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Challenges of the church in facing religious pluralism and its impact on church growth in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to examine the church's challenges in dealing with religious pluralism in Indonesia and its impact on church growth. This article takes a qualitative method with an emphasis on historical-grammatical interpretation. The following data collection approaches were employed in this study: To begin, interpret the biblical text grammatically-historically. Following that, perform a comparative analysis of the primary contemporary views of the unknown God (Acts 17:23). Finally, conduct a critical study in order to develop a historical reconstruction that takes into account ancient writing techniques. The purpose of this article is to classify, explore, and extract texts from the historical city of Athens, as well as to produce texts using hermeneutic principles. This research will examine various interpretations of each source in order to develop conclusions about the research conducted and its theological implications. Acts 17:23-25 is the focus of this study. The findings of this study reveal that while the Bible preaches religious tolerance, this study demonstrates that the Church must naturally expand in accordance with God's purposes and the Word, which compels the Church to accommodate religious tolerance. The conclusion is that the church must continue to exist in order to fulfill the Lord Jesus' commandment to bring the gospel to all people (Matt. Acts 1:8), as Paul did in Athens.



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Introduction

Indonesia is a country that is open to religious development, with an agrarian heritage that attracts foreign traders. That was the beginning of the infiltration of various religions into Indonesia through merchants who bought and sold spices. As a consequence, Indonesia has developed into a fertile environment for the formation and development of various sects, and as a result, religious plurality has a place in Indonesian society. Which is why the government recognizing the five major religions in Indonesia as a form of Unity in Unity (Bhineka Tunggal Ika) in the third precept: Unity of Indonesia, namely: Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Muslim, and Christianity.

Indonesia is a country with a diverse range of religious beliefs and practices. Indonesia has a recognized religion, which includes Islam, Christianity, Protestantism, Catholicism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Confucianism, and a variety of other religions that are also thriving in Indonesia. Response to such a situation is unquestionably difficult for evangelism in the archipelago. The church has a mission to make disciples of all

nations of God and baptize those who believe, and teach them to do the Word of God. Matt 28:19-20 (Susanto & Waruwu, 2021)

As previously highlighted, pluralism is not centered on the doctrine and comprehension of every belief; rather, pluralism refers to the process by which a teaching can be produced in order to be accepted as part of contributions to the inhabited earth. Hence, what is meant is not how one believes, but how one performs a teaching that can contribute to the future of Post-modern society.

As a consequence, all beliefs are good, according to the worldview that all religions are acceptable as long as they respond to and contribute to humanity. As a result of the concept of pluralism, each religion's beliefs would disintegrate and its distinctive traits may be lost. Another intriguing aspect of Christian ethics is that it can be a teleological ethic, leading simply to goals rather than a process to accomplish them. Despite the fact that it will clash with the ethics of the belief itself. Steven Tong says that Christianity has always swung between the two extremes. One leads to a rational direction, which is centered on world culture and humans and other is to be satisfied with the church which focuses on the liturgies, turning to emotional sacrifices, leaving the strict teaching of the Bible, it is said that this is like poison to the church. Churches that have lost Christian ethics based on the Bible can lead to an extreme where the teachings of the Bible do not need to be the standard. So that they fall into a world culture that is hedonism and worldly.

When it comes to tolerance, the church must be careful not to fall prey to universalism. Only because of the word tolerance does the church have to compromise with drive in order to attain a single purpose. In a plural society, the Church should be free to claim its rightful place to proclaim the good news. With respect to Indonesianism, the book "Kontek berteologia in Indonesia" which promotes not only Christian ethics, but how to be ethically decent for all religions (Banawiratma, 1998 in (Wijayanti, 2016)). As well as how Christianity is framed in the Pancasila state as an agent of change.

We cannot separate evangelism from a grasp of Pancasila's ideas. In fact, the fundamental reason that mission and evangelism are carried out in Indonesia is because of the Pancasila ideology. As stated in the book *Challenge of the Church in Indonesia* (Caleb Tong 1990 in (Tingginehe, 2013)), the church as an institution must perform out its responsibilities for national development as the practice of Pancasila toward final approach, as salt and light and blessing for everyone.

Naturally, there are distinctions in how each belief expresses its faith; there are even sharp contrasts that cause conflict between one doctrine and another in interfaith. Accordingly, the potential that will manifest itself in the gospel's propagation is confrontation between Christianity and non-Christians. This is what we must avoid in our daily actions as executors of Jesus Christ's great commission. Clearly, in this environment, a bridge called tolerance must be developed.

In accordance with the title of the article above, talking about "challenges," according to the Big Indonesian Dictionary (KBBI) means: there are objects/things that need to be overcome. This means that Pluralism is an object which is a new problem for the religions themselves. This had a particular impact on Christianity, and it was a great challenge for the church. Pluralism leads us to accept that all religions are the same. Perhaps with the background of past trauma, various events that occurred that resulted in the division of one group with another group (Objantoro, 2016).

The following are some events that have occurred in various parts of Indonesia, due to disputes between groups; Rudi Purnomo (ICDS Implementing Staff, nd) wrote in his book, namely:

Historically, in the 1990s, societal tensions erupted into SARA (or refers to social conflict that involve ethnicity, religion, race, and inter-group relations) which arise in a number of other locations. For example, in November 1992, a group of Muslims in East Jakarta destroyed a house belonging to the Batak-Protestant community because the Batak-Protestant community's Sunday worship activities were seen to be bothersome to the nearby people. During the same year, a conflict between religious groups, reportedly sparked by economic difficulties, resulted in attacks on Church in North Sumatra, Pasuruan, Wonosobo, and Jember, as well as an attack on 10 Church in Surabaya in June 1996 (Bertrand, 2012)

In 1994, conflicts between East Timorese Catholics and Muslim traders from South Sulawesi erupted in Dili. This incident grew in extent until the riots in Dili blew up in September 1994. Meanwhile, in Flores, a trial for suspected blasphemy was underway, specifically a case of abuse of Christian worship customs. Following the trial or reading of the blasphemy conviction, the masses who are dissatisfied with the sentence issued cause damage to courts and businesses owned by Muslim migrants (Bertrand, 2012).

The Situbondo riots began with the Soleh case trial on October 10, 1996. The Situbondo District Court attracted the attention of a crowd of hundreds of people. Disagreement with the judge's decision finally

erupted into a riot in the courtroom, which spread across the situbondo town and nearby surrounding region. Consequently, the history of conflict or riots in Situbondo requires serious consideration by all stakeholders, particularly citizens and religious leaders, to ensure that such events do not recur themselves both in Situbondo and elsewhere. Indonesia frequently experiences conflict as a result of a variety of societal issues, and practically all of the country's social tensions are always religious in nature (Retnowati, 2014). But strangely, this case developed into SARA (Ethnicity, Religion, Race, and Inter-group relations). This incident resulted in the damage to 21 church buildings, 1 pagoda, 1 cinema, 4 damaged cars, 2 motorbikes being burned, and 5 people were killed.

A few weeks after the Situbondo incident, riots erupted in Tasikmalaya. On December 26, 1996, a social riot broke out in Tasikmalaya, sparked by a case of police officers mistreating *ustadz*. The case sparked public outrage. Tensions in Tasikmalaya came to a head when certain parties provoked the masses, encouraging them to commit acts of violence. However, social tensions at the local level do not only occur in Tasikmalaya (Tantoh & Sampurno, 2020).

From the number of examples of these cases, community conflicts generally originate from differences that exist in society. But in reality, the religious element is the target. Responding to this problem Tolchah said: "religion in a pluralistic life can act as a unifying (integrative), but can also act as a disintegrating factor (disintegrative)" (Tolchah, 2015). Thus, Victor I. Tanja wrote:

Religious pluralism is important because indeed for a nation to guarantee the unity and integrity of the nation, religious pluralism as an aspect of the nation is clearly a strategy that must be managed wisely and wisely so as not to shake the nation's national resilience (Vicor, 1997 in (Wilson, 2021)).

In their research, Sagala & Dabora (2020) underlined the role of pedagogical shepherds in preparing church residents for social transformation. The first duty is to provide coaching that focuses on improving Christian religious beliefs in order for them to be demonstrated in daily life. Social change, particularly changes in plurality and multicultural values, including pluralism, can erode Christian faith convictions. As a direct consequence, it is vital to reinforce the Christian faith's value in light of contemporary circumstances.

In connection with research on mission actualization in religious pluralism in the era of disruption, Arthur Reinhard Rumengan has studied a research study entitled *Mission in the context of religious pluralism in Indonesia* (Rumengan, 2020). The research concluded that the reconstruction of the Church's mission in religious pluralism in Indonesia is by a dialogue, which does not mean that the mission is stopped. The mission is still carried out, but needs to be reconstructed into a more relevant form of mission such as dialogue. When the dialogue is executed, it does not mean the mission is silent. Likewise, Fransiskus Irwan Widjaja and Noh Ibrahim Boiliu conducted a similar study in their book entitled *Mission and Plurality of Faith in Indonesia* (Widjaja & Boiliu, 2019a). With the conclusion that the foundation of the church's mission is an obligation that must be carried out. Therefore, the mission and plurality of beliefs in Indonesia must focus on their calling and open up Christian insight in responding to the plurality of beliefs in Indonesia. Various beliefs in the Pancasila state are also a challenge in their mission assignments.

Regardless of whether the group clashes were triggered by economic, socio-cultural or religious issues, what is clear from several cases is that religion has been used as a tool to justify disputes. Religious differences between groups have been brought to the surface by some groups. If the use of religious labels is continued, then apart from not being in accordance with the basic teachings of their respective religions, it will also result in the destruction of the nation and state which was pioneered by the founding fathers of the nation. However, it also plays an important role in the development and growth of religion itself, therefore in it there are elements of mutual suppression, mutual inhibition, mutual obstruction, so that anarchism and destruction of places of worship emerges to the surface.

This is aligned with the opinion expressed by Objantoro (2016), who asserts that religious diversity has become an unavoidable reality, requiring each religious community to play a positive role in fostering a feeling of community and mutual understanding. This is a necessary condition for the establishment of a secure and tranquil environment inside society. Christians and churches in Indonesia bear a direct or indirect role for fostering an environment similar to the one described above. As a sense, the growth of Christian theology in the present and future must pay attention to the emerging ethical dilemmas in people's lives. Christian theology must address the underlying causes of each of these emerging crises. Therefore, theology must also demonstrate significant changes in response to the challenges that arise. This can be accomplished by increased cooperation with other religions, fostering a genuine sense of oneness and mutual understanding among believers of existing religions. When this occurs, horizontal conflicts that frequently arise in society and

are provoked by religious problems can be minimized to the greatest extent feasible. So that the majority of the community's people might have a peaceful and prosperous life.

To overcome this issue, one of which is the understanding of pluralism as a means of middle point for reducing the atmosphere of division or discord. Based on the events above, the author reviews the impact of pluralism on people's lives individually and in groups, especially the impact on church growth.

Method

This research takes a qualitative method with an emphasis on historical-grammatical interpretation. The following strategies were utilized to acquire data for this study: To begin, interpret the Bible text using grammatical-historical methodologies. Following that, perform a comparative analysis of the primary contemporary interpretations of the unknown God (Acts 17:23). Finally, do a critical study to develop a reconstruction of history, taking into account ancient writing techniques. The paper makes an attempt to classify, examine, and extract texts from the historic city of Athens, as well as to construct texts, using hermeneutic principles. This study will examine many interpretations of each source in order to develop conclusions about the research conducted and its theological implications. In addition, Acts 17:23-25 is the focus of this study.

Results and Discussions

The Emergence of Pluralism

The term "pluralism" comes from the English word "plural" which means: plural, many, various. Pluralism means: understanding, or understanding of the beautiful diversity. Francisus ever said that: "Pluralism is the condition of the existence of something that is diverse" (Widjaja & Boiliu, 2019b). Hence, pluralism was born because of this diversity. Pluralism in Indonesia can be classified according to its importance: scientific pluralism and religious pluralism;

The following is the difference between scientific pluralism and religious pluralism. Scientific Pluralism, namely the pluralistic nature of the scientific process is a major factor in the rapid growth of science. In turn, the growth of knowledge can be said to lead to increased human well-being, because, for example, greater performance and economic growth and better medical technology (Masduki, 2020).

Pluralism also shows the rights of individuals in deciding their respective universal truths. Pluralism is arguably one of the most important characteristics of modern society and social groups, and is perhaps the main driver of progress in scientific, societal and economic development (Hitami, 2021).

Religious Pluralism is a special term in the study of religions. As a 'special terminology', this term cannot be interpreted arbitrarily, for example it is equated with the meaning of the 'tolerance', 'mutual respect', and so on. As an understanding (ism), which discusses the perspective of existing religions, the term 'Religious Pluralism' has become a long discussion of religious studies among scientists in religious studies (Noer, 2019).

The author strongly disagrees if pluralism forces all religious communities in Indonesia to recognize the existence of religious similarities, so that "all religions are the same" arise in order to achieve security and peace. However, if it is forced, religious pluralism will have a negative impact on the believers of that religion, in this case we focus on Christianity. St. Pope John Paul II, in 2000, issued the Decree Dominus Jesus, this explanation apart from rejecting the notion of Religious Pluralism, also reaffirmed that Jesus Christ is the only mediator of Divine salvation and no one can go to the Father except through Jesus (Dunn, 2012).

Therefore, Christianity rejects the notion of pluralism, because it is very dangerous for the faith of its adherents (Christianity), as well as the impact on the growth of Christians themselves. Because it is contrary to the doctrine of salvation contained in the Bible. Below are three different perspectives on teaching understanding: (1). Understand exclusivism, which is only those who hear and accept the Bible who will be saved. Other than that, he's not safe. (2). Inclusivism, which holds that even though Christianity is the true religion, salvation may also be found in other religions. This view appears there may be considerations that must be addressed; for the sake of creating social harmony and others. Under certain conditions, the notion of inclusivism gave birth to the term "tolerance". To interpret the word "tolerance" is only used in social reality, but cannot be used in religion. Because the meaning in tolerance will shift to understanding pluralism. (3). Understanding of pluralism, which see all religions as an equally legitimate path to the core of religious reality. Pluralism understanding is that no religion is seen as superior to other religions. All religions are considered as the same path to God. All of them are considered as equally valid paths to God. The existence of diversity or

differences that affect language, culture, and beliefs. Sociologically, Indonesian society is a religious society and easily accepts culture that carries spiritual values.

Of the three explanations, the author strongly disagrees with religious pluralism. Because as a church with a mission, this understanding is very contrary to the nature of the church itself. Because the church is synonymous with mission, mission is identical with repentance, repentance is identical with salvation. Salvation is only received in Jesus Christ. The author agrees on the first part, namely exclusivism, which views only those who hear and receive the Bible who will be saved. Other than that, he's not safe. This means that apart from Jesus there is no salvation.

As evidence and foundation of faith, of course, based on the true source of Scripture, namely the Bible as a guide for the faith of believers. The Bible is a barometer in proclaiming who the Savior really is. In John 14:6; "Jesus said to him, 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.'" John 3:16 "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that everyone who believes in Him may not perish but have eternal life."

This revelation of Jesus is an important Christology in Christian theology. Christians believe in Christ as a unique Person, Christ is not just a messenger/prophet as other religious people believe. Christ has a very special position both before the Father and mankind. The Bible gives very convincing evidence that Christ is the only way of salvation for humans to come to the Father (John 3:16; John 14:6; Acts 4:12; 10:36; Phil 2: 9-11). Christ has all power in heaven and on earth (Matt. 28:18). Christ is also the source of life for humans (John 6:35,48; 7:38; 10:10). Jesus Christ, the only God-man, who gave Himself as the only ransom for sinners, is the only mediator between God and man. There is no other name by which we are sure to be saved. Moreover, P. Octavian responded that: "The church must hold fast to the belief (faith) that salvation can only be found in the person of Jesus Christ. The current of globalization makes faith beliefs lead to pluralist beliefs. The attack on the Christian faith is that Christianity must admit that there is salvation outside of the saving work of Jesus Christ". In response to this problem, the Church must still hold fast to the principle believed by the apostles when under pressure in his time (Acts 4:12): "And salvation is in no one but in Him, for under heaven there is no another name given to man by which we can be saved." Therefore, Harold says in his book that:

Consequently, in contrast to the teaching of "God" in other religions, as believers, we still hold fast to the exclusivity of Jesus, because "Even though God is experienced by adherents of other religions, they do not really know God; because saving knowledge comes only with Christ, the experience of God in other religions cannot save (Hasan, 2018).

The next part is that we should not get carried away in the notion of religious pluralism because, Soteriology in Christianity has a close relationship with Christology. If the understanding of Christology seems exclusive, so does the understanding of Soteriology. The central problem in this paper is the challenge of the church in dealing with religious pluralism in Indonesia, its impact on the growth of the church in Indonesia. As Eka Darmaputera wrote that:

A religion that only succeeds in making its followers fervently pray, but does nothing in improving their welfare, does not make a sound when their legitimate interests are violated, only instills hatred but does not provide peace in their hearts, in short, a religion that does not show ethical concern, will not be able to survive. Religions must be sensitive/careful to the many ethical issues surrounding people's lives. The ethical issues include: poverty, injustice, socio-economic inequality, democratization, press freedom, freedom of association, human rights, evictions, the environment, and so on.

Responding to this statement, the author argues that Christianity is required to play a role in two things, namely acting as a good citizen in order to maintain religious harmony, this is what is called tolerance in the diversity of religions. However, what is inward is how we build our faith in the midst of the growing diversity of religions in Indonesia, which demand tolerance. In this case, the author says, tolerance is very important but we should never sacrifice our faith that the Lord Jesus is the only Savior.

Religious Pluralism in Indonesia and its problems

Table 1. Indonesia's religious population in 2018 is recorded as follows:

Religion	Total %
Muslim	86%
Christian Protestant	7.6%
Catholic Christian	3, 12%
Hinduism	1,74%
Buddhism	0, 77%
Confucianism	0.03%
Other religions	Not answered

Based on these data, we can see that the largest population is Muslim (the majority) reaching 86%. While Christianity (Protestant and Catholic) only reached approximately 10, 72%. The remaining less than 4% are Buddhism, Hinduism and others. This means that the majority of Indonesia is Muslim. Further, Gros argue that:

Religion in Indonesia plays an important role in people's lives. This is stated in the ideology of the Indonesian nation, Pancasila, in the first principle, "Belief in One Supreme God". This ideology is a compromise between the idea of an Islamic state and a secular state (SarDesai, 2018). A number of religions in Indonesia collectively influence politics, economy and culture. According to the results of the 2018 Indonesian Population Census, 86.7% of Indonesia's 267,670,543 population are Muslims (Indonesia is the region with the largest Muslim population in the world (BPS, 2018).

From the data above, it is a factor in the birth of religious pluralism, which will later emerge the term religious tolerance. We see in the 1945 Constitution it is stated that "the state guarantees the independence of each resident to embrace their own religion and to worship according to their religion and beliefs".

In Presidential Decree Number 1 of 1965 concerning Prevention of the Abuse and/or Blasphemy of Religion, the state officially only recognizes six religions, namely Muslim, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism.

Meanwhile, Indonesia's population is based on the 2020 Population Census which was carried out in February. The Ministry of Home Affairs (Kemendagri) stated that Indonesia's population until December 2020 reached 271,349,889 people (Indonesia's total population in 2021). Jan 24, 2021, which means: The annual population growth rate during 2010-2020 is 1,25 percent on average, slower than the 2000-2010 period which was 1,49 percent.

This is a familiar situation because the dialogue has been ongoing for decades, yet it must be noted that the dialogue has not been very successful in developing mutual understanding and cooperation among Indonesia's religious communities. This attempt is carried out as a demonstration of religious tolerance. Mutual respect, but without "forcing" acceptance of a philosophy of salvation, turns the phrase "all religions are equal" into a sort of tolerance. This is completely incorrect; "tolerance" simply means to respect, care for, give each other space, give each other time, and accept one other's differences. These are the boundaries that all parties should be aware of. Pluralism exists and cannot be eradicated, but tolerance is a method of mutual development and evolution.

The Role of the Church in Pluralism

The beginning of the emergence of the word church from Greek, explained by Micelle: From the word *ekklesia*, the word is taken from the verb "to call" (*kaleo*), from the root word "*klesia*" in the passive form, and the prefix *ek* means: "from" or "out". So, the group of people is not a segregation of certain people by chance, but they are made up of people specially called by God and gathered together. Likewise, in his writings, Yohanes Marbun asserts that:

The term church or *ekklesia*, which is used in the New Testament as a congregation or association of people, does not generally refer to religious activity. John Marbun explains: the term *Ekklesia* specifically in the Septuagint is often used to refer to the congregation of Israel who gathered to hear the word of God.

The word is now used in the sense of "church", which means "the place where God" becomes the object of God revealing His plans; regarding the meaning contained in the word "qahal" in the Old Testament (Gen. 49:6; Deut. 33:4; 2 Sam. 20:14). So, the meaning contained in the words qahal and *ekklesia*, namely the fellowship of God's people. This fellowship is called the place of Allah. John Marbun said: "And it is said that as the center of the execution of God's plan from time to time is in the church, God showing His works and works."

The role of the church in a pluralistic society also remains at its original goal, namely the preaching of the Gospel of Salvation to everyone. As Chris Marantika explains that: "the role of the church as an agent of transformation is to carry the divine mandate to the prospective people of God." (Chris, 2000 in (Margareta, 2020)). This is a mandate for God's church; thus, the church is tasked with being the agent and implementer of transformation not because of her will but because of God's plan for the world. Therefore, the involvement of believers (church) is something that is absolute as evidence of obedience to God through its existence in the midst of family, community, region and country.

Church growth is the responsibility of all the body of Christ, namely the church itself. Wegner said: "Everything has to do with bringing people who are not yet in a relationship with Jesus Christ into fellowship with Him and into responsible church membership." Meanwhile, according to John Virgil: "church growth is a variety of manifestations or manifestations of the Great Commission of the Lord Jesus (Matt.28:19-20; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:47-48; John 20:21; Acts 1:1) 8) to build churches (not buildings) in all kinds of growth."

Based on the sources above, it can be categorized into two aspects; church growth increase/development of the number of members (quantity) and growth in the quality of faith (seen in terms of daily life). So, the role of the church must continue to exist and move simultaneously in its growth both in quantity and quality.

Theological Foundations of Church Growth

The basis of church growth was the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-5). In this regard, Jacob Nahuway asserts that:

The basis of the Theology of Church Growth always touches on the dimensions of mission and social theology. The basic premise of the theology of the Church Growth movement is so heavily influenced by missiology that it touches on a social dimension. When talking about Church Growth, we always refer to what the Bible says and its relevance to social reality as the context for the message of the Gospel of Christ.

This means that, Church Growth theology is to direct believers to have a firm belief or faith that only God in the Lord Jesus Christ is the Creator God (Father), God the Savior (Jesus Christ) and God the Sustainer (Holy Spirit). Hence, the emphasis is on building biblical concepts. Talking about Church Growth Theology, cannot be separated from the role of the Holy Spirit, as Chris Marantika said: "The Holy Spirit is the central dynamic in church growth". This means that the church is a divine creation, where the church itself is the body of Christ and the temple, the abode of the Holy Spirit. God as the source of the growth of the church, as the mover. The Bible explains that God is the creator of the heavens and the earth and their contents, and God is also the main actor in the growth of His church. Chris Marantika also argues: "Church growth is the work of the Triune God. God the Father planned and formed in eternity past, God the Son redeemed and sanctified the church through His death and resurrection and God the Holy Spirit sealed and strengthened the church". As a consequence, under any circumstances we should not be complacent to keep on evangelizing/proclaiming salvation in Jesus. Because Jesus Himself has laid the foundation for the growth of the church.

Important Aspects in the text of Acts 17:22-25

As for aspects related to the situation of pluralism, namely the ministry of the Apostle Paul in Athens: Verse 22: the word "Very Religious/Religious/worshipping" (δεδιδαιμονεστέρους): *deisidaimonesterous*. Paul went to stand on the Areopagus and said: "Men of Athens, I see that in all things you worship the gods greatly." Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: "People of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious."

From the verses examined related to the history of the city of Athens, it is said that the Athenians are the majority of people who are religious. Evidently in the city many idols as their Lord (verse 18). They are people who are busy in everything (verse 21). So, Paul lauds him with polite but sarcastic language (verse 22). Paul uses the phrase "in all things you are very worshipful", here Paul includes cultural and religious elements as the beginning of his speech. He understands the situation of the city of Athens which is very pluralistic in many ways because it is the center of the city. But without reducing the meaning of Christian faith, he uses the existing facilities, namely on the altar (a place of worship for the Athenians).

It becomes a point for believers in responding to the understanding of pluralism so that the doctrine of the Godhead in Jesus Christ remains firm in believers. Although in practice social life may be together in diversity. So, from the information above, it can be observed that tolerance is allowed, but we must not sacrifice our faith as believers. As the Lord Jesus' message: "be smart as snakes and sincere as doves" (Matt. 10:16), meaning that you must have wisdom in dealing with all things, including the attitude of a pluralistic society.

Verse 23: Unknown God (Ἀγνώστῳ): Agnosto Theo διερχόμενος γὰρ καὶ ἀναθεωρῶν τὰ σεβάσματα ὑμῶν εὖρον καὶ βωμὸν ἐν

"For when I was walking around your city and looking at your worship objects, I also found an altar with the inscription: "To an unknown God." What you worship without knowing it, that is what I proclaim to you.

For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription: 'To the unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. Translation in the original language: unknown To Allah (what) who therefore does not know you worship, this I proclaim to you (*Agnosto*) means: the unknown, the unknown; is an adjective, negative form (A). (*Gnostos*): known. εἴ ποὶ ὁ (*Theo ho*) means: to that God. The article ho (o) is a dative case determinant (importance, to), masculine and neutral type, singular number (singular).

Here Paul takes advantage of a very precise opportunity, right on target. "To an unknown God", Enny Irawati said: "when Paul saw that, he realized that the people there (Athens) had been looking for the living and true God. Paul begins to preach God's Word in the synagogues and markets (Enny, 2021). This means that, so far, the Athenians are indeed people who are very obedient in their religion, namely obedient in worship also pious (verse 22). But they do not understand who they worship. They worshiped gods in the form of statues around the temples. Herein lies the difference between Christian doctrine and the doctrines of other religions. The Christian faith believes that the God worshiped is the living God, the God who created the heavens and the earth. It is described in the Bible from both the Old and New Testaments.

Some sources in the Bible on which to base, God created the heavens and the earth: Genesis 1:1 "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth". Acts 7:49 "The heavens are my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What house will you build for me, says the Lord, what place will be my rest?" Based on this Word, Paul introduced the Athenians to the true God, not a man-made god, but rather the God who created the heavens, the earth and everything in it, including humans.

Verse 24: Lord of heaven and earth The God having made the world and all things that [are] in it, The Lord, not in hand-made temples dwell. The God who made the earth and all. that is in it, He who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by human hands having made, which means: God is the one who creates/creates. The God having made the world and all things that [are] in it, which means: Allah has created the world and everything in it.

Paul took advantage of the situation where the Athenians who worshiped dead gods (because they only lived in the temples, did not move), the God who lived in one place. This contradicts the person of God Almighty, who controls the heavens and the earth and all that is in it (Genesis 1:1-31). God is omnipresent, transcendent and immanent. Again, Enny Irawati says: Paul begins his sermon with the Theocentric method introducing the person of God who acts as God the Father who is the creator (verses 24a and 26a), God as the ruler of human life (verse 26a), and God as the source of sustaining life in the world and all its contents (verse 29). In this section Paul preaches the gospel using their mindset (v.23)(Enny, 2021). Paul introduces the real God, through existing media.

"Verse 25: God who gives the breath of life (αὐτὸς διδοὺς πᾶσι ζωὴν καὶ πνοήν)

"And also not served by human hands, as if He needed anything, for it is He who gives life and breath and all things to everyone." nor by hands of men is He served, as needing anything, Himself giving to all life and breath, and the all;

Himself : personal pronoun (2nd person singular): He (God)

giving from the word dodom: is a verb (verb): to give

to all life and breath, from adjective: everything that lives

breath all; from the noun feminism: breath

Paul is very intelligent and very observant, so from this verse, he recognizes who the God is that Christians worship. In this regard, Drewes said: "Paul's approach to mission in Athens is an example of finding common ground according to the cultural context and thinking of the local community so that the gospel message can be conveyed.

First, Paul greets using the local language (Greek) greeting: deisidaimonesterōi (very religious, very worshipping of the gods). Second, Paul uses another object, namely a place of worship "there is an altar" which

reads "To an Unknown God". It is from these two objects that Paul can enter into the mission strategy that is his target wherever he is.

Athens City

The city of Athens is included in the territory of Greece, becoming a very busy capital and a very complex capital with various styles of life, culture and social. Prabowo explained:

In Modern Greek (Dhimotici) the city is called Athina or Αθήνα, while in Ancient Greek and Katharevousa it is called Ἀθῆναι "Athēnai", the plural form of "-Athēnē", the Greek name for the goddess Athena. The city has a population of about 700,000 people but when calculated by the metropolitan area, the population is around 3,5 million people. Athens was also the economic, cultural and political centre of Greece. Athens is also often referred to as the origin of western civilization for its cultural achievements in the 4th and 5th centuries and making it rich in ancient buildings, monuments and works of art. One of the most famous is the Acropolis which is a testament to classical Greek art. These cultural heritages were renovated in conjunction with the 2004 Athens Olympics (Gama, 2020)

Wahyudi Jaya says: "Greek religion was influenced by Etruscan beliefs and cults to later form many parts of Ancient Roman religion." (Wahyudi, nd). The situation is no different from conditions in the territory of Indonesia, especially in big cities (Jakarta, Surabaya, Medan, Bandung, and so on), almost a variety of ethnicities, cultures, languages and even religions. It is a complex heterogeneous area, so pluralistic understanding must be maintained in dealing with situations like this.

That's what Paul did when he was in Athens, it turns out that this is precisely the situation that Paul uses to get to know the real God. Brink says:

The journey that Paul took to Athens was a very tough journey, because Paul would be dealing with a city called the city of "philosophers". A city filled with many intellectuals, great thinkers and philosophers where their works greatly influence civilization, technological progress and culture. In addition, Athens is also a city of the gods, because so many gods are depicted in various statues that are almost on the streets of the city (Acts 17:6). There is a satire that "in Athens it is easier to find gods than to find humans. Further, Drewes explains that:

"There is an altar in Athens with the inscription "To an unknown God" Paul used as a meeting point to start his preaching. He emphasized that the god they did not know was God/Ruler over the heavens and the earth, He is the one who will judge the world fairly. It is clear that the god that Paul preached was the only one, namely Allah"

Furthermore, Enny Irawati said: The "meeting point" that Paul used in Athens was because of the Stoics and Epicureans who had an important role at that time in Athens." (Enny, 2021) So if you look closely, what Paul explains (Acts 17:24-29), is a way to find common ground with other groups.

The causes of conflict are due to dominance and discrimination, relations between social groups, and even religious differences that can trigger divisions. Therefore, the cultural element is very important in a situation like this as a starting point. According to D. Hendropuspito, "Culture is the whole pattern of outer and inner behavior that allows social relations among members of society". The same thing was said by John Witoto Enny Irawati in the Church History :

As has been done by several missionary figures, Collen who applied the concept of Javanese culture, with a local dance, Javanese gamelan, even used wayang and dhikr as a means to reach people in Surabaya (1827), when worshipping on Sundays. Thus, Collen won many Javanese tribes in Surabaya.

The example above shows the existence of tolerance between people, culture is a means for the creation of tolerance, so as to create an environment that remains safe and peaceful. Pluralism is a challenge for the church, especially for church growth, while the church has a mission to make disciples of all nations. As Paul has done in Athens, describes his attitude in dealing with pluralism in the city of Athens. Stay tolerant of culture, culture, various statues there, but have a firm attitude and have principles and hold on to a solid foundation of faith in the Lord Jesus who has chosen him.

According to the findings, some people experience trauma as a result of the riots that happened in numerous cities and areas throughout Indonesia. The incident was accompanied by a disagreement or misunderstanding on how to handle the many types of difficulties that arose. As a consequence, religious symbols have become a factor in creating damage; many places of worship (churches, mosques, pagodas), schools, shops, workplaces, vehicles, and private residences have all been targeted, with fatalities reported.

Tolerance, as a final step toward maintaining a sense of security, is a form of peace contemplation. Religious pluralism is a hue that pervades a pluralistic society's life. As a matter of fact, this understanding transform, expands, and even diminishes doctrinal teaching, posing a challenge to its believers' faith.

As a believer (church), this situation should not be a reason to drag on and accept pluralism. Hence, there is a statement that: "all religions are the same". The Christian faith still holds to the gospel of the truth that salvation is only in Jesus Christ, beyond that there is no guarantee of salvation. This means that pluralism must not dominate the Christian faith so that it is getting weaker day by day, because it considers all religions to be the same. However, the church must continue to grow both in quality and quantity in the midst of a pluralistic and heterogeneous society. Those statement is not true, all religions are not the same, only in Jesus there is salvation. Therefore, the gospel must continue to grow in the midst of any conditions, including in a pluralistic situation. Paul used Athens as an illustration of how things were in the pluralistic city. Whatever the circumstances, the gospel must be preached in accordance with the Great Commission's command to "make disciples of all countries" (Matt.28:19-20).

The church's tips in facing the challenges of religious pluralism are; the church still holds to the faith that only in Jesus there is salvation, without Him there is no salvation (John 3:16; John 14:6; Acts 4:12). The church remains focused on the theological basis of church growth (Acts 2). The church must be shrewd as a serpent and sincere as a dove (Matt. 10:16). The church must have a high tolerance for any conditions (peace) (Matt.22:39). The church is accommodative to the positives of several notions that do not conflict with religious teachings.

Conclusions

Based on the findings of the issues discussed above, it is possible to conclude that pluralism is a characteristic of heterogeneous communities, which is supported by the evidence. When it comes to interpreting pluralism, particularly religious diversity, it is important to gain an understanding. Recognizing and differentiating between the functions of religious tolerance and religious pluralism. The impact and risk of religious plurality on one's religious beliefs. Religious pluralism poses challenges to the growth of the church. In reaction to religious pluralism, it is necessary to set boundaries.

Religion pluralism has become an unavoidable reality, encouraging each religious community to play a positive role in fostering a sense of community and mutual understanding. This is a necessary condition for the establishment of a secure and tranquil environment inside society. Christians and churches in Indonesia bear a direct or indirect role for fostering an environment similar to the one described above. As a consequence, the growth of Christian theology in the present and future must pay attention to the emerging ethical dilemmas in people's lives. Christian theology must address the underlying causes of each of these emerging crises. After all, theology must also demonstrate significant changes in response to the challenges that arise. This can be accomplished by increased cooperation with other religions, fostering a genuine sense of oneness and mutual understanding among believers of existing religions. When this takes place, horizontal conflicts that frequently arise in society and are provoked by religious problems can be minimized to the greatest extent feasible. So that the majority of the community's people might have a peaceful and prosperous life.

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