

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

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Abstract: This study is to determine and identify the implementation of the concept of understanding tolerance in the plurality of people of Kedungrejo Village, Rowokangkung District, Lumajang Regency. The village community is a society with a very high level of plurality; various religious cultures and feelings exist in the village. However, harmony and mutual respect are evident in everyday life. Differences are not a reason for the village community to be hostile to each other, but differences are considered wealth to be grateful for. So, in some ways, the village community carries out activities and life together regardless of the differences that exist. The approach used in this study is qualitative. The paradigm is phenomenological or interpretive. A qualitative approach is a paradigm of Natural Research, which is to find a theory by pulling it from the beginning of nature, that is, from data that comes from the real world. The researchers took the research location in Kedungrejo Village, Rowokangkung district, Lumajang Regency. The results of this study show that all religions tend to have claims of absolutism, whether Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, or Judaism. Claims of monotheism that are particularist-subjective will impact inter-religious conflict, and the competition will be heightened if several strong and particularistic religious organizations coexist.

Keywords: Plurality, Religious Cultures, Tolerance.

Introduction

Pluralism is one of the main characteristics of reality.¹ Despite a certain generality, the elements have various characteristics, due to which each element is simultaneously unique. As part of reality, human life is also characterized by plurality. The term “human” itself is a categorical name for individual organisms that share specific common characteristics, enabling them to be classified as one species distinct from the species of other organisms. Apart from being at the species level, pluralism also marks human life at the sub-species level, such as race, gender, sexual orientation, belief, ethnicity, nation, etc. At the species level, groupings at the sub-species level are based on the shared characteristics of many individual organisms. One group can be classified as a race that is different from other races, and so on.

However, the human individual, as the most basic unit that is the subject of classification at the species and sub-species level, is unique to one another. On the other hand, because these individual units also associate to meet their individual needs, it requires the willingness of each unit to share living space in differences peacefully. *Pluralism* is a paradigm relevant to the human need to share living space amidst differences. This paradigm demands acceptance of pluralism as a human fact, operationalized in a tolerant attitude towards differences.² This paradigm is increasingly relevant when human society, from time to time, is increasingly characterized by a variety of characteristics that are not only physical but also mental, not merely innate but also formation.

What is then essential to pay attention to is on what foundation this tolerance must be built. Issues such as whether we must tolerate intolerance or whether all kinds of differences must be respected indicate the need for an ethical foundation for the paradigm of pluralism itself.³ However, the

¹ Sung Min Kim, J. B. Banawiratma, and Dicky Sofjan, “Religious Pluralism Discourse in Public Sphere of Indonesia: A Critical Application of Communicative Action Theory to Inter-Religious Dialogue,” *Religio Jurnal Studi Agama-Agama* 10, no. 2 (September 1, 2020): 158–88, <https://doi.org/10.15642/religio.v10i2.1307>. Kunawi Basyir, “The Religious Pluralism Movement in Indonesia,” in *Cultural Heritage and Contemporary Change Series IIIA, East Asian Philosophical Studies*, vol. 39 (Washington, D.C.: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2022), 183–96, <http://repository.uinsa.ac.id/id/eprint/2676/>. Nurman, Yusriadi Yusriadi, and Sufian Hamim, “Development of Pluralism Education in Indonesia: A Qualitative Study,” *Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Studies* 9, no. 3 (2022): 106–20.

² Muhammad Ikhza Helmy Nugroho and Sugeng Bayu Wahyono, “Correlation Between The Attitude Of Religious Tolerance Educators With Religious Intolerance Of Learners,” *AL-ISHLAH: Jurnal Pendidikan* 15, no. 1 (January 4, 2023): 653–64, <https://doi.org/10.35445/alishlah.v15i1.2350>.

³ 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,”

increasingly complex character of pluralism today is closely related to modernization. One of the salient features of modernization is the rise of individualism, the individual human awareness of his unique personality, which cannot be reduced entirely to “collectivity” or “generality.”

In the modern era, differences in human life 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 because, at an underlying level all classifications, individual human units are unique to each other. A person, for example, because he has specific characteristics in common with many other people, may be classified as a follower of a particular religion that can be distinguished from people who, because of their common characteristics, are classified as adherents of other religions. However, the personality of a religious adherent makes it have a meaning that will be somewhat different even with fellow adherents.

A similar situation holds in race, gender, ethnicity, nationality, and other sub-species groups, where individuals construct the meaning of their group affiliation differently. The pluralism paradigm based on communitarian ethics,⁴ in which respect for differences stops at the level of relations between different groups, needs to be revised for 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 has a diversity of ethnic religions, races, and languages. According to Tempo, Indonesia has 1,128 spread across 17 thousand islands or 633 major ethnic groups. And 250 religions and beliefs in Indonesia. Meanwhile, there are 718 local languages in Indonesia. Several cases of conflict occurred; for example, the *Sampit* Case occurred in 2001, which killed around 469 people and lasted ten days; this was more of a conflict triggered by ethnicity and culture, the Maluku conflict which killed 8-9 thousand people as well as several churches and mosques burned, and houses were also burned and religious issues triggered this conflict. The 1998 conflict, which was affected by the reforms, was the change from the New Order to the reform era, in which there was a loss of life, several houses were burned, cars and other infrastructure were damaged, and political issues

triggered this conflict. As well as several other conflicts, such as Ambon, West Nusa Tenggara, Situbondo, Lampung, and Java.

In the context of Kedungrejo Village, the community lifestyle is very religious but inclusive. The community is heterogeneous but has an attitude of tolerance, marked by joint social activities but still maintains the normative boundaries of each religion and group (agree in disagreement). To see this phenomenon, the study of John Galtung's theory states that the problem of peace is the same as a health problem, so it requires a diagnosis-prognosis-therapy that can be applied.⁵ Abed-Kotob considers that the issue of plurality is an issue of Islamic brotherhood with the basic assumption and understanding that Islam is universal so that the spirit of building brotherhood, openness in social life, and carrying out various forms of cooperation, is built as wide as possible for Muslims and non-Muslims alike.⁶

The interpretation of revealed truth becomes religious truth, believed by its adherents to be absolute, absolute, essential, transcendental truth, and gives rise to conservative, exclusive, and fanatical attitudes whose excesses deny the truth of others that only the religion one adheres to is the best, most accurate and most accepted in the sight of God, and the highest degree of truth compared to other religions. Furthermore, this belief raises the perception that truth exists only in his own beliefs and does not recognize the truth that others believe in having a potential conflict.

For example, in several conflict countries, even though it eventually led to an understanding, such as in Lebanon, Muslims were massacred to the ground, despite social contracts between Shiite Muslims, Sunni Muslims, Maronite Christians, Drusus, so that constitutions were created to shape an experience in that country. Conflicts lead to a search for solutions, one of which is dialogue. However, according to Shihab, actors in dialogue must have important commitments, namely, first, tolerance and second, pluralism.⁷ Without these two commitments, dialogue actors will not find mutual understanding. Moderate religious understanding by mainstreaming religious moderation raises interesting studies to study. This phenomenon is undoubtedly exciting and urgent to study and research. This study raises questions about the concept of understanding tolerance in the plurality of village communities.

⁵ Charles Webel and Johan Galtung, *Handbook of Peace and Conflict Studies*, 1st ed. (London: Routledge, 2007).

⁶ 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>.

⁷ M. Quraish Shihab, *SUNNAH-SYIAH Bergandengan Tangan? Mungkinkah!* (Jakarta: Lentera Hati, 2022).

The approach used in this study is qualitative. The paradigm is phenomenological or interpretive. A qualitative approach is a paradigm of Natural Research,⁸ which is to find a theory by pulling it from the beginning of nature, that is, from data that comes from the real world. The researchers took the research location in Kedungrejo Village, Rowokangkung District, Lumajang Regency. The technique determining the subjects/informants in this study used the purposive sampling technique to assess the representation of data to be processed using the snowball sampling technique, which is done in a chain; the method of determining the sample number is small, then enlarged like a snowball that is rolling farther and farther the bigger. So, when the researcher interviewed an informant, they first selected one or two people. Still, because this first-person data is considered incomplete, the researcher looked for other informants who were seen to know better and could complement the previous data the person had given. The data analysis Model used in this study is the Miles and Huberman Model Analysis.⁹

Pluralism in Religion: a Necessity

The study of religious pluralism must be more widely understood and contain ambiguous meanings. Etymologically, religious pluralism contains two words, pluralism, and religion. For this reason, the author will discuss both sequentially, starting from the notions of pluralism, religion, and religious pluralism. Plural means plural, plural, or many. In the Contemporary Indonesian Dictionary, it means plural nature or condition. This pluralism occurs in social and political systems in society, as written in the Big Indonesian Dictionary, that pluralism means a condition of a pluralistic society (concerning its social and political system).

Another understanding of pluralism, apart from being a condition, pluralism can also mean a principle of life in society. Pluralism has two dimensions of meaning, namely, a). existence in one society of many groups that belong to different races or have different religious beliefs, b). the principle that these different groups can live together peacefully in one society. From the understanding in point b, pluralism is more appropriate to use in the sense of living together in difference, as the suffix *ism* means the understanding or principle of community life. Apart from the above

⁸ 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>.

⁹ 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>.

understanding, the author cites several opinions of figures discussing pluralism. So, pluralism must be understood as affinity.¹⁰

Plurality in all its forms is a natural thing that cannot be avoided. It reflects a given social reality or *sunnatullah*, which describes how humans are indeed created by Him in diversity and difference between one another so that there will not be a single power that can deny and try to get rid of reality.¹¹ In the recent period, the history of the problem of plurality has become even more complicated compared to the past because, at that time, the religious community was in places like camps, so conflicts arising from outside were isolated. On the other hand, nowadays, the problem of plurality is increasingly challenging because external influences are felt to be getting stronger and harder to avoid. According to Harold R. Isaacs, a group is an identity whose existence changes dynamically; lives grow, change, and progress rapidly, wither under the increase in the group's vitality, or even disappear.¹²

The problem of pluralism is not only a religious problem but also a social problem that exists outside of religion because this problem is an unavoidable social reality, so it becomes a universal humanitarian problem; therefore, Mukti Ali, a pioneer of religious dialogue, offers several forms of religious dialogue, namely life dialogue, dialogue in social activities, dialogue for communication of religious experience, dialogue for collective prayer, and dialogue for theological discussion.¹³ The reasons why Mukti Ali suggested the dialogue are religious pluralism is a reality, a strong desire to contact other people, dialogue helps to grow self-confidence when meeting other religions, increase cooperation in mutual respect, justice, and friendship, mankind has only one God, Man is *Sabt*, Theological reasons that religions can take a positive attitude towards other religions, Dialogue is an act of religion.

Alwi Shihab provides limitations regarding pluralism: first, pluralism does not merely refer to the fact that there is pluralism but active involvement in that pluralism. Second, pluralism is different from cosmopolitanism, which is merely being in the same place, but there needs to be cooperation. Third, the concept of pluralism cannot be equated with relativism which says that the truth depends on the area in which one is

¹⁰ 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>.

¹¹ 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.

¹² Harold R. Isaacs, "Group Identity and Political Change: The Role of Color and Physical Characteristics," *Daedalus* 96, no. 2 (1967): 353–75.

¹³ A. Mukti Ali, *Ilmu Perbandingan Agama Di Indonesia* (Jakarta: Mizan, 1998).

located. Fourth, pluralism is not syncretism which creates something new from two or more elements.¹⁴

These differences cause divisions in society, so it is not surprising that pluralism is understood as one of the factors causing social conflicts, both because of narrow religious interests and the cultural supremacy of certain groups. Awareness efforts from all parties are felt to be very urgent, and a strong attitude of tolerance is the hallmark of the religious life of the Indonesian nation. Tolerance is expected to stem all forms of destructiveness caused by the plurality of religious communities. Religion contains the essence of a comprehensive guide to living in peace, including a life full of tolerance in a pluralistic life. Islam recognizes the life of pluralism and respects religions other than Islam.

To see the phenomenon of tolerance in plurality, theoretical studies are made using the theory of Johan Galtung, which states that the process of peace and tolerance is built on four things, namely culture.¹⁵ Historically, during the colonial period, Muslim communities in the archipelago felt threatened by colonial political policies that protected the spread of Christianity. As a result, until the early post-independence period, Muslim suspicions towards Christians and Catholics quickly formed. However, the decision of the founders of the Republic of Indonesia, who also consisted of Islamic religious leaders, to establish Pancasila as the foundation of the state can be considered a severe effort to seek a state system that guarantees religious harmony and pluralism.

According to Abu Rabi', although Islam has been a valuable force in fostering an ethos of religious pluralism since Indonesia's independence, the potential to become a social movement that goes backward with its anti-Christian sentiment remains wide open. Various tendencies and patterns of Islamic thought that have emerged recently illustrate the different positions of Islam in dealing with other religious communities. Therefore, according to Rabi', growing political-religious aspirations will continue to open opportunities for the growth of Islamic social movements, which find it difficult to uphold the values of tolerance, openness, and moderation. Moreover, this challenge is becoming increasingly evident as post-modern religious discourse develops.¹⁶

As is well known, in the context of fostering and maintaining inter-religious harmony in Indonesia, the government has sought a way out

¹⁴ Alwi Shihab, "Christian—Muslim Relations into the Twenty-First Century," in *Islam and Other Religions* (London: Routledge, 2006).

¹⁵ Webel and Galtung, *Handbook of Peace and Conflict Studies*.

¹⁶ 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>.

through various methods and efforts, including by holding dialogues between religious leaders and functioning religious institutions as a medium for conveying ideas and thoughts. One of the religious institutions that have been relied upon in channeling government programs is religious figures. These religious figures have a great position and influence in their society because they have several advantages in knowledge, position, heredity, etc. Religious figures are informal leaders in their communities, and generally, they are not appointed by the government. However, they are appointed with the will and approval of the local community.

The Concept of Understanding Tolerance in the Plurality of Village Communities

Kedungrejo Village, as the setting of this research, can be used as a mirror in looking at the reality of the plurality of modern society; community harmony is evident in natural diversity. The people of Kedungrejo Village do not seem bothered by the differences that surround them. The reflection of differences in political, economic, cultural, and even religious views does not mean that it is an obstacle to achieving harmony in society. Several religions exist in society, including Islam, Christianity, Protestantism, and even Hindu-Buddhist, and the beliefs that are adhered to by the community.

One thing that characterizes the world today is religious pluralism, said Coward. *Pluralism* is a phenomenon that cannot be avoided. Humans live in pluralism and are part of it, either passively or actively, including in matters of religion. *Religious pluralism* is a particular challenge faced by world religions today. Furthermore, as Coward observes, every religion emerges in a pluralistic environment from a religious point of view and forms itself as a response to this pluralism.¹⁷ Suppose religious adherents need to understand it correctly and wisely. In that case, religious pluralism will impact not only conflicts between religious communities but also social conflict and national disintegration.

According to Simon, none of the world's religions has a single essence, no single content of enlightenment or revelation, and no single way of emancipation or liberation built into all that plurality.¹⁸ There are different interpretations of God himself: God, Emptiness, Suchness, the One, Nature, and the Many. There is a difference in understanding what God reveals about God and us in our relationship regarding harmony and disharmony with God. There are different interpretations of what method we should follow to

¹⁷ Harold G. Coward, *Pluralism in the World Religions: A Short Introduction* (Oneworld Publications, 2000).

¹⁸ Benjamin Simon, "Interreligious Dialogue and Convergent Hermeneutics," *The Ecumenical Review* 73, no. 5 (2021): 879–91, <https://doi.org/10.1111/erev.12667>.

change (our outlook) from fatally self-focused to freely God-centered. However, such religious discourses and methods can sometimes complement each other and, to a certain extent, complement some aspects that still need to be advanced from the others. However, at the same time, they can also interfere with and obliterate one another.

According to Hick, religious pluralism implies recognizing a common foundation for all varieties of religious pursuits and the convergence of world religions.¹⁹ For others, religious pluralism implies mutual respect between various worldviews (worldview) and fully acknowledges these differences. If the former emphasizes individual religious freedom, the latter emphasizes the recognition of denominations as unique answerers. Hick is true, as Soroush says, a theologian who defends pluralism and inclusivism.²⁰

However, why are adherents of monotheistic religions inherent in intolerance and violence? According to Rodney Stark, the claims of adherents of monotheism that are particularistic-subjective - that the religion they embrace is the only true one, that believes in only one God, the One True God - triggers many conflicts. Stark highlighted the subjectivism of adherents of monotheistic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) who looked down on other religions.²¹ Through his research, Stark concluded that religious differences in all societies are rooted in social niches, groups of people who share preferences related to religious intensity. When several strong particularistic religions threaten one another, the conflict will be maximized, 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 mutual understanding between one person and another as fellow members of the village community. There is a harmonious dialogue between members of the Kedungrejo village community. This dialogue occurs to accommodate every component of society with mutual respect. The forum for dialogue occurs in several activities carried out by the community, both in terms of religious rites and culture. One of the forms of members of the *Reog* cultural art community is dominated by a variety of Muslim and Christian youths.

¹⁹ John Hick, "Religious Pluralism," in *Routledge Companion to Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Chad Meister and Paul Copan (London: Routledge, 2008).

²⁰ Abdulkarim Soroush, *The Expansion of Prophetic Experience: Essays on Historicity, Contingency and Plurality in Religion* (BRILL, 2008).

²¹ Rodney Stark, *For the Glory of God: How Monotheism Led to Reformations, Science, Witch-Hunts, and the End of Slavery* (Princeton University Press, 2004).

In the village of Kedungrejo, *Musrembangdes* are often carried out as a forum for communication between community members, which the village administration carries out. More globally to accommodate relations between religions at the international level, in 1958, in Tokyo, an international congress was held by The International Association for The History of Religion, at which Congress Friedrich Heiler from Marburg explained that it gave information about the unity of all religions is one of the essential tasks of the science of religion. According to him, people who recognize the unity of religion must hold it seriously with tolerance in word and deed.

Here Heiler sees how close the religions are to one another; by comparing their structure, beliefs, and practices, it is brought to a transcendent that transcends all but remains immanent in the human heart. Therefore, the study of comparative religion is the best deterrent against exclusivism because it teaches love; where there is love, there is unity in the soul. At the end of his speech, Heiler compared the importance of comparative religion with what Helmholtz, the inventor of glasses, had done to help millions of people with eye problems. This is also true for the scientific study of religion; its quest for truth has significant consequences for the functional relationship between religions and one another.²²

Moreover, it does not rule out the possibility that there have not been significant results from the dialogue approach in resolving inter-religious conflicts so far because the approach taken is still top-down, not using a bottom-up dialogue model so that it can be used as material for comparison and evaluation of the implementation of harmony dialogues in future. In carrying out dialogue with other religions, whatever form it takes, mutual openness, mutual respect, and a willingness to listen to others are required. These attitudes are needed to find common ground (*kalimatun sawa*) between various religions because each has unique and complex characteristics.

In the case of dialogue between Islam and Christianity, according to Hassan Hanafi, both have two rich “ideal characteristics” to be compared. They can then lead to a common platform. Dialogue needs to be carried out by prioritizing the principle of humanism because Islam and Christianity have a cosmopolitan view of human beings, making it easier to compare two dimensions: anthropological and theological. According to Hanafi, God and man are the keywords for the emergence of unity and division between modern culture and traditional culture or between Christians and Muslims in the East.²³

²² Gerrie Lubbe, “The Study of Religion and Inter-Faith Dialogue,” *Religion in Southern Africa* 7, no. 2 (1986): 27–37.

²³ 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).

There are several reasons for doubt as Muslims respond to this religious dialogue. This dialogue movement is purely a Western Christian initiative, and Muslims feel like guests, have no agenda, and feel little can be achieved from this dialogue. Their belief that the Christian mission is an additional agenda to colonialism which Christians often carry out, adds distrust of the Christian agenda, and Muslims fear the dialogue as a hidden agenda of evangelism agenda. This distrust is compounded by the global injustice of the West, particularly in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. According to Hans Kung, the critical thing to note in this dialogue is that every religious person must prove their faith. Despite all the differences, according to Kung, Christians, and Muslims must be responsible to God and serve human society with full respect for one another.²⁴

Seyyed Hossein Nasr offers religious studies with *Philosophia perennis* because he sees that many religious studies in the West need to understand the reality of religion as religion and sacred forms as a divine reality. Something missing in the West in the study of religion is the knowledge that can view religion fairly, namely by using the perennial wisdom in the “heart” of all religious traditions. *Philosophia perennis* is the knowledge in the “heart” of religion, which can explain the meaning of religious rites, doctrines, and symbols. *Philosophia perennis* also provides the key to understanding the importance of religious plurality and a method for entering into other religious worlds without reducing our significance or eliminating our commitment to the world of religions we study. *Philosophia perennis* will examine religion from all its aspects; God and man, revelation and sacred art, symbols and images, religious rites and laws, mysticism and social ethics, metaphysics, cosmology, and theology.²⁵

For the sake of the success of inter-religious or inter-faith dialogue, understanding other religions is not only needed by religious elites. However, it must reach the lowest strata of society or ordinary people who rub shoulders directly with adherents of other religions in everyday life. The science of comparative religion and understanding other people’s religions is a prerequisite for conducting interreligious dialogue because it is only possible to carry out a dialogue with this. 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.

Dialogue between faithful religious adherents can lead to understanding and enlightenment for the people in the container of interfaith

²⁴ 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>.

²⁵ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, “The Significance of Comparative Philosophy for the Study of Islamic Philosophy,” *Studies in Comparative Religion* 7, no. 4 (1973).

harmony. This dialogue requires mutual openness between religious adherents who are in dialogue. Assuming that the religion he embraces is the most valid is not a wrong assumption; he even believes that the religion he embraces is the most actual religion. Disaster will occur if a person believes that the religion he embraces is the most valid, and then thinks that other people must follow him to embrace the one he embraces.

According to Azyumardi Azra, there are several models of inter-religious dialogue (tribology), namely: First, parliamentary dialogue, namely dialogue involving hundreds of participants, such as the World's Parliament of Religions dialogue in 1873 in Chicago, and dialogues which were organized by the World Conference on Religion and Peace (WCRP) in the 1980s and 1990s. Second is institutional dialogue (Institutional Dialogue), namely dialogue between institutional representatives of various religious organizations. This institutional dialogue is often carried out to discuss pressing problems faced by people of different religions.

Dialogue like this usually involves government-recognized religious assemblies such as the Indonesian Ulama Council (MUI), the Indonesian Church Association (PGI), the Indonesian Bishops' Conference (KWI), Parisada Hindu Dharma, and the Indonesian Buddhist Trusteeship (WALUBI). Third, theological dialogue. This dialogue includes regular meetings or not to discuss theological and philosophical issues. Theological dialogues are generally held by intellectual circles or organizations formed to develop interfaith dialogue, such as interfaith, paramadina, LKiS, LP3M, MADIA, and others. Fourth, dialogue in society (dialogue in the community), dialogue in life (dialogue of life), dialogue like this generally concentrates on solving "practical and actual things" in life that are of common concern to the nation and state. Dialogues in this category are usually held by study groups and NGOs or NGOs—fifth, spiritual dialogue, namely dialogue that aims to enrich and deepen spiritual life between various religions.²⁶

On the Christian side, according to Kate Zebiri, openness towards other religions has given rise to interfaith movements, which in the last decade have been expressed in organized dialogue. The Vatican established a secretariat for non-Christian religions (Pacifi Council for Interreligious Dialogue-PCID) in 1964, which has the mission of promoting the study of other religious traditions and sponsoring interfaith dialogue. Vatican II (1962-5) has also issued documents containing respect for Muslims because they worship One God, the Most Living, Eternal, Compassionate, and

²⁶ A. Azra, *Konteks Berteologi Di Indonesia: Pengalaman Islam* (Jakarta: Paramadina, 1999).

Mighty. They also submit wholeheartedly to God's destiny, as did Abraham, the backbone of the Islamic faith. Although they do not recognize Jesus as God, they admit him as a prophet. They also honor Maryam, the holy Mother of Jesus. They also look forward to the Day of Judgment.²⁷

The actual praxis of religious dialogue is a dialogue that merges with reality and an unjust social order with a critical attitude because every religion has good values and the mission of upholding morality.²⁸ Mudji Sutrisno firmly said that it is not enough to build interreligious dialogue only with rational logic dialogues; psychological logic is also needed. So the endeavor to dialogue theology of harmony must also be accompanied by psychological liquefactions, such as the mutual suspicion that has always arisen.²⁹ Indeed, as also revealed by Kautsar Azhari, the obstacle to dialogue between religious communities is a matter of exclusivism. Exclusivism will continue trying to get other people to follow their religion by assuming that other religions are wrong and unsafe (truth claims).³⁰

Thus, as long as the above attitude has not been dissolved, dialogue toward noble religious ideals will be challenging. So do not worry about dialogue, because what you want to achieve in dialogue, said Victor I. Tanja is not a matter of compromise of faith, but how our religious morals can be contributed to others. Moreover, as Shihab emphasized, we do not want to act in the name of religious teachings and then sacrifice religious harmony. Moreover, at the same time, we do not want to uphold religious harmony at the expense of religion. Islam longs for harmony, but not for the sake of harmony; our religion is insulted.

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 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,

²⁷ Kate Zebiri, *Muslims and Christians Face to Face* (Simon and Schuster, 2014).

²⁸ 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.

²⁹ Mudji Sutrisno, *Dialog Kritis Dan Identitas Agama* (Jakarta: Mizan, 1994).

³⁰ Kautsar Azhari, *Eksklusivisme Dalam Agama Yahudi* (Jakarta: UIN Syarif Hidayatullah, 2004), <https://repository.uinjkt.ac.id/dspace/handle/123456789/18781>.

Thalchah Hasan, fostering religious harmony that has existed so far is suspected to be still structurally and politically oriented.³¹

In carrying out dialogue with other religions, whatever form it takes, mutual openness, mutual respect, and a willingness to listen to others are required. These attitudes are needed to find common ground (*kalimatun sawa*) between various religions because each has unique and complex characteristics. Huston Smith, in his introduction, expressed Schuon's thesis regarding the relationship between religions, that everything has both similarities and differences, as well as religion. The religions in this world are called "religions" because each has something in common.³²

The similarities or meeting points between these religions are at the level of esotericism, while at the level of exotericism, the religions appear to be different. Therefore, to find common ground between religions, it is necessary to have an esoteric study of religion. According to Raimundo Panikkar, to understand other people's religions comprehensively, we must understand their religion (religious books) through their original language. We cannot ignore the differences within each religion to conclude that "all must become one." According to him, each religion reflects, justifies, adds to, and opposes the others.

Pluralism and Interreligious Dialogue: Several Approaches by Village Communities

It must be admitted that religions, aside from having absolutism claims, also have inclusivism. In this context, there is an interesting case that was experienced by the Prophet Muhammad, namely when the polytheists insisted on rejecting Islamic teachings for the sake of mutual benefit, 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."

According to the interpretation of Quraish Shihab, when absolutism is brought outside (into the real world), the Prophet is not ordered to state what was inside (beliefs about the absoluteness of the religion), but quite the opposite. That is why, according to Quraish Shihab, one of the weaknesses of humans is their passionate enthusiasm, so some of them act more than God, for example, wanting all humans to have one opinion and become one sect and one religion. This passionate passion drives them to force their total views to be adhered to by others.

³¹ 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>.

³² Frithjof Schuon, *The Transcendent Unity of Religions* (Quest Books, 1984), https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/261030.The_Transcendent_Unity_of_Religions.

In general, most philosophers argue that the nature of the highest reality is one, so automatically, the philosophical principles used by all religions are also one. When ‘Allama Thabataba’i spoke about religion at the philosophical level, he was never permissive, but when his studies began to touch the sociological level, he was very tolerant, as was his student, Motahhari. That is why, according to Shihab, a philosophical perspective should be used in comparative religion, not a sociological one, to avoid falling into the trap of religious symbols.

In dealing with religious pluralism, John Hick offers a cross-cultural approach. This approach asserts that there is one infinite (Almighty) God behind all religious impressions and views. Therefore, according to Hick, there is no reason for a religion that claims to be the most correct and considers other religions wrong. It is not possible that the most complete or incomplete impression of God is made in different religious traditions. In his work, *On Grading Religions*, Hick assesses these religions as complete (total) traditions rather than seeing them as particular religious phenomena and ultimately unrealistic works. Hick sees the tradition of religious differences as equally productive in changing humans from self-centredness to reality-centredness. Hick, in this case, analyzes the criteria and evaluative approaches that might help assess religious culture in a whole and intact way.³³

Hick analyzes three criteria when people welcome and accept God’s intermediary in building a religious tradition. First is a moral criterion based on a universal moral order, which questions: Is the mediator better than evil, and does his teaching offer a better moral vision than existing general morality? Second, criteria that focus on the ability of the mediator to express a new vision of reality that encourages humans to follow it: Is the new vision better, and can a new and better life be through the mediator? Third, criteria that focus on human response: Can humans change, and is it guaranteed that God will deliver them?

Hick proposes a rational evaluation of cognition, elements of the theory of religious traditions, and a moral evaluation of the cultural-historical actualization of religious beliefs. However, according to Stenger’s judgment, both (rational and moral evaluations) lead to positive and negative conclusions, more robust and weaker, which exemplify each tradition. One may also question whether the essential vision of religion continues to be “soteriologically effective” or transformative life, but according to Stenger, 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

³³ Hick, “Religious Pluralism.”

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.³⁴

Brian Fay, in studying social phenomena, uses the multicultural approach. There are twelve multicultural approaches in social science philosophy built by Fay. This approach tries to reconcile different views in the social sciences in a deeper, plural, inclusive way, without boundaries and subjectivism. In the philosophy of social science, there is a dominating dualistic pattern. This pattern is related to the question: "Is it one choice or the other - and then one of them is considered the right choice?" Fay tries to avoid destructive dualism, for example, self vs. others; subjectivism vs. objectivism; atomism vs. holism; our culture vs. their culture; insider vs. outsider; similarity vs. difference, etc. Fay explained about "understanding others" and "criticizing others." Understanding and criticizing are two different things. Social science is related to understanding other people instead of judging others.³⁵

From the twelve multicultural philosophy theses developed by Fay, there are four points that the writer considers appropriate for understanding religious pluralism, namely: first, being aware of dichotomies, avoiding evil dualism, and thinking dialectically. As Fay suggests, we should be free of conflicting categories. These categories or dichotomies must be addressed openly and thought about dialectically; second, do not regard other people as "the other." In fact, according to Fay, all personal identities are dialogical. There is no self-understanding without the understanding of others, and the knowledge of others limits the range of our self-awareness; third, transcending the mistake of choosing between universalism and particularism, assimilation, and separation. We should take advantage of

³⁴ 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.

³⁵ Brian Fay, *Contemporary Philosophy of Social Science: A Multicultural Approach* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996).

differences by taking lessons, learning, and mutual benefit; fourth, think in a process, with the notion of a verb, not a noun (product). If religious people can use a multicultural approach to interacting, then the existence of religion and the differences that exist between religions will not lead to dangerous contradictions and conflicts.

Regarding the problem of understanding and the role of religion, it can be seen from two aspects. The first is the conative aspect. This aspect is related to the ability of religion to provide facilities to the community and its members to help them solve various life problems. Second, the aspects that are cognitive (cognitive aspects). This aspect is related to the role of religion in establishing the framework of meaning used by humans in morally interpreting their difficulties and successes, as well as the history of their society in the past and its current situation. Such an understanding of the role of religion can be found in the sacred sources of Semitic religions. In Islam, for example, the Qur'an not only obliges its followers to perform ceremonial rituals that can provide emotional and spiritual relief but also opens up space for intellectual interpretation to assist humans in obtaining meaning from all their life experiences. The role of Islam like this can be seen clearly in almost every ritual worship, which always contains what is commonly called a moral message. Even so, the importance of this moral message, the "price" of worship in Islam, is judged by the extent to which humans can carry the moral message. If worship cannot increase a person's morale, then his worship is considered meaningless. Therefore, when someone does things forbidden by *fiqh* in worship, the ransom is to carry out the moral message itself. For example, during the fasting month, a husband and wife have sex during the day. The *kifarat* (refined) is to feed sixty poor people because one of the moral messages of fasting is to pay attention to hungry people around them.

Cognitive aspects of the role of religion like this can also be found in Christianity. The narrative about Ayub in the Bible, for example—or the Prophet Ayyub in the Qur'an—symbolizes human issues that contain profound moral teachings. Job's seriousness in carrying out social and religious obligations did not necessarily make him happy. On the contrary, it caused him to experience trials of suffering. However, Job's seriousness in living up to the sacred values contained in God's commandments caused him to endure this suffering and helped him find meaning from all of his life experiences. Thus, when Job asked God for information about what happened, it was not his condition that was prioritized but the bad luck that befell all of his people that was put forward. 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 humanely but must

also be seen in terms of God's judgments in it. Therein lies (one of) the essential functions of religion, namely "giving moral meaning to human experiences." The moral meaning here parallels what Paul B. Horton and Chester L. Hunt said, that all significant religions emphasize virtues such as honesty and love of neighbor. Virtue like this is essential to the expected behavior of human society, and religion helps people to take such virtue seriously.³⁶

The meaning of religion, as illustrated in the teachings of Islam and Christianity above, is a matter of the meaning of religion in individual experience. The same problem can also be found at the society's whole level. Problems such as social injustice, economic inequality, and power issues are shared secrets in the life of human society. This kind of phenomenon is sociologically very capable of encouraging the emergence of moral interpretations of the existing social order. In certain situations and conditions, it is common to cause social conflicts if the interpretation carried out by each member of society does not reach a common ground.

Based on such an understanding, the issue of the meaning of religion in the experience of society becomes more unique and complicated than that of the individual. If a society can understand the role of religion in helping to interpret its life experiences appropriately morally, then religion will exist according to its function. Conversely, if they are wrong in carrying out these interpretations, religion can become a fertile ground for developing social conflict. If religion contributes to peace, religious adherents must learn to leave absolutism and accept pluralism, said Nurcholish Madjid. We may view religion as absolute, but what must be remembered is that our understanding—personal and group—holds relative human qualities. Concrete instructions for fostering brotherhood, according to Nurcholish are so that a group of people of faith does not look down on or belittle other people and religions.³⁷

At least according to Bambang Sugiharto, there are three challenges facing every religion today: first, disintegration and moral degradation; second, the matter of pluralism and exclusivism; Third, injustice.³⁸ These three problems are difficult to overcome due to several factors, including an excessively aggressive attitude towards followers of other religions, a

³⁶ P. B. Horton and C. L. Hunt, *Sociology* (New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1964).

³⁷ 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>.

³⁸ 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>.

misunderstood concept of God's absoluteness, and interests outside religion (politics, economics) that intervene in religion. However, these challenges can also be answered if the above factors can be resolved.

According to Armahedi Azhar, five diseases plague activists of religious movements: absolutism, exclusivism, fanaticism, extremism, and aggressiveness. Absolutism is intellectual arrogance, exclusivism is social arrogance, bigotry is emotional arrogance, extremism is excess, and aggressiveness is physical excess.³⁹ Regarding religious pluralism in Indonesia, Victor I. Tanja advocated a reorientation of missions and da'wah. According to Tanja, the purpose of mission and da'wah is not to increase the quantity but must be based on creating people who are high in knowledge, faith, and dedication (quality of people).⁴⁰ In line with Tanja, Jufri emphasized that the religious tensions that have occurred so far are due to the perpetrators of da'wah (*da'wi*, preacher, missionary) who love their religion but do not have in-depth religious knowledge. As a result, his preaching tends to be propagandist and provocative.⁴¹

Of course, with inter-communal conflicts in recent years, one cannot simply return the error to a such dialogue approach because apart from that, other factors take part in it, such as the economy, law, politics, and so on. Now is the time for religious leaders to start prioritizing religious missions related to spirituality and humanitarian issues (justice, honesty, and hospitality). Therefore, one thing that needs to be considered to create religious harmony in this plurality is to understand each religion's teachings as a whole.

Conclusion

Pluralism is a historical fact whose existence cannot be denied by society, including the people of Kedungrejo, and is a challenge faced by world religions today. A plural understanding of religion is needed to face the challenges of pluralism. Each religion should be assessed as intact traditions, not as a particular religious phenomenon. The tradition of religious differences should be regarded as equally productive in changing humans from self-centeredness to reality-centredness. All religions tend to have claims of absolutism, whether Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, or Judaism. The

³⁹ Armahedi Mahzar, *Revolusi Integralisme Islam, Merumuskan Paradigma Sains Dan Teknologi* (Jakarta: Mizan, 2004).

⁴⁰ Victor Immanuel Tanja, *Pluralisme Agama Dan Problema Sosial: Diskursus Teologi Tentang Isu-Isu Kontemporer*, trans. M Solihat (Pustaka Cidesindo, 1997).

⁴¹ 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>.

claims of adherents of monotheism that are particularistic-subjective will impact conflicts between religious adherents, and these conflicts will escalate if several strong and particularistic religious organizations coexist. No religion has a single essence. There are different interpretations of God: God, Emptiness, Suchness, the One, Nature, and the Many. The differences between religions are only at the level of exotericism, while there is common ground at the level of esotericism. We cannot ignore the differences within each religion to conclude that all must become one.

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