

Interfaith Dialogue in the Post-Truth Age: Challenges, Strategies, and Prospects

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Abstract

This paper investigates the challenges, strategies and prospects of interfaith dialogue in the post-truth age. Conflicting truth claims constitute one of the major obstacles in establishing dialogue and rapprochement among believers. Some members of faith communities have an exclusivist view of the truth, which prevents them from embracing other truths. This would hinder the progress of interfaith ecumenism. Using qualitative content analysis, the results of the current study show that the rise of post-truth poses additional challenges to the progress of interfaith dialogue since it evaluates the truthfulness of information based on personal believability and inclinations. In the age of post-truth, societal fragmentation is amplified as there are polarized conceptions of truth. Some strategies can be undertaken in response to these challenges, such as nurturing empathy, compassion, and religious moderatism through formal and informal education. In addition, critical argumentation and civil dialogue within academia should be adopted for a larger society. This paper argues that the prospects for interfaith dialogue in the post-truth age depend on the strength of civil society actors who can moderate the tension and polarization within the society by maintaining civility either offline or online.

Keywords: Interreligious dialogue, challenge, strategy, prospect, post-truth, truth claim, exclusivism.

Introduction

In areas where religions are prominent in the public sphere, interfaith activists and peacemakers may play a crucial role in promoting interreligious coexistence. While conflicts in these regions may not be purely religious, religious language has often fostered reconciliation and peace (Smock 2016, vii; Jackelén 2021, 9). This is because religion constitutes a prominent aspect of identity in these regions, and it is by understanding the truths inherent within these religions that tensions between different communities within these regions could be alleviated.

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Studies have been devoted to the investigation of interfaith relations in the context of post-truth. Jacobsen and Jacobsen (2018) propose a model of engagement between religion and learning in the post-truth era, which includes four key elements: proclamation, rationality, transformation, and wonder. Slater (2017) puts forth post-liberal Scriptural Reasoning as a model of interfaith dialogue, arguing for its relevance for contemporary American democratic discourse. The interpretive and logical resources of Scriptural Reasoning will provide a fertile ground for a critical contribution to the ethics of public discourse, particularly within the context of the digital age. Jackelén (2019) argues that a theology of resilience, coexistence, and hope needs to be developed to contribute to interfaith coexistence in general, and Christian ecumenism in particular. This type of theology is essential for countering polarization, populism, protectionism, post-truth, and patriarchy.

This paper studies the challenges, strategies, and prospects of interfaith dialogue in the post-truth era, focusing on the Muslim religious tradition. Such a study is of significance in unravelling the complexities of interreligious dialogue in the contemporary age, which is people's concern in today's world. The future of interfaith dialogue will play a crucial role in shaping the destiny of humankind, particularly in terms of global peace at the macro level, and the sustainability of nation-building at the micro level. The advent of the post-truth age complicates the nature and future of interreligious dialogue. In this new era, personal beliefs and emotions are often given more significance than facts when assessing the value of information, particularly on social media. In this context, information is deemed true when it aligns with the beliefs and emotions of individuals.

To begin with, the paper will highlight the intricate interplays between truth and interfaith dialogue. The issue of post-truth will be also elucidated to provide context for the study. The following discussion is devoted to unravelling the challenges of interfaith dialogue in the context of post-truth as well as the strategies for venturing into interreligious dialogue. This will be followed by a discussion of the future of interreligious dialogue in the post-truth age.

Truth and Interfaith Dialogue

Every religion has its own truth claims, which can potentially pose a threat to peace if its adherents hold them as a narrow and exclusive theological perspective. Interfaith dialogues will not be fruitful if the participants insist on their respective truth claims in an exclusive way. One of the prerequisites of fruitful interfaith dialogue is that participants cultivate an inclusive religious outlook.

One of the fundamental aspects of an interfaith endeavor is treating fellow human beings with kindness and respect, regardless of their religious backgrounds (Magonet 2015, 45). In this vein, kindness is considered one of the most important outcomes of religiosity. Religion is intended for human beings, therefore being more religious can

be seen as showing more humanness in one's behaviors. Humaneness is a quality that allows somebody to acknowledge others as his/her fellow human beings and respect their dignity. This is in line with Abdurrahman Wahid's (1940-2009) statement: "Those who are not your brothers in religion should be considered as your brothers in humanity." In this vein, participants in interfaith dialogue ideally strive to transcend their religious identity and recognize that humanity takes precedence over such identity.

Interreligious dialogue encourages participants to actively engage with religious diversity and perceive it as a necessity. Participants are encouraged to maintain an open-minded approach that enables them to acknowledge the potential for shifting their perspectives on specific topics through honest and authentic conversations (Holland and Walker 2018, 19). Interreligious dialogue enables participants to enhance their skills in interacting with others, including the need for cultivating respectful relationships.

There are however some obstructions to interfaith dialogue. Bias, conjectures, and prejudice on the side of the dialogue partner would hinder the progress of the dialogue. Another barrier to interfaith dialogue would be the fact that adherents of the same faith may construe their tradition in completely opposed ways (Penaskovic 2016, 30). Diversity within the same faith can be a positive feature as long as there is mutual respect among the various viewpoints. The diversity within the same religious tradition can pose a threat to harmony if the groups involved perceive one another as rivals.

On a practical level, it can be challenging for individuals to adopt a neutral and apolitical stance that serves as a foundation for initiating dialogue between faith communities. The power undercurrents between dominant and subordinate communities, for example, often necessitate conversations and negotiations that commence with a sense of urgency and may be accompanied by significant levels of distrust. Despite these challenges, it is still possible for mutual clarity and understanding to emerge from such conversations. Such mutual comprehension can only be achieved when each participant makes an effort to understand the language and perspectives of others involved. Learning the language of different religions is a fundamental component of interreligious and ecumenical dialogue (Phillips 2016, 23)

During the dialogue, it is crucial for participants to actively listen to one another without condemning, dominating, confronting, or antagonizing members of other religions (Howe and Heim 2008, 25). Indeed, listening is a fundamental requirement for interfaith dialogue, which enables participants to engage with one another empathetically. This empathy would enable participants to grasp the rituals and doctrines of other religious traditions. Such understanding lays the foundation for fruitful dialogue among the participants.

Ray (2010) brings forward a model of interfaith cooperation that may serve as a "critical appropriation of the tradition." This model is reflected in four distinct moments. The first moment involves creating vibrant intra-faith opportunities for individuals to deeply understand and interpret their own religious traditions. The second

moment revolves around engaging in problem-based discussions involving university stakeholders as well as stakeholders from around the world. This inclusive approach seeks to address challenges and foster collaboration on a global scale. The third moment involves collaborative efforts with all relevant stakeholders to address societal issues and actively engage in critical and timely social reforms. The fourth moment involves critically examining the significance of this shared action, determining whether it aligns with one's secular tradition, including philosophies of rights and ethical systems, or with one's religious tradition, encompassing theologies of self and world.

Interfaith dialogue can manifest in three distinct modes: informally, institutionally, and intellectually. Informal interfaith dialogue refers to situations where individuals from diverse religious traditions come together to discuss a matter of shared concern, such as their respective perspectives on divorce. Institutional interfaith dialogue can be exemplified by gatherings hosted at prominent institutions like the King Abdullah International Centre for Interfaith and Intercultural Dialogue (KAICIID) in Vienna, Austria. Finally, intellectual interfaith dialogue refers to the use of information and research skills from diverse disciplines to investigate and actualize the goals of the interfaith endeavor (Kollar 2016, 8).

Within the Islamic tradition, notable examples of intellectual ecumenical dialogue can be found. One such figure is Suhrawardi al-Maqtul (1154-1191), who is among the Muslim philosophers known for advocating a cosmopolitan dialogue between Islamic scholarship and other traditions, such as Neo-Platonism, Zoroastrianism, and Pythagoreanism. Through his philosophical approach, Suhrawardi reconciles these diverse elements to illustrate that the innermost dimension of all divinely revealed faiths is sacred and serves as a manifestation of the divine (Aminrazavi 1996, 383-84).

In this context, it is important to emphasize the significance of dialogue through joint action, where religious communities come together to address environmental challenges and promote the idea of sustainable living. There is a noticeable and growing movement among various world religions to safeguard the earth from environmental degradation (Penaskovic 2016; Reuter 2015; Sanders 2021; Koehrsen 2021; Bratton 2018). At the grassroots level, active participation in collective efforts that transcend religious backgrounds becomes paramount for individuals. Numerous individuals at the grassroots level have already engaged in joint actions. They view their fellow human beings with a sense of kinship, leading them to willingly collaborate for the betterment of society and the environment.

To foster civic cooperation and peace, individuals with diverse worldviews must actively seek to understand one another through direct engagement. When encountering individuals of different faiths, it is morally incumbent upon oneself to make an earnest effort to understand their beliefs (Waters 2018, 413). Engaging in committed encounters allows for the empowerment of every individual's voice and facilitates meaningful dialogue. Such encounters have the potential to foster a

comprehensive comprehension of both differences and similarities. When faced with disagreements regarding one's religious standpoint, it is preferable for others to base their dissent on a genuine understanding of the individual's perspective rather than relying on stereotypes or prejudices.

Global citizenship is believed to have the potential to foster interfaith ecumenism, emphasizing intergroup empathy and a genuine appreciation for diversity. Global citizenship represents a response to the growing recognition of the interconnected nature of our world, acknowledging that the responsibilities of being a citizen extend beyond specific political boundaries to encompass the broader global community. It is envisioned as an additional dimension of citizenship that has emerged alongside the expansion of democratization in contemporary times (O'Byrne 2004, x).

The concept of global citizenship is closely linked to the idea of cosmopolitanism. Cosmopolitanism represents a global political framework where interpersonal connections transcend national boundaries, and relationships between states are guided, in part, by universal laws and institutions. Cosmopolitanism reflects a recognition of cultural diversity, a longing for harmonious coexistence, and a deep respect for other cultures (Carter 2006, 2).

Post-Truth Age

The digital era exemplifies the widespread use of the internet as a communication tool, influencing the formation of new patterns of social interactions. One significant consequence of the digital age is the phenomenon known as the "death of expertise."

The concept of the "death of expertise" portrays a situation where expertise is not completely extinct but rather in a state of upheaval. It has become common for individuals to perceive their equal civic and political rights as an indication that their view on any subject should be given the same weight as anyone else's. While people continue to rely on experts, they often regard them merely as technicians. It signifies the utilization of established knowledge as a convenient resource, which is seen as desirable, rather than relying solely on negotiations between specialists and the broader community. The issue lies not in an indifference towards established knowledge, but rather in the emergence of a hostile attitude towards this type of knowledge (Nichols 2017, 3).

In our modern society, there is a tendency to view the acquisition of a small amount of knowledge as the ultimate goal, rather than recognizing it as the beginning of education (Nichols 2017, 7). This condition highlights the potential for the future of interfaith dialogue, as the dialogue itself necessitates respect, appreciation, and curiosity, which play a crucial role in transforming the participants involved. Each one of us harbors prejudices, personal experiences, fears, and even phobias that hinder our ability to listen to and accept expert advice.

The Internet is often considered one of the factors contributing to the decline of expertise in society. While it is an immense source of both knowledge and misinformation, it has

not only contributed to a decrease in intellectual capacity but has also fueled negative behavior. Many individuals now engage in isolated arguments rather than constructive discussions, prioritizing offense over active listening (Nichols 2017, 9).

The nature of communication on social media often overlooks the importance of civility, which differs from face-to-face interactions. In the digital realm, people communicate with each other from a distance, which diminishes the sense of intimacy among individuals. This condition poses a potential obstacle to interfaith dialogue.

The cyber age is often referred to as a post-truth era, signifying a condition where appeals to "emotions" and "personal convictions" hold greater influence over public opinion than "objective facts." In this context, it can be argued that the concept of "truth" has been surpassed by the notion of "believability" (Keyes 2004, 3).

In this vein, people tend to favor information that aligns with their preexisting beliefs. This phenomenon is commonly known as confirmation bias (Gilchrist 2018, 15). Someone does not challenge a clear and easily verifiable fact without reason; they do so when it aligns with their own self-interest. When an individual's beliefs are confronted by a challenging fact, they may make efforts to contend with that fact in order to protect their beliefs. Confirmation bias is closely linked to motivated reasoning, which describes the tendency to actively search for information that aligns with our desired beliefs. Those in the clutches of one-sided bias are strongly motivated to dismiss evidence that contradicts their beliefs, which can sometimes result in a phenomenon known as the "backfire effect." The backfire effect, in this context, refers to a psychological phenomenon where the presentation of factual information that contradicts someone's misguided beliefs actually strengthens their adherence to those beliefs (McIntyre 2018, 158-59).

Post-truth refers to the notion that emotions hold greater truth value than facts, often employed for political purposes to manipulate the perception of reality. An exemplification of this can be observed in the case of Newt Gingrich (b. 1943), a surrogate of Donald Trump (b. 1946), who emphasizes prioritizing people's emotions over the opinions of experts. In essence, a post-truther is more inclined towards embracing "alternative facts" rather than acknowledging objective facts. In this context, alternative facts refer to information that is presented to challenge the narrative established by facts that do not align with one's preferred beliefs. The individual promoting alternative facts tends to prioritize the inferences they desire the audience to perceive, rather than focusing on conclusions supported by evidence (McIntyre 2018, 152; Lewandowsky, Ecker, and Cook 2017, 18).

Post-truth embodies a form of ideological dominance, where its proponents attempt to compel others to believe in something, irrespective of the availability of sufficient evidence. One of the foundations of post-truth is "truthiness," popularized by Stephen Colbert in 2005, which pertains to being swayed by what feels right, even in the absence of factual support (McIntyre 2018, 5).

Post-truth is primarily associated with willful ignorance and deception. Willful ignorance refers to a state where one disseminates information without accurately knowing its truthfulness, and without making any effort to investigate its veracity. A lie, on the other hand, involves intentionally expressing falsehoods to deceive others. Each falsehood finds its respective audience, willing to accept and believe it. One may not feel accountable for telling lies when there are no listeners or when they assume that no one will believe them. However, when one deliberately seeks to manipulate someone into placing trust in something they know to be false, they have transitioned from merely interpreting facts to actively distorting them (Lewandowsky, Ecker, and Cook 2017, 15; McIntyre 2018, 7).

The emergence of the post-truth society can be attributed to three major factors: globalization, populism, and the internet. Globalization has brought about widespread disruption, resulting in feelings of alienation and discontent at both the national and community levels in many countries. This, in turn, has fueled the rise of nationalism and separatism. Additionally, such disruptions have contributed to a growing lack of trust in the elite, which is a characteristic feature of populism (Gilchrist 2018, 14).

The Challenges of Interfaith Dialogue in the Post-Truth Age

According to Nietzsche, convictions pose a greater threat to truth than falsehoods (Ucko 2017, 19). This is because Nietzsche believes that convictions act as indicators of an exclusionary theological perspective. Delusion and scapegoating mechanisms are employed to assign blame to others, thereby contributing to the problem. These traits are particularly prominent in the post-truth era, as they arise from interpreting information through the lens of personal beliefs and preferences. The utilization of the scapegoat mechanism reflects a deficiency in comprehensive understanding and empathy, ultimately posing a threat to the progress of interfaith dialogue.

In the post-truth age, combating entrenched prejudices remains a significant obstacle in fostering interfaith dialogue. In the offline realm, individuals often harbor biases towards unfamiliar individuals or communities. However, the digital landscape exacerbates this inclination towards prejudice, as people engage in interactions from a distance, primarily through the use of social media platforms.

In the post-truth era, politicians often exploit and manipulate people's prejudices for their own gain, aiming to maximize their voter base. They view these prejudices and the resulting ignorance as valuable assets that can be utilized to further their political agendas. However, this kind of politicization unknowingly undermines the principles of multiculturalism and poses a threat to the overall well-being of society.

For many individuals, self-reflection and criticizing their own groups prove to be challenging tasks. It is difficult for people to objectively examine and acknowledge the wrongdoings perpetrated by their respective groups. In general, people tend to display fervent loyalty towards their own groups, unless they possess the ability to transcend their

personal biases and group affiliations. Unfortunately, group fanaticism not only persists but also appears to be on the rise in the digital realm. Moreover, certain politicians exploit this phenomenon to leverage maximum support and secure votes.

A significant factor contributing to societal tensions is the widespread reluctance of individuals to listen to those who are different from them. People often exhibit a limited willingness to engage with information and opinions that challenge their own beliefs and the perspectives of their respective groups.

The abundance of information available on the internet can often leave people feeling confused and directionless. It is important to distinguish between the intentions of "seeking truth" versus "justifying truth." The former group is dedicated to the pursuit of truth and makes a conscious effort to set aside personal biases and judgments when encountering information. They prioritize rationality in evaluating the information at hand, considering factors such as the credibility of the source, implicit meanings, and the potential impact on the community. This group shares the belief, similar to Muhammad ibn Idris al-Shafi'i (767-820), that their own opinions may contain errors, while the opinions of others may hold fragments of truth.

The second group, on the other hand, prioritizes "justifying truth." They are occasionally inclined to embrace and validate information that aligns with their preconceived notions. Without careful reading or examination, they eagerly share posts or news that cater to their desires. Conversely, they tend to outright reject other information without considering factors such as implicit meanings, truthfulness, or the potential impact on the community. This group firmly believes in the existence of a singular truth that overwhelmingly supports their own perspective.

The growing phenomenon of post-truth has resulted in a troubling decline in the value of expertise (Nichols 2017, 55). Internet browsing has led many individuals to mistakenly believe that they have become experts themselves. This misunderstanding arises from the failure to distinguish between mere "information" and true "knowledge." While people can access abundant information online, the problem arises when they assert their expertise solely based on internet sources and challenge the authority of actual experts. This trend poses a significant challenge in society.

The digital age has witnessed the rise of what can be referred to as "new religious authorities." These individuals gain a significant following on social media platforms and consequently assume positions of authority. However, many of these new religious authorities lack the necessary knowledge and training in their respective religions. Their popularity among netizens stems more from their appealing messages and social media posts rather than their expertise. Furthermore, these individuals often lack sufficient understanding of the teachings and principles of other religious traditions.

As a result of these factors, the presence of new religious authorities poses challenges to interfaith ecumenism. Their limited understanding of the profound aspects of their religious traditions often leads them to rely solely on literal interpretations of

teachings. This narrow interpretation tends to promote an exclusivist understanding of truth. Due to their superficial religious knowledge and lack of interfaith literacy, these new religious authorities often contribute to tensions and conflicts with other faith communities.

Strategies of Interfaith Dialogue in the Post-Truth Age

Higher education can play a significant role in promoting interfaith dialogue due to its unique position. The rigorous scholarly process and core principles of academia grant academic scholars a crucial role in the broader civic discourse. Within academic circles, even profound disagreements are expected to adhere to established rules of logic and evidence. Ad hominem attacks and other forms of character assassination have no place in academic discourse. Academics are more likely to discredit those who engage in such misconduct rather than those who become victims of it. By bringing the standards of academic discourse into the public sphere, academics can contribute to the restoration of civility that has been diminished in recent years (Walt 2011, 8).

Critical argumentation and "civil dialogue" serve as valuable assets cultivated within academia. These assets enable scholars to engage in fruitful dialogues with other faith communities, preventing them from falling into prejudiced beliefs or succumbing to internet hoaxes. Their focus on the common good ensures that they are not drawn into the polarization prevalent in society. Instead, they prioritize constructive engagement and seek to foster understanding and harmony among different faith communities.

Academia is ideally concerned with knowledge and wisdom, going beyond mere data and information. This emphasis on knowledge and wisdom enables academics to engage in interfaith dialogue, particularly at an intellectual level. A crucial starting point in engaging with others is the willingness to listen to their perspectives and arguments, and academics typically possess such qualities. Their training and intellectual curiosity equip them with the ability to approach interfaith dialogue with an open mind.

The pursuit of deep knowledge cultivates wisdom, allowing individuals to recognize the limits of their own disciplines and appreciate the richness of other fields and cultures. As a result, a natural respect for diversity arises. However, fostering an awareness of diversity does not necessarily require an extensive time frame to transition from knowledge to wisdom. The key lies in instilling a mindset of embracing plurality within higher education. This mentality should be nurtured to prepare students for coexistence and collaboration with others. Additionally, it is crucial to introduce insights into diverse cultures and religions to further reinforce this mindset.

Engaging students in authentic conversations and dialogues is essential, where they can express their sincere commitments, ethics, and beliefs, while also recognizing the realities of the world and striving to promote the common good. These interactions

should be rooted in truth-seeking, understanding how the world functions, and being enthusiastic about making positive contributions to society (Jacobsen and Jacobsen 2018). Such a dialogue will also help the students to establish meanings and spiritual orientation most specifically in response to crisis-associated challenges (Domsel 2022, 124-125; Narasimhan and Saputra 2023, 4-5).

Students are often regarded as aspiring scientists and scholars, and as such, it is important for them to be open to different perspectives and engage in fruitful dialogues. By actively listening to others, students can broaden their understanding. They should recognize that their studies serve not only to satisfy their curiosity and advance scientific knowledge but also to contribute to the betterment of society as a whole.

Mystery and wonder hold great importance in higher education, particularly in the era of post-truth. They serve as a reminder of the complexity and awe-inspiring nature of the world, fostering a deep respect for the pursuit of truth. Instilling a sense of mystery and wonder in students cultivates a lifelong love for learning, ensuring they are never satisfied with superficial knowledge and always strive for a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of reality. This mindset stands in stark contrast to post-truth reflexivity, which dismisses the wonders of the universe in favor of ill-informed beliefs (Jacobsen and Jacobsen 2018, 23).

Compassion holds significant value in higher education learning. It embodies a virtue that is present in many religions, encapsulated in the ethical principle known as the "Golden Rule." This principle urges individuals to treat others as they themselves would like to be treated. The essence of the Golden Rule aligns, to some extent, with the fervor of contemporary academia in understanding the perspectives of others. Gaining a comprehensive understanding of the world involves the capacity to learn and empathize with the human experience through the eyes of others, embracing the unique lives of those different from the learner. This approach differs from post-truthism, which is driven by passion rather than compassion. Post-truthism often celebrates the achievements of one community at the expense of others, rather than seeking to empathize and connect with others (Jacobsen and Jacobsen 2018, 28).

Cultivating compassion and empathy enables students to understand and connect with individuals from diverse religious and cultural backgrounds. This quality is essential for engaging in interfaith dialogue and cooperation. In the era of post-truth, it becomes even more crucial to foster empathy among students, as it equips them to become good leaders and scholars. By nurturing empathy, we can counter the rise of post-truthism, which often relies on passionate approaches.

The pursuit of interfaith dialogue is a central focus for students studying in the field of "interreligious studies." These students are being prepared to become future "interfaith leaders." Interfaith leaders possess the necessary knowledge, frameworks, and skills to facilitate positive relationships, foster mutual respect, and cultivate a shared commitment to the common good among individuals and communities with

diverse religious orientations in civic and political spheres (Patel 2013, 40). The core competency of interreligious studies students lies in their ability to understand and navigate diverse religious communities, bridging potential tensions that may arise between these communities.

It is important to note that the responsibility of engaging in interfaith dialogue extends beyond the students of "interreligious studies." Students and scholars from various disciplines, particularly those in the humanities and social sciences, also have the opportunity and obligation to participate in such dialogues, albeit to varying degrees. The fields of social sciences and humanities are inherently concerned with understanding (*verstehen*) and interpreting the experiences of diverse individuals and social groups. Students in these disciplines can develop the capacity for engaging in dialogues with people from different cultures and religions. By actively involving academia in the exploration of religious diversity, we can foster pluralism within society while also generating cosmopolitan and well-rounded knowledge.

Interfaith dialogue is fundamentally oriented towards peace-building, and it is crucial that the dialogue itself proceeds in a peaceful manner. It is important to note that peace can be understood in two distinct ways: negative peace and positive peace. Negative peace refers to the absence of violence, while positive peace encompasses the presence of conditions that foster a sustainable peace, ensure physical safety, and promote mutual respect for the inviolability of human rights (Irvin-Erickson 2016, 4-5). The nature of the conversation itself plays a significant role in the success of interfaith dialogue. This hinges on the understanding that meaningful discussions require participants to approach them with a willingness to listen, comprehend differences and conflicts, reach agreements, and take action based on those agreements (Kollar 2016, 20).

The success of dialogues hinges on the participants' capacity to listen effectively. This entails being fully present with our entire being, both mentally and physically (Kollar 2016, 21). It calls for embracing silence and attentively hearing the words of others, recognizing their inherent worth. It involves interpreting the actions of others as meaningful expressions. We should hold deep respect for the ideas of others, treating them as sacred. Furthermore, it necessitates the appreciation of the values and emotions of others.

Respecting the beliefs of others is essential in interfaith dialogue. It is through respect that participants can genuinely understand one another and engage in meaningful dialogue and cooperation. Without respect, the dialogue becomes superficial and fails to yield fruitful results.

Indeed, cultivating respect in the post-truth age can be challenging. In an era where personal beliefs and emotions heavily influence the way information is perceived, people often become entrenched in their own perspectives. Consequently, promoting interfaith dialogue becomes the responsibility of a dedicated minority (*khawass*) who

have achieved inner peace and possess the capacity to listen, suspend judgment, and show respect towards others. It is hoped that such individuals can serve as role models, leading by example and making a positive impact on society.

Engaging in interfaith dialogue is less likely for individuals who have not yet attained religious maturity, particularly in terms of its creedal, devotional, and cognitive dimensions. It is important to note the four features of religiosity outlined by Yoshio Fukuyuma (as cited by Holdcroft 2006, 90): cognitive, creedal, cultic, and devotional. The cognitive aspect pertains to one's knowledge about religion, encompassing their understanding of religious concepts. The cultic element involves the ritualistic practices observed by adherents of a particular religion. The creedal dimension focuses on the religious beliefs held by individuals who follow a specific faith. Lastly, the devotional dimension relates to the religious experiences and emotions lived by individuals in their religious journey, representing the experiential facet of faith.

Those who have not reached maturity in terms of the creedal dimension of religiosity are the potential to be attracted or converted to other faiths. Those who have not reached maturity pertaining cognitive dimension of religiosity would potentially misunderstand other faith traditions. Those who have not reached maturity in terms of the devotional-experiential dimension are hardly able to respect the experience of other faith communities.

The same principle applies to Islamic intra-faith dialogue. Sunnis and Shiites who have attained maturity within their respective traditions are more likely to engage in intra-faith dialogue, which can result in fruitful discussions and foster ecumenism. Throughout Islamic history, we have witnessed that those who have reached maturity in their respective traditions have played significant roles in promoting Sunni-Shia dialogue.

In this light, it is worth reconsidering the following: How can we address interfaith challenges if we have not yet achieved maturity within our own faith? How can we effectively tackle the issues faced by nations, communities, and religions if we are unable to resolve our own problems? As the Arabic saying goes, "faqid al-shay' la yu'ti" (literally meaning "the one who lacks something cannot give it"), which emphasizes that individuals who have not successfully addressed their own challenges are unable to contribute meaningfully to the improvement of others.

Interfaith dialogue requires the fundamental aspect of respecting the truths inherent in other religious traditions. For the dialogue to be meaningful, participants must genuinely understand and hold respect for these truths. However, such respect becomes challenging in the context of the post-truth age. The post-truth era, by its nature, undermines the very notion of truth, which is essential for fostering genuine respect. Post-truth stands in contrast to the concept of "respecting truth." As McIntyre (2018, 11) notes, respecting

truth entails embracing the methodologies of investigation and scholarly inquiry that have historically guided us towards attaining genuine knowledge.

Interreligious dialogue involves meaningful conversations among individuals of diverse religious backgrounds, aimed at fostering shared religious knowledge and cultivating peace at both local and global levels. However, for these dialogues to yield positive outcomes, certain qualities such as compassion, fairness, and maturity are essential. In this context, it is crucial to emphasize empathy rather than mere tolerance. Tolerance implies accepting others while maintaining a sense of superiority. Conversely, empathy involves genuinely appreciating others, seeking common ground, and immersing oneself in their perspectives and experiences (Kollar 2016, 26). Hence, it becomes evident that empathy plays a pivotal role in facilitating interreligious dialogue. Ultimately, interfaith dialogue serves as an extension of the empathetic nature displayed by individuals who have attained maturity within their respective religious traditions.

Empathy should be the guiding principle in the pursuit of interfaith dialogue, surpassing mere tolerance. The concept of tolerance has its limitations, as it implies recognizing others while simultaneously asserting one's superiority. On the other hand, empathy entails genuine appreciation, actively seeking common ground with others, and imaginatively immersing oneself in their experiences and perspectives (Kollar 2016, 28). In this regard, it becomes evident that empathy plays a crucial role in fostering interreligious dialogue. Interfaith dialogue, in its essence, represents the manifestation of empathy among individuals who have attained maturity within their respective religious traditions.

When considering the importance of empathy in interfaith dialogue, it is worth highlighting Abraham Heschel's (1907-1972) concept of depth theology. As cited by Palmisano (2016, 105), Heschel argues that depth theology stimulates personal spontaneity, which involves a genuine and immediate response aimed at fostering a profound sympathetic harmony with individuals from diverse religious backgrounds. As one engages more deeply in exchanges with other faith communities, the innermost essence of the soul undergoes a transformation, leading to an outward-oriented participation and connection with others.

According to Heschel, spontaneity can serve as the foundation for dialogue, as he argues elsewhere. This concept of depth theology is distinct from other theologies, particularly those that may create divisions, especially when reduced to mere ideology. Deep theology, on the other hand, has the potential to bring people together (Palmisano 2016, 98). It represents a form of religiosity that prioritizes deep empathic solidarity. It focuses on the esoteric dimension of theology rather than its exoteric aspect. By engaging with others from a place of depth, individuals can foster peaceful interactions and emphasize harmony instead of conflict.

In the context of the post-truth age, it is imperative to reconsider our approaches to cultivating empathy. This is due to the inherent presence of apathy within this era. The prevalence of virtual communication enables individuals to engage in discussions from a distance. While this mode of communication is efficient, it can pose challenges when participants lack empathy and critical reasoning. Without empathy, individuals tend to prioritize information that aligns with their personal beliefs and emotions. Furthermore, they may perceive others through the lens of stereotypes.

Regular interactions and visits with individuals from different religious traditions can help reduce stereotyping. When people spend their entire lives in a specific region, they often develop stereotypes about those from different regions. Similarly, individuals residing in a particular neighborhood where everyone shares the same religion may lack sufficient knowledge about other religious traditions, leading to the formation of stereotypes about people from different religions.

Individuals confined to their own limited perspectives and environments are often unable to fully appreciate the beauty of differences, let alone embrace those who are different from them. This notion aligns with the wisdom imparted by German scholar Alexander von Humboldt (1769-1859), who famously stated, "The most dangerous worldviews are the worldviews of those who have never viewed the world."

It would be beneficial for individuals living in restricted environments, be it physical or ideological, to step outside their cubicles, even if only temporarily, in order to gain a broader perspective on life. In this context, cubicles can represent closed religious or ethnic communities. The challenge lies in the fact that some individuals either enjoy living in these cubicles or are unaware of their confined existence. Furthermore, in the digital realm, some people tend to create their own virtual cubicles, surrounding themselves with like-minded individuals and forming an echo chamber. Interfaith organizations often organize programs that encourage youth to visit and stay in different faith communities, offering them a glimpse into a different world. These short-term experiences in diverse faith communities can facilitate the development of understanding and empathy among the youth.

Creating friendships with individuals from other religious traditions can indeed help counteract apathy towards others. In the realm of social media, people often gravitate towards befriending those who share the same religious background. Such tendencies can foster solidarity among these individuals, as they share similar perspectives on social and political issues. However, a problem arises when these individuals are unwilling to listen to or engage with information that contradicts their beliefs and outlook. They may develop opposition towards those with different opinions, considering them as adversaries. This situation can be improved if people are open to forming friendships with individuals from diverse faith traditions, both in offline and online settings. Through social media, people can develop empathy by connecting with friends from other religious traditions. Having friends from different

faith traditions, especially those who are kind-hearted and virtuous, provides tangible examples of individuals from those traditions. This firsthand experience prevents them from making distant judgments about other religious traditions, as they now know someone directly associated with those traditions.

Moderatism and Interfaith Dialogue in the Post-Truth Age

Moderatism, known as *wasatiyya*, holds great importance in promoting interreligious dialogue in the world. It represents a religious culture that stands in contrast to both excessiveness (*ifrat*) and negligence (*tafrit*) in matters of creed, devotion, and cognition. By embracing moderation in these three aspects of religiosity, individuals are more likely to appreciate and value people from other faith traditions. Those who embody a moderate approach to religion rarely encounter others with anger, as they have found inner peace within themselves. Moderatism, therefore, serves as a valuable asset in engaging in interfaith dialogue.

Moderatism holds implications for obtaining balanced information, promoting balanced thinking, and generating balanced knowledge. It is essential for each religious community to nurture moderatism, and if feasible, develop a moderate theology. Such an approach can serve as a solid foundation for interfaith ecumenism.

The virtue of moderatism has the potential to extend beyond being solely a religious culture and instead become a knowledge culture. Embracing the middle way and moderatism can serve as a foundation for the production of balanced and inter-subjective knowledge. Moderatism opposes the politicization of sciences, including religious and Islamic sciences. This becomes especially significant in the age of post-truth, as it provides a counterbalance to the emergence of a post-truth society and the erosion of expertise.

It is important to note that a knowledge culture encompasses not only the accumulation of knowledge but also the underlying ethos, epistemology, and the processes of transmitting and institutionalizing knowledge. As Bakar (2013, 18) elucidates, the fundamental knowledge vision of a civilization plays a pivotal role in shaping its identity and worldview.

It is crucial to acknowledge that all individuals, regardless of their ideological standpoint, whether conservative or liberal, are susceptible to cognitive biases that can contribute to the phenomenon of post-truth. It is incorrect to assume that post-truth solely stems from others or that its consequences are only someone else's concern. Recognizing a truth that others may be unwilling to see is relatively straightforward. The challenge lies in our own reluctance to question information that aligns with our preexisting beliefs, as we tend to accept information that confirms our biases (McIntyre 2018, 164). Being aware of our own potential biases is essential in fostering effective communication with others and ensuring a balanced exchange of ideas. This self-awareness becomes particularly crucial during interfaith dialogues.

In the realm of communication, individuals who have a strong sense of self-worth are often more open to receiving information that corrects their misunderstandings (McIntyre 2018, 162). This principle applies to interfaith dialogue as well, where individuals who are at peace with themselves tend to be more receptive to diverse opinions. They are more likely to change through dialogues.

The challenge lies not in adapting to a world where facts are disregarded, but rather in defending the concept of truth and learning how to confront falsehoods. Every lie finds an audience, and therefore, there is still an opportunity to make a positive impact on others. If we fail to challenge the arguments of a liar, those who have not yet transitioned from ignorance to willful ignorance may slip further into a state of complete denial. In such circumstances, they may become impervious to facts and reasoning. Without our counter-narrative, they may have no reason to question the veracity of the lies being presented. Even the smallest action of witnessing and exposing a lie for what it is holds significance. In the era of post-truth, it is essential to actively challenge attempts to obscure factual matters and confront falsehoods before they corrode further (McIntyre 2018, 156-57). Similarly, in the context of interfaith dialogue and ecumenism, it is crucial for individuals to provide a counter-narrative against exclusivism and the politicization of religion. Without such efforts, exclusivism may become more pervasive in the post-truth age.

Prospects for Interfaith Ecumenism in the Post-Truth Age

The future of interfaith ecumenism holds promise when the state apparatus demonstrates a genuine commitment to its promotion. The role of the state is evident in the formulation of policies and regulations that prioritize the enhancement of pluralism, including measures to prevent discrimination and persecution against religious groups, particularly minorities. However, the state alone cannot single-handedly foster interfaith ecumenism. It requires the active engagement of a robust civil society, acting as a bridge that connects diverse religious communities. This aligns with Ernst-Wolfgang Böckenförde's argument that "even freely secular lives on premises that it cannot itself guarantee." In the context of Indonesia, mainstream organizations like Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama have played significant roles in nurturing interfaith ecumenism, particularly in regions where conflicts are prevalent.

The future of interfaith ecumenism is, to a certain extent, dependent on the strength of civil society actors who can effectively moderate tensions and polarization within society. As new religious authorities emerge alongside traditionally established ones, it becomes crucial to address the potential challenges they may pose to interfaith ecumenism. If these new authorities are not balanced by the traditionally established religious authorities, it can jeopardize the progress of interfaith ecumenism. This is especially true when these new authorities promote a literal interpretation of religious texts and espouse exclusive theological perspectives. The risk arises when

people mistakenly perceive these new authorities as the sole representatives of their religious community. Complicating matters further, the internet serves as a platform for these new religious authorities to disseminate their ideas, potentially leading to misinterpretations and misconceptions that they speak on behalf of the entire religious community.

In the post-truth age, there is a pressing need for traditionally established progressive religious authorities to adapt their strategies and become influential figures in the realm of social media. By harnessing the power of digital platforms, they can effectively maximize their agency and actively promote their ideas online. It is crucial for these authorities to prioritize the common good of both the general public and their faith community, rather than solely seeking popularity.

In the post-truth age, the prospects for a bright future of interfaith ecumenism rely on the presence of individuals who continue to uphold civility, both offline and online. Unfortunately, civility has become increasingly scarce in this era, as people often prioritize their own beliefs and emotions, leading them to disregard information or dismiss individuals who hold different perspectives. However, fostering a culture of civility is essential as it provides a solid foundation for conducting meaningful interfaith dialogues and promoting the growth of interfaith ecumenism and cooperation.

There are two distinct varieties of civility: horizontal civility and vertical civility. Vertical civility focuses on the role of societal institutions in maintaining social cohesion and preserving the overall well-being of the community. On the other hand, horizontal civility pertains to how individuals treat one another with respect and dignity, regardless of disparities in religion, race, culture, or any other differentiating factors. Public civility is deeply rooted in the pursuit of human welfare (Park 2016, 154-55).

The potential for interfaith ecumenism is also influenced by the presence of scholars who engage in intellectual interfaith dialogue. According to Kollar (2016, 8), intellectual interreligious dialogue occurs when individuals utilize their inquiry skills and knowledge from diverse fields of study to explore and achieve the goals of interreligious endeavors.

In order to engage in intellectual interfaith dialogue, scholars must possess certain skills, particularly moderation, organized skepticism, and impartiality. Their dedication should be towards the betterment of society and the pursuit of global peace. They should not conduct research and publish solely out of curiosity, but rather with a conscientious focus on the common good and the welfare of humanity.

In the era of digitalization, certain scholars exhibit a paradoxical behavior, being critical in their scholarly pursuits, particularly in research publication, while being uncritical when consuming information through social media. Unfortunately, these scholars contribute minimally to the fostering of intellectual interfaith dialogue. It falls upon their fellow scholars to remind them and encourage the gradual development of integrity and moderation in their approach.

One of the emerging objectives of ecumenism is macro ecumenism, which encompasses the broader scope of dialogue with individuals from diverse religious backgrounds. This inclusive form of ecumenism, often referred to as macro or total ecumenism, aims to tackle the complex issues faced by global humanity (Latinovic, Mannion, and Phan 2016, 4). By embracing this approach, the Earth can become a welcoming home for all individuals, irrespective of their religious and ethnic affiliations.

Interreligious dialogue necessitates a profound intellectual and spiritual humility. This humility enables individuals to recognize, with gratitude and grace, that their own faith provides valuable insights while acknowledging its inherent limitations. Furthermore, it cultivates an awareness that other faiths have the potential to enrich, complement, enhance, and refine one's own understanding (Latinovic, Mannion, and Phan 2016, 7). Without such humility, interfaith dialogue cannot truly progress. Arrogance and exclusivity undermine the dialogue process when participants view their counterparts as deviant due to a lack of openness and humility.

Conclusion

Prevalent prejudice and the perpetuation of scapegoat mechanisms pose significant challenges to the advancement of interfaith dialogue in the post-truth era. To address these challenges, several strategies can be implemented. Firstly, the critical argumentation and civil dialogue methods that have been cultivated within academia should be extended to a broader societal context. Secondly, fostering empathy and compassion should be prioritized through both formal and informal education channels. Lastly, promoting religious moderatism as both a religious and knowledge culture can serve as an effective countermeasure against prejudice and scapegoat mechanisms.

In order to propel interreligious dialogue in the digital age, it is crucial to have progressive religious authorities who can adapt their strategies to effectively engage on digital platforms. Additionally, the participation of academic scholars is vital, as they possess valuable skills such as balanced inquiry, organized skepticism, and impartiality. The future of interfaith ecumenism hinges, in part, on the ability of these religious authorities and academic scholars to serve as role models in promoting civility, both offline and online.

This paper was primarily concerned with a philosophical exploration of the challenges, strategies, and potential of interreligious dialogue in the post-truth era. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of this paper. For instance, it does not incorporate an ethnographic account that delves into the feasibility of interfaith dialogue within a specific region. Consequently, conducting such an ethnographic investigation would enhance the understanding of the intricacies of interfaith dialogue in the post-truth age within a concrete local or regional context.

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