



SANGKÉP:

Jurnal Kajian Sosial Keagamaan

DOI: 10.20414/sangkep.v2i2.

p-ISSN: [2654-6612](#) e-ISSN: [2656-0798](#)

Sangkep
Jurnal Kajian Sosial Keagamaan

INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE AS THE FOUNDATION OF RELIGIOUS ANTI-VIOLENCE: Praxis Implications of the Dialogality of Armada Riyanto and Pope Francis

Egidius Agu

Sekolah Tinggi Filsafat Teologi Widya Sasana Malang

Jl. Terusan Rajabasa No.2, Malang, Jawa Timur 65146

Egisubumontfortan@gmail.com

Keywords:

*Religion, Dialogue,
Interreligious, Violence,
Anti-Violence*

Abstract

The focus of this research aims to explore the views of Armada Riyanto and Pope Francis on anti-violence dialogue, especially in the context of prevention and reconciliation. This research will go through an analysis of the practical approach of these two personages in implementing dialogue as a preventive and reconciliatory tool in facing violence in the name of religion. The point of emphasis is not only to reject the emergence of violence in the name of religion, but also to encourage proactive preventive efforts. Armada Riyanto and Pope Francis believe that dialogue can be an effective means to deal with the potential for violence and to respond to the reality of existing violence. The views of these two personages emphasize the importance of dialogue as a powerful preventive instrument. Through dialogue, people can understand each other, reduce tensions, and find solutions that are fair to all parties. Both are aware that one cannot ignore the reality that life adopting a religion often displays the face of violence. A dialogal spirit becomes the foundation of prevention and reconciliation in dealing with the reality of conflict, without having to lead to violence. It is hoped that the results of this research can provide new insights into the importance of dialogue in building communities of religious believers who are more peaceful and tolerant.

Vol. 7, No. 01, 2024

 [10.20414/sangkep.v2i2](https://doi.org/10.20414/sangkep.v2i2).

Submitted: March 21st, 2024

Accepted: June 13rd, 2024



A. INTRODUCTION

Violence in the name of religion is still a frequent phenomenon in many parts of the world. Violence in the name of religion is not a recent issue; it has been there in many parts of the world for centuries, and Indonesia is no exception. These incidents are often triggered by sensitive issues related to religion that trigger conflicts between groups. Indonesia, as a country with a high spirit of religiosity, is not exempt from violence in the name of religion. It has been recorded that several times in history, the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI) has experienced various religious upheavals (Chandra, 2021). Although Indonesia adheres to the principle of Unity in Diversity (*Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*), violence in the name of religion does still occur in several regions (Sihombing, 2020). In order to uphold what they believe, proponents of Islamic fundamentalism often ignore the teachings of the Quran that instruct every Muslim to spread love, tolerance and peace. Instead, they only quote verses that can justify the violence they commit in the name of religion, framed as "jihad" (Jalil, 2021).

Some of the more egregious cases include the 2002 Bali Bombings (Aiman et al., 2023), violence in Poso, Central Sulawesi in 1992; Aceh in 2015; the 2018 Surabaya Church Bombings; and Sintang, West Kalimantan in 2021. Moreover, on April 23, 2023, quite recently, there was a death threat by one of the civil servants of the National Research and Innovation Agency against Muhammadiyah Muslims because of a difference in the date of Eid al-Fitr 1444 Hijriah (Piter, 2023). Terrorist acts are insane. Wrapped in the slogan 'jihad' they are motivated to carry out ultimate defense with violence. This sacred terminology legitimizes every act of violence that is rewarded with heavenly happiness (Riyanto, 2014a). Violence in the name of religion is the result of a person's evil behavior, resulting in the wrong practice of their religious teachings (Y, 2017). Anticipating more severe violence, for the Indonesian context, President Jokowi issued the Presidential Regulation (Perpres) Number 7 of 2021 concerning the National Action Plan for Preventing and Combating Violent Extremism that Leads to Terrorism for 2020-2024. Referring to this Perpres, extremism is a belief and/or action that uses violent means or the threat of

extreme violence, with the aim of supporting or carrying out acts of terrorism (Jalil, 2021).

The same thing happened in Myanmar, where a number of Buddhist monks committed acts of violence against the Muslim Rohingya people, ranging from acts of discrimination to forced evictions from their homes. The Myanmar government seems to let this happen, and is even considered to support the movement of these radical Buddhist groups. Similarly, terrorist and radical Christian groups such as the Army of God and the Ku Klux Klan in the United States often commit acts of violence and kill people who are considered different from their Christian faith. In addition, other radical Christian groups are also present in several countries such as 'The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in Uganda, The National Liberation Front of Tripura in India. Some also mention that Christian radical groups emerged in Indonesia during the inter-religious conflicts in the late 1990s in Poso and Ambon, such as Laskar Kristus (The Army of Christ) and Pasukan Kelelawar (The Bat Squad), as well as in Papua recently (Jalil, 2021).

Acts of violence in the name of religion, such as shooting at worshippers praying in mosques, killing doctors and nurses in abortion clinics, killing the highest government official, and even overthrowing a sovereign state. An event that emerged and shocked a superpower, and about which the news echoed in all corners of the world, was the collapse of the World Trade Center (WTC) Towers in New York, United States, on September 9, 2001. This event was also linked to a fundamentalist movement that had developed in this country (Armstrong, 2001).

This research is intended to analyze the traces of violent events and the possibilities of violence in the name of religion through the dialogality thoughts of Armada Riyanto and Pope Francis. These two personages specifically offer the idea of non-violent religion to overcome these problems through dialogue. Armada Riyanto sees the phenomenon of violence that occurs in the name of the implementation and appreciation of religious teachings as the inability of religious subjects to understand and live their religious values properly and correctly (Riyanto, 2010) while Pope Francis through *Fratelli Tutti* (FT. 282) emphasizes

that "The truth is that violence has no basis in our fundamental religious convictions, but only in their distortion" (Francis, 2021). The analysis of the thoughts of these two personages intends to contribute to the scheme of religious moderation in Indonesia in particular and in the world in general.

B. METHODS

This research was conducted using the literature study method. This involved reading, examining, reviewing, and synthesizing various sources of information such as books, articles from various journals, and previously published scientific works (Riyanto, 2020). This method is used to collect data and sources related to the research topic, namely the thoughts of Armada Riyanto and Pope Francis related to anti-violence dialogue and/or religion. Then these data and sources were analyzed using the descriptive analysis method to describe the facts collected and provide an explanation and understanding of these facts (Habsy et al., 2023). This research is thus the result of critical interpretation of the reading of the data that have been collected.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Anti-Violence Religion from Armada Riyanto's Perspective

Armada Riyanto as a philosopher who also conducts research in the field of interreligious dialogue believes that human beings from their nature long for peace and harmony. This longing can be seen in the existential phenomenon of the followers of any religion. Islam is known as a religion of peace, Christianity is known as a religion of love, Hinduism is known as a religion that emphasizes dharma, and Buddhism is known for the idea of detachment from all human suffering (Riyanto, 2010). Conceptually, the values contained in these religions refer to the same point and ideals, namely peace and harmony to be realized in everyday life (Riyanto, 2010). However, in reality, realizing these ideals of peace and harmony is not always easy. Many matters stand in the way of these lofty ideals. At the concrete, real, and mondial level (the reality in the everyday world), almost always one will find a variety of details showing the complexity of the dynamics of the problem (Riyanto, 2010).

The phenomenon of war and alienation from others in the name of religion shows that the noble values contained in the teachings of each religion become "dead" in practice. Starting from this reality, Armada Riyanto finally dares to say that the dynamics of practicing a religion are not always enchanting, but often become a disaster (Riyanto, 2010). The phenomenon of the actions of religious subjects often displays the various faces of conflicts, violence, discrimination, and even persecution (Riyanto, 2018). The phenomenon of fundamentalist intolerance destroys human relations and automatically uproots the noble values of religion from within the religious subjects when they, in the name of God and their religion, do whatever they want, are selfish and deny peace and love. This reality actually emerges from the view of superiority, meaning that people feel that their religion is at a higher level and better than any other religion.

It was this phenomenon that prompted Armada Riyanto to come up with the essential idea of anti-violence religion. This idea actually wants to emphasize that religion basically rejects violence. 'Anti-violence religion' does not refer to the doctrinal understandings of a religion, but rather the duties and responsibilities of any human subject who claims to adhere to a religion (Riyanto, 2010). In addition, anti-violent religion also implies openness, not closedness and exclusivism (Riyanto, 2010). Religious teachings are inherently opposed to violence because violence does not come from the religious teachings themselves but from the subjects who practice them. No religion intrinsically teaches violence. Thus, the spirit and practice of anti-violence in religion is more directed towards the subjects who practice their religious teachings.

Anti-violence religion is a dynamic reality, not a static motto, definition, adage, banner, jargon, or logo (Riyanto, 2014b), but must be lived out. According to Armada Riyanto, three concepts should be put in practice to realize an anti-violence religion. These concepts help create a peaceful and harmonious life of the subject adherent of a religion, and is valid as well for all humans. The three concepts are, building an embracing faith, promoting true brotherhood, and prioritizing humanitarian orientation.

First, building an embracing faith. According to Armada Riyanto, an anti-violence religion first of all implies a deep and concrete meaning that subjects

adherent of a religion must build an embracing faith (Riyanto, 2010). "Embracing" is a reality that expresses welcoming, acceptance, forgiveness (Riyanto, 2014b). "Embracing" reflects more than just physical contact; it represents a deep unity and recognition between individuals. By "embracing," all humans build emotional bridges that strengthen relationships and promote peace.

Second, Promoting true brotherhood. This point wants to highlight the value of friendship. The big question is, why in the context of realizing an anti-violence religion should there be friends and friendship? Because a friend is an "Other Me," whose various experiences of joy, hope, and anxiety are my own joy, hope, and anxiety (Riyanto, 2010). Friendship is very necessary in every situation of human life of whomsoever and whenever. Friendship triggers solidarity, togetherness, harmony, familiarity, neighborliness, a sense of being family, and the like (Riyanto, 2014b). Building friendship means getting out of oneself to get more into oneself. The more a person "crosses over" to others, the more he becomes himself. And, conversely, the more he confines himself, the less human he becomes. For, to shut oneself away is to deny the existence and role of the other (Riyanto, 2010). This attitude of "crossing over" expresses equality between fellow human beings (Aliano et al., 2023).

Third, prioritizing humanitarian orientation. The problem that often occurs is that religious people often display the face of violence. The basis of this problem is due to the reality of human imperfection in living their religion (Riyanto, 2010). Religion is intrinsically sacred, because it contains teachings from God himself. Meanwhile, humans are weak, sinful and imperfect creatures. Violence in turn stems from human weakness in living what is holy and divine (Riyanto, 2010). The defect in the articulation of the divine message, expressed in its being lived, requires an open humanitarian orientation. Prioritizing an open humanitarian orientation means seeking cooperative action in bearing the weight and hassle of this life, not by excluding or condemning one's fellow human beings. Openness refers to attitudes of welcoming and forgiveness, not hatred or revenge. Therefore, a humanitarian orientation in building an anti-violence religion is nothing but undertaking actions promoting peace with one's fellow human beings, here and now (Riyanto, 2010).

2. Anti-Violence Religion from Pope Francis' Perspective

Pope Francis emphasizes that “at times fundamentalist violence is unleashed in some groups, of whatever religion, by the rashness of their leaders” (FT. 284). Meaning, religion that intrinsically presents a face of peace, love, embrace and forgiveness, in its practice often shows the opposite. Leaders who lack wisdom or understanding of religious teachings can mislead their followers. On the one hand, religious leaders misinterpret Divine Revelation, but on the other hand it is not uncommon for religious leaders to utilize the ignorance of their followers by proclaiming to them false teachings for personal gain. In extreme cases, this can trigger eruptions of violent actions between religious communities that are actually incompatible with the teachings of religions that generally teach peace. Therefore, violence initiated by religious leaders should not be tolerated (Daffa, 2023).

Responding to the so highly precarious situation, Pope Francis has issued an imperative recommendation to religious leaders: "As religious leaders, we are called to be true 'people of dialogue', to cooperate in building peace not as intermediaries but as authentic mediators (FT. 284). The call for peace by the Pope as the supreme leader of the Roman Catholic Church is not limited to dead words stored neatly in a document, but is truly lived. The meeting between Pope Francis and Ahmad Al-Tayyeb, the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Mosque, is an expression of dialogality and a concrete proof of the call for peace. At the meeting, these two great personages both signed the "Document of Human Fraternity". For both of them, the Abu Dhabi meeting was a joyful and encouraging encounter (Francis & Al-Tayyeb, 2019).

In that fraternal encounter, these two great personages pointed out, “We resolutely [declare] that religions must never incite war, hateful attitudes, hostility and extremism, nor must they incite violence or the shedding of blood. These tragic realities are the consequence of a deviation from religious teachings. They result from a political manipulation of religions and from interpretations made by religious groups who, in the course of history, have taken advantage of the power of religious sentiment in the hearts of men and women” (FT. 285). In addition, together they also emphasized that all parties should stop using religion to incite people to hatred, violence, extremism, and blind fanaticism, as well as to refrain

from using the name of God to justify acts of murder, alienation, terrorism, and oppression (Francis & Al-Tayyeb, 2019). Violence leads to more violence, hatred to more hatred, death to more death. We must break this cycle which seems inescapable (FT. 227).

3. Dialogue on the Foundations of an Anti-Violence Religion

According to Armada Riyanto, religion is the most complete form of dialogue between humans and their God and between humans and their fellow human beings (Riyanto, 2010). In another section, he emphasizes that religion is the origin of the never ending wandering of humans to unite with their God, because God is the source of all peace, happiness, and love (Riyanto, 2010). This means that in the context of religious people, dialogue is always triangular. The dialogue of "I" with God always expects its bias on the dialogue of "I" with "The Others". Starting from the "I'm Dialogal", the genuine spirit and praxis of a dialogue are vertical and horizontal. Vertical means the relationship of "I" with God as the Creator and horizontal means the relationship of "I" with "The Others".

Religious people who serve God but neglect others are chasing after a mere utopia. The opposite should happen, namely serving God in the form of caring for others regardless of any differences. It is only in unity with "The Others" expressed in dialogue that one can reach God. This is in line with the view of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) which emphasizes, "Walk in man and you will arrive in God" as quoted by Kaluge (Kaluge, 2021). This quote is a triptych - Man-You-God.

For Kaluge, the triptych must be read from the center as the axis of a very private life that nevertheless is open to a very public life. "Man-You-God" – 'you' stands on the axis of life that never thinks of man without God, and never thinks of God without man (Kaluge, 2021). In short, this triptych underscores the relationality that is built in the spirit of dialogality. "Some people attempt to flee from reality, taking refuge in their own little world; others react to it with destructive violence. Yet "between selfish indifference and violent protest there is always another possible option: that of dialogue. Dialogue between generations;

dialogue among our people, for we are that people; readiness to give and receive, while remaining open to the truth" (FT. 199).

At the beginning of the Encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis expresses the intention of the publication of this encyclical by saying, "I offer this social Encyclical as a modest contribution to continued reflection, in the hope that in the face of present-day attempts to eliminate or ignore others, we may prove capable of responding with a new vision of fraternity and social friendship that will not remain at the level of words. Although I have written it from the Christian convictions that inspire and sustain me, I have sought to make this reflection an invitation to dialogue among all people of good will" (FT. 6). This point aims to highlight the relationality of humanity that transcends differences, including religious beliefs.

This social encyclical is a contribution to reflect on the need to confront various forms of exclusion with a new vision of fraternity and social friendship that goes beyond words. Although rooted in Christian belief, this reflection is offered inclusively to serve as one of the foundations of dialogue for all those of good will despite differences in belief. "Just as there can be no dialogue with 'the others' without a sense of our own identity, so there can be no openness between peoples except on the basis of love for one's own land, one's own people, one's own cultural roots. I cannot truly encounter another unless I stand on firm foundations, for it is on the basis of these that I can accept the gift the other brings and in turn offer an authentic gift of my own" (FT. 143). This means that the activity of dialogue stems from differences and emerges from the distinctiveness and uniqueness of each individual or group to build mutual understanding.

It needs to be acknowledged that people in this world have nothing in common, except that all are God's creatures, and besides that, all are different and unique. Although there are similarities in culture, not necessarily there are similarities in the way of thinking and looking at things. Although people have the same religion, not necessarily they have the same culture and language. Although they have the same religion, language, and culture, not necessarily they have the same experience, and so on. This is to emphasize the uniqueness of each person, who can only enrich and complement one another in and through open dialogue.

In the context of nationality, openness between nations begins with a love for one's national identity, one's own citizenship and culture. Without a strong identity, dialogue between nations will lose its important foundation. Love for one's country, nation, and culture plays a key role in opening the door to respectful and understanding dialogue between nations. Thus, bloody conflicts due to differences (Riyanto et al., 2023) can be avoided.

Pope Francis recognizes his religious identity of being a Christian. Nevertheless, the encyclical is inclusive. This means that it is open to all human beings of good will and who together strive for social friendship without barriers of culture, race, religion, and language. This encyclical is itself a form and expression of dialogue. It is precisely through these differences that the unity and mutual enrichment of each party are found through a dialogal spirit. This idea is emphasized in the FT encyclical by saying, "we need to communicate with each other, to discover the gifts of each person, to promote that which unites us, and to regard our differences as an opportunity to grow in mutual respect. Patience and trust are called for in such dialogue, permitting individuals, families and communities to hand on the values of their own culture and welcome the good that comes from others' experiences" (FT.134).

At this point dialogue does not stop at mere words, but is realized in the actions of daily life. Nor does it stop at a certain time and space, but becomes a way of life. This means that dialogue is not a mere formalism, but rather an emanation of life as social beings who in their existential experience always coexist with other people with all kinds of differences. Related to this, Armada Riyanto emphasizes that dialogue emerges precisely from the awareness that, evidently, our life lived together is very rich and fascinating. (Riyanto, 2001).

A year before issuing the encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, in the document *On Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together*, also known as the Abu Dhabi document, Pope Francis and Ahmad Al-Tayyeb declared that dialogue aims to create peace. Faced with the reality that religious leaders are sometimes the cause of violence (cf. FT. 284), Pope Francis and Ahmad Al-Tayyeb affirmed, "In the name of freedom, that God has given to all human beings creating them free and distinguishing them by this gift; In the name of justice and mercy, the foundations of prosperity and the cornerstone of faith; In the name of all persons

of good will present in every part of the world; In the name of God and of everything stated thus far; Al-Azhar al-Sharif and the Muslims of the East and West, together with the Catholic Church and the Catholics of the East and West, declare the adoption of a culture of dialogue as the path; mutual cooperation as the code of conduct; reciprocal understanding as the method and standard" (Francis & Al-Tayyeb, 2019).

Concerning the purpose of dialogue, Pope Francis explains it very firmly and straightforwardly, by saying, "Approaching, speaking, listening, looking at, coming to know and understand one another, and to find common ground: all these things are summed up in the one word 'dialogue'. If we want to encounter and help one another, we have to dialogue" (FT. 198). Dialogue is the way to peace. The spirit of peace is realized through dialogue as an effort to promote a culture of tolerance, improve various economic, social and political problems, continue the highest moral virtues aimed at by religions, and dialogue becomes a cure for spiritual and religious diseases that sometimes emphasize the spirit of materialism. In short, dialogue among the various religions of the world is essential for realizing peace among individuals, communities and nations (Cinar, 2004).

Interestingly, when it comes to the benefits of dialogue, Pope Francis in *Fratelli Tutti* does not explain it explicitly, but instead he imagines and asks about the gloom of a world without dialogue. In this regard, he says, "I have only to think of what our world would be like without the patient dialogue of the many generous persons who keep families and communities together" (FT. 198). The importance of patient dialogue in maintaining family and community unity cannot be underestimated. Without it, the world would lose the diversity and balance that so many generous people have nurtured. Patience in dialogue is the main foundation in preserving harmonious relationships and building closeness between individuals.

This is to say that dialogue is something that absolutely needs to be done. Armada Riyanto asserts that the human being is a "Dialogal I". The "Dialogal I" emphasizes respect, equality, and a sense of fellowship. The "Dialogal I" is the nature of the presence of human beings that was intended from the moment of creation. With a negation sentence, Armada Riyanto even explains that when the

character of dialogality is suppressed, manipulation of the purpose of human creation is happening. Human presence is dialogal. Dialogality cannot be reductive, nor can it be ripped from the individual 'I'. In short, human beings without dialogue are an impossibility (Riyanto, 2018).

The major challenge in dialogue is that not everyone is willing to dialogue. Individuals or groups who do not want to dialogue are generally opposed to diversity and change and feel superior. Their religion is considered of a higher level and more truthful than other religions. It is important to realize that dialogal faith requires new awareness (Wahono & Riyanto, 2002). In the context of Indonesia, language, religion, culture, and customs become a challenge in conducting dialogue. Thus, it is crucial to develop an ethical framework for interfaith dialogue and, in the Indonesian context, contextualization of the dialogue is essential (Riyanto, 2023). In line with Armada Riyanto, Douglas Pratt says that the socio-contextual reasons for engaging in interreligious dialogue refer to broader contextual factors that can help or indirectly encourage the creation of dialogue (Pratt, 2021).

The Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue presents forms of dialogue such as dialogue of life, dialogue of works, dialogue of faith experience, and theological dialogue (Riyanto, 2010). What the Pontifical Council affirms regarding dialogue is also in line with what Cornille affirms. Cornille suggests that the term 'dialogue' can be "used in many ways, ranging from peaceful coexistence and friendly exchanges to active engagement with the teachings and practices of the other, and from cooperation toward social change to common prayer and participation in the ritual life of the other" (Corpuz, 2021).

Whatever form the dialogue takes, for it to be fruitful it is important to pay attention to three things: 1) The dialogue must begin, and continue for many years; 2) At the end, concrete documents must be produced, and disseminated as widely as possible; 3) Maximum authority must be given to the documents produced (Riyanto, 2011). This idea finds its application in a personage who is the supreme leader of the Roman Catholic Church, namely Pope Francis. Pope Francis, in his efforts to realize a dialogue on anti-violence religion in order to create peace, has not only done so through direct meetings between religious and government leaders, but also produced documents and encyclicals. These

documents and encyclicals are expected to reach every person from generation to generation, anywhere and anytime.

This endeavor was undertaken because dialogue is extremely helpful in eliminating violence in the name of religion (as well as other differences) and creating peace among people (Phan, 2022). Therefore, when individuals or groups engage in dialogue, it presupposes openness and this openness will lead to change. The change in question is the change in a mindset that always considers itself superior and that brings all parties to a spirit of mutual respect for freedom. Dialogue is essentially directed towards mutual understanding in obedience to the truth and mutual respect for freedom (Yusof & Majid, 2012) and at the same time anticipates conflicts over (religious) differences (Fajar et al., 2023). Dialogue helps open the horizons of new ways of thinking and is the path to the spirit of peace (Kebingin & Riyanto, 2022).

D. CONCLUSION

Interreligious dialog is a communication process that involves adherents of various religions in exchanging their understanding, views, and experiences about their respective religious beliefs. Pope Francis and Armada Riyanto have made important contributions in understanding and promoting the importance of interreligious dialog. Both of them emphasize that interfaith dialogue is not just about reaching agreement or eliminating differences, but rather about respecting diversity and strengthening the human values that different religions uphold in common. Interreligious dialogue, according to them, is the path to peace and tolerance between people.

A fundamental aspect of dialogue is the importance of listening intently to the views of other religions without compromising one's own religious identity. Through a deep understanding of the beliefs and practices of other religions, one can strengthen one's own religious beliefs and values while building respect for diversity. The importance of respecting diversity and building interfaith relationships is based on the common ground of fundamental human values, such as justice, compassion and truth. Despite differences in religious beliefs, many universal values exist that can serve as a basis for interfaith cooperation. An

outlook centered on human values and respect for religious diversity will help in inspiring religious subjects to engage in efforts to build peace and harmony in the spirit of love between faith communities.

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