

Methods of Religious Leaders in Enhancing Interfaith Harmony: Cases of Muslims, Buddhis, and Confucians in Malang

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ABSTRACT

Social and political considerations alone are not sufficient to be the basis for an inclusive attitude to build religious harmony because conflicts still occur. Activities to promote religious harmony require stronger foundations that are social and political. This study aims to explore the methods of religious leaders in Malang to increase religious harmony. The primary data is based on interviews, documents, and active participation. Six religious leaders were interviewed, representing three religions in Malang, namely Islam, Buddhism and Confucianism. The results showed that religious leaders used at least four methods: providing a theological basis based on inclusive verses, reinterpreting exclusive verses, reinterpreting da'wah's mining, and conducting live-in activities. This study also shows three methods for interpreting exclusive verses: privatization, hermeneutic, and proportional. Based on this, this study recommends that it is very important to provide a theological basis for religious harmony and live-in activities. In addition, the findings of the three methods of interpretation of exclusive verses can be considered as models of interpretation of the scriptures.

Keywords: interfaith harmony, exclusive, inclusive, live-in, interpretation model.

1. INTRODUCTION

Religious harmony and inclusiveness are important issues in contemporary life, especially in a plural society like Indonesia. Because an inclusive attitude significantly influences harmonious relations between religious communities [1]. More than that, an inclusive attitude can reduce the emergence of an exclusive and harsh attitude that has begun to bloom in society lately [2] [3] [4] [5].

Historically, the inclusive attitude and religious harmony that emerged in Europe in the 1930s were based on political considerations, namely, to obtain equal rights for minorities, especially Protestants who were oppressed by the Christian majority [6]. The same reason also occurs in Malaysia: the emergence of an inclusive attitude guarantees religious rights and individual freedoms [7].

In Malang itself, based on interviews from several religious leaders, the religious harmony and inclusiveness program was initially based more on

political and social considerations due to the emergence of the economic and social crisis in 1998. According to [8], an inclusive attitude and inter-religious harmony based on political and social considerations as above will not be substantial. Because not a few people who carry out dialogue and cooperation with people of other religions still do not abandon their sense of superiority and continue to reject all forms of salvation that are not affiliated with their religion [8]. It shows that religious harmony's inclusive attitude and activities require more robust and more convincing foundations.

Therefore, religious leaders in Malang try to provide the foundations that are political and social so that solid religious harmony can emerge. It seems that the efforts of these religious leaders are pretty successful because the harmony of religious communities in Malang is very conducive. Therefore, this study aims to explore the methods used by religious leaders to increase religious harmony.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In general, there are three models of a person's attitude towards people of other religions, namely exclusive, inclusive, and pluralist [9] [10]. *Exclusive* is defined as an attitude that claims that truth and salvation only exist in their religion [11]. Some teachings can encourage exclusivity [12]. In Catholicism, for example, there are the terms "Extra Ecclesiam nulla Salus" (there is no salvation outside the Church) and "No Other Name" (there is no salvation outside of Jesus Christ) (Munawar-Rahman, 2001). In Islam, there is a verse that says, "Whoever accepts a religion other than Islam will not be accepted and on the last day he will be among the losers" (QS. Al-Maidah: 3) and "Indeed the religion with Allah is Islam" (QS. Ali Imran: 85).

This exclusive attitude is divided into two forms, namely, ignorance and independence. Ignorance is an attitude in which each religious community walks independently without caring about other people and religions. At the same time, independence is an attitude in which each religious community knows the existence of other religious people besides themselves. However, they do not know each other, busy with themselves. It is stated that these attitudes could not build religious relations [13].

Inclusiveness is interpreted as a view that believes in truth and salvation in other religions, but the standard of truth and salvation remains in their religion. In Catholicism is the term "the Anonymous Christian" (Christian Anonymous people or non-Christians), which was introduced by Karl Rahner (1904-1984 AD) [14]. In line with this term, the terms "non-Muslim par excellence and Muslim par excellence" are known [9].

This inclusive attitude is divided into two forms, namely apologetics and tolerance. Apologetics is an attitude in which each religious community knows and interacts. Still, they are more likely to show their differences and strengths, so they cannot build good religious relations. *Tolerance* is an attitude in which people of religion can accept people of other religions but only on social aspects [13]. Additionally, social religious harmony will not strong because they do not abandon the superiority of their religion and still reject all forms of salvation not affiliated with their religion [8]. Besides, religious harmony also requires basics that are not only social (Soleh & Rahmawati, 2021).

Pluralism is interpreted as a view that believes that every religion has its truth and way of salvation so that no one has the right to claim his true religion [9]. Some expressions stated that other religions are equally valid

ways to the same truth. Other religions speak of different but equally valid truths. Each religion expresses an important part of the truth [9]. This attitude is called as "pro-existence", which was about the awareness that life is not for his religion but for living with adherents of other religions [13]

There needs to be a change in attitude to build religious harmony. First, the exclusive attitude in religion must change to be inclusive so that each religious believer can understand and accept the presence of other religious people [15] [16] [17]. Second, religious people must intensively carry out inter-religious communication and dialogue to create open and mutual trust [18] [19]. Third, religious people must intensely collaborate with adherents of other religions to emerge a sense of togetherness between them [20] [21] [22].

There are various forms of inter-religious dialogue. Among other things, First, the parliamentary dialogue, which is a dialogue that involves many participants from various religions. In this dialogue model, participants are directed to be able to focus on creating and developing better inter-religious cooperation while at the same time promoting peace among religious adherents. Second, institutional dialogue, namely dialogue carried out by representatives of various religious institutions such as Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), Indonesian Church Association (PGI), Jawi Wetan Christian Church (GKJW). Third, theological dialogue, which is a dialogue that aims to discuss theological and philosophical issues in religion. Religious elites or intellectuals usually carry out this dialogue [23].

However, several obstacles can hinder the formation of communication and religious harmony. These obstacles need to be anticipated. The obstacles in question are, among others, first, the fanaticism of each religion's adherents so that there is continued suspicion and prejudice against people of other religions. Second, the lack of a strong spirit to continue fighting for dialogue and religious harmony. Third, there is a gap between the religious elite and the grassroots so that communication and harmony efforts are more elitist and discursive. Fourth, no infrastructure supports inter-religious communication [24] [25].

3. METHOD

This study examines the methods of three religious' leaders in their efforts to increase religious harmony, namely Muslims, Buddhists, and

Confucians. Two important reasons for choosing these three religious' figures as research subjects are presented below. First, Buddhism and Confucianism are minority religions, but their existence is quite prominent in the relations of religious people in Malang. Second, as a religious minority, not many studies talk about them. Most studies focus on the relationship between Muslims and Christians or Catholics.

The research is based on interviews as the primary source, plus document data and active participation. Then, the interviews were conducted on religious leaders in Malang, namely Muslims, Buddhists, and Confucians.

There were six leaders interviewed, two representing their respective religions. The religious leaders who became the resource persons were chosen purposively for three important reasons: (1) the resource persons came from religious, social institutions originating from each religion so that they could represent their religion; (2) the religious leaders in question often carry out inter-religious dialogue activities; (3) they are recommended by their socio-religious institution so that their opinion is considered to be the official opinion of their religious group.

Document data are in the form of their respective religious scriptures, interpretations of these holy verses, and written fatwas of scholars. Other written rules, such as the classic Islamic literature (*Kitab Kuning*), fall into this category. Researchers are also active in religious harmony activities. For example, several times, the researchers attended meetings involving interfaith leaders. In addition, it is not uncommon for researchers to visit places of worship of other religions and pay attention to their religious ritual activities. At other times, researchers invite followers of other religions to come to their homes to establish religious harmony.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Religious Demographics of Malang Raya

Malang Raya, which is the object of this research, is located in East Java, Indonesia. The Malang Raya region itself is composed of three different government administrations, namely Malang city, Malang district and Batu city. However, these three regions were originally one which later split into three parts.

Six religions are overgrowing in the Malang Raya area, namely Islam as the majority religion, Christianity, Protestantism, Hinduism, Buddhism and

Confucianism. If not managed and communicated correctly, this significant development can lead to religious disaster. Because of this, religious leaders are trying to establish communication and improve inter-religious harmony.

Table 1 is data on Islam, Buddhism, and Confucianism in Malang Raya area.

Table 1: Religious Demographics in Malang (2020)

Religion	Malang	Malang Regency	Batu	Sum (%)
Islam	840.407	2.595.710	209.479	3.645.596 (99.79%)
Buddhist	4.655	1.868	588	7.111 (0,20%)
Konghuchu	251	--	171	422 (0,01%)
	845.313	2.597.578	210.238	3.653.129

4.2. Relations of Religious People

In 2006-2007, there were two blasphemy cases by other religious persons in Malang, threatening religious harmony [26]. Religious leaders immediately responded to the case by conducting interfaith communication and meetings. The meeting resulted in a forum, namely the Inter-Religious Harmony Forum (FKAUB). Their activities include discussions about religion held in turns in each religion and social cooperation. In the following year, this interfaith meeting was conducted more intensely and received full support from the government so that the Religious Harmony Forum (FKUB) was formed [27].

Next time, interfaith communication will involve religious leaders, women, and youth activists to establish many forums for harmony. Among other things, the Women's Interreligious Forum (PAUB), the Young Interfaith Movement (Gema UB), and the Joint Prayer Forum (FDB). The activities of these forums are not only interfaith discussions but also collaborative work involving the grassroots level.

The description shows that religious harmony in Malang Raya has been disturbed by the behavior of certain religious persons. However, these disturbances could soon be quelled due to the alertness of religious leaders to conduct interfaith communication. In addition, they also use many methods to build and promote inter-religious harmony. To this day, Malang Raya is one of the cities with conducive religious harmony.

4.3. Theological Basis

Religious leaders use many methods to build and promote inter-religious harmony. The primary method provides a theological basis for religion by showing inclusive verses in the scriptures. According to religious leaders, this method is very effective and meaningful because it involves religious belief. So far, religious harmony programs and activities have been based on sociological and humanitarian interests, not on religious beliefs. His religious beliefs are exclusive, not inclusive, so the fabric of religious harmony is not strong.

CH and AH from Islamic leaders stated that knowing and respecting other parties, including people from different religions, was part of Islamic teachings. Both figures pointed to QS. Al-Hujurat, 13. According to both, this verse explicitly commands people to know and respect each other so that there is no reason to reject those of different religions [28].

Meanwhile, BK and BS from Buddhist religious leaders pointed to [29]. According to both, this verse very clearly acknowledges the existence of other religions besides Buddhism. The religions that exist are the same. That is, they both lead to God, only with different methods and ways of expressing it.

Meanwhile, BO and WH of Confucian religious leaders pointed to SU SI, Sabda Suci, XV, 40. According to both, these scriptures never claimed that Confucius was the only bearer of truth. This book even forbids its followers to question the differences between the paths of truth (religion) because all religions are essentially the same way towards the Truest, namely God [30].

The description above shows that religious leaders provide the theological basis for increasing religious harmony. The theological basis in question is that respecting and accepting the presence of other religious people is part of religious teachings. This understanding is based on their interpretation of inclusive verses in the holy book.

4.4. Re-interpreting the Exclusive Verses

Religious leaders pointed out that religious holy books contain not only inclusive but also exclusive verses. Some religious adherents use these exclusive verses to support their thoughts and attitudes so that it is not uncommon to produce violence between religious communities in the name of religion. How to respond to the existence of these exclusive verses?

Religious leaders did several ways to complete these exclusive verses. First, placing exclusive verses

in the private sphere and not using them in social problems, especially regarding relations between religious communities. Instead, religious leaders take inclusive verses and link them with social verses to provide inclusive understanding. Second, interpreting these exclusive verses is contextually hermeneutic, not textual. Thus, giving birth to an inclusive understanding. Third, linking the exclusive verse with the inclusive verse and then interpreting it gives birth to a new and detailed understanding. For example, teaching an exclusive attitude is related to theology, while teaching an inclusive attitude is related to the social area or *mu'amalah*.

According to religious leaders, reinterpreting exclusive verses to give birth to an inclusive understanding is not easy. First, textually exclusive verses give a strong impression of exclusive attitudes and behaviour. Giving an interpretation that is not in harmony with its explicit meaning requires a strong argument. Second, exclusive verses have become the basis for certain circles' exclusive movements. Giving different meanings to these verses means dealing with groups that support these exclusive verses. Three, giving an inclusive meaning to an exclusive verse is an unpopular effort that requires a strong commitment to socialize it.

4.5. Redefining Da'wah's Meaning

The third method to increase religious harmony is to reformulate da'wah's meaning. Religious leaders stated that so far, da'wah or mission activities have been more expansive, that is, inviting other parties or influencing adherents of other religions to enter our religion. However, this expansive da'wah method also varies, ranging from subtle narratives to material persuasion, from friendship to trapping with marriage, from promotion to dismissal, and others. Religious leaders stated that the attitude and behavior of da'wah or missions like that caused more conflicts between religious communities, not strengthening their relations.

Therefore, religious leaders need to reformulate da'wah's meaning or religious mission. According to them, da'wah activities must change, from da'wah, which means inviting outsiders to enter our religion, to da'wah, which means improving and improving the community's quality. Da'wah is more about improving the community's shortcomings and improving its quality.

The meaning of the new da'wah, which is more like improving the quality of the community itself, is then massively socialized. Religious leaders convey the

new meaning of da'wah in their respective religious activities. In addition, they also publish social media such as magazines and bulletins to provide a broader understanding to the public.

4.6. Live-in Activities

Live-in is an activity to experience the lives of people of other religions by participating in witnessing and joining in their worship activities. Religious leaders carry out this activity by allowing participants to witness other religious worship activities. For example, Muslims witnessed the activities of Buddhist worship or Confucianism. Furthermore, some Muslims and other religious participants even learn and participate in Buddhist meditation because they think meditation is not ritual worship. On the other hand, Buddhists and Confucians live in the pesantren to see and experience the life of the santri firsthand. According to religious leaders, this lives inactivity effectively establishes communication and openness among religious people. In addition, it is also able to increase mutual trust between people of different religions. The emergence of openness and mutual trust can create awareness to accept the presence of other religious people.

More than that, it can generate awareness that life is not for itself but also for living with people of other religions so that all religious communities can fight together to uphold the basic principles of religious teachings, such as upholding justice or overcoming humanitarian problems as ignorance and poverty.

5. DISCUSSION

The thought of religious leaders in Malang Raya to provide a theological basis in increasing religious harmony is a new step. Previously, religious harmony was based on sociological interests, namely social harmony and humanity. This sociological basis cannot build religious harmony because their thoughts and attitudes do not support it. Farid Esack stated that religious harmony based on social considerations is not strong enough to improve harmonious relations between religious communities [8]. The religious leaders then provided a theological basis based on their interpretation of inclusive verses to be solid religious harmony.

Other circles also need to provide a theological basis for building and increasing religious harmony. Several Christian religious figures in Russia have reformulated their theological teachings to provide a basis for attitudes and thoughts on religious

inclusiveness. It is intended that inclusive attitudes and religious harmony can be closely and firmly established [31].

Reinterpreting exclusive verses to give birth to an inclusive understanding is not easy. As stated by religious leaders, this interpretation effort requires strong arguments, high commitment, and more courage because they have to deal with supporters of exclusive attitudes and behaviours. However, they still do it with two convictions. First, that religion in principle teaches peace and love, not cursing and blaspheming each other. Second, religious differences exist precisely so that each adherent can know each other and compete in virtue, not disbelieve and bring down each other.

Furthermore, religious leaders use three methods to interpret exclusive verses to give an inclusive understanding: privatization, hermeneutics, and proportionality. Privatization is an interpretation model by placing exclusive verses into the personal realm, not for a social context with people of other religions. Hermeneutics is a contextual interpretation model, while proportional is an interpretation model by combining exclusive and inclusive verses and explaining them contextually and proportionally. The three methods are interesting to be developed in a wider context.

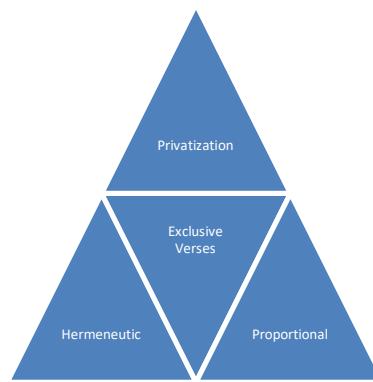


Figure 1: Interpretation Methods of Exclusive Verses.

Shifting the meaning of da'wah from an expansive movement to a defensive one, from a movement to invite people of other religions to change to improve the religious quality of their people, is also not easy. Because the shift in meaning is not in line with the general meaning that is commonly used, namely inviting followers of other religions. However, the meaning of da'wah to the defensive attitude and improvement of the people themselves is actually in line with the thoughts of [32]. According to Ibn Hajar, it is true that there are five pillars of Islam, starting

from saying the shahadah to performing the pilgrimage. However, that does not mean that those who have not been able to carry out all of these five things have not become Muslims.

On the other hand, anyone who has said the shahada means that he has become a Muslim. Their shortcomings only show the imperfections of their Islam [32]. Da'wah plays a role in filling this gap. Da'wah activities are more about correcting the shortcomings of their people, not inviting people of other religions to enter their religion.

Religious leaders carry out this missionary orientation massively. Religious leaders of Islam, Buddhism and Confucianism together and consistently provide new directions for da'wah's meaning. The initial meaning of da'wah is offensive and invites other parties to a defensive meaning and is more about improving the people themselves. The demand for a change from an exclusive attitude to an inclusive one in increasing religious harmony is in line with [15] [16] [17].

Religious leaders use this new method to increase religious harmony regarding live-in activities. This activity is carried out to foster a sense of intimacy, openness, and mutual trust among religious people. In the next phase, mutual trust will encourage someone to pro-existence. Pro-existence is an attitude and awareness that life is not only for our religion but also for living with other religions. By doing so, all religious communities can fight together to uphold the basic principles of religious teachings, such as upholding justice and truth and overcoming humanitarian problems (ignorance and poverty).

The *live-in* activity is in line with the findings of previous studies. Soleh and Rahmawati's findings confirm that one of the obstacles that hinder the formation of religious harmony is the attitude of distrust among religious people due to the lack of good communication between them. In addition, there is also a gap between religious leaders and the general public, so that inter-religious dialogue still looks elitist, not grounded and does not involve the grassroots. The lack of supporting facilities and infrastructure and the lack of a strong spirit to continue fighting for an inclusive attitude and dialogue between faiths can also hinder the creation of good religious harmony [33].

6. CONCLUSION

Based on the results and analysis above, the researchers conclude as follows. First, political and

social considerations are not strong enough to build conducive religious relations. Therefore, stronger foundations are needed to build and increase religious harmony. The basics are theological foundations or understandings based on sacred verses and religious teachings.

Second, religious leaders use four methods to increase religious harmony. Namely, providing a theological understanding based on inclusive verses, reinterpreting exclusive verses, reformulating da'wah's meaning, and conducting live-in activities. Third, religious leaders use three methods to reinterpret exclusive verses: the privatization of exclusive verses, interpretation of exclusive verses hermeneutic, and connection of exclusive and inclusive verses.

Based on these conclusions, this study recommends the following. First, we need to continue to socialize inclusive verses to compensate for exclusive verses that some people often use to carry out radical movements. Second, we need to develop three methods of interpretation of the exclusive verses as above to provide an inclusive religious understanding and moderate religious attitudes. Third, live-in activities can be considered to be carried out to establish better communication between religious communities and foster mutual trust between them.

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