



The Beauty and the Beast of Religions in Indonesia: A Philosophical and Theological Analysis of Presupposition and Hermeneutics of Religious Pluralism

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Abstract

The purpose of this article was to reveal the suitability of religious pluralism in the perspective of Christian philosophy and theology as a solution to the religious and social problems of Indonesian society or to exacerbate religious and social problems in Indonesia. To achieve this goal, the author uses a qualitative approach with content analysis method. Content analysis is a research technique to make conclusions based on text or content analysis in writing and systematically. Based on this analysis method, it was found that religious pluralism (many) is the same as nihilism (nothing) and dualism (dual) which is not in accordance with Christian philosophy and theology which recognizes that everything comes from the one and only ultimate reality and source. Religious pluralism is built on presuppositions and hermeneutics that are not biblical, so it is contrary to the formulation of Christian theology that is universal (standard). Therefore, pluralism is indeed very dangerous not only for Christianity but also for all religions, because religious pluralism rejects the essence of all religions and contradicts Pancasila, the ideology (base) of the Indonesian nation.

Keywords: *Beauty; Beast; Religions; Philosophical; Theological; Analysis; Presupposition; Hermeneutics; Religious Pluralism*

Introduction

Indonesia is one of the most religiously plural countries in the world (Pedersen, 2016). The Indonesian government formally acknowledges six major religions allowed to exist in Indonesia, made up of Islam, Christianity, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism and Confucianism (Simatupang, 1983; Wikipedia, 2018). Therefore, religious plurality in Indonesia, on the one hand, is a beautiful face (beauty) of the Indonesian nation in the eyes of the world, where even though the population has different

religions, each resident has freedom of religion and worship guaranteed by Pancasila and the Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia, but on the other hand, religious plurality can also be a bad face (beast), as here and there there are still acts of intolerance, violence and even terrorism in the name of religion (Zainuddin, 2005). In fact, the beauty and the beast are two faces of religious plurality are engraved in many incidents recorded in many literatures. Even so, the beauty of religions still dominates the beast of religious people behavior during the seventy-seven years since the independence of the Indonesian nation (1945).

In many of the Western world it is difficult to imagine, the existence of many different religions co-existing within a region. However, it is not so in in the Republic of Indonesia, which as of right has many different religions. It is impossible for an Indonesian citizen to walk down the street each day and not meet others of different religions. For the first time in world history it is impossible for any one religion to exist in splendid isolation and ignore the others (Pinnock, 1992; Benz, 1969). In Indonesia it had been an every day experiences for ages, which is very different experiences than those who live in the countries of Europe where the population is more homogenous is nature. Indeed, for the believers of the second and third world, plurality constitute a fact of life which is faced every day, but for us this a new experience for us to meet a Muslim, of Buddhist in the streets or shops (Pinnock, 1992).

One more thing, religious plurality, on the one hand is the uniqueness and wealth of the Indonesian nation (beauty), but on the other hand, mismanagement of religious plurality causes serious religious and social problems (the beast). There are at least three main problems caused by religious plurality in Indonesia. *First*, religious discrimination based on religions perpetrated by certain individuals in the government who favours the majority compared to the others. *Second*, domination by the majority group of the sources of political and economic power, leaving the minority groups being marginalized. *Third*, horizontal conflict, constitutes psychological and physical tensions of the minority groups, such as limiting their religious activities of the other religions, and even to the extend of oppressing and murdering the followers of other religions (Arfa, 2014)

In reality, some fundamental groups in the majority religion are aggressive, seem to suppress and even attack minority religious groups, such as forced closure of places of worship, difficulty in obtaining permits to build places of worship, persecution of people who are worshiping, burning houses of worship. and persecution of minority religious groups (Lumintang, 2010). At the same time, those who feel that they are the majority religious group struggle to religion the state in all fields (Sudaryangto, 2007). The failure to implement the Syriat Islam (Jakarta Charter) as a state basis in 1945 (Rayahu, 2007; Setijo, 2007), did not stop their efforts to control them to Islamize Indonesia, as seen in the rise of Islamic organizations such as HTI, MMI, Salafi (Aritonang, 2006; Muntoha). , 2013) and efforts to implement sharia regional regulations in several regions (Mujiburhman, 2021; Wisnuwardhani, 2008; Muslimin, 2012).

Religious fundamentalism and horizontal conflicts between religious communities are one of the factors causing the rise of groups that adhere to the notion of religious pluralism (Lumintang, 2010:490). Religious pluralism is different from religious pluralism. Religious pluralism is the fact that there are different religions, but have the same rights and responsibilities in an area (Douglas, 1989; Zainuddin, 2015); while religious pluralism is an understanding that recognizes all truths in religions. In other words, religious pluralism is a position that rejects uniqueness, finality or decisive claims to the revelation of God in Jesus Christ (Gnanakan, 2010). Pinnock defines the term Pluralism as "The position that denies the Finality of Jesus Christ and that other religions are the same way of salvation to God." (Pinnock, 1992; Lengenhausen, 2010).

Observing religious pluralism as an understanding that is contrary to the finality of religions, including the finality of Christianity, several studies have arisen as a form of response, criticism and

assessment of it. In the following, several studies are presented, such as: Criticism of Critical Reasoning for Religious Pluralism (Faizin, 2013); the problem of religious pluralism (Armayanto, 2014); sociological problem of religious pluralism (Khaeru-rrozikin, 2015); "Insists" criticism of the idea of Religious Pluralism (Fata, 2017). In particular, Christians have also responded to the rise of religious pluralism, such as the writings of Religious Pluralism and Christian Responses (Abjantoro, 2018); negative implications of religious pluralism on church development (Asadu, Diara, Asogwa, 2020); the dangers of religious pluralism (Husaini, 2021), Christian Response to Religious Plurality: An appraisal of the Twentieth Century Christian Pluralist Approaches (Bano, Hassan, Urooj, 2021). Researchers have not found any research on the analysis of the hermeneutics of religious pluralism, especially in Christian philosophical and theological perspectives. That is why this research is urgent and important to do at this time.

Starting from the literature gap stated above regarding the hermeneutics of advocates and adherents of religious pluralism, the following research questions arise: Can religious pluralism still be maintained as a solution to religious and social problems in Indonesia (the beast) after a philosophical and theological analysis of the system hermeneutics? The answer to this question is the purpose of this research, namely, to reveal the suitability of religious pluralism in the perspective of Christian philosophy and theology as a solution to the religious and social problems of Indonesian society or to exacerbate religious and social problems in Indonesia.

Method

To achieve this goal, the author uses a qualitative approach with content analysis method (Nelson, Woods, 2011). Content analysis is a research technique to make conclusions based on text or content analysis in writing and systematically (Lumintang, 2016; Krippendorff, 2004). In this regard, the author analyzes the content of an essential and in-depth understanding of related research (Kaariainen, 2014), namely thoughts in the literature on religious pluralism, especially regarding presuppositions and its hermeneutic system. The steps of content analysis research are as follows: selecting a text that is relevant to the purpose of this research and then finding the message from the text regarding the hermeneutic hold and the pluralist view of religious pluralism (Nelson, Woods, 109). Furthermore, the researcher uses two types of categories to classify the unit of analysis, namely the content of the basic substance of presuppositions and the hermeneutics of religious pluralism based on an analysis of the contents of the literature philosophically and theologically.

Results and Discussions

Turning Point of Religious Theology Paradigm

All of the religious problems stated above, whether practical discrimination toward the minority religions, and domination of the majority religion toward the minority religion, or the psychological and physical conflicts between the followers of religion in whatsoever form and reason, cause the leaders and theology of religions to reconsider their theological position. After launching on studies from various approaches, the development forward, gave birth to a new paradigm in doing theology, that is, the theology of religions which is called "religious pluralism".

In the Muslim circle, there are several prominent intellectuals who strongly struggle to achieve tolerance through new approaches and paradigm, that is religious pluralism. Nurcholis Madjid, taking of from QS al-ankabut/29:46, emphasized the attitude of politeness and feeling of respect with others of different religion. He acknowledged the existence of salvation in the faith of religions that possess their own holy book, like that of Judaism and Christianity, by quoting from QS al-Maidah/5:44 and QS al-

Maidah/5:46-47). Basically, Madjid was building a platform so that Muslims could accept people of other religions based on the existence of their similarity (Madjid, 2001). Besides him, other prominent Muslim who are pluralist is K.H. Abdulrahman Wahid (Gus Dur) who was not received well by the fundamental Muslims because of his attitude of openness and in fact helped other religions. There are many other prominent Muslims who struggle along the same road with the said two prominent Muslims above.

In Christianity, those who are really enthusiastic in the effort of carry out dialogue, are groups who called themselves as the Ecumenical Group, who are generally group under the umbrella of the Association of Indonesian Churches (Persekutuan Gereja-Gereja Indonesia (PGI)) and WCC (Ukur, 1979). They are of the opinion that the plurality of religions is a richness beyond comparison, and as such studies about other religions ought to be carried out intensively. This matter is due to their presupposition that has its root in them, that in the traditions of religion, keeping rich spiritual truth that comes from the truth of God. In their progress and development, certain portion of the theologians from the PGI and WCC, are not satisfied with the achievement they had through holding dialogue all these while, and therefore, they are re-examining the concept of dialogue that has its root from a theological concept. According to them, that Christian theology and dialogue still have the elements of preaching the Gospel, its uniqueness, and the absoluteness of Christianity, and as such must be changed to a theology of religions, that does not have any further claim of uniqueness and finality of its religion (Schumann, 2021).

Understanding of the Religious Pluralism

In reality, plurality of religions in Indonesia has not been managed properly, even though Pancasila and UUD 1945 have been made as the source of all laws, guaranteeing the existence of religions that there are, yet the reality of religious conflicts are increasing, getting bigger and wide spread. Even before the interest of socio-political expediencies, . Having revealed the matter, there arose a number of theologians from all religions in Indonesia, without thinking critically about it, adopted and applied the religious knowledge from the West, which *nota bene* does not “know” the facts of “religious plurality”. The said religious knowledge is known by the name “religious pluralism” with its dialogue method of dealing among religions.

Besides the factor of text (hermeneutic), factor of social-political context, that is marked with religious conflicts, there arose a number of theologians who formulated and socialized the phrase “religious pluralism”. Before that, the writer wish to understand and explain the meaning of the phrase “religious plurality”. Religious Plurality is, a “reality of the existence of different religions, but found in the same area, equally acknowledged, equal rights and responsibilities within the context of a society, nation and country”. Therefore, all religious existence that are different from one another, has a place, freedom, rights and responsibilities that are the same, and together.

Religious plurality is different than that of religious pluralism. Religious pluralism is a view that all religions that there are in the world possess the same truth, the same final purpose, and the same faith in the same God. The differences that exist are only the differences of perspectives (point of view). The differences that exist in each religion is seen as enriching the truth for all. In other words, in the context of Christianity, religious pluralism is a position that reject the uniqueness or the finality or the claims that determined the revelation of God in Jesus Christ”(Gnanakan, 2000). Pinnock understood the term Pluralism as the “Position that denies the finality of Jesus Christ and that all other religions possess the way of salvation to the same God.” (Pinnock, 1992). That means, the first and foremost Christian authenticity, Christianity’s self respect, is thrown away.

Newbigin commented that: “The differences between religions are not a problem of truth and falsehood, but about the different of perception toward the one truth; this means that talking about beliefs of religions as truth and falsehood, cannot be allowed.” (Newbigin, 1993). Pluralism therefore is an understanding that acknowledges the existence of one truth as seen from many angles that are different.

Because of that, the followers of pluralism possess one attitude that is open toward the existence of truth, and even receive truth that are in the the other religions.

They argue that all truth from all religions in the world is possess a level and value that are equally true. According to them all the objet that there is in all religions are the same, its is only the view from a different perspective that makes the different. Christian Truth is the same as all the truth in the other religions. Therefore, all religions believed in the same object or divine reality that is the same. Because of that, automatically, all religion although possessing different truth, yet in substance there are the same in relation to their objects or divine reality. Differences does not mean that conerns with the different view points only. Further more, not all religion only possess different truth as to the objects, but also possess the same purpose (Knitter, 1989). Because the purpose originates from one divine reality that is the same. This is what is called pluralism.

The ambition of the pluralist group is to at least minimize the differences, and in fact to abolish the differences that pose a stumbling block to communication between religions. This is what is called as the destruction of the self respect of each religion. In other words, at the end of it all, there will only be one religion in the world which is a global religion. And to reach this purpose they must build a global theology or world theology as is proposed by Paul F. Knitter (Knitter, 223). The said global theology, is no other than religious pluralism, a theology that has no identity, a theology that has lost its original colour. This kind of theology is the merging of two or more colour theology from all the truth that exist in religions, in cultures, philosophy and educational knowledge whatsoever. In order to bring about religious pluralism or the said global theology, it is necessary to leave out the doctrinal standings of every religions. Without that, pluralism of religion could not be realized.

Presuppositions of the Religious Pluralism

There are several presupposition of the pluralist group that forms the starting point of their view that enables them to develop and apply religious pluralism in Christian theology. This presupposition is explained in a negative way, appropriate with their tendency of the attitude of the pluralist group that rejects traditional or orthodox theology. The accused that traditional or orthodox Christianity in manifesting its history had made Western tradition and had demonstrated an attitude of aggression, superiority, colonialistic and imperialistic. They reject the claim of traditional theology concerning the Special Revelation of God in and through the Lord Jesus, reject the salvation that centers on the person of the Lord Jesus, and also reject the salvation that centers on the person and work of Christ, that flows only to the people of His elections (Song, 1989). For their thoughts had been blinded by the gods of relativism, to the extend that they emphasized that the Christian Religion is not the final religion (Hick, 2001). Their committment to relativism bring them face to face with the irrelevant claim of the finality of the Gospel. As such, to them, the Christians who adopt the attitude of exclusiveness are considered as Christians who are proud and old fashioned. According to them, even the Bible experts do not make the Bible absolute, because that would be wrong if Christianity makes it an absolute religion and its truth. Why is the Bible not absolute in the eyes of the pluralist group any more? At least there are three presuppositions of the pluralist group that caused them to reject the finality of the Bible, finality of Christ and the finality of Christianity.

Writings of the Writers of the Gospel not in Continuation with the Events of the Life of Jesus

Generally, the Pluralists are also known as the Liberals. This is so because Liberal Theology which was founded by the prominent liberal theologians like Schleirmacher, Ritschl, Harnack, Strauss and Schweitzer whose method of Biblical Criticism, opened the way for the continued journey of religious pluralism. The rejection by the Pluralists of the finality of Jesus, is as a result of the study of the Bible through the Biblical Criticism method of the Historical Critics, who reached conclusions with their characteristic ways of correcting the Bible, with their explanation that the Bible is not the Word of God,

that the writings of the Gospels were not a faithful record of the historical Jesus, but a Jesus believed by the writers of the Gospels. This meant that the writers of the Gospel did not write about the real Jesus, the historical Jesus, the Jesus who truly existed then, but rather they wrote about the Jesus based on what they grasped with their faith, thought of and then formulated into what we know now as the Gospel. They question the events of Jesus' life with the time when the Gospels were written which according to them was impossible to bridge. Between the time of the actual events of Jesus' life and the time of writing there was a time span of fifteen or twenty years. According to them it would be impossible for the disciples to remember what they saw and heard directly from Jesus. As a result there was a discontinuation between the real events of Jesus' life and the writings. The writers wrote the Gospels based on stories that they had gathered and based on their beliefs, and as such their authenticity and historicity as to their truth greatly suspected. As such the writings are nothing more than myths from the writers of the Gospels (Song, 1993). Therefore, they urged Biblical interpreters when interpreting the Bible to reject and throw away the myths, in particular those actions and statements of Jesus which are not reasonable. For them, it gives an implication that worshiping Jesus is idolatric (Smith, 1987; Coward, 1993).

All Histories are the Revelation of God

All the Pluralist groups, who are classified in three models of approaches are inclusivism who are Christocentric, inclusivism who are particularist, and universalist, and the pluralism-theocentric, reject the existence of Special Revelation that is declared in the Bible (Newbigin, 1993). They do not accept the understanding that Jesus is the final revelation of God, because there are many revelations of God besides Jesus. As such it means that they also reject the Bible as the final and absolute revelation of God. C.S. Song is an Asian Pluralist who sees that all history is the history of God, and at the same time the history of salvation. In other words, all histories are the revelation of God. In this matter, Song does not confess to the existence of Special Revelation, as is confessed by Reformed Theology who confessed to the revelation in and through the Lord Jesus Christ. For Song, all histories are the history of God, because God is the beginning and the end, and that God possesses time, for reasons he put forward as follows:

Because history moves in time.... at the beginning and to the end encompass the whole of the whole of history, from the beginning until the end, history that includes the whole of the human races and including Israel. All histories are the history of God. The history of Persia is the history of God as is the history of Israel. The History of the East of people who worship idols, is no less the history of God in the history of Christianity in the West. In fact the history of China and Vietnam does not exist outside God's history. History existed in God. That which comes from God will go back to God. God does not challenge history but exists in history. And this is the God who works in history through the prophets and brilliant people, through kings and farmers, and through us all (Song, 1993).

From his comments above, it is explicit and implicit that Song does not confessed as to the existence of Special Revelation in and through the Lord Jesus. Besides that, Song rejects General Revelation as in the perspective of the Bible, because it is a fact that he identifies all histories past and ongoing in the world with the revelation of God. He does not stop there, he continues to stress that all histories are the history of God's salvation, where God works to save human beings in all the events of history in the world.

The view of Song above, evidently is in the same direction with several views of other Pluralists, amongst whom are the like of Paul F. Knitter, Lesslie Newbigin and Raimundo Pannikar. In particular, Paul F. Knitter guided by the view of Ernest Troeltsch, rejects Special Revelation, by saying that modern scholar like Troeltsch is not satisfied with the concept of revelation that God would come down from heaven and be involved in history at a particular time (Knitter, 1989). The same is also the case with Newbigin who followed the views of James Barr, in rejecting the existence of Special Revelation, and

instead only confessing to the revelation of God in all the histories of human beings (Newbiggin, 1993). Even more extreme than that, Pannikar brought up concerning the revelation of God that exists in all religions, in that Jesus Christ is only one of the many revelations of God that exists in all religions (Tanja, 1996). By that he meant that Jesus is not the final revelation of God, but only one of the revelations of God, and that Jesus is one of the ways of salvation. This Pluralistic thinking also possessed the thoughts of Indonesian Pluralists. For example, Soetapa tried to develop dialogue between Christian and Islam by showing the concept of the revelation of God in His relations with history, which he revealed with many questions like: In what type of understanding could be said about the revelation of God in that He revealed Himself in the process of history? In answering this question, he raised the formula of W.Bijleveld who said that Islam views history as a revelation, the same is also true of Christianity which views God in history, so much so that history is revelation. That's mean the history of Islam and the history of Christianity are revelations of God. In this matter Soetapa together with the Pluralists understand history as the same with the revelation of God (Soetapa, 1981).

All Histories are the History of the Salvation of God

Arising from the Pluralists rejection of Special Revelation, which is the final revelation of God in and through the Lord Jesus, they continue to reject the concept of centricism. The concept of centricism meant that the concept of salvation is in one straight line that is followed by the Churches who hold onto Orthodox or Traditional Theology, where the history of the salvation of God arises or originates from one source and flowing to one person, that is Christ. The pluralists reject the Centricism or the History of Salvation in the linear characteristic (*Heilsgeschichte*). This matter is directly said by Song in his effort at building the Transpositional Theology which was inspired by thinking of Pluralism, in that:

There is a stumbling block that has created an immense problem for Transpositional Theology in Asia which is Centricism coming from the Traditional Theology which has been accustomed to viewing the history of Israel and the history of Christianity. This stumbling block must be casted aside to clear the way for theologies in Asia (Song, 1993).

Because of that, Song dedicated many pages in his book "The Compassionate God" in order to expose his reasons that vigorously deny the concept of Centricism. While the concept of centricism has been the concept that had taken roots and became part in understanding the doctrine and faith of Christianity. The concept in which the Christians are proud to confess the uniqueness, absolutism, and the finality of Christ, are the one that Song tries to set aside from Christian Theology. According to him this is a stumbling block in doing theology in Asia. Further he wrote: I am very worried as to whether the one straight line could expressed the huge complexities from the work of God in saving the world...but when it reaches at a complex matter as in the concern of God towards man, we begin to wonder if this concept of the straight line could still function...God as the straight line from *Heilsgeschichte* is a stern God, cruel who has predestined people to be saved and those to be punished (Song, 1993). Therefore, the understanding of the Pluralist about the attributes of God in the concept of *Heilsgeschichte* is different. The supremacy of God as one of His attributes is not accepted by Song. On the other hand, together with the Pluralists, Universalists who in general are Secularist, only accept the attribute of God as a God of Love. With this foundation he rejects the concept of *Heilsgeschichte*. This led Song to reject the doctrine of predestination taught by the Bible and held on to by the followers of Reform Theology in general (Beeke, 2013). Basically in this matter, the view of the Pluralists is the same as the views of the Armenians and the Universalists.

All the three presuppositions of the pluralist group put forward above, are closely connected with their system of hermeneutics, which later brought about the theories concerning religions that are know by the name of religious pluralism.

Hermeneutical System of the Religious Pluralism

The results of the interpretation of the liberal theologians gave fresh air of freedom to the pluralist group in building and developing their pluralism. *Firstly: Reduction Criticism.* Theologians with their method of Historical Criticism of the Bible, amongst whom is the Reduction Criticism, had carried out a critical investigation about the reduction of the books of the Gospels, comparing while finding differences between the Gospels to prove that their said writings are in fact repeated interpretation of the writers or evangelists for the consumption in the contexts of the Christians of that time, which clearly are different from the time nowadays (Bruce, 1988). Apparently the Reduction critics, not only saw that the Gospel writings are the result of a re-interpretation by the evangelist, but also being the theological formula from the evangelists who nota bene were theologians, and the expression of faith from the writers, who nota bene were people of faith. From this kind of approach, it was concluded that the writings of the Gospel is therefore not historical writing, but theological writings and the expressions of the writers of the Gospels. Because of that Eckardt stated: “By saying that Jesus is “the Christ” means making a statement of faith that cannot be proven or denied by history” (Eckardt, 1996). Song in his effort of explaining about transposition hermeneutic between the resurrected Christ and the crucified Christ, where he opined that “historical connection is not absolute in the understanding of the resurrected Jesus” (Beeke, 2013; Song, 145).

Secondly, the Gospel is the Testimonies of the Disciples, which is not Relevant in Today's Context. The Gospel is the testimonies of faith from the disciples, apart from it being fables, it is also irrelevant with the human context today. As such, they only see the Gospel as only being orientated to the purpose of human salvation from their suffering that is caused by the unfairness of social and political condition, and throwing away the core of the Gospel, that is the salvation of human beings from eternal suffering brought about by sin and its consequences. Yewangoe wrote about the question Jesus asked “According to you who do you think I am?” clearly stated that the reporting of the Gospel of John is different from the reporting of the Gospel to Mathew concerning the confession of Peter about Jesus. True, John recorded Peter saying that “Messiah from God,” while Mathew said that “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God”. According to Yewangoe, the differences are not totally accidental, but because of the existence of a particular situation. According to him, this matter explains that the Gospel itself shows that there is no uniformity as to the picture of Jesus. Therefore, the understanding of people about Jesus depend upon their choice of Jesus Christ based on their memory that refers to the pre-existence of Jesus Christ. Further, in reference to the comment of a Sri Langka theologian, Wesley Afiajarah, who opined that the report which is in our possession now (Synoptic Gospel) is only reports from the awareness of the followers of Jesus...and the stories of the New Testament are efforts at explaining the meaning of the terminologies of their own faith in the religious limits of the cultures of their time (Yewangoe, 1997). In other word, he is of the opinion that the Synoptic Gospel is not relevant with the Christians today. Because of that, Christians today, especially Christians in Asia who are suffering due to the imperfection of the socio-political situations in their countries, must search for a Jesus with a meaning of His presence among them in their midst of their problems: poverties, suppressions, injustices and so on and so forth (Yewangoe, 281).

Thirdly, Sociological, Anthropological and Psychological Approach Toward the Bible. Lately, as a development from the Biblical Critics, a new approach to biblical interpretation came into existence, the socio-anthropological approach towards the Bible. Researchers who are using this method of approach try to reconstruct ancient social Israel and social conditions in the era of Jesus by using various sociological criticisms. This kind of approach concluded that Jesus did not experience any healthy social development so that he became a rebel who started his own sect. Another method of approach is that of anthropological approach which studies all aspects of human life and cultures in order to retest the question concerning the origin of human beings, social organizations, customs and cultures, folk stories, where Jesus is (terhisap) sucked in. Until they concluded that Jesus was truly a Jew, stressing his humanness and

denying his divinity. Marcus J. Borg, concluded that the historical Jesus was a spiritual human being, a prominent figure in history of mankind that possessed an awareness and experiences as to the reality of God. (As was the opinion of Adoptionism), Jesus was a teacher of wisdom, Jesus was a social prophet, Jesus was the founder of a movement that gave birth to a Jewish revival movement (Borg, 1997). In this matter, Jesus was just an ordinary man who was superior because of his relationship with God. At the core, this kind of hermeneutical approach will result in the approach of Christology from Below. Beside Borg, there are other theologians who use this approach, amongst whom are E.P Sander, Ben F. Meyer, Anthony E. Harvey and Choan-Seng Song (Wright, 1994; Song, 1993).

Fourthly, Favourite Texts: Stressing only the texts of the Bible that support their concept which is inclusive and understanding the texts outside of the context of the said texts. There is no other text of the Holy Bible most quoted by the Pluralist to support their biblical foundation, apart from the story of Cornelius in the book of Acts 10 and 15. Pluralists are of the opinion that Luke is telling us concerning Cornelius, although a gentile, was a person who was loyal in his belief of Yahweh (Nash, 1994). Further, the Pluralists show the key to their understanding based on the opinion of Peter about the repentance of Peter and his family in Chapter 10:34 and 35: “In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him.” Because of this, Sanders, one of the Pluralists commented that: “These words are cited to show that knowledge of Christ is not necessary for salvations” (Sanders, 1992). According to Sanders, “Cornelius was already a saved believer before Peter arrived but he was not a Christian believer” (Sanders, 1992). The Pluralists, like Sanders built or strengthened their inclusive views only by hanging onto certain texts of the Bible. They purposely do not want to talk about other texts that clearly talk about salvation for the chosen people. Jesus did not die for all people, but only for His people, that is those whom the Father has given to Him (John 6:37-40). Limited election is clearly seen through the expression “His people” (Matthew 1:21), “His sheep” (John 10:15, 26), “His Church” (Acts 20:28), “His bride” Christ gave Himself for His church, but not for Him (Ephesians 5:25-27). Apart from that, the Pluralists purposely do not stress what is stressed by Luke, the writer of the Book of Acts.

Fifthly, Canonical Criticism: The Bible and Tradition as Sources of Theology. Classical Protestant accepts that canon is a collection that could be mistaken from the books that could not be wrong, and Liberal Protestant (Historical criticism) who accepts that canon is a collection that could be mistaken from books that could be wrong. The view of the historical criticism is mostly adopted by the Pluralist, in particular the method of Canon Criticism that examines the process of collection of the books and the measurement used for the collection of the books of the Bible. Canonical Criticism is mainly propagated by James Sander and Brevard Childs. The Pluralist put high hope in this kind of conclusion in order to land their religious theology based on the existence of truth outside the Bible. As such, the Pluralist not only accepts the books of the Bible as canonical, but also accepts several books like the Gospel of Barnabas and the Gospel of Thomas (Sugirtharajah, 1996). The Pluralist also confess that God continues to speak throughout the ages. By this they did not mean the Bible, but as is revealed in the opinion of Darmaputera: “God never stop speaking after He revealed His will through the Bible” (Darmaputera, 1997) Song explained about the many roads to God, that are wide and spacious, that exist outside of the Judeo-Christian tradition. In other words, Song confesses the existence of truth outside of the Bible (Song, 3-36). Further, Song expanded his theology base on tradition that is known as folklores and later reconstructed the said traditions with the stories in the Bible, which later on gave birth to revelation doctrines. Song always manipulates the verses of the Bible to strengthen his inclusive concept which is anti-Scriptural (Song, 1993).

Sixthly, Incarnation of Texts: Texts give way to context. In general, the pluralist group are very interested with the theology of contextualization. From existing research, in general the pluralist group value more the context to such an extent that they would “put aside” Biblical text, and in fact manipulate the text for the sake of the need of the context. They acknowledged the concept of the incarnation of text

in the context, and are prepared to change the text for the sake of the need of the context. According to Song, the Gospel does not only have the power to cause change, but also the Gospel must change to be acceptable in all contexts (Song, 1982). In this matter, the Gospel gives way to or is subjected to the texts, just as in the texts of cultures, religions, and socio-political texts. The Gospel accommodates itself with the situation and needs of the said texts

Seventhly, The Socio-Critical Interpretation. Bong Rin Ro is a theologian from the Asian Evangelical fortress categorized theology in Asia in 4 models, namely Syncretism, accommodation, situation theology and theology that is oriented to the Bible (Chow, 1994). The Syncretism and Accommodation Model are those that compromise the truth of the Bible. The model or situation theology is followed by the Pluralist in the third world, amongst whom is Asia. In general Pluralist theologians of Asia, are *nota bene* theologians from the South, are very enthusiastic with the contextual theology as a correction towards Western theology in Asia, and as a development from the native theology (Indigenization). Contextual theology which is understood by the Pluralist is the same as Situational Theology. The launching point of Situational Theology is the reality of the social factors that have in them many truth about Christ. This system of interpretation is called by J.Tong as Social Criticism. According to Tong, the various systems have influenced all the scholars of the Bible with the principles of interpretation of the Social Criticism by choosing particular topics concerning social and political issues as is pointed by the Bible. The examples are the interpretation of texts of the Bible concerning slavery, women, poverty as in the system of Liberation Theology, and the system of interpretation of Feminist. One of the pioneer of Liberation Theology opined that the Bible must be read in the light of the present practices and take “de-ideologize” in replacement of “de-mythologize” of the Gospel. This system of interpretation is categorized in the field of hermeneutic today which concerns social issues (Tong, 1999). Theologians who used the system of hermeneutic are Choan Seng-Song (Song, 1982), Shoki Coe (Coe, 1992), and Kosuke Koyama (Elwood, 1992). This system of hermeneutic is rejected by the Evangelicals because it places context as the source of inspiration, and the texts only supportive.

Analysis on The Religious Pluralists’ Presupposition and Hermeneutics

After presenting the background of the religious pluralism rise, understanding, presupposition and its hermeneutics, the writer analyzes and finds that the usage of terminologies that are inconsistent, presupposition that are not theological and philosophical, their hermeneutic which is not biblical. These all cause their theories cannot be defended.

Inconsistency of the Term (Pluralism and Monism)

Concerning the fact and question of religious plurality, almost all pluralist group make use of the terminology “religious pluralism” and “global theology” to explain their view. They themselves socialized the said terminology and understood it as one of the confessions toward the existence of all religions that possess truth, purpose and faith on the same God but with a different perspective. As such, they make an effort to unite all religions in one united view, that of, religious theology as a unity of all theological truth from all religions.

From the above understanding, the pluralist group are not consistent in their usage of terminology. Infact the terminology “religious pluralism” is a view that confesses the existence of all different religions, but acknowledge of having the same right of equal standing. By reason thereof, the pluralist group must acknowledge the fact of the different existences of religions having the same right. Yet the struggle of the pluralist group is their effort at denying or abolishing completely the various claims of finality by the various religions, and to establish a claim of truth for all. Surely this is not an effort of “pluralism” but “singularism”. This is the inconsistency of the pluralist group. Apart from that, the Writer has observed that the view of the pluralist is more accurately called with by the term of “similar monism”, because they disregard the differences and struggle for the unity of all religions, where all the

religions become one, because of their belief that the source of all religions is one and the same, leading to the one and the same, that is God.

The same is also true with the terminology "global theology", which is essentially the same as the term "similar monism", a view concerning the existence of a single theology as a result of the combination of all the theological truth of all religions, that have the same belief to form a unity of all religions. Such religious theology will only be for the consumation of the said religions. In this matter, global theology is in reality anti-theology or a theology that is in oppositon with their respective religious theology, which is an impossibililty. This is the inconsistency of the pluralist group. In order words, the term that is used apart from it being in oppositon with the view that has been explained is also in oppositon with the fact and essence of the plurality of religions.

Motto of the Pluralist that is in Opposition with their own View

The motto of the pluralist group is in oppositon with their own view, as well as with the fact of religious plurality. To them, all religions possess the faith toward God and has the same purpose, even though different in their ways or roads that are taken. Their motto is not appropriate with the significant facts of religous differences amongst religions, in particular the absolute difference between the Christian religion and the other religions. This is so, because of the fact that all religions have different beliefs, confessions and views about God. The differences are not only with the term and concept, but also that of the object believed which is a different worldview. Christian world view is one that is theistic, surely is totally different than that of Hinduism world view which is pantheistic. The same is also true of the world view of Islam and Buddhism.

The motto of the pluralist group above is also in oppositon with their own view. They are of the view that there is only one truth about God, yet in many perspectives. Because of that, the untity of all the perspectives will result in one truth for all the religions. In fact, the different perspectives, do not have the same ways and roads taken by each religion. The different ways of all the religions are not the same perspectives that are different. The road or ways taken are techniques in reaching their purpose, while perspective concerns with the thought or view that is seen from the respective sides. Both are totally different from each other. Apart from that, with their motto as such, the pluralist are proposing "absolute relativism" and this is surely not possible. This is the same as proposing a chaotic situation, because where there is religious relativism, there also is confusion that later will lead to disorder.

Presupposition and Hermeneutic of the Pluralists that is not Philosophical and Biblical

The presupposition of the pluralist group does not possess both theological and philosophical foundation. Because there is no support from the theology of religion which maintains that all history is the history of God. In the perspective of Christian theology, the Lord controls the whole history of the world, yet that does not mean that all religions are caused by God. In the same way, not all religious history is acknowledged as the revelation of God. In world history, including church history and history of religions, the role of satan and sinful men also influence history. Becasue of that, it is not appropriate to identify all histories as the history of God and the revelations or truth of God. It is not possible to identify the history of men that have been tainted with sin and influenced by satan with the history and revelation of God that is true and holy. Taking all the history of religions as the revelation of God, is the same as mixing the revelation of God which is true and holy with the thoughts of men that is tainted by sins and that is influenced by satan. No religion would acknowledge such a situation.

If all religious history is not identical with the history of God, therefore it is not appropriate to claim that all history are the history of the salvation of God. Religions are the responds of men towards the general revelation of God, and God does not reveal His salvation to sinful men through His general revelation. The general revelation of God is the truth of God that can be acknowledged by men through

the universe. In other words, the general revelation of God only results in the truth of knowledge, philosophy and morality for the continuation of the whole of creations and for the fulfillment of the needs of men. Besides that, sin has distorted or disturbed men from knowing the truth from the revelation of God in general, so much so that not one person possess a perfect knowledge from general revelation, and a perfect knowledge to know God, but rather men has fallen and made himself powerless toward the universe. As such, it is certain that all history, including the rise of history and the development of religions, which is not identical with the history of God, and what more to say that of the history of salvation. This means that, the presupposition of the pluralist group does not possess any theological and philosophical basis.

In the same way, sin has destroyed man's understanding, and that the consequence of sin is death, which is the eternal judgment. Sure, God has provided a way out, by giving a ceremonial law for the forgiveness of sin (the way of salvation) and a moral and civil law to order the lives of human beings, but because of sin, man is incapacitated, and cannot fulfil the demand of all the said laws. In fact, since eternity God had prepared the way of salvation, through His special revelation, in and through the Lord Jesus Christ, by way of his sacrifice for the redemption of men's sin. Those who believe on the Lord Jesus are Christians, who later form the Christian society, and became to be called the Christian religion. Therefore, the Christian religion is not as a result of the respond of men towards the general revelation and special revelation of God, but the product from the special revelation of God, that is the Lord Jesus Christ, which is only written in the Bible. This means that, there is no salvation in the religions that arise and developed as a result of the respond of men toward the general revelation of God, and therefore, the presupposition of the pluralist group, once again does not possess the theological and philosophical basis.

Conclusions

There is no philosophical and theological argument to defend the view of dualism, nihilism and pluralism, especially when speaking concerning the origin of all things or source of all things that exist, apart from only that of monism. Monism acknowledges that all things that exist (in the universe) originated from one source, and one main cause, that is sovereign, assumed by philosophers as the "the ultimate reality" and believed by reformed theologians as "the sovereign God. He is one only". The presupposition of the pluralist Christians about religions, is that all history of religions is God's revelation and all religions are ways of salvation prepared by God, does not have a biblical, theological or philosophical basis whatsoever. The same is also true about their system of hermeneutic, which is not a biblical system of hermeneutic. They use the philosophical system of hermeneutic to examine and study the Bible. Because of that, the result of their study is not appropriate with the summary of the traditional church theology which had been the standard all these while, and also it is in opposition to the the Bible as a whole. Apart from the fact of their theories which do not possess theological or philosophical basis, their theories are also in opposition with one another. As a result, the views of pluralist groups that are foreign to Christianity are very dangerous because they can destroy the claims of the finality of each religion's religion, reject the essence of Christianity, and contradict the Indonesian ideology, namely Pancasila, which at the same time causes relations between religions in Indonesia to worsen. Therefore, religious pluralism must be removed, and religious plurality must be increased for the unity of the Indonesian nation.

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