Bridging Christian and non-Christian Relationships through Dialogue: Church Leaders' Perspective

J. Siahaya
Teruna Bhakti Christian College
Yogyakarta, Indonesia
charistajasmine@gmail.com

H. Soegijono
Teruna Bhakti Christian College
Yogyakarta, Indonesia
harysgy@gmail.com

M. Patora
Teruna Bhakti Christian College
Yogyakarta, Indonesia
Marianus79patora@gmail.com

H. L. Setiawan
Teruna Bhakti Christian College
Yogyakarta, Indonesia
hluckysetiawan15@gmail.com

D. Pujarsono
Teruna Bhakti Christian College
Yogyakarta, Indonesia
aletheiatirtakencana@gmail.com

Abstract—**The Indonesian society is pluralistic in determining the differences related to ideologies, doctrines, religions, and cultures, which are a great wealth capable of disintegrating the nation. According to preliminary studies, identity politics shook the fundamentals of the nation and state life years ago. Therefore, it is necessary to develop appropriate approaches capable of overcoming these problems by determining and increasing "dialogue" between religious communities. This research examines church leaders' perspectives in bridging the relationship between Christians and non-Christians through dialogue. Data were obtained from the Christian congregation, church leaders, and pastors through questionnaires and qualitatively analyzed. Furthermore, this is attractive research that significantly contributes to Christians and religious communities in Indonesia. The result showed that church leaders need to be courageous while dialoguing because it is an open opportunity for them to become witnesses and preach Christ to non-Christians. Furthermore, approximately 90% of the church leaders as respondents supported the dialogue, which means that it is an inexpensive and open means of building a better life for the nation and states' future. Research Contribution: This research significantly contributes to the development of religious life in Indonesia, especially among Christians. Furthermore, the research shows that an open leader facilitates the association between the nation's children without any barriers of ideology, doctrine, religion, and culture. This also minimizes suspicion between religious communities and identifies politics in Indonesia**

Keywords— bridging; Christian; dialogue; leaders; church

I. INTRODUCTION

Indonesian plural society is an unavoidable recognized fact that guarantees various religions' adherents along with their teachings and beliefs [1]. Furthermore, religious diversity is a social fact that often becomes a problem where religion is considered an independent personal right with nuanced social consequences in people's lives [2]. Therefore, the disastrous effect of the plurality of religious and cultural values is catastrophic and leads to conflict in most cases. The biggest problem in inter-religious life in Indonesia is the strategies needed to open a dialogue between Christians and non-Christians to maintain their respective beliefs. Dialogue between religious communities is a powerful bridge to minimize conflicts [3]. This is in line with the research carried out by Th. Kobong, which stated that harmony does not need to reach the dogmatic side of religious beliefs [4]

Generally, people tend to continuously justify their religious teachings even when others do not recognize the lofty ideals contained in the beliefs. Despite coming from the same religion, passionate and enthusiastic religious followers sometimes insult those that disagree with them. However, it is essential to note that belief in truth is based on God as the only source of reality. When the truth is interpreted, it looks different due to differences from historical sources as well as indistinguishable claims. The most striking difference is the claim of salvation by a particular religious group, thereby mandating others to follow suit and be saved [5]. This has often led to between- and inter-religious intolerance in Indonesia, such as the Poso and Ambon conflicts and the dispute between Sunnis and Shiites in East Java [6]. Various solutions have

been attempted to settle a conflict, such as the introduction of dialogue peacefully. Indonesia once established a "forum for deliberation between religious communities" [7] however, violence against religions still continues to date. Research on inter-religious dialogue in Indonesia has not been significant because it is only discussed in papers without adequate implementation as a sub-theme. This led to this research topic, which has been widely discussed in journals published in Malaysia, it has been going on since 1956 [8]. In Indonesia, scientific writings have recently appeared which emphasize "dialogue". The thought of dialogue to be a bridge for interfaith meetings has been formulated by several institutions such as the Forum for Believers in Yogyakarta [9]. Therefore, the authors ensured that studies on the dialogue between religious communities are still relevant today and act as the best solution for various religions, especially with the prevalence of intolerance.

The process of initiating dialogue is often demanded between religious communities. However, in this research, the authors initiated inter-religious dialogue from the perspective of church leaders and pastors. This research portrays the understanding of church leaders on the importance of dialogue between religious communities. It was carried out in three cities in Indonesia, namely Yogyakarta, Kendari, and Ambon. Yogyakarta was chosen because it acts as an aggregation of a cultural and mini-city that houses almost all ethnicities and religions in Indonesia. Kendari is a city with approximately 1-2% of the total population of Christians [10]. Meanwhile, Ambon is a city that has experienced horizontal religious conflicts [11] with a balanced population between Christians and non-Christians [12].

This research is aimed explicitly at Christian congregation leaders and pastors in Indonesia to understand and promote dialogue. According to Henry Blackaby, being a leader is essential in the church and market world [13]. This means that Christian leaders need to be able to deal with spiritual matters and various national and state issues. One of the reasons for their involvement is to develop togetherness in fighting for humanitarian issues and social justice for the entire nation [14]. The study bridges the relationship between Christians and non-Christians through dialogue from the perspective of church leaders.

II. METHOD

This is quantitative and qualitative research. Quantitative research is an assessment procedure that produces descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words and observed behavior. Therefore, the main objective of this descriptive research is to provide a clear description of the phenomenon being investigated [15]. Quantitative research uses data in the form of numbers and tools to obtain information analyzed using statistical methods. Meanwhile, a qualitative approach is used to describe the quantitative data [16]. The authors examined church leaders in three cities in Indonesia using questionnaires sent via a google form. The results were discussed using quantitative tables and described qualitatively.

Furthermore, books and journals were also referred to as the main references in this research.

III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The data from the portraits of Christian leaders involved in inter-religious dialogue were taken from 58 respondents categorized into tables and graphs with four answer choices, namely strongly agree, agree, less agree, and disagree used for analysis. Furthermore, groups of leaders that understand the importance of dialogue analyzed the dominant percentage of the respondents. This used descriptive analysis to explain the numbers in tables and graphs with a literature review.

TABLE I. PORTRAIT FOR THE INVOLVEMENT OF CHRISTIAN LEADERS THAT "STRONGLY AGREE" IN DIALOGUE

No	Question	n	%
1	Understand the importance of dialogue	38	65.5
2	Unity between people through dialogue	35	60.3
3	Can adapt to non-Christians	32	55.2
4	Willing to discuss religious matters with non-Christians	25	43.1
5	Attend non-Christian religious celebrations when invited	13	22.4
6	Not awkward to live in a house with a non-Christian	17	29.3
7	Willing to attend non-Christian religious ceremonies such as marriage, death, and others.	24	41.4
8	Always nice to hang out with non-Christians	17	29.3
9	Teach congregation to build dialogue	22	37.9

There are three answers number 1,2 and 3 which are responses from church leaders over 50% who "strongly agree", that dialogue between people is very well understood by church leaders, as well as the importance of unity among people through dialogue and its implementation is able to adapt to non-Christians, who do not agree, do not believe, are not the same doctrine. This means that the role of dialogue is very important for fostering tolerance as well as mutual welfare [17]. Portrait for the involvement of Christian leaders that "agree" in dialogue

No	Question	n	%
1	Understand the importance of dialogue	19	32.8
2	Unity between people through dialogue	22	37.9
3	Can adapt to non-Christians	24	41.4
4	Willing to discuss religious matters with non-Christians	28	48.3
5	Attend non-Christian religious celebrations when invited	41	70.7
6	Not awkward to live in a house with a non-Christian	36	62.1
7	Willing to attend non-Christian religious ceremonies such as marriage, death, and others.	32	55.2
8	Always nice to hang out with non-Christians	40	69

No	Question	n	%
1	Understand the importance of dialogue	19	32.8
9	Teach congregation to build dialogue	36	62.1

There were 5 answers that received "agree" responses from more than 50% of church leaders, for questions number 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9. These questions were related to the attitudes or responses of church leaders towards living together with those who are not Christians. The results are very encouraging that Christian leaders in establishing dialogue are not allergic to non-Christians. Indeed that is the hope of dialogue, to avoid divisions in the life of the nation and state [18].

TABLE II.   PORTRAIT FOR THE INVOLVEMENT OF CHRISTIAN LEADERS THAT "LESS AGREE" IN DIALOGUE

No	Question	n	%
1	Understand the importance of dialogue	1	1.7
2	Unity between people through dialogue	1	1.7
3	Can adapt to non-Christians	1	1.7
4	Willing to discuss religious matters with non-Christians	4	6.9
5	Attend non-Christian religious celebrations when invited	4	6.9
6	Not awkward to live in a house with a non-Christian	4	6.9
7	Willing to attend non-Christian religious ceremonies such as marriage, death, and others.	2	3.4
8	Always nice to hang out with non-Christians	1	1.7
9	Teach congregation to build dialogue	0	0

Overall the results of this study are very significant where church leaders are aware and understand that one way to build religious togetherness and harmony is to build a bridge of dialogue. However, there are still a small number of church leaders who still feel taboo, are reluctant to even reject the existence of such dialogue. This can be seen in table 3 above. Although it is small and insignificant, it can also be a threat to the formation of intolerance and can threaten the division of the nation and state [19].

TABLE III.   PORTRAIT FOR THE INVOLVEMENT OF CHRISTIAN LEADERS THAT "DISAGREE" IN DIALOGUE

No	Question	n	%
1	Understand the importance of dialogue	0	0
2	Unity between people through dialogue	0	0
3	Can adapt to non-Christians	1	1,7
4	Willing to discuss religious matters with non-Christians	1	1,7
5	Attend non-Christian religious celebrations when invited	0	0
6	Not awkward to live in a house with a non-Christian	1	1,7
7	Willing to attend non-Christian religious ceremonies such as marriage, death, and others.	0	0
8	Always nice to hang out with non-Christians	0	0
9	Teach congregation to build dialogue	0	0

The thing that is surprising is that there are still church leaders who do not agree with dialogue between religious communities, even though it is less than 2%, but this will become a seed which, if it is continuously nurtured, will become an obstacle to the creation of a harmonious, safe, and peaceful national life. And this is not only detrimental to the nation and state, but also to religion itself [20].

The four tables above show that more than 90% of church leaders agree and strongly agree with the dialogue between Christian and non-Christian. This means that Christian leaders in the three cities surveyed understand that dialogue between religious communities is very important for the nation and state life. However, there are still some doubts and a lack of agreement among those in establishing dialogues related to their religious "beliefs" or "creeds." This is also seen from the fact that there are still respondents that agree less agree, and also disagree when answering questions numbers 4,5,6, and 7 associated with the coexistence of Christians and non-Christians in religious and social activities. The following graphs provide a real portrait of the research results:

The tables above show that some church leaders still think that "dialogue" between religious communities is less important and insignificant. This means that the understanding of church leaders to cohabitate with non-Christians in national life is still lacking. According to Daniel Ronda, it is necessary to develop a sense of brotherhood among the nation's children because it has a very strong theological foundation [21]. Dorkas Orienti Daeli, et al revealed that one of the solutions for religious harmony is to enhance the theological dialogue between religious communities [22].

Church leaders need to understand the importance for Christians to share ideologies, doctrines, religions, and cultures of others in the 21st century [23]. Presently, this understanding is inconsistent in a small number of church leaders. In question number 9, all of them agree to teach their followers "dialogue" by referring to the answers of numbers 4, 5, 6, and 7. Furthermore, Christian leaders are expected to ensure there is no distance or gap between the teaching and action [24]. However, this research shows that there are still a handful of Christian leaders that are somewhat "allergic" to the "dialogue" approach in relations between religious communities. Dialogue is the best effort to make people more aware of other religions, thereby opening a broader perspective [25]. This is not a pragmatic tolerant attitude, rather it is only natural for religious leaders, in this case, church leaders, to become the spearhead in building and becoming role models in the framework of national and state life as well inter-religious dialogues.

IV. CONCLUSION

The future of national and state life is in the hands of Christian leaders that promote dialogue. Therefore, it is important for religious communities to dialogue to avoid conflicts. Church leaders need to be courageous while taking the initiative to build dialogue because it creates an open

opportunity for them to preach Christ to non-Christians. Furthermore, this research showed that 90% of the church leaders that became respondents supported the dialogue between the congregations, which means that dialogue is cheap essential in the present and future for a better life at the nation and state levels

REFERENCES

[1] "Undang-Undang Dasar Negara Republik Indonesia 1945."

[2] George Ritzer-Douglas J. Goodman, *Teori Sosiologi Moderen*, VI. Jakarta: Prenada Media, 2004.

[3] S. E. Zaluchu, "The Impacts of Internet of Things and Digital Culture on Contemporary Islamic-Christian Dialogue," in *International Conference on Religion, Spirituality and Humanity*, 2020, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 69–80, [Online]. Available: http://pps.iainsalatiga.ac.id/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/The-Impacts-of-Internet-of-Things-and-Digital-Culture-on-Contemporary-Islamic-Christian-Dialogue.pdf.

[4] R. F. W. Sairin Weinata, Ed., *Dialog antar umat beragma; membangun pilar-pilar keindonesiaan yang kukuh*. Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 1994.

[5] F. M. Yunus, "Konflik Agama Di Indonesia Problem dan Solusi Pemecahannya," Oct. 2014.

[6] M. Marzuki, "PLURALITAS AGAMA DAN KERUKUNAN UMAT BERAGAMA DI INDONESIA (Mencari Peran Pendidikan Agama di Perguruan Tinggi Umum)," *Cakrawala Pendidik. J. Ilm. Pendidik.*, vol. 2, no. 2, May 2016, doi: 10.21831/cp.v2i2.9291.

[7] J. M. Z. J. N. John Campbell_nelson, Ed., *Teologi Politik: Panggilan Gereja di bidang politik pasca orde baru*. Makasar: Yayasan Oase INTIM, 2013.

[8] J. A. Kamal, Mustafa Amat Misra, "Dialog Antara Agama Di Malaysia: Perkembangan Daripada Tahun 1956-2010," *Univ. Sains Islam Malaysia*, vol. XI, 2013.

[9] A. Rifa'i, "DEALEKTIKA PEMIKIRAN DALAM DIALOG ANTAR UMAT BERAGAMA: Studi Kasus Forum Persaudaraan Umat Beriman (FPUB) DI. Yogyakarta," *J. Pemberdaya. Masy. Media Pemikir. dan Dakwah Pembang.*, vol. 1, no. 1, p. 75, Jun. 2017, doi: 10.14421/jpm.2017.011-04.

[10] "Badan Pusat Statistik." .

[11] D. S. Lindawaty, "Konflik Ambon: Kajian Terhadap Beberapa Akar Permasalahan dan Solusinya," *J. Polit. Din. Masal. Polit. Dalam Negeri dan Hub. Int.*, vol. 2, no. 2, Aug. 2016, doi: 10.22212/JP.V2I2.295.

[12] "Pemeluk Agama." .

[13] S. Henry and Richard Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership: Moving People on to God's Agenda*. USA: Broadman & Holman, 2001.

[14] Z. J. Ngelow, *"Islam dan Kristen dalam Politik Indonesia" dalam Meretas Jalan Teologi Agama-Agama di Indonesia*. Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 2020.

[15] I. Hajar, *Dasar-dasar metodologi kuantitatif dalam pendidikan*, Ke-2. Jakarta: Raja Grafindo Persada, 2003.

[16] S. Margono, *Metode Penlitian Pendidikan*. Jakarta: Rineka Cipta, 2009.

[17] Z. Hasan, "Dialog Antar Umat Beragama," *LISAN AL-HAL J. Pengemb. Pemikir. dan Kebud.*, vol. 12, no. 2, pp. 387–400, 2018, doi: 10.35316/lisanalhal.v12i2.152.

[18] M. K. Anwar, "Dialog Antar Umat Beragama di Indonesia: Perspektif A. Mukti Ali," *J. Dakwah*, vol. 19, no. 1, pp. 89–107, 2018, [Online]. Available: http://ejournal.uin-suka.ac.id/dakwah/jurnaldakwah/article/view/1347.

[19] A. U. Albab, "Interpretasi Dialog Antar Agama Dalam Berbagai Prespektif," *Al-Mada J. Agama, Sos. dan Budaya*, vol. 2, no. 1, pp. 22–34, Feb. 2019, doi: 10.31538/almada.v2i1.223.

[20] M. T. H. D. Nur Hidayati, "PERAN KOMISI HUBUNGAN ANTAR UMAT BERAGAMA GEREJA KATOLIK DALAM MEMBANGUN DIALOG," *Reli. J. Stud. AGAMA-AGAMA*, vol. 14, no. 2, p. 194, Jan. 2019, doi: 10.14421/rejusta.2018.1402-03.

[21] D. Ronda, "Peran Kepemimpinan Kristen Membangun Dialog antar Umat Umat Beragama," *Voice Wesley J. Ilm. Musik dan Agama*, vol. 2, no. 2, Nov. 2019, doi: 10.36972/jvow.v2i2.25.

[22] D. O. Daeli, S. E. Zaluchu, B. Niha, K. Protestan, and S. Nias, "Analisis Fenomologi Deskriptif terhadap Panggilan Iman Kristen untuk Kerukunan Antar Umat Beragama di Indonesia," 1979.

[23] Y. K. Johannis Siahaya, "Considering Pluralism Reality in Christian Religious Education," *Int. J. Soc. Sci.*, vol. 3, no. 1, pp. 32–38, 2020.

[24] J. Siahaya, "Kepemimpinan Kristen dalam Pluralitas Indonesia," *Teruna Bhakti*, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 1–16, 2018, doi: 10.47131/jtb.v1i1.8.

[25] A. B. Purnomo., "Religious Literacy dan Tantangan Pluralisme Agama," *kOMPAS*, 2001.