RELIGIOUS PLURALISM IN THE THOUGHT OF JOHN HICK (1922–…)

Pandangan John Hick (1922–…) tentang Religious Pluralisme

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INTISARI

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk memahami secara kritis pandangan John Hick tentang pluralisme agama. Sebagai seorang pensiunan, Hick adalah seorang filsuf agama yang menurutnya pencarian kebenaran tentang agama Kristen dan hubungannya dengan agama lain. Menurut Hick, pluralisme agama dapat dilihat dalam konteksnya tentang hipotesis pluralistik.

Konsep Hick tentang hipotesis pluralistik menunjukkan bahwa ada dua respon terhadap dua pemikiran besar yang ada sebelumnya tentang hubungan agama Kristen dengan agama lainnya yakni eksklusivisme dan inklusivisme. Bagi Hick, keberadaan dua agama memang memutuskan perbedaan tajam dalam hal-hal yang menurutnya yakni tentang kenyataan historis, tradisi, dan perbedaan konsep tentang Tuhan. Kesamaan dalam agama Kristen juga kadang dimaknai secara tradisional sebagai melingkupi, meluluhkan, atau melengkapi agama lainnya. Oleh karena itu, dalam konteksnya tentang pluralisme agama, Hick menawarkan pemahaman bahwa dua agama sebagaimana hakikatnya adalah sebagai respon yang dibentuk oleh budaya yang berbeda.

Hick juga menganggap bahwa semua agama sama baiknya jika mereka memberikan pengertian yang baik secara moral dan spiritual pada pemeluknya.

Hick hipotesis pluralistik mempunyai beberapa implikasi. Bagi agama Kristen, kerabuhan yang tercapai oleh orang-orang Kristen menjadi lebih sempurna dan doktrin tradisional tentang persaudaraan Kristen menjadi tidak cocok.

Selain itu hipotesis Hick juga dapat merubah cara pandang orang Kristen terhadap agama lainnya dari Kristosentrisme menjadi Teosentristisme, serta memberikan perspektif yang baru terhadap posisi agama-agama lainnya.

Ada beberapa kritik yang bisa diliberan terhadap hipotesis pluralistik Hick. Misalnya, Hick mungkin mencoba untuk menjadi pengamat yang netral dalam hipotesisnya dengan tidak berpikir pasti satu agama akan tetap ada. Hick menghadapi kontradiksi internal jika melihat konsep sejarah kebenaran logis bahwa dua hal yang berbeda tidak bisa dikatakan sama pada satu waktu. Hick juga mengajukan suatu pendekatan yang pragmatis dengan

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In contrast, inclusivists claim that their religion provides the standard for religious truth, for it answers the questions better than any other religion, but they also allow that other religions may express the same truth. Even though this point of view is one step ahead compared to exclusivist, it seems like inclusivist on the ground that for the inclusivist’s mind, salvation as final expression is still depended on one particular religion.

Based on problems above, religious scholars carved out religious pluralism as a problem solving in their field of religious relationship. Many Pluralists argues that all religions have their own religious teachings. The problem of religious pluralism actually arises from the fact that there are many such claims. In the view of this variety of truth-claims, it would seem that they cannot all be true; and in that case may they not well all be false? (Hick, 1982:89)

An alternative that will explain here use to the experimental apologetic rejects the assumption that only one of the different religious beliefs systems can be true. The proponent of this idea is John Hick. He is the great thinker who forced the issues of religious pluralism upon the attention of theologians. He gave enormous scholarly and intellectual effort to accept pluralism. Based on this background, I would like to do research entitled “Religious Pluralism in the Thought of John Hick (1922- ) : A Critical Study”.

B. Problem Statement
From the aforementioned considerations, a study of Hick’s perspective on religious pluralism will be relevant and reasonable. The problems discussed in this research are:
1. What is the starting point of Hick’s thought?
2. What is Hick’s explanation of his pluralistic hypothesis?
3. How has it been employed to view other religions and its implication?
4. How to apply the contextualization of Hick’s perspective on religious pluralism in the present day Indonesia?

C. Methodology
This research is a qualitative research so data are gained from library resources. The data collection will contain mainly the original intellectual works of John Hick on religious pluralism as primary sources. Written data, including the complete works of Hick, the data written by

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INTRODUCTION

The history of the encounters among adherents of different religions is taken the form of conflict, diatribe, and even hatred. One of the most important causes is the tendency of religious sentiment to be strengthened among adherents of different religions. Consequently, the conflict between Israel and Palestine and the world of Arab continues. Revival of Biblical Christian groups in Latin America, rivalry among Muslims and Christians in Africa, conflict between secularists and clergy in Turkey are all examples. Others include the struggle of fundamentalists opposing secular military regime in Algeria, conflicts of Hindu fundamentalists facing adherents of different religions in India, the war of religious groups in Balkan, even the riots in places such as Poso, Pululuh and so on in the current Indonesia.

Basically, diversity stands as a hallmark of contemporary cultures in the modern world, and it is no less significant in religion than elsewhere, in a society that consisted of many different groups such as religion, culture as well as group of interest, every people has their own orientation. Due to this fact, conflict between religions have spread larger in every society.

In fact the world religions are significantly different in practice and oint of views. Paul Knitter explained that in Christianity religious exclusivist theology is the first which had been set formally by religious scholars. The main terms of exclusivist in Christian theology as Cyprians oint it out is extra ecclesiam nulla salus or there is no salvation outside the church (Knitter, 1995). Exclusivists claim that truth is the exclusiveossession of their religion alone; it adequately answers the questions of
erpreters or scholars on the thought of Hick, religious pluralism and relevant works related to the subject of this research will be used as secondary sources.

To make this research successful, I collected data from literary sources, classified data, and analyzed data. Here I used description, interpretation, and personal reflection. All about Hick's and religious pluralism, related to the subject of the research, are described using description. Meanwhile, interpretation is used to interpret Hick's concept on religious pluralism and its implications. Finally, personal reflection is used to give an evaluation up to Hick's concept on religious pluralism. General conclusions will be formulated as well.

**CK'S PLURALISTIC HYPOTHESIS**

Who is Hick?

John Hick, who was born on January 20th, 1922 in Yorkshire, England, is not best understood as a theologian. Rather, he has always professed to be a philosopher of religion. However, surprisingly, Hick's works have had significant theological implications. Almost a lifelong Presbyterian, Hick's concerns have been primarily concerned with Christianity, but it is Christianity (more than any other religion) that is subjected in s works to all of the implications of his philosophy of religion. Indeed, very concrete concerns would develop one of the most intricate and systematic theories of religious pluralism through his pluralistic hypothesis.

Exclusivism and inclusivism as starting point

John Hick's pluralistic hypothesis is his attempt to respond to the two previous responses of the relationship between Christianity and other religions that have been widely acknowledged such as exclusivism and inclusivism.

Exclusivism has been seen as the traditional response and this is a position strongly that defended by Fundamentalists. In short, it is biblically based. The Bible, that is considered to be the definition Word of God, seems to clearly teach that the relationship between Christianity and other religions is to be one of separation and mission.

Still through the discussion and debates of the last thirty or so years, new major consensus has emerged which is generally known as Christian inclusivism. Generally, this inclusivism type of theology of religions takes three forms. Consider, first form is based on the idea developed within Catholic thinking of implicit faith that at least some indi-
As Hick (1995:16) noted, if we define salvation as being forgiven as accepted by God because of the atoning death of Jesus, then it is a utility that Christianity alone knows and teaches the saving truth. If we have seen that this circle of ideas contradicts our observations at the fruits of the Spirit seem to be as much evident outside the church within it.

Yet as Hick said in Okholm (1996:43) if we define salvation in a very concrete way, as an actual change in human being, a gradual transformation from natural self-centeredness (with all the human evils that flow from this) to a radically new orientation centered in God and manifested in the fruit of the Spirit. Then it seems clear that salvation is taking place within all of the world religions and taking place to more or less the same extent.

Hick (1993:136) also said that different conceptions of salvation are reflections of what, in a generic formula, is the transformation of human existence from self-centeredness to a new orientation centered in the Divine reality. We then come to a question on how we are to judge such salvation claims?

Hick (1993:136) here suggested that we cannot directly observe the inner spiritual quality of a human relationship to the Real; but we can observe how that relationship. It is as one’s deepest and most pervasive relationship, affects the moral and spiritual quality of a human personality and of a man’s or a woman’s relationship to others. It would seem that we could only assess these salvation projects in so far as we are able to observe their fruits in human life.

Philosophical Explanation of Religious Pluralism

Such an expanded understanding of religion has been forming in many minds during the last seventy years or so has come to be known as religious pluralism. As shown by Hick (1996:12), this is the view that the great world faiths, both monotheistic and non-theistic, are different culturally formed responses to the ultimate and thus independently valid channels or contexts of the human salvific human transformation.

Hick’s pluralistic hypothesis is that of an ultimate inefable Reality that is the source and ground of everything, which is such that in so far as the religious traditions are in soteriological alignment with it they are contexts of salvation. These traditions involve different human conceptions of the Real, with correspondingly different forms of experience of the Real, and correspondingly different forms of life in response to the Real [Hick, 1995:27]. In short, this is like that all traditions are culturally conditioned responses to the same Ultimate reality.

Yet, how can all traditions be experiencing the Real when their conceptions of the Real are diverse and contradictory? Hick resolves this dilemma by borrowing from the thought of Immanuel Kant. Kant who distinguished between the noumenal world, the world as it exists unperceived, and the phenomenal world, that same world as humanity perceived, with all the difference that the act of perception makes. Here Hick (1989:236) applies Kant’s distinction to religious phenomena and proposes a distinction between the Real as such, as it actually exists, and the Real as perceived and experienced by individuals in a particular tradition.

IMPLICATIONS OF HICK’S PLURALISTIC HYPOTHESIS

A. Divine Incarnation of Jesus Christ as Metaphor

Hick’s pluralistic hypothesis involves for Christianity that is primarily reflected in Christology, an issue that receives substantial attention first in Hick’s book God and the Universe of Faiths (1973). Here Hick argued that the propositional truth-claims of traditional Christology insistence on the uniqueness of the revelation of Jesus Christ are indefensible as such.

It is widely known that traditional orthodoxy says that Jesus Christ was God incarnate. It means that Jesus is the Son of God as well as the second person of a divine Trinity. Jesus thus became man to die for the sins of the world. He also found the church to proclaim this to the ends of the earth. (Okholm, 1996:51). Still, Hick is able to appreciate the origins of this doctrine and its religious significance for previous generations of Christians through formulating these objections to the continued insistence on its literal interpretation.

First is the lack of dominical authority for the teaching [Hick, 1995:95]. It is because historically Jesus did not teach himself the doctrine of the incarnation. Yet it is a creation of the church. Second is the failure of the church and theology to provide any intelligible explanation of the content of the doctrine that is literally understood [Hick, 1995:99-100]. In this regard Hick returns often to what he calls the problem of the incompeletable attributes ascribed to Jesus, divinity and humanity. Third is the historical fall out of the church’s insistence that Jesus is Son of God in a unique sense [Hick, 1995:99-100].

As an alternative to the literal interpretation of the traditional doctrine Hick thus views that this Christians belief in the incarnation and the divinity of Jesus is myth or metaphor and therefore not only allows...
it demands reinterpretation (Knitter, 2000:150). This myth of incarnation is much like the Trikaya myth in which Mahayana Buddhists attempted to speak about the Mystery they had encountered in Buddha (Hick, 1973:117).

Hick actually has presented three fundamental reasons for rejecting a traditional Chalcedonian-understanding of incarnation. First, that Jesus Christ was the eternal creator God become man, it becomes very difficult indeed to treat Jesus, the New Testament, and Christian faith as being on the same level as phenomena from other religious tradition (Hick, 1973:172).

Second, Hick finds the notion of one person truly being God and Man coherent. Third, Hick relies exclusively on the liberal wing of Christianew Testament Scholarship. Hick contends that the brute of Scholarship proves that Jesus Christ never thought of himself as divine, nor did his early believers.

Finally Hick (1980:186) concluded that when we see the incarnation as a mythological idea applied to Jesus to express the experienced fact that Jesus is our sufficient, effective and saving point of contact with God, we have no longer to draw the negative conclusion. We can also commend the way of Christian faith without having to discard other ways of faith. Thus for Hick we can say that there is salvation in Jesus Christ without having to say that there is no salvation other than in Jesus.

The Traditional Atonement Doctrine of Christianity Becomes Inappropriate

Among the implications of Hick’s pluralistic hypothesis, that traditional atonement doctrine, which presuppose the deity of Jesus Christ, kewise become inappropriate. Here Hick suggests that we are freed to look back to Jesus Christ’s own teaching about divine forgiveness (Hick, 1996:16).

In addition, Hick gives a reason why traditional Atonement doctrine becomes inappropriate. As Hick (1993: 11-12) stated, the basic notion is that salvation requires God’s forgiveness and that this in turn requires an adequate atonement to satisfy the divine righteousness and justice.

Rejecting the traditional Atonement doctrine, Hick (1993:11) suggests that atonement simply means salvation, or entering into a right relationship with God. Jesus Christ’s death may or may not be separated from his self-giving life as a whole as having a special significance of its own.

C. Christians’ View on Other Religions: From Christocentrism to Theocentrism

As Hick’s pluralistic hypothesis stated that all religions are human responses to the Ultimate, therefore when we visit the various non-Christian places of worship, we conclude that the same king of things is taking place in them as in a Christian church. It also means that human beings opening their minds to a higher divine Reality (Hick, 1980:5).

For Hick, that older Christian’s view has come to seem increasingly implausible and unrealistic in the light of growing knowledge of other faiths and as a result of better contacts with their adherents. By recognizing the analogy of no salvation outside Christianity doctrine, Christianity is seen as the center of the universe of faiths, and all the other religions are regarded as revolving round it and as being graded in value according to their distance from it. We have to realize that the universe of faiths centers upon the Real (God), and not upon Christianity or upon any other religions (Hick, 1980:180). The Real or God is the originaire source of life, which all the religions reflect in their own different ways.

Finally we can see that through his pluralistic hypothesis, viewing other religions, what Hick has effectively prescribed for Christianity is a shift from Christocentrism to theocentrism. By viewing other religions from theocentrism perspective, there is also social implication of doing that Hick’s pluralistic such as to reduce the availability of religion to validate and justify conflict and war that is based on conflicting truth and salvation claims of different religion believers.

D. A New Map of Religions

Here we will concern on the questions why Hick chooses pluralism as the best religious hypothesis and why Hick believes that we ought not to be exclusivists? As David Basinger explained in Peterson (1996: 339) it is not because Hick sees exclusivism as incoherent. It is certainly possible, Hick grants that no particular Pluralistic religious vision does correspond uniquely with how things we are. Yet Hick finally proposed the Copernican revolution in theology. It parallels with Copernicus model of the universe.

Hick’s proposal for a Copernican revolution is an attempt to shift the dominant conceptual focus of Christianity from a Christ-centered to a God-centered viewpoint. In order to make it clearer, Hick then uses the analogy of a shift from a Ptolemaic to a Copernican theology. In his book God and the Universe of Faiths explained that the Ptolemaic view was that our earth is the center of the universe, and the Ptolemaic theo-
Further, in explaining his pluralistic hypothesis, it should be recognized that Hick is not claiming to stand in a unique position amongst the religions. He is not seeking to impose pluralism onto religions but finds pluralism is the result of his a priori commitments.

C. Internal Contradiction of Hick’s Hypothesis

Firstly let us see an additional point about the nature of truth. One of most basic notions of logic is the principle of non-contradiction. If a given proposition X is true, then its opposite, not X, cannot be true at the same time.

Following the Indian parable about three blind men and an elephant, I would love to say that this parable is a greatly simplified version of Hick’s hypothesis. Hick believes that each religious tradition is like a blind man who, suffering from Kantian blindness, is unable to see the elephant as it really is an elephant. Still, how could Hick judge these blind men were all describing the same elephant? Further, the situation depicted in this parable does not really describe the world religions on the ground that no one of blind men’s description was contradictory. They were just merely different. Still what if each of the blind men made statements about an alleged elephant that actually contradicted the claims of the others?

D. Pluralistic Hypothesis as a Pragmatic Approach

It seems that Hick proposes a pragmatic approach to grading religious systems as a function of their soteriological efficacy. Hick suggests that the transformations of human existence that the different major visions produce appear, as we see them described in their scriptures and embodied in the lives of the saints, to be equally radical in their nature and equally impressive in their outcomes. As such, since the major religious traditions can be said to be equally effective in their soteriological methods and thereby inscribe equally valid impressions of the Real, Hick’s pluralistic hypothesis would seem to be justified on pragmatic grounds.

E. Problems of The ineffably Real

In his hypothesis, Hick leaps to the conclusion that all religions are human response to the Real. The Real Hick’s concept of the Real uses the kantian epistemological categories. There are noumenal (for the Real an sich) and phenomenal (for the Real as variously experienced). As we know, there are three key ideas in Hick’s concept of the Real such as, the Real is ineffable, the ground of morality, and experienced through the phenomenal aspect of religions.
Still we have to criticize leveled at Kant concerning the relationship between the noumenal and the phenomenal. How is it possible to derive a relationship between them when the former is beyond cognitive apprehension? Here Kant would see no problem as the noumenal is always postulated. Yet for Hick the noumenal Real is experienced through the phenomenal religious realm, and thus there is a problem with the ineffable Real in that no formal concepts can apply to the Real. How we are left with the ineffable Real that is at the same time accessible and known within the experience of the phenomenal religious realm.

Religious Pluralism as a Moral Necessity

Hick’s pluralistic hypothesis is actually developed by his acceptance of the cultural relativity of religious truth-claims. Here, from the very beginning Hick wants to challenge the need for a response to a specific mode in order to be saved. He also wants to move from orthodox into the praxis that the latter being required if we want to begin to say that salvation is the work of God. In addition this is for his achieved as far as one is in relation with God. Hick interprets the world religions as alms for soul-making and culturally determined points of contact with God. So, all religions seem equally good at producing morally and spiritually good people.

Through his pluralistic hypothesis, Hick wants to remove the idea of conversion as converting crusades. Any contact, with members of other religions should be done, not to displace but to deepen and enlarge their relationship with God. Thus Hick’s hypothesis is as something required if we are to tell in tension the idea of a God of love and the need for salvation on the ground that conflict among different religion believers can be minimized.

2. The possibility of Applying Hick’s Pluralistic Hypothesis in Indonesia

In the context of Indonesia, as we know Indonesia is one of the most pluralistic societies in the world. Within the Indonesian context in recent years, religious conflicts have again risen in larger scope and caused quite many of deaths. It can be easily assumed that the riots in the traditional areas, such as those in Kutupang, Ambon, Poso and so on were driven by difference in religions. Lastly, the bombing tragedy in Legian, Bali in 2002 is suspected of those who have narrow mind in their religious interpretation toward plurality of religions.

The horrified toward the conflicts based on religions diversity have caused the need of understanding pluralism have spread larger. In Indonesia, this can be measured from the rise of good response of Muhammadiyah and NU towards understanding pluralism. LIPIW and Lakpesdam NU have wanted to avoid the understanding religious teaching exclusively. Similarly, the figure of Christian such as Muslim Sutrisno has the same opinion with NU and Muhammadiyah towards understanding pluralism. He wrote in journal of Ulumul Qur’an (No.4 Vol IV, 1992) that we, Indonesian people, should have dialogue between Muslim and non-Muslim who have same opinion in using structural approach such as Gutiérrez and in using social and humanity approach like Ali syar’i ati and his people power theology to create an inter-religious dialogue.

There is also a polemic toward understanding pluralism. This can be seen from what have happened in NU, Muhammadiyah and Christianity in Indonesia. We can see that the pure interpretation of religious teaching has been talked by traditional penantren (Islamic centre) of NU, the young generation of NU preferred to discuss ‘liberal Islam’. Similarly while some Muhammadiyah movements have much spirit to abolish TBC (Tahayyal, Bida’ah and Khurufiat), their young generation prefer to have a good understanding toward Transformative Islam (Al-Mandar, 2002:140).

Moreover, as said by Josias Longkong when he presented his paper on jihad in Christian’s perspective, there are many intellectual Christians who have trapped in interpreting the Bible with exegetical that is an interpretation using their own perspectives. Still, Longkong said that intellectual Christians should understand their religious teaching with exegetical that is an interpretation to the texts as what it should be interpreted (Al-Mandar, 2002:139).

Generally, all religious conflicts that happened in Indonesia were mainly based on exclusive truth and salvation claims. The two claims are main topics of theology. On this account, it will be relevant to discuss with the theme of Hick’s pluralistic hypothesis.

In Indonesian context, the concept of Hick’s pluralistic hypothesis cognitively should be ethically based on religious life in Indonesia. It is because to some extents, most of religions existing in Indonesia ethically have similar standard in their moral value.

Using Hick’s views on his pluralistic hypothesis on religious life in Indonesia, we will have wisdom and maturity in perceiving our religious teaching. Resulting from this perception, we will also be wise and mature in understanding the plurality of religions in Indonesia. Thus, it be-
quences easier to realize a peaceful religious life in Indonesia.

For Muslims in Indonesia as majority, this is a duty to find the authentic source of Islamic teaching, the elements and seeds that can be nurtured as the basis for religious tolerance. Such are some of the basic tenets in the Qur'an related to tolerance and pluralistic persuasion. These principles should then be combined with the principles of the meeting of a set of common terms, or harmonization across between religion, evolving around belief in God. This has been initiated by Nurcholish Mahjuddin in Indonesia.

INCLUSION

After expounding chapter by chapter I conclude that Hick's pluralistic hypothesis actually is a response to the previously explanation of the oneness between Christianity and other religions, namely, exclusivism and inclusivism. Hick's pluralistic hypothesis in the great religious faiths are different culturally formed response to the Ultimate Reality, and independently valid channels or contexts of the human salvific transformation. The Real is actually the ground and source of anything. In addition, all religions seem equally good at producing moral and spiritually good people and must therefore be presumed to operate on the basis of the same sanctifying divine Reality.

Inevitably, Hick's hypothesis involves for Christianity. It is that the aim to unique superiority is not deeply rooted in the belief-system, as the traditional orthodoxy saying Jesus as God incarnate. As an amenable to the literal interpretation of the traditional doctrines, Hick qualifies that the incarnation and the divinity of Jesus in Christian's belief is myth or metaphor. If we say the incarnation of Jesus as a mythological idea, we have no longer to draw the negative conclusion, meaning that there is salvation in Jesus without having to say that there is no salvation other in Jesus.

Another implications of Hick's hypothesis is that the traditional atomistic doctrines, which presuppose the deity of Jesus, likewise become appropriate, and we are freed to go back to Jesus' own teaching about divine forgiveness. Borrowing Copernican Revolution, in relation with her religions, Hick's pluralistic hypothesis seems to change from theistic centrism to Theocentrism. It means that we recognize the universe of faiths centers upon the Real, and not upon Christianity or upon other religions.

Using Copernican Revolution as an analogy, Hick's tried to make a new map of religions. It means that this analogy involves an equally radical transformation in our conception of the universe of faiths and place of our own religion within it. Hick explained that he believes all of world religions share a common ethical ideal or a common soteriological structure.

It seems that in his hypothesis, Hick wants to be a neutral observer. Hick is not claiming to stand in a unique position amongst the religions. Still, there is also an inherent contradiction facing Hick's hypothesis. If we see nature of the truth, two contradiction cannot be true at the same time. Actually it is the problem of How Hick could judge that all religions are manifestation of the Same Real, in fact there are many contradiction things of conflicting truth and salvation claims, not merely different.

In his hypothesis, Hick also seems to propose a pragmatic approach to grading religious system as a function of their soteriological efficacy. Again, there is also a problem of ineffable Real that is difficult to know the relationships between but the Real are such and the Real as we perceived and experienced.

Still, Hick's pluralistic hypothesis is as something inevitably required if we are told in tension between the idea of a God of love and the idea of conflicting truth and salvation claims. Finally, if applying to Indonesian context, Hick's pluralistic hypothesis should be ethically founded to understand the plurality of religions in Indonesia. Using Hick's views on his pluralistic hypothesis on religious life in Indonesia, we will have wisdom and maturity in perceiving our religious teaching and as a result, we will also be wise and mature in understanding the plurality of religions in Indonesia.

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