The Role of Religious Books in Interfaith Dialogue in Plural Society in Indonesia

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Abstract

This article aims to describe the role of religious books in interfaith dialogue. Interfaith dialogue is one alternative for overcoming and minimizing disputes and misunderstandings between religious communities. The values written in religion can be used as a reference for such things. This study uses qualitative methods by conducting observations, interviews, and literature studies. The focus of this research is centered on plural societies that have different beliefs. Dialogue between religious communities is very important in plural societies, and one of the foundations of dialogue is the awareness that in religion, especially Christianity, there is a need for peace and unity in a society without being influenced by radicalism in religion. The role of values conveyed through religion can make its adherents appreciate that all creatures, especially humans, must coexist in harmony and peace. The role of the Bible not only provides a foundation for Christian faith, but the Bible understands that humans from other religions need to be attached and respect each other's ideas, beliefs, freedoms, and so on. Thus, diversity in Indonesia can be realized without being separated by religion.

Keywords: Religious Books; Dialog; People; Public.

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INTRODUCTION

Amid today's religious pluralism society, we cannot deny the existence of differences between one another. This diversity and differences are called pluralism. As religion is an important part of society, it should be understood that every religion must take part in creating peace among religious communities. According to Knitters (2004), religion must play a role in creating harmony as a sign of respect for BHHINIKA TUNGGAL IKKA. Thus, Indonesia experiences peace and prosperity, respecting each other's freedom to embrace each other's religion.

On the one hand, the Indonesian nation is a nation rich in diversity under the auspices of BHHINIKA TUNGGAL IKKA, but on the other hand, a society with diverse characteristics generally faces problems, namely sentiments based on SARA (Ethnicity, Race, Religion, and Inter-group). (Sofia, 1999). Especially in Indonesia, the conflicts that often occur are conflicts concerning religion. Ironically, this problem is very contrary to the nature of religion in Indonesia, especially in the 1945 Constitution, Article 29 (Sofia, 1999).

Religious plurality is a reality in the lives of Indonesian society. Broadly speaking, it can be said that religious diversity in Indonesia is a characteristic of this nation. However, it is inevitable that in this diversity, various phenomena arise that are not only limited to differences in belief but also the emergence of conflicts such as accusations that are not necessarily motivated by religion, but religion becomes a scapegoat, resulting in hostility between adherents of one religion and another religion (Effendi, 1994).

According to Paul Knitter, the condition of Indonesia, which lives in diversity, must have a broader form of tolerance, which gives birth to a new view, namely that in each religion, there is truth. (Knitters, 2004). In other words, all religions are the same, only their methods of worshiping the One Truth are different. Frithjof Shcuon stated that all religions are basically or essentially (esoterically) the same and only differ in their exoteric form (Schuon, 2009). Thus, the author wishes to state that Christianity, especially in interpreting the Bible, is a part that plays a role in dialogue between religious communities regarding the diversity of beliefs that exist in Indonesia.

The role of the Bible is not only to provide a foundation for the Christian faith, but the Bible understands that people from other religions need to be connected and respect each other's ideas, beliefs, freedoms, and so on. Durkheim said that religion can only be understood by looking at the social role that unites the community into one unit through the role of religious books (Turner, 2012). Thus, the author understands that interfaith dialogue based on the role of religious books is needed to realize a pluralistic society that remains peaceful and harmonious. With forms of religious awareness, pluralistic societies integrate without offense, which results in conflict. Through religious interpretation, each provides social experiences that are inherent in the human mind to see the problems experienced in the interpretation and explanation of beliefs in their social context.

The role of the Bible is an approach that directs humans to define themselves and their beliefs within the framework of religious diversity. An individual's understanding of their beliefs describes their understanding of how they define themselves in the reality of society. The definition of themselves as individuals or groups provides a position for themselves to act wherever they are. The role of the Bible provides a goal so that religion will always be in the memory of humans who believe in it and create various unities and unity when, in their interactions, differences are found in understanding their God.

RESEARCH METHODS

This paper uses a qualitative research approach with the type of ethnographic research. Qualitative research is a research procedure that produces descriptive data in the form of written or oral words related to the meaning, value, and understanding of observable objects (Kaelan, 2012). Data collection techniques used, field observation, and interviews (Kaelan, 2012). Then, the author will conduct data analysis based on three stages of qualitative data analysis, namely, data condensation, data display, and describing/verifying conclusions from the data (Miles, et.al, 2014).



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Informants who will be a plural society that lives side by side in embracing their respective religions

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The role of the Bible in interfaith dialogue

The Bible is a record of a great dialogue between man and God. Through dialogue, God created the entire universe and conveyed promises, rebukes, and love through Jesus Christ. The Bible is the result of human struggle and thought in the context of its situation in the past and becomes a guideline for living in faith in the present. However, it must be admitted that the stories of the Bible generally focus on the dialogue between God and only one people, namely the people of Israel, and through Jesus with the early church. One can easily be convinced that according to the Bible, God has nothing to do with people of different beliefs. To support this view, it is enough to quote Bible verses without looking at the context that seems to show the exclusivism and particularism of Christian religious books. In the same way, the opposite can also be stated that God, through His presence among those of other beliefs, has a meaning that is no less important than His encounter with Christians.

The Bible is usually not always relevant to modern situations, but its function is to enrich and build the faith of modern humans so that with sufficient faith, they are able to see their own situations more clearly and are able to judge their actions more accurately. According to James Barr, the relationship between humans in the Bible and modern humans is guaranteed through two things. First, both humans in the Bible and modern humans are in the unity-continuity of the one people of God. Second, modern Christians are closely related to the pattern of understanding about God found in the Bible (Barr, 1995). Thus, Barr underlines the important position of the Bible as a foundation for building faith and understanding and being able to reflect it in acting toward others.

In the present day, The Lion (2018) argues that religious freedom is a way for humans to determine themselves in religion. It seems that each religion emphasizes its own uniqueness too much. Although they emphasize each other's uniqueness, the absence of freedom is a reflection of the absence of responsibility because only free people will choose the path of goodness for the sake of mutual harmony. Here, the author agrees with the view that has documented the basics of interfaith dialogue. Through the Bible, there is actually documentation of God to state harmony between people, for example, the development of mutual tolerance between religious communities in a region when carrying out religious holidays.

In this article, quoting one of the religious scriptures, namely Christianity, "The Bible says that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life." Through these words, does the Bible not support dialogue with people of other religions? For centuries, the Bible itself, especially several verses, has taught an exclusive life about Christ, which shows why people should become Christians and leave their beliefs in other religions. These difficulties are caused by two things, according toAriarajah (2003). First, the Bible is not a book that discusses other religious beliefs or issues of dialogue with other religions, but instead only talks about two beliefs, namely Judaism and Christianity. Second is the problem of interpretation. Among Christians themselves, until now, there has been no common agreement on how the Bible should be read and interpreted. Thus, it can be understood that certain verses in the Bible are often interpreted at the level of personal concepts and not within the framework of diversity adopted by the Indonesian people.

However, from this statement, the author argues that the Bible does not only state that by converting to Christianity, you will find the truth of God but also that other religions have their own truth according to the beliefs taught in their religion. The Bible itself does not only show exclusivism but there are parts of the Bible that are the basis for dialogue with other religions, especially in Indonesia, which has a pluralistic society in religion. Dialogue means opening oneself to different views but remaining loyal to one's own beliefs and identity in the context of a shared task to develop answers to challenges in a pluralistic society together. (Schumann, 2022). The Bible itself has several bases for conducting interfaith dialogue, including:



God's dialogue with the world

The Bible affirms that God is love. But the Bible does not stop with this affirmation, but tells, in the Gospels, stories about what it means to love. The Gospels reveal that the essence of God's love is to do according to God's commandments. (Kung, 2004). This affirmation or claim reveals that in the life and ministry of Jesus, Christianity can come to know God and know how the relationship between God and humans is. Living based on the guidelines of Jesus Christ, who not only loves his fellow man but also loves those of different beliefs. Christians have truly been united in God through Jesus' sacrifice on the Cross. Being united in Jesus' teachings is not a condition of acceptance but a response to God's acceptance of all people. Jesus accepted people who, according to his time, "did not deserve it." And Jesus often had problems with His actions. God loves unconditionally, and He accepts without first putting forward certain criteria. Because of God's love, the Gospel calls someone to love others, even in other religions (Ariarajah, 2003). He said that God accepts people before they realize it. Thus, grace-filled love can also be conveyed to other religions as a basis for building interfaith dialogue for the sake of creating peace.

God as Creator and Man as Creation.

This second basis refers to the Book of Genesis chapters 1-11 and other parts of the Bible that concern the confession of faith that God is the Creator of the universe and that humans are His creatures. The Great (2003). Further explains that in its development, God did not create His people directly but did it through other humans, so people were formed. That means that even though God's attention is focused on the people (Israel and the Early Church), this attention is also always related to humanity. In the Book of Genesis, the word "Adam" is not just the name of the first human. In Genesis 4 25, "Adam" is indeed the name of a person, but before that, "Adam" always meant "Man." So, when humans are called "the image of God," it also states that all humans are God's creations. Through the story of Genesis, it is intended to show that the image of God is humans. Only humans from all of His creations are the image of God. That means that, on the one hand, humans have similarities with other creations of God, and on the other hand, humans also have their own uniqueness so that they are called the image of God. The uniqueness of humans lies in their humanity. This proves that the humans mentioned in Christian religious books do not only refer to humans who embrace Christianity but refer to humans who adhere to all religions on earth.

Jesus Christ as the Servant of God

The issue of Christology must be part of an interfaith dialogue. The Christian's confession is that the determining factor in his life is Christ. In this case, Christianity has no reason to reduce the weight of this confession. According to The Great (2003)), The image of Christ inherited by Christians is the image of Christ from a world that is homogeneous in nature. Christ is the Conqueror of the world. Christ is the King of Kings, the King above all kings. In the New Testament, Christ is called Kurios, the Ruler. The context is the resistance against the Emperor who considered himself Kurios, who controlled everything. In a certain sense, the New Testament actually describes Kurios, namely Jesus, as the founder of the initial foundation of recognition of religious diversity within the framework of pluralism. Knitters (2004) reveals that Jesus the Curios is the central figure in appreciating religions during his ministry. This can be proven by not discriminating between which religion he wants to serve.

According to The, one of the dialogues that can be developed in Indonesia in dialogue with other religions with Christians is the value of Christ as a Servant, so He is not a conqueror and annihilator for others, but He is an example of a reformer in conducting dialogue. Thus, the image of Christ as the Servant-Messiah is the image of Christ as the Transformer.

The confession that Jesus Christ is God and man cannot be reduced in the Kerygma of the Christian religion. That is the confession of Christians in any context. But often, the confession of the divinity of Jesus dominates and defeats His humanity. Jesus did not just happen to take on human form, as in the docetistic understanding. Jesus is both God and man. Conversations with people of other religions about Jesus as a man do not mean betrayal of the main Christian teaching





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about Jesus as divine and human. ((Daradjat, 2011). Christians need to provide a contextual description of Jesus Christ, meaning that it can be easily understood by people of other religions. When engaging in dialogue with other religions, it is permissible, for example, to speak of Jesus as Abdullah, "servant of Allah" (rather than Christ as "son of Allah"), and this does not need to be labeled as a betrayal of religion. Christian. This effort is a contextualization that is still within the scope of the vocabulary of the Bible that speaks of Jesus as the Servant of God.

Emulate Jesus' attitude towards people of other faiths.

Jesus did oppose hypocrisy and self-righteousness, the kind of religion that is only concerned with the externals, the ceremonial, and the dryness of spiritual meaning. But there is no evidence that he rejected or condemned other religions at that time. (Ariarajah, 2003). Jesus himself regularly worshiped in the synagogue, knew the Torah well, visited the temple, and kept the feast days. Jesus came to fulfill the Law, not to abolish it. He did not encourage his followers to reject or abandon their own religion (Judaism). At that time, Jesus himself was part of the Jewish religion. He, like the other prophets who preceded him, challenged his own tradition in order to be faithful to his true calling. The Gospels record little of Jesus' encounters with other religious traditions. Jesus was once surprised to find that so-called "outsiders," such as the Canaanite woman, were more responsive to his teaching than most people. His people (Matthew 15: 21-28).

Ability to See the Kingdom of God

The kingdom of God cannot be confined to religious boundaries. God's reign penetrates human life. Believers understand that the kingdom of God is at work throughout human history, so they need to see it happening in all walks of life and places. The parable of the goats and the sheep is a timely reminder of the participation in God's reign by those who have little or no awareness of it (Matthew 25: 31-46). Belief in the reality of the kingdom of God compels Christians to dialogue with those who have other experiences of living in the reign of God that has begun, is happening, and is to come. Dialogue is a means for Christians to see and celebrate God's universal reign over all life.

God's People as Servants of Human Unity

This principle is often considered exclusive. The understanding that Israel is God's favorite people or God's chosen people among the nations is a very prominent theme in the Christian Bible. Salvation comes from the Jewish people (John 4:22). In Romans chapter 11, Paul firmly argues that only the Israelites are God's chosen people, while non-Jewish Christians are pagans. (cf. Letter Romans 11:17). The idea of God's people is also present in Peter's letters. Christians are a Royal Priesthood (1 Peter 2:9). If the people of Israel consisted of priests and ordinary people, then in "New Israel," all of them are priests. In traditional theology, the church is usually understood as Israel's replacement as God's people. The Church is the new Israel, God's beloved people.

The Bible does not present just one theme. It is rarely realized that the Bible does not always emphasize the understanding of "God's beloved people." This is especially true in verses that are close to the time of exile and those written during the time of exile. It is said that the Israelites who escaped God's punishment would be left as "a humble and weak people." This means that Israel would become a people who could no longer be proud of their status as the chosen people. In the Book of Isaiah, there are "Four Poems of the Servant of the Lord" (embed Yahweh), namely Isaiah chapter 42:1-4, chapter 49:1-6, chapter 50:4-11, and chapter 52:13-53:12.In these four poems it is reflected that Israel must reflect on its past suffering in the humiliation of their shameful exile. Israel is pessimistic about continuing their future even though they will later experience the times after the exile. Usually, only certain figures are called servants. But now, all the people of Israel are called servants. Despite suffering great shame, Israel is believed by Isaiah (and also understood by other nations) to be suffering to redeem the world. Israel suffers for the world to serve the world.



In the Gospel of Matthew, chapters 5-7, Jesus addressed his sermon on the Mount not only to the apostles but to anyone who heard. The content is about relationships between humans. Then, in chapter 7:13, Jesus summarizes the Torah and the Prophets as follows: "Everything you want people to do to you, do likewise to them." Hundreds of years earlier, Confucius also said that. It's just in a negative sentence formulation. Even though the formulation is negative, the meaning is equally positive. Both Jesus and Confucianism took inspiration from universal truths that have existed throughout the ages. So, the uniqueness of the people can never be separated from the universality of humans. The distinctiveness of the people is not an end in itself. People are called to realize their true identity so that they can develop together with others towards human universality.

The Meaning of Safety in Living Together with Others

Salvation in the Bible cannot be interpreted as being only particularistic. The Bible explains that salvation is also universalistic. Because of this latter thing, the gospel was also preached to non-Jews. It was not only the Jews who were to be saved by the work of Jesus. Paul once rejected the idea that to be saved, a person must first be Jewish by being circumcised. Christians today should follow Paul's view and not oppose it. Christians should not consider salvation as the exclusive right of only a group of Christians.

In the Old Testament, salvation is always associated with shalom, which is usually interpreted as "peace." Peace here does not mean the absence of war or the absence of chaos but rather a state of balance associated with a harmonious social situation. And this is associated with its origin from God. Today, salvation in Christ is not merely believed to be spiritual but holistic. The news of salvation must be proclaimed together with social actions. The Social Gospel, or "social gospel," is thus an integral part of the proclamation of the gospel and not merely a tool of evangelism. Social actions are the manifestation of the experience of faith and not merely the "fruit of faith" (which is only done by the Holy Spirit). If good deeds are seen as the manifestation of the experience of faith, then we can welcome all good deeds done by others, even though those good deeds are human efforts.

Christians around the world, especially in pluralistic societies, are always neighbors with people who adhere to different religions and beliefs. Indonesia, for example, consists of several islands, ethnic groups, and different religions. (Schumann, 2022). Indonesia recognizes five major religions, namely Islam, Protestant Christianity, Catholic Christianity, Hinduism, and Buddhism, which means that in one region, several religions can be practiced. It can be seen that not only a life full of tolerance and tension can be built but also mutual assistance. (Effendi, 1994). However, on the other hand, it cannot be denied that problems between adherents of different religions often result in misunderstandings which result in various conflicts.

The problem that is very disturbing the integrity of religious harmony today is the occurrence of disharmony in relations between religious communities. In such a situation, there must be a solution that can take a middle path so that religious diversity does not become a container for hostility but rather coexists with one another in achieving a just and prosperous community life.

Interfaith Dialogue

The relationship between Christianity and other religions is one of the main issues in Christian self-understanding. Perhaps pluralism is a pressing challenge because of the exclusive missionary approach adopted by Christianity in recent years. Many Christians argue that the presence of missionaries in large numbers resulted in the conversion of people to Jesus Christ. Today, Christianity realizes that religion, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism did not experience extinction but rather survived and developed despite the efforts of Christian missionaries. With the rapid development of other religions, Christian theologians conclude that the development of Christian theology must be reviewed where its formulation cannot be separated from other religions and that the development of Christian theology in the future is a direct result of serious



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dialogue with other religions (Tillich, 1996). Dunne (2009) recommends experiencing other religions and then reflecting on enriching your own religion. So Tillich (1996) sees the openness of Christianity in the tension between assessing the religions encountered and accepting the assessment of those religions, which is actually the strength of Christianity at the beginning. Thus, Christianity, through its encounter with other religions, must conduct dialogue. The role of religious books in dialogue becomes the basis for Christianity to open itself both individually and in groups to dialogue in order to show itself in the plural diversity in Indonesia.

Dialogue is a process of communication between religious communities; dialogue is necessary and very important to be carried out between communities of different beliefs. Misunderstandings between religious groups can be resolved by being open to each other. Efforts to communicate with each other through dialogue will bring an open understanding to both parties in conflict (Schumann, 2022)

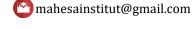
Knitters (2004) said that religion is an equal vessel for interfaith dialogue. He continued that building interfaith dialogue requires a shared commitment on the basis of welfare and harmony between religious communities. Not only concerning social justice but more on the harmony of all humanity. An interfaith dialogue recognizes correlation as a fact to build interfaith relations. The most principled thing in realizing interfaith dialogue is openness between religions that conduct dialogue. Hans Kung argues that the world can achieve greater peace and justice only if all religions can together recognize at least the values, norms, basic principles, and perfections contained in all religions. Religions must recognize the responsibility to work together for comprehensive justice, more lasting peace, and more lasting relations rather than drawing dividing lines with each other, fundamentalists which results the emergence of and fanatics (http://musafirflorez.blogspot.com/2017, accessed 12 Jan 2025).

The approach of harmony through dialogue between religious figures must be carried out, although, on the one hand, some people close themselves off from dialogue with others on the grounds that with such openness, it can obscure the characteristics and identity of a group or nation. However, on the other hand, opening oneself up in a positive dialogue will eliminate feelings of mutual suspicion between one another. (Daradjat, et al., 1996). Interfaith harmony is one of the results of dialogue, in addition to close association and peace. Dialogue is a universal truth that is not fully owned by each party. In dialogue, both parties must acknowledge the truth in general. Dialogue conducted between religious communities is not only to seek mutual understanding between one religion and another but also to understand what has been happening between the two parties, such as misunderstandings, suspicions, and accusations. In dialogue, openness, respect, communication, patience, reflection, the desire to receive, the willingness to give, self-correction, and obedience to truth and goodness must be upheld.

Dialogue includes all forms of association, cooperation, and social relations between adherents of different religions. This kind of dialogue can have a positive impact on eliminating suspicion between one another and, on the other hand, can strengthen harmony between religious communities. Previously, several cases of violence under the guise of religion hit minority groups of adherents of other religions. If examined in detail, harmony within religions or between religious groups is fading, and on the other hand, they accuse adherents of other religions of being infidels. To unravel religious egoism or heal the wounds of cases of violence, the idea of interfaith dialogue in Indonesia needs to be campaigned widely. So that each religion understands the peace efforts that will stop religious violence. Dialogue is very important to initiate open communication between religious communities. Violence triggered by religion is increasing in Indonesia. Although in different patterns, it still packages religious understanding. The increase in the number of violence proves that the government is not optimal in building dialogue between religious groups. (http://www.setara-institute.org/id/content/konflik-agama accessed Friday, November 02, 2024).

Dialogue is a constructive and potential step in an effort to build peace in the midst of human civilization. Various conflicts, especially in the realm of religion that occur in Indonesia are a clear indication that this nation is still faced with the problem of religious plurality and inter-religious





conflict. This nation should realize that religion should not be a source of problems. Instead, religion must appear in paying attention and trying to solve problems together. (http://majalah-alcerita.com/index.php, accessed Friday, January 02, 2025).

For centuries, the history of interaction between religious communities has been marked by suspicion and hostility. Therefore, one alternative to realizing religious harmony is by conducting dialogue. A dialogical attitude should be a shared attitude; all parties must be open to each other, respect each other, let go of all prejudices, and understand other religions. Each must prepare themselves to engage in dialogue with other groups of different beliefs as a reality of this life. However, the purpose of dialogue is not to merge with other religions but to achieve better mutual understanding and appreciation. Dialogue is conducted not only to avoid conflict but also to discuss the participation of religion in changing society through modernization. With such dialogue, each party will enrich each other's insights in order to find similarities that can be used as a foundation for living in harmony in community life.

CONCLUSION

The role of Christianity is part of the suggestion for interfaith dialogue in the context of openness and honesty for the sake of harmony between religious communities. Dialogue is a means to eliminate prejudices caused by religion towards other religions. Our religious role is very important in the experience of realizing harmony between religious communities in a pluralist society in Indonesia. Through religious dialogue, Christianity opens itself to other religions. Open does not mean having to merge with other religions, but Christianity rethinks its role in maintaining its religion in the context of a pluralistic state. Dialogue does not at all reduce complete and honest loyalty to one's own faith but rather enriches and strengthens it. Dialogue is a creative activity together that frees a person from his closed and rigid system, increases spiritual freedom and provides an overview of the broader dimensions of spiritual life when a person is able to participate in the spirituality of others. Dialogue is a fundamental thing in changing negative attitudes towards other religions, changing negative attitudes that invite rejection, to eliminating prejudice that has arisen in the past; dialogue will create an atmosphere in which we give and receive each other, listen, and preach.

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