



## FARID ESACK'S QUR'ANIC HERMENEUTICS OF PLURALISM FOR INTERRELIGIOUS COOPERATION IN INDONESIA

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### **Abstract**

This paper elaborates the application of Farid Esack's Qur'anic hermeneutics to build interreligious cooperation in Indonesia. Esack's Qur'anic hermeneutics, which was formulated as a response to the social injustice in South Africa during apartheid regime, emphasizes the function of religion in liberating people from oppression. Considering that injustices happen not only in a particular religious community, Esack urges the adherents of religions to cooperate in the struggle against oppression. In doing so, Esack proposes Qur'anic hermeneutics in which it gives a theological ground for interreligious cooperation toward liberation and social justice. This paper looks for the possibility of Esack's Qur'anic hermeneutics to be applied in Indonesia, which still faces problems of humanity in grave such as poverty, social justice, lack of education, gender equality, environment, among others. The paper starts with the elaboration of Esack's idea before eventually offers methodological approaches to its application not only to build interreligious harmony but also interreligious cooperation to help overcome humanity problems in Indonesia.

**Keywords:** Qur'anic Hermeneutics, Farid Esack, Interreligious Cooperation.

### **Abstrak**

Artikel ini membahas penerapan hermeneutika al-Qur'an yang diajukan oleh Farid Esack untuk membangun kerjasama antar agama di Indonesia. Hermeneutika al-Qur'an yang diajukan oleh Esack, merupakan bentuk respon terhadap ketidakadilan sosial di Afrika Selatan pada masa rezim apartheid, yang menekankan fungsi agama

dalam membebaskan manusia dari penindasan. Menyadari bahwa ketidakadilan yang terjadi tidak hanya dalam satu agama tertentu, Esack mendesak para pemeluk agama untuk saling bekerja sama dalam perjuangan melawan penindasan. Untuk itu, Esack menawarkan hermeneutika al-Qur'an yang memberikan dasar-dasar teologis bagi kerjasama antaragama untuk pembebasan dan keadilan sosial. Artikel ini mencari kemungkinan hermeneutika al-Qur'an yang diajukan Esack untuk bisa diterapkan di Indonesia yang masih menghadapi banyak persoalan kemanusiaan, antara lain kemiskinan, keadilan sosial, keterbelakangan pendidikan, kesetaraan gender, dan masalah lingkungan. Artikel ini dimulai dengan mengelaborasi pemikiran Esack untuk kemudian menawarkan pendekatan metodologis dalam penerapannya, tidak hanya untuk menciptakan hubungan antaragama yang harmonis, namun juga untuk membangun kerjasama antar agama dalam rangka membantu mengatasi masalah-masalah kemanusiaan di Indonesia.

**Kata Kunci:** Hermeneutika al-Qur'an, Farid Esack, Kerjasama Antar Agama

## Introduction

Interreligious tension and conflict in Indonesia still become a problem to overcome in Indonesia, especially between Muslims and Christians. Most of the conflicts relate to the exclusive understanding among them. Both perceive universal characteristic of their religions; the right and unique religion, the only salvation, the only God's revelation, etc. Thus, adherents of both religions believe to have rights to make any attempt to save and invite other people coming and converting to their religions.

Farid Esack's Qur'anic hermeneutics of pluralism offers theoretical framework on how Muslims read Qur'anic verses on the interreligious relationship, especially between Abrahamic religions. It promotes a pluralist and harmonious life among different religions. Moreover, Esack's hermeneutics also provides theological basis for interreligious solidarity and cooperation against injustice and oppression. While Esack's hermeneutics was meant to respond to a particular situation of South African apartheid system, this paper argues that it can also works within Indonesian context.

Indonesia has many religions but also many poor. Esack's hermeneutics also encourages a liberation from disadvantages of life on the basis that the Qur'an was revealed to liberate people. The Prophet Muḥammad was not only a religious leader, but he also played an important role in changing social and

structural inequality and improving the quality of people's lives. All religions, in fact, have a common call to the praxis of liberation.

This is what Tandirerung has discussed when she compares Esack's idea to Paul F. Knitter's one on the liberative dialogue.<sup>1</sup> In her thesis, Tandirerung emphasizes on the praxis of liberation in Esack's and Knitter's idea of interreligious dialogue, in which Muslims and Christians in Indonesia in particular can apply both thinkers' proposal of liberating people from any kind of injustice and oppression. Elsewhere, Rahmawati explores Esack's proposal on the spirit of Qur'anic hermeneutics to support the struggle for justice and liberation,<sup>2</sup> this paper will focus on Esack's proposal on the importance of interreligious collaboration to address the problems of humanity in Indonesia. Instead of competing each other to pursue their exclusive truth claims, I argue, they should employ their commitment to working together overcoming social injustices, alleviating poverty and other problem of humanity. This paper thus will explore Esack's Qur'anic hermeneutics, which focuses on pluralism and liberation, and then seek for the possibility of applying it specifically on the interreligious cooperation to help overcome the problems of humanity in Indonesia.

### 1. Farid Esack and South African Context

In contemporary Islamic thought, religious pluralism has been a discourse that many Muslim scholars have introduced to the Islamic community. One of the scholars is Farid Esack, a South African exegete who is also well-known as a human right activist. Brought up under an apartheid regime ruling South Africa, Esack is of a certain opinion that religion should function to struggle against any unjust order. To make a radical and fundamental change, according to Esack, there is no way but to constructively reinterpret religious discourse and role so as to be a tool of liberation. Using yet controversial a hermeneutical analysis on the Qur'an, Farid Esack raises the idea of pluralism dealing critically with the struggle against oppression and toward liberation for South Africa.

Born in Wynberg, a suburb of Cape, South Africa in 1959, Farid Esack grew up in a poor family with his mother as a single parent since his father died when he was three weeks old. His childhood was offended since he lived under the discriminative politics of apartheid in South Africa. Esack's very passionate

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<sup>1</sup> Lidya Kambo Tandirerung, "Liberative Dialogue: A Comparative Analysis of the Proposals of Paul F. Knitter and Farid Esack for a Liberative Dialogue of Religions and Their Contribution to Muslim-Christian Relation in Indonesia" (Universitas Gadjah Mada, 2004).

<sup>2</sup> Erik Sabti Rahmawati, "Spirit of Liberation and Justice in Farid Esack's Hermeneutics of Qur'an," *Ulumuna*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (2016), p. 119-146.

commitment to the redress of injustice was formed by “just looking at his mother”. He had witnessed the suffering of his mother who succumbed to the triple oppression of women under apartheid; racism, capitalism, and patriarchy.<sup>3</sup> Esack vividly recalls the hunger and cold of his earliest years, scavenging in the gutters for apple cores and running rather than walking to school to try to stave off frostbite. All those experiences filled him strongly with an abiding commitment to a comprehensive sense of justice.

Given the poverty and deprivation of his background, it is inspiring how early Esack’s intellectual gifts developed. Esack won a scholarship to attend a seminary in Pakistan to do his theological training in a conservative institute where “*wordly-things*” were frowned upon.<sup>4</sup> He spent eight years, 1974-1982 in Pakistan, where he did his undergraduate studies in Islam at Jami’ah Ulum al-Islamia and graduated from Jami’ah Alimiyyah al-Islamia with a Bachelors Degree in Islamic Law & Theology. He did post-graduate research in Qur’anic Studies at Jami’ah Abu Bakr (all in Karachi) and completed a doctoral degree in Qur’anic Hermeneutics at University of Birmingham (UK). In 1984-1989, Esack was the National Coordinator of Call of Islam, an organization committed to inter-religious solidarity for justice and peace and the struggle against apartheid.

The context of oppression in South Africa pushed Esack to be sensitive and critical of the Qur’anic rethoric of liberation. The Qur’an has to be interpreted through the eyes of justice. He eventually created a new model of interpretation in the framework of circular hermeneutics. The prime cause that motivated Esack to propose a hermeneutical reading of the Qur’an is that much of the suffering inflicted on the people of South Africa was committed in the name of, and sometimes with, the scriptural support of a religious tradition, particularly that of Christianity.<sup>5</sup>

Unfortunately, the socio-political culture of South Africa that ran the apartheid system had divided religious believers into many groups and interests. This polarization brought a divisive struggle of the people against the hegemony and oppression of the apartheid reign. In South Africa, it was characteristic of accommodation theology to take on the mocking of the faith. Ironically, organizations such as Christ for All Nations and the International Islamic Propagation Centre, in varying degrees, continuously displayed support for

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<sup>3</sup> Farid Esack, *Qur’an, Liberation and Pluralism; An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity against Oppression*, (Oxford: Oneworld, 1997), p. 2.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

the apartheid authority structures at any time they paused in their onslaughts against the religious other.<sup>6</sup> This was because they committed to each theological opinion mostly produced by religious elites who did not allow their people to work together with other adherents.

## 2. The Idea of the Self and the Other

Esack has successfully made a bridge connecting theological stiffness among the oppressed by proposing a theology of religious pluralism wedded intrinsically to one of liberation. The very basic concept of this idea is redefining the Self and the Other among religious communities according to the Qur'an.<sup>7</sup> A prominent consequence of this has been his questioning of what he takes to be traditional Sunni verdicts on the religious efficacy of the Religions of the Book. In his exploration, Esack critically traces religious (Islamic) views, which he assumes are to be reinterpreted progressively. Among them are the concepts of *iman* (faith or belief), *Islam*, *kufr* (disbelief), *ahl al-kitab* (People of the Book, usually employed for Jews and Christians), and *musyrik* (believer in a deity other than God).

According to Esack, the supersensory salvation history conceptualized in the *Kalam* (Islamic theology) is not enough; he will only approve of doctrine which allows Christians and Jews, and others, to achieve salvation on their own terms. This obliges him to examine and attempt to defuse the numerous Qur'anic verses that appear to condemn pre-Muslim forms of religion, a task to which he brings to bear the theory developed in particular by Rashid Rida that *iman* and *kufr* do not denote a 'reified' faith and unbelief, but dispositions of the heart which can exist within any religious denomination. He declines, for instance, even to attempt any defusing of a verse such as "They commit *kufr* who say, "God is Jesus, the son of Mary".<sup>8</sup>

Additionally, in the application of his liberative-praxis theology, Esack emphasizes the concept of *wilayah* (comradeship, friendship, or alliance) to create inter-religious solidarity. According to Esack, there are three groups mentioned in the Qur'an whose *wilayah* is prohibited. First, people who abuse the *din* (religion) of the *mukminin* (believers) and mock the signs of God. Second are the people who deny the truth. Third, people who oppress and persecute the *mukminin*. In some Qur'anic verses, the ban to work with others generally deals

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 189.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 179.

<sup>8</sup> Q.S. 5:17.

with their motif to seek *wilayah*. All events recorded by the Qur'an show that the motives primarily are placing personal interest over public interest, looking for personal glory and power, and tending to narrow tribalism.

In the context of South Africa, *wilayah* is applied on the aspect of socio-politics and religion. It has two synonyms; collaboration and solidarity. In a pejorative meaning, an oppressed community which joins in a socio-political structure of oppression is included as collaborators, whereas solidarity refers to the relationship among different components in a struggle toward liberation. Esack insists that the Qur'anic ban to take *wilayah* from *kafir* (unbeliever) tends to the meaning of collaborating with the oppressors, not solidarity with the oppressed and exploited people. The context of banning in the Qur'an is not based on doctrinal terms, rather on the situation of hatred, war, and physical threat to the believers.<sup>9</sup>

Therefore, according to Esack, in the oppression context in South Africa, any person or any group that struggle for justice and against oppression of the apartheid regime is categorized as the Self. On the contrary, whoever collaborates with the oppressing regime is the opponent that has to be opposed relentlessly. Esack categorizes them as the Other and attributes to them the opponents of the prophetic responsibility.<sup>10</sup>

### 3. Toward Qur'anic Hermeneutics on Pluralism

From the explanation above, it is clear that Esack's *tafsir* (interpretation) is driven by praxis. Esack's hermeneutics tries to elaborate the universality of interpretation in the historical context of the Prophet Muhammad to the contextual reading of South African pluralism. Esack relates Qur'anic attitude towards other believers as an effort to create solidarity among the oppressed. Esack eventually comes to discuss his hermeneutics of pluralism for developing an Islamic theology of pluralism in the framework of liberative-praxis. He borrows from the liberation theology of Gutierrez and others to suggest that old-fashioned scriptural readings which acquiesce to establishment tyranny must be displaced by a liberative exegesis that emphasizes God's justice.

Esack tries to formulate his ideas in a hermeneutic of liberation. The basic perspective built by Esack in his hermeneutic is emphasis on an interpretation

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<sup>9</sup> Farid Esack, "Qur'anic Hermeneutics: Problem and Prospects", *The Muslim World*, Vol. 83, No. 02 (1993), p.114-141.

<sup>10</sup> Esack, *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism; An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity against Oppression; ....*

that is particular, contextual, and having praxis relevance from a text.<sup>11</sup> Esack quotes the outline of the Call of Islam's basic position that the Qur'an is addressed to people, and the social context of the people constitutes a main factor of its hermeneutics. The famine of South African people, humiliation and expropriation by the reign in one hand, and the struggle against oppression in the other hand, has fashioned its hermeneutical epistemology.

This idea refers to reception hermeneutics which is popular in Biblical traditions. Reception hermeneutics is generally included in the school of text functionalism, which sees that the existence of a text lies in its functional and pragmatic dimension.<sup>12</sup> Not only does this hermeneutic consider the text and its original audiences, but also takes into account the transformation between the horizon of the past and the present.<sup>13</sup> The truth of a scriptural text can be observed from how far it can solve contemporary humanity problems.

Prominent Muslim scholars who have influenced Esack in formulating his hermeneutics are Fazlur Rahman and Mohammed Arkoun. Rahman insists that the Qur'an is the divine response to the moral and social situation of the Prophet's Arabia. He thus pleads for a hermeneutical theory that will help Muslim understand the meaning of the Qur'an as a whole so that both the theological sections of the Qur'an and its ethico-legal parts become unified.<sup>14</sup>

Meanwhile, Arkoun emphasizes the need to reconstruct the historical background of each (Qur'anic) text or period and for greater consideration to be given to the aesthetics of reception: how a discourse is received by its listeners and readers<sup>15</sup>. He offers the hope that semiotics and linguistics can create the possibility of reading religious texts in a new way.<sup>16</sup> Esack employs the methodology used by Arkoun that Esack clearly defines –as Arkoun does- as a 'regressive-progressive' procedure. The regressive procedure means continuously

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<sup>11</sup> Farid Esack, "Contemporary Religious Thought in South Africa and the Emergence of Qur'anic Hermeneutical Notions," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, Vol. 02, No. 02, (1991): p. 206-226.

<sup>12</sup> J.J. Buckley, "The Hermeneutical Deadlock between Revelationists, Textualists, and Functionalists," *Modern Theology*, Vol. 6, No. 4, (1990), p. 307-415; Richard E. Palmer, *Hermeneutics* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1969).

<sup>13</sup> E. Schusler Fiorenza, "The Crisis of Scriptural Authority: Interpretation and Reception," *Interpretation*, Vol. 44, No. 4, 1990, p. 265-289.

<sup>14</sup> Fazlur Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1982).

<sup>15</sup> Muhammad Arkoun, "The Concept of Authority in Islamic Thought," in *Islam: State and Society*, ed. Klaus Ferdinand and M. Muzaffar (London: Curzon Press, 1988), p. 56–58.

<sup>16</sup> Muhammad Arkoun, *Rethinking Islam*, Occasional Papers Series (Washington DC: Centre for Contemporary Arab Studies, 1987), p. 23; Victoria S. Harrison, "Hermeneutics, Religious Language and the Qur'an," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, Vol. 21, No. 3 (2010), p. 207-220.

revering the past, not to just project on fundamental texts the demands and needs of the present, but also to discover the historical mechanisms and factors producing these texts and assigning them such functions. The progressive procedure means reworking the texts in order to assign a contemporary and contextual meaning to them by examining the process of transformation of initial contents and functions into new ones.<sup>17</sup>

Esack, nevertheless, is not consistent in employing his method. On one hand, Esack sometimes works on general principles of exegesis used in classical *'ulum al-qur'an* (traditional Qur'anic studies) such as *asbab al-nuzul* (occasions of revelation), *nasikh wa al-mansukh* (abrogation and abrogated), and *munasabah al-ayat* (co-relating verses). On the other hand, he only quotes few verses that he assumes to be normatively adequate on which he bases his religious views. For example, Esack takes only some verses about *iman*, *islam*, and *kufur* and chooses the more inclusive and universal meaning of the terms using linguistic arguments proposed by classical interpretation. Yet Esack does not explore linguistic arguments when interpreting *musyrik* and *ahl al-kitab*, rather he considers more the socio-religious phenomena of South Africa. He does not clearly distinguish the status of religious texts using the "historical and literary criticism" of Fazlur Rahman.<sup>18</sup>

Another critique addressed to Esack especially coming from the South African Muslim perspective is that Esack's odd but interesting exercise in role reversal was inspired by his admirable willingness to cooperate with Christian opponents of apartheid. Among South African Muslims, however, he remained a provocative and sharply controversial figure. Most mosques and Islamic organizations saw him as a dangerous gadfly, either because they were worried about his support for the ANC, which they believed might launch Ugandan-style expulsions of South Africa's Asians, or because they were bothered by his apparent co-option by Selly Oak-type Christians. Deprived of a substantial base of Muslim support, in the tense, dying years of the apartheid regime he found himself in the sparsely-populated veld which separated two laagers: the accommodationist or nonpolitical movements (such as the *Tablighi Jamat*, or Ahmad Deedat's Islamic Propagation Centre), and advocates of armed resistance to the *taghut* (devil, anyone who turns from good; in this case properly translated as oppressor) of apartheid (*Qibla*, the *Murabitun*, and a confusion of others).

<sup>17</sup> Esack, 'Contemporary Religious Thought in South Africa and the Emergence of Qur'anic Hermeneutical Notions.' *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, Vol. 02, No. 02, (1991): p. 206-226.

<sup>18</sup> Fazlur Rahman, "Historical versus Literary Criticism," in *Approach to Islam in Religious Studies*, ed. Richard C. Martin (Tucson, 1985), p. 198-202.



This refusal by South African Islam drove Esack further into the embrace of Christian activist movements, who paid for his studies and welcomed him on their platforms.

This religious pluralism discourse, however, brings Farid Esack to a different style among other Muslim pluralists. Not only does the discourse create harmony among different religious adherents, but also builds inter-religious solidarity against apartheid. It is a re-interpretative reading of the position and role of religions that was assumed to have failed to work on prophetic task in the context of oppression in South Africa. It also serves as a radical reaction to the traditional-conservative Islamic thought paradigm, which is in practice infiltrated by political power.

To conclude, Esack's pluralism can be observed from two perspectives. First, it is a critique of Islamic mainstream thought that seems to lose the spirit of reinterpreting the meaning of transcendent truth. Particularly when positioning other religious believers, Muslims tend to affirm the text literally and the context of truth in the past; in and by early Muslim exegetes and generation, which condemned other religious believers as reified faith and disbelief so that they will not be saved. Esack launches to reformulate the text for the need of the contemporary context while still retaining basic principles of defining religious others.

Second, Esack's pluralism constitutes a discursive-practice moving into a tool of liberation (politic-ideologist) in terms of unifying the oppressed people -without considering the different backgrounds of race, ethnicity, tribe, skin-color, and religion- against the hegemony of the apartheid regime. Unfortunately, Esack prefers to emphasize the praxis dimensions of the texts, albeit with linguistic, historic, and traditional exegesis supports, rather than bearing in mind transcendental aspects of the knowledge of exegesis (*tafsir*) itself. However, Esack's hermeneutics has given a new horizon to pluralism discourse by relating it to the theme of liberation as well as placing it into a liberal exegesis genre in Qur'anic interpretation, which is characterized by its critical reinterpretation of the sacred text.

#### **4. Applying Farid Esack's Qur'anic Hermeneutics in Indonesia**

Given a different situation of then South Africa's apartheid system, it surely is complicated to identically apply Esack's Qur'anic hermeneutics within Indonesian context. However, there are useful insights from Esack's

hermeneutics in terms of how religious communities can collaborate to help overcome humanity problems in Indonesia.

Esack's hermeneutics emerged in a response to the structural and cultural oppression in South Africa. As he noted, his mother's experience as the oppressed was among his motivation to build a theological basis for the struggle against oppression. Although Indonesia does not face the problems of apartheid oppression as South Africa did, however, social structure of Indonesia has similar situation, where poverty and economical gap is high, large unemployment numbers, low education access, gender inequality, as well as unsolved problems of human right and environment, among others.

The government alone cannot fix the problems. It needs a collaboration of all people to overcome those problems. In this context, religions can play an important role to mobilize their adherents in helping people. Moreover, all people of religions should come together in an orchestrated cooperation. Religions face difficult situation in the modern era. Among their challenges are capitalism, atheism, and structural and cultural oppression. Instead of competing each other, religions would have to prove that their existence represents the presence of God granting human beings with His love and grace.

Esack's hermeneutics exactly offers what religions need to do. They have to collaborate to prove that religions are not the problems and have social functions to improve people's lives. Indonesia has many religions; some of them are organized religions and officially acknowledged by the government, some other are local and indigenous religions, faiths and systems of belief. In Esack's words, they need not only build a bridge for living harmoniously, but also productively create opportunities to cooperate and collaborate for the sake of humanity.

Esack advocates an interreligious cooperation against injustice and oppression. There are some cases in Indonesia, where, for instance, in the name of Islamic *da'wa* and Christian mission, Muslims and Christians compete to attract sympathy by giving food, shelter, scholarship, or just holding charity market in order people of religious others to convert to Islam and Christianity. Unfortunately, this model of religious actions often results in interreligious tensions and conflicts among the adherents of religions. The building of new churches is considered by some Muslims as the expansion of the mission to spread Christian gospel. This, to some extent, receives resistance from Muslims. On the

other hand, the coming of Muslims to areas that are predominantly Christians is seen by Christians as Muslim propaganda to spread Islamic mission.

Muslims and Christians often come to this suspicion. The long period of Dutch colonization which brought some Christian missionaries to present Christian gospel to Indonesia still left the hurt-feeling of Muslims which is hard to heal. Some Muslims still perceive Christian services in education, healthcare, and other social services, even when those are intended purely for humanity, as means for converting others to Christianity. Meanwhile, some Christians view the will to implement Islamic *syari'a* in public life by some Muslims as an effort to "Islamize" Indonesia and a threat for religious freedom for minority groups like Christianity.<sup>19</sup>

Applying Esack's Qur'anic hermeneutics in Indonesia will bring not only interreligious harmony but also interreligious collaboration. As was the South African case, Esack's Call for Islam collaborated with other progressive Christian groups addressing the issue of apartheid oppression. To Esack, those Christians who struggle together with Muslims against injustice were socially *muslims*. On the contrary, Muslims who corroborated with oppressive apartheid regime were socially *kāfir*. This labelling comes from his Qur'anic hermeneutics principles of the oneness of God (*tawhīd*), God's fearing (*taqwā*) and justice (*'adl*), which aims at the privileged voice of the victims and marginalized on earth (*al-mustad'afūn fi al-arḍ*).

Likewise, even though there is no such apartheid oppression in Indonesia, Esack's hermeneutics of pluralism suggests that Muslims, Christians, Hindus, Buddhists and adherents of local and indigenous religions put aside their differences and their missionary motives to come to the common platform in restoring Indonesia.<sup>20</sup> Muslims, as the most populous religious adherents, should lead initiatives and invite religious others to work together in addressing humanitarian problems in Indonesia. They should not be worry of theological basis in this interreligious cooperation since Esack has built a contemporary reading of the Qur'an on the need of the struggle against injustice.

Religions still matter in Indonesia. Religious leaders still have a special place in Indonesian society. Instead of arguing for truth claim which leads to

<sup>19</sup> Alwi Shihab, *Membendung Arus; Respons Gerakan Muhammadiyah Terhadap Penetrasi Misi Kristen Di Indonesia*, (Bandung: Mizan, 1998), p. 187–88.

<sup>20</sup> Olaf Schuman, "Problems in Attitudes and Communication between Interreligious and Ethnic Groups in Indonesia: A Socio-Religious Analysis," in *Communal Conflicts in Contemporary Indonesia* (Jakarta, 2002); PGI, "Dokumen Keesaan Gereja (DKG): Pokok-Pokok Tugas Panggilan Bersama (PTPB) 2000-2005" (Jakarta, 2000).

interreligious tensions and conflicts, religious leaders in Indonesia should voice their support for alleviating humanity problems in Indonesia. With the strong encouragement from religious leaders, their society (*umma*) will follow their lead not only to live harmoniously, but also to engage in the collaboration with their neighbors, friends and colleagues from different religions to help eradicate poverty, provide better and free education and literacy, reduce unemployment, and improve gender equality and human right advocacy.

### **Conclusion**

Indonesia has many religions, but it also has many poor, many uneducated, many unemployed, many problems. Religions should participate in addressing those problems since all religions were not meant for rites and rituals, but also for social changes. All religious figures led their people to improve their lives by overcoming social injustices and oppression. Budha Gautama was *guru* for love and compassion, Jesus took side with the oppressed, and Muḥammad promoted equality before God. Instead of fighting each other to claim the truth, people of religions should lead the initiatives for interreligious collaboration to solve problems of humanity. Esack's Qur'anic hermeneutics offers not only Muslims but also all religious adherents a theological as well as social basis for the struggle against injustice and oppression.

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