

## **Love Your Enemy: A Christian Response to Embrace Others**

**Hanna Dewi Aritonang , Bestian Simangunsong , Adiani Hulu**

Institut Agama Kristen Negeri Tarutung

E-mail address [hannadewiaritonang09@gmail.com](mailto:hannadewiaritonang09@gmail.com) ; E-mail address  
[bestiansimangunsong41@gmail.com](mailto:bestiansimangunsong41@gmail.com) ; E-mail address [adianihulu@gmail.com](mailto:adianihulu@gmail.com)

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### **Abstract**

*This article addresses the issue of conflict between religious communities that cause enmity amid society. Hostilities must be overcome and resolved in accordance with the call of Christianity to live in love and peace. The study used the qualitative paradigm as the method of the research and the descriptive-analyses as the writing method by describing the research problems based on data collected from related publications. One of the powerful messages of Jesus's teaching is "Love your enemies." It's one of the greatest challenges in life. Jesus Christ gave an important doctrine about loving the enemy because love is more powerful than evil, hurtful deeds. Loving the enemy means canceling hostilities and violence, but instead, it promises acceptance of each other. The title of this study is "love your enemies": A Christian Response to Embrace Others. As the title of this study is "love your enemies," the reason for the selection of this article is because the author sees that "loving the enemy is a commandment from God that must be obeyed. This research question emphasizes how to realize "loving the enemy" amid hostility. This paper argues that Jesus's command to love the enemy is a proper Christian lifestyle choice in the midst of hostility. We use CS Song thoughts, which elaborated with other scholars' views on theology, loving, and embracing others. The purpose of the research was to gain understanding and build a theological reflection on Jesus' commandment to love the enemy. In this article, we first briefly discuss the portrait of life among religious people in Indonesia. Secondly, we discuss the conflict between religious people in Indonesia. Finally, we apply the command of Jesus to love our enemy as a Christian lifestyle in the midst of hostility to construct harmony amid hostility. We propose the command of Jesus to 'love your enemy' as a response to establishing sustainable peace by embrace others. Finally, the Christians must become a loving community because God so loved us, and we also ought to love and embrace others.*

Keywords: Religious Conflict, Love Your Enemy, Embrace, Others

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## **I. INTRODUCTION**

The lack of understanding of religious diversity and lack of acceptance among religious people can potentially create conflict in the midst of religious life. Conflict damages human life relations and disrupts the stability of people's lives, so conflict requires immediate resolution. If the conflict is not resolved, it could create animosity that leads to the tearing up of unity between fellow citizens. Hostility creates tension and hatred. Hostility creates tension, hatred, and suspicion of the enemy. If this is not managed, it will have the opportunity to have explosive power that can damage the general public. It is therefore important to find a panacea that encourages religious people to love and live harmoniously with each other. Loving and appreciating others is the core of teaching all religions.

## **Portraits of Religious Life in Indonesia**

Indonesia is a multicultural country with various religions, ethnicities, and beliefs. There are officially six religions in Indonesia: Islam, Christian Catholic, Christian Protestant, Hindu, Buddha, and Konghucu. In addition, there are still many local religions the heritage of the ancestors in various corners of this country. The way they are praying, doing religious activities, the holy book is different. The diversity of Indonesian culture and religion is a reality and inevitability. This distinction should be respected and appreciated as a form of love for the context of diversity that our own nation has. But the reality is that the country often experiences and faces various cases of violence, especially based on religion occurring in various parts of Indonesia.

Various religious issues and conflicts plague our country. Ranging from the difficulty of obtaining permission to build houses of worship to the destruction or burning of houses of worship, and a number of issues about houses of worship are prone to creating conflict between religious people. Some real examples were experienced by a parishioner of Indonesian Congregation Church (GKI) Yasmin and Batak Christian Protestant Church (HKBP) in Bekasi. They did not get permission to build the church, so their church was sealed off and made them unable to perform Sunday services and various church activities as they should be. The same case also happened in Aceh Singkil district. The churches do not have building permits, burned and destroyed by the local government at the urging of an intolerant mob. There is a group of intolerant Islam communities that do not want the presence of other religious communities outside of Islam.

Houses of worship become one of the main components in the life of religious practice. Church attendance for Christians is an important necessity for various Christian religious activities. Thus the rejection of the presence or establishment of the church is interpreted as a rejection of Christianity. This rejection often leads to conflict between religious people. The conflict occurred when the churches of GKI Yasmin and HKBP Filadelfia Bekasi were sealed off, and Christians were forbidden from performing Sunday services. The case of GKI Yasmin and HKBP Filadelfia almost the same. Although the Supreme Court has issued a legally-binding verdict that stipulates that the GKI congregation has the right to establish a church there, the local government insists that the resistance of Muslim groups living in the area should be respected (Andavita, 15 Agustus 2019). But Christians rejected it and continued to perform Sunday services at the church site. The congregation keeps holding sermons, including Christmas celebration outside the building for years since they have not a place to worship.

Conflicts between Muslim and Christian communities, which include violent attacks, building closures, and restrictions on the establishment of places of worship, are not a new phenomenon in Indonesia. If in GKI Yasmin and HKBP Philadelphia, the location of the church is only sealed off, and no permit is issued to build church buildings, in Aceh Singkil was even worse. Some churches burned and torn down. Muslims in Aceh, as well as elsewhere in Indonesia, are suspicious of church attendance because it is considered a center of the spread of the influence of Christianity. Even the majority of Muslims fear the church to be the basis for attracting them to Christianity with the aim of proselytization so that gradually there is a conversion of religion from Islam to Christianity. The suspicions expressed above sparked opposition and objections from Muslims to the presence of Christianity in the Aceh Singkil region. This was evident by the actions of the rejection of the establishment of the church there. The border area of Sumatera and Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam is quite often experiencing religious conflicts, which creates social tensions caused by the issue of houses of worship. If it is narrated from some events about the establishment of the church in Singkil, it can be said that Christians often experience conflict with the intolerant society. The conflict occurred through the actions of lawsuits, sealing, closing, destructing, and burning of churches in Aceh Singkil (Salim, 27 February 2017).

The church burning occurred in Aceh Singkil on October 13, 2015. A group calling itself the Islamic Youth Alliance (APPI) staged a demonstration against the local government for not closing the churches that do not have a permit. The burning of the church frightened the congregation and made them crying

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hysterically. They were not willing for the church to be burned because they set it up painstakingly through fundraising of each family's crops year after year. In addition, for them, the church is not just a building where worship takes place, but rather a recognition of Christian identity in this region that is dominated by the religious community. After burning the church, they went to another church, but the church was guarded by the congregation concerned. They did not want the church burned or torn down, so there was an altercation between Christians and Muslims until there was a victim from the Islam group and injuries victim from both Islam and Christian groups. The rioting made them flee to various places for fear of retaliation from the Islamic side. In the evacuation area, the congregation only slept on a mat in school or church rooms. They enjoy the food provided by the congregation and the local government. Fleeing with all their worries and limitations becomes a bad experience for them and leaving a dark memory for Christians. After returning from exile, relations between religious communities became tense due to suspicion and animosity between Muslims and Christians even though Christians are taught not to live in hostility, even more strictly commanded to love their enemies (Matt 5:44).

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

We need to provide information about the studies related to the title of this article. This review may also provide frameworks and benchmarks to reinforce the importance of such research and for the benefit of the utilization of relevant literature in this study. We used the Miroslav Volf theory to present the issue of loving and forgiving as the foundation of peace.

## III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research method used in this dissertation writing is qualitative research, while the method of writing used is descriptive-analytical by describing the context of existing problems based on the data collected from related publications. This article writing uses literature studies by using the main idea of Miroslav Volf's about embracing theology.

## IV. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The finding of this study is that interfaith conflicts must be ended to avoid hostilities. Hostility can only be overcome by living up to Jesus' command to love the enemy.

### 1. Who Told Us: "Love Your Enemy" and How to Love Our Enemy?

Actually, in Proverbs 24:17, we're told not to gloat when our enemy falls, even to feed our enemy when he's hungry (25:21), but the blatant instruction to love our enemies came from Jesus in His sermon on the mount. Maybe we ask, "who is my enemy?" Before, Jesus had also said, "love your neighbor as yourself (Mark 12:31; Matt 19:19)." Who is our neighbor? Neighbors are the random selection of people with whom we are thrown together, drawn from all parts of the globe. Race, gender, sexuality, ethnicity are irrelevant – there are just care and concern for a neighbor no matter who that person happens to be (Foster, And Finally Love Your Neighbor, 2015). Jesus said, 'love your neighbor as yourself. The problem is, how can we love the enemy? Hating an enemy is what comes naturally. Moreover, the enemy has treated us unfairly and made us suffer. Of course, it's not easy, we can't do it by ourselves, but we need God's guidance work in us. The ability to love others can only be realized because God enables us to do so. Neighbor-love is always dependent on God's gracious gift through which we are capable of loving "the neighbor" – as we have been loved – and the neighbor is potentially anyone else (Fiddes, 2020). Why should we love the enemy? There are several reasons why we must love the enemy. First, because this is the Lord's commandment, and the second, the most important is because God has loved

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us first. Love must be the foundation of the Christian life because God so loved us, and we also ought to love one another (John 4:10-11). Christians have an obligation, a mandate, and a responsibility to realize the command of Jesus to love others and also our enemy. The command to love enemies may behave many practical strikes against it, or it may be a utopian dream. But it is a command from the Lord that is needed by people amid hostility. As Christian, we have the responsibility to fulfill this calling. This calling can be implemented through the movement of religious Christian leader today by providing the strategy to emphasize the important Christian – Muslim cooperation in campaign multi-religious citizenship (Hefner, 2017).

## 2. Embrace Others

This article proposes that religious conflicts have damaged relations between religious people, even created hostility for fellow religious people. So the commandment to love your enemies must be realized by embracing others, including those who persecute us- those who participated forbade the worship of Christians, even those who burned and destroyed churches. These relationships must be restored so that they can live together harmoniously. Love and embrace others gives great hope for the future of our society. Embrace theology became an important theme in creating peace and restoring relations with others. Volf is well placed to help us think about this. The underlying of embracing theology is God worshipped by Christians is a God who loves unconditionally and indiscriminately, so the desire to embrace the other is the most fundamental obligation of the Christian faith (Volf, 2000).

Volf surely is right about the only way to build peace is through an embrace that begins with forgiveness.

An embrace always involved a double movement of aperture and closure. I open my arms to create space in myself for the other. The open arms are a sign both of discontent at being myself only and of desire to include the other. They are an invitation to the other to come in and feel at home with me, to belong to me. In an embrace, I also close my arms around the other-not tightly, so as to crush her and assimilate her forcefully into myself, for that not would be an embrace but a concealed power-act of exclusion but gently, so as to tell her that I do not want to be without her in her otherness (Volf M., 1992).

From what Volf wrote, the theology must begin from opening up and making room for others within us and making ourselves a safe place for him. The summary shows our dissatisfaction with ourselves, thus opening ourselves up to others to supplement it with all its abnormalities or uniqueness. This lacks self-awareness of the importance of another presence. Volf asserts that embrace is important because one's identity is inseparable from others. One cannot live authentically without welcoming others-another gender, another culture, another into the structure of his or her existence (Volf M., 1992). In this case, Volf developed embrace theology by asserting that Jesus' open hand on the cross is a sign that He opened Himself to embrace all mankind.

The idea of how to build social relationships with others become an important idea from Volf. Humans, as social beings, should be able to organize their lives with others because their personal identities are tied to their close and distant neighbors. It means the human being is inseparable from the social interaction that has been lived even though various of tension occurred amid the social dynamics they lived. Actually, this is not easy. It takes a willingness of the heart to be focused on obedience to God's commandment to love others. Similar views are also expressed by Knox by saying, "if we embrace a radically different kind of power, we must embrace the kenotic kind of love demonstrated through the incarnation of Jesus, which spills over into enemy love" (Knox, 2018). Based on the idea of Volf and Knox, the crucifixion of Jesus being a tangible proof of God opening up to love and embrace his enemies-those who have persecuted God. This act of love of Jesus can be used as an inspiration that must be lived by Christians amid hostility.

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## V. CONCLUSION AND FURTHER RESEARCH

The article concludes that violence has played a part in human life experiences in many forms, including violence in the name of religion. The religious conflict created hostility and enmity between religious people. This situation must be restored by living up to Jesus' command to love the enemy and pray for those who persecuted us. The concrete action of loving the enemy begins with an openness to welcome and embrace others. Loving and embracing our enemies means establishing sustainable peace.

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