

Paul Tillich's Concept of "Ultimate Concern" for Sustainable Inter-Religious Dialogue

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Abstract

Indonesia's rich diversity in ethnicity, culture, religion, and beliefs is a national strength and a potential source of conflict. Instances such as public opposition to the construction of places of worship in various regions demonstrate how religious differences can fuel conflicts. In this context, inter-religious dialogue is vital in preventing and resolving conflicts within religiously plural communities. The harmonious relationship between Muslims and Christians in Sambikerep Village, Surabaya, motivated the author to investigate this subject. This article explores Paul Tillich's concept of "Ultimate Concern" as a framework for understanding the experiences of research participants in Muslim-Christian dialogue. This phenomenological study aims to highlight the importance of Tillich's concept in promoting sustainable inter-religious dialogue and fostering long-term peace and understanding. For this study, the author employed Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenological method, utilized in-depth interviews to collect data, and conducted observations to confirm the authenticity of the interview findings. The three main findings of this article are: the importance of viewing religion as a concept that helps balance the opposing aspects of religious content and practice; inclusivism as a path for interreligious dialogue that does not dilute personal convictions; and the courage to participate in a humanist community, which fosters sustainable interreligious dialogue by overcoming the fear of rejection.

Keywords: Conflict, Inter-religious dialogue, Phenomenological, Sustainability, Ultimate concern

Introduction

The Setara Institute for Democracy and Peace (2024, pp. 5-6) released a report on religious freedom in Indonesia for 2023, noting an increase in disruptions at places of worship between 2017 and 2023, with incidents rising from 16 to 65 over the years. In 2023 alone, 40 churches, 17 mosques, 5 temples, and 3 monasteries were affected by disturbances, including the rejection of construction, damage, demolition, and vandalism. Saprillah (2017) notes that the establishment of minority places of worship can be perceived as a threat by majority religious groups, leading to tensions in Indonesia's diverse society. Liliweri (2005, p. 104) emphasizes that majority behaviors are often driven by fear and suspicion, resulting in negative responses like denying permits for minority worship spaces.

Gereja Kristus Tuhan (GKT) Citraraya, located in Sambikerep village, Surabaya, offers a noteworthy example of harmonious interfaith relations. Established in 2010, the church received local approval and support from the community during its construction, without facing opposition or special demands. Subsequent expansions in 2016 and 2020 similarly encountered no resistance. This phenomenon raised the author's interest in researching inter-religious dialogue utilizing Paul Tillich's concept of "ultimate concern." The study seeks to address the question: "How does the concept of "ultimate concern" contribute to fostering sustainable inter-religious dialogue?" The term "sustainable" is significant, as the possibility of conflict cannot be ignored. Social, cultural, political, economic, and technological developments—including social media—shape public attitudes and actions, particularly in their responses to different religious groups. Therefore, the mutual acceptance currently experienced by the community must be carefully maintained and continuously fostered.

The concept of "ultimate concern" was introduced by Paul Tillich as a way to promote inter-religious dialogue. Riyanto (2018, p. 25) asserts that dialogue is an essential part of life itself; life is shared with others. Human existence involves more than merely breathing or fulfilling physical needs—living means being with others. In the context of inter-religious dialogue, discussions transcend worldly matters, extending into shared spiritual experiences. This dialogue shifts from the physical to deeper spirituality, from human friendships to intimacy with God. Tillich (1965, p. 7) acknowledges that "ultimate concern" is not easily understood. He clarifies the term "concern" by explaining several key concepts. First is seriousness, which refers to human focus and care. Then comes passion, which signifies enthusiasm, and interest, which represents attraction or curiosity. Tillich (1965, p. 8) suggests that "concern" encompasses seriousness, passion, and interest in a more comprehensive way.

Tillich (1965, p. 27) further explains the term "ultimate" by comparing it to a pyramid. It doesn't refer solely to the top or the bottom of the pyramid but to the entirety. "Ultimate" encompasses both the highest and foundational aspects, which are inseparable. Midgley (1967) adds that Tillich's concept of ultimate implies something most important, dominant, or controlling. Midgley connects "ultimate concern" with politics, expanding our understanding of the term. Eventually, "ultimate" can mean supreme, foundational, most important, dominant, and controlling. "Ultimate concern" refers to what a person values as supreme and all-encompassing. Tillich (1964, p. 8) explains that, in its broadest and most fundamental sense, religion is defined as "ultimate concern", a totality that is expressed through all the creative functions of the human soul. He further emphasizes (2013, p. 59) that an individual's deepest concerns—what they are ultimately devoted to—define their religion.

The concept of "ultimate concern" encompasses three key characteristics essential for fostering inter-religious dialogue, with the first being universality. This characteristic involves a broad perspective on religion, as Tillich (1965, p. 4) emphasizes the need to distinguish between the broader concept of religion and its specific content in dialogue. While focusing on specific practices, symbols, and doctrines

limits the conversation, viewing religion universally opens the door for more inclusive and meaningful interactions. In the study of religion, it is vital to approach it not merely as a set of doctrines or rituals but as a concept deeply connected to cultural and personal experiences. Merriam-Webster defines a concept as something conceived in the mind or an abstract idea derived from specific instances, highlighting the connection between abstract ideas and the tangible events that shape them. In this study, the concept of religion emerges from the lived experiences and reflections of the research subjects. The notion of “ultimate concern” shifts the focus from doctrinal specifics to a broader understanding of religion as a lived experience, reflecting societal concerns and values. This approach offers a foundation for inter-religious dialogue that transcends doctrinal boundaries, linking religion to individuals' daily concerns and cultural contexts.

The second key characteristic of “ultimate concern” is inclusivity, which emphasizes embracing others rather than excluding them. Riyanto (2018, p. 25, 232) stresses that inclusion involves welcoming everyone, creating an environment conducive to dialogue and friendship. Within the framework of ultimate concern, inclusivity extends beyond Christianity to encompass all religions and beliefs. As a non-symbolic term, “ultimate concern” avoids the exclusivity often tied to religious symbols, which can hinder interfaith dialogue. Pattison (2015, p. 5) notes that terms like Father, YHWH, and Trinity are symbolic, while Oswald (2009, p. 34) highlights that “ultimate concern” captures the open-ended nature of discussing God. This non-symbolic language creates a universal platform for people of all faiths, as Leiner (2009, p. 37) observes. Pannikar (1999, pp. 5-11) contrasts exclusivism, which asserts that only one religion is true, with inclusivism, which acknowledges truths in both one’s own faith and others. Christian doctrine, as outlined in the catechism manual “On a Firm Foundation” (Dominggus, 2022, pp. 11-15) also supports inclusivity by recognizing both special and general revelation, reinforcing the importance of inter-religious dialogue.

The third characteristic of “ultimate concern” is the courage to accept acceptance, a concept introduced by Tillich in *The Courage to Be* (1952). This courage involves affirming one's existence and entering fellowship despite the fear of rejection. In inter-religious dialogue, the fear of exclusion often threatens meaningful connection, making the courage to embrace others essential. Tillich (1952, p. 82) asserts that courage is rooted in vitality and intertwined with all aspects of life, including creativity, language, spirituality, and ultimate concern. The pursuit of genuine fellowship reflects this courage to welcome others into one’s life. Tillich (1953, p. 155) describes the human condition as one of separation—from oneself, others, and God—manifesting as estrangement and leading to behaviors like aggression and self-destruction. Yet, God’s grace offers redemption through unconditional acceptance, as highlighted in Tillich’s sermon, *You Are Accepted* (Tillich, 1952, p. 1962). Christians, following Christ’s example, courageously participate in a humanist community, fostering mutual acceptance and dialogue, where differences in faith no longer impede coexistence.

Method

This study utilizes a qualitative research approach to conduct phenomenological research. According to Riyanto (2018, p. 173), phenomenological research focuses on meaning, based not on the researcher’s interpretation but on the meaning derived from the subjects’ experiences. This type of research goes beyond mere historical narrative or daily experience. It seeks to uncover the deeper social realities at play. Phenomenological research often involves a small, carefully selected group of individuals who have experienced a specific phenomenon. Creswell (2013) suggests that the number of research subjects typically ranges from 3 to 15 people. The author interviewed three Muslim individuals

who were directly involved in inter-religious dialogue with GKT Citraraya. For this study, the author employed Heidegger’s hermeneutic phenomenology method, which fuses descriptive phenomenology with interpretative hermeneutics. As Mackey (2005, pp. 179-186) notes, for Heidegger, a purely descriptive approach is insufficient; meaning can only be revealed through interpretation.

This research utilized in-depth interviews as the primary method of data collection. Additionally, the author conducted observations, not as a means to gather supporting data, but to confirm the authenticity of the interview data. Observation of the daily lives of the subjects provided valuable insights into their experiences and contributed significantly to this study.

Findings And Discussion

The interviews and observations yielded 16 distinct themes. The author organized these themes into three primary categories, reflecting the three characteristics of the concept of ultimate concern. The classification of these themes is presented in the following table:

Table 1. Classification of 16 distinct themes according to the three characteristics of the Ultimate Concern Concept

The Characteristics of The Ultimate Concern Concept	Classification of themes
Universality	<i>I. Concepts:</i> 1. Silaturahmi; 2. Divinity; 3. Humanity; 4. Unity; 5. Integrality; 6. The other
Inclusivity	<i>II. Acceptance:</i> 7. Cultural respect; 8. One God; 9. Living in the same world
The courage to accept acceptance	<i>III. Participating In A Humanist Community</i> 10. Respectful treatment of the church building; 11. Freedom to worship; 12. Humanitarian concern; 13. Conflict management; 14. Fostering religious moderation; 15. Peace, harmony, and tolerance; 16. Concerning the nation's welfare

Source: This table is derived from the three key characteristics of the Ultimate Concern Concept as they relate to the themes.

From the table above, it is evident that the three characteristics of the ultimate concern concept form a cohesive progression from abstract ideas to concrete actions, from thought to practice, and from internal understanding to outward behavior. In relation to the research themes, the ultimate concern is expressed through themes that move from concept towards real-world application. Once classified, these themes narrow into three main categories: the concept, the acceptance, and the action (or concrete) theme.

The universal characteristic aligns with the concept theme, reflecting the idea that universality addresses broad concepts rather than specific content. The inclusive characteristic connects with the acceptance theme. This theme illustrates how the ultimate concern concept fosters cultural inclusion and acknowledges God, allowing people to coexist with mutual respect and acceptance. The courage to accept acceptance corresponds to the real action (concrete) theme. The courage to accept others is demonstrated by actively engaging in daily life and contributing to society. This aligns with Colossians

3:23, which states, “And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men,” (King James Bible). Ultimately, a person’s ultimate concern should point towards God.

The importance of viewing religion as a concept

The concept of ultimate concern emphasizes the close relationship between religion and culture. Every cultural element, to some extent, carries a dimension of religiosity. One such example is the concept of *silaturahmi*, a cultural practice of maintaining social ties, which holds significant religious value in Indonesian society. While *silaturahmi* is not unusual to Indonesia, its religious connotation is particularly strong among the research subjects, who have a Muslim background. The practice of *silaturahmi*, endorsed by both the Qur'an and Hadith, is seen as an integral part of faith. Nasrullooh and Suharyat (2023) asserts that *silaturahmi* is a noble form of communication based on faith in Allah, mirroring findings on cultural-religious fusion such as *halal bi halal* during Eid celebrations (Mulyono & Habib, 2022). It exemplifies how religion and culture can merge, creating a meaningful daily practice that embodies faith and ultimate concern for God.

In the context of Sambikerep village, *silaturahmi* emerges as more than a social activity, it becomes a bridge for inter-religious dialogue. Through interviews and observations, it was evident that *silaturahmi* is embedded in the daily lives of the research subjects, serving as a starting point for conversations with people of other faiths, including the Christian community. This cultural-religious practice fosters dialogue, mutual understanding, and strengthens relationships across religious lines. Widyana et al. (2022) assert that everyday cultural-religious practices play a significant role in supporting broader scholarly findings on how daily cultural interactions contribute to the promotion of interreligious dialogue and tolerance.

Another key theme that surfaced in this study is the concept of divinity. For the research subjects, God is not merely a theological construct but a deeply ingrained symbol of the Almighty, the Creator, who is central to their existence. Indonesia’s national ideology, Pancasila, emphasizes belief in one God, a principle that predates the nation’s founding and is deeply embedded in the cultural and spiritual life of Indonesians, offering a foundation for inter-religious dialogue (Setiawan et al., 2020). This shared belief in divinity provides a foundation for inter-religious dialogue. Instead of exclusive religious names for the divine, the subjects in this study employ the universal term “Tuhan” for God which can be accepted and understood by people of all faiths. Taufik (2021) states that in Islam, the symbol of “Tuhan” represents divine existence. The subjects’ understanding of divinity transcends exclusive religious symbols, making the symbol of “Tuhan” a universal reference for all religions.

The use of a universal symbol for God is significant. As theologian Paul Tillich argues, exclusive religious symbols are not conducive to dialogue. In contrast, the word “Tuhan” serves as a symbol of universality, fostering an inclusive space for inter-religious conversations. The research subjects view the word “Tuhan” as a tool for promoting sustained and meaningful interfaith dialogue in Indonesia, where the concept of ultimate concern centers on the belief in the Almighty.

The concept of humanity also plays a critical role in this study. As creatures of God, humans are endowed with wisdom and the responsibility to care for the world. For the Muslim subjects in this research, humans are regarded as caliphs or stewards of the earth. Rasyad (2022) writes that humans serve as stewards in life and are responsible for carrying out the tasks passed down from their predecessors, resonating with environmental and social stewardship themes seen in interfaith initiatives (Manalu, 2023). This theme reflects the subjects' understanding of religious concepts as part of everyday life and their efforts to foster interreligious dialogue through shared values. This belief highlights the moral responsibility to contribute positively to society and to enhance human civilization. It is through

this shared understanding of humanity's purpose that inter-religious dialogue can flourish, as all of God's creatures are called to work together for the betterment of the world.

The concept of unity is deeply rooted in the foundation of the Indonesian nation, reflecting a historical and cultural legacy that has shaped the daily lives of Indonesians for centuries. This theme is not a modern invention but has evolved over time through the lived experiences of inter-religious dialogue. A significant example of this is found in the *Kakawin Sutasoma*, an ancient Javanese literary work that illustrates how unity was viewed as essential, depicting Buddha and Shiva as part of an inseparable whole (Aghababian, 2015). This unity was further emphasized during the reign of Hayam Wuruk in the Majapahit Kingdom, where national unity were regarded as crucial to achieving the nation's greatness (Kamdani et al., 2025; Latif, 2015).

The motto *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (unity in diversity) which originated from this text, captures the ancestors' vision of religious coexistence. It allowed for religious freedom within internal religious affairs (hinduism and buddhism at the time) while ensuring the nation's integrity. For the research subjects in this study, this historical concept of unity remains highly relevant, as it continues to inspire present-day inter-religious dialogue and shapes their aspirations for the future. The enduring theme of unity in diversity provides a robust historical foundation for sustained inter-religious harmony, showing that religion and the pursuit of national unity are inherently linked. Utomo (2022, pp. 169-170) in his dissertation states that Islam has indeed provided guidelines and key principles for the common good in nation-building, consistent with grassroots interfaith efforts (Office of the President of Indonesia, 2023). In other words, the responsibility to maintain national integrity is based on strong spirituality within Islamic tradition.

For the research subjects, religion must embody the concept of unity as part of their ultimate concern. This means rejecting dichotomies between secular and sacred, or between religious and everyday life. Tasman (2021) writes that several Muslim scholars, including Muhammad Abduh (1845-1905 AD) from Egypt and Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817-1898) from India, offer the insight that the sacred must be able to enter the secular in religious life. In their view, every action, no matter how ordinary, is a form of worship to God. This theme underscores the belief that religion should be integrated into all aspects of life, where acts of kindness to others are seen as expressions of faith. The research subjects deeply experience this idea of religious integrity, manifesting their beliefs through good deeds in daily life as a form of devotion.

It is important to note that the concept of religious integrity in inter-religious dialogue does not suggest the blending of beliefs or diluting one's convictions (McNeal, 2022; Ab. Majid, 2022). Rather, it emphasizes maintaining one's personal faith while expressing it through actions that contribute to the common good, seen as acts of worship to God. This idea allows for the coexistence of strong individual religious identities within a framework of mutual respect and shared values, making it an effective tool for ongoing inter-religious dialogue.

The concept of "the other" in this study offers a new perspective on who the "other" is. Traditionally, the "other" has been understood as those who are marginalized, oppressed, or excluded from society—whether due to their socioeconomic status, gender, or minority status (Riyanto, 2018, pp. 265-267). However, the research subjects extend this concept to include individuals or groups who exclude themselves from society due to radical beliefs. In their interpretation, "the other" refers to people or religious groups who hold extreme views, distancing themselves from the broader community, often advocating for ideals like a caliphate that threaten national unity.

These individuals or groups, while not marginalized in the traditional sense, pose a different kind of challenge to societal cohesion. The research subjects express concern over the rise of religious

radicalism in Sambikerep village, where extreme interpretations of religious doctrine disrupt dialogue and harmony, even within the same religious community. The narrow, dogmatic application of religious beliefs is seen as detrimental to the broader goal of unity, and efforts are being made to re-engage and deradicalize these groups, reintegrating them into society.

The research subjects emphasize that a narrow view of religion is not appropriate for a nation as diverse as Indonesia, and maintaining intra-religious and inter-religious dialogue is essential for fostering peace, harmony, and religious tolerance. Isnawati et al. (2020) and Salim (2022) show how interfaith dialogue models in Indonesia effectively counter radicalism. From these reflections, the author gained a deeper understanding of how the concept of religion, viewed universally, has long been embedded in the minds of the Indonesian people. This concept is not a recent development but is rooted in the country's history, where religion has always been intertwined with culture. The research subjects see religion not just as a set of beliefs but as a concept that shapes identity and fosters unity.

Thus, Christianity and Islam, the two major religions in Indonesia, share common ground for sustainable inter-religious dialogue. This common ground is not shallow or superficial; rather, it is a strong and deep foundation, grown from a long history of coexistence and mutual respect (Kurniawan et al., 2024; Ardiansyah & Prihantoro, 2023). All human beings, within their cultural contexts, pose theological questions, and effective understanding depends on shared frames of reference. As Tillich (1951, p. 6) famously stated, "In order to answer a question, one must have something in common with the person asking it." This statement implies that effective communication and understanding require a shared frame of reference or common ground between the questioner and the respondent. Having something in common means sharing language, context, or a set of similar experiences. This commonality could take the form of cultural background, level of knowledge, beliefs, values, or simply a mutual understanding of the topic at hand. Such shared ground facilitates meaningful understanding and interaction, as both parties are operating from a similar foundation. To answer a question effectively, the respondent must understand not only the words but also the intent, context, and significance behind the question. Shared experiences or knowledge help the respondent grasp what is truly being asked, including the assumptions or nuances that underlie it. It remains relevant today, as it functions effectively in facilitating dialogue, helping to build bridges between different religious communities, and promoting a vision of unity that has long been part of the Indonesian cultural and religious landscape.

Inclusivism is the way for inter-religious dialogue

A theme of cultural respect is integral to the inclusiveness within the concept of ultimate concern, harmonizing the realities of culture and religion. The Church actively supports *Sedekah Bumi* cultural event, celebrated annually in Sambikerep village, as an opportunity to connect with religious, community, and political figures who are invited to express gratitude to God together. *Sedekah bumi* is a traditional ceremony symbolizing human gratitude to God Almighty for providing sustenance through the land/earth in the form of various agricultural products (R., 2014) and that offerings from the land are an expression of gratitude for the food received and a request for the abundance of food in the future (Maulana et al., 2022)

This event illustrates a realm of general truth, where gratitude is directed toward God as the source of humanity's prosperity. Remarkably, the thanksgiving prayers are often led by Muslim leaders, with Christian representatives participating, demonstrating a willingness to integrate within the community. The Church's involvement in cultural event and national events—such as the cultural parade during Indonesian independence celebrations—highlights its commitment to ongoing inter-religious dialogue.

During national prayer gatherings, representatives from various state-recognized religions take turns praying according to their respective beliefs, fostering mutual respect and understanding.

The inclusive characteristics of culture can be understood through the theology of general truth or grace. Syayekti et al. (2023) emphasize that general truths play an important role in inter-religious dialogue. God, as the creator of the universe, endowed humanity with the ability to manage and appreciate the world. *Sedekah Bumi* culture event in Sambikerep village is interpreted as an expression of gratitude to God for creation and divine grace, where the bountiful harvests and livelihoods are viewed as gifts from the divine. This awareness of gratitude is deeply embedded in the hearts of the society, affirming that the divine is the ultimate concern of humanity.

The theme of One God carries profound significance. Each individual's faith and expression of devotion to God is a unique and authentic experience, characterized by personal dialogue between the individual and the divine. Through observation, the author notes that the research subject believes fervently in the power of prayer, experiencing moments of deep emotional distress during the COVID-19 pandemic. During this time, the subject sought solace through prayer, facing the church building in the early morning, illustrating a genuine connection to God. Such spiritual experiences affirm that God welcomes all who come to Him with sincere hearts, demonstrating the authenticity of faith beyond religious boundaries.

This experience challenges the exclusivity often associated with religion. The concept of "ultimate concern" posits that an individual's total focus should be directed toward God, who embodies the ultimate truth. Tillich (1974, p. 109) suggests that God serves as a universal symbol, representing a person's ultimate concern. Contemporary scholarship emphasizes that such universal symbols not only foster authentic spiritual encounter but also support inclusive theological encounters across traditions (Pan-chiu, 2017; Volf, 2015). In moments of genuine connection with God, authentic faith arises from within, while simultaneously, collective recognition of the Almighty is shared within the Sambikerep village community. Here, God is not only the focus of individual devotion but also the creator and sustainer of the universe.

Living in the same world necessitates coexistence, even amidst diverse and sometimes conflicting interests. Religion has often been a source of social conflict in Indonesia. Regus (2020) and Setyawan (2020) emphasize that religious tensions in Indonesia mainly occur between Christianity and Islam. This statement touches on a significant issue in Indonesia, a country known for its religious diversity. Indonesia is home to multiple religions, with Islam being the majority faith, followed by Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. The historical struggle over the nation's foundation reflects the tensions between proponents of various ideologies, including those advocating for Islam as the state's foundation. This history underscores the urgent need for continuous inter-religious dialogue in Indonesia. The nation's founding fathers, with their commitment to inclusivity, established a foundation that embraces all elements of society. This context underscores the urgent need for sustained inter-religious dialogue, a principle also highlighted by public religious moderation initiatives (Burhani, 2024).

In Sambikerep village, the belief in religious plurality as a means for harmonious coexistence is exemplified in the Quranic verse from Surah Al-Kafirun verse 6, "To you is your religion, and to me, my religion." This verse underscores respect for the inner dimensions of each faith. Syayekti et al. (2023) asserts that tolerance in the context of religion and belief does not mean compromising faith. In the Indonesian context, the symbol of the Almighty God represents a unifying concept that facilitates inclusivity in ongoing inter-religious dialogue across various faiths. While the term "God" is inherently symbolic, it serves as an inclusive reference for all religions, reinforcing the idea of ultimate concern

that aligns well with the principles of continuous inter-religious dialogue. In this context, the concept of “God” becomes a unifying religious symbol that transcends specific traditions while honoring ultimate concern (Widyana et al., 2022). Living in a shared world requires mutual respect, appreciation, and care for one another. Therefore, inclusivity in inter-religious dialogue is paramount.

The themes of acceptance discussed above offer enlightening insights into inclusivity in this dialogue. First, the concept of ultimate concern, grounded in Christian theology regarding general revelation, creates a wide space for inclusivity in inter-religious dialogue. Recognizing that God reveals Himself through the universe allows for a shared understanding of the divine across different faiths. The acknowledgement of the One Almighty God becomes a symbol that unites all people in Sambikerep village. Budiyo (2014) asserts that the recognition of the Almighty God in Indonesia is not at all a principle that enters the realm of personal religious faith, but rather a principle for living together in a country, among various layers of society with different religions. This aligns with theological perspectives that see universal divine symbols as essential for cross-faith understanding (Pan-Chiu, 2017; Volf, 2015). This statement reflects a crucial aspect of Indonesia's foundational ideology, *Pancasila*, particularly its first principle: *Ketuhanan Yang Maha Esa* (Belief in the One Almighty God), serves not as a religious mandate but as a foundational social ethic that supports unity within a diverse society (Hamdan & Masyitoh, 2025; Masinambow & Banfatin, 2023).

Second, inclusivity represents a preference for responding positively to the realities of a pluralistic society. Individuals and communities can choose between remaining isolated or engaging with others of different beliefs. In Sambikerep village, the community consciously opts for acceptance and dialogue amidst cultural and religious diversity. This decision, although challenging given the permanence of exclusive religious truths, reflects a commitment to fostering inclusivity.

Third, choosing inclusivity does not require compromising one's beliefs or exclusive truths. Instead, it demonstrates a profound commitment to worship according to personal convictions. The sincerity of worship enriches the community's understanding of faith, emphasizing that authentic devotion to God naturally extends to caring for others. Volf's (2015) theological model of flourishing faith explains how authentic religiosity informs communal care beyond doctrinal confines. Eventually, inclusivism serves as a vital pathway for inter-religious dialogue, promoting understanding, respect, and cooperation among diverse religious communities. By embracing the shared values of gratitude, respect, and care, individuals and communities can foster a more harmonious coexistence in an increasingly pluralistic world.

The Courage to accept acceptance manifests as courage to participate in a humanist community

Muhammad and Muhlas (2023), quoting Mangun Harjana, write that humanism is a school of thought that emphasizes focus on human dignity and all its capabilities. Muhammad and Muhlas (2023) further explained that humans are regarded as having a high dignity, capable of determining the direction of their lives both individually and communally, developing themselves, and fulfilling their needs. Based on the understanding above, a humanist community is a collection of individuals who uphold the dignity, autonomy and potential of each member, working together to encourage self-development, ethical living and mutual respect. It is a place where personal freedom is balanced with social responsibility, and where everyone is encouraged to grow while contributing to the common good. Inclusivity, collaboration and respect for human rights form the core principles of the community, creating an environment where individual and communal well-being is valued and fostered.

Courage to participate in a humanist community involves being authentic and actualizing oneself with respect for others. It means living authentically as a Christian, Muslim, or follower of any faith,

without shame or secrecy when practicing one's religious duties with sincerity and earning respect both spiritually and socially (Suprianto et al., 2024). This genuine approach earns respect for both one's spiritual and daily life. The sustainability of inter-religious dialogue is heavily influenced by individual or group behaviors toward others. In society, inter-religious dialogue develops through concrete actions that benefit others or the community. Courage to participate in a humanist community is a form of participation, working together with others in everyday life to strengthen the community and build a civilization that actively sustains inter-religious dialogue. Such behavior significantly influences the sustainability of inter-religious dialogue, as it is rooted in everyday actions that benefit others (Kusmayani, 2023; Ramadhani, 2024). Interfaith civic engagements, such as community service, youth forums, and shared cultural celebrations, demonstrate that working together in daily life fosters communal bonds and builds a civilization that actively sustains interfaith dialogue (Suprianto et al., 2024; Soffi & Haque, 2022).

In this study, a recurring theme is the respectful treatment of the church building, akin to the reverence shown to a mosque. Behaviors such as removing shoes and protecting the sanctity of the church demonstrate the deep concern research subjects have for the space. This is rooted in their experience of being welcomed by the church community, where no distinction is made between Christians and Muslims. The Church gives research subject freedom to worship. This acceptance is further reflected in the positive view Muslims hold toward the church and its leaders. For instance, Muslim security personnel are allowed to pray at the security post, and on special occasions, like holidays, they are even permitted to use the mosque. This mutual respect has led research subjects to boldly assert that Christians are not infidels (*kafir*), but fellow servants of God, just like Muslims. This courage to affirm that Christians are not infidels confirms the church's acceptance of them, and in turn, Muslims reciprocate by accepting Christians.

Another notable theme is the church's humanitarian concern for people across religious boundaries. When one of the research subjects was ill, the church visited and prayed for him. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the church had the opportunity to express Christ's love for humanity, offering food assistance and maintaining full salaries for security staff affected by the virus. This act left a lasting impression on the Muslim security team, showcasing the church's deep financial and emotional concern for them, even when the church itself faced financial difficulties. The church's willingness to share in the struggles of others further strengthened this bond.

Conflict management also emerged as a key theme, illustrating the intensity of daily interactions between the church and the participants. These conflicts are handled wisely and seen as issues between individuals, not between the church and the Muslim community. This positive relationship gives security personnel the confidence to address church visitors who do not follow the rules. The church also plays a role in fostering religious moderation alongside Islamic leaders, demonstrating its commitment to the broader community by addressing societal needs, especially in promoting religious harmony. The church's presence brings tangible benefits to the community.

The themes of peace, harmony, and tolerance are echoed by the Baitulrozzaq Mosque, located near GKT Citraraya. They follow government regulations for religious practices and stand out from other mosques by moderating their use of loudspeakers and actively preventing radicalism. Offering Christmas greetings to Christians, despite debates over its permissibility, is a clear example of how the mosque community embraces Christians. During inter-religious events, church leaders join other religious leaders in offering prayers to God according to their respective faiths. This mutual respect reflects active participation in national unity and shows the church's deep concern for the future of the nation. Research subjects view this cooperation as a collective effort to promote the nation's welfare.

These themes represent concrete forms of inter-religious dialogue. This courage is expressed through individuals or groups engaging in public spaces, contributing to and showing concern for society. Humans live in a shared world, connected to others as a single entity. As social beings, they care for others just as they care for themselves. In inter-religious dialogue, the courage to participate in a humanist community is built on mutual concern. Living in a humanist community is an active engagement in the lifeworld or everyday life of society. Actively participating in the everyday life of a pluralistic society fosters sustainable inter-religious dialogue.

Conclusion

Inter-religious dialogue requires a shared foundation, specifically a theological commonality or mutual understanding. The importance of the concept of “ultimate concern” lies in its ability to facilitate discussions about “The Total” without resorting to the exclusive symbols of particular religious languages. In a pluralistic society, religious and cultural diversity often creates tensions between opposing forces, which can lead to social conflict. While religious exclusivity cannot be dismissed, inclusivity is equally essential. Navigating this tension is key to fostering ongoing inter-religious dialogue. The concept of “ultimate concern” is significant in managing this tension through its three core characteristics. Its universality emphasizes the need to understand religion through a broader conceptual lens, helping balance the opposing aspects of religious content and practice. Inclusivity encourages acceptance of people from different faiths based on the principle of general revelation, mitigating the clash with exclusivity. Finally, the courage to participate as part of a humanist community is essential for building societal fellowship. This third characteristic addresses the challenge of turning potential into reality, fostering sustainable inter-religious dialogue by overcoming the fear of rejection.

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