

Faith In God as The Source of Goodness and Religious Moderation In Indonesia: A Christian Moral Perspective

Paskalis Lina^{1*}, Robertus Wijanarko²

¹STFK Ledalero, Maumere, Indonesia

²STFT Widya Sasana, Malang, Indonesia

*email: paskalislinasvd@gmail.com

Abstract: Goodness is the basis and goal of all moral actions. Therefore, ethics, be it theological or philosophical, must in some way explain specifically what goodness is and where one can find it. The Christian faith answers this by stating its fundamental belief that God is good. It says that the Christian belief in goodness is based on faith in God, placing each Christian at the heart of the relationship between faith and moral action. After confirming this fundamental Christian belief that God is the centre of all values, in this paper, we will draw out some implications of the relationship between faith as a personal and communal experience of God and the development of an attitude of religious moderation in a pluralistic Indonesian society. Thus, cultivating an attitude of religious moderation does not stop as an external rule but should go further as an ethical imperative for every Christian.

Keywords: God, Faith, Goodness, Christian Ethics, Religious Moderation

Abstrak: Kebaikan adalah dasar dan tujuan dari semua tindakan moral. Oleh karena itu, etika, baik teologis maupun filosofis, dalam beberapa hal harus menjelaskan secara spesifik apa itu kebaikan dan di mana seseorang dapat menemukannya. Iman Kristen menjawab ini dengan menyatakan keyakinan fundamentalnya bahwa Tuhan itu baik. Dikatakan bahwa kepercayaan Kristen pada kebaikan didasarkan pada iman kepada Tuhan, menempatkan setiap orang Kristen di jantung hubungan antara iman dan tindakan moral. Setelah meneguhkan keyakinan fundamental Kristiani bahwa Tuhan adalah pusat dari semua nilai, dalam tulisan ini, kami akan menarik beberapa implikasi dari hubungan antara iman sebagai pengalaman pribadi dan komunal tentang Tuhan dan pengembangan sikap moderasi beragama dalam masyarakat yang pluralistik. Masyarakat Indonesia. Dengan demikian, menumbuhkan sikap moderasi beragama tidak berhenti sebagai aturan eksternal tetapi harus lebih jauh sebagai keharusan etis bagi setiap orang Kristen. Kami menemukan bahwa menjadi orang Kristen identik dengan menyambut kehadiran orang lain, bersatu dengan mereka dan beriman kepada Allah yang merangkul semua.

Kata kunci: Tuhan, Iman, Kebaikan, Etika Kristen, Moderasi Beragama

Introduction

Philosophers' beliefs about goodness have long influenced moral disposition and action. For Aristotle, as explained by Franz Magnis-Suseno, goodness is happiness; if a person wants to live happily, they must also live morally (Magnis-Suseno, 2009, p. 64). Happiness is the highest good that can be achieved by employing good life, namely by becoming a human being who can carry out their obligations as a human being. For hedonists goodness is pleasure; for the utilitarians, the good is in what is most useful. The tradition of scholastic philosophy, as manifested in the tradition of the Roman Catholic Church, has also developed an intrinsically intimate link between goodness as happiness and a person's perfection (Pinckaers, 1995, p. 390). The nature of goodness as happiness is fulfilled in the attainment of final perfection in God Himself as the ultimate goal and source of all goodness essentially. Thomas Aquinas (1920) states,

God alone is good essentially. For everything is called good according to its perfection... perfection belongs to no creature by its own essence; it belongs to God only, in Whom alone essence is existence; in Whom there are no accidents; since whatever belongs to others accidentally belongs to Him essentially...and He is not directed to anything else as to an end, but is Himself the last end of all things. Hence it is manifest that God alone has every kind of perfection by His own essence; therefore He Himself alone is good essentially (Summa Theologiae I, q. 4, a.3).

The innate tendency in humans to seek perfection is the ontological basis for a fundamental moral obligation, i.e. to realize one's potential, or to become perfect according to one's abilities. Actions are said to be moral if they flow out of this innate (natural) tendency and contribute to the total actualization of human potentialities (*Agere sequitur Esse*) (Pinckaers, 1995, pp. 390-392). With the help of faith that enlightens the intellect to understand the nature of goodness, believers will see God as a perfect person and understand God's actions as good because they flow from the divine nature as Love.

However, for atheists, this is not a sufficient basis for claiming that God is the basis of morality. There is no ontological morality. Morality, on their view, has a basis in itself and not in others. For example, William P. Alston, as quoted by Morrision, states as follows,

Why are love and justice and generosity and kindness and faithfulness good? What is there in the depths of reality to make them good? My preferred answer is *Nothing further*. If you like, you may say that they are the ultimate standard of goodness. What makes them the standard? *Nothing further*. Possessing these characteristics just is good-making. *Full stop*. Is there some problem with this? Some reason to press on, looking for a 'deeper' answer that only theism can provide? [....] It's not obvious that there is. No matter what story you tell about the ontological ground of moral value, you must at some point come to your own *full stop*. If you say that love is necessarily good because God necessarily exists and loves and because God's moral nature is the ultimate standard of goodness, then we can ask what makes God's moral nature the ultimate standard. It would be unwise to respond, 'because it includes love and justice and the rest' since that would confine us to a small and entirely unenlightening circle of 'explanations' (Morrision, 2012, pp. 29-30).

This article does not intend to refute nor acknowledge the above arguments. For the Christian belief in God as the only ontological basis of morality is rooted in the religious credo expressed in the story or history of Scripture, especially in Jesus, and which is further explained in detail in the theological tradition of the church. Indeed, discussing Alston's argument from a Christian ethical perspective is an interesting undertaking, but that is not the aim of this essay.

With that said, the basic Christian belief in what is good and where it can be found is in the following: that God is good. Everything else is good only concerning God as a reflection or mediation of God. The monotheistic faith of the Christian faith recognizes only one source of value. All other forms of goodness are dependent on that ultimate good, which is God. God as a source of goodness can be a guide for humans in judging everything evil and contrary to the goodness that comes from God. C. S. Lewis said that only because we have already known the good, we can call an action good or evil objectively. The good is in itself and is never changed or diminished. Meanwhile, evil is nothing but good that is corrupted. God's goodness is inherent in all of His creation (Lewis, 1952, p.27). Therefore making others, besides the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Jesus, the center or source of all values is nothing but idolatry.

The goodness of God is contained in the Scriptures and manifested ultimately in the very person of Jesus Christ himself. Thus our knowledge of God's goodness is given through our knowledge of the person of Jesus and the interpretation of human experience in the light of the life of Jesus as it is written in the Scriptures. Our belief in God must also affect our moral life. This fundamental belief that God is

good, that God is the only source of all values and definite reference and the end of morality, makes Christian morality an objective morality, and giving continuous answers to God is an unconditional moral obligation.

This article aims to underline the theological concept of God being good as a basic reference in building an attitude of religious moderation in Indonesia. The Ministry of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia mentions three key elements in the development of religious moderation attitudes in Indonesia. They are the following: first, a conceptual study of religious moderation attitudes; second, the empirical experience of religious moderation; third, the strategy of strengthening and implementing religious moderation (Kementerian Agama RI, 2019, p. iii). In our opinion, a conceptual study of God's goodness is very much needed to cultivate an attitude of religious moderation. This concept certainly does not stop at a mere conceptual level but, it should also be a personal experience that is deeply believed by every Christian so that it can influence their moral attitudes and behavior in establishing a dialogue with others both internally and externally. Dialogue in this context is built upon an understanding of implicit faith, which helps the church to understand that God does love all humans with His goodness. According to Eko Armada Riyanto, the Church must realize that all people, whether or not they believe in God, are loved by God (Eko Armada Riyanto, 2010, pp. 168). Therefore, from a Christian perspective, God is a person who is good to all humans without discrimination.

Our reflection in this article commences from the question: what does it mean to believe in God? Why does not faith in God have transformative power in us, even though we perform various religious rites every day? When we look at the actual situation that is happening in Indonesia today, such as radicalism and violence between religions and groups, we become aware that our faith in the Almighty God is still far from what is supposed to be. Many examples prove that religious people are busier with external matters, such as religious rituals, and forget the essence of religious life itself, namely faith in a good God or the Transcendent, which is the basic belief of every religion. However, it is not our intention to cover the concept of a good God according to all religions and beliefs that exist in Indonesia. In this paper, we will rather limit ourselves to the concept of Christianity and how the Christians must live their faith in their daily lives, especially in cultivating an attitude of religious moderation amid the reality of a pluralistic Indonesian society.

Methodology

The methodology that I employ in this article is to draw a correlation between the meaning of faith in God as being good and its application in the practical context. According to Rua Penagos and Toro Jaramillo, the meaning or content of the Christian faith is not only limited to the Apostles' Creed but also includes the personal experience of God himself. Faith in God must be correlated with concern for actual moral problems and crimes against God's will. Faith cannot be merely doctrinal, but must also be practical and contextual (Rúa Penagos & Toro Jaramillo, 2020, p. 2). Indeed, everyone can have a different experience of God according to the teachings of his religion. In Christian belief, however, God is believed to be the only perfect good. Christians believe that God is good and that his goodness is permanent and will never be changed by anything or anyone. As Richard Swinburne states, 'God is supposed to be perfectly good. His being perfectly good follows from his being perfectly free and omniscient... So he will always do what is overall the best, and never do what is overall bad. Hence God will be perfectly good' (Swinburne, 2010, pp. 13-14).

Biblical scholars can also explain this based on the writings about God in the Scriptures. Church teaching also affirms that goodness is the perfect and final identity of God. Neither human being nor any creation can add to or subtract from His goodness. Therefore, a praxis and pastoral approach are very necessary for this faith to truly have a transforming power in the life of every believer when faced with any life experience, especially when dealing with experiences of pain and suffering. God's goodness is never diminished by the reality of evil and suffering. Gotfried Leibniz said that it would be wrong to conclude who God is based solely on human experience or by human standards. He explained it as follows:

With God, it is plain that his understanding contains the ideas of all possible things, and that is how everything is in him in a transcendent manner. These ideas represent to him the good and evil, the perfection and imperfection, the order and disorder, the congruity and incongruity of possibles; and his superabundant goodness makes him choose the most advantageous. God, therefore, determines himself by himself; his will acts by virtue of his goodness, but it is particularized and directed in action by understanding filled with wisdom. And since his understanding is perfect since his thoughts are always clear, his inclinations always good, he never fails to do the best; whereas we may be deceived by the mere semblances of truth and goodness. . . . There was therefore in him a reason anterior to the resolution; and, as I have said so many times, it was neither by chance nor without cause, nor even by necessity, that God created this world, but rather as a result of his inclination, which always prompts him to the best (Leibniz, 2007, No. 202, pp. 256-257).

This statement of Leibniz can be understood differently, namely, that pain and suffering or any evil in this world cannot reduce God's goodness. In this paper, we do not describe the goodness of God concerning the reality of pain and suffering or evil, since that is not the main purpose of this paper. My point here is more on how the faith in a good God can encourage a Christian to cultivate an attitude of religious moderation, so that people no longer focus on differences and external things, but rather on similarities, namely, that the good God loves all human beings without discriminating any of them. This God who is good to all humans teaches the church to open up to the world as God's goodness cannot – and should not – be confined to the church community alone. All those with anonymous faith, as Karl Rahner called it, in such a God still have salvation (Karl Rahner as quoted by Eko Armada Ryanto, 2010, p. 167).

To this end, we will structure this article in the following manner. Firstly, we will explain in general terms the relationship between the Christian theological concept of God as the highest good and moral action; Secondly, we will delineate some of the characteristics of God's goodness in the Christian faith for the development of religious moderation in Indonesia; Thirdly, we will put forward some suggestions of praxis and novelty of this paper; The fourth section concludes. The concept of a good God, if truly experienced as a personal intimacy with God, must also appear in personal and communal moral attitudes and actions. If this is not achieved, then, in our view, there is no point in having a religion and claiming to believe in God. In Christian belief, this kind of behavior is seen in the scribes and the Pharisees. The Scripture states that they appear externally close to God and know God, but internally they are not. Why is it so? Because their moral attitudes and actions are far different from the God they believe in, namely, a God who is full of goodness, mercy, and love for human beings.

We have a little caveat before proceeding further. Personal pronouns for God as “He” or “Him” will often appear in this essay. This is not to mean that God is a male, nor is it to mean that we believe that God is a male. We use them simply because we have not found personal pronouns for God that are gender-neutral and at the same time can be employed without making the essay a boring text due to frequent repetition.

The Christian theological concept of faith in God as *Summum Bonum* and moral action

Christianity has come into the world with a double purpose, namely, to offer human beings the vision of God and to call them to the pursuit of that vision. But different ideas or experiences of God could have very different implications, both for the goal and for the mode of its attainment. For example, according to Adam K. Fetterman et. al., people always refer to God as a man in the Christian tradition. Meanwhile, there are still various names for God, for example, God is the Creator, God is Love, etc. They finally conclude that the experience of God depends on the experience of one's life that is most memorable ((Fetterman et al., 2021, pp. 6-7). Meanwhile, both the Scripture and the Christian theological tradition emphasize that human beings can have a vision of God or an experience about God as a Good Person. His goodness cannot be limited and reduced by anything. From the very beginning, after God created all things, so the Scriptures clearly state, that God sees all that He has created as good (Genesis 1:31). This goodness is not merely an attribute given to all created things, but is, primarily, the existence that comes from God the Creator himself. This God gives rise to all that exists and He is the fulfillment of our aspiration for happiness (cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, 28). Therefore, in the following, we will delineate the relationship between the theological concept of God, who is believed as the highest good (*summum bonum*) by Christians, and moral action.

God as Creator

Individuals who adhere to the Judeo-Christian tradition believe that no one in this world has pre-selected what to become. Because, indeed, everything on this earth is radically dependent entirely on the source of everything that exists, namely, God as the creator. The belief that God is the creator creates a feeling of dependence on one another, and ultimately on God Himself. It requires self-awareness from a person as the guardian of creation to maintain the goodness that God has created. It also provides a reason to be moral, that is, to express one's loyalty to the one who maintains all things. Terence E. Fretheim asserts:

God is the ultimate source of creation. Most fundamentally, creation is an act of God whereby "heaven and earth" are originally brought into being, understood both in terms of "out of nothing" and ordering. The creation accounts in Genesis 1–2 are the primary witness to this creative activity, though "out of nothing" is on the edges of the text. Several other texts witness to this originating creative action of God (Psalms 33; 104; Wis 9:1-2; Heb 11:3) (Fretheim, 2005, p.26).

What does that mean? By claiming that God is the ultimate source of creation, it does not mean that God is a part of creation. The existence of God is not the same as that of creation. According to Thomas Aquinas' theory of creation, as explained by Daniel Soars there is no immanence or entitative union between divine existence and the created order. God has a transcendent, unlimited nature, whereas human existence and creation are finite. However, in the concept of *creatio ex nihilo*, God is still present for His creatures within the perspective of 'de-entitative immanence' (Soars, 2020, p. 963-964). From this perspective, the statement, '...in Him, we live and move and have our being', can be understood (Act 17:28). From God's goodness, God made all things from nothing and everything that God made is very good (Gen. 1:31). Thus we can understand that God is the source of all goodness and His goodness cannot be added or subtracted by anything. From His goodness, God conferred on us the same dignity as His image and likeness (Gen. 1:26-27) and we are invited to take part in God's perfection. By saying this, then our dignity in contemporary understanding, as Bernard Brandy writes, is not something that separates persons but something that unites persons (Brady, 2021, p.9).

This dependence leads to an attitude of accepting limitations as created beings, being critical of ourselves and what we produce, and developing interdependence with others and the rest of creation. Thus, ecological concern, for example, teaches us what the risks are when we lose our sense of interdependence with nature and fall into the temptation of radical self-gratification. Self-criticism is essential here to awaken in us an attitude of avoiding the tendency to oppress others and exploit other creations. This can also be seen in the attitude of not absolutizing our religion and demeaning others from different religions. The feeling of dependence evokes a certain disposition to believe in God. This virtue also frees us from the danger of false belief that we can create something new with our strength or make religion a source of salvation instead of God. In short, we do not believe in religion, but God. Therefore, the act of defending religion, especially using violence, is contrary to faith in God who is good to all of His creation. The calling of all Christians of all ages, as stated by Shelomita Selamat is to attain union with God and to live in loving fellowship with Him (Selamat, 2021, p. 81).

God as a Generous Person

The belief that God is generous is nothing but rooted in the realization that God gives His gifts freely and in love. No one should be forced to gain God's love. Each human person can only take for himself or herself and participate in what God freely gives. The belief that God wills the good for all of creation further demands the virtues which are so important in the moral life, that is, gratitude. As an expression of gratitude to God for all the gifts He has given, every believer should use the gifts given to him for the common good (*bonum communa*). What has been freely received must also be freely given (cf. Mt 10:8). The experience of God giving freely has implications for one's attitude, in that one should pay attention to what is given to him or her, and such gifts should be shared freely and justly out of love. This is especially true when we remember that God is the eternal goodness and the center of all values.

Furthermore, to be conformed to God, one needs to live in the virtue one desires most. What has been given to him or her is not for fulfilling his or her pleasure at the expense of others. Faith in a gracious God requires one to be responsible for the goodness of others as God had intended to. It means that for the sake of his integrity, a person must give an appropriate answer to God's calling, by continuously building up a dialogue with others both at the academic level and in the context of daily life without discriminating against ethnic, religious, and racial backgrounds and always be grateful to God for the experience of togetherness. But to truly give thanks to God one must know and truly build a relationship with Him. As Richard Swinburne puts it:

God keeps us in existence from moment to moment, gives us knowledge and power and friends—and all the help that other benefactors give us arises from God sustaining in them the power to do so. Hence it becomes a duty to thank God abundantly. But to properly thank others involves showing that you know who they are and what is their relation to you (Swinburne, 2008, p.10).

The most basic principle of the Christian moral life is the awareness that every person bears the dignity of being made in the image of God. He has given us an immortal soul, and through the gifts of intelligence and reason, He enables us to understand the order of things established in His creation. God has also given us the free will to seek and love what is true, good, and beautiful. This is the most fundamental reason why we should be grateful to God and believe in Him. More than that, faith in God who is generous to everyone encourages us to be able to share and do good to anyone beyond the boundaries of religion, ethnicity, and class. This is an essential moral requirement for everyone who believes in a God who is good and loving.

God as the Final Destination of All Creation

The belief that God is the beginning and the end of human life and all other creation will lead us to a more directed feeling in the moral life. This belief in God is something very prominent in the Catholic Church's moral handbooks. Humans act according to their ultimate goal in life, that is, to be in union with God. This union is the most perfect happiness that even death cannot eliminate. Perfect happiness here refers to the union of the human body and soul with God Himself in heaven. It means that if one has a fundamental intention in moral life that is directed to God, it will give a feeling of integrity and integration into the person's own moral life. This moral life that puts God as the main goal is ultimately guided by the principles that are certainly in line with God's will and purpose. More specifically, faith in God who is love, justice, and truth should further encourage one to act accordingly in life with others. Without real moral actions, as one knows from the God one believes in, one's faith in God will be meaningless and will slowly die out. That is why morality must be rooted in the faith in God but will lose its meaning if it is not manifested in actions. So, from this perspective, there is no morality based on human nature, as many people believe today. As Laura Schlessinger says,

to believe in God is to believe that humans are more than accidents of nature. It means that we are endowed with purpose by a higher source and that our goal is to realize that higher purpose...Without God there is no objective meaning to life, nor is there an objective morality. I do not want to live in a world where right and wrong are subjective (Schlessinger, 1998, p. xxv).

Schlessinger's statement above is correct. From a Christian perspective, the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity (love) are the virtues that are related directly to God. They are not acquired through human effort, but, they are infused within us as gifts from God through Baptism. It means that God's grace disposes us to live in a relationship with the Holy Trinity. Faith, hope, and charity influence human virtues by increasing their stability and strength in our lives. God, through His laws, helps us to be able to decide what is right and good for our lives.

God is the embodiment of good. He is the *summum bonum*, is eternally good, even before the existence of any creature that receives His goodness. Hence, the first manifestation of His goodness to the creatures is the very act of creation itself. In human beings, as God's highest early creatures, we see His goodness reflected in how wonderfully we are created. Therefore, all humans who come from different tribes, religions, races, and any groups are the children of God whom He loves from eternity to eternity. Every Christian who believes in such a God should know that he or she has a moral obligation not to discriminate against any person for any reason.

Some implications for the development of religious moderation in Indonesia

Most people who hold fast to the Christian faith have a feeling that their faith in God should bring something unique in the way they understand themselves and their way of life. The belief that even our religious commitments demand some form of moral behavior can be seen in several places. For example, in Dostoevsky's classic *The Brothers Karamazov*, Ivan states that if God does not exist then everything will be allowed (permissive) (Dostoevsky, 1994, p. 330). This can be taken to mean that we will never have morality if we do not believe that there is some form of behavior that is punished or forbidden by God.

Ordinary life experiences can show some form of connection between faith in God and morality. Often, we hear phrases like "a Christian would never do such a thing," or, "It would certainly be done by a Christian." Expressions such as these show that the speaker assumes that a Christian at least needs

and approves of moral instructions and norms, which are the reasons why a person acts or does not act that particular way. These instructions or norms are commonly found in the teachings of faith in God. But teachings that are not translated into real actions are useless and meaningless. This statement at least emphasizes that true faith in God must also be manifested in the right actions towards human beings. Therefore, in this part, we will draw two important implications that are useful in cultivating religious moderation in Indonesia.

Firstly - Faith in a good God never justifies violence

One of the things that are denied by atheists is the concept of monotheist religion and its claim of truth, which, according to them, can lead to intolerance and violence. Several texts in the Old Testament also describe the reality of violence against the Canaanite population at the command of God. This biblical story seems to be supporting the atheist position mentioned above. What, then, should we do about it? Here Christians must re-read the Scriptures from the perspective of God who has to deal with human violence and cruelty to those who are small and weak. God is always with the helpless, namely Israel when they have to deal with forces that oppress and destroy their existence as a nation that believes in Him. But, when Israel forgets God and relies on their strength, then they become invaders and oppressors who will also be destroyed by God (cf. II Kings 15:27-29). In short, God does not condone violence but always fights against those who oppress the weak and suffering. God is always on the side of the small and the helpless. On this, Waclaw Hryniewicz writes, 'The biblical God is no 'apathetic God', indifferent to human suffering, misery, and oppression. On the contrary: Israel's God is very sensitive to the destiny of the people. Already this points to the forthcoming attitude of Jesus marked by God's real compassion as opposed to his indifference or violence' (Hryniewicz, 2014, p.29). A humanizing view of one's faith consists precisely in looking at reality through the eyes of others, i.e. being sensitive to their situation. It is therefore imperative today to humanize religion. Along this line, Wardoyo maintains that to understand violence in the Scriptures, especially the Old Testament, believers must place it in the context of salvation and a new creation. He writes 'to understand the violence of God in the Bible, the reader is invited to read the texts on violence by putting it in the frame of the new creation. Thus, the violence of God is necessary to lead humankind to salvation and the new creation' (Wardoyo, 2021, 125). So, God still has a good purpose for all humans and His creation.

From the perspective of the Christian faith, it can be reiterated that the teachings of Jesus and the example of his own life do not justify violence for any reason. This point must be integrated into the self and conscience of every person who believes in Christ. The goal is that the words and life of Jesus must be put into practice so that they can transform the lives of everyone who believes in Him. According to Paul Bharathi,

during his time, when a change was needed both at a religious and social level, Jesus emphasized the transformation of people. He observed that many people were religious but not spiritual, in the sense that they were following all the religious practices meticulously without understanding the deeper meaning of those practices. As a result, there was no qualitative change in their lives (Bharathi, 2021, p.10).

To improve the religious moderation in Indonesia, we are not obliged to believe in the true and merciful God who commanded Israelites to use violence and kill people, as described in the Old Testament. What is needed is a new interpretation of some violence-leaning texts of the Old Testament. A more advanced understanding of the human experience of violence and its impacts on human life helps us to understand that we should not use violence of any form against others. Waclaw Hryniewicz says, 'the Christian

faith sees the incitement of violence in the name of God as the greatest corruption of religion. Interreligious violence and the violence in the name of religion or God are simply senseless” (Hryniewicz, 2014, p.32). At this point, our faith in a good God invites us to also look at the person of Jesus Christ, the truth that comes from the Father, the relationship between the revelation of God, and non-violent humanism.

Secondly - Violence and religious intolerance are contrary to God’s goodness

Historically, violence and religious intolerance have also occurred in Christianity. This happened when Christianity became the state religion toward the end of the fourth century. Politics and religion entered into a fatal relationship. Along with the conversion of the emperor Constantine, the Church was no longer a marginalized group in society. The power and control of Emperor Constantine became somewhat of a smooth path for the Church to use that power for developing its power. Whereas in the beginning, Emperor Constantine only meant to make Christianity equal to other beliefs or religions in the Roman Empire. But later, Christianity became the religion of the empire and fell into various acts of violence against those of different beliefs (Ramelli, 2013, p. 65-66). Dogma was established as part of the state’s law. Those who contradicted the teachings of the Church were immediately accused of being enemies who had to be eliminated and punished. Hatred and punishment for those who are different and contrary to the Christian faith were seen as a religious virtue. The ideal of obligation to the state and the church took the place of grace and mercy.

The unification of religion with politics results in justifying violence against those who have different views in society. When dealing with the Donatists, for example, St. Augustine once stated that the use of force in the name of the state is permissible against all heretics. In Augustine's mind, it was Christ Himself who stated that when He asked Saul to repent and become an apostle of the nations, the Church only followed what the Lord Himself taught. The act of coercion was regarded as an expression of brotherly love, for only then are the heretics freed from eternal punishment. This argument was very influential in the Church in the following centuries and became the beginning of a history of darkness and violence against heretics, which indeed also brought many bad effects for Christianity itself (Hryniewicz, 2014, pp.32-33). How can faith in a good God be understood in such a historical context? For Christians who live in a diverse and plural society such as today, the dark history of Christianity can be a point of reference for improving themselves and learning that Christianity can no longer justify violence and intolerance in any form. Furthermore, religious intolerance and violence will always be at odds with God's voice, which is the source of all goodness, as seen in the Good News brought by Jesus Christ himself.

The crimes committed in the name of faith in God are, therefore, in no way to be justified. They are a sad and dark page in the history of Christianity. More clearly, this action is contrary to faith in a good God. For Christians in Indonesia who live side by side with people of other religions and beliefs, the dark history that has ever occurred in Christianity must be treated as a reference for building a truly religious life in the future. In our opinion, in developing religious moderation, we must have a clear understanding of God's immanent presence in this world: everything is in God, everything comes from God who is the source of all goodness, and God as Spirit is present in everything as an undeniable good. That Spirit of the Lord has filled the whole world. The moral life of Christians, according to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, is sustained by the gifts of the Holy Spirit. ‘These are permanent dispositions that make human beings docile in following the promptings of the Holy Spirit’ (Katekismus

Gereja Katolik, 1992, 1830). If we obediently follow the promptings of the Holy Spirit, we will reject all the attitudes of radicalism, which often easily demeans others and justifies the use of violence of any form. Each act of violence and injustice cries out to heaven. It should not have taken place at all.

Toward a vision of God who remains good to all creatures

Goodness is the most essential attribute of God. He has all truth, wisdom, justice, and peace. When speaking of or believing in God, we humans run the risk of falling into anthropomorphism. We often assume or imagine God's goodness in human form. God cannot be equated with the creation, nor can He be understood in the way humans understand mundane things. A lesson for Christians from this truth is that our talk about or faith in God requires a persevering self-critical consciousness of its fragility and imperfection. According to Waclaw Hryniewicz, one needs to have here what is called 'the second naivety', which does have a special role in helping us to understand the good God (Hryniewicz, 2014, p.34). Our faith should be more moderate and humble in its theological claims and ambitions. In short, we cannot apply the teachings of a religion or the Bible literally to justify ourselves or, even worse, to defend the God we believe in. The cases of violence in the name of religion that still occur in Indonesia can be a valuable lesson for every Christian as to how important it is to have a correct understanding of the good God. God's goodness and His righteousness cannot be imprisoned in man-made religious formulas.

In this context, our way of understanding the goodness of God as mentioned in the Bible is more realistic. The great goodness of God is also seen in Jesus Christ himself, truly a man who empties himself and is open to human limitations, to leave space and freedom for others, let's say to all of us. The statement of Richard Dawkins, an English biologist, and publicist, deserves careful consideration. According to him, religion can become redundant and irrelevant, because it only leads people to delusion. He criticized theology for separating literal and allegorical interpretations of Scripture in its moral 'blind flying.' A theology that wants to be true to reality cannot ignore such objections. Critical views find a worldwide resonance not only with those who criticize religion but also with those who are hesitant in their faith. One of the causes of this situation may be insufficient knowledge of theological accounts in the Bible, 'as if the described events happened in the history of humankind' (Dawkins, 2006, p.56-57). Here, in our opinion, there is a great need for proper explanation and interpretation of the biblical texts by religious leaders before they are taught to the people. Because all religions in Indonesia, of course, teach their people to believe in God who is good, and not in God who destroys humanity.

Reflecting theologically on the question of God's goodness, one has to take into account that we perceive the transcendent reality only through the finite and limited capacity of our intellect. Human knowledge of God's goodness may also be burdened by our sinfulness. Even understood as love, mercy, justice, and peace, God may also appear in our notions as representations of human ways and images or metaphors (Fetterman et al., 2021, p. 2). We would like to have Him always on our side, according to the logic of partiality. This is one of the challenges that must be continuously realized by the faithful to be able to go further in believing in God as the only *summum bonum*. Instead, courage is needed to take seriously the challenging words of Jesus from the Sermon on the Mount: our Father in heaven 'causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and send rain on the righteous and the unrighteous (Mt 5:45). These words of Christ clearly show that the good deeds we give to others based on our faith in God, especially in the attitude of religious moderation, cannot be built on the pressure of our religion or culture. It should rather be built on God's attitude which is always kind to all humans.

In inter-religious relations, we are often trapped in thinking that they are different from us, or that our religion is better and more correct than other religions. Anshori states that this kind of perspective can be called religious radicalism, namely when a person perceives other people outside his/her religion as wicked and infidel and is reluctant to listen to the people outside their group' (M. Afif Anshori, 2019, pp. 222-223). This attitude is not in line with our faith in God which we believe in as Christians. God surpasses our logic of justice and partiality. He appears to show justice in His divine way. Like the apostle Peter, we should be aware that "God does not show favoritism" (Act 10:34). In this way, we would better understand that the God of Jesus Christ is greater, more generous, and bounteous than we are accustomed to thinking: He is God of all people, God of all people in Indonesia, the God who is truly inter-religious.

Such a truly universal view of God reminds us of the *paleontological* concept of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1888-1955), as quoted by Waclaw Hryniewicz. In de Chardin's view of Christ as *Alpha* and *Omega*, The First and the Last- certainly a view that would aptly be called 'pan-en-theism' - all things exist in God, yet they have not lost their own identity as creation (Hryniewicz, 2014, p.35). It is a serious mistake to lock God in a religious barrier as if Christ came only for Christians. The development of an attitude of religious moderation cannot work if we separate God from the world as a completely different reality. We must be aware that, in religion, we are not only talking about God which is understood and explained differently in every religion, but especially about the same God who is believed to be the source of all goodness, love, and peace. God is the source of our dignity as human beings. For Christians, the goodness of God as seen in the incarnate *Logos* becomes the main basis for behaving and acting rightly towards all those of different faiths and religions. It is therefore very important to continually instill confidence in ourselves that our God in Christ has emptied himself and in his goodness has brought all mankind to salvation. Our faith in God in Jesus Christ must come to a true understanding of God's goodness, especially in developing a moral attitude of religious moderation in Indonesia.

Finally, we are aware that religion without faith and moral actions that flow from faith in a God who is good to all human beings are empty and hollow. If this separation continues, according to Paul Bharathi, it will lead to a dichotomy between religious life and personal life (Bharathi, 2021, pp.16-17). Christians in Indonesia, if they want to be true followers of Christ, must take this matter seriously. True love for God is seen in the acts of love or kindness without limits to all people because our God loves all humans without exception. As Winardi puts it 'God who is Love, in three persons who from eternity coexist, inherit His image and likeness to His human creation so that humans have nature to live together as social beings. Unity and plurality have implications of beauty, where we as humans, especially in Indonesia, even though pluralistic in terms of religion, can continue to live together in unity as human beings and the Indonesian nation, for the sake of mutual progress' (Winardi, 2021, p. 217).

Concluding remarks

To encapsulate all that has been said, we need to correctly answer the key question, 'why do we believe in God?' Religion is only a medium to bring us closer to God personally. All of us need to be aware that all religions and beliefs in Indonesia must teach that the divine or God, or whatever His name is, must be the source of all goodness, truth, and justice. For Christians, God as seen in Jesus Christ is a person who shows His goodness to all humans without division and distinction. He has emptied himself until he suffers and dies because of the wickedness of human beings. God nevertheless still wants all humans to be safe. This unchanging goodness of God can be a good inspiration in developing an attitude of

religious moderation in Indonesia. The Christian faith requires us to be tolerant and respect the differences between people of various religions. Finally, we must be able to move from faith based on narrow religious groups to faith in a good God, who loves all people without distinction. It is this God, who in Christian belief is called the source of all goodness, that desires all creation to become one flock with one shepherd. This personal belief in the goodness of God, so we humbly believe, can be the basic motivation for our moral actions in building religious moderation in Indonesia.

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