

Cross-Cultural Philosophy of Religion: Case Study of Mekar Mukti and Sertajaya

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Abstract-Mekar Mukti and Sertajaya are the villages in Jababeka city which are coloured by the fast development of industrial companies, residences, expatriate immigrants and new comers from different areas of Indonesia. People in here live together with those who have different cultures and religions. Encounter of the different followers of religions with their various cultural background has an impact of a gradual process of awareness towards cross-cultural faith in these villages. However political influence and local leaders use religious elements to influence the vote and to get power. Religiosity and its expressions, human limitedness to the mystery of the Divine, and the conception of human life in the world as a temporary journey to God provide seeds which are necessary for the possibilities of cultural faith in religion, mutual respect, inclusiveness spirit and cooperation among the followers of religions. This writing, therefore, is intended to give an inspiration on how to minimise social, religious and economic gaps from the perspective of cross-cultural faith. Hopefully it also becomes means that are necessary to create harmony, respect, tolerance, and inclusiveness spirit among citizens of Mekar Mukti and Sertajaya and Indonesia in general.

Keywords: Mekar Mukti and Sertajaya, encounter of the different followers of religions, cross-cultural faith, religiosity, human limitedness, mystery of the Divine, temporary journey to God.

1. Introduction

Mekar Mukti and Sertajaya are two villages among many other villages in Jababeka City, Cikarang, Bekasi, West Java, Indonesia. Jababeka city has more than 1.400 national and multi-national companies (Compare President University, *Prospectus 2010-2011*:8; PT Jababeka, *Directory Business Patner 2007/2008. Jababeka Industrial Estate, Cikarang Indonesia*) which are employing 600.000 people from both abroad and different areas of Indonesia (See Lembaga Riset dan Pengabdian Masyarakat Universitas Presiden (LRPM) 2011:1; Andreas Yumarma 2013:1). Mekar Mukti and Sertajaya villages are chosen in this writing because they have a very fast development in economics, trade, number of companies, education, resident number and public facilities. Accordingly, many various immigrants and new comers who have various religions and cultures come and live together in these areas (Bandingkan H.Khoiruddin 2012:20)

There have been many rescearhes on market study, economic potential, property development, and etcetera. However there is no philosophical research on prospect of Cross-Cultural Faith yet. For this reason this writing would like to investigate the Cross-Cultural Philosophy of Religion in these villages. This study is expected to contribute a prospect of Cross-Cultural faith in those villages and Indonesia in general.

The method of study in this writing is qualitative descriptive method. Questionnaire is spread to get data of the villages; indepth interview is done to get deeper understanding on the data, and existential fenomenology is used to shed a light to a possibility of Cross-Cultural Philosophy of Religion. Hopefully this study can contribute mutual understanding, opened minded citizens and tolerance among the followers of various religions.

2. Case of Mekar Mukti and Sertajaya

Mekar Mukti and Sertajaya are two villages among four big villages where 70.647 residents live. Those four villages are Mekar Mukti, Sertajaya, Pasir Gombong, and Simpangan (Gloria Andriani Putri 2012:4-5; Santa Rismauli Sihombing 2012:3-4; Jihad Dwidyasa 2012:3; Putri Huwaida Ifwah,

Ratnawaty 2012:8-9; Cyntia, 2012:8). Besides those four big villages, there are other small villages such as Pasir Sari, Cibeber, Jatireja, Jayamukti, Kaum Tengah, Kaum Lebak, Lemah Abang, and so on.

Mekar Mukti and Sertajaya get special attention in this writing, because they have fast development in the resident number, economic and facilities. They are also coloured by various new comers, religions and cultures. Societal development and lifestyle changes take place in these villages. Most of new comers reside here are to get jobs and make business. There are 31.897 registered residents in these both villages (see Endah Putri Kennedy, 2012:1; H. Khoiruddin 2012). Among the residents in those villages there are 30.206 muslims, 898 protestants, 681 Catholics, 69 Buddhists and 42 Hindus. Besides the differences of their religions, many people who have different cultures also actively participate in developing villages. Variety of cultures can be seen from their cultural backgrounds. The cultural background of residents in Mekar Mukti and Sertajaya are Sundanese, Betawinese, Javanese, Batakese, Chinese, Korean, and so on. In such multi-religions and cultures atmosphere, an issue on difficulty of getting permit to build worship places once is heard. But overall, a togetherness of people still works well at the same time. Mutual respect to different cultures and religions are still very strong in the daily life of ordinary people. Furthermore the result of questionnaire shows us the interesting phenomena of the potential of cross-cultural faith in religion.

The questionnaire is designed to get data and information on people reaction to new comers, different cultures and religions. Sixty four questionnaires were randomly distributed in those both villages. Fifty eight respondents were young people and fifteen respondents were adults. The respondents express their emotional reactions to new comers, different cultures from other regions and abroad and religion differences. Secondly they answer question on their feeling when they address, communicate and associate with new comers, different cultures and religions. The respondents also tell us the impacts of different cultures and religion in their faith.

The result of questionnaires can be described as the following: seventeen people or 26.5 percents of respondents feel pleasant with new comers and cultures from other areas and abroad. No respondent feel being disturbed by them. Sixteen people or 25 percents of respondents feel being accustomed with new comers, different religions and cultures from other areas and abroad. Most of respondents, namely 48 percents of respondents want to know about new comers and their cultures. The above data inform us that most of people have curiosity on the new comers, their cultures and religions.

Concerning respondents' experience in communicating and associating with new comers, different religions and cultures, 24 people or 37 percents of respondents have been accustomed with them. One person or 1.5 percents feel inconvenient, and one other person or 1.5 percents feel afraid of the new comers, different cultures and religions. Most of the respondents, namely 59 percents of them feel pleasant in association with new comers, different religions and cultures. The data tell us that eventhough many people have been accustomed and pleasant with different cultures, religions and new comers, but few of people still feel inconvenient and afraid in making association with them.

The impact of different cultures and religions to their faith is as the following: Most of the respondents, 44 percents of them do not feel that new comers, different religions and cultures do not disturb them. No respondent feel annoyed by them. Twelve respondents or 18.7 percent have been accustomed with different cultures and religions. Even 8 respondents or 12.5 percent feel to be strengthened with different cultures and religions. Those data tell us that most of the people experience that their faiths are not disturbed or annoyed by new comers, different cultures and religion. Some of them have been accustomed with them, and some even learned from them so that their faith becomes strengthened.

3. Existential Phenomenology in the Case of Mekar Mukti and Sertajaya

Existential phenomenology critically reflects concrete human existence including choice, action, basic human relationship with God and the lived experiences. Martin Heidegger (1889-1975) in his book of *Being and Time* (1927) reflects relationship between the mode of being, mode of humanity and the structure of time. He sought to investigate nothing less than the meaning mode of being characteristic of human being (Martin Heidegger, 1996: 274) There is a dynamics of appearance and

disappearance according to intentionality. Concerning the case of Mekar Mukti and Sertajaya, we let the phenomena appear themselves in front of us according to the intentionality of cross-cultural faith in religion. Hence an essence behind phenomena can be discovered and interpreted, and analysed.

With regard to what happens in Mekar Mukti and Sertajaya, every follower of religion in these two villages enlivens his/her faith in association with the people who have different cultures and religions. Since there is a big number of residents from outside the area, many people have also been accustomed to associate with those who have different cultures and traditions. They live together with other ethnics and people such as Sundanese, Betawinese, Batakese, Javanese, Chinese, Floresnese, Chinese, Korean, and so on. An ability to adapt and behave in cross-cultural situation also happens in the workplace, especially when the people have to work in the multi-national companies in these villages. Evolutionary change of the mindset might happen in such a way so that they enliven their cross-cultural faith in their religions. Accordingly, the evolutionary changes constitute a possibility of cross-cultural faith in religion.

Concerning people who have different religions, a gradual awareness of the change is shown by an informant in the office of Sertajaya village. He said that the development of the village should be done gradually, moreover the worship places such as worship places of Christian, Hindu, Buddhist, and so on. Its location should not far away from one and others so that there will be harmony, tolerance and increase of respect among the followers of religions (Gloria Andriani Putri 2012: 7).

It means that a religious understanding develops in accordance to societal changes and development of people's perception to their environmental reality. Soekarno in his exposition of the first principle of Pancasila, Believe in the Only God, (Soekarno 1964:94-99) mentions the five phases of human development regarding human understanding of God. Those five phases are hunting and fishing, husbandry, cultivation of plant, handicraft, and industrialism. They influence people's understanding about God. Each phase of human development constitutes a certain perception about God. Niels Mulder in his book of *Inside Indonesian Society* offers a new interpretation that opens a way for novel cultural development (Compare Niels Mulder 1994:170). There is a gradual development of mindset together with their environmental changes and demands. Habits of thinking beyond one's own group transform how he/she perceives reality and environmental changes.

4. Profan and Religious Experience

Human profane experience is events that take place to human beings and become a common experience which is not have any connection with God or religion. According to Mircea Eliade, the profane and secular life are the opposite of the sacred and religious life (Mircea Eliade 1993:1). An instance of the profane is the discovery of Galileo which maintains that matter itself had to be studied in its quantitative aspect. Mass and motion are the main characteristic of matter (Bede Griffiths 1989:13). The profane experience could be materialistic or mechanic. It contains what is taking place to human beings through senses. Human beings have five senses. Those are eyes, ears, nose, skin, and tongue. By using eyes, someone sees an object, and in quick mechanism an individual makes judgement of the object. He directly reacts to it in a certain way. Based on this judgement, an individual decided the categorization of object whether the object is animal or human being, male or female. This mechanism mysteriously works and it happens very fast. Just in a couple of second, a human being has made judgement and at the same moments he reacts to an object in a certain way.

With smelling, a human being directly makes judgement to an object. It operates very fast so that an individual gets an understanding of the kinds of perfumes, its smell which is good or bad. He directly reacts to it at the same time. There is a certain mechanism that creates a fast judgement on what the human nose informs to our mind. An individual usually reacts to an object without thinking whether they are religious or not. Those experiences come to us through human senses. The similar things also happen to us through the usage of ear, tongue, and our skin to touch. The nature of these human experiences contains a religiosity which is a kind of openness towards something bigger than human self. For an instance, when someone is hearing some tones of melodies, his mind goes beyond the melodies and he says that it is the song of the Indonesian anthem, that is Indonesia Raya song. There is an openness of the tones of melodies towards the whole song of Indonesia Raya. If this openness is connected to God or the attributes of religions, then it becomes religious experience.

Anne Bancroft in her book *Weavers of Wisdom. Women Mystics of the Twentieth Century* expresses such a religiosity when she exposes a woman mystic, Twylah Nitsch. She writes as follows: “When we open our eyes we see beyond ourselves. When we open our ears, we listen beyond ourselves. When we surrender to this attraction, we grow in self awareness” (Anne Bancroft 1989:46).

Such a self awareness can be elaborated when an individual gets an accident which is common to human experience. But when the individual who gets an accident spontaneously expresses ‘Thank God, it was just a small accident’, it means that he connects it to God or religion. Then it has become a religious experience. Profane human experience, therefore, can be religious experience by means of self awareness toward God or attributes of religion.

A human person with its rationality constitutes a human consciousness and awareness. Human rationality has an important role to create an awareness of openness toward something bigger than him/herself, that is the Transcendent. Ken Wilber as it is quoted by Bede Griffiths, traces the stages of development from the elementary psychology of the child and of primitive man, right through the supreme consciousness, which is the awareness of ultimate reality (compare Bede Griffiths 1989:10). A religious experience may exist because of such an awareness of the ultimate reality in human nature.

Religiosity, therefore, contains an openness toward something bigger than the self. It is also called as human transcendency. This human transcendency makes possible a presence of religious experiences. Every human experience has potentials to be religious experience when it is connected to God or attributes of religion. How to connect to God depends on the religious experiences that they have. It is enough to say that an ordinary human experience may become a religious experience when that ordinary human experience is connected to God or to the attributes of religions.

5. God and Human Being

God is perceived by human being as the Transcendent, the perfect, eternal unlimited reality, and as Creator. The perfection of God and unlimitedness of God makes a human being who is limited cannot understand God in a full way. A human being needs analogy to speak about God. Human beings only can understand some attributes or parts of the whole mysterious reality of the Divine. The reason is because human being is limited, not eternal and can be broken, meanwhile God is perfect, eternal, and Most Powerful. When human being has to speak about God, he has to use symbol, because the symbol can contain something bigger than itself. The symbol of the sky, for instance, is something sacred because its mode of being is outside the time. Accordingly symbolism give meaning and support to all religious forms (Mircea Eleade 1993: 111).

Our human mind cannot understand God in a full way. God is a great mystery, and human understanding on God is always limited. Gilbert Ryle in his most influential work of *Concept of Mind* argues against the traditional conception of mind as spiritual or non-physical substance residing in the physical body (Dagobert D. Runes 1982:290-291). Further, Hyung S. Choy speaks about an expansion of the mind horizon. As we expand our mind horizons, we also expand our understanding of God, for we know God is the ultimate reality-far greater than any human imagination of the unseen (Hyung S. Choy 2001:12).

This limited human being is believed as created being by God. He is from God and will return to God. A human being with his mind will just arrives to a kind of obstacle wall which is a big question on the mystery of divine reality. In the article of *Light of Science in Our Eyes*, Edward Searl says: “Our incredible mind allows us to communicate with one another, here and now, and to a degree in the past and to the future. I believe that our incredible mind is an expression of an urge in the universe to reflect on itself and to reach beyond itself toward the Transcendent” (Robert L. Hermann 2001: 296). When he gets an answer to a question in the mystery, other questions will emerge. A human being therefore cannot explain what it is behind the big question of the mystery of divine reality.

There are some cultural-religious expressions concerning to the mystery of divine reality. In this way some different religious experiences and their various ideas on the mystery of divine reality can be mutually clarifying, without losing their individual identity (Compare Michael von Bruk 1991:6). Some of those expressions are as the following: “*tan keno kinoyo opo*” in Javanese expression which means “it cannot be described or imagined”, “*Celak tanpo senggolan, adoh tanpo wangenan*” in

Javanese expression which means “close without touching and far away without any distance” (Andreas Yumarma 2012:24), and “*neti-neti*” in Sanskrit which means “not this, not that” (Margaret and James Stutley 1985:208). The above expressions are cultural-religious expressions that describe a limited human understanding on the mystery of God.

The answer of this human limitedness is revelations in religions as they are written in their holy scriptures. The revelations elaborate who is behind the big question in the mystery of the Divine. However, human understanding to the revelations of God in the holy scriptures is also still limited. For this reason, interpretations and commentaries of the contents of scriptures are necessary according to each religion.

Hindu Scriptures such as Veda, Upanishads, and Bagavad Gita (R.C. Zaehner 1992; Marisusai Dhavamony 1982; Eknath Easwaran 1986) reveal gods as personification of natural forces (Richard Kennedy 1984:86), and that God is Trimurti namely Brahma, Vishnu, Siva. The Trimurti in its earliest conception is the manifestation of the Supreme Spirit in three forms: Brahma, Vishnu and Siva (Marisusai Dhavamony 1982: 67). Hymns of the Rig-Veda are dedicated ever reaches the supreme distinction of being undisputed king of gods and men (R.C. Zaehner 1989:8). The Holy Bible in Christian Religion reveals the Kingdom of God, and mystery of the Holy Trinity which is Father, Son and Holy Spirit who are One. The one God, the maker heaven and earth, has shown himself to man in three different but undivided ways. God the Father send the only Son Jesus Christ. Before he returned to the Father, Christ promised that the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God would enter men’s heart and mind to give strength and faith to believe in him (Richard Kennedy 1984:191). The Holy Quran in Islamic Religion reveals God as Allah which is the name of majesty and supreme name. Allah is the Name of the Essence or the Absolute (Ceryl Glasse 1991:35). Allah is an opening on the divine Essence, beyond language and the word itself. The Holy Quran contains laws for society and warnings of the end of the world, descriptions of judgement, of Heaven and of Hell (Ceryl Glasse 1991:229).

A human being in the world is perceived as a journey of returning to God. When someone dies, there is an expression of “*inna li lahi wa ina roji’un*” meaning that we are from God and returning to God. There are expressions of “Going home to the Father” or “Rest in Peace (RIP)” which imply human life in this world as a journey of returning to God. In Javanese cultural religious expression, there is an expression like “*bali ing alaming asuwung*” meaning “return to a realm of nothingness” which is applied to someone’s death. They perceive human life in this world as “*mung mampir ngombe*” meaning “just a stop over to take a drink”. These expressions imply a human journey to God and temporariness of human life in the world.

6. Many ways to be back to the mystery of God

Each religion offers unique way to return to God. The unique ways are provided by religions. Fraser Watts in his article of *Brain Science and Religious Experience* also underlines such a reality when he says: “Religious Experiences are very different from one another. Some are striking, memorable experiences that stay with people for life” (Russel Stannard 2000:123). The fact that religious experiences are so different from one another shows that there is no simple theory of God spot in the brain can be adequate. Eventhough they are different from one and other but they all direct to one mystery of God. According to Raymundo Pannikar, the mystery of God is not only transcendental as known in religious rituals, but it is also emanent and active in historical situation (compare Harold Coward 1989:79). Many persons try to describe the existence of many religions in the world. Most of them use analogy in their elaboration. They describe them as many various paths of returning to God such as in the following analogies.

6.1. Analogy of rainbow

Rainbow consists of many various colours. Each colour is close to the other colours. They stay together in close relationship without losing the identity of their colours. The existence of many colours in rainbow can be compared to the presence of many religions in the world and societal life. Each of them is different and unique, but they all together exist in a close relationship. Togetherness

should not exclude the existence and identity of every religions. Identity, uniqueness, and colors of religions create a beauty of togetherness or closeness without losing their identity.

6.2. Analogy of a garden with various flowers

Garden where many various flowers are analogy of different religions or cultures. Their existence with their own identity makes the garden colourful with different flowers. The different flowers in the same garden are like the various religions which exist in the world. The religions offer the different guidelines to be a good persons. A good person should worship God, and do love and kindness to others. The various colours of flowers enrich a human awareness towards atmosphere of various religions and cultures.

6.3. Analogy of climbing up to the mountain

Climbing up to a mountain can be reached by means of different routes. Different routes are concrete evidence the can be chosen by every individual. These many various routes are used as an analogy of the existence of many religions in the world. As an example, someone can choose a route to come to the top of Merapi mountain from Kaliurang in Jogjakarta. Others may climb up the Merapi mountain by Selo, Boyolali. This route has unique natural sight and specific experience. Next other individuals may reach the top of the Merapi mountain by means of Dukun, Magelang. The landscape, sight and experience is different from the two previous routes. However they will come to the same top of the Merapi mountain. Base on the above explanatory expression, it is underlined that there are many routes to come to the same top of Merapi mountain. Every route has its specific natural situation and also give a unique experience. Whatever the route they take, they finally come to the same top of the Merapi mountain.

All of those above analogies are descriptions that are used to depict how cross-cultural philosophy of religion has actually already got its seeds in the common mind of people. They believe that all various religions finally lead all followers of religions to come to the Ultimate Reality. Because all religions give direction and guidance to be united with the Supreme One, many people make oversimplification that all religions are the same; they guide people to the highest unity with God. However the highest unity is already conceals with itself the richest diversity. The one and the many do stand instark opposition to each other, for each implies the other (Compare Thomas A. Aykara 1978:174).

Cultural heritage on the many ways to be back to God has existed long time ago. It becomes a disguised awareness behind societal history. Nevertheless these ideas of many ways to be back to God are sometimes marginalised by practical political interets and passions of power which promote a narrow mind in some societal groups in order to get power, position and societal influences.

7. Essense of Religion and Cross-Cultural Faith

Esesse of religion is faith in which an individual answers “yes” to God’s revelation and His intructions. Faith basically can be seen from two dimensions, namely faith can be seen from the content dimension, and faith can can be seen from the attitude dimension (compare Andreas Yumarma 2010:7). From the dimension of content, faith is God, divine revelation, as well as moral and religious instructions which function as guidance to humankind. Religions designate God in many various names such as Allah in Islam, Brahma in Hindu, and God the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit which are one in Christianity.

From the perspective of attitude, faith is an attitude of surrender to God. This attitude makes faith becoming a way of life which influences human choice, attitude and behavior. Religions accordingly constitutes human attitude to surrender him/herself to God. John Hick in his book of *An Interpretation of Religion* states that religions make a transformation from self-orientation to the orientation towards others. Religion, therefore, centres upon an awareness of and response to a reality that transcends ourselves and our world, whether the direction of transcendence be beyond or within or both (John Hick 1991:3).

Such a concept of faith underlines an essence of religion and its primacy of which are placed in the relationship between human being and God. Accordingly, faith is always relational. Formal religions with their rituals are perceived as a kind of faith formalization as well as a guideline of human life, action and that of behavior. Variety and plurality of religions underline a primacy of religion as a medium to facilitate a human intimate relationship with God. Revelations, doctrines, and spiritual teachings from religions are perceived as means to attain the Transcendent (Compare Harold Coward 1989:170). Religious rituals are practised, because they are necessary to intensify human affections and feeling toward God in worship. Religions therefore provide teachings, spiritual exercises, guidance that are necessary for forming an intimacy of relationship between human beings and God. Besides, religion provides means of worship that are necessary to keep and improve human relationship with God.

Encounter with different people, cultures, religions are common things in a life journey. Such an encounter will enrich human religious experiences and influence how someone sees reality and enliven his/her faith. In the same line, John Hick emphasises that essence of religions is transformation from self-orientation to the orientation towards others and God.

Furthermore they also enable some followers of religions to have cross-cultural faith. For them, various cultures and religions do not threaten identity of the followers of religions. They even enrich their understanding of religions. They strengthen their awareness of their own religion and the religion of others at the same time. John Macquarrie in his article of *The One and Many: complementarity of Religions* concludes that each faith must be respectful towards and ready to learn from the spiritual insights of others. The one and the many as a principle of ontology can be reflected in the actual life of the communities of faith (Thomas A. Aykara 1978:176). Cross cultural faith in religion therefore supports human respect to other religions and constitutes an attitude of tolerance to differences and uniqueness of others.

8. Conclusion

Based on the above explanation, we can make some conclusion as the following:

Firstly, the increase of new comers from abroad and other areas of Indonesia in Jababeka City especially in Mekar Mukti and Sertajaya, provides a potential of the possibilities of cultural and religious encounter. Desire to know new comers and their cultures/religions as well as no feeling of being disturbed by different cultures and religions strengthen possibilites of cross-cultural faith in religion.

Secondly, the encounter of different followers of religions and cultures has an impact to a gradual process of awareness towards a cross-cultural faith. Human limitedness to the mystery of the Divine and cultural religious expressions constitute a necessary seeds to an existence of cross-cultural faith in religion. However some practical political interests and passion of power sometimes marginalised them. The practical political interests are getting stronger with the local autonomy policy and the direct election system in Indonesian democracy.

Thirdly, concept of human life in the world as temporary journey enables an open pattern of religious thought constituting cross-cultural faith, mutual respect, inclusiveness spirit and cooperation among different followers of religions. The similarity of perception that human life in the world is a temporary journey, pilgrimage, and being back to God can be a meeting point or common basis for togetherness and cross-cultural faith in religion.

Hopefully, those findings can shed a light to a prospect of cross-cultural faith in religion that can give inspirations and contributions to create harmony, inclusive spirit, respect and tolerance among the citizens of Mekar Mukti and Sertajaya villages as well as Indonesia in general. Such a cross-cultural faith in religion might be a mean to minimalise social, religious and economic gaps in a developing society which is coloured by various cultures and new comers. Moreover it also promotes a spirit of inclusiveness in societal life. The most important in this spirit of inclusiveness is not only having a formal religion but enliven a cross-cultural faith in term of surrender to God and practising religious intimacy with God in workplace, association with followers of other religions and daily societal life.

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