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Building Harmony and Peace through Multicultural theology- Based Religious Education: An Alternative for Contemporary Indonesia [Etika Islam dan Problematika Sosial di Indonesia]

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BUILDING HARMONY AND PEACE THROUGH MULTICULTURAL THEOLOGY-BASED RELIGIOUS EDUCATION: AN ALTERNATIVE FOR CONTEMPORARY INDONESIA

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Abstract

Indonesia has undergone a paradigm shift during the last decade in managing societal diversity because of an increase in ethnic and religious conflict. This shift impacts education because school curricula must deal with issues of living together as a nation united despite differences in religion and ethnicity. This is especially true of the religious education curriculum. Since the New Order era (Suharto regime, 1966-1998), religious education has been misused by the state to limit freedom of religion and promote a model that is not sensitive to diversity and difference. It is critical that religious education be rooted in a multicultural perspective supported by theological insight.

Religious education is an essential building block for a multicultural theological framework. In an era in which plurality is accelerating, religious education must lead the way toward minimising a dogmatic, indoctrinating approach to education. Religious education should exemplify a dialogical approach, with materials that can support pupils' and teachers' diverse religious beliefs and practices. This would constitute religious education for peace and harmony.

Its characteristics include: emphasising the fourth pillar of education – how to live together *with* others in a collective consciousness of religious diversity;¹ encouraging sincere relationships in a spirit of modesty, equality, mutual trust, and understanding; fostering respect for similarities, differences, and uniqueness; modelling close relationships and interdependence that value being open-minded, listening to each other, practising tolerance of different religious perspectives, resolving conflict through creative interreligious dialogue, promoting reconciliation through forgiveness, and espousing non-violent action.

Keywords: multiculturalism, Islam, religious education, peace

Background

The wealth of religious, ethnic, and cultural diversity in Indonesia can create ambivalence. On the one hand, diversity enhances the dynamism of life in Indonesia; however, it can also result in vertical and horizontal tension leading to conflict. Since mid-1997, several crises have arisen whose causes reflect the complicated and multi-dimensional relationships among many areas in Indonesia: international and national interests, colonial history, natural resources, ethnic diversity, religious climate, tradition, and globalisation. Many communal conflicts have occurred as a result of political conflicts among elites, and some have come close to triggering civil war (Bamualim *et al.* eds., 2002).

For example, the monetary crisis of 1997 had a severe impact on the Indonesia at the end of the twentieth century and the early part of the twentieth-first century; complex social-political relationships created unpredicted upheavals. Violence was confused with the fragile process of democratisation, and freedom was incorrectly identified with the absence of responsibility and law enforcement.

Meanwhile, economic recovery in the reform era (1998-) has not been successfully reorientated toward a more inclusive model, and the

¹ The three others are: how to learn, how to do, and how to be.

ruling state apparatus has failed to make the transition from its monopoly of power to a decentralised policy of district autonomy. The three main laws enacting decentralisation and eradication of corruption – No. 22/1999 on the District Government, No. 25/1999 on the financial balance between central and district government, and No. 28/1999 on upholding clean government and freedom from corruption, collusion and nepotism – have created new opportunities for corruption and abuse of power. The main causes of corruption have been the pursuit of personal benefits over communal good and the lack of information, transparency, and public accountability.

One of the unfortunate by-products of decentralisation has been the emergence of local figures whose ethnic chauvinism has resulted in heightened tensions and conflicts. These elites, who are essentially anti-democracy, manipulate ethnic sentiment in order to weaken the demands of democratisation. Democratisation is doomed to fail when the institutions of democracy are powerless and elites cannot or will not adopt democracy. Indonesian society is living with the consequences of politicising and arbitrarily exploiting ethnicity by local elites whose attachment is only to their own ethnicity, defined as reality, and fidelity to their ancestors (Klinken in Nordoholt dan Abdullah, eds., 2002).

In response, different religious, ethnic, and sociocultural groups have attempted to increase their political involvement in the last few years, raising demands that social policy and programmes respond to the needs and interests of diversity, not of narrowly defined ethnic groups. Responding to these demands requires more cultural sensitivity, a “rainbow coalition” approach, and a multiculturalist model for negotiation by both the government and the local participants. But competition among ethnic and certain interest groups for limited resources – public housing, political power, etc. – remains a problem.

None of these critical problems can be solved without adopting and adapting the concept of a multicultural society.² A pluralistic society³ cannot overcome cultural issues when the society permits the marginalisation of certain cultures. Once democratisation and freedom become a greater part of the national ethos, the state-supported system

² The term 'multicultural society' is generally used to refer to a society that exhibits three kinds of diversity (i.e. distinct ways of life, perspectival diversity, and communal diversity), the last two kinds, or only the third kind (Parekh, 2000: 2-6) Blum, 2001: 16-19 defines multiculturalism as an understanding, a respect, a valuation of other people's culture. It is a respect with a curiosity, an eagerness to know and understand that other culture. The respect for a culture here means the ability to see how that particular culture can express or help its bearers express their values for themselves. Thus, multiculturalism has three sub-values: enhancing one's cultural identity, studying and respecting one's cultural heritage; eagerness to understand and learn about as well as respect toward other culture; and a respect and acceptance of the cultural differences, i.e. viewing the existence of the different cultural groups as something positive that must be kept and nurtured. The following conditions indicate Indonesia's low level of multiculturalism.

First, lack of knowledge of other ethnic cultures or religions. Many Indonesians do not know or understand other people's culture. Many do not even know their own ethnic culture. Many Muslim in Indonesia have Christian, Hindu, or Buddhist friends and relatives, but only a few of them know anything about Christianity, Hinduism, and Buddhism.

Second, lack of a will to understand the other's culture. Culture as understood in anthropology is relatively unknown to many Indonesians. This limited knowledge hampers the progress of cross-cultural understanding.

Third, lack of respect for other cultures or religions. Deficiencies in knowledge of other cultures and the will to understand them lead to low respect for them. Most Indonesians do not really care about culture. They do not even care about what happens to their own culture. Although many local ethnic cultures are gradually disappearing, local languages forgotten, and local ethnic traditions abandoned, many people have no concern for such problems.

³ In anthropology and sociology, the term "pluralistic society" became an important concept after Furnivall (1939) used it to characterise societies in the Netherland Indie where different social orders existed side by side within the same political unit, and the market place was the social arena integrating them. A pluralistic society, in my opinion, can be characterised as follows: it consists of several different groups having different cultures; these groups live side by side but with *minimum social interactions* between members of these groups, so that society looks like more a mosaic of culture; these groups live within the boundary of a polity or a political unit; the groups have a common economic arena where their members meet the members of other groups and have some social-economic transactions and relation.

of social-political control loses much of its authority in the eyes of the people. Globalisation also contributes to lessening the state's control; citizens no longer recognise the individual state as the only dominant agent. For this reason, a system that incorporates knowledge, sensitivity, and respect for diversity becomes an attractive alternative. *Power sharing* and *cultural recognition* (Lijpart, 1977; Taylor, 1992) that respect different experiences, perspectives, and communities with their ethnic and cultural identities lead to a multiculturalism that can succeed.

Multicultural education is one of the most effective instruments in creating a multicultural society. The future of Indonesia depends on education for mutual understanding and cultural diversity.

Religious Education as an Ideological State Apparatus

Both Indonesian and foreign observers note that relations among religious communities in Indonesia were at their best during the New Order era (1966-1998). Pancasila⁴ (the state ideology) played a unifying role in the nation-state (Taher, 1997). Unfortunately, these conditions, imposed by a top-down policy, failed even before the downfall of Suharto. The following period was marked by increasing violence, direct and indirect, structural and cultural. Riots and conflicts caused by different religions, ethnic and social groups, and politics became common in Indonesia everywhere from Aceh to East Timor, Sanggau Ledo, Situbondo, Jakarta, Solo, Sampit, Maluku, and Poso. These crimes against humanity continued throughout the last decade.

⁴ Pancasila, the five pillars of state ideology, is a consensus of the Indonesian people and was mentioned in the preamble of the constitution: belief in the one God; just and civilised humanity; the unity of Indonesian; people's authority under the system of public consensus and representation; and social justice for all people. Under the Suharto or New Order regime (1966-1998), a single interpretation of Pancasila was dominated by the government. But after the fall of this regime, it became open to every citizen to interpret these five pillars, which gives many chances for public opinion, discussion, and even polemic.

This is an indicator of government ignorance concerning the existence and rights of local cultures comprising hundreds of ethnic and social groups in all areas of the country. For more than three decades, the state development programme has focused on making the variety of cultures in Indonesia homogenous in order to improve efficiency and productivity. This was motivated by the need to maintain national stability as a prerequisite for attracting development capital.

Authoritarian government, unbalanced competition in exploiting economic and political resources, and large social gaps in distributing development welfare created jealousies and injustices far from society's hopes and ideals. The harmonious state system of which the government was proud was more like a fragile and vulnerable spider web. The ideology of the New Order was passive and static, so it failed to understand the collapse of social and religious harmony in the country.

During this New Order era, education in Indonesia paid scant attention to how we appreciate and respect religious and cultural diversity. The trend was toward homogenisation in the guise of national cultural protection, systematically introduced through education. Javanese culture was the central paradigm, and other cultures were marginalised. In addition, the reorganisation of groups into a number of Indonesian provinces de-emphasised the variety of cultural identities. The process of homogenisation, cultural hegemony, and pauperisation was taught in civic education such as Education on Pancasila and Citizenship (PPKN), Education of National History and Struggle, Training of P4 (Guidance for Internalisation and Externalisation of Pancasila) – and even Religious Education.

Consequently, in defending the stability of the nation-state, the government maintained a *de facto* policy of limiting the freedom of religion. Only religions officially acknowledged by the government had the right to be practised in Indonesia – Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, and Hinduism. The GBHN (Outline of the Nation's Direction) policy of

1993 declared that one of the national development objectives in religious life was to create a harmonious life amongst religious communities. The government made many efforts to achieve this objective by creating dialogues among religious leaders and holding informal discussions, conferences, and seminars with religious leaders and scholars from all the existing religious communities.⁵

Unfortunately, the government's initiative was structurally imbalanced toward civil society's freedom to establish similar voluntary initiatives. The religious institutions mentioned above were seen as having the right to talk only about the importance of religious communities in Indonesia, while the voices of civil society did not succeed in expressing their importance and aspirations.

To achieve the objective, the government used religious education as a state ideological apparatus to indoctrinate students with state-

⁵ One effort was to establish a forum of communication and consultation for maintaining the harmony of religious communities in which the government plays the initiator with the representatives from all "official" religions. The forum was established in 1980 and called Wadah Musyawarah Antar Umat Beragama (Interreligious Communities Conference Organisation). The members of the forum were MUI (Council of Indonesian Ulemas), PGI (United of Indonesian Churches), KWI (Conference of Indonesian Churches), Walubi (Council of Indonesian Buddhist Followers) and Parisada Hindu Dharma. Thirteen years later the government initiated the first National Conference on Religions in Indonesia, held on 11-12 October 1993, and created the LPKUB (the Institute for Study of the Harmonious Life of Religious Communities).

The Minister of Religious Affairs, Tarmizi Taher, initiated the establishment of the institute. The objective of this institute was to study and to develop religious thinking on harmonious relations among the spiritual communities from various religions. The government also disseminated the official religions point of view on the harmonious life of communities under the supervision of the Department of Religious Affairs. The effort was supervised by the Improvement Program on Harmonious Life of Religious Communities, Committee of Religious Study and Development. The effort of spreading the ideas on the harmony of interreligious communities in line with government's version was through MUI, PGI, KWI, Walubi and Parisada Hindu Dharma and had been done when the Department of Religious Affairs was led by Tarmizi Taher. One of their works is an anthology titled *The Theological Frame of Harmonious Life of Religious Communities in Indonesia* (Jakarta: Balitbang Agama DEPAG RI, 1997) published in bilingual – Indonesian and English.

sanctioned concepts of religious freedom. Confucianism, which had the misfortune to be associated – in the state’s mind – with the forbidden ideology of communism, was not recognised as an official religion. This model of religious education systematically negated mutual respect and neglected minority group contributions to Indonesian culture.

Religious education in public and religious schools adopted an exclusive model (see table 1), teaching particular systems of religion or belief as the truth and the only path to salvation and regarding other religions as inferior. This approach leans heavily toward indoctrination and does not provide an adequate base for determining a religious education that could be either accepted or rejected.

No	Characteristic	Implication
1	It introduces only its own system of religion	Narrow system of knowledge
2	It does not recognise the other religions as genuine or authentic;	Truth and salvation claim
3	It ignores the otherness in religions and regards other religions as inferior	Sense of superiority
4	It regards other religions as worthless	Prejudices, biases, and stereotypes
5	It views the other religions and the world through its own religion or weltanschauung	Myopic
6	Its extreme loyalty of religious belief protects against outsider influence	Religious fanaticism and radicalism
7	Its mentality of conversion and mission is very forceful	Religion’s burden of proselytism

Table 1. Exclusive characteristics of religious education and their implications⁶

⁶This table was concluded from my own observation on teaching-learning practices in class, focus group discussions, interviews with headmasters of Islamic Junior High School and Islamic Senior High School in Central Java in 1998 and 1999; and Teachers of Religious Education of Islamic Senior High School from all representative of provinces who attend Master Degree in Integrated Islamic

In the past, religious education dealt only superficially with the importance of harmonious life among religious communities. Harmony, in a context of indoctrination, is artificial because it does not reflect dialectical dynamics or cooperation among religious communities. In the New Order era (1966-1998), harmony was configured in passive terms because encounters were permitted only in a framework designed by the government, without the participation of civil religious people.

When the state or schools teach only about official religions, education fails to promote democratic pluralism. By not teaching the values of democracy, the state and the schools diminished the role of diversity and limited their pupils' and people's political freedom.

Basis of Multicultural Theology

Multiculturalism is usually defined as a socio-intellectual movement that encourages the value of diversity as the core point of view: all cultural groups must be regarded and treated equally (Baidhawiy, 2005). Multiculturalism in Indonesia increases in significance and demands a central place in contemporary life when it is seen in the context of a rising awareness of the need to improve social order and harmony within the life of a nation-state that has been damaged by sectarian violence.

In religious education, multiculturalism should become the principal base of teaching and learning. But religious education needs more than curriculum reform. It also needs the transformation of religious perspectives – from exclusivist to multicultural. Given the problems mentioned above, contemporary development cannot be approached artificially. The solution must deal with the fundamental aspect of formulating a base for multicultural theology.

Islam as a great religion, culture, and civilisation came to the Indonesian archipelago in the fourteenth century and continues to grow and contribute to local cultural diversity. Islam is in and by itself a great tradition, but it also fosters plurality through the Islamisation of the culture it encounters and the way in which it absorbs aspects of that culture into itself, creating distinct sub-traditions of Islam. The variety of Islam – from Aceh and Malays, Java, Sunda, Sasak, Bugis, etc. – created a plurality within itself that, in turn, created ambivalence.

On the one hand, the diversity of Islam, by offering norms, attitudes, and the value of harmonious interrelation among ethnic, cultural, and religious communities, contributes to a foundation for living together within the context of societies, nations and states that are Islam. Sociological and anthropological studies show that religious worldviews such as Islam can reduce tension and provide non-violent solutions for conflicts within various cultural settings (Irani and Funk, 2001). But it is also true that the diversity of Islam can directly or indirectly contribute to inter-group conflict, tension, and friction.

In the face of continuous communal conflict, Islam needs to reposition itself in the context of religious and cultural diversity. It should show that Islam is a smiling, peaceful, and non-violent face of religion. It is important for Islam to contribute nuance to the paradigm for reconstructing the nation. It can portray itself as a non-centrist, as opposed to a doctrinaire and authoritarian, religion. Without ignoring theological doctrines of faith and eschatological value and achievement, Islam can bring together a consciousness of dialogue and preparedness to encounter all people anywhere and at any time. In this way, Islam has appeal as a promising public and prophetic religion that enriches itself with a multicultural mandate.

With the failure of political elites to manage a multicultural society, it is a time for the moral and ethical paradigm of multicultural Islam to become the life-soul of the nation-state. This is a theological perspective

that respects the diversity of others; it is a theological interpretation of the religious, cultural, and ethnic identity of others. It belongs properly in the sphere of ethical public order – a Qur’anic theology that allows the “other” to be “different” and regards this as a permissible or necessary ethical reality. This is the theology of the twenty-first century, which communicates beyond particular languages and traditions.

Borrowing Abdulaziz Sachedina’s term (2001), this is the *ecumenical sensibility* of multicultural theology, which includes a shared concern with all people of the world and influences their lives beyond the limits of religious and cultural communities. And the *summum bonum* of multicultural theology is to emancipate people from the narrow-mindedness, poverty, backwardness, injustice, and discrimination that are a result of colonial relationships of upper-lower, domination-subordination, superior-inferior, oppressor-oppressed in interreligious, interethnic, and intercultural settings. To resolve the conceptual deadlock of a pluralistic society in which the slogan of national development contributed to a culture of discrimination, domination, and conflict, multicultural Islam has the potential to reorder the value system through a pattern of equal social relations and mutual respect of diversity (see table II below).

Religious and educational institutions in the Indonesian context have been criticised for creating prejudices against different groups, resulting in the escalation of inter-group tension and schism (Abdullah, 2005; Asy`arie, 2001). These institutions did not promote an appreciation of pluralism but denied it instead, in such a way as to intensify social segregation and sectarian conflicts (Khisbiyah, 2004).

Hence, through the Centre for Cultural Studies and Social Change, Muhammadiyah University of Surakarta, we arrange and offer a programme of reconstruction and implementation of an alternative paradigm, approach, and method of religious learning that can eliminate interreligious tensions and bring peace and well-being to the whole

community. We help change the paradigm and way of thinking of religious institutions and communities concerning cultural diversity and religious pluralism. We believe that Islam has provided the basis for understanding pluralism and multiculturalism within its own teaching and values in the Koran and Sunnah. Islam teaches its adherents to become tolerant, open-minded global citizens who are responsible for the planet earth and humanity.

The main problem is that respect for diversity and pluralism has not developed properly. This is because of the various hegemonies imposed by political, economic, educational, and puritan religious authoritarianism that penetrated irresistibly into local and ethnic cultures. Furthermore, the prevailing Muslim attitude of identifying Islam with Arabia leads Islam in Indonesia to have little respect for the plurality of local cultures. One of the crucial factors in contributing to heightened tensions between institutionalised religions and local cultures is religious intolerance of cultural diversity. To some extent, this attitude is also exercised by Muhammadiyah, the second largest Islamic organisation in Indonesia, whose traditional method of dealing with local culture deviating from its standard of behavior and belief is characterised by many scholars as “judge and reject” (Mulkhan, 2003).

In response, we have designed a programme titled “Muslim Tolerance and Appreciation for Multiculturalism”. This programme divides into two components – “Multicultural Islam” and “Teaching Appreciation of the Arts”. The two parts are linked in that they are both conducted within the context of the Muhammadiyah branch of Indonesian institutional Islam, and their primary target is the discourse, attitudes, and policies of Muhammadiyah both at the level of leaders and at the grassroots – schools and mosques. Both parts deal with difference and cultural diversity.

The “Multicultural Islam” component is designed to develop arguments for multicultural Islam based on theological, philosophical

and Islamic jurisprudential precepts, use the precepts to legitimate the concept of multicultural Islam, promote religious tolerance towards multicultural society (one of the products is *Reinventing Multicultural Islam* [Baidhawiy and Thoyibi eds., 2005], and criticise and modify the content of religious teaching and sermons or speeches that reinforce stereotyping, prejudice, and hatred of difference along religious and ethnic fault lines. The “Teaching Appreciation of the Arts” component aims at acquainting schoolchildren directly with local and traditional arts (especially those not overtly Islamic in character or function); and cultivating awareness and appreciation of local cultural identities, as well as improving tolerance and respect for the plurality of other cultures in the Islamic elementary schools.

Category	Content of Values
Core values	1. <i>Tawhid</i> : the unity of Godhead for the unity of humankind; a worldview aimed at realising the unity of God in inter-human relations. God is the primary source of all humankind: we are brothers (<i>ukhuwwah basyariyyah</i>).
	2. <i>Ummah</i> (living together): everybody has equal access to inhabit this universe, lives side by side, and binds social ties in a group, community, and society, etc.
	3. <i>Rahmah</i> (love): to manifest attributes of God the Merciful and the Benevolent, human beings were created by God to interact and communicate each other based on spirit of love and care.
	4. <i>Al-musawah, taqwa</i> (egalitarianism): all human beings are brothers and equal before Allah, even though their sex, gender, race, colour, and religion are different.
Implementations	1. <i>Ta`aruf, ihsan</i> : (co & pro-existence/altruism): the awareness and willingness to live together, neighbours with the others who come from different cultures, ethnicities, and religions, in order to enlarge social horizon (co-existence); to collaborate, take and give (pro-existence), and to get ready for sacrifice (altruism).
	2. <i>Tafahum</i> (mutual understanding): the awareness that their values and ours are different. We may complement each other and contribute to a dynamic relation. Our opposite is our partner, and partnership encounters a

	<p>particular truth in one relation. True friends are partners in dialogue, who always show their commitment to a common platform, and seek to understand their difference, similarity, and uniqueness.</p>
	<p>3. <i>Takrim</i> (mutual respect): mutual respect is a universal value of all religions and cultures by which we prepare ourselves to hear different voices and perspectives, to respect the dignity of variety of individuals and groups.</p>
	<p>4. <i>Fastabiqul khayrat</i> (fair competition): equality in diversity supports communication and competition in a good manner among individuals and groups to achieve a higher quality and prestige in all aspects of social life.</p>
	<p>5. <i>Amanah</i> (mutual trust): to preserve mutual trust in inter-human relations.</p>
	<p>6. <i>Husnuzhan</i> (positive thinking): to have positive thinking means be careful in judging anyone or anything and to seek clarification at first hand from the source.</p>
	<p>7. <i>Tasamuh</i> (tolerance): to accept freedom of religion and expression means respecting differences and diversities in religion, cultural perspectives, and ethnicity.</p>
	<p>8. <i>`Afw, maghfirah</i> (forgiveness): to forgive means forgetting all form of torture, crime, and wrongdoing, whether done willingly or reluctantly. Forgiveness is twofold: to pardon when we have the power of revenge; and to excuse when we have no power of payback.</p>
	<p>9. <i>Sulh</i> (reconciliation): the chosen way to assemble concepts of truth, mercy, and justice after violence has taken place.</p>
	<p>10. <i>Islah</i> (conflict resolution): this action emphasises the powerful relation between psychological dimensions and communal political life, through testimony that the sufferings of individuals and groups will grow vastly when we do not understand, forgive, and overcome.</p>
<p>Goals</p>	<p>1. <i>Silah, salam</i> (peace): peace-building, peacekeeping, and peace-making.</p>
	<p>2. <i>Lyn</i> (non/anti-violence culture): actions, sayings, attitudes, behaviour, structures and systems that preserve and protect physical, mental, social, and environmental security and safety.</p>
	<p>3. <i>`Adl</i> (justice): a social equilibrium that is caring and sharing, moderate in responding to difference, and fair and open to a variety of point of view and action.</p>

Table II. Basic values of multicultural theology

Religious Education for Peace and Harmony

Religious education is an important instrument in implementing the multicultural theological perspective. Religious education in a context where plurality is intense and accelerating needs the courage to declare the end of a dogmatic approach and a strategy of indoctrination in teaching and learning. Instead, multicultural theology-based religious education must employ a dialogical approach and take living religious diversity as its starting point.

Multicultural theology-based religious education has the following characteristics:

How to live and work together

It includes: *first*, developing tolerance, empathy, and sympathy, which are the essential requirements of successful coexistence and pro-existence in a religiously diverse environment. Tolerance is the inner preparation that fosters the competency of being *at home* with others who differ essentially in the understanding of what is a good and proper way of life (Thun in Ali *et al.*, 2002). *To be at home* is not merely acknowledging differences but also accepting that there are many paths to Rome and, furthermore, not all people want to go to Rome. Tolerance is an ambivalent concept. On the one hand, being tolerant, allowing others to be themselves, respecting others and their origins and backgrounds always means refraining from telling others what to do and not wanting to influence them to follow one's own ideas and for one's own advantage. Tolerance calls for dialogue aimed at communicating and explaining differences. This presupposes mutual recognition, prohibits any form of dogmatism, and endorses curiosity as its guiding principle. This is tolerance in a solid form. Merely decorative tolerance entails no commitment and seem to blend wonderfully with smug complacency while making it possible to attach an aura of virtue to

one's own passivity. (Goeudevert in Ali *et al.*, 2002). Multicultural theology-based religious education attempts to promote tolerant attitudes from a minimum to a maximum level, from a merely decorative tolerance to a solid tolerance.

Second, clarifying values of living together in the religious perspective. Religions involve themselves in discussions and propose their own perspectives on values that can be understood as similar to the values and interests of other religions. These values are eventually agreed upon by all and undergo objectification – they are concretised and become the common property of all members of religions, irrespective of race and color, who are committed to preserving and implementing living together. The Global Ethic (1993), outlined in the *Declaration of the Parliament of the World's Religions*, is a statement of values essential to the common interest of humankind globally in order to resolve common problems of global ecology and humanity. The twenty-first century began with incredible human tragedy – the destruction of the World Trade Centre in New York, the subsequent war in Afghanistan, the terrorist bombing in Legian, Bali, Indonesia and other events of that kind in Thailand, the Philippines and other places. It is time for religions to regain their commitment to condemn all forms of violence and bloodshed against the innocent in the struggle for narrow self-interest. Religious values of togetherness need to be reinforced, and religious education is the most effective tool to accomplish this for the future of humankind on earth.

Third, maturing emotionally. Living together in diversity is a difficult thing. Togetherness is often coloured by in-group feeling. True togetherness requires freedom and openness towards *outsiders*. In collaborating with others, we must prepare ourselves to achieve freedom of speech and thought in expressing our identity, teaching, doctrine, and practice etc. We must also get ready freely to accept the out-group's way of life and thinking. Without freedom and openness, togetherness can

imprison us in a disadvantageous relationship. But freedom and openness without togetherness can fail and lead to conflict. Togetherness is making a bridge between one's freedom and openness and the freedom and openness of others. Togetherness, freedom, and openness must develop simultaneously towards emotional maturity in inter- and intra-religious relationships.

Fourth, participating equally. Recognising the existence and the right to life of other religions, while important, is not enough to build the pillar of living and working together with others. Mere recognition can open the possibility of perceiving the other in a relationship of superior to inferior, domination and subordination, oppression, and subjugation. To preclude domination and supremacy, all religions must have a relationship of interdependence and equality. Every religion has the chance to live and contribute to a universal human welfare.

Fifth, building a new social contract and formulating new rules of interreligious life. Gain freedom from the memory of interreligious conflict of the past! Contemporary needs require members of all religions to establish a new life and to agree on a healthier vision for living together. To this end, it is crucial that education prepares pupils with *communication skills* so they can make use of encounters with others and apply creative reconciliation through various means.

The result of these five processes is the growth and development of *thinking skills* in new problem-solving; capacity for developing interpersonal and intrapersonal religious relations; ability to tackle controversial issues caused by religious sentiment and *religious triggering* in creative ways; and developing empathy, mutual-understanding, and religious collaboration.

Establishing mutual trust

Mutual trust is critical to social capital in cultural reinforcement of civil society (Hanifan, 1916; Jacob 1961; Loury in Wallace and LeMund, eds., 1977; Light, 1972; Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2000; Fukuyama in Harrison and Huntington, eds., 2000). Norms producing this social capital have to demonstrate substantively such virtues as delivering truth, meeting duties, and reciprocity. Social capital is a set of cumulative cultural contributions supporting certain social duties in establishing civil society.

In addition to mutual trust, non-material resources in this society include status, good intention, citizens' freedom, tolerance, respect for rule of law and norms, and networks that can increase social efficiency by easing coordinated actions accumulated by social agents. This social capital is the foundation for reconstructing rational attitudes, positive thinking, freedom from prejudices and stereotypes whether constructed socioculturally or politically. Religion is one of the important factors in constructing culture and ethnicity (Smidt, 2003).

Because of the process of internalisation and externalisation over time, it often occurs that cultural and ethnic identification impact religion and *vice versa*. This may be the cause of the growth and development of certain prejudices in religious groups, whether or not they were consciously cultivated or inherited from a previous generation. Religious education underlines the necessity of enlightenment through promoting interreligious, intercultural, and interethnic mutual trust.

Preservation of mutual understanding

To understand is not merely to agree. People sometimes believe that if they try to be "gentlemen" and to understand another's point of view, this is similar to sympathy towards someone or something. However,

mutual understanding is an awareness that values differ among people and may possibly be complementary and contribute to dynamic and living relationships. Someone with different values may be a partner in unifying little truths in one relationship.

A true friend is a partner in dialogue who always commits to accept differences, prepares to consider all possibilities in an encounter, and understands that in relationships each person is unique. Because of this, religious education is responsible for establishing the ethical foundation of mutual understanding among the many religious and cultural entities in order to forge a common attitude and shared concern.

Developing mutual respect

This attitude puts all human beings in equal relation: there is neither superiority nor inferiority. To respect each other in human society is a universal value of the world's religions. Multicultural theology-based religious education develops the awareness that peace requires mutual respect among religious followers, and through this we prepare ourselves to listen to other voices and different perspectives of religions; we respect the significance and nobility of all individuals and religious groups. Sacrificing the dignity of the others or using violent means to maintain self-esteem and dignity is never permissible. Mutual respect leads to mutual sharing among individuals and groups.

Open-mindedness

Rational i.e. cognitive maturity is one of the most important goals of education (Brown & Palinscar, 1986). Education provides new knowledge about how we think and act. As a result of encounters with the world and its diversity, pupils undergo a process of maturing and begin to develop a point of view and understanding of reality. Through this new horizon, they begin to rethink how they see themselves, the

others, and the world. They are reinventing themselves and a new culture with new open-mindedness. Multicultural theology-based religious education enables them to face the plurality of viewpoints and radical differences among people that challenge old identities.

Interdependence

A proper human life is only possible in a caring social order in which all members of society show appreciation for each other and preserve relationships, cohesion, and social interdependence. As a *homo socius*, a human being is born with race and sex, but even those who consider themselves rugged individualists would not survive without social cohesion. Many aspects of human life have not been overcome by wealth, money, power, and property. There remains a need for mutual help based on love and sincerity to banish powerlessness, contingency, and scarcity. It is our responsibility collectively to make a caring society for all. A harmonious, dynamic, and interdependent social order supports the unity of individuals – it does not divide them. This order regards cooperation as something urgent for a healthy society which can bestow individual well-being. In this manner, religious education must share its concern about the appreciation and interdependence of human beings from all religious traditions.

Conflict resolution and non-violent reconciliation

Interreligious conflict, when attempts are made to impose religious values on a group who are unwilling to accept them, is a reality of the past and the present. It is a transgression against the universal unity of humankind. In this situation, religious education has a responsibility to emphasise the place of spiritual power as a medium of social integration

and cohesion that will advance the cause of human security and peace. In other word, religious education promotes religion as an effective conflict resolution tool.

Conflict resolution without reconciliation will not make peace. Only when reconciliation is achieved will peace through forgiveness occur. Religious education reinforces the teaching that “earnings for an evil are a similar wickedness. But if one forgives and reconciles, than his earnings come from God” (the Qu’ran 42:40). To forgive means to forget willingly all attacks, evil, wrongdoing, and sins of others. Forgiveness is twofold: forgiving when we are powerless to take action – this kind of forgiveness is similar to tolerance and self-control and is not true forgiving; and forgiving when we have the power to redress the grievance – this forgiveness is what many religions in the world require.

Reflecting on these seven basic concepts, one can conclude that multicultural theology-based religious education introduces reform and innovative movement in religious education in order to promote awareness of the importance of living together within a framework of religious diversity supported by a spirit of equality and equity, mutual trust, mutual understanding, and respect for the similarities and differences among religions, with a firm belief in the unique insight of each religion. Through embracing this point of view, we can build successful relationships and realise the interdependence of all people. This posture of open-mindedness will provide the best way out of interreligious conflict and will empower peacemaking through forgiveness and non-violent action.

Conclusion

Multicultural theology-based religious education should be pursued collaboratively among educational institutes, policymakers, and governmental and non-governmental organisations in order to establish

a new vision of the role of religious education in society. Religious education should promote the values of mutual understanding, interdependence, and peace. This imperative is clear cut if religious education wants to participate in developing a peaceful and harmonious society in a global context. We need to envision a new paradigm, with a place for the spiritual in the world of education, neither as an isolated movement on the margins of academia nor as a new form of repression and social control, but as an essential element of a greater duty to reorient educational institutions to respond adequately to the challenges we have to face in teaching, learning and our daily lives.

Based on these insights, a new form of institutional cooperation should be attempted. The key elements are the interplay between sacred texts and changeable social context and the tension between normative and popular religions. The challenge of comparing religions and practising dialogue among them will be enough to enlighten our reason in seeking a true multi-dimensional and interdisciplinary project.

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