of dialogue is often conducted to address urgent issues affecting people of different religions.

Dialogue of this nature typically engages with government-sanctioned religious organisations, including the Indonesian Ulama Council (MUI), the Indonesian Church Association (PGI), the Indonesian Bishops' Conference (KWI), Parisada Hindu Darma, and the Indonesian Buddhist Trusteeship (WALUBI). Thirdly, there is the matter of theological dialogue. This dialogue encompasses both scheduled and unscheduled meetings, during which theological and philosophical issues are discussed. Theological dialogues are typically conducted by intellectual circles or organisations established with the objective of fostering interfaith dialogue. Examples of such organisations include Interfidei, Paramadina, LKiS, LP3M, MADIA, and others. Fourthly, there is the category of dialogue in society, which may also be termed dialogue in the community. This form of dialogue is concerned with the practical and the actual, and with matters of common concern to the nation and the state. It is usually conducted by study groups and NGOs, or by NGOs. Fifthly, there is the category of spiritual dialogue, which aims to enrich and deepen the spiritual life of those of different religions.[21]

In the Christian tradition, as Kate Zebiri has observed, a willingness to engage with other religious traditions has led to the emergence of interfaith movements, which have, in recent years, manifested as structured dialogue. In 1964, the Vatican established a secretariat for non-Christian religions (Pacific Council for Interreligious Dialogue-PCID), which was tasked with promoting the study of other religious traditions and sponsoring interfaith dialogue. Furthermore, the Second Vatican Council (1962-5) issued documents that espouse respect for Muslims on the grounds that they worship one God, the Most Living, Eternal, Compassionate, and Mighty. Additionally, they wholeheartedly submit to God's destiny, as exemplified by Abraham, the foundational figure of the Islamic faith. Despite not recognizing Jesus as God, they acknowledge him as a

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[21] A. Azra, *Konteks Berteologi Di Indonesia: Pengalaman Islam* (Jakarta: Paramadina, 1999).

prophet. They also venerate Maryam, the holy Mother of Jesus, and anticipate the Day of Judgment.[22]

The practical application of religious dialogue is a process that integrates religious teachings with the realities of an unjust social order, while maintaining a critical stance. Every religion possesses intrinsic value and the mission of upholding morality.[23] Mudji Sutrisno posited that interreligious dialogue must encompass not only rational logic but also psychological logic. Consequently, the pursuit of a theology of harmony through dialogue must be complemented by the dissolution of psychological barriers, such as the mutual suspicion that has historically been a hindrance.[24] As Kautsar Azhari has elucidated, the impediment to interreligious discourse is the phenomenon of exclusivism. Exclusivism perpetuates the endeavour to proselytise by assuming the superiority of one's own religion and denigrating the veracity of alternative belief systems.[25]

Therefore, as long as the aforementioned attitude persists, engaging in discourse towards noble religious ideals will remain a significant challenge. It is therefore unnecessary to be concerned about the process of dialogue, as the objective of such a process, as espoused by Victor I. Tanja, is not to reach a compromise regarding one's own religious beliefs, but rather to contribute to the moral development of others through the medium of one's own religious teachings. Furthermore, as Shihab emphasised, it is not our intention to act in the name of religious teachings and subsequently compromise religious harmony. Additionally, we do not seek to uphold religious harmony at the expense of religion. Islam aspires to harmony, but not at the cost of our religious identity.

Ulil Abshar Abdalla identified seven practical obstacles in the field that impede interfaith meetings, namely: the tendency for dialogue to be discursive and elitist, not serious (read: aggressive) in

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[22] Kate Zebiri, *Muslims and Christians Face to Face* (Simon and Schuster, 2014).

[23] Cornelia Roux, "Religious and Human Rights Literacy as Prerequisite for Interreligious Education," in *International Handbook of Inter-Religious Education*, ed. Kath Engebretson et al., International Handbooks of Religion and Education (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 2010), 991–1015, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4020-9260-2_59.

[24] Mudji Sutrisno, *Dialog Kritis Dan Identitas Agama* (Jakarta: Mizan, 1994).

[25] Kautsar Azhari, *Eksklusivisme Dalam Agama Yahudi* (Jakarta: UIN Syarif Hidayatullah, 2004), https://repository.uinjkt.ac.id/dspace/handle/123456789/18781.

fighting for dialogue issues; there is a gap between the religious elite and the mediator (*da'i*) in the field; inadequate "dialogue infrastructure"; there is prejudice between religious communities and also within religious communities; the existence of social inequality and injustice and the absence of dialogue between religious communities. Meanwhile, according to the former minister of religion, Thalchah Hasan, fostering religious harmony that has existed so far is suspected to be still structurally and politically oriented.[26]

In engaging in discourse with other religious traditions, regardless of its form, it is imperative to embrace a spirit of openness, respect, and a willingness to listen to the perspectives of others. In his introduction, Huston Smith articulates Schuon's thesis regarding the relationship between religions, namely that everything possesses both similarities and differences, including religion. The term "religion" is applied to these diverse traditions because each has something in common.[27]

The similarities or points of convergence between these religions are evident at the level of esotericism, whereas at the level of exotericism, the religions appear to diverge. Accordingly, in order to identify common ground between religions, it is essential to undertake an esoteric study of religion. Raimundo Panikkar posits that in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of other people's religions, it is necessary to engage with them in their original language, as reflected in their religious texts. It is imperative not to overlook the nuances and divergences within each religion, as this would be tantamount to suggesting that they should all become one. Panikkar asserts that each religion serves to reflect, justify, add to and oppose the others.

Pluralism and Interreligious Dialogue: Several Approaches by Village Communities

It is important to acknowledge that, in addition to making absolutist claims, religions also espouse an inclusivist stance. This is exemplified by an intriguing incident involving the Prophet

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[26] Ulil Abshar Abdalla, "Ulama Dan Perubahan Sosial: Melawan Atau Berdamai Dengan 'Zaman Baru'?," *Tashwirul Afkar* 41, no. 2 (December 30, 2022): 163–212, https://doi.org/10.51716/ta.v41i2.77.

[27] Frithjof Schuon, *The Transcendent Unity of Religions* (Quest Books, 1984), https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/261030.The_Transcendent_Unity_of_Religions.

Muhammad. In this instance, the polytheists attempted to reject Islamic teachings for the sake of maintaining a peaceful coexistence. God ordered the Prophet to say to them: "….God will one day gather all of us, then He will correctly decide between us. Verily, He is the Most Decision-giving, the All-Knowing."

In the view of Quraish Shihab, when absolutism is introduced into the real world, the Prophet is not required to espouse the beliefs about the absoluteness of the religion that are held within, but rather the opposite is true. According to Quraish Shihab, one of the fundamental limitations of the human condition is our tendency towards passionate enthusiasm. This can manifest in various ways, including a desire to impose a singular, unified opinion and sectarian affiliation on an entire population. This fervour often motivates individuals to compel others to adhere to their own, often narrow, interpretation of reality.

In general, the majority of philosophers argue that the nature of the highest reality is one. Consequently, the philosophical principles used by all religions are also one. When Allama Thabataba'i discussed religion from a philosophical perspective, he maintained a stance of strict adherence to the tenets of his beliefs. However, when his studies began to encompass sociological considerations, he exhibited a notable shift towards greater tolerance, a quality also evident in his student Motahhari. This illustrates the importance of employing a philosophical lens in comparative religion, as opposed to a sociological one, in order to circumvent the pitfalls associated with the interpretation of religious symbols.

In his analysis of religious pluralism, John Hick employs a cross-cultural methodology. This approach posits the existence of a single, infinite deity, the source of all religious experiences and beliefs. Accordingly, Hick maintains that no religion has grounds to claim superiority and condemn others as erroneous. It is not feasible that the most comprehensive or least comprehensive representation of God is presented in disparate religious traditions. In his work, On Grading Religions, Hick assesses these religions as complete (total) traditions rather than viewing them as particular religious phenomena and ultimately unrealistic works. Hick perceives the tradition of religious differences as equally conducive to fostering a shift from self-centredness to reality-centredness in humans. Hick, in this case, analyses the criteria and evaluative approaches that might assist in

assessing religious culture in a comprehensive and integrated manner.[28]

Hick identifies three criteria that inform the acceptance of God's intermediary in the establishment of a religious tradition. The initial criterion is a moral one, based on a universal moral order, which prompts the following question: The second criterion concerns the mediator's capacity to articulate a novel moral vision that motivates human adherence. This criterion assesses whether the mediator's teachings offer a superior moral framework and whether they provide a compelling rationale for following them.

Hick puts forth a rational evaluation of cognition, elements of the theory of religious traditions, and a moral evaluation of the cultural-historical actualisation of religious beliefs. However, Stenger asserts that both rational and moral evaluations yield positive and negative conclusions, which are more robust and weaker, respectively, and exemplify each tradition. One might also inquire whether the essential vision of religion remains "soteriologically effective" or transformative. However, Stenger maintains that this final proof is eschatological.

Indeed, as Stenger judges, Hick does not find sufficient criteria for an adequate comparison and a sound assessment of the religious tradition. Even so, according to Stenger, the criteria made by Hick can be applied to extraordinary religious phenomena and, therefore, should be considered in issues related to the issue of assessing religious truth. Hick says that all religions have taken up demand for a single transformation of self: from Self-Centredness to Reality-Centredness. In some religious ways, one has to change ego concerns by adopting a new relationship with God. Only then can the self stop being ego and find authentic freedom connected to nature, history, and the other. Not all religious enlightenment may be different expressions of the same religious position. Plurality among religions does not reduce the claim that they all exhibit the same enlightenment or practice the same freedoms.[29]

In his study of social phenomena, Brian Fay employs a multicultural approach. Fay has identified and outlined twelve distinct

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[28] Hick, "Religious Pluralism."

[29] Mary Ann Stenger, "Mediating Relativism and Absolutism in Tillich's and Hick's Theories of Religious Truth," in *Religious Pluralism and the Modern World: An Ongoing Engagement with John Hick*, ed. Sharada Sugirtharajah (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2012), 164–75, https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230360136_13.

multicultural approaches within the field of social science philosophy. This approach aims to reconcile disparate perspectives within the social sciences in a comprehensive and pluralistic manner, transcending the limitations of conventional boundaries and subjectivism. In the field of social science philosophy, a dominant dualistic pattern can be observed. This pattern is related to the question of whether... The question thus arises as to whether one should choose one option or the other, with one of them being considered the correct choice. Fay attempts to circumvent the destructive dualism that pervades many philosophical traditions, including the dichotomies of self versus other, subjectivism versus objectivism, atomism versus holism, our culture versus their culture, insider versus outsider, and similarity versus difference. Fay elucidates the distinction between "understanding others" and "criticizing others," emphasizing that these two processes are not synonymous. Social science, he posits, is concerned with understanding the nuances of human experience, rather than with passing judgment on it.[30]

From the twelve multicultural philosophy theses developed by Fay, four points are identified as being particularly relevant for understanding religious pluralism. These are: first, being aware of dichotomies, avoiding evil dualism, and thinking dialectically. As Fay proposes, it is imperative to transcend the limitations of conflicting categories. These categories or dichotomies must be addressed openly and subjected to dialectical analysis. Secondly, it is imperative not to regard other individuals as "the other." Indeed, as Fay asserts, all personal identities are dialogical. It is impossible to achieve self-understanding without understanding others, and the knowledge of others serves to limit the range of our self-awareness. Thirdly, it is imperative to transcend the mistake of choosing between universalism and particularism, assimilation and separation. It would be beneficial to utilise the differences between cultures by learning from one another and deriving mutual benefit. Fourthly, it is important to adopt a process-oriented mindset, rather than a product-oriented one. If religious individuals can adopt a multicultural approach to interacting, it will prevent dangerous contradictions and conflicts from emerging due to the existence of religion and the differences between religions.

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[30] Brian Fay, *Contemporary Philosophy of Social Science: A Multicultural Approach* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996).

In considering the issue of understanding and the role of religion, it is possible to adopt a dual perspective. This aspect pertains to the function of religion in establishing the conceptual framework that humans employ in moral interpretation of their experiences, including both difficulties and successes, as well as the historical trajectory of their society, both in the past and in the present. This understanding of the role of religion can be found in the sacred sources of Semitic religions. In Islam, for instance, the Qur'an not only requires its adherents to engage in ceremonial rituals that can provide emotional and spiritual solace but also permits the pursuit of intellectual interpretation. This function of Islam is evident in nearly every ritual act, which typically conveys a moral message. Nevertheless, the significance of this moral message, or the "price" of worship in Islam, is determined by the extent to which humans are able to internalise and act upon the moral message. If worship does not enhance an individual's morale, it is deemed futile. Consequently, when an act prohibited by *fiqh* is committed during worship, the consequence is the implementation of the moral message itself. For instance, during the fasting month, a husband and wife engage in sexual intercourse during the day. The *kifarat* (refined) is to provide sustenance to sixty impoverished individuals, as one of the moral messages of fasting is to address the needs of those in need in their vicinity.

The cognitive aspects of the role of religion, as illustrated in this example, are also evident in Christianity. The narrative about Ayub in the Bible, or the Prophet Ayyub in the Qur'an, serves to illustrate a number of human issues that are imbued with profound moral teachings. Job's dedication to social and religious obligations did not necessarily result in personal fulfilment. Conversely, this resulted in him undergoing a series of trials characterised by suffering. Nevertheless, Job's commitment to upholding the sacred values espoused in God's commandments enabled him to persevere through this suffering and to derive meaning from his life experiences. Therefore, when Job requested information from God regarding the circumstances that had befallen him, it was not his personal situation that was of primary concern, but rather the collective misfortune that had befallen his people. The religious message reflected in the story about Job is that the inequality of luck and misfortune for humans cannot be explained in terms of good and bad behaviour alone; it

must also be seen in terms of God's judgments. This exemplifies one of the fundamental functions of religion, namely "giving moral meaning to human experiences." The moral meaning here is analogous to the assertion made by Paul B. Horton and Chester L. Hunt that all significant religions emphasise virtues such as honesty and love of neighbour. Virtues of this nature are essential to the expected behaviour of human society, and religion plays a role in encouraging people to take such virtue seriously.[31]

The meaning of religion, as illustrated in the teachings of Islam and Christianity, is a matter of the individual's experience of religion. The same issue can also be observed at the societal level. Problems such as social injustice, economic inequality, and power imbalances are pervasive in human society. This phenomenon has the potential to give rise to moral interpretations of the existing social order. In certain circumstances, the divergence in interpretations among members of society can give rise to social conflicts.

In light of this understanding, the question of the meaning of religion in the context of social experience becomes a more distinctive and intricate matter than that of the individual. If a society can comprehend the function of religion in facilitating the appropriate moral interpretation of its lived experiences, then religion will persist in accordance with its designated role. Conversely, if such interpretations are misguided, religion can become a source of social conflict. If religion contributes to peace, religious adherents must learn to abandon absolutism and accept pluralism, as Nurcholish Madjid has observed. While we may view religion as absolute, it is important to remember that our understanding of it, both personal and collective, is relative. Concrete instructions for fostering brotherhood, as Nurcholish has proposed, include ensuring that a group of people of faith does not look down on or belittle other people and religions.[32]

Bambang Sugiharto identifies three key challenges facing religion in the contemporary era. The first is the disintegration and moral degradation of religious communities. The second is the issue

[31] P. B. Horton and C. L. Hunt, *Sociology* (New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1964).
[32] Nurcholish Madjid, "Beberapa Renungan Tentang Kehidupan Keagamaan Untuk Generasi Mendatang," *Dalam Jurnal Ulumul Qur'an* 4, no. 1 (1993). Fatonah Dzakie, "Meluruskan Pemahaman Pluralisme Dan Pluralisme Agama Di Indonesia," *Al-Adyan: Jurnal Studi Lintas Agama* 9, no. 1 (August 29, 2017): 79–94, https://doi.org/10.24042/ajsla.v9i1.1408.

of pluralism and exclusivism.[33] The third is the prevalence of injustice. These three problems are challenging to overcome for a number of reasons, including an overly assertive stance towards followers of other religions, a misinterpretation of the concept of God's absoluteness, and the influence of external interests, such as politics and economics, on religious matters. However, these challenges can be addressed if the aforementioned factors can be resolved.

Armahedi Azhar posits that five maladies afflict those engaged in religious activism: absolutism, exclusivism, fanaticism, extremism, and aggressiveness. Absolutism may be defined as intellectual arrogance, exclusivism as social arrogance, bigotry as emotional arrogance, extremism as excess and aggressiveness as physical excess.[34] In the context of religious pluralism in Indonesia, Victor I. Tanja put forth the proposition of a reorientation of missions and da'wah. Tanja posits that the objective of mission and da'wah is not merely to increase the quantity of adherents, but rather to cultivate individuals who are imbued with a profound understanding of their faith, unwavering conviction, and unparalleled dedication.[35] In alignment with Tanja's perspective, Jufri underscored that the religious tensions that have emerged are largely attributable to the individuals engaged in da'wah (da'i, preacher, missionary) who are driven by a profound devotion to their religion but lack a comprehensive understanding of its tenets. Consequently, their discourse tends to be propagandistic and provocative in nature.[36]

It is evident that the recent history of inter-communal conflict renders the assumption of a straightforward return to dialogue an untenable proposition. The reality is that a multitude of factors, including economic, legal and political considerations, interweave with the dialogue process, rendering it a complex and multifaceted endeavour. It is imperative that religious leaders prioritise religious

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[33] Bambang Sugiharto, "Iman Tanpa Nalar, Bunuh Diri Nalar Tanpa Iman, Delusi," *Arete: Jurnal Filsafat* 1, no. 2 (March 11, 2013), https://doi.org/10.33508/arete.v1i2.171.

[34] Armahedi Mahzar, *Revolusi Integralisme Islam, Merumuskan Paradigma Sains Dan Teknologi* (Jakarta: Mizan, 2004).

[35] Victor Immanuel Tanja, *Pluralisme Agama Dan Problema Sosial: Diskursus Teologi Tentang Isu-Isu Kontemporer*, trans. M Solihat (Pustaka Cidesindo, 1997).

[36] Andi Jufri, "Islam dan Pluralitas Agama (Studi Analisis tentang Model Pendekatan dalam Dialog Antar Umat Beragama di Indonesia)," *Jurnal Ilmiah AL-Jauhari: Jurnal Studi Islam dan Interdisipliner* 4, no. 2 (December 23, 2019): 428–51, https://doi.org/10.30603/jiaj.v4i2.959.

missions related to spirituality and humanitarian issues (justice, honesty, and hospitality) at this pivotal moment in history. To foster religious harmony in this pluralistic world, it is essential to understand each religion's teachings in their entirety.

Conclusion

The existence of pluralism is a historical fact that cannot be denied by society, including the people of Kedungrejo. It represents a challenge faced by world religions in the contemporary era. In order to effectively address the challenges of pluralism, it is essential to adopt a pluralistic understanding of religion. It is imperative that each religion be evaluated as a complete tradition, rather than as a specific religious phenomenon. The tradition of religious differences should be regarded as a catalyst for change, facilitating a shift from a self-centred to a reality-centred perspective. All religions tend to make absolutist claims, whether Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, or Judaism. The particularistic-subjective claims of monotheistic adherents will inevitably give rise to conflicts between religious groups. These conflicts are likely to intensify when multiple strong and particularistic religious organisations coexist. It is important to recognise that no religion possesses a singular essence. There are numerous interpretations of the divine, including God, Emptiness, Suchness, the One, Nature, and the Many. While differences between religions are evident at the exoterric level, there is a considerable degree of common ground at the esoterric level.

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