

TAWHID AND TOLERANCE: MUSLIM YOUTH ACTIVITIES RESPONSES TO THE INDONESIAN ULAMA COUNCIL'S PROHIBITION ON CHRISTMAS GREETINGS

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Abstract: *This study aimed to investigate Indonesian Ulama Council (MUI) fatwa on Christmas, particularly the prohibition of greeting Christians with “Merry Christmas.” It addressed two main questions, namely what is the content of MUI fatwa on Christmas, and how does the relationship between tawhid and tolerance manifest in Christmas greetings? To achieve this objective, a qualitative case study design was used. Data sources included MUI fatwa on Christmas and the perspectives of young Muslim activists on Christmas greetings. The results showed that MUI fatwa on Christmas and the prohibition of Christmas greetings were based on the 1981 and 2016 fatwas, further reinforced by sermons from North Sumatra and South Sulawesi MUI regarding Christmas greetings. MUI fatwa is derived from the Qur’an, Hadith, Usul Fiqh, and Ulama’s opinions. The religious arguments referenced by MUI generally emphasize an attitude of hostility between Muslim and non-Muslim, while other normative sources that promote religious tolerance are not adequately referenced to provide a context for harmonious relations between Muslim and non-Muslim. Meanwhile, the perspective of young Muslim activists on the relationship between tawhid and Christmas greetings shows that there is no direct relationship between tawhid and Christmas greetings. However, the greetings can foster religious tolerance. MUI perspective on Christmas, particularly the prohibition of Christmas greetings, appears to be irrelevant to the context of Indonesian pluralistic society.*

Keywords: *MUI Fatwa; Merry Christmas; Tawhid; Tolerance; Young Muslim Activists; Indonesia.*

Abstrak: Penelitian ini berupaya menyelidiki fatwa Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI) tentang Natal, khususnya larangan mengucapkan “Selamat Natal” kepada umat Islam. Penelitian ini mengajukan dua pertanyaan utama, yaitu apa isi fatwa MUI tentang Natal, dan bagaimana hubungan antara tauhid dan toleransi terwujud dalam ucapan Natal? Untuk mencapai tujuan ini, digunakan desain studi kasus kualitatif. Sumber data meliputi fatwa MUI tentang Natal dan perspektif aktivis Muslim muda tentang ucapan Natal. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa fatwa MUI tentang Natal dan larangan ucapan Natal didasarkan pada fatwa tahun 1981 dan 2016, yang diperkuat oleh khutbah MUI Sumatera Utara dan Sulawesi Selatan mengenai ucapan Natal. Fatwa MUI diambil dari Al-Qur’an, Hadits, Usul Fiqih, dan pendapat ulama. Argumen keagamaan yang dirujuk oleh MUI umumnya menekankan sikap permusuhan antara Muslim dan non-Muslim, sementara sumber normatif lain yang mendorong toleransi beragama tidak cukup dirujuk untuk memberikan konteks bagi hubungan harmonis antara Muslim dan non-Muslim. Sementara itu, perspektif aktivis Muslim muda tentang hubungan antara tauhid dan ucapan selamat Natal menunjukkan bahwa tidak ada hubungan langsung antara tauhid dan ucapan selamat Natal. Namun, ucapan selamat tersebut dapat menumbuhkan toleransi beragama. Perspektif MUI tentang Natal, khususnya larangan ucapan selamat Natal, tampaknya tidak relevan dengan konteks masyarakat pluralistik Indonesia.

Kata Kunci: Fatwa MUI; Selamat Natal; Tauhid; Toleransi; Aktivis Muda Muslim; Indonesia.

Introduction

The debate over the permissibility to say “Merry Christmas” to non-Muslim, specifically Christians, continues each year. This debate typically arises toward the end of the year, particularly during Christmas celebrations observed by Christians.¹ It originates from perspective of Indonesian Ulama Council (MUI), emphasizing caution to the point of prohibiting or forbidding the involvement of Muslim in Christmas celebrations. MUI has issued two fatwas specifically addressing Christmas, namely the 1981 and 2016 fatwas. Both fatwas contain a religious perspective that generally prohibits or forbids Muslim involvement in Christmas celebrations.² However, some Muslims participate in Christmas activities as a form of tolerance between religious communities, respecting each other as individuals living side by side.

MUI perspective through the fatwa is further emphasized by sermons that expressly prohibit Muslim from wishing non-Muslim a Merry Christmas. This view is based on the belief that Christmas greetings signify a recognition of non-Muslim beliefs. The prohibition is associated with an effort to maintain the purity of faith, particularly the *tawhid* of Muslim.³ However, Christmas greetings are often understood as a form of ceremonial activity that is not related to the element of *tawhid*. MUI assumes that

offering Christmas greetings can influence the *tawhid* of Muslim, who believes that Allah is the One Almighty God. However, some Muslim communities view the greetings as a gesture of openness that is unrelated to the issue of *tawhid*. This perspective holds that strong *tawhid* will not be easily affected by simply wishing non-Muslim a Merry Christmas.

Studies on MUI fatwa regarding Muslim involvement in Christmas celebrations have been widely conducted by scholars in Indonesia and internationally. Others have shown how MUI fatwa on Christmas often generates controversy, specifically among groups that either permit or reject wishing non-Muslim Merry Christmas. For instance Nurhadi (2022),⁴ explored the history of the debate on Christmas celebrations in Indonesia, with the results explaining that the debate occurred due to the lack of clear legislation regarding the status of Muslim involvement in Christmas celebrations. However, MUI, as an Islamic mass organization, considered it necessary to maintain Muslim *tawhid*, depriving the extension of religious tolerance, potentially compromising faith. This has sparked various reactions among Muslim regarding whether it is permissible for Muslim to participate in Christmas celebrations.

Qodir and Singh (2021) further discussed the tension in relations between Muslim and non-Muslim from the New Order era to the present.⁵ The main issue affecting this relationship is associated with marriage and Christmas celebrations involving both religions. The relationship also involves theological elements, giving rise to differences of opinion among Muslims. This study showed the need for theological dialogue to reduce tensions in interfaith relations. Subuki, Akmal and Huda (2023)⁶ examined MUI fatwa regarding the prohibition of using non-Muslim attributes and discussed MUI fatwa on the prohibition of using non-Muslim attributes, sparking controversy. It also explained MUI fatwa as an ideological text that tends to support the perspective of classical Ulama's, prohibiting the use of non-Muslim attributes. MUI fatwa justifies the actions of several mass organizations that prohibit the attributes. The fatwa is reinforced by the consolidation of Islamic mass organizations that view identity as permanent, considering the use of non-Muslim attributes contrary to Islam.

Arai (2023)⁷ specifically explored the debate in Muslim community about whether it is permissible to wish non-Muslim Merry Christmas. This debate often intensifies as Christmas approaches. Several Muslim groups actively participate in Christmas celebrations to show tolerance toward people of different religions. The results explained Christmas celebrations involved not only Christians but also Muslim, expressing faith and tolerance

in living side by side with adherents of other religions. Furthermore, Murtaza MZ and Nasution (2022)⁸ examined the law of saying Merry Christmas as conveyed by Arrazy Hasyim in Deddy Corbuzier's podcast. It provided a detailed account of Arrazy's perspective on the law of saying Merry Christmas. Arrazy stated that this act is permissible as it does not diminish the value of *tawhid* for those who express the greeting.

Studies have shown that MUI fatwa on Christmas, particularly the prohibition of Christmas greetings, sparks debate in Indonesian Muslim community, specifically among pro and con groups. Meanwhile, MUI perspective has implications for the formation of segregation in communities of different religions. The relationship between Muslim and non-Muslim can be disrupted by a closed attitude between religious communities, which has the potential to foster inter-religious conflict in Indonesia. This study aimed to test MUI fatwa by presenting empirical perspectives from the community, particularly among young Muslim activists, to contribute to the debate over whether it is permissible to wish non-Muslim Merry Christmas. Testing MUI fatwa on Christmas has been limited to a normative context, necessitating the examination of empirical narratives from communities directly involved in interfaith relations.

This study utilizes a qualitative research aiming to present the findings in a descriptive and analytical manner. This study uses a case approach to explore the fatwa issued by the MUI regarding the Christmas holiday. The data was derived from the fatwa of the MUI and the perspectives of young Muslim activists concerning the issue of tauhid and the expression of felicitations for Christmas. The secondary sources of data are instrumental in elucidating and comprehending the primary theme of the research study. These sources encompass research reports, articles, theses, and dissertations, among others. The collection of data was conducted in accordance with a systematic approach, encompassing a thorough review and analysis of relevant MUI documents. This was complemented by in-depth interviews with prominent figures among the younger Muslim community. The technical analysis data was obtained through the interpretation of fatwas related to the topic of the Christmas holiday, and subsequently classified based on their thematic content. A comparison of the sources obtained is necessary to establish the subsequent findings of the research.

Trajectory of MUI Fatwa and Christmas

Based on an analysis of MUI fatwa, no fatwa explicitly prohibits saying Merry Christmas to adherents of other religions, specifically Christians who celebrate the event. However, two MUI fatwas are directly related

to Christmas. Although not explicitly prohibiting Christmas greetings, these fatwas are indirectly related to the prohibition of the greetings.⁹ The first fatwa, issued by MUI in 1981, concerns Christmas celebrations in Indonesia, while the second, issued in 2016, addresses the use of non-Muslim religious attributes. Both fatwas contain prohibitions on participating in Christmas celebrations and using any form of attributes that identify non-Muslim groups. The 1981 MUI fatwa shows that the issue of Christmas has been a long-standing discourse in Indonesian Muslim community.¹⁰ This discourse arises because not all groups in Indonesian Muslim community accept MUI fatwa as a religious guideline, leading to ongoing debates in the community.

The 1981 MUI fatwa was developed in a legislative framework that referred to the Qur'an, Hadith (Sunnah), and *usul fiqh* principles as its basis. Religious references regarding the permissibility of collaborating and associating with people outside of Islam include Q.S. al-Hujurāt: 13, Q.S. Luqmān: 15, Q.S. Mumtaḥanah: 8, and others.¹¹ The verses generally emphasize the acknowledgment of differences and the importance of doing good to other groups that are not hostile to Muslim. In addition, other verses are cited to support the recognition of Prophet 'Isa as the son of Mary, as mentioned in Q.S. Maryam: 30-32, Q.S. al-Mā'idah: 75, and Q.S. al-Baqarah: 285. The verses used as references generally advocate for mutual acceptance in the face of differences, including religious belief, for people of different religions.¹²

Another verse that seems contradictory to the previous is related to the prohibition of mixing right and wrong, as seen in Q.S. al-Kāfirūn: 109, Q.S. al-Baqarah: 42, and others. The argument built on this reference is further supported by *usul fiqh* principles, where the prevention of harm takes precedence over obtaining benefit. The argument shows that the 1981 MUI fatwa views the relationship between Muslim and non-Muslim in a similar context as described in the verses. However, the current social situation, particularly in Indonesian Muslim community, reflects a different reality, specifically regarding the recognition of religious diversity and the protection of all beliefs by the state.¹³ The arguments underlying MUI stance tend to ignore verses that permit interaction with non-Muslim groups, such as marrying, eating their food, socializing well, and other actions explicitly stated in the main sources of Islam.¹⁴

The 1981 MUI fatwa issued several decisions stating that Christmas celebrations are non-Muslim religious activities in which Muslim may not participate, both for theological and social reasons. The fatwa explicitly states that participating in Christmas celebrations involving Muslim is

a forbidden behavior that should be avoided. The prohibition against participating in all forms of activities related to Christmas is based on concerns that it could affect Muslim. Although the 1981 MUI fatwa does not directly address the prohibition of saying Merry Christmas, several restrictions presented provide room for the prohibition of the greetings. The fatwa can be understood as an attempt to prohibit or limit Muslim from giving Christmas greetings to adherents of other religions.¹⁵ MUI perspective, expressed through the prohibition fatwa, serves as an effort to limit Muslim involvement in the activities of other religious groups. However, as a community living side by side with people of different faiths, perspectives may impact on social relations.

The 2016 MUI fatwa states the prohibition of using non-Muslim attributes, confirming the legal status of the actions as *haram* (forbidden), meaning their implementation is prohibited and considered inconsistent with Islamic teachings. The 2016 MUI fatwa is a continuation of the previous fatwa, which is considered insufficient in fully regulating Muslim involvement with Christmas. In constructing the framework of thought in the fatwa, the arguments used refer to the Qur'an, Hadith, and Ulama's opinions. These arguments cite several verses, such as Q.S. al-Baqarah: 104, describing the condition of infidels who will receive punishment from God. Another verse mentioned is Q.S. Al-Baqarah: 42, regarding not mixing right and wrong, while Q.S. Al-Kāfirūn: 1-6, discusses the absence of tolerance in worship, among others.¹⁶ However, none specifically addressed Christmas celebrations by non-Muslim, meaning the verses used do not have the same context as the prohibition of using non-Muslim attributes.¹⁷ Hadith is also referenced to strengthen the fatwa perspective, prohibiting the imitation of infidels. However, this hadith has a different context when applied to the practice of prohibiting the use of non-Muslim attributes.

The 2016 MUI fatwa is supported by Ulama's perspective, which is used as a consideration in making the fatwa. Ulama's perspective quoted comes from the opinion of Ibn Qayyim, who stated that extending Christmas greetings is equivalent to prostrating on the cross. The greetings are more hated by Allah than greetings for people who drink alcohol, kill, or commit other sins. Ibn Qayyim's perspective cannot be used as a reference in deciding the prohibition of Christmas greetings because it is subjective and based on different context than the situation in Indonesian Muslim community, specifically regarding the harmonious relations between Muslim and non-Muslim. The 2016 MUI fatwa confirms that the use of non-Muslim religious attributes is haram. Although the fatwa

does not directly mention the prohibition of Christmas greetings, the prohibitions show that Christmas greetings are indeed discouraged.¹⁸ While the 2016 MUI fatwa does not use the specific term “prohibition of Christmas greetings”, the prohibitions it outlines clearly limit Muslim from saying Merry Christmas. Therefore, the 2016 MUI fatwa is used as evidence regarding the prohibition of Muslim involvement in Christmas celebrations, including the giving of Christmas greetings.

MUI perspective on Christmas greetings is emphasized through the 2021 North Sumatra MUI sermon, where the prohibition of Christmas greetings is based on the view that saying “Merry Christmas” is considered a form of recognition and approval of symbols of infidelity.¹⁹ Although this sermon cannot be equated with a fatwa, it refers to and uses MUI fatwa as a reference, clearly emphasizing the prohibition on Muslim from saying “Merry Christmas.” The arguments presented in the 2021 North Sumatra MUI sermon refer to the 1981 and 2016 MUI fatwas, implicitly emphasizing the prohibition of Christmas greetings.²⁰ The sermon states that participating in Christmas activities is prohibited or forbidden. Therefore, saying “Merry Christmas” is also not allowed, as this action cannot be separated from faith. The sermon further advises Muslim not to use religious attributes of other faiths, as the legal status is considered forbidden, and it simultaneously urges companies and factories to respect Muslim in practicing their beliefs according to Islamic law.

The prohibition is emphasized through a statement in the sermon that wishing Christians a Merry Christmas is considered contrary to Islamic teachings. The sermon delivered in writing by North Sumatra MUI can be understood as a form of reference to the fatwa previously issued by MUI regarding Christmas.²¹ The sermon was delivered as a form of affirmation of the prohibition on Christmas greetings to Christians because it is viewed as a form of recognition of the beliefs of the community. Although the prohibition of Christmas greetings delivered by North Sumatra MUI is not considered to represent the perspective of the Central MUI, it still influences the prohibition of wishing Christians a Merry Christmas among Muslims. In contrast to North Sumatra MUI sermon, South Sulawesi MUI issued a sermon in 2023 that was more open and tolerant toward religious groups outside of Islam.²² The sermon affirms the recognition of different views regarding saying “Merry Christmas” and urges Muslim to respond wisely, not making it a polemic that can disrupt religious harmony. Greetings to adherents of other religions based on social ties are encouraged, while maintaining the values of Islamic faith and without imposing religious attributes on other groups.

***Tawhid* as the Basis of Faith**

Tawhid, as an expression of faith in the recognition that God is One, is a fundamental part of Islam. *Tawhid* also serves as the dividing line between faith and disbelief, so that if a person does not accept the oneness of God, then that person has become an unbeliever.²³ *Tawhid* as an instrument of faith is not only in the form of recognition of God, but also has other dimensions that are interrelated with the issue of divinity. *Tawhid* itself is built on various values that place God as the focus of concentration, but it must not contradict the goal of Islam as a blessing for the entire universe with goodness for life and humanity.²⁴ According to young Muhammadiyah activists, the teachings of *tawhid* teach about the equality of human beings regardless of religion.²⁵ This human equality is clearly stated in Islamic teachings, especially in the Qur'an, which states that human beings are created different from one another (Q.S. 49: 13). Acceptance of differences is part of the manifestation of tauhid regarding Islamic teachings that are universal and apply to all of humanity.

From this perspective, it can be understood that tauhid teaches that humans are not differentiated based on social attributes, including religion, but rather that all humans are God's creatures on earth, so respecting every human being is part of Islamic teachings on humanity. The same view was also expressed by young NU activists who argued that *tawhid* is a teaching about divinity, but it cannot be separated from its social aspects. so that *tawhid* is not only understood as a form of recognition of the oneness of God, but must also be seen in a broader context in which *tawhid* also has a social dimension, especially regarding the recognition that humans were created by God in different tribes and nations, including different religions.²⁶ Humans have differences in matters of religion, but as humans they have rights that must be respected as humans. *Tawhid* cannot be separated from the context of universal humanity because the expression of *tawhid* is proven by placing the values of Islamic teachings that accept religious differences and at the same time respect all human beings as creatures on earth.²⁷

In a more empirical context, young NU activists view tauhid as the most fundamental principle in Islam, which does not justify violent behavior in the name of religion.²⁸ Violence, whether physical or verbal, is prohibited in Islam. Islam prohibits insulting or belittling the beliefs of people of different faiths. In this view, the AW youth activist group believes that tauhid prohibits actions that can damage or harm the beliefs of people of different religions. Tauhid clearly prohibits religious communities from engaging in behavior that can disrupt interfaith relations. In this

context, it can be understood that belief in One God should not lead to attitudes that contradict Islamic teachings about not insulting or cursing the beliefs of others. The social dimension of *tawhid* must create peace between religious communities by not damaging or insulting people of different faiths. Young activists from Muhammadiyah also believe that *tawhid* should not be a cause of conflict between religious communities. Islamic teachings through the Qur'an clearly state that it is not permissible to insult the beliefs of other religious communities, which will provoke followers of other religions to insult the God of Islam, so that religious communities through *tawhid* should be able to be open in trying to respect communities with different beliefs.

Another important element in monotheism is related to fairness. Fairness here means that there should be no attempt to differentiate between statuses or groups in the applicable rules, including those of different religions. Everyone is positioned equally under the law. In Islamic history, it is evident that the Prophet and his companions have provided a clear example of fairness that does not discriminate based on certain beliefs.²⁹ According to young NU activists, fairness is a fundamental principle in Islamic teachings, including towards groups of different religions. These groups must have the same rights and obligations as Muslims in social relations. Laws or regulations are enforced based on actions, so justice does not discriminate based on the beliefs of the community.³⁰ The teachings of monotheism contain the principle of justice, so in applying justice, there is no discrimination based on belief. According to young Al-Washliyah activists, justice is an integral part of Islamic teachings, so the application of justice must be carried out without regard to the beliefs of human beings. Therefore, if there are religious groups that commit unjust acts or have deprived diverse groups of their rights as human beings, then justice must be given to those groups.³¹

Based on the explanation given by the young activist, tauhid is a form of belief in God Almighty, but it also has an inseparable social dimension. *Tawhid* is believed to shape reflections in life about the view of humans as noble beings on earth, so that *tawhid* does not only stop at the aspect of divinity, but is also directly related to the attitudes and behaviors of religious communities towards life, including in relation to interfaith relations. *Tawhid* has universal values that place teachings about humanity and the attitude of being fair to all other religious adherents, so that *tawhid* does not become a driver of actions that contradict Islamic teachings about humanity. *Tawhid* becomes a driver for the formation of an open attitude among religious communities while still placing faith as the basis for doing

good in life.

Relating *tawhid* with wishing non-Muslim a Merry Christmas has generated diverse perspectives. Some groups refuse to greet, while others tend not to have a problem with greetings. In the context presented, young Muslim activists from Al-Washliyah, Muhammadiyah, and Nahdatul Ulama (NU) offer diverse perspectives on how *tawhid* relates to Christmas greetings. From the perspective of Al-Washliyah's young activists, *tawhid* is related to the issue of divinity and belief in Allah. Conversely, humans are also taught to respect each other.³² The perspective shows that *tawhid* is not only related to divinity but also has implications for humanity, particularly the duty to respect each other, including in aspects of differing beliefs. It places *tawhid* as an integral part of human values, meaning that *tawhid* should not only be understood in a simple context but broadly, embodying humanitarian issues.³³

Another perspective, represented by young Muhammadiyah activists, is organizations do not openly declare that saying Merry Christmas is forbidden. However, this view emphasizes the need for caution when it comes to offering Christmas greetings.³⁴ Christmas greetings can be understood as a form of respect in social relations that is not necessarily related to adopting the beliefs of the other group.³⁵ The perspective of Muhammadiyah activists stresses the need for caution in extending Christmas greetings. The activists also acknowledge the view that saying Merry Christmas can be seen as a form of recognition of other religious beliefs. However, there is an advocacy for a flexible attitude and a strive to respect this perspective while avoiding any violation of *tawhid* and faith.³⁶

In the context of the prohibition of Christmas greetings, the NU youth activist group stated that as long as the intention of saying Merry Christmas is to maintain harmony, there is no prohibition.³⁷ The perspective emphasizes a more open view of *tawhid*, suggesting that saying Merry Christmas to followers of other religions does not alter one's belief. It is further emphasized that there is no convincing evidence to suggest that an individual's faith or *tawhid* can waver simply by saying Merry Christmas.³⁸ However, a clear boundary should be established, hence, when Muslim says Merry Christmas with the intention of changing their beliefs, it can damage *tawhid*.³⁹ Damage to *tawhid* can occur when saying Merry Christmas leads an individual to abandon the belief in a particular religion. However, there is no prohibition against simply saying Merry Christmas without the aim of affecting others' *tawhid*.⁴⁰

Muslim who says Merry Christmas do not change any aspect, and should remain submissive and obedient to Allah's commands while maintaining

unity. Therefore, saying Merry Christmas will not alter the identity of Muslim in relation to non-Muslim.⁴¹ Damage to *tawhid* occurs only when an individual is involved in the worship practices of another religion and changes beliefs as a result. The perspective expressed by the young activists shows Christmas greetings exchanged by Muslim with other religious groups do not affect the aspect of *tawhid*. Damage to *tawhid* can occur when the greetings are accompanied by involvement in, or become part of, the rituals of other religions. In the context of saying Merry Christmas the NU youth activists are even more emphatic in stating that Muslim *tawhid* will not be compromised just by offering the greetings. Muslim is fully aware of the boundaries of the faith as part of *tawhid*.⁴² The explanation regarding the relationship between *tawhid* and Christmas greetings shows that words do not directly influence others faith because words are not always an accurate reflection of the heart. Therefore, words cannot be viewed merely as an expression of faith.

***Tawhid* and Tolerance**

Viewing *tawhid* in relation to Christmas greetings also has implications for tolerance. In general, Christmas greetings, which are often conveyed by Muslim to non-Muslim, are seen as part of an attitude of tolerance to respect and maintain good relations with others.⁴³ As an effort to maintain positive interfaith interactions between religions, Christmas greetings do not affect the faith aspects of Muslim. However, the intention of Muslim is the key factor in maintaining harmony between religious communities. Therefore, *tawhid* as the basis of faith will not have a negative influence, even when Muslim says Merry Christmas.⁴⁴ In this context, young Muslim activists more clearly state that strong faith will not be affected by Christmas greetings conveyed to adherents of other religions, and there is no need to worry about conveying the greetings. Christmas greetings are a form of social interaction between fellow human beings to support each other and have no direct connection to faith.⁴⁵

Christmas greetings in the context of tolerance can also be understood as an expression of *tawhid* teaching to create peace, which is a core principle in Islam.⁴⁶ *Tawhid* should bring goodness to humanity, hence, Christmas greetings should be viewed in the context of *tawhid*, which aims to affirm the oneness of God and promote goodwill for all humans.⁴⁷ *Tawhid* should not undermine tolerance, which is an integral part of being religious, specifically for those living in a pluralistic society. Efforts should be made to accept differences as part of Islamic teachings that aim to build a harmonious community. The perspective presented emphasizes that

tawhid as the basis of faith aims to create a good and peaceful community, hence, the prohibition of Christmas greetings contradicts the values of *tawhid*. Christmas greetings, as a form of social expression, require religious adherents to respect each other beliefs without compromise.⁴⁸

Young NU activists cite Gus Dur's perspective that saying Merry Christmas is a sign of respect for adherents of other religions in order to understand Christmas greetings as a form of tolerance. These greetings cannot damage the *tawhid* held by Muslim.⁴⁹ Christmas greetings are seen as a form of tolerance between religious communities that does not affect the *tawhid* believed by Muslim, hence, saying the greetings to adherents of other religions does not result in Muslim losing or damaging faith. Furthermore, young NU activists stated that NU generally allowed saying Merry Christmas as long as it did not become a belief.⁵⁰ The perspective of the activists shows Christmas greetings are not prohibited as a form of tolerance in interfaith relations. Conversely, these greetings should not be regarded as truth or belief considered contrary to the beliefs of Muslim.⁵¹

Christmas greetings, as an attitude of tolerance, are not directly related to the issue of faith. These greetings are a form of social expression encouraging adherents of other religions to accept differences. In this context, Christmas greetings should be viewed in the social domain, where the greetings exchanged between people of different faiths serve as a form of support for the fulfillment of human duties to do good in life. Viewing Christmas greetings in the context of faith is considered inappropriate because these greetings fall in the social domain and are not intended as an effort to recognize the divinity of other religions. The differentiation of perspectives on greetings in social and faith contexts contributes to the variations in Muslim attitudes toward wishing others a Merry Christmas. Therefore, placing Christmas greetings in a social framework as a form of tolerance will not only affect the faith aspect of Muslim but is also related to the values of *tawhid*, necessitating the creation of peace in life.

The perspective strengthens the effort to differentiate Christmas greetings in social and faith contexts. Young Muhammadiyah activists argued that Christmas greetings have no direct relationship with *tawhid* because these greetings pertain to the social rather than the faith domain. Christmas greetings do not interfere with the *tawhid* that Muslim believes in the religious teachings,⁵² as these greetings are typically a social response from a plural community acknowledging the integral differences. Therefore, relating Christmas greetings to the aspect of *tawhid* is an irrelevant perspective because a plural community should be open to other groups, particularly in the socio-religious context in the community. A plural

community cannot reject differences because it exists in an environment with various beliefs, hence, efforts are needed to accept differences as a form of tolerance toward differing beliefs.

In a plural community, a way to respect differences in beliefs is by giving greetings that foster peace. Giving Christmas greetings is understood as a way to respect others beliefs. The main purpose of Christmas greetings is to maintain good relations and cultivate an attitude of tolerance. Tolerance is also defined as the refusal to participate in or be part of the worship or religious activities of other groups.⁵³ In a plural community, tolerance is essential for creating harmony, allowing all interfaith activities or agendas to proceed smoothly. Tolerance through Christmas greetings to adherents of other religions is seen as a way for Muslim to contribute to building a peaceful community. Christmas greetings, as a form of tolerance, are also based on the value of *tawhid*, which Muslims believe teaches humans to respect each other. Therefore, efforts to create tolerance correspond to God's commandments.⁵⁴

Christmas greetings by Muslim can be seen as a manifestation of *tawhid* in Islam. *Tawhid* is not only about the belief in the oneness of God but also about fulfilling God's command to accept others, even when there are differences in beliefs. Acceptance of differences as a form of tolerance is part of the values Islam teaches, fostering the creation of goodness in life. The practice of tolerance should not violate boundaries that may obscure the teachings of any religion.⁵⁵ Therefore, Christmas greetings should be viewed in a social context aimed at fostering tolerant relations between people of different faiths in the community. Therefore, these greetings are not a threat to the *tawhid* of Muslim but part of an effort to actualize the value of *tawhid* in life through an attitude of tolerance to create a harmonious community.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study showed MUI fatwa on Christmas had implications for the prohibition of Muslim participation in Christmas activities, including the prohibition of Christmas greetings. MUI issued two fatwas specifically on Christmas, namely the 1981 MUI fatwa and the 2016 fatwa, which were later reaffirmed through North Sumatra and South Sulawesi MUI sermons, both explicitly stating the prohibition. The fatwa produced by MUI as a religious argument for the prohibition of Christmas greetings was based on the Qur'an, Hadith, and Ulama's opinions. However, the fatwa was not understood in the context of a plural community, tending to ignore other normative sources that encouraged the

creation of tolerance between religious communities. In response to MUI fatwa prohibiting Christmas greetings to non-Muslim, a group of young Muslim activists expressed perspectives, tending to see no relationship between *tawhid* and Christmas greetings. These young Muslim activists believed Christmas greetings were a form of tolerance and part of the core teachings of *tawhid*, which not only focused on the unity of God but also had implications for social life, fostering tolerance and mutual respect in a community of different religions.

Endnotes

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