

Inter-Religious Relations and Methodologi Issues

Abdul Syukur

Religious Studies Department Faculty of Theology UIN Sunan Gunung Djati, Indonesia
Asyukur217@gmail.com

Abstract

Every religion teaches its followers to live peacefully and harmoniously with others, both the same and different religion followers. However, the fact shows that relations among religious people are often to be problematical. This is not only because of differences between religions in doctrines and practices but also because of different interpretations (sects) and organizations. This religious conflict obviously will harm the religious people themselves. As humanity, religious people want to live together harmoniously with others, both fellow religion, and different religions, because they live on the same earth. This article will discuss how are the inter-religious relationships related to methodological problems in the field of religious studies. Methodologically, Comparative Religion that developed in the early time it studied religions from a theological perspective that is looking at the other religions from their own. So, what happened was the pokrol bambu attitude, raising his religion and demeaning on another. This method is not good for students who study religions, particularly for Indonesians who are multi-religious, because it will only look at his/her religion as superior whereas another as inferior. Wilfred Cantwell Smith, on the other hand, offers a method that is personalizing religion as a way of studying religions. Religion should not be seen only as a set of fixed doctrines and ready-made. The problem of religion is essentially a human problem in which the adherents of each religion always understand, experience and realize their religious beliefs and practices in daily life. Therefore, religion is always new every day. This method or approach requires students to study other religions through the perspective of the people who embraced it, so that, biased interpretation can be avoided. This method requires students to come and have a dialogue with the religious followers concerned.

Keywords: *inter-religious relations, religious studies, personalization of religion*

Introduction

Humans are social beings, and therefore, they always want to live together peacefully and harmoniously.¹ To create a harmonious life together so, community elites make or create values and norms that become guidelines for each member. Anthropologically these values and social norms are then called tradition which becomes a part of the culture of the community concerned. Functionally religions contain a set of values and norms that teach each follower to live peacefully. Religious norms teach how humans should do good things concerning God, humans and God's created nature. There are no religions that teach to ungodly to God, hurting fellow humans or destroying creation world of God.²

Nevertheless, the facts show that in human life sometimes there are relationships that are not harmonious, even involved in physical conflict with one and another. World wars (I and II), wars inter countries (India-Pakistan), or conflicts inter-ethnic groups (Sri Lanka and Myanmar) are examples that result from social relations that are not harmonious. Likewise, in the context of religious relations, it is often we find conflicts between one and other religious communities. For example, the Crusades that lasted for two centuries and are not easily forgotten between Islam and Christianity, conflicts between Catholicism and Protestantism in Northern Ireland, conflicts between Sunnis-Shiites in the Middle East, etc. These religious conflicts are not only caused by differences between believed religions but also often occurred only because of differences of sects, interpretations and organizational differences among religious communities themselves.

Besides, religious differences and differences in religious interpretation are often not entirely the cause of conflicts in the religious relations, but rather become vehicles that are boarded by other interests. In other words, certain religious groups often use the issue of religious differences or interpretations to achieve the desired position and economic resources that are contested for. However, this article does not want to explore the issue of misuse of differences or interpretations of religion in the context of inter-religious relations, but it will try to see how to build inter-religious relations from the other side, namely in terms of methodology, so that differences are not to be a thorn in one's flesh in the relationship between these religious people.

Many Religions, One World

The experts on religion often classify religions into several classifications. They classify the religions to the great tradition and the lesser tradition. The great tradition, for example, includes Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism; while the lesser tradition includes Sikhism, Shintoism, Bahaim, and others. There are also who classify the existing religions to revealed religions, such as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, on the one hand; on the other hand, some religions are classified as world religions, namely Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Jainism, and others. Some classify the religions on this earth into living religions, namely Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and others and religions that have already died (death religions) such as Zoroastrianism. The rest of them classify religions as western traditions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam) and Eastern traditions (Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Shintoism, etc.). Whatever the classification of religions made by religious

¹ In the relationship between individual and society, Durkheim stated that society is primary, whereas the individual is secondary. He saw the fact no individual was born alone, but each individual was always born and raised amid society. Furthermore, there is no individual can live alone. It is very painful to live alone and alienated from society, from parents who are very affectionate and from people who are loved. Therefore, to be accepted by those around him/her, so individual inevitably have to submit to and obey the surrounding community. As such, an individual depends on and is constructed by society.

² In Islam, for example, although it is allowed to fight the enemy who is attacking, the ethics of war must remain within the limits of humanity, such as not being able to kill women, the elderly and children, not being able to damage plants, etc. Buddhist ethics (*sila*), on the other hand, do not allow people to kill, including small animals, in any situation, because that will cause bad karma.

researchers, these classification clearly show that there are many religions on this earth. In addition to the religions stated above, there are even more religious systems that live and still exist among certain ethnic groups or communities. Adherents of these religious systems still maintain the beliefs and religious practices that they have received from generation to generation from their ancestors amid the current modernization and globalization which continues urge for change. The researchers call these belief systems as tribal religions, local religions, local beliefs, traditional religion, and so on.

Because there are many religions, the researchers classify religion into several classifications so that they are easy to be learned. In other words, the classification of religions is only an effort of the experts to understand so many map of religions in the world. By classifying religions into several groups or categories, it will be easy to understand these religions.

Many religions, one world. There are a lot of religious adherents, while they live on one and the same world. As a result, it often occurs a (seizing) competition for space among adherents of the religion. The space that is the (purpose) essential need of human life on earth is the only place to fight for life, including among religious communities. To maintain that life, religious people build social groups and make the religion they embrace as the identity of their respective groups. The competition for space among social groups based on religious beliefs often gives birth to religious conflicts.

These religious conflicts obviously will harm the religious people themselves. As human beings who want to live together peacefully and harmoniously, the contradictions caused by religious differences and interpretations clearly will disrupt the religious life. How could it be the people practice religious doctrines peacefully when they get threats from other religious people? Or, at least, people will be got with feelings of worry or insecurity when faced with interference from other religious communities. People believe in different religions, even though they live on the same earth. Therefore, how people of different religions can live together peacefully without feelings of fear or worry about other groups disruptions.

Religious conflicts are caused by differences doctrines between one religion and other religion. The existence of differences doctrines among religions is what makes people of one religion assume that his/her religion is the most correct and other religions are not true. Assuming that the most correct is only his/her religion then results in an exclusive attitude and tends to blame other religions adherents. So, there is an attitude of blaming religious followers and others. Because they assume other religious groups are "wrong", then there is also an attempt to invite, call or return other groups to the perspective or belief of his/her group. As a result, there are mismatched relationships, even conflicts inter-religious people.

That conflict also often occurs among groups of the same religion followers. Differences in understanding or interpretation of doctrines of the same religion often produce to different groups. Each of these groups assume that their opinion or view is the most correct, while the opinion or view of the other group considered is "wrong" that needs to be returned to a straight path, that is a view that is in accordance with the views of their group. Because each group feels the most right then there arises conflict among groups even though they are both people of the same religion.

Theologically, there are very different beliefs between one religion and other religion. Islam, for example, like Judaism, firmly believes in The One God, that God is the Creator of the universe and humans. He is not born nor give birth. As well Christianity believes in The One Almighty God, but the oneness of God in Christianity forms the doctrine of Trinity, which is the union between Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Hinduism believes in The One Almighty God called Brahman (in Hinduism in Bali He is called *Sanghyang Widi Wasa*), but Brahman is the creator of the universe is united with His creation, so God according to Hinduism is everywhere. Buddhism does not teach about God because the Buddha does not teach it.³

³ In my dissertation research, I found that although the Buddha did not teach about God but politically Buddhists in Indonesia recognized it with several different names, such as *Sanghyang Adi Buddha* (Buddhayana), *Tuhan*

Besides, every religion has ritual practices that are different between one religion and other religions. As one of religious symbols, that is to approach and serve the God they believe in, each religion has its way, so that the form of ritual in one religion is different from the ritual system in another religion. As other forms of symbols, such as holy books, worshiping places, language used in rituals, social systems, there are differences between one religion and other religion.

Why do people pay much attention to differences? People tend to see differences because these differences become boundaries in constructing group identity. Ethnic groups, for example, will notice and emphasize differences, such as language or performances, with other ethnic groups in their social relationships so that it becomes clear who "we" are and who "they" are. Likewise in the context of religious relations, each religious group will emphasize differences, both doctrine and understanding, with the other groups so that it is clear who belongs to the group of "us" and who belongs to the group of "they". Therefore, differences in doctrine, ritual practices and understanding are always maintained in socio-religious interactions because by keeping these differences the identity of a religious group is clear. Unfortunately, the construction of identity by emphasizing the differences that become the boundaries of identity is rarely accompanied by awareness of the similarities between various social and religious groups.

Rapid technological progress has led to globalization where human relations have become so close and people cannot close themselves anymore, so knowledge of various religions and beliefs embraced by others is inevitable. In social life, for example, a family does not only have neighbors who share the same religion but sometimes have different religions or even understanding. In such conditions, constantly suspect each other is the same as torturing themselves. Therefore, positive knowledge, at least the basics, of other religions is needed to create a harmonious and mutually respectful life together.

The late President Soekarno once said about the existence of religious plurality with the illustration of some blind people who try to recognize the shape of an elephant. One touches its leg, one touches its ear, one touches its trunk so no one gets knowledge about the elephant shape perfectly. Likewise religious people in achieving the Truth, no one can know it entirely, what each can grasp is only a part of it. Indeed, the illustration above can be misleading, because it can be misinterpreted and produce the assumption that all religions are 'true'. However, behind that illustration, there is a very deep philosophical meaning, that the essence of Truth is too large to be understood by the naive human mind. Consequently, every person, every follower of any religion, must be sure of the truth of their respective religions, but at the same time, he/she must also learn to respect the truth of religion as understood by others.

The mistake that often occurs both past and present among certain people is to assume that the truth of the religion they believe is the most correct and insist the others to follow the understanding about the truth of the religion they believe according to their thoughts. Believe in the truth of own religion as they understand is a must because religion is based on conviction or belief that is understood. There is no religion without faith. But forcing their own beliefs or understanding to others can cause problems, because other people may not necessarily be insisted to follow or accept their beliefs and understandings.

The Truth is only one, and the essence of the Truth is too great to be limited by the human narrow mind. So, why do people feel worry about learning other people's religions? This often happens usually because people are satisfied with partial thinking, they do not think the Truth universally. One example is the case of the expulsion of the Rohingyans in Myanmar and the destruction of the vihara in North Sumatra. For Buddhists, the vihara is a sacred place in which they perform rituals honoring the Buddha and meditating to purify their mind from worldly attachments.

Yang Maha Esa (Theravada), *Tathagathagarbha* (Mahayana), *Namyohorenggekyo* (*Nichiren Shoshu*). On the other hand, even though they called God differently, they agreed that He is not personal.

But we also know that the world is only one and a place for all humanity. God never gave this earth to certain people or made an agreement that the Rakhine territory was only for the Arakan people. The questions are: Is it for the sake of his/her love for the Buddha that Buddhists are justified in offending the Rohingya people? Also, is it for the sake of love of Allah and His Messenger that Muslims are justified in offending the Buddhists?

The problem is now to be found in the willingness and effort to understand each other's ways of thinking. Furthermore, it lies in the question: Is there a willingness and effort to work together from every religious community? Technological progress and globalization have caused changes in every aspect of human life, including the religious aspect to be sure. This fact cannot be inevitable, but it must be realized. The side impact of the development of technology and globalization is the growth of materialism, secularism, and the decreasing of spiritual values that are precisely the enemies and challenges for every religious community. It is ironic if every religious adherents are still quarreling with each other while their enemies are in their eyes and even have penetrated their lives. Even more ironic is the quarrel that occur between sects or organization in certain religion while they claim it comes from the same source.

Religions in the Focus of Methodological Debate

The existence of differences between one religion and another religion has indeed long attracted the attention of people so that, they research them. Specifically, disciplines makes the differences and similarities of religions as objects of study is the *Comparative Religion* discipline. The term of *Ilmu Perbandingan Agama* popular in Indonesia is a translation of the term in English *Comparative Religion* or *Comparative Religions*. The term *Comparative Religion* or *Comparative Religions* itself is not the only term that is commonly used among experts in that field because, besides of that term, we also find other terms, such as *Religionswissenschaft*, *The History of Religions*, and *Religious Studies*.

Comparative Religion as defined by Louis J. Jordan, for example, developed among priests and missionaries who together with the colonialists came to the colony land and found the beliefs of local communities different from their own beliefs.⁴ The differences between their beliefs and the local community beliefs made the priests or missionaries more interested in investigating and comparing them than developing the mental and morals of the colonialists of themselves. Besides, because they carry out their religious mission, so the nature of 'selfish' (apologist) tends to be more than to see the reality as it is. This can be understood because the approach they used was more theological.

Religionswissenschaft (Science of Religion), on the other hand, is considered a mother of scientific disciplines that discuss various religions aspects such as Archeology of Religion, Philology of Religion, History of Religion, Comparative Religion, Phenomenology of Religion, Anthropology of Religion, Sociology of Religion, Psychology of Religion, and others.⁵ In contrast with theology which only discusses one religion and normative, the Science of Religion makes religions - both past and present religions - as the objects of the study. Thus, from the point of view of the *Religionswissenschaft* (the science of religion) experts, Comparative Religion that tries to research and

⁴ Mukti Ali said that Dutch scholars who wrote about Indonesia could be divided into 3 groups: first, advisors who gave advice about Indonesia, including about Islam, to the colonial government, to the interests of colonialism; second, missionaries, both from Catholicism and Protestantism, who made significant contributions, especially about linguistics but not about Islam, carried out the mission of broadcasting the gospel; third, the academics are expected to be 'neutral' but apparently still feel a sense of 'ethnic superiority' (*Ilmu Perbandingan Agama di Indonesia*, Yogyakarta, IAIN Sunan Kali Djaga, 1988: viii-ix).

⁵ See, for example, Farichin Chumaidy, 'Comparative Science of Religion and Its Relationship to the Sociology of Religion and History of Religion' and Herman L. Beck, 'Comparative Science of Religion and Phenomenology of Religion: Search for the Essence of Religion?' (In Burhanuddin Daya and Herman Leonard Beck (eds.), *Ilmu Perbandingan Agama di Indonesia dan Belanda*, Jkt, INIS, 1992: 24-29 and 48-56).

study religions by comparing their similarities and differences is only one part of Science of Religion whose nature of study is integral using the *'polymethodic'* method.⁶

But otherwise, there is a tendency for contrary opinion⁷ where people understand the Science of Religion only studies one religion⁸ -generally, the religion studied is the religion of the researcher himself- with his research method too. Mukti Ali, for example, wrote an article titled *'Metodologi Ilmu Agama Islam'*⁹ which explained the objects, methods, and approaches in studying Islam. In the other article, *'Penelitian Agama di Indonesia'*,¹⁰ Mukti Ali often understands the expert in 'Religion' as an expert (*'alim'*) in only one religion, or even 'theologian' (Mukti Ali in the same article and Mattulada in his article *'Penelitian Berbagai Aspek Keagamaan Dalam Kehidupan Masyarakat dan Kebudayaan di Indonesia'*¹¹ said that the thought of 'Religious Sciences' is speculative-theoretical by using the 'deductive' method). Whereas the term Science of Religion in terms of *Religionswissenschaft* as an independent discipline and different from theology, arises among western Europeans, especially Max Muller with his philological-mythological method, in studying religions, even though they are both speculative.

Furthermore, there is another term, *the History of Religions*. According to Kitagawa,¹² different terminological usage of *Religionswissenschaft*, *Comparative Religion* and *The History of Religions* imply the obscurity of character of these disciplines. Despite they are different, however, all of these terms refer to a general knowledge known originally as the *Allgemeine Religionswissenschaft*, which is translated into English "general science of religions". But this term in English is not widely used in the society, because it is too long, and the word 'science' can be misleading, which can be misinterpreted as an empirical science. Finally, scholars engaged in the field adopted another English term, "The History of Religions". In other words, Kitagawa said, the term "*The History of Religions*" is synonymous with "*general science of religions*" and therefore, the characteristic and the disciplines must be seen in the context of *Religionswissenschaft*.

However, in Indonesia, especially in the PTKIN (State Islamic Higher Education), The History of Religions becomes a subject of courses obligatory to all students of Religious Studies. It is considered as part of the 'Science of Religion' (*Religionswissenschaft*) and is a separate course besides the Comparative Religion. The History of Religion studies religion only from a historical point of view

⁶ Farihin Chumaidy quotes this term from Smart's book, *The Science of Religion and the Sociology of Knowledge* (1973), as the method of the Science of Religion. On the other hand, Sharpe suggested that this *'polymethodic'* and interdisciplinary method were related to the shift in Smart's ideas when he became the first professor at Lancaster University who tried to combine the Comparative Religion with Philosophy of Religion that was typical of England, but not in Europe generally, and at the same time the department name was changed to Religious Studies, not Comparative Religion or The History of Religions (*Comparative Religion: A History*, London, Duckworth, 2nd imp., 1992: 289).

⁷ Mukti Ali, for example, stated: "Now, under the common term 'Comparative Religion' contained History of Religion, Sociology of Religion, Phenomenology of Religion, Philosophy of Religion, and others that have their respective approaches and methods" (*Ilmu Perbandingan Agama di Indonesia*, Yogyakarta, IAIN Sunan Kali Djaga 1988: 3).

⁸ Harun Nasution made Islamic Studies into 7 fields (*Saresehan Pengembangan Perguruan Tinggi Agama Islam Pada IAIN/PTAIS at IAIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung (26-27 Rabiul Tsani 1416 H./22-23 September 1995 M.)*).

⁹ In Taufiq Abdullah and M. Rusli Karim, (eds.), *Metodologi Penelitian Agama: Sebuah Pengantar*, Yogyakarta, Tiara Wacana, cet. 1, 1989.

¹⁰ In Mulyanto Sumardi, (ed.), *Penelitian Agama: Masalah dan Pemikiran*, Jakarta, Balitbang Depag RI, cet. 1, 1982: 20-30.

¹¹ In Mulyanto Sumardi (ed.), *Penelitian Agama: Masalah dan Pemikiran*, Jakarta, Balitbang Depag RI, cet. 1, 1982: 50-68.

¹² Kitagawa, 'The History of Religions in America' in Mircea Eliade and Joseph M. Kitagawa, (eds.), *The History of Religions: Essays in Methodology*, London, The University of Chicago Press, 6th imp., 1973: 15.

and it is not within the framework of the special *Religionswissenschaft* methodology as stated by Kitagawa above.

In addition to the terms above, there is another term, namely Religious Studies. This term is now widely used in Western universities. Nevertheless, according to Sharpe¹³ the term '*Comparative Religion*', burdened with the Darwinian-Spencer evolutionary approach and views religion based on 'superior and inferior' criteria, cannot be easily replaced. In the UK, for example, even though the term '*Religious Studies*' has been used there, there is still the title of professor of '*Comparative Religion*' or '*Comparative Religion*' lecturers. Likewise, the name of the department '*Comparative Religion*' in several universities is still used. It might be easier to use the term *Comparative Religion* than other terms. Likewise, the term *History of Religions* is popular in Swedish and Finnish universities, but the *Temenos* journal covering Scandinavian countries still carries the title '*Studies in Comparative Religion*'. Furthermore, Sharpe stated that indeed the shift of the term from *Comparative Religion* to *Religious Studies* since the 70s it was not merely without cause, but because it involved a methodological debate process among the experts who questioning the controversy whether religious studies will be pure or applied.

From "It" to "We/Us"

Relating to the research methodology in religious studies there is debate among religious researchers. However, to get a complete understanding about the debate process is not easy. According to Sharpe, the difficulty in getting an understanding of the debate caused by several things. First, the debate is occurred in various countries and languages. All is done to respond to stimuli both locally and in general. Second, no way can complete the whole of what happened so that the selection process or the choice is very necessary. Third, the debate process is still ongoing until now.

Furthermore, Sharpe said that the debate revolved around the purpose of religious studies which in turn had an impact on methodological issues in religious research. Simply, the experts who are involved in religious studies can be categorized into two groups.

The first group said that the religious studies must be truly scientific, that is every researcher who really wants to research religions must be truly objective. To get an objective opinion, that is the goal of the research, he/she must get off from his/her religion believes altogether. Because, if a researcher of religions still hold to his/her religion, he/she tends to become a theologian. As long as a researcher of religions still holds their religion, so an objective attitude towards other religions will be difficult to achieve. In other words, he/she will remain subjective and consider other religions from the perspective of his/her religion.¹⁴

That view of point is a form of reaction to the study of religions when the discipline of *Comparative Religion* becomes part of the theology faculty. In Indonesia, at the beginning of *Comparative Religion* was introduced by Mukti Ali at IAIN (State Institute for Islamic Studies) around the 1970s, the *Comparative Religion* became a department that was part of the Faculty of *Ushuluddin* (Islamic Theology). As part of the Faculty of Islamic Theology, studies made by lecturers and the literature used by students tend to see other religions from the perspective of the Islamic point of view. They see other religions by underestimating and make them objects of Islamic proselytizing (*da'wah*)

The second group said that besides the study of religions, learning about the meaning of a religious phenomenon also asks 'what can we do for humans?'

If in the West researchers generally tend to see religion as something static, a mere collection of data, or if not, it only is an organism that must be dissected so that the West is accustomed to

¹³ Sharpe, Eric J., *Comparative Religion: A History*, London, Duckworth, 2nd imp., 1992: xiii.

¹⁴ Sharpe said that Werblowsky and Bleeker were examples of the models of religious research methodologies that developed much in mainland Europe where the idea of purely historical and objective research was emphasized on absolute boundaries and derided those who sought to compromise these criteria at all costs (*Comparative Religion: A History*, London, Duckworth, 2nd imp., 1992: 281-2 f.n.).

spending most of its energy researching ancient religious traditions, then in the East religion is viewed or studied to deepen one's love and understanding of Reality. In other words, eastern researchers do not see religion as a merely passive object that lies on the operating table of a researcher, but religion must be developed within human life. If religious studies cannot help students live better so the study will have little meaning.

But, the problem is not about the East versus the West, because the attitude of seeing religion in an 'intuitive' way can be done not only by researchers in the East but also by those in the West. The real problem is the Western researchers cannot understand life outside Western civilization. They are often reluctant to fix the basic assumptions in their research where 'method' and 'objectivity' have become sacred concepts. Only a few of them want to do that. So, there are now more dogmatism and sacred assumptions in the social science departments than in the theology faculty.

The notion of religion must be regarded as something that has existed in the West since the time of Romanticism. It is just that in public they refuse to compromise scientific reputation with 'subjectivism'. Goodenough, for example, said that the techniques of philological, historical, archeological, and the other studies in which religious research must be based, must be strengthened scientifically and accurately. But these studies should not be regarded as the only final purpose, but must be referred to the problems of the cosmos. In other words, Goodenough has tried to lay the basis for the religious studies that is humanized. Likewise, Smith was one of the researchers who attempted to study the essence of religion as it is interpreted and expressed by its follower. The data collected about one religion is not valid without involving and having agreement from its adherents. In other words, the methodology of religious research is to 'personalize religion'.

Wilfred Cantwell Smith in his article, '*Comparative Religion: Wither-and Why*',¹⁵ said that in the religious studies we must see the religion as 'person'. Or in other words, not just making religion as an 'object' with the pronoun 'it' but as 'we/us'. Smith states how the methodology of religious research has developed from time to time. According to Smith, religion as a dead object and impersonal in the history of the development of religious research is the result and characteristic of the Age of Discovery as the first phase in which the Western-Christian world meets people from other parts of the world who have different beliefs and cultures. They bring a variety of information and data both in the form of documents and their observations about religion and the other cultures to the West. In the nineteenth century, we saw a serious effort to research, record and analyze these facts systematically and interpret it. This effort culminated in the recognition of *Religionswissenschaft* as a discipline in western various universities.

However, although the characteristics of the first phase did not mean missing altogether, in subsequent developments, there was a shift that marked the second phase in which the researchers themselves were present as the people of the different religions. It marks the second phase in religious studies in which the researchers effort to personalize religion.

Furthermore, Smith explained that, because religion is the value of human life all religions are new religions, every morning. Religion is not in the heavens, it has not taken for granted; religion is in every human heart, so it has not finished yet and static. In this second phase, religious research begins with the discussion of religion as 'they'. With this view, Smith criticized the social sciences and humanism that their mistakes and fundamental manipulations were because they had regarded the invisible manifestations of human problems as if the manifestations were the problem itself.

Indeed, external forms of religion such as religious symbols, institutions, doctrines, and practices can be researched separately. This is what has happened to the most researchers lately and especially in the world of European science. But we must pay attention to is that external forms themselves are not religion. Smith is more likely to see that religion lies in the realm of meaning of

¹⁵ In Eliade and Joseph M. Kitagawa (eds.), *The History of Religions: Essays in Methodology*, London, The University of Chicago Press, 6th imp., 1973: 31-58.

these external forms in their point of view of those who embrace and believe in them. Therefore, students who study religions must realize that they are not related to religious systems but with people who are religious, or at least with something that is in the person of these people.

It is recognized that research on the visible external forms of religion as initial work that must be done is still needed because by doing that way the religious studies can begin. Even the religious studies must continue to be fixed in line with the data and the information about research on the external religious factors that are becoming richer and richer and more developing. There is no problem whether the tasks must be carried out by one researcher or the division of tasks should be done among researchers. The thing which must be considered is that the clarity is needed among research that is relating to the external forms of religion in the religious studies and the religious studies itself.

Another thing related to personalization of religion is the fact that the majority of the world's population are religious groups who enthusiastically acknowledge that their religion is the most correct. In dealing with such matters, knowledge of these religions is needed. Knowledge about religions may come from external aspects. If knowledge of external aspects is seen as a guide to the personal qualities of human life, then a sympathetic understanding of these qualities can come from its followers, either as informants or as friends, by asking about the meaning of its religious symbols to the person concerned.

Moreover, the various books about the various religions have been published and people can easily obtain and read it. Books about the religion are not only written by the adherents of the religion and apologetic, but also by others outside the religion who are often loaded with prejudice. In anticipating this, students of the study of religions who write about religions must realize that they write not only for the sake of their studies but also for the benefit of the reader in general. Besides, writing books or articles about religions outside of one's religion is open and allows the adherents of the religion in question to read it. Therefore, according to Smith, a statement about a religion is not valid if it is not recognized by the follower of that religion.

The next stage is that religious researchers themselves are not inanimate objects, but humans are also personal so that now there is a situation when '*we talk about a they*'. Why is that?

First, the 'objective' attitude in the academic world that sees the object of research as impersonal, as noted above, is a legacy of Western (European) academic tradition, or more specifically Western (European) characteristics of the 19th century. Until the early twentieth century, the requirements that are needed to be 'neutral' or scientific in religious research, including other people's religions, is that the student or researcher must get off his own belief or not be engaged. But now, the opposite is often found.

Second, the researchers from various backgrounds of disciplines and cultures come together where the Western dichotomy of secular-religious cannot be fully achieved. Or at least it is recognized that along with secular academic traditions also develops traditions where scholars from different religious backgrounds relate to one another.

Third, in line with this development now even a secular rationalist realizes that he is not as a god or a superior impersonal intellectual, but as a human being like the others and has a certain point of view. Secular-rationalism might be on the right track, it might be also the Truth they stated is true. But now it is felt that there is no *a priori* thought or universal reason to think of it, so that, he is in a position without challenges from the other party who also equally claims to declare the Truth. The rise of philosophy of existentialism, the phenomenon of 'the West returns to religion', the emergence of Communism, the rise of Eastern civilizations based on religion, all combine and produce a completely new condition in which each person and party in a position as one of the members of the world community who must support each other.

In the field of religious studies, each author is recognized and recognizes himself as a supporter and defender of one religion in the world where the others become defenders and supporters of the other religions.

After occurred of personalization of religion on both sides, so a meeting will take place, where 'we talk to you'. And if the situation is more intimate where there is a situation of mutual listening and mutual respect, then there will be a dialogue where 'we talk with you'. This stage is marked by the communication among the two sides in a parallel manner so that, the statements about a religion not only require the recognition of the followers of the religion to be considered valid, but also beneficial and useful - at least not - to themselves, and others.

Finally, the existence of face-to-face dialogue makes it possible to have side-by-side talks where experts from different religious backgrounds no longer merely face-to-face each other but also work together to face the issues that they have. When this happens the situation is '*we all talk to each other about us*'. Because in principle in the study of human religions learn about himself.¹⁶ In other words, the expert in religious studies is no longer just a researcher who studies various religions, but also a person who participates or participates in the problems of the human community.

Conclusion

One important fact is that religion can be a divisive factor of society. Many cases have been shown how social conflicts sometimes occur resulting from different religious beliefs and understandings. Even religion is also often used as a means by certain groups in inflaming people's emotions to face the other religious groups. It is ever and may still be a tendency in the study of religions. If this tendency is tolerated, so social conflicts will continue, especially, as emotions that inflamed by religious beliefs are very deep because it is rooted in the problems of life and death.

The spirit of studying religions has brought researchers to the crossroads where two inclinations become choices. Some researchers emphasize that religion, as well as other study objects, must be studied objectively so that, the results of their research are truly scientific. And some more researchers see that even though religion can be studied objectively, but religion cannot be separated from human life both the researchers themselves and those who embrace other religions. Unfortunately, researching other people's religions from the perspective of the religion of the researchers also does not make the relationship between religious communities better, because it can give rise to mutual suspicion so that it does not support the creation of a peaceful and harmonious human life which is to be achieved.

The problem of religion is a human problem. Even though religion is based on a set of doctrines, the doctrine does not speak for itself but is understood and practiced by humans. Therefore, Religious Studies students especially, who study other religions other than their religion must consider and involve followers of the other religions in their studies. A Muslim, for example, besides studying Buddhism from texts both written by Buddhists themselves and others who study Buddhism must have a partner among Buddhists as informants or one can be asked. Vice versa. A Buddhist who studies Islam is not enough just to rely on written texts, but also must have a Muslim partner as one can be asked about the religion of Islam which he/she studies.

In a larger scope, institutions that study religions, such as the Department of Religious Studies, apparently, it is time to consider recruiting the experts from other religions in their teaching and learning activities. Or, it is time for universities that study certain religion to be open-minded in recruiting students. They may accept student from other religions, for example, or establish student

¹⁶ When Jerald C. Brauer gave introductory speech to *The History of Religions: Essays on the Problem of Understanding*, (Kitagawa, et. al. (eds.) London, The University of Chicago Press, 3rd imp., 1974: ix) said "Perhaps its title ought to have been History of Religions: Essays on the Problem of SELF-Understanding."

exchange programs with other religious universities. Thus, the gap in inter-religious relations can be really bridged.

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