The Future Prospect for Religious Dialogue in Malaysia

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Abstract-

Basically this article gives primary focus on the religious dialogue in Malaysia. Most importantly, the focal study is on the prospect issues of future trends for the religious dialogue in Malaysian global context. Initially, this article highlights the issue of the religious dialogue in the contemporary Malaysia which has been designed to be divided into several sections and discussions by content analysis. We get to witness how religious dialogue process had been conducted in Malaysian context even though there are still many flaws that need to be fixed together by both sides, the Muslims and non-Muslims. By using futuristic analytical approach (examining current trends and proposing alternative solutions), this paper argues that the religious dialogue can be a future prospect of problem solving for modern crisis and therefore, an urgent need for global agenda. Religious dialogue are now expanding in Malaysia as the people from different religions typically practise several kinds of dialogues such as dialogue in life, dialogue through acting out together and dialogue through intellectual discourse. Having through these practical life experience in dialogue, it is believe that the religious dialogue trend in Malaysia has a somewhat bright future and proven to be in reality with several supports. The support to introduce the subject of religious pluralism concept from the Islamic perspective on the discipline of civilizational dialogue to be studied by all devotees of world religions. Most importantly, creating a framework for Islamic discipline of knowledge that is related to the concept of religious pluralism in middle form which has to be the opposite of secularist approach of anti-Islamic tradition. This paper conclude that the bright future of religious dialogue, while many shortcomings still need to be addressed together on both sides; Muslim and non-Muslims, has become a reality in Malaysia.

Keywords: religious dialogue, futuristic approach, civilizational dialogue, Malaysia

Introduction

In this modern world which is also known with the globalisation, it is a reality for the people from different continents to face complex and numerous socio-political-cultural problems as a natural and unique phenomenon. The globalization which has a direct effect on all aspects of human life including religious patterns and religious
dialogue have called for people to be a positive awareness of diversity. Each community should be aware of the existence of its own group and other groups with all the differences. The crisis of modernity that swept the world cannot be solved by religion alone or by other great world ideologies. The environmental problems, the impact of the use of sophisticated technology, the deeper the gap between rich and poor countries, the hegemony of the superpower against the weaker countries, and the increasing abuse of the rights of minority communities are parts of the global humanitarian problems which are becoming the common agenda of mankind transcending ideological and religious boundaries. To answer those problems, then, the need for the religious dialogue for future prospect of problem solving is an urgent global agenda. This paper intends to suggest that the religious dialogue based on an Islamic Education approach can be a new formula to unite the communities of the world. Although the focus will be on Malaysian reality, but this approach will be lengthened for the benefits of all humanity by looking at the religious functionality for solving problems of the mankind. Humans as Allah’s creations have many cores (known as fitrah) and man attributes (homo religious) which calls for religion to achieve happiness in life.

According to Islam as proposed by Kanani et al. (2017), the relationship between Muslim and non-Muslim can be executed through the concept of muwālāt (commonly translated as ‘loyalty’) in the Quran. Kanani argues that the term muwālāt should be understood based on various circumstances and conceptual understanding of relevant verses in the Qur’ān and Prophet Muhammad methods for dealing with non-Muslims. Muwālāt is not only ideological but can be contractual too. A historical study of the Prophet’s (PBUH) interaction with non-Muslims in Mecca and Medina illustrates that as long as non-Muslims did not behave treacherously or turn to violence, a peaceful relationship was established and alliances and coalitions were formed. Therefore, he devides muwālāt into two categories; i) ideological muwālāt which involves matters of faith and spirituality, and ii) contractual muwālāt which pertains to socio-political relationships, which Muslim and non-Muslim can developed amicable relationship with each other. In promoting the religious dialogue in Malaysian context, some steps of measurement have been taken into account to flourish the element of knowing the others and clarifying any misunderstanding. Dialogue Harmony is one of its kinds which is the first interfaith dialogue programme that officially broadcasted on television (TV Al-Hijrah). The role of Dialogue Harmony is a medium of interfaith dialogue that could give an explanations, understanding and reducing the religious issues and cultivating a sense of respect among different religions.

Fundamental Islamic Concepts on Religious Dialogue

In a larger scope, we can say that the question of religious dialogue had close relation with the concept of religious pluralism which stresses on inclusive principles of having a religion; this has to be accepted positively and selectively by Muslims. This matter can be further explained through several points. Ultimately, Islam emphasizes how Muslims should be inclusive towards the many religions. This can be evidently seen from the Qur’ān itself, such as:

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1. Admitting the existence of wahi from Allah to the past Prophets.\(^5\)
2. Admitting the nature of religious pluralism and societies as Sunnatullah – the purpose is to have mutual interaction harmonically.\(^6\)
3. Suggestion to have good and open dialogue with other groups.\(^7\)
4. Suggestion to be fair in religious relationships despite different religions and cultures.\(^8\)
5. Suggestion to give freedom to each community member to practise their religion and culture in peace.\(^9\)
6. Suggestion to avoid extremism in societal relationships.

Moreover, it cannot affect the framework and fundamental understanding that is based on Tawhidic concept as enclosed in Islamic teaching. The fundamental Tawhid as explained by Islamic theological scholars is constant and cannot be changed until the end of the day.\(^10\) Simply put, for whatever forms of religious dialogue that will be done, it is vital to cast aside secularism approach which rejects the function of divinity in Man’s life and which depend solely on the roles of mind (‘aql) and lust (nafs) in determining all prime aspects in life.\(^11\)

Much worst is that, according to approach of Western secularism study, any elements in relation to the phenomena of divinity and metaphysics will be considered as ludicrous and not empirical.\(^12\) Moreover, they assume that man’s suffering is caused by man’s own weakness which is to be blinded by having faith in religion.\(^13\) Regarding this subject, Mohd Kamal Hassan explained (as translated below):

“They dislike the idea of religion and presume that continuing religious life in modern world either as a relic of medieval obscurantism or as one of manifestation of primitivism and irrationality in human self.”\(^14\)

Furthermore, Islam admits the existing similarities among all religions of the world, which usually has;\(^15\)

1. Emphasis on good moral system.
2. Emphasis on punishment for bad behaviour.
3. Positive and compassionate attitude towards the universe.
4. Faith in God’s powers which is controlling and influencing Man’s life and the universe.
5. Emphasis on self-purification for the purpose of goodness.
6. Emphasis on knowledge culture.

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\(^5\) Quran, Surah Yunus (10):94.
\(^6\) Quran, Surah Hud (11):118.
\(^9\) Quran, Surah al-Mumtaanah (60):8.

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At the micro level, Islam’s acceptance towards the concept of pluralism in religion has to be based on several main principles, which are usually used through the concept of adab ikhtilaf in Islam, among which are; emphasis with manners and conditions for the concept of religious pluralism which can be described in detail as:

1. Attitude of understanding differences and similarities to achieve Man’s harmonious life.
2. Nature and condition with harmonious and high interaction.
3. Non-relativism – still believes in the excellence of Islamic teaching and Islam as the most perfect religion.
4. Non-syncretism which enables the invention of other distinctive religion.

Besides that, the importance of practising positive ethics of religious dialogue, which can be further described as follows:

1. Joined by experts and committed practitioners.
2. Identifying issues for dialogue session for the benefits of all.
3. Accompanied by good character and high passion for learning.
4. More emphasis towards common issues on how religion can solve Man’s problems.
5. Does not contain debatable elements that can humiliate other group’s pride.
6. Does not have the purpose of belittling and changing other’s religious principles.
7. Does not question religious section that is constant and unchangeable.

We cannot deny the importance of knowing what cause a certain dialogue session to fail, which consists of:

1. Avoiding the attitude of permitting religion and culture to be manipulated for certain groups’ agendas.
2. Obstinacy and refusal to practise what has been decided.
3. Refusal to practise critical thought.
4. Attitude of taking one’s own group as more superior and higher than the others.
5. Dismiss the use of forceful da’wah as a method.

**Exposure on the Reality of Religious Dialogue in Current Malaysia**

In a normal conduct, a dialogue process will involve discussion among two or more parties by having features of meeting, communication, agreement, understanding, relationship and collective understanding. By using futuristic analytical approach (examining current trends and proposing alternative solutions), we can detect three forms of religious dialogue that are now expanding in Malaysia. These three forms of dialogue are not static and often change, either to become better or worse. Despite the nature of this development, as based on modern knowledge advancement, we are at least able to plan or even manage all changes and development.

Basically, the existence of the three forms of religious dialogue in Malaysian context has close association with the history of past community of Malay Archipelago which was open-selective with cultural diffusion or foreign religion that originated from outside of Malay Archipelago territory. This reality had then changed with

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17 See Abdul Halim el-Muhammad, (2001) *Adab Berijithad Dan Berikhtilaf Mengikut Syaria’at*, Kajang: IPI.
the coming of Western colonisation which stressed monopolised approach, fraud, manipulation and gave priority to economical concern in most of their colonisation policy.\textsuperscript{23} In this modern age context, there are three forms of religious dialogue as follows;

\textbf{First}, dialogue in life; when members of different communities are forced to or even strived to live together outside their own comfort zone with no religious scope boundaries. In several isolated cases, as what happens in community of Baba and Nyonya in Malacca, the non-Malay ethnic groups had received high level of assimilation with the Malay community, so much so that it can be seen to eradicate their own original ethnic culture.\textsuperscript{24} They are neighbours, have \textit{gotong royong} (activity which requires them to work together) and share sadness and grief in humanistic problems.\textsuperscript{25} Another example of dialogue of life which occurs at the natural setting of getting-to-know the others in Malaysian context of plural society, is ‘Mamakization’. The Mamakization according to Olmedo, E. and Shamsul Amri (2019)\textsuperscript{26} has been drawn from an iconic figure of street food in Malaysia. The foundation of Mamakization paradigm derive from a food alternative network framing. Mamakization views primarily the act of patronising a food stall in multi-ethnic Malaysia as a social transition and analytical tool of social cohesion through a specific social practice: eating out in a Malaysia food stall. Mamakization promotes a lifestyle of daily life interaction in spontaneous manner with unstructured friendly agenda. This form of dialogue is frequently noticed happening in daily lives of Malaysian community even though it is sometimes superficial and is specifically sponsored for media advertisement purposes to teach the members of society. National development philosophy, ever since Malaysia had gained independence until currently whereby it highlights national integrity, emphasizes more on elements of patriotism without pointing towards serious religious value issues.\textsuperscript{27}

\textbf{Second}, dialogue through acting out together; this is realised whenever every believer of different religions come together to plan and implement actions that will benefit all parties. Normally, this form of dialogue is done by the Muslim and Non-Muslim NGOs whom unite in order to fight for issues involving global humanity such as environmental issues, consumerism issues, poverty issues, educational issues, Drugs issues, AIDS issues, freedom of democracy issues and globalisation issues. All parties are to agree with their religion’s roles in various values and formula in order to solve societal problems.\textsuperscript{28}

Aside from these NGOs, there is also another non-Muslim religious body (Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism and Sikhism) which operates under JAKIM; to voice out and fight for rights for every non-Muslim in Malaysia.\textsuperscript{29}

For Muslims, despite the fact that this official body was not established for political rights of an ethnic group, it frequently creates many religious and racial conflicts. Examples of such matter can be seen in;

1. Attitudes of several non-Muslim religious activists who are both questioning and inciting convert issues (of Islam) among the non-native ethnic groups.\textsuperscript{30}

\textsuperscript{30} Further information can be found in Mohamed Azam Mohamed Adil (2000) “Bidang kuasa dan kedudukan Mahkamah Syariah di Malaysia pasca Alaf 20: Ke arah mana”, in \textit{Jurnal Syariah}, vol. 8, bil. 2, pp. 111-114 and “Kebebasan beragama
2. JTSS (Jawatankuasa Teknikal Syariah dan Sivil or Syariah and Civil Technical Committee) who are responsible in the reviewing process and for making amendments in Islamic and civil legal system so that both are made to be more Malaysian – are always negatively understood by the non-Muslims. This in turn had caused the reviewing process to be done in low profile to avoid objections by the non-Muslims.31
3. The actions of MCCBCHS (Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism and Sikhism) who meddled with political issues; they strictly objected the suggestion by PAS to implement Hudud laws in Kelantan. There was also several other activists who openly rejected proposition made by PAS to present Akta Kawal (Controlling Act) for non-Muslims religious propaganda in Malaysia – which was labelled as unacceptable, not democratic and against the Constitution of Malaysia.32
4. Government’s Dasar Islamisasi (Islamisation Policy) such as the insertion of Islamic values had been judged by the non-Muslims as an effort to strengthen the position of the Malay communities, which was called to be as an extreme Malay nationalism that it threatens the positions of the non-Muslim communities.33

Third, dialogue through intellectual discourse; it is planned to be in either (i) bilateral form (involving two religions) such as Islam-Christian Dialogue, or (ii) trilateral form (involving Abrahamic religion) such as Islam-Christianty-Jew or even (iii) multilateral form (involving Abrahamic religion and culture). Clearly this multilateral form of dialogue is more effective because its discussion is more focused and controllable.34 However, this form of dialogue is still limited in current Malaysian context, especially when it is specifically done in Higher Institutions35 and IKIM (Institut Kefahaman Islam Malaysia or Institute of Islamic Understanding Malaysia) and its scope had not been expanded to societal living.

At international level, as a response to frequent disputes between the West, Israel, Palestine and Arab countries; trilateral dialogue (involving the Abrahamic religion) such as Islam-Christianity-Jew should be done more often, particularly by the leaders of the Abrahamic religion to resolve the point of dispute which had a long background history.36 Most importantly, in accordance with the human rights standard and religious freedom (New World Order), the Western had continuously observing relationship development and religious dialogue in forms of academic discourse in Malaysia, before determining their interests to invest in economic activities in Malaysia.37

If we are to do literature review (Content analysis) on various works that are produced by Malaysian scholars of different religions, we will be able to notice several trends related to the reality of Dialogue through the intellectual discourse;

1. Prejudiced attitudes of Muslims towards other religions. Muslims need to be taught to practise religious pluralism [allow religious pluralism] of the non-Muslims because generally the Muslims are still biased
towards the other believers.\(^{38}\) This has caused the Islamic revival movement which is happening in Malay community to exclude the non-Muslims communities in Malaysia.\(^{39}\) This is also very devastating as we can see from the history of struggle of the early mubalighs (missionaries of Islam) in Malay Archipelago, who had practised Sufism approach for \textit{da’wah} until they actually succeeded in their efforts of \textit{da’wah}. This Sufism approach showed positive attitude towards different religions which had existed in the past Malay community.\(^{40}\)

2. Such negative scenario had caused non-Muslims to be afraid of and become cynical towards the development of Islamic revival movement. The non-Muslims should be well explained so that the phenomenon of Islamic revival is not; “\([a]\) cultural imperialism, because Islam is a universal religion and it does not belong to the Malays only, and its message delivery should not act only to strengthen an ethnic group’s position but should also give goodness to the other groups.”\(^{41}\)

3. Failure of religions dialogue in many official government policies. According to a Chinese scholar, Paul Tan Chee Ing, he questioned the impact ability of discourse dialogue in life which is created in official government events such as in school and public places. It is considered to be less effective to create awareness for Muslims to understand the universal good values of other religions. As a result, this trend would cause Muslims to be unprepared to attend non-Muslim events like funerals and weddings. On the contrary, the non-Muslims like Buddhists, Hindus, Taoists and Confucius devotees can easily interact with the Christians.\(^{42}\) According to Muhammad Abu Bakar, Muslims should take the initiative to understand the reality of living for non-Muslim communities in Malaysia. Interaction on any ideas which are not contradictory to the Islamic teachings should be maximised. Such isolation would only cause the other believers to be continuously not knowing (jahil) about Islam even though they have lived many years with them.\(^{43}\)

Furthermore, Paul Tan strictly emphasised that failure of dialogue in academic discourse is caused by three major factors;\(^{44}\)

- Lack of experts who truly understands the religions in Malaysia.
- More focus is given to aspect of differences in ethnic groups especially between Malays and non-Malays.
- No openness from the Muslim community to confront and have dialogue session with the non-Muslim communities.

4. Cynical attitude which is practised by the Christians. This view demands the Christians to be more positive in dealing with religious dialogue through academic discourse with the non-Christians. This was proposed by S. Batumalai regarding the need for Christians to be proactive and open to understand non-Christian communities’ socio-cultural and religious aspects, especially Malay community, as an effort to be closer to them. In short, understanding a religious community’s aspiration, culture and custom is prerequisite to the

\(^{38}\) Chanda Muzaffar (1997), “accommodation and acceptance of non-Muslim communities within the Malaysian political sistem: The role of Islam”, \textit{American Journal Of Islamic Social Sciences}, vol. 13, no. 1, pp. 33.


\(^{41}\) Jaffary Awang, “Toleransi agama dan perpaduan kaum K Response intelek Malaysia – Satu observasi ringkas”, p. 82.


\(^{44}\) Paul Tan Chee Ing, “Muslim-Christian relations in Peninsular Malaysia”, pp. 145-146.
existence of academic dialogue between the non-Christians. As alternatives to create unity among the non-Muslims, he suggested:^{45}
- The Christian community should be united despite the differences between their churches.
- To have dialogue session with the Government that can be done when the non-Muslims join the NGOs to voice their desires which are not against the Government’s policy.
- To recommend several values that are included in other religions such as Christianity to be used as universal moral values for Malaysians.

Analysis of Negative Prospect on Reality of Religious Dialogue in Malaysia

In a fairly moderate way, it is not wrong to say that the trends of religious dialogue in Malaysian context has a dim future and may fail to be conducted effectively. However, if there is a proactive effort by all major religious believers in Malaysia that is done in a well-mannered way together with complete blueprints on this religious dialogue concept, this matter can be avoided. The factors that will cause failure to this religious dialogue programme are;

First is the involvement of religion in racial issues that implicate all ethnic groups in Malaysia. Bloodshed has repeatedly happened in Malaysia, either in the past, after independence or in present times, which is caused by religious issues, albeit a small one. As explained by Khoo Kay Kim; “Majority of the Malaysians do not understand the meaning of religion because in practising that religion, they only know the ritual aspects, rarely the fundamental teachings. Therefore they are not able to compare one religion with another which exists in this country. As a result, difference in the ritual aspect is preferred more than the basic teaching.”^{46}

Second, the existence of anti-pluralism among the major believers in Malaysia, which are analysed as follows:^{47}
  1. Extremism; goes overboard and beyond balance when interpreting and implement a rule or punishment in an extreme way.
  2. Chauvinism; obsessive when considering own thoughts or group as the best, whereas others’ thoughts and other groups are false and must be rejected.
  3. Fanaticism; always acting in a sudden way (near to psychosis) when following and implementing a method, opinion and own approach without considering and even strictly objecting other people’s opinion.

Third, attitudes of the non-Muslims are directly influenced by Western media propaganda – on Muslims’ attitudes which are allegedly anti non-Muslims, supporting all violent trends and opposing all elements of modernisation. As an example, the non-Muslims’ act to oppose Islamisation programme that is conducted by the government, even though believers of other religions will also be enjoying the benefits.^{49}

Fourth, there is an inclusive ideology among those believers who consider their religions to be the only right ones and deny this fact to the other believers of other religions. The extremity on the implementation is detected by Muslims themselves, which generally consists of three main approaches as being upheld by Muslims in combating the issue of religious pluralism. This can be further explained as;

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^{48} See Just World Trust (JUST), Terrorising The Truth: The Shaping Of Contemporary Images Of Islam And Muslims In Media, Politics And Culture, a Prosiding to International Workshop by Just World Trust (JUST) on 7th-9th October 1995, pp. 4-7.
1. **Secularists**: who are too obsessed with Western element of progress that they accept the idea that all religion has the same concept in front of God, without realising the excellence of Islam compared to other religions. Basically, they fully accept secularised reformation which is sponsored by the West to be moulded in order to repair Muslims’ weakness, together with rejecting all basic and understanding of past Islam, and to replace that the Muslims will have to rely on new approach as proposed by the West, including the issue of extreme religious pluralism.\(^{50}\)

2. **Traditionalists**: those who holds on to several main principles which are;\(^{51}\)
   a. Exclusive (closed) in which they refuse to accept outside views, especially regarding the question of religion. According to them, only the views from their group are correct and denied this to other groups, particularly to those who have associations with West world.
   b. Practises *backward looking* in suggesting answers to the problems of the Muslim *Ummah*. According to them, all traditional elements that was decided by past *ulama*’ which consisted of theological works and jurisprudence (fiqh) have to be defended and if there are any efforts to judge the authority of past *ulama*’ views, such matter will only ruin this noble heritage.

3. **Fundamentalists**: who feels that Islamic understanding needs to use several key principles, namely;\(^{52}\)
   a. Exclusive (closed) to outer and inner elements. Outer exclusive refers to the attitude of assuming all religions except for Islam are lost and unacceptable. On the other hand, inner exclusive refers to the attitude of being obsessive and fanatical by assuming that their group is the only right one and denied the truth to other groups, those who are considered to be living in sins.
   b. Anti and negatively view all form of modernisation that is brought by Western world, and which is frequently perceived as a form of modern jahiliyah (the state of being jahil). In contrast, the best method to have Islam in life is to go back to living in the salaf generation.
   c. Making politics as a medium for the purpose of Islamic battle and enforcing genuine Islamic legal system. As a result, they look at most of the Islamic nations who support secularism system, which is founded by the Western world, as must be strongly opposed.
   d. Supporting the principle of violence to achieve the meaning and final goal towards the establishment of true Islamic nation. Their views are clearly the same with the Khawarijs, as written in the Islamic history, who are willing to restrict and allow bloodshed of those who are against their skirmish.
   e. Firm support should be given to the international Islamic fundamentalist movement (al-Qaeda) that is to contribute moral help, training and finance towards creating resistance in the form of violence to the kafir’s power.\(^{53}\)

**Analysis of Positive Prospect on Reality of Religious Dialogue in Malaysia**

If we are to look at a more *futuristic* angle and perspective (looking at current development), we can summarise that the religious dialogue trend in Malaysia has a somewhat bright future. This statement was made based on several main key points as follows;

\(^{50}\) For further information, see Rahimin Affandi Abdul Rahim (2000), “Orientalisme dan keutuhan ummah Islam: suatu analisis”, in *Jurnal Syariah*, vol. 9, bil. 1, pp. 39-41.


First, the reality of globalisation phenomenon which makes spreading information possible particularly on a certain religion is more open and accessible to anyone. With the era of globalisation era, the world community has changed with the existence of cyber space/virtual space (virtual reality) which has never happened before in human history. The cyber space is said to be; “an atmospheric space or airspace which contains mass and matter that becomes a path for light and sound waves as a medium for information delivery and also a route for communication. It is benefitted for communication system may it uses wires or not. It is an information highway belt that crosses distance, borders, time and place when it is used for communication.”54 This writer further adds; “the birth of this cyber space further quickens the process of civilising human thought because through this the spread and information transformation process is easier and faster. The effect of this cyber space through this cyborg philosophy has given birth to the new society (online) which is different from the mass society (industry).”55 This phenomenon, among others, will enable every devotee of all religions to profoundly know and understand the teachings of other religions from correct sources, without being influenced by one-sided perspective.56

Second, the reality of how many Islamic books and websites which explains on Islamic teachings57 which strongly oppose any forms of extremism.58 As explained by a Muslim scholar, after the September 11 incident, the West communities had tried to study Islamic teaching from the correct source, al-Qur'an and As-Sunnah. As a result, majority of the Western communities are surprised because most part of the Islamic teaching is full of rahmah (or love) (human value) which is very good,59 and the climax can be seen by the increase of many Western people who have embraced Islam.60

According to an analysis by Chandra Muzaffar, the influence of the globalisation phenomenon on civilisation of modern human living is quite complex; there are positive and negative elements. He had listed eight good element of globalisation, but the list of bad element is more in numbers, which are thirteen bad elements. The good elements consist of;61

a) Role of foreign investment (FDI) in creating jobs and reducing poverty in a number of countries.
b) Increasing social mobility and strengthening middle class (intellectual).
c) Wider opportunity to seek information and spread knowledge thanks to new communication technology.
d) Communication is made easier and cheaper.
e) Wider chance for humans of different ethnic groups, cultures and religions to interact.
f) Broadens the chance to disclose sympathy and sense of humanity towards victims of various kinds of natural disaster and man-made tragedy.
g) Highlighting ideas and better rules such as public accountability, laws and human rights.
h) Highlighting women’s rights.

55 Ibid.
57 Among the famous homepages that uses this approach is Kampung.net-Singapore Muslim Community page, Japan Islamic network dan About al-Islam and Muslims. See “Islam dalam Internet”, in Majalah PC, Sumber Komputer Generasi Baru, Jilid 5, vol. 1, 1996, p. 29.
As what can be seen from this list (particularly points b) to h)), is human awareness on the importance of living together, and it is hoped that this can correct all bad elements which are products of globalisation.62

Third is the reality of modern people being aware of that religion has an important role in Man’s life. As what had been mentioned by Muhammad Kamal Hassan, a large number of Western communities who are scholars, CEOs, judges and Islamists admitted that moral degradation which happens in the West is caused by the Western people who had abandoned religions in their lives and prefer lust (nafs) and materialism only, which are seemingly able to give pure happiness to the human kind.63 Emphasis on moral issue for human beings (as spiritual food) had been realised by Western scholars that humans could not rely on mind as the sole source, however require religious teachings. This is because religion is seen as capable of giving spiritual input regarding the purpose of life, the goals and also how life would end for a human soul.64

Fourth, the reality that all religions of the world are united to accept pluralism, as a response to violent attacks which was brought by secularism ideology. To give accurate explanation, there has been awareness on the importance of all religions of the world to be united in order to combat new secular-based hegemony as brought by globalisation. Such matter had produced religious pluralism concept among the believers of major religions of the world.65 A clear example to indicate such awareness can be seen on the perspective of Catholic Church who acknowledges all devotees of other religions besides Catholic Church as will be accepted by God.66 The other example is when the Church of England apologised and sympathised with the fate of Muslims in Iraq who were attacked by NATO.

Fifth, the reality of Muslim Ummah themselves being aware of the importance of making religious dialogue a trend in the context of this modern world. This trend had been widely used in Malaysia67 and Indonesia, but sadly it was strongly objected by some who accused that the religious dialogue trend is betraying Islam itself.68

As for Muslims, the religious dialogue trends or even religious pluralism concept which has been used as central agenda by several modern Islamic institutions should to be supported, based on a few of its major benefits, among which are;

1) Positive element as a result of implementing openness that also included toleration which acknowledges other’s perspective,69 comprising of two main aspects; (a) being open and in the need of mutually studying all sects in Islam70 and (b) being open towards all devotees of major religions of the world. We can learn from the nobility of the West, China, Korea and Japan civilisations which was caused by the teachings of ethics and work value ethos that are possessed by major religions of the world such as Confucianism, Shintoism and ethical Protestants.71

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63 Muhammad Kamal Hasan in Intellectual Discourse at The End Of The Second Millennium: Concern Of A Muslim-Malay CEO, pp. 6-9.
64 Ibid.
66 Readers are advised to read books which strictly oppose this religious pluralism trend in Hamid Fahmy Zarkasyi (2004), Tantangan Sekularisasi Dan Liberalisasi Di Dunia Islam, Surabaya: Penerbit Khairul Bayan, specifically pp. 53-85.
68 See the details given by Shukri Ahmad and Razali Mat Zin (2001) in Adab Dan Etika Kerja Dalam Organisasi, Sintok: Penerbit UUM, pp. 29-56.
2) As major alternative to fill up the development of pro pluralism that was caused by era of globalisation. Islam is seen as able to fill up anxiety of universal mankind as caused by the rejection of the Westerns on religious teachings through the concept of secularism. As it should, religious pluralism approach has to be proposed and developed in Islamic learning in order to fill up space and need of showing the love of Islam to the societies of the world.72

3) This pluralism approach can be used as chief means to defeat racial polarisation issue which strikes the current Malaysian society. In order to forget the 13th May 1969 tragedy and to strengthen unity of diverse society in Malaysia, the Government and NGOs, either Muslim based or non-Muslim based, had been struggling to contribute constructive ideas to accomplish this unity programme. Majority of the NGOs agreed that religion as a factor, when compared to ethnic and culture, can be a point for unity as all devotees of major religions in Malaysia believe that every religion discourages its people to act belligerently and to oppress one another.73

4) Students from Islamic academic institution should have been moulded to be more proactive towards practising the pluralism trend.74 In this manner, Islamic academic institution will directly inculcate objective-humanistic approach that appreciates others despite different religions, ancestry and culture.75

5) Accepting and using perennial philosophy as foundation for the concept of pluralism in Islamic education. This perennial philosophy has to be differentiated with modern Western’s material philosophy.76 In contrast to materialistic philosophy which tries to eliminate The Holy and One (God) from Man’s lives in aspects of philosophy, science and art; this perennial philosophy which came to be the main reliance of Eastern societies77 emphasises the question of God in all aspects of human life. As explained by Budhy Munawar Rachman, the perennial philosophy that is upheld by a group of Islamic scholars like Frithjof Schoun, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Abdul Halim Mahmud, A.K. Brohi, Yusuf Ibish, Martin Lings, William Chittick, Sachiko Murata and many others – gave emphasis on three important matters;78

1. Metaphysics which shows the existence of God and divinity in all matters: life and mind.
2. A psychology that shows there is something in Man’s soul which has relation with element of divinity.
3. Ethics which clarifies the truth and final purpose of Man’s life that has relation with element of divinity.

6) As key alternative to undermine the negative impact of traditionalism’s orthodoxy which claims oneself as right and denies other’s truth. This orthodoxy ideology which is frequently associated with certain political power has become a prime factor for a policy to oppress79 and delay the creativity of Muslim Ummah.80

74 This matter becomes clear when the subject of comparison of religion, culture and civilisation was made compulsory for non-Muslim students in Malaysia. See the analysis by Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud (1989), The Concept Of Knowledge In Islam And Its Implications For Education In A Developing Country, London: Mansell publication limited, pp. 106-111.
Moreover, in the context of Malay Archipelago itself, this orthodoxy ideology is often said to be a tool to unite Malay-Muslim community who are facing many external challenges. But there is a fact that cannot be forgotten which is this ideology had also caused taqlid culture to become stronger in Malay community and that it is supported by Malay political power who wishes to maintain their status quo in which they encounter the westernisation process carried out by the Western colonisation power. Nevertheless, this matter also contributes to the existence of a bunch of oppression among Muslims as what has been stated happening in a clash between Hamzah Fansuri and Nuruddin al-Raniri. Inadvertently, this issue had ruined the image of toleration and peace as how it has been portrayed about the Muslims of Malay Archipelago.

7) As a major method to eliminate bad impression given by the Western media to Islam and the Muslims. Nowadays, the negative thoughts brought by Western scholars have been dominating and accepted by Western powers, in drafting foreign policy for the Muslim world. Generally the Western orientalists gave rather stereotypical analysis towards Islam and modern Islamic movement of the whole world;

   1. Protruding modern Islamic movement as terrorist groups who are thirsty for non-Muslim bloods. This happens because of the fact that Islam itself encourages its people to be violent to the non-Muslims.
   2. Displaying Islamic movement as rebellious towards all elements that come from the Western world, like modernisation idea, human rights, system of democracy and others.
   3. Exhibiting Islamic movements as a huge threat to the new order of domination of modern world as sponsored by the United States of America. This perspective fits the theory of clash of civilisation which was brought up by Samuel Huntington, who assumes that the factor of culture and religion, particularly Islam as Western society’s archenemy, has to be fought endlessly.

To combat this situation, Islamic academic institutional developers need to have proactive approach by introducing the subject of religious pluralism concept from the Islamic perspective on civilizational dialogue of discipline – to be studied by all devotees of major religions of the world that will surely implant good approaches and views about Islam itself. Most importantly, we need to create a framework for Islamic discipline of knowledge that is related to the concept of religious pluralism in middle form. It has to be the opposite of secularist approach which is anti-Islamic tradition and which recklessly supports Western practises, by being not too negative towards other religions’ devotees, particularly Western civilisation as how the Islamic traditionalists and fundamentalists are.

Conclusion

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85 Further information can be found in Fawaz A. Gerges (1999), America And Political Islam; Clash Of Cultures Or Clash Of Interest. Cambridge: Cambridge university press, pp. 21-28.
As the final summary, we can say that if we are to look deeper into the paradigm upheld by Islam in handling the question of life, clearly Islam puts a clear cut fundamentals and principles on the concept of religious pluralism. It is positive and open for as long as it does not endanger *tawhidic* principles which are strongly set up by Islamic worldview, and it does not bring danger to the human kind. Along with this positive element, we get to witness how religious dialogue process had been conducted in Malaysian context even though there are still many flaws that need to be fixed together by both sides, the Muslims and non-Muslims. It is not wrong to say that if this matter cannot be settled by both parties, then the prospect of the religious dialogue would be quite dim, that it can trigger bloodshed, since it has never been blessed by any religion whatsoever. As how this article had tried to explain, the writer thinks that Islamic paradigm in handling the issue of religious pluralism, particularly involving human societies which are mostly diverse needs to be developed and elaborated in a well-mannered way by other Muslim scholars. This matter requires materials and high intellectuality which has to be submitted by the modern Islamic scholars, who are then strongly supported by many parties of a society.

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