

The Role of Religious Institutions in Promoting Social Welfare in Indonesia

(Peran Institusi Agama dalam Meningkatkan Kesejahteraan Sosial di Indonesia)

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Diterima: 4 Agustus 2021

Direvisi: 17 Desember 2021

Disetujui: 22 Desember 2021

Abstrak

Tulisan ini membahas agama dari sudut pandang antropologi sosial. Ajaran agama tidak dilihat sebagai sesuatu yang sakral dan transenden, melainkan sesuatu yang duniawi dan imanen sebagai sumber motif pengikutnya, sedangkan lembaga agama dilihat sebagai lembaga sosial yang berinspirasi agama yang memiliki peran dalam masyarakat. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan lapangan di mana data dikumpulkan dari observasi partisipatif dan wawancara. Studi kepustakaan juga dilakukan, selain untuk mengumpulkan tambahan informasi, juga untuk mengecek kebenaran data lapangan. Hasil penelitian menemukan bahwa karena sifatnya ini, dalam memajukan kesejahteraan sosial, agama melalui ajaran dan institusinya bekerja pada dua tingkatan: tingkat spiritual dan praktis. Meskipun makalah ini menggunakan Gereja Katolik Indonesia sebagai contoh, lembaga keagamaan lain mungkin memiliki program serupa untuk berpartisipasi dalam proses menjadikan dunia tempat yang nyaman untuk dihuni oleh semua orang.

Kata kunci: agama, ajaran agama, lembaga keagamaan, kesejahteraan sosial.

Abstract

This paper discusses religion from social anthropological point of view. Religious teachings are not seen as something sacred and transcendent, but something worldly and immanent as a source of motives of its followers while religious institution are seen as religion inspired social institutions that have their role in the society. The method used in this study is fieldwork. The data are collected though participative observation and interview. Literary study is also done to complete the data and check the data collected from the field. The result of this study shows that due to this nature, in promoting social welfare, religion through its teachings and institutions work on two levels: spiritual and practical level. Though this paper uses the Indonesian Catholic Church as an example, other religious institutions may have similar programs to participate in the process of making the world better place for everybody.

Keywords: religion, religious teachings, religious institutions, social welfare.



INTRODUCTION

Many times we hear the word of religion we directly think of religious teachings and dogmas or religious conflicts, radicalism, and violence. It is true that every religion has its own religious teachings and dogmas and it is true also that nowadays we often read or listen to the news of religious conflicts, radicalism, and violence. But, they are not all about religion. Religion can be defined as a sacred involvement in a spiritual world which has continued to play a part in all human cultures. Religion cannot be separated from human experience across human cultures. As part of human experience and culture, religion may play a functional role in people's life without claiming about what it is or has to be. Religion is not an entity with a constant meaning, or even a zone with fixed determined boundaries. It covers all aspects of human experience that may penetrate, mingle, or overlap with other aspects of life and society. Religion is not only a part of someone's life but also of group of people. Religion does not only include patterns of attitude but also of behavior, thought and culture.

Functional analysis on religion appeared in sociology when Auguste Comte (1842), who coined the term "sociology," borrowed this idea from biology for useful analogies between biological organisms and societies. Drawing on Comte's thought, Herbert Spencer (1820) extends the SE idea to sociology. Biological organisms and human societies, in Spencer's view, "follow the same universal, natural evolutionary law." In a similar vein, Sociologist Talcott Parsons observes that social institutions or systems are like the component parts of an organism—interlocking organs that work together, with each performing its own function in an environment to create stability in the system of which it is a part. Nevertheless, Parson points out that when one part of a society (a social institution) fails to function properly, other parts take over its function, so as to help meet society's needs.

Religion reaches the deepest part of someone's identity. It can be used to mobilize people to fight and to make peaceful agreement. In many parts of the world religion provoke people to do violent actions, although in many cases it is exaggerated (Smock 2006, 33). Throughout the history of mankind, religion may become a source of intolerance, abuse, and violence. On the other hand Aminah Rasul (2009) stated that religion may become a source of non-violent transformation, human rights promotion, integrity in business and government, and peaceful societies.

Clifford Geertz defines religion as (1) a system of symbols, (2) that plays a role in mood and motivation to build a strong, pervasive, and long lasting in men, (3) by formulating conceptions of general order of life, (4) and wrap these conceptions with such an aura of factuality, and (5) that makes hearts and motivations seem realistic (Geertz 1993, 90). This definition of religion means that religion can belong to any group and any individual, they do not believe in a deity or an eternal life after their life on earth, or any of the more specific ideas of institutionalized religion. Any group of people may have a certain religion because it may have the same framework that its members share in common, to give meaning to their life and to guide their behavior. The first point of the definition is that religion is a structured system of symbols. What is meant by symbol is anything such as pictures, figures, objects, treatments, occasions, relationships, or anything else that is meaningful to someone (Pals 2009, 349). The functions of a symbol is to send the message about the reality of the world that they live in; to tell them how to observe or to understand the world in a certain way; and to format the experience of the followers. Moreover, symbol also informs about how to understand and to react to certain experience. It suggests something about the ideal way of living. The symbol persuades the followers that a strong connection between their worldview and their way of life really exists. It tells that the followers should live in a certain way because the world operates in a certain way. Thus, it can be concluded

that a system of symbols is the pattern to see and to understand the reality. Symbols may function as a 'pattern of' and 'pattern for' reality. It becomes the 'pattern of', in the case that it may help the followers understand what is the true reality by providing the understandable picture of the reality, and it becomes the 'pattern for', in the case that the pattern also determines the followers' actions by giving the guidelines of how everything has to be done (Geertz 1993, 93).

Religious institutions, as a kind of social institutions, also play a significant role in people's life. Nobody can reject the fact that the different kinds of other social institutions such as educational institutions, economic institutions and political institutions have their influence upon religious institutions. On the other hand it cannot be denied that those kinds of social institutions are also affected and reformed by religious institutions. It may happen also that some members of a certain religion gather together to respond to the call of the society in the form of various humanitarian activities. It is clear now that religious institutions do not only perform religious acts but also different types of social activities such as, free education for all, free medications for those in need, food for the hungry and shelters for the homeless. They may perform many different social activities to express what they believe.

Emile Durkheim states that religion is the soul of society. He started his examination on the meaning of religion by studying the Australian tribal religion, totemism. He reflected on this tribal religion and compared it with how people lived their religion in his society in Europe, especially in France where he lived. In analyzing religion, Durkheim suggests that in every religion there is always a totem (Pals 2009, 108). The totem symbolizes the god and the determined society called as the clan (Pals 2009, 112). It functions as a name and also an emblem for the society. Wherever they are spread over, the members of the society have the same relation of kinship with one another (Pals 2009, 112). Here it can be said that the religion becomes the soul of the society that unites the members together. Emile Durkheim's understanding on religion is not like many Indonesians understand their religion. He excluded the factor of divinity (supernatural) from religion. For him, religion was something purely social. Here is his definition of religion: 'religion is the system of symbols by which society becomes conscious of itself; it is the characteristic way of thinking of collective existence' (Durkheim 1915, 312). Moreover, he stated that 'religion is a system of faith and human performances, behavior, activities and actions in relations to the sacred entity' (Durkheim 1915, 47).

From sociological point of view almost all religious teachings facilitate social order. Religious teachings motivate the believers to live peacefully with the neighbors, to act responsibly and to run for the common good. In more moderate teachings, especially in multi-religious society, the scope is wider and includes all members of society. The fact shows that many members of faith communities who do not practice their religion and are not fond of such teachings, still practice the religious moral virtues and support the humanity. Regardless of the followers' acceptance of the religious teaching and its interpretations, they may find that human values drive them to give attention to the unfortunate ones. These social teachings of religions are surely powerful to format people's way of thinking and way of behaving even in secular societies.

Max Webber (1905) in his essay "The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism" which was the result of his studies of the impact of the interaction between religious ideas and economic behavior towards the economic system (Ritzer 2009, 31). In this essay Webber presented the comparison of the Catholic countries (Spain, France, and Italy) and Protestant countries (England, the Netherlands, and Germany) at the time of the shift of post-reformation of Europe. Webber proposed the thesis that protestant way of understanding the Bible and their

understanding of the world and themselves supported the emergence of capitalism. Webber claimed that certain religions push and motivate the followers to pursue economic prosperity and to take part in winning the world for them. It can be concluded that religious ideas may become the source of or at least supports and generate social changes.

Indonesia is a multi-religious country. There are 6 (six) officially recognized religions of the country: Islam; Protestantism, Roman Catholics, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. Other religions, either local or global, may exist and be practiced but do not get support from the government. A day after the independence, on 18 August 1945, the government decided to adopt Pancasila as the pillar of Indonesian identity. *Pancasila* includes 5 principles: belief in one only God; a just and civilized society; Indonesian unity; democracy under the wise guidance of representative consultations; social justice for all Indonesian people. Moreover, Indonesia's founding fathers decided to have an article in their Constitution (Art. 29) which specifies the principle of freedom of religion.

For Indonesians, religions play a very important role. In 1970, the Indonesian government included religion class in the national curriculum of all levels of formal schools, even in universities. Since religion class is a compulsory subject, all students studying in Indonesian schools have to take it. At least for 12 years Indonesians learn their religion in their formal schools. Though this is problematic, this policy continues until this present time. The period of twelve to thirteen years to learn religion is quite a long time so that the teaching of religion may penetrate the way of thinking of Indonesians joining formal school after 1970s.

This paper is exploring how religious institutions in Indonesia may play a significant role in promoting social welfare through its followers either personally or communally, specifically the Catholic Church of Indonesia. It is expected that by knowing and learning from the experience of the Catholic Church, other religious institutions in Indonesia may develop their own programs to promote social welfare among their followers and participate and engage actively in the inter-religious movements to bring social welfare for all.

METHOD

This study is a socio-anthropological research. The data are collected through field observation and interview. The observation here is done directly by participating in the social welfare programs of the institutions. The focus is to get information about the elements, values, motives, methods, achievements and failures of the programs. The interview is done to the participants and to the leaders of the programs, covering lay and religious leaders. The type of interview used is open interview in which the interviewee is invited to explore much the topic being asked. After being described, the data are then processed based on the problem of the study to find the role of the institutions in achieving social welfare for all in Indonesia.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Social Teachings of 6 Official Religions in Indonesia

Islam promotes charitable acts. The Qur'an mentions the significance of zakat, which means "to thrive or to be wholesome." In practice, Zakat is an Islamic law-ruled institutionalized financial contribution for the good life of the poor, the missionaries and those whose life is dedicated to the practice and spread of Islam. The Qur'an also teaches the practice of *sadaqah* which means voluntary alm-giving to those in need (Harmsen 2008, 176). In Islam charity and responsibility for others are regarded as moral obligations. This idea comes from their belief that everything in this world belongs to God and God provides them for all.

Christianity (Protestantism and Catholicism) mandates its followers to help and care for their neighbors. The Christian Bible talks much about helping and caring for the unfortunate neighbors. One concept which is referred in Christian social teaching is the Greek word of agape (Jackson 2015, 354). The term of love of agape has different meaning from other Greek terms of love (eros and philia). Agape is a love that values, respects, commits and sacrifices for the well-being of the loved one. Someone who loves others with 'agape' love, will prioritize the welfare, happiness and the fulfilment of the needs of the loved ones.

Buddhism is centered on loving empathy to poor people. The teaching of the virtue of poverty is really strong in Buddhism. For them living in poverty shows their detachment for worldly materials. Many Buddhists choose to become beggars, as for them begging is an act of virtues. Some others live in modesty and appreciation of simplicity. While the others, who are not called to live as beggars, are commanded not to pass a beggar without giving alms. They are also taught not to refuse a request to support acts of kindness.

In Hinduism, two of the most important central teachings are living non-violently and almsgiving in the form of supporting people in need (Canda and Furman 2010, 162). Though in the Hindu social religious community the caste system is practiced, broad social harmony and social order have to be maintained responsibility by the people regardless their castes. They believe that all members of the community have to be responsible to take care of and help the poor.

Confucianism is known as an ethical philosophy that supports good social system. Confucianism focused on the acceptance and practice of social values and norms in any level of social institutions and of any level of human relationships. It teaches that human relationships should be guided by roles and mutual obligations; in which all participants of the relationships should know and practice his/her proper role. It also claims that those who act rightly could contribute to the better, more perfect society.

It can be concluded from the description above that all official religions of Indonesia teach their followers to be caretakers of their neighbors. Through their teachings and the spirit, all official religions in Indonesia have helped provide the foundation for the social values lived by the followers. These social values, in turn, motivate them to have social ministries to the needy ones. In Indonesia they focus on education and health ministries because both are the most needed by the society. Their ministries are open to other religious followers.

To widen the scope of its social ministries, some of the ministries are, then, formalized to become NGOs while others remain as ministries of the religious institutions/groups. The term "non-governmental organization" firstly appeared in Article 71 of the United Nations Charter which signed on 26 June 1945 in San Fransisco, at the conclusion of the United Nations Conference on International Organization, and came into force on 24 October 1945. The term refers to an organization which is not under or controlled by the government but by a group of civil people for the promotion of common goals. There are several million NGOs in existence today, and there are many of them which define themselves as "religious NGOs" to differ themselves from secular NGOs. Martens defines "religious NGOs" as formal organizations whose identity and mission are self-consciously derived from the teachings of one or more religious or spiritual traditions and which operates on a nonprofit, independent, voluntary basis to promote and realize collectively articulated ideas about the public good at the national or international level (Martens, 285).

Elizabeth Ferris in International Review of the Red Cross 2005 listed unique advantage of religious NGOs compared to the secular ones (Ferris 2005, 321-335). They are:

1. Religious NGOs play a major role in shaping and reshaping norms, so it should be much easier for them to move across from a focus on policies and behaviors to something deeper.
2. Religious NGOs are motivated by their faith. For believers, they are called to do the duty to respond to the needs of the needy. Though different religious traditions may influence on how they express their faith of the calling, but all of them show that this calling is the source of powerful motivation to do humanitarian social action.
3. Religious NGOs are rooted in the society so that they have an established relationship of trust and familiarity with local communities in which they are embedded.
4. Religious NGOs, due to its global network, may play significant roles in delivering services, organizing communities, implementing advocacies, mediating conflicts among different social groups, and gathering information and resources around the world.

In Indonesia there are many religious NGOs that work with the people on the grass-root level to promote social welfare. Some of them have become big organizations with branches in many different parts of Indonesia while others remain small and work locally but contribute a lot to local communities.

A Case Study: The Role of Indonesian Catholic Church in Achieving SDGs

Indonesian Catholic Church as one part of the Catholic Church plays a role in the Sustainable Development Goals achievement in local scale. The Indonesian Catholic bishops (KWI/Konferensi Waligereja Indonesia) met to discuss Indonesian Catholic church's support and active engagement in delivering the SDGs. They believe that government, on itself, is not able to address the challenges only through appropriate interventions detailed in its policies and plans. It needs to be assisted by civil society and other social institutions. Indonesian Catholic Church feels that this is an important call because the church is part of the frontline service deliverers in this country.

Indonesian Catholic Church, as one of the social institutions, feels that it may take a lead in adopting the SDGs as a roadmap for lifting the poor out of poverty. It realizes that it can adopt the SDGs as their own Church policies and incorporate them into its plans and programs. It is convinced that they even can do better since it does not only focus on the work to achieve the SDGs but also provides the fundamental layer of the SDGs, the spirituality which becomes the motive of the achievement.

As a religious institution Indonesian Catholic Church believes that tragedy of poverty is not only a social matter but also a spiritual (religious) matter. Facing this tragedy, Indonesian Catholic Church sees the importance to demand its people willingness to understand the situation, and motivate themselves to participate in social processes to help others coming out from the bad situation (*Caritas in Veritate*, article no. 20). This is the reason why the Indonesian Catholic Church commits to solve the problem through spiritual development. It believes that by doing this, it may modify people's behavior and decisions regarding this social fact. On the other hand, Indonesian Catholic Church realizes that it is not enough to invite reflection. To solve the problem, it needs to actively intervene in the situation (Massaro 2012, 4). Indonesian Catholic Church tries to combine these two (spirituality basis and active involvement) into one movement. It does not want that its participation falls into the sphere of feeling only, without real action and awareness in search for the truth and goodness for all. In other words, Indonesian Catholic Church is about arousing the people's interior awareness of the responsibility for others so that

they may be able to alter their style of life (*Caritas in Veritate*, article no. 27) and inviting the people to take actions in favor of the good of society.

Supporting the activities done to reach the SDGs, just as the universal Catholic Church, Indonesian Catholic Church emphasizes the need of genuine solidarity with the poor. It believes that without this genuine solidarity, there is no social conscience and responsibility. D. Brian Scarnecchia and Terrence McKeegan (2009) stated that without them social action may only become an activity to achieve private interests so that according to the logic of power, it may result in social fragmentation, especially in a plural society at difficult times like at the present time. As the universal Catholic Church, Indonesian Catholic Church in its efforts to reach the SDGs uses these four principles—human dignity, the common good, subsidiarity and solidarity (Mirus 2008, 25). The Indonesian Catholic Church occupies its resources to reach the SDGs through various activities including spiritual and social activities. It also encourages its people, institutions including foundations and Catholic faith based NGOs to help build local communities so that not only the MGDs are reached but also the local communities become sustainable. Indonesian Catholic Church develops and provides guidelines for them, such as *Ecopastoral* which was promulgated by the Indonesian Bishop Conference in 2012, that their activities may not fall into political interests. A lot of things have been done by Catholic local Churches and parishes, Catholic foundations (schools, public health and social services) and Catholic faith based NGOs all over Indonesia. They also work hand in hand with other religious institutions or even with the government. Though they are working behind the screen and are rarely published, they have contributed a lot to the achievement of SDGs in this country.

One of the major influences of the Catholic Church on social practices can be seen in how the Catholic social teachings influence the people. This teaching becomes the religious (spiritual) motivation for the Catholic institutions and people. Moreover, through the teaching, the Catholic Church plays its role in forming social policy which signifies the role of the Church in the development of social policy in the future. These are some ways how the Indonesian Catholic Church serves the religious (spiritual) motivation among its institutions and people:

1. Indonesian Catholic Church's Theme of the Year

Every year Indonesian Catholic Church decides a theme of the year. The theme of the year functions as the guidelines not only for the theme of reflection of the whole Catholic Church in Indonesia but also the theme of movements. During Lent season, the Catholic people usually have a common retreat reflecting the theme of the year. Parish organizer develops reflection book which becomes the guidelines for the people to reflect on the theme. Furthermore, Catholic communities hold programs in which people gather together to talk, discuss and reflect on the theme. This is usually followed up with actions accordance with the theme.

2. Indonesian Catholic Church's Participation in the World Food Day

Following the universal Church, the Indonesian Catholic Church get involved in the annual celebration of world food day. The commitment of the Catholic Church to participate in the celebration is in favor of agricultural development to combat hunger and malnutrition, is also an occasion to underscore the situation of so many people who lack daily bread. The Church is fully aware that liberation from the yoke of hunger is the first concrete manifestation of the right to life, which ~ despite its having been solemnly proclaimed ~ is often very far from being fulfilled effectively. The Church invites the people to reflect on the importance of the different factors that can give people and communities essential resources, beginning with agricultural work, which must not be considered as a secondary activity, but as the objective of every strategy of growth and integral development. In doing this action the Indonesian Catholic

Church is always inspired by the Christian values: the feeling of compassion and humanity toward others and the duty of solidarity and commitment to justice. The Indonesian Catholic Church believes that besides immediate aid in the face of the death of entire communities caused by famine and the forced abandonment of the native lands, it is also necessary to intervene in the medium- and long-term. The Church invites the people to participate also on the other activities to solve the problem.

3. Catholic Church's Support toward the Works of Catholic Institutions

The Indonesian Bishop Conference (KWI) regularly meets and gathers with Catholic institutions and Catholic inspired NGOs (non-governmental organizations) to coordinate their important efforts. In the meetings and gatherings they discuss about the presence, impact, difficulties and challenges which they are facing in the society. They concern with the development of cooperation and collaboration in some areas of work, such as human rights, education, migration, migrant workers, environment, and healthcare. Through conversations either in panel or in small groups KWI and the representatives of the Catholic institutions and Catholic inspired NGOs not only share their concerns and their activities in those areas, or develop their cooperation, collaboration and network across the different institutions and NGOs, but also address the problems of those who they work with. In this kind of meetings and gathering, the Catholic Social Teaching permeates the discussion and color the decision making process.

Indonesian Catholic Church tries to help Indonesia achieve the SDGs by employing its experience as far-reaching social service providers. Catholic institutions such as hospitals, schools, orphanages and other similar institutions which multiply and flourish all over Indonesia are encouraged to participate with the Catholic Church to achieve the SDGs. Moreover, in reaching the SDGs, the Indonesian Catholic Church urges its religious congregations and Catholic faith based NGOs to take part in the process in each of its own field of work. These two types of faith based institutions become the real drive and energy of various Catholic social works and movements. While the religious congregations focus their work to increase the quality of education, health and others, the Catholic faith based NGOs try to fight against social inequality or to reform the society. Both of them, as the agents of Indonesian Catholic Church, work hand in hand to reach the goals set by its source.

CONCLUSION

Religious institutions may play a significant role in promoting social welfare through its followers either personally or communally. In promoting social welfare, religious institutions may work on two levels: the spiritual level and the practice level. On the spirit level, religious institutions may provide religious (spiritual) fundament for the movement while on the practice level it may work with its foundations, religious ministerial groups, and religious (faith-based) NGOs. Inspired by their religious spirit. Religious institutions may enforce their competence, performance and influence toward the society and by involving the institutions and organizations under their sphere. Learning from the experience in Indonesia, they have proved themselves to become the agents of social change. Regardless the achievement of Indonesia in social welfare, they have shown that they play an active role in performing its commitments to participate to reach it.

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