

Hermeneutic Dilemma in the Indonesian Interfaith Dialogue Program

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Abstract. In Indonesia, one of the needs for dialogue between religious people manifests in religious harmony forum programs as the implementation of Pancasila, Preamble 1945, Article 29 paragraph 2, and Joint Decree of Ministry of Home Affairs and Ministry of Religious Affairs No 8 and 9 2006. This research employed ethnographic methods to reveal the dialogue difficulties between religious people that are prone to conflict. One of the research results showed that the root of conflict between religious people is the diversity of interpretation of the religious teachings. However, this issue refers to the diversity of interpretations between religious institutions and the diversity of interpretations from each individual of the religious community. It implies that dialogue in the context of religions and daily life yields problems or dilemmas that are impossible to solve. However, it should be regarded as an integral part of the dialogue itself.

Keywords: Dilemmas, Conflicts, Dialogue Between Religious, Interpretation, Religious Teachings

1 Introduction

Hermeneutics is one of the key themes in philosophy, literature, language, linguistics, culture and is generally found in humanities studies. McCaffery et al. [1], hermeneutics is regarded as one of the research methods in humanities sciences. As a method, hermeneutics becomes a process of understanding either direct text or anything that requires various processes such as translation, adaptation, and many others. Therefore, hermeneutics can be understood as a science integrating texts' interpretation, lexical meaning, and research method context. In a broader context, Gadamer et al. [2] understands hermeneutics as realities, either the visible and the invisible as text. According to Gadamer, all of them are facts ready for interpretation. On a more utmost note, Gadamer believes that when someone expresses his idea or construct through writings, at that very moment, that idea will stop or die because what is going to be developed is the idea or interpretation of others.

Hermeneutics teaches us how to write, understand, and place a text in its proper context. Hence, Thiselton differentiates hermeneutics from philosophy studies, holy scripts studies, literature studies, and social studies. Thiselton describes that in philosophy, the process of hermeneutics roots oneself in his community and tradition [3]. While in the holy scripts studies, it is based on the roots of the text based on space and time. In literature study and holy scripts interpretation, hermeneutics is better understood as part of the critical study process and further explores the meanings of theories based on readers. In that sense, hermeneutics on the broader

dimension can be understood as a study of something attractive, social sciences, critical theorists, history of thinking, and theology.

The hermeneutic process, in general, starts when someone faces reality or text. Interpretation will apply to that reality in order to gain understanding. Next, there will be a process of expressing that understanding, either verbally or non-verbally. Such expression will be a reality or text interpreted by other people to gain understanding. Hence, the two ways of understanding reality are a direct encounter with that reality and an indirect encounter through text interpretation. The two have the same objective, which is understanding reality. Fleck [4] believes that this process happens to all interpreters. A hermeneutic process is a thinking process that happens inside one's mind either from an external stimulation or an automatic process within oneself to "speak to himself."

The common hermeneutic process is different from the hermeneutic process in religion. In hermeneutics of religion, the process starts with imagining God's thoughts which later formed as God's words. Therefore, the hermeneutic process starts from God's words. However, this process cannot be done by a human. Because to understand God's words, one should earn a revelation from God. In general, all religions acknowledge that the prophets interpreted God's words in two approaches. The first one is directly from God without any intervention from the prophets. The second is indirect revelation through the writings of the prophets inspired by God [5].

The expressions of prophets' understanding of God's words, directly or indirectly, manifest in the holy scriptures. Hence, the holy scriptures are sources of message about who and what from God to humans. Piliang [6], texts in holy scriptures hold three fundamental subjects: 1) Do the contents of the holy scriptures resemble God's words? 2) As a text with human language, are the texts in the holy scriptures stretching a room for human interpretation of God's words? 3) Can a text in holy scriptures experience a shift of meaning in different socio-culture, economy, and political contexts? Caputo [7] infers that interpretation in religion started when the text was reinterpreted (deconstructed) to gain new meaning.

In religious studies, hermeneutics is discussed as an interpretation of language and message of God so it can be understood by human language. Sya'bani [8] stated that it is intended for other people (readers) to gain the scientific aspect while understanding God's message. In this way, an understanding emerges that interpreting God's message as scientific interpretation in studies is always dynamic. Understanding of this kind emerges as the consequence of reading the holy scriptures and experiencing the social reality.

In a certain sense, the roots of dilemma in the discussion of religion started to show. However, Caputo [9], this can be understood as long as the essence of religion is understood as a space of subjective truth and an area of understanding with never-ending paradoxes. Dilemma or paradox illustrates difficult choices between two alternative truths that contradict, but at the same time, both of the alternatives can be accounted for. It clarifies that truths in religions cannot be seen as black and white. Gold [10] describes a brief history of the term paradox, which was first used in poetry, myth, and religion to describe the breadth of understanding of something to be expressed. Gold stated that the term paradox is prevalent in all contemporary studies to show abundant meanings in every reality.

That is why interfaith dialogue is needed to understand that the truth of each religion lies within the context of subjective truth. Therefore, consistent communication should be organized to clarify that "I" and "the others" have different subjective truths. Hick [11] said that interfaith dialogue is a dialogue between two religions and beliefs at different levels and contexts. John Hick categorizes the inter-faith dialogue into three levels. The first is the discursive theological dialogue that deals with the theological discussion between the theologians. The second is the

interior discussion that deals with the development of discussion from discursive theological dialogue that considers the ways of lives, religious symbols, and involvement in other religious rites. The third one is practice dialogue that deals with humanity's problems. It emphasizes that interfaith dialogue does not happen at the theologian level but at the laypeople level. The dialogue will not concern theological dialogue, instead, it discusses the sociological and anthropological aspects. At this level, the people discuss how they live together in harmony.

Dialogue is essential because the truths produced by religions are paradoxical. The paradox has pushed leaders of all levels to implement every possible agenda to run their organizations. In such a situation, there are various concepts and activities from many organizations, and even at the same organization level, there are organizations with no agenda. It happens to Inter-Religious Harmony Forum. Lemann [12] emphasizes the importance of inter-religious dialogue to show that uniformity does not always happen. Instead, there will be constant differences from one another. In that sense, a dialogue will become the tool to unite those differences.

More substantial dilemmas can be found on multi-interpretation religious teachings; 1) On one side, some religious people expect the sustainability of their original religious teachings to preserve the original identity of that religion. On the other side, some religious people expect their religious teachings to be understood based on the development of life state; 2) On one side, some religious people want their leaders to be charismatic. On the other side, some religious people want their leaders to be rational; 3) On one side, some religious people expect uniform principles in living together. On the other side, some religious people think and acknowledge diversity; 4) On one side, some religious people use symbols to facilitate their appreciation of the religion. On the other side, some religious people see symbols in religion that will lead people to the danger of idolatry; 5) On one side, some religious people internalized the concept of halal and haram in living together. On the other side, some religious people see all God's creation as good. For them, halal and haram only apply to the health context.

The dilemmas occur due to the interpretation of broad responsibilities that cover the moral and harmonious community responsibilities. Government, religious leaders, and the community altogether feel responsible for the harmonious life. Everyone has the right to interpret how they will build that harmonious life. Institutional dilemma (religious teaching) also occurs due to the abundant source of truth. Every religion interprets God through their religion's history. Every religion interprets God's command through the religious teaching they embrace. Therefore, logically, interpretations in the context of religious truth can be different or even the opposite of one another. It is not only in the context of the same religion but also in the same religion.

It becomes more evident when those dilemmas are found in social interactions. Community from the same or different religious backgrounds are indirectly forced to manage this matter for their own lives. Chatters et al. [13] revealed that the role of social context is significant in influencing the communities' religious understanding and appreciation. At a certain point, the social context requires religion to re-reflect and even self-correct to get its meaning and relevance according to the situation and circumstances of both its adherents and people outside it. Countries with inhabitants of different religious teachings emphasize that the most effective way is to build tolerance. Tolerance refers to the attitude that realizes many people are living together with different life principles (way of life). Talib and Grill [14] reported the experience of socio-religious tolerance in Malaysia since long time ago. Such tolerance has been strived for and built by the people, which does not mean the effort for tolerance will cease. Instead, Talib showed that in such a tolerant situation, more contradictive principles would arise and keep coming. It means the dialogue and the expectation of tolerant life will constantly accompany each other.

2 Research Method

Some methods are applied in this study to collect and process the data. Observation method was conducted in the beginning to identify the what and how of Inter-Religious Harmony Forum (IRHF) in Indonesia. The observation was done to watch the work of IRHF. Results of observation were confirmed through in-depth interviews with the members of IRHF, regional government, and the community. Focus group discussion was implemented to process and develop the information at the same time. Last but not least, the collected data from individual interviews and FGD were formulated in ethnographic writing that is easy to digest by readers.

3 Finding and Discussion

In Indonesia, inter-faith dialogue movements are implemented in the form of Inter-Religious Harmony Forum. The job of the forum is indirectly related to Knitter [15], who said that inter-religious dialogue accommodates many religions to coexist in a nation. Interfaith dialogue in Indonesia is an implementation step from the concept of citizenship that the government initiated, so this forum exists structurally from the central to regional (province, city/region). It is intended to assist the regional government's duty to preserve the harmonious living of inter-religious communities. Firdaus [16] also emphasized that sustaining the religious communities is the rationale for inter-religious harmony forum establishment in Indonesia. Implementation of interfaith dialogue is regarded as unique and interesting since not every country wants to discuss it. In Indonesia, the effort to hold interfaith dialogue has been happening naturally due to the pressure of daily life situations. Reality shows that most Indonesian people live in religious diversity starting from within the family. This encourages each person to be familiar with the differences even at the closest level. Thus, Mantu [17] appointed that the country's intervention toward inter-religious harmony is a formalistic approach to legitimize the existing diversity in Indonesia.

For many countries, faith and religion are private matters that should not be discussed publicly. Roger [18] shows this in the context of education. He believed that faith does not need to be debated in education since it may be an aspect that encourages new and diverse perspectives in the dynamic of education. The truth of the faith shall not be met, but it will enrich the horizon of education. In Indonesia, faith and religion can be discussed since they are seen as part of sustaining the harmony of living together. It is recognized that the program of interfaith dialogue is not easy to realize because it deals with personal matters and relates to abstract things, and is difficult to express in words. Hence, the interfaith dialogue issues are rooted in the hermeneutics problems because faith and religion refer to something broad and abstract where everyone can give their perception and opinion as a guide for their lives. That is where the dilemma emerges because when we long to discuss faith and religion, we are in the position to discuss the abstract and unspeakable matters where everyone has their own interpretation.

Interfaith dialogue in Indonesia was initiated based on the nation's historical background. To understand the concept of inter-religious harmony in Indonesia, we must first understand Pancasila, Preamble 1945, Article 29 Paragraph 2, and the Joint Decree Number 8 and 9, 2006. Indonesia fully acknowledges its citizens' diversity, and that is why the founding fathers formulated the management principles based on diversity which is Pancasila, Unity in Diversity.

Suwarno [19] highlighted it by acknowledging the important role of the founding fathers in establishing brilliant Indonesian governance.

Therefore, Pancasila, as the country's principle, points that Indonesia is founded in the context of diversity. Notonegoro [20] highlighted diversity as the identity of Indonesia that is appointed as the country's foundation. Other countries do not widely do recognition of such matters. The long experience of the Indonesian people has noted that diversity is the main characteristic of this nation, and it is only natural that it is appointed as the basis for state administration. It is more emphasized on the Preamble of 1945 Constitution first paragraph that highlights the values of "natural right" embedded in every citizen. It also underlines that "coexistence between countries" means every country's right for independence should be guaranteed for the sake of justified universal humanity value and appreciation toward the individual natural right.

In terms of interfaith diversity, the commitment is comprised in Article 29 paragraph 2, which stipulates that the state guarantees each and every citizen the freedom of religion and of worship in accordance with his religion and belief. Article 29 paragraph 2 indicates that the government is responsible of: 1) Protecting every citizen in practicing their religions and beliefs, 2) Guiding and serving every citizen to have a conducive and peaceful religious practice, 3) Improving the quality of religious service and understanding, religious living, and improving the interrelation and relation between religious community, 4) Promoting harmonious interfaith value as an essential part of national harmony. To implement the concepts of Pancasila, Preamble 1945 constitution, first paragraph, and Article 29 paragraph 2, the Ministry of Home Affairs and Ministry of Religious Affairs issued a Joint Decree Number 8 and 9, 2006 as the model or guideline for the Indonesian Government to realize the interfaith dialogue under the name "Inter-Religious Harmony Forum (IRHF)."

Many institutions work to maintain the harmonious life. For example, the national commission on human rights, the national commission on children and women protection, and others. However, IRHF and the commissions are different. The national commission on human rights focuses on keeping people from degrading treatment. While, the national commission on children and women protection focuses on protecting children and women from acts of violence, abuse, and so on. FKUB focuses on establishing harmonious atmosphere in people's lives, specifically related to the relationship between religious people.

The collaboration between the central government and the people through inter-religious harmony forum is intended to assist the regional government's duty (Governor, Mayor/Regent) to preserve the harmonious living of inter-religious communities. The rationale was simple, managing the harmony of the interfaith community has included all elements of the community. Organizationally, the IRHF runs three primary duties; nurturing the inter-religious harmony living, empowering the inter-religious harmony forum, and facilitating the establishment of the house of worship. It is done since it was realized that the religious diversity among Indonesian people is prone to conflict. Why? In Indonesia, religion becomes an identity that determines people's daily activities and attitudes. How to dress, what to consume, choices of greetings and many others show one's religious background. Therefore, tiny mistakes could lead to conflict. Through inter-religious harmony forum, the government intends to anticipate such kinds of horizontal conflicts.

Nationally, Inter-Religious Harmony Forum holds general guidance for its members' activities. However, the form and model of activities are formulated based on each Inter-Religious Harmony Forum. Hence, it is understood that the activities of Inter-Religious Harmony Forum can be different and varied from one another. For example, the following are the activities of Inter-Religious Harmony Forum in Malang City. They run five primary tasks;

1) Facilitating the establishment of the house of worship, 2) Performing mediation to listen and accept aspirations from the community, 3) Performing mediation to channel aspirations from the community to the government, 4) Socializing information about the rules and policies of Inter-Religious Harmony Forum, and 5) Performing mediation to have a dialogue between religious leaders and community leaders.

The realization of the five primary tasks has been successful [21], Therefore, it should be acknowledged that Malang citizen's harmony cannot be separated from the significant role of Inter-Religious Harmony Forum. The process to facilitate the establishment of house of worship by Inter Religious Harmony Forum has successfully settled the uproars, even though some issues have not been solved. The role of mediation between the community and the government has contributed to the interests and needs of the community. Government recognizes the forum as helpful, and in many opportunities, the forum has been a great partner. In many aspects, the inter-religious harmony forum members may participate as discussion partners who respond and solve many important issues.

Even so, in implementing this function, various dilemmas will emerge to the surface. One of the technical dilemmas is related to the main person in charge. Is it the government or the community? How does that responsibility apply consistently? Kewuel [22] stated that the situation left some issues related to budget and office facilities provisions. The office facilities are unlike other government offices. Activities budgets are not automatically included in the annual budget. The activities of the forum are included in the category and mechanism of community organization proposal so it can be funded or not. It means the forum is acknowledged to hold a strategic role, but it lacks technical support. This is the structural dilemma that should earn structural attention in order to develop this forum.

Ironically, Inter-Religious Harmony Forum is highly dependant on the government to fund their activities. That matter encouraged the community service team from Universitas Brawijaya to hold capacity-building training to encourage IRHF members to see better funding opportunities from other stakeholders, such as CSR and others. The paradigm that sees government as the only stakeholder should be changed into government as one of the stakeholders. Thus, the activities of inter-religious harmony forum have the freedom of funding. This is reasonable because the work of this forum is related to the peace of life and peace of mind for all levels and groups of the community.

4 Conclusion

Interfaith dialogue program in Indonesia exists not only because of Indonesian historical background but also because of recent complicated problems in the context of religious teachings interpretation. The intervention from the state does not mean regulating the faith of believers; instead, it regulates how diverse believers can coexist harmoniously. That is the essential role of Inter-Religious Harmony Forum today. This movement shows the Indonesian government and people's realization that we will always live in a dilemma/paradox. Therefore, we need to conduct anticipatory actions. Discussions on the importance of pluralism and multiculturalism are part of the anticipatory actions. Dilemma or paradox is rooted in the issues of interpretation, which is complicated in its religious life hermeneutics and daily life hermeneutics.

The complexity of hermeneutics has forced us to have a never-ending dialogue with other people. The dialogue orientation in dilemma/paradox is directed toward mutual understanding.

The dialogue will not show any context of a comparison of right and wrong, instead, it will encourage understanding that in life, there is an endless version of “right.” In the context of religious dialogue, we strive to understand the same God with different hermeneutics paths. Inter-Religious Harmony Forum in Indonesia is a genuine effort to build harmonious living while at the same time nurturing each religion’s identities. Finally, referring to Ken Wilbert, “a valuable truth is born because of the courage to search for it, not some truths that lie on the system of any rigid regulation. Openness to what is different will make us stronger while closed to what is different will throw us apart.”

In this sense, religious life in a plural society requires everyone to make progress continuously. It is not only a progress of an individual who tries to keep a harmonious relationship with other people, but also a progress of becoming a better person. Therefore, a diverse life condition is a tool to upgrade the quality of oneself and the community. It is because problems within a diverse living will bring troubles not only to oneself but also to other people while living together.

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