

The Dark Side of Religious Pluralism According to Alan Race's Theory

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Abstract

Opposing religions can experience prolonged chaos due to conflicts arising from differences in beliefs. Therefore, it is a hope that religious pluralism will provide a fresh outlook on such inter-religious conflicts. Amid these conditions, religious pluralism offers a new approach to reducing and eliminating inter-religious conflicts. Religious pluralism brings in a solution that carries the concept that no religion is superior to the other. It eliminates the differences between each religion and unifies the similarities. However, it actually brings new problems. On the contrary, religious pluralism poses a threat to religions rather than providing relief. The understanding and practice of religious pluralism itself inform them that they bring a new threat to religious harmony and freedom. The purpose of this paper is to reveal the dark side of the notion of religious pluralism. This research is educational in nature to understand the effects of religious pluralism and for those who see religious pluralism as a peacemaker.

Keywords: Radical, Tolerance, Christianity, Religious Pluralism.

I. INTRODUCTION

Liberals appear to be a breath of fresh air for religious unification in the twenty-first century, a time of religious strife. They observe several disputes between religions. Liberals propose religious pluralism as a solution to this issue, acting as a link between different religions to foster cooperation (Lestari, 2020: 35). Muhammad Legenhausen believes that religious pluralism is a product of liberal Protestantism. He added, "The essence of religious pluralism is the relativity of truth to every religion in the world, as a form of tolerance to maintain inter-religious harmony amid existing diversity" (Afif, 2007: 96).

To ease the chaos between religions, Alan Race stated "No religion is superior to the other". This is a concept of religious pluralism. This understanding began to be widely accepted and became a peacemaker for every religious group. Many thinkers to street vendors agree with this approach. They see religious pluralism as a savior for conflicts caused by religion. Religious pluralism is good news to avoid conflicts between religions. Alan Race in his book *Christians and Religious Pluralism* uses

a typology (exclusivism-inclusivism-pluralism) to map various approaches to the relationship between Christianity and other religions. As the religious people's foundations are what fuel the conflict, he understood that religious plurality, which he invented, should work to bring about peace rather than destroy it. Because of this, the benefits of religious plurality actually undermine the tenets of current religions. Ahmad Khaerurrozikin noted that the emergence of religious pluralism has created problems for religions (Khaerurrozikin, 2015: 86).

Donovan explained that pluralism is coercive, it does not allow other people to be themselves. To play the pluralist game properly, groups are expected to accept radical reinterpretations and make amendments to their own views and those of others. Religious pluralism presupposes liberalism, which involves compromise, an accommodative attitude, and the demolition of certain traditional beliefs (Asian, 1999: 168). Therefore, from various critical comments and from the facts seen in the field regarding the notion of religious pluralism, it is not wise, if not critical, to the view of religious pluralism initiated by Alan Race.

Alan Race and other religious pluralists such as John Hick (Sulistio, 2001: 51-69) are also religious people, but they are not happy with literal interpretations of the Scriptures. They want to take a new approach by emphasizing free thinking without being confined by the original rules of interpretation (hermeneutics) held by fundamentalists. Based on this thought, religious fundamentalists see religious pluralism as a deadly wind for religious exclusivity. This makes religious pluralism the enemy of all religions.

Therefore, a critical view of the notion of religious pluralism must be carried out, in order to answer the question about the dark sides of the view of religious pluralism and to find the reason why it is so deadly. The aim of this paper is to open up and explain the notion of the teachings of religious pluralism so that everyone can see the dangers it poses. Because this paper is educational in nature, candor is the main basis for obtaining objectivity and clarity of argument.

Alan Race's Perspective on Pluralism

Alan Race is a theologian and bishop of Leicester. Race serves as Dean of the Center for Graduate Studies at St. Phillip, Leicester. He was the one who popularized the term exclusivism-inclusivism-pluralism (Jura, 2018:235). He also writes in the fields of theology and interfaith dialogue and is the chief editor of the international journal *Interreligious Insight: A Journal of Theology and Engagement*.

Race's famous work *Christian and religious pluralism*, written in 1983, has become one of the classic pieces of literature in the study of Christian theology. In the book, Race uses a typology (exclusivism-inclusivism-pluralism) to map the various approaches of Christian theologians and non-theologians regarding the relationship of Christianity with other religions (Ulfah, 2018: 213). Race explained, in religious pluralism, no religion has perfect religious knowledge, including Christianity. Thus the superiority of Christianity is seen as irrelevant because divine truth is not only owned by Christians but every religion is seen as having the same possibility of religious direction.

Apart from Alan Race, there are several other Christian theologians from religious pluralism figures such as Paul Tillich, John Hick, and Wilfred Cantwell Smith who also developed the concept of religious pluralism. The development of the concept of religious pluralism has resulted in fierce resistance to this view, due to its attacks on religious foundations.

II. METHODOLOGY

The research material was taken from various scientific journals and other written works. Writing is developed using documentation review techniques, in the form of observations from books, and articles that discuss topics relevant to the theme of religious pluralism. This article tries to explain objectively, the dark side of the notion of religious pluralism which is considered a civilized view in this era. This study uncovers the true face of pluralists who carry the mask of peace. A comprehensive critical-philosophical study will dismantle this mask.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Religious Pluralism

Religious pluralism is a concept introduced by believers who follow liberal ideologies and hold faith in holy scriptures (Afif, 2007: 94). Therefore, the issue of religious pluralism has never been a conflict between religious individuals and atheists, since it originates from within religious community itself. The problem here is the difference in understanding between the pluralist (liberal) clergy and the fundamentalist clergy. These two camps exist in every religion.

Liberalists have a freer understanding, not bound by the basic rules of faith in the religion they believe in. They set their standards for their faith and behavior, according to the (free) interpretation they believe in. Therefore, it is correct to say that religious pluralism is promoted by liberalist clergy (Khaerurrozikin, 2015: 90). Religious pluralism was initiated by Protestant Christians such as Alan Race, John Hick, Paul Tillich, Wilfred Cantwell Smith who later developed into other religions.

Atheism is created from the human rejection of the existence of God. However, liberalists are created because they do not accept the absolute truth of the religion they believe in. They want freedom in understanding their faith, which in the end is known as religious relativism. Religious relativism is the fruit of freedom, which they call enlightenment. This idea of enlightenment is increasingly being developed and generally accepted because it is considered to have an interesting and enlightening understanding. The development of this idea is inseparable from thinkers from religious people who disagree with the interpretation of religious fundamentalists.

There are three ideas developed from the notion of religious pluralism. First, religious syncretism is a view that agrees with the teachings of other religions as truth. A religious person involves himself in other religions but still holds his religion as a way of life. Second, Synthetism (Fios, 2014: 71-81) religion is an understanding that combines several religions into one. An example of this synthetic religion is the Millah Ibrahim Group. Judaism, Islam, and Christianity are combined into one religion (Farhan et al, 2020: 1-16). Third, religious relativism is that all religions are equally true. The names and procedures for each religion may be different, but the essence is the same, toward one God.

The prevailing perspective on religious pluralism is that of relativism, which is widespread across the globe at present. Pluralists of various religions generally prefer the view of religious relativism, because it is considered more correct and conciliatory. This perspective is deemed to be the most effective in fostering global harmony and stability.

3.2 Religious Pluralism Disarms Religions

The concept of religious pluralism, which is promoted by liberalists, does not recognize the truth of the teachings of each religion (Muttaqin, 2014: 101). Examples of truth from each religion: Christianity teaches, the only true religion is Christianity, and all other religions are wrong. Judaism teaches that the only true religion is Judaism, all other religions are wrong. The Islamic religion says that the only religion blessed by Allah is Islam, all other religions are wrong. Similarly, other religions express similar beliefs. Such claims of truth from each religion are not recognized by religious pluralism.

Religious pluralism, which is expected to be a peacemaker for inter-religious conflicts, is the opposite of religion. They strip away the main teachings of religions. By not acknowledging the truth held by each religion, religious pluralism creates an opposing position to the teachings of each religion. For religious pluralism, there is no absolute truth and no absolute error. While all religions hold teachings and believe the teachings of other religions are wrong. In short, all religions claim to be the most correct, while religious pluralism says truth is relative (Yasyak, 2017: 66).

If truth is considered relative, then religious pluralism should not be a concern since the perspectives of different religions are relative from the standpoint of pluralists. If each religion's perspective is relative, then there are no objective criteria for determining the truth since each perspective is correct according to its own beliefs. If there are no established criteria for assessing what is correct, then nothing can be deemed wrong. Despite this, religious pluralism seeks to eradicate the exclusivity of individual religions. As such, there is no requirement to eliminate the exclusivity of religions since it is subjective.

Religious pluralism holds an exclusive position in the relative views it promotes. In cases where pluralists claim that certain religious views are incorrect, the means by which they assess such errors remain unclear. Given that pluralism subscribes to the belief that all views are valid, it appears contradictory to claim that certain perspectives are incorrect. However, the notion of religious relativism as advocated by pluralists can be self-destructive since they may not wish to have their perspectives evaluated against alternative views.

3.3 Radicalism Understands Religious Pluralism

The extremist nature of religious pluralism, which asserts that all religions are identical, renders them indistinguishable from the very religions they oppose. Liberalists believe that only their own views are correct and all absolute views of religions are wrong. They are using the same standard of exclusivity as held by religions. It seems that the radicalism of the pluralists cannot be challenged, but they themselves oppose the radicalism of the fundamentalists. This is the danger of the double standard of religious pluralism. Religious pluralism should not be allowed to be radical in spreading their beliefs if fundamentalist religions are prohibited from using a similar approach to propagate their teachings.

Liberalists say adherents of religious exclusivism use a lot of subjective approaches from their religious perspective in viewing adherents of other religions (Ulfah, 2018: 214). Liberals do apply their own subjective viewpoints when evaluating religious doctrines, as per this assertion. Another accusation of religious pluralism towards the notion of religious exclusivism is that they will tend to be fundamental, conservative, extremist, intolerant, apologist, and dogmatic. Regarding this accusation, clergymen can also say the same thing that religious pluralists are also radical, extremist in their views, intolerant of the teachings of religions, and apologists

defend their relatively dogmatic views.

The concept of religious pluralism is rife with hypocrisy, evident in their assertion of being free thinkers, yet failing to respect the free thinking of religious leaders. Religionists subscribe to an exclusive ideology, which is a manifestation of freedom of thought. However, this perspective is contested by religious pluralists who do not wish for existing religions to possess exclusive views. If religious pluralists are permitted to exercise free thought by asserting that all religions are equivalent, then religions should also have the liberty to exercise free thought by upholding that all religions are distinct from one another.

3.4 Religious Pluralism Opposes Religious Tolerance

The concept that is promoted by religious pluralism is the unification of all religions in one understanding that all religions are equally true. By proclaiming that all religions are equally true, chaos can be pacified. If the notion of religious pluralism teaches that the essence of religions is the same, of course, its discourse as the principle of tolerance raises crucial questions, because tolerance is an attitude that respects, allows, and allows the stances, opinions, views, beliefs, habits, behavior, and so on that are different or contrary to their position (Fata and Fauzan, 2017: 31-56). However, if all religions were true, there would be no need for absolute claims by each religion. The existence of absolute claims of each religion shows the differences recognized by religions.

If all religions are equally true, then tolerance is not needed, because the concept of tolerance recognizes the differences between each religion. Religious pluralism is not a carrier of tolerance (Fata and Fauzan, 2017: 31-56). If there are no differences between each religion, then tolerance is no longer needed. If all religious teachings were equally true, then there would be no need for tolerance, because tolerance can exist when there are differences. Pluralists claim that pluralism upholds and teaches tolerance, but what happens is that they are intolerant, because they have denied the exclusive truth of religions by saying all religions are equally true (Fata and Fauzan, 2017: 31-56).

3.5 Religious Pluralism is Included in the Post-Truth Category

The Oxford Dictionary itself defines post-truth as “a condition in which facts do not significantly influence the formation of public opinion compared to personal emotions and beliefs (relating to circumstances in which people respond more to feelings and beliefs than to facts)” (Hartono, 2018: 73) . Simply put, post-truth is a lie disguised as the truth. This is what religious pluralism practices as if they bring peace, but in fact, they add conflict.

Religious pluralism does not solve existing problems, but people still believe in it as a help to existing conflicts (this is what is called post-truth). Until now, religious pluralism has not produced good achievements, but it is predicted to create peace between religions. While promoting peace, religious pluralism is often characterized by a discrepancy between its stated intentions and the reality on the ground. Despite the emphasis on unity, religious pluralism often challenges the fundamental truths held by various religions, as highlighted by Fata (2018: 105-128).

3.6 Religious Pluralism Creates a Negative Stigma for Religions

As liberalist ideas gain popularity, an increasing number of thinkers are reluctant to accept the books of their religions as the absolute truth. The notion of religious pluralism accuses religions that hold absolute truth (fundamentalists) as anarchists and extremists. They attribute the conflicts between religions to religious individuals who believe that their own faith is the most righteous compared to other religions. This negative stigma is attached to fundamentalist religions.

The term fundamentalist is associated with a name that causes anarchist actions. Fundamentalists' names are labeled as rioters in the conflicts and terror that occur. Frederik Fios accuses fundamentalists of not thinking critically, and of misguided thinking with negative prejudice towards adherents of other religions (Fios, 2014: 71-81). Negative stigmas like this are launched to pave the way for pluralists in spreading their understanding of religious relativism.

According to Ryandi (2013: 251-270), religious pluralism teaches that claiming one's religion as the only true religion is highly problematic, as it can lead to conflict and negative stereotypes. This perspective creates tension between liberalists (supporters of religious pluralism) and fundamentalists (adherents of specific religions) by challenging the idea of one religion being the most correct. Religious pluralism's liberal outlook further exacerbates the conflict, as it asserts that all religions are equal and valid, given that they worship the same God in different ways. Such ideas can undermine and alter the fundamental teachings of original religions.

Pluralists accuse fundamentalists of looking for flaws in other religions to cover up their religious mistakes. This kind of accusation explains the attitude of the pluralists who look for the shortcomings of the fundamentalists, to cover up their mistakes in thinking. Certainly, there are numerous followers of different religions who engage in mocking one another, even targeting those of other faiths. However, the reason behind this behavior is not due to the invalidity of their own religion, but rather the opposite - they believe that their religion is correct, and therefore ridicule the errors or flaws of other religions.

Arguing and mocking one another is not necessarily a beneficial action, as it may not respect freedom of thought and opinion. While disagreements can deepen one's beliefs through arguments and objections, if there is no conflict between religions, there may be no need to defend or challenge opinions. In other words, if the concept of religious pluralism is accepted, there can still be freedom of thought and opinion among religious followers.

3.7 Religious Pluralism Opposes Freedom of Religion

Freedom of religion is regulated in *Undang-Undang Dasar 1945* (Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia) Chapter IX Article 29 (Maharani, 2021: 1-7) which declares that the state is based on belief in the one and only God and the state guarantees the freedom of each resident to embrace their religion and to worship according to their religion and beliefs. This is the standard for the Indonesian people to hold their beliefs freely. Freedom of religion has had a legal basis since the founding of the Indonesian nation.

Freedom of religion means having the liberty to worship according to one's faith without causing a disturbance or offense to individuals of other religions. It does not promote the idea of all religions being the same. Rather, it recognizes and respects the differences among religions, allowing for freedom among followers of different faiths. The concept of religious pluralism, however, focuses on the unity of all religions at a fundamental level and therefore does not endorse the idea of freedom of

religion. Due to this difference in ideology, religious pluralism contradicts Chapter IX Article 29 of the 1945 Constitution.

3.8 Religious Pluralism Opposes the Motto *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*

The Indonesian national motto, *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, emphasizes the importance of unity in diversity. The motto only makes sense if there are differences among people. However, in religious pluralism, it is necessary to minimize or eliminate these differences because they can lead to conflicts. Religious pluralists view differences in beliefs as contradictions, but in the context of unity in diversity, differences in faith are considered beautiful. This is because the beauty of each religion lies in its unique beliefs and practices.

It may seem contradictory that liberals want to reconcile existing differences if differences are considered beautiful. This is why some argue that the concept of religious pluralism is in conflict with the idea of unity in diversity. Religious pluralists do not accept the absolute differences between religions and seek to merge them into one. However, if all religions are merged into one, the motto of unity in diversity loses its significance, as it requires the recognition and celebration of differences.

3.9 The Notion of Religious Pluralism is Blown Up by the Media

The idea of religious pluralism suggests that no religion should be considered superior to others, and therefore the differences between religions must be eliminated, while similarities should be emphasized. This concept is promoted through various movies, such as the Indian film “Rab Ne Bana Di Jodi,” which features prayer scenes in three different places, and “Bajrangi Bhaijaan,” which was released in 2015 and directed by Kabir Khan (Abidah, Husin, 2021: 318). Although these films are not explicitly about religious pluralism, they do promote the concept. This campaign for religious pluralism can also be observed in Asian films, where a Buddhist main character is shown getting married in a church scene.

Religionists do not question the existence of multiple religions in a pluralistic society. They believe in equality in terms of rights, social responsibilities, and the obligations of the state, but not necessarily in terms of religious beliefs. However, religious pluralists seek to unify everything, including faith, and admire the purity of their own beliefs. Religious pluralism considers things that should not be done in religions as acceptable.

3.10 Religious Pluralism Limits the Movement of Religions

Internal beliefs must remain in the internal sphere. Gus Dur made an analogy of pluralism as a house with many rooms. In that room, they are free to talk about anything. No one forbids exalting the coolest, coolest, cleanest, most fragrant room among the other rooms. But if they leave the room, they must respect fellow residents, help each other, and obey the house rules (Taufani, 2018: 198-217). In other words, Gus Dur was saying don't spread your religion outside. Muslims don't preach, Christians don't carry out great commissions, Hindus and Buddhists don't spread your faith, because your religion is only internal. All the goodness and advantages of your religion only apply in your religious “room”, when you leave the room, you must leave your belief in that room.

These religious chambers confine all religions to their respective cages. In other words, all religions are not allowed to carry out God's commands to spread the religion they believe in. Conditions like this cause each religion to gradually decline

and eventually “stop breathing” because their freedom is taken away. The breath of each religion is its freedom. This freedom of theirs must be brought out in public to be known by other religions, without which they will die because it does not work. If religion is only for oneself and the group, then, how can other religions know the beauty of other religions? If religion is partitioned within each religion's chambers it is tantamount to violating the most essential Human Rights to state what is right for other people (outside the group).

3.11 The Flawed Logic of Religious Pluralism

Two or more different propositions (Poythress, 2019: 309) can be both true at the same time, but if two different propositions contradict each other, then only one of the two propositions is true. There is no truth in contradiction. Therefore, if the Christian faith is true, then the Islamic faith is wrong, conversely, if the Islamic faith is true, then the Christian faith is wrong. Religious pluralism says all religions are equal, there is no superiority of one religion over another, and no religion is more true. How can “two contradictory propositions be equally true?”

The pluralists are showing a logical flaw which is quite apprehensive. In sound logic, there is no place in relativism, because relativism violates the law of contradiction. In relativism, truth does not have a definite size everyone may argue that truth is error and error is truth (Fauzi, 2018: 245-269).

3.12 Nationalist Greetings Versus Diversity Greetings

One of the real results of the view of religious pluralism in Indonesia is the emergence of interfaith greetings which are pronounced as greetings. This cross-faith greeting is a product of religious pluralism. These greetings are said simultaneously, namely *Assalamualaikum warahmatullahi wabarakatuh* (Islam), Greetings to all of us (Catholic), *Shalom* (Christianity), *Om Swastyastu* (Hindu), *Namo Buddhaya* (Buddhist), and Greetings of Virtue (Confucianism), (Siahaan, 2020: 13-22). This cross-faith greeting has only appeared in the last two years.

This cross-faith greeting makes differences between religious adherents in public. In public, national greetings are usually called good morning, good afternoon, or good evening, not diversity greetings. The greeting of diversity divides religions in public. In public what should be put forward is unity. This unity is properly represented by “nationalist greetings” by saying good morning, good afternoon, good evening, and good night. Nationalist greetings strengthen unity more than greetings of diversity. Nationalist greetings do not carry greetings from each religion, because in public they do not talk about religion, but about nationality.

Religious pluralism as the initiator of “greeting diversity” in this case goes against its concept. He was the one who called for “the unity of religions”, but he created religious barriers in the greetings of diversity. Indonesia has always been unfamiliar with the concept of combined greetings from various religions, now when the notion of religious pluralism hit, greetings of diversity divide religions in public.

3.13 Interfaith Prayer is the Idea of Religious Pluralism

To overcome crises and divisions between religious adherents, many clergymen from various religions practice interfaith prayer together (Saputro, 2021: 41). They think this way can establish friendships between followers of religions. However, this idea is only found in the clergy who no longer adhere to the original

teachings of their religion. They reinterpret their religious teachings so that they can justify the practice of praying together across faiths. For thousands of years, the original religions living side by side have never carried out this kind of practice because it is not only not recommended, but also not found in the teachings of their respective religions.

The Christian faith has never taught the practice of praying together with people of other religions, as is done in interfaith prayer. Throughout the Bible, there is not a single verse that teaches this either explicitly or implicitly. Saputro stated that the clergy reinterpreted verses in the scriptures, according to the current conditions and situation (Saputro, 2021: 44). This is the small road to liberalism. Re-deconstructing the meaning of scriptures to be used for personal and group interests is the hallmark of liberals. The outcome is a joint prayer among people of different faiths, which may eventually promote the idea of religious pluralism - the belief that all religions are equally valid - thereby weakening the notion of religions having an absolute truth.

IV. CONCLUSION

Massively propagated religious pluralism does not promote peaceful coexistence between different religions. Instead, it undermines the fundamental principles of religions. This understanding contradicts the idea of religions being absolute and does not recognize the importance of acknowledging differences in beliefs. In addition to being in conflict with religions, advocates of religious pluralism oppose several positive values such as diversity, tolerance, logic, and freedom of religion. These values are essential for preventing conflicts and maintaining the distinct identities of individual religions. By upholding the absolute nature of their teachings, respecting freedom of religion, accepting diversity, practicing tolerance between different religions, and applying logical reasoning to their teachings, religions can thrive in a pluralistic society.

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