

## Nature of Tolerance in Christianity as a Contribution to Building National Unity

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**ABSTRACT:** Intolerant attitudes and actions that result in horizontal conflicts are inevitable in the life of a pluralistic nation like Indonesia. They hinder, however, the development of the nation's integrity protected and fought for decades by its founding fathers. Through this paper, Indonesian Christians are expected to be aware of the importance of their nation's integrity and of them living in harmony, which will bring peace. This study used a descriptive qualitative method with a literature study approach. It concluded that a correct understanding of the nature of tolerance within the framework of the Christian faith is necessary to contribute to building national unity. The tolerance possessed by Christians will maximize their role in contributing to practical building of national unity in daily life, such as in carrying out activities that emphasize coexistence and mutual respect as the realization of obedience to God's word. Christians also need to participate in inter-religious dialogue to find solutions to the problem of disintegration. Thus, the role of Christians in building national unity and integrity through tolerance has an impact on the harmony, security, and sustainability of the state.

Key Words: tolerance, pluralism, multicultural, national unity, christian faith

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## INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is an archipelagic country with a population of over 237 million and 1,340 ethnic groups. It is a nation of various cultures, languages, ethnicities, and religions due to its geographical conditions, stretching from Sabang to Merauke (Adawiyah et al., 2019). There are six officially-recognized religions in Indonesia, namely Islam, Protestant Christianity, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. They obtained this status from the state by virtue of legalization with definite and binding force. Besides the six religions, the Government also recognizes and respects folk beliefs and faiths, commonly called as traditional belief systems (Toruan, 2017). Indonesians are known worldwide as courteous and hospitable. This also becomes the basis for their general philosophy of upholding diversity. The spirit of unity and integrity, the main force of independence and

sovereignty of the nation, has become its strength in developing and advancing itself in national integration. However, during the nation's journey of embracing diversity towards unity and integration, it has experienced frictions and conflicts. This nation, which prides itself in their diversity of people, languages, ethnicities, cultures, politics, economies, religions, and beliefs, has experienced instabilities of integration (Stefanus, 2009). This causes frequent feelings of instability and uncertainty.

The various events inspired by intolerance in Indonesia are triggered by distinctive understanding centered on the value of relations between groups and between classes. Inevitably, in the nation's contemporary existence, it is often argued that radicalism, extremism, and fundamentalism are the "clothes" of violence caused by patterns of exclusive and anti-dialogic understanding of religious texts (Ginting & Ayaningrum, 2009). Especially at this

time, this situation is worsened by the occurrence of acts caused by political heat, intolerance, and even terrorism. Indonesia is experiencing a period of crisis caused by issues of SARA (Ethnicity, Religion, Race, Inter-group Relations), which are developed and disseminated through hoaxes. It has become a big problem for this nation that leads to division and conflict in society, both verbally and physically; it also can cause political instability and security disturbances that hinder national development (Septanto, 2018). The potential for conflict and national disintegration is even higher when each religion prioritizes its absolute truth claims and the content of religious emotions that form the basis of interaction (Rantung, 2017). The potential for horizontal conflicts between ethnic and religious groups in society is still quite open in various regions of Indonesia (Saefullah, 2011). Post-Reformation conflicts have occurred, with many riots happening in districts or cities in Indonesia, such as in Tasikmalaya, Situbondo, East Java, Kupang NTT, Sambas, Poso, and Maluku. The transpiring conflicts signify that religious life in Indonesia has not resulted in harmony, but often causes conflict (Khotimah, 2011). Nowadays, there are often problems regarding conflicts between religions that often occur in Indonesia. Issues of religious differences often trigger horizontal conflicts among the community (Adawiyah et al., 2019). Inter-religious and internal religious conflicts in Indonesia are serious problems. Various cases of conflict in the name of religion, both intra-religion and between religions color the life of the Indonesian nation. Many material, psychological, and life losses have occurred as a result of inter-religious conflicts (Mayasaroh & Bakhtiar, 2020), such as in the massacre of Christians under the command of Ali Kalora, the leader of a terrorist group within the East Indonesia Mujahidin assembly (Fauzi, 2020). Similar cases also include the church bombings in Surabaya and Samarinda, which intimidated minorities and disrupted inter-religious harmony. Should law enforcement not take immediate action on these matters, conflicts between religions may then occur.

Therefore, intolerance is a serious problem and can harm various groups if people do not immediately realize it and find out the solution (Supriyanto & Wahyudi, 2017). On the nature of harmony within the framework of the Christian faith as a contribution to building the nation's unity, Nazmudin had conducted a research entitled *Harmony and Tolerance between Religious People in Building the Unity of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia* (Nazmudin, 2018). The study concludes that living harmoniously in peace and helping instead of being hostile to each other due to religion become the unifiers of the Indonesian nation, which indirectly contribute to the stability and development of the country (Nazmudin, 2018). Hidayat and Hendarin (2019) also conducted a similar study in an article entitled *Empowerment of Village Communities in the Framework for the Development of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia*. It concludes that the diversity starting from the village can not only be an opportunity, but also a threat to the survival of the life of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia itself, especially if there are groups of nations who feel left alone amid the progress of other national groups. The empowerment of rural communities is vital to building the framework of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia in the future (Hidayat et al., 2019). Nazmudin (2018) in his research entitled *Harmony and Tolerance between Religious People in Building the Unity of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia* (NKRI) concluded that inter-religious harmony and tolerance should be a unifying tool for the nation. One of the effective ways found to manage pluralism properly is inter-religious dialogue to discuss the problems of each religious group. Suryan (2017) carried out a Muslim theological study regarding tolerance in nation-building entitled *Tolerance Between Religions: An Islamic Perspective*. The study emphasized that in the perspective of Islamic tolerance, Islam allows people of other religions to practice their worship and religious teachings as long as they do not disturb the public order and interests. Meanwhile, in

Christian education, Arifianto et al. (2021) conducted a study entitled *Sociology of Pluralism in Christian Religious Education as an Effort to Build National Unity*. They concluded that Christian religious education should build the nation's unity by educating students to actualize themselves as the salt and light of the world amid a pluralistic society.

Based on these five studies, there are things that still have not been researched, namely about the nature of harmony within the framework of the Christian faith as a contribution to building the integrity of the nation, which is viewed from Christian theology and perspective which can provide understanding for Christians to be able to actualize tolerance in building unity of the nation and state. Therefore, this article examines and discusses the topic.

## **METHOD**

This research used a descriptive qualitative research method (Umrati & Wijaya, 2020), with a literature study approach to explore the literature related to the concept of the essence of harmony within Christianity based on biblical-theological studies as the primary source to find the meaning of harmony. The author studied on harmony as an analytical study of the condition of Indonesia's heterogeneous society, interpreted and actualized for the development of the integrity of the Indonesian nation based on God's word, as the responsibility of believers to create human harmony and the deep awareness to continue developing the state in building the integrity of the nation. In addition, the author used references discussing harmony and its implications for the lives of Christians today as an act of building national unity. In addition, the author also used various sources of journals that OJS has published.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **Nature of Tolerance in Pluralism**

The words tolerance, tolerate, and toleration have the meaning of letting, admitting, being able to

withstand something, patience, and freedom. Tolerance also means understanding each other and opening up to each other in the frame of brotherhood (Rusydi & Zolehah, 2018). When people have the attitude of maintaining and sustaining the unity of fellow nationals and growing it in the spirit of brotherhood, tolerance is practicable. Differences in beliefs do not dampen the harmony between religious communities that accept each other, respect each other, help each other, and work together to achieve common goals (Rusydi & Zolehah, 2018). Tolerance is also an attitude where people can live side by side and respect each other's differences, especially differences in belief or religion (Adawiyah et al., 2019). Therefore, the value and concept of religious tolerance are related to the attitude of giving freedom, independence, and human rights to everyone to embrace their religion and accept their existence in a pluralistic society (Muhid & Fadel, 2018).

Harmony between religious communities is significant to bringing together and regulating relations between different religions or groups in social life (Rusydi & Zolehah, 2018). Inter-religious harmony is a condition in a socially-interacting pluralistic society when all religious leaders and people can join hands, have toleration to each other, and live together without eliminating the individual rights and personal freedom to carry out all activities and obligations to improve their religious life (Arifianto & Santo, 2020). It is a form of embodiment of the value of harmony and tolerance between devout believers, which is a characteristic of the potential for integration found in religious life in a multicultural society (Mayasaroh & Bakhtiar, 2020). Therefore, inter-religious tolerance needs to be strengthened at the junction of national and state life (Nugraha & Firmansyah, 2019) to support and encourage the national community, to advance the nation's integrity, and to reduce acts of intolerance that can divide the country.

Tolerance is a quality of human attitude in respecting to allow differences in opinions, beliefs, customs, and behaviors of others who are different from themselves (Nugraha & Firmansyah, 2019).

Every human being who embraces a belief system or religion must acknowledge the existence and tolerance of other faiths and be involved in efforts to understand differences and similarities to achieve a harmony that can bring about change in diversity (Irfani, et al., 2013). The diversity possessed by Indonesia makes people in plurality naturally live side by side in differences. However, all of this is not a barrier, let alone a threat to Indonesian integrity. The existing differences in society reinforces the national and state life (Nugraha & Firmansyah, 2019).

Tolerance to different religions is a very noble attitude and deserves support. However, there can be no tolerance to crimes, acts of terrorism, or human rights violation, committed in the name of religion. The crimes themselves are contrary to religious teaching, moral values, law, and humanity (Mayasaroh & Bakhtiar, 2020). Positive tolerance does not confuse the claims of truth of each religion but gives respect and freedom for others to claim their right to live their beliefs differently (Zega & Arifianto, 2021).

To respect human rights as a whole, including right to worship according to one's faith, is a goal of human dignity (Sairin, 2006, p. 9). Pluralism in a heterogeneous society and the existence of Indonesia is a great gift that God has given to this nation to maintain and care (Sairin, 2002, p. 125). The root of horizontal conflicts between religious believers is the absence of humility and awareness of true pious life and the ignorance or lack of understanding of their own religious beliefs, let alone the beliefs of others (Khotimah, 2011).

### **Harmony in the Perspective of the Christian Faith**

The teaching of Jesus to His people to respect others is one of the priorities in social life. Jesus said in the Gospel of Matthew that doing to others whatsoever we would have them do to us is the content of the whole law and the prophets (Matthew 7:12). It is clear that the values of

harmony can materialize in each actualization of harmony development as a Christian lifestyle that can impact Christians. In the Old Testament, Psalm 133 reveals that God brings blessings upon those who live in harmony. Therefore, Christians must appreciate the differences in ethnicity, religion, race, and inter-group relations among human beings. Once when Jesus taught about loving neighbor, a scribe asked Jesus, "Who is my neighbor?" The question was motivated by his understanding of the fellow humans, which was only limited to Jews. This narrow-mindedness can threaten harmony because this kind of understanding tends to limit behavior to love others outside of a relationship (Simanjutak, 2020).

The law Jesus applied to His disciples was to love God and humans (Saidurrahman & Arifinsyah, 2018, p. 62). Love is the hallmark of the followers of Jesus. John 13:34-35 says that Jesus gives His disciples a new commandment that they love one another; just as He has loved them, so they must love one another. By this, everyone will know that they are His disciples if they love one another. In addition, Jesus also expects Christians to be in unity, as Jesus uttered in His prayer asking the Father so that believers have and are in oneness (John 17:1-26). Jesus' teaching about love, which is the hallmark of Christianity, is strong identical proof that Christians must be a blessing and light for others, yet all of it must be bound in love to achieve perfect unity (Colossians 3:14)/(Arifianto & Santo, 2020).

Similarly, the apostles taught about the importance of Christians living in love and respect. Peter the Apostle in 1 Peter 2:17 told Christians to honor everyone, love their brethren, fear God, and honor the king. The apostles expected every Christian to respect all people, whether those who have positions in government as rulers to ordinary people who do not have property are obliged to receive fair and equal treatment. Thus, Christians cannot escape the responsibility of realizing religious harmony (Simon & Arifianto, 2021).

Besides Peter, there is also Paul. In his letter to the Romans, he exhorted them to be kindly affectionate to one another with the brotherly love and in honor preferring one another (Romans 12:10). The Apostle made it clear that Christianity is a practical religion that aims to regulate the right way of life. In addition, he asked them to pursue what makes for peace and is for the building up of one another (Romans 14:19). Christianity does not merely intend to provide punishment for human actions when violating the Word of God, yet to transform the hearts and the lives of the people (Pfeiffer & Harrison, 1962). Thus, they will do good to others and bring impacts on their environments. Likewise, in Romans 12.17-18, Paul urged Christians to have tolerance as a priority by living in peace with all people, not paying back evil for evil, doing things honestly for everyone, and if it is possible, living peacefully with everyone.

In another letter to the Philippians, Paul exhorted them not to seek self-interest or vain praise. On the other hand, let one humbly regard the other as superior to himself (Philippians 2.3). The Apostle upheld the value of togetherness, in which to make it happen, Christians should be able to throw away personal interests and egoism and prioritize others. James, in his letter, wrote about the impact of self-interest and envy, namely chaos and all kinds of evil deeds (James 3:16).

Harmony is a call to faith and internal awareness driven by love. Therefore, Christianity can apply the value of harmony based on love for others and especially for hostile people (Yewangoe, 2015, p. 34). This harmony will impact the peace that produces happiness as expressed by Matthew, namely blessed are those who bring peace (Matthew 5:9). Christians should bring peace first when there is conflict in togetherness, as Jesus commanded His listeners to make peace with their opponents immediately while they are with them in the middle of the road so that their opponents do not hand them over to judges. Jesus also taught about love that gives more than those who ask for it (Matthew 5:40-41). The law of love that Jesus applied to His

disciples was to love God and love humans. Anything related to hatred and acts of intolerance has no place in Christian witness, much less in Bible teaching. Tolerance must be a priority and the primary need in building a good society in the application of Christians by loving others as yourself. After all, Christians should accept that everyone is a neighbor who should be respected and respected, regardless of religion or belief (Arifianto et al., 2020).

### **Christians' Contributions to Building the Nation's Unity**

Religion should play a role as a balancer in people's lives, balancing various fields such as politics, society, economics, education, and science and technology. Moreover, religion should also be able to become the basis and purpose of humans in living a good social life and obeying existing norms or rules (Mayasaroh & Bakhtiar, 2020). Mutual respect is a force that supports the development of good relations between religious communities (Mayasaroh & Bakhtiar, 2020). Therefore, Christians should play a role by willing to agree not to create disputes, both verbal and physical conflicts, especially fight involving the masses (Mayasaroh & Bakhtiar, 2020). Christians need to renew their mindset about diversity, which diversity is a unifying tool by an attitude of being open to each other and accepting differences (Putra, 2015). The value of Christian tolerance does not compromise the Christian faith with any other religion or belief. But Christianity allows other people of different faith and practices of religious life (Zega & Arifianto, 2021). Christians believe that freedom to embrace religion is a human right sustained by the state (Pamungkas, 2014), and harmony is a unifying pillar in a pluralistic society (Arifianto, 2020). Thus, Christians should uphold the diversity of belief systems that exist in Indonesia.

The state has the duty and obligation to protect the rights and obligations of every citizen to embrace their respective religions and provide directions that can make religious foundations safe

and orderly, based on applicable and legal laws (Harudin et al., 2020). However, Christians are also required to respect and appreciate and submit to government authorities as part of living obediently to the teachings of Jesus Christ. Christians need to increase their spirituality and understanding of their religious teachings to actualize God's mandate as light and salt for their countrymen (Ismail, 2010). The harmonious life of the society will strengthen the nation's unity and the stability of national security (Sodli, 2009). For Christians, harmony is a call of faith to actualize (Yewangoe, 2015). This call of faith also includes the responsibility to maintain the welfare of living together in a multicultural society (Yewangoe, 2015). When Christians respond to and manage diversity correctly and positively, tolerant behavior will arise by itself (Azmi & Kumala, 2019).

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## CONCLUSION

Living in a multicultural society creates unavoidable challenges that could lead to divisions among people. However, Christians, as citizens, can build the nation's unity through an attitude of living in harmony. The conclusion drawn in this article is that the correct understanding of the nature of tolerance within the framework of the Christian faith is significant to contribute to building the nation's integrity. Christians can maximize their role in contributing to building the nation's unity practically in everyday life, by carrying out activities that emphasize coexistence and mutual respect as the realization of obedience to God's word. Christians also need to participate in inter-religious dialogue to find solutions to the problem of disintegration. Thus, the Christian's role in building the unity and integrity of the nation through tolerance impacts the harmony, security, and sustainability of the country.

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