

## THEOLOGY OF PEACE BASED ON RELIGIOUS HARMONY IN ASGHAR ALI ENGINEER'S PERSPECTIVE

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**Abstract:** *This article will explore Asghar Ali Engineer's ideas on the significance of religious harmony and examine how this concept is manifested through his formulated theology of peace. The research method used in this study is literature review with a philosophical approach using hermeneutic and text analysis techniques through verstehen. The results of this study explain that the theology of peace sees religion as a source of values and spirit that encourage humans to live together in peace and harmony. Asghar Ali Engineer suggests that Muslims prioritize the principles of peace, such as the understanding of Islam, the meaning of jihād, movement, and the application of justice. In addition, according to Asghar Ali's perspective, Muslims must cultivate values that can realize religious harmony and peace, such as anti-violence, justice, truth, tolerance, love, and compassion.*

**Keywords:** *Asghar Ali Engineer; Theology of Peace; Religious Harmony.*

**Abstrak:** *Artikel ini akan membahas pemikiran Asghar Ali Engineer tentang pentingnya kerukunan antarumat beragama, serta bagaimana konsep kerukunan ini diwujudkan melalui teologi perdamaian yang dikembangkannya. Metode penelitian ini merupakan kajian pustaka dengan pendekatan filosofis dengan metode hermeneutik dan analisis teks menggunakan teknik verstehen. Hasil penelitian ini menjelaskan bahwa Teologi perdamaian melihat agama sebagai sumber nilai dan spirit yang mendorong manusia untuk hidup berdampingan dengan damai dan harmonis. Asghar Ali Engineer menyarankan agar umat Islam memprioritaskan prinsip-prinsip perdamaian, seperti pengertian tentang Islam, makna jihad, pergerakan, serta penerapan keadilan. Selain itu, menurut pandangan Asghar Ali, umat Islam harus memupuk nilai-nilai yang dapat mewujudkan kerukunan beragama dan perdamaian, seperti anti kekerasan, keadilan, kebenaran, toleransi, cinta, dan kasih sayang.*

**Kata Kunci:** *Asghar Ali Engineer; Teologi Perdamaian; Kerukunan Beragama.*

## **Introduction**

Religious harmony is a very important aspect in society, especially in countries with diverse religions like Indonesia. Islam, as the majority religion in Indonesia, has a strong concept of tolerance and harmony. The history of Islam in Indonesia has shown the concept of tolerance and harmony, which Muslims lived together with people of other religions harmoniously.<sup>1</sup> In the history of Islam in Indonesia, religious harmony was also very strong. During the Islamic kingdoms in Indonesia, Muslims lived peacefully alongside people of other religions. The tradition of mutual cooperation in society, mutual assistance in religious celebrations, and tolerance towards different beliefs are the example of the harmonious life.<sup>2</sup> However, despite Islam has a strong concept of religious harmony, in reality the religious conflicts are still occurred in Indonesia and in various other countries because of various factors, such as politics, economics, and socio-cultural issues.<sup>3</sup>

In this era of globalization and modernization, conflicts between religious people become a very important issue around the world. Syamsuddin explains that conflicts between religions often occur due to a lack of understanding, prejudices, and different political interests among religious groups. Interreligious conflict can cause social, economic, and political damage to society.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, the researcher conduct in-depth research on how to create peace between religions and prevent religious conflicts. It is important for Muslims to understand the concepts of tolerance and interfaith harmony taught in Islam.<sup>5</sup>

In theology of peace study, it is important to look at the perspective of religious figures who have successfully created peace through their developed thoughts. One of the religious figures known as a peace theology

thinker is Ashgar Ali Engineer. Ashgar Ali Engineer was an Indian Muslim scholar and intellectual who has written extensively on religion, society, and politics. He was known as someone who advocates religious pluralism and tolerance in India.<sup>6</sup>

In the context of Indonesia, Ashgar Ali Engineer's ideas about interfaith harmony are also relevant. Indonesia is a country with strong religious diversity, however, the cases of intolerance and interfaith conflicts emerge in some areas. Understanding the concept of *Tawhīd* and human unity in Islam can be a strong foundation to strengthen interfaith harmony in Indonesia. In efforts to strengthen interfaith harmony, it is important to adopt concepts of inclusivity, dialogue, and tolerance in every action and policy. The statement is in line with Ashgar Ali Engineer's view on pluralism and interfaith harmony based on the concept of theology of peace.<sup>7</sup> Latif explained that in Ashgar Ali Engineer's thinking, Islam's *Tawhīd* is not just about affirming the existence of one God, but it also includes the unity and equality of humans before Allah. The concept of *Tawhīd* in Islam teaches that humans are created in various forms, races, and religions, yet they still have similarities and unity in worshipping Allah. Therefore, Ashgar Ali Engineer's understanding of *Tawhīd* strengthens his argument about pluralism and interfaith harmony.<sup>8</sup>

Research on theology of peace based on interfaith harmony perspective of Ashgar Ali Engineer can contribute positively in strengthening interfaith harmony. Theology of peace is a study of the way to create peace among religious communities. Theology of peace views religions as a source of values and spirit that encourage people to live together peacefully and harmoniously.<sup>9</sup> In his opinion, the concept of interfaith harmony is one way to create peace in society. This interfaith harmony is based on principles of equality, mutual respect, and understanding between religions.<sup>10</sup> With interfaith harmony, society can live together peacefully and harmoniously without any religious conflicts.<sup>11</sup>

The contribution of Ashgar Ali Engineer in the development of peace theology is very important. His ideas inspired many people to fight for pluralism, tolerance, and interfaith harmony. He fought for the rights of minorities and advocated for equality and justice in society. He is an exemplary figure for many in the pursuit of peace and equality in society.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, research on the peace theology based on interfaith harmony from the perspective of Ashgar Ali Engineer is very important. This research is expected to contribute to the development of peace theology and to address interfaith conflicts in society.

This research method is a literature review with a philosophical

approach aimed at understanding a concept or theory of a figure through the hermeneutic method by studying relevant literature or bibliographic materials. According to Bakker, the hermeneutic is a method to deeply understand and interpret texts. The data analysis in this research uses the *Verstehen* technique as an effort to understand the meaning behind the text by placing oneself in the position of a subject who understands. The data are the texts of Ashgar Ali Engineer's works that discuss the theology of peace and religious harmony. The data of this study is Ashgar Ali Engineer's books such as *Islam and the Concept of Tolerance* (2003), *Islam and Inter-Faith Relations* (1998), *The Challenge of Pluralism: Paradigms from Muslim Contexts* (2004), *Islam and Liberation Theology: Essays on Liberative Elements in Islam* (2003), as well as previous articles and research that have the same topics as this research.

Moreover, to analyze the data, the researcher used the *verstehen* technique. In this technique, the researcher read and understand deeply the contents of Ashgar Ali Engineer's writings. Then, the next step is critical reading and interpretation of his thoughts on the rationality of peace theology and religious harmony. The results of the text analysis are the basis to build a philosophical argument about Ashgar Ali Engineer's ideas. This argument will elaborate on the concepts of rationality of peace theology and religious harmony as described by Ashgar Ali Engineer, as well as their relevance in the context of religious and cultural diversity in Indonesia.

### **Ashgar Ali Engineer and His Thoughts**

Ashgar Ali Engineer was a Muslim scholar and intellectual from India who was born on March 17, 1939, in the city of Salumbar, Rajasthan, India. His father, Rahmat Ali Engineer, was a businessman who was active in the Indian independence movement and became a member of the Indian National Congress. Ashgar Ali Engineer pursued his education at the University of Bombay, where he earned a bachelor's degree in Sociology and Philosophy. During his studies, he was active in the student movement and involved in social movements to fight for the rights of Muslim minorities in India. He received a scholarship to continue his studies abroad and earned a master's degree in Sociology from the University of Warwick, England.<sup>13</sup>

After returning to India in 1970, Ashgar Ali Engineer remained active in social and political movements, especially in advocating for the rights of Muslim minorities. He established the Institute of Islamic Studies in Mumbai in the 1980s, which aimed to promote interfaith dialogue and

fight for the rights of Muslim minorities. In addition to his activism, Ashgar Ali Engineer was also a productive Muslim intellectual. He has written many books and articles on various topics, including Islam, pluralism, minority rights, and feminism in Islam. His most famous work is the book “Islam and Pluralism” published in 1997.<sup>14</sup>

Ashgar Ali Engineer was a very productive intellectual. He wrote articles in several famous newspapers in India such as *the Indian Express*, *The Times of India*, *Telegraph*, *Statesman*, *The Hindu*, and others. In 2004, he received the prestigious award which is equivalent to Nobel Prize Right Livelihood Award from the Swedish Foundation based in Stockholm. Ashgar Ali deserved the award because he had been working for 40 years to create peace and harmony in society, especially in India and Southeast Asia. Ashgar Ali not only received the Right Livelihood Award but also received other awards. In 1983, he received a (D.Lit) degree from the Calcutta University to appreciate his phenomenal work on communal harmony. In 1987, he also received The Distinguished Service Award from the International Student Assembly and Indian Student Assembly, USA. Additionally, in 1990, he received the Dalmia Award and several other honorary doctorates and awards. He even received the R.B. Joshi Inter-Faith Award from Christian organizations in the Tamil Nadu region.<sup>15</sup>

Juliani and Hambali argue that the thoughts of Ashgar Ali Engineer refer to a deep understanding of Islamic teachings and universal human values. He also played a role in advocating for minority rights and promoting interfaith harmony in a multicultural society. He rejected extremist views and emphasized the importance of understanding the social and historical context in understanding Islamic teachings.<sup>16</sup>

Several important figures such as Muhammad Iqbal, a Muslim poet and philosopher who played a significant role in the Indian independence movement, and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, a scholar and politician who led the Indian independence movement and became India's first Minister of Education after its independence influenced Ashgar Ali Engineer's thought. In addition, Western thinkers, such as Friedrich Nietzsche, Karl Marx, and Michel Foucault, who had a great influence on his views on religion, politics, and society also influenced Engineer's thought.<sup>17</sup>

### *The Meaning of Islam*

The essence of Islam refers to the core teachings of Islam that include the belief in Allah as the One True God, Prophet Muhammad as the messenger of Allah, and the Quran as the source of Islamic teachings. Every individual who follows Islamic teachings must apply the essence of Islam i.e moral,

social, and ethical principles such as honesty, justice, compassion, and tolerance in their everyday life.<sup>18</sup> Islam recognized and respected diversity, resulting in harmony among people of different religions and unity in social and political life. Therefore, the essence of Islam promotes peace, harmony, and equality for all human beings, regardless of religion, race, or cultural background.<sup>19</sup>

However, according to Asghar Ali Engineer's study, People recognizes Islam as violent acts in various parts of the world, for example, the bombing attacks on the WTC in New York, Washington, and the Pentagon. The bomber said that it is a part of jihad, which creates the understanding that Islam is a religion that promotes violence. Therefore radical groups used the term of jihad to legitimize their violent actions as part of religious teachings. This has led to a decrease in society's understanding of the essence of Islam as a religion of peace. Asghar Ali states that although humans have a tendency to engage in warfare, the ultimate goal of religion is to create peace. To achieve this, humans must be responsive to their surroundings, helping those who are oppressed, and emancipate them.<sup>20</sup>

Asghar Ali Engineer views that in studying Islamic theology or *kalām*, *tawhīd* should be the foundation of Islamic teachings. According to his view, *tawhīd* is not only refers to performing religious rituals, but also refers to the social structure that accommodates the *mustad'afin* and encourages the creation of peace.<sup>21</sup> In the context of Islamic theology studies, *tawhīd* is a very important fundamental concept. *Tawhīd* refers to the belief in the oneness of Allah as the only God who has power over everything in the universe. However, according to Asghar Ali Engineer, *tawhīd* is not only related to religious rituals, but moslem must implement *tawhīd* in the social structure to create justice and peace in society.<sup>22</sup>

Although there are various forms of worship in Islam, sometimes the followers forget about this point. In addition, misunderstandings can lead to violence and discrimination influenced by political, economic, and social factors in various Islamic countries. Therefore, Asghar has concepts that the believer must instil i.e. anti-violence, justice, truth, tolerance, love, and compassion. Asghar Ali emphasizes that the perfect Muslim is the one who has and gives a sense of love, patience, and fairness.<sup>23</sup>

### *Peace Theology in Ashgar Ali Engineer's Thought*

Peace theology is a concept that aims to create peace and harmony between human beings and their environment. In his thinking, Asghar Ali Engineer integrates the concept of the theology of peace with liberation theology, a theological approach that prioritizes the poor and marginalized

as its primary focus.<sup>24</sup>

The theology of liberation by Asghar Ali Engineer emphasizes that theology must serve as a liberating function for humanity, rather than being a dogmatic doctrine firmly held without regard for the social reality surrounding us. Theology must serve society and provide solutions to the problems it faces. The concept of theology of liberation is very relevant to the social-political situation in India, especially related to social inequality, discrimination, and interfaith violence. Therefore, Asghar Ali Engineer strives to build a concept of peace theology based on the principles of theology of liberation, so that it could provide solutions to social problems and create harmony among people of different faiths.<sup>25</sup>

Said Agil Siradj defined theology of peace as the study and reflection on ways to create peace, harmony, and well-being among humans and between humans and the universe, based on certain religious beliefs. Peace theology encompasses aspects such as ethics, spirituality, and religious practices related to peace and social justice. This concept combines an understanding of religious teachings with efforts to find a path towards sustainable peace, and encourages people of faith to actively contribute to realizing peace in this world. Peace theology also interpreted as an effort to bring about a greater transformation from conflict or violence towards peace and justice, through an approach characterized in religion, spirituality, and humanity.<sup>26</sup>

In language, “theology” comes from the Greek word “theologia” which consists of the word “*theos*” meaning “God” and “*logos*” meaning “word” or “thought”. Literally, theology means the study of thoughts or words about God. Meanwhile, “peace” comes from the root word “*dama*” which means calm, free from conflict, and without disagreement. Generally, peace refers to a state in which there is no violence or conflict.<sup>27</sup>

According to Hassan Hanafi, the meaning of peace derives from the word “*aslama*” which means to surrender oneself to God and not to anyone else. This has two meanings: rejecting transcendental power and accepting transcendental power. The definition of peace needs to be reconstructed in line with the new theology that focuses on humans as speech and conversation analysis.<sup>28</sup> In a universal perspective, peace means a calm, happy, and moderate atmosphere and behavior that leads to balance. Theology itself is a science that serves as the foundation or core of the teachings of a religion, and peace is a noble goal that every creature of God desires to achieve. Therefore, theology of peace discusses the basic teachings of religion on how to achieve the desired peace by every creation of God in the world. Although Islam is often associated with violence

and *jihād*, this is not true because Islam teaches peace and justice, and the bombings carried out by terrorists are not a form of jihad that is in line with Islamic teachings.<sup>29</sup>

Although many people associate Islam with violence, the reality is that Islam is far from being violent and there is no connection between violence and religion. The violence that occurs in various places is only a social and political phenomenon. The Quran does indeed describe the political and social situation at that time, including war, but peace remains an ideology and goal, not violence. Islam or any other religion does not consider violence as part of an ideal goal. Allah created the potential for humans to commit violence, but at the same time instilled a strong desire for peace, as stated in QS. al-Ṭīn [95]: 4-5.

لَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ فِي أَحْسَنِ تَقْوِيمٍ ثُمَّ رَدَدْنَاهُ أَسْفَلَ سَافِلِينَ

“We have certainly created man in the best of stature, Then We return him to the lowest of the low.”

According to Asghar Ali Engineer, the verse explains that the most perfect form is Allah’s goal and will for humanity to attain peace. Those who achieve the most perfect form are those who always pay attention to their surroundings and help the weak and oppressed. This most perfect form is the highest level of jihad and should be possessed by every human being. People like that always strive hard to avoid temptation, greed, and power.<sup>30</sup>

Ashgar Ali Engineer said that the theology of peace is based on the understanding and recognition that Allah is the only just and merciful God. Therefore, when one believes in the same God, it should bring us closer together, not produce conflict and hostility. True peace can only be achieved through respect for the religious and belief differences that exist within society. Religion and belief have the same values and principles, which ultimately lead to harmony and peace.<sup>31</sup>

According to Asghar Ali Engineer, the idea of liberation theology forms the basis for understanding the theology of peace. The theology of peace is the science that discusses the fundamental teachings of religion on what and how to achieve the peace that every creation in the world yearn for.<sup>32</sup> The theology of peace regards peace as a noble aspiration that every creation of God wants to achieve and yearn for. Liberation Theology believes that true peace can only be achieved if human beings gain freedom from all forms of oppression. Therefore, liberation theology has the same goal as the Theology of Peace, which is to create true peace.<sup>33</sup> However, to achieve this goal, liberation theology emphasizes the need to liberate



human beings from all forms of oppression. In the view of Asghar Ali Engineer, there are three important points in Liberation Theology that underlie the understanding of the theology of peace, namely *tawhīd*, movement, and justice.

### 1. *Tawhīd*

In the study of Islamic theology, tauhid is the core of its teachings that cannot be separated. However, in the view of Asghar Ali Engineer as a well-known contemporary Islamic thinker with his theology of liberation, tauhid has a broader meaning as a social structure for liberating humans from slavery. Through his book *Theology of Liberation*, Engineer explains that *tawhīd* must be understood from a social perspective, not just as the oneness of God.<sup>34</sup> Peace theology diverges from traditional theology, where *tawhīd* is interpreted as the unity of humanity achievable only in a classless society free from all forms of oppression. Consequently, Engineer's concept of tawhid in peace theology advocates for social equality and a societal structure emancipated from slavery.<sup>35</sup>

Generally, the concept of *tawhīd* in Islam is closely related to the spirit of the Quran in creating justice and goodness. Asghar Ali Engineer, a contemporary Islamic thinker and modern theologian, interprets *tauḥīd* in his theology of liberation as the unity of God and the unity of humanity that cannot be achieved without the existence of a classless society. Islam is also not an exclusive religion that triggers fanaticism or division, but holds important human values and anticipates deviations and manipulations of history. This also applies to other religions that oppose violence and discrimination. Asghar Ali Engineer believes that every religion has a liberating experience and emphasizes values such as truth, non-violence, justice, equality, compassion, tolerance, and love that should be held by every religious community.<sup>36</sup>

The concept of *tawhīd* involves an emotional dimension, where one combines all of their abilities and strengths to achieve the singular, absolute, universal, and comprehensive truth that can only be attained through pure and sacred thoughts. *Tawhīd* is not just a theory about possible or obligatory tauhid concepts, but a process of integrating existing thoughts and reality. This aims to prevent the assimilation of foreign thoughts that can change the direction of *tawhīd* from a practical dimension to something that is theoretical.

In Asghar Ali Engineer's thought, *tawhīd* in Islam is not only about affirming the existence of one God, but also includes the unity and equality of humanity before Allah. The concept of *tawhīd* in Islam teaches

that humans are created in various forms, ethnicities, and religions, yet still have commonality and unity in worshipping Allah. Therefore, Ashgar Ali Engineer's understanding of *tawhīd* strengthens his argument about pluralism and interreligious harmony.<sup>37</sup>

## 2. Movement

To be a true adherent of liberation theology, strong faith is certainly necessary. According to Ashgar Ali Engineer, as quoted by Muhaimin Latif, faith is not just an abstract belief, but underlies the hard struggle to create a just society. The true meaning of faith, which comes from the Arabic word "*Āmana*" is safety, peace, protection, reliability, trust, and conviction. Hence, a person who has true faith will show these qualities, for instance, being trustworthy, striving to create peace and order, and believing in all the values of goodness in life.<sup>38</sup>

Based on Ashgar Ali Engineer's perspective, strong faith is the main foundation for liberation theology. Engineer emphasizes that faith is not just a belief, but also creates good attitudes and provides peace in social life. Strong faith enables humans to contribute to others by sharing goodness and spreading a peaceful atmosphere on this earth. Therefore, muslim should implement this well.<sup>39</sup> Ashgar Ali teaches that one should involve themselves in society such as helping the orphans, the oppressed, and the marginalized to become a true believer. Everyone should help those in need because in the God's eyes, all humans are equal and no difference. Therefore, sensitivity towards others should be a trait inherent in religious communities.

The movement emphasized for a believer is to implement their understanding of *tawhīd* by paying attention to the welfare of fellow human beings. Ashgar Ali Engineer presented a different meaning of faith than its common meaning. This definition has changed the definition of *kāfir* (unbeliever) as the opposite of faith. Ashgar Ali Engineer urged that *kāfir* not only refers to religious disbelief as understood in traditional theology but also includes rejection and resistance to a fair and egalitarian system and society, and is part of exploitation and oppression.<sup>40</sup>

## 3. Justice

In liberation theology, the ultimate element is justice, but the concept of justice discussed here is no longer related to metaphysical concepts of God or justice on the resurrection day as in classical Islamic understanding. Ashgar Ali Engineer mentioned the term justice in the Quran is translated as '*adl* or *qist*'. *Adl* in Arabic not only means justice, but also implies equality

and equivalence. Its antonyms are *ẓulm* and *jawr*, denoting injustice and oppression.<sup>41</sup>

Latif explained that justice is an important focus in understanding Islam that promotes freedom. Justice in society is a crucial element in this view. Asghar Ali Engineer proclaimed that justice is an integral part of *taqwā*, which is not only understood as a ritual concept, but also related to social and economic justice. Therefore, Asghar Ali Engineer emphasized that Islam is very concerned with the creation of justice in society. Asghar Ali Engineer believed that social and economic justice is an integral part of understanding Islam which pay great attention to humanity. This also shows how important it is for Muslims to have a caring and fair attitude towards their environment.<sup>42</sup>

Asghar Ali Engineer classified justice into two important areas, namely justice in agriculture and justice in trade. In agriculture, Asghar Ali Engineer opposed capitalism and paid great attention to creating justice for people at the grassroots level, in accordance with his theology of liberation. Meanwhile, in the field of trade, Asghar Ali Engineer took seriously the demands of the Quran to behave honestly in trade transactions and imposed severe sanctions on those who exploited others. In the context of trade, justice and virtue support each other.<sup>43</sup>

### **Religious Harmony in Asghar Ali Engineer's Thought**

Asghar Ali Engineer is an Islamic figure who advocates for a concept of Islamic liberation theology that promotes the concept of peace. One of his ideas regarding Islamic peace theology is about interfaith relations. This theology of peace upholds the unity of humanity and always strives to achieve that unity by eliminating differences, including religious differences.<sup>44</sup>

Asghar Ali Engineer argues that his perspective on interreligious harmony can be found in the concept of religious pluralism or theology. According to him, theology must be adapted to the changing conditions and needs of humanity. Allah possesses the attribute of *rubūbiyyāt rahmatan li al-‘ālamīn*, which refers to the sustenance of the entire universe, including living beings and inanimate objects. This concept not only emphasizes the unity of all human beings but also the unity of the entire universe.<sup>45</sup>

Ashgar Ali exclaimed the most important aspect of pluralism is harmony, openness, tolerance, and mutual respect for other religions without imposing one's own beliefs on others. Ashgar Ali Engineer has a very positive view of religious harmony in Islam. He mentioned that Islam places harmony and peace as the ultimate goal of human life.

This understanding is based on the verses of the Quran and Hadith that emphasize the importance of maintaining good relationships with fellow human beings, including those of different beliefs. Asghar Ali Engineer bases his arguments on QS. al-Baqarah (2): 256.

لَا إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ قَدْ تَبَيَّنَ الرُّشْدُ مِنَ الْغَيِّ فَمَنْ يَكْفُرْ بِالطَّاغُوتِ وَيُؤْمِن بِاللَّهِ فَقَدِ اسْتَمْسَكَ بِالْعُرْوَةِ الْوُثْقَىٰ لَا انْفِصَامَ لَهَا وَاللَّهُ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ

“Let there be no compulsion in religion, for the truth stands out clearly from falsehood. So whoever renounces false gods and believes in Allah has certainly grasped the firmest, unfailling hand-hold. And Allah is All-Hearing, All-Knowing.”

Asghar Ali Engineer stated that in Islam, there is respect for the existence, teachings, and right to life of other religions, so it is not appropriate to reject their existence, judge them, or impose our will on other people's religions. Islam acknowledges the existence of other religions and recognizes the rights of each religion to exist, as well as granting freedom to followers of religions to practice their beliefs according to their own convictions. Asghar Ali Engineer used the verse of QS. al-Kāfirūn (109): 1-6 to support his argument that this freedom of will is recognized in Islam.<sup>46</sup>

قُلْ يَا أَيُّهَا الْكَافِرُونَ لَا أَعْبُدُ مَا تَعْبُدُونَ وَلَا أَنْتُمْ عِبُدُونَ مَا أَعْبُدُ وَلَا أَنَا عَابِدٌ مَّا عَبَدْتُمْ وَلَا أَنْتُمْ عِبُدُونَ مَا أَعْبُدُ لَكُمْ دِينُكُمْ وَلِيَ دِينِ

“Say, O Prophet, “O you disbelievers, I do not worship what you worship, I do not worship what you worship, I do not worship what you worship, I do not worship what you worship, I do not worship what you worship.”

Asghar Ali Engineer argues that although the Quran declares Islam is the religion accepted by Allah, it also prohibits coercion in embracing religion. Human beings are given the freedom to choose their own beliefs, whether to accept Islam or reject it.<sup>47</sup> Therefore, Islam recognizes that people in this world cannot agree on everything, including matters of religious beliefs. Each individual has the freedom to act according to their own will, and the reward or punishment will depend on their actions. The understanding of Muslim communities about the Quranic verses related to social and religious pluralism principles has resulted in a tolerant, open, and just attitude throughout Islamic history. Asghar Ali Engineer cited the example of the Prophet Muhammad, who demonstrated this attitude in his interactions with non-Muslim communities during his time. The Prophet's example is reflected in the Medina Charter, the first official political document that established the principle of religious freedom and

sought to create harmony among religious communities.<sup>48</sup>

Quraish Shihab believes that Islam is a peaceful religion desired by Allah to guarantee peace for everyone. Shihab voiced that if someone is forced to embrace Islam, there will be no sincerity in their heart. Prophet Muhammad set a concrete example of how communities with different religions and customs can live in peace and harmony to create unity and respect obligations in maintaining a community or country.<sup>49</sup>

For Asghar Ali Engineer, pluralism means respecting the beliefs of others and living together harmoniously with them, as well as competing in goodness and not speaking ill of each other. He also emphasizes that each person has their own rights in practicing their religion and has their own uniqueness. Asghar Ali Engineer affirmed the statement by quoting QS. al-Mā'idah (5): 48.

لِكُلِّ جَعَلْنَا مِنْكُمْ شِرْعَةً وَمِنْهَاجًا وَلَوْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ لَجَعَلَكُمْ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً وَلَكِنْ لِيَبْلُوَكُمْ فِي مَا آتَيْتُمْ فَأَسْتَبِقُوا الْخَيْرَاتِ إِلَى اللَّهِ مَرْجِعُكُمْ جَمِيعًا فَيُنَبِّئُكُمْ بِمَا كُنْتُمْ فِيهِ تَخْتَلِفُونَ

“To each of you We have ordained a code of law and a way of life. If Allah had willed, He would have made you one community, but His Will is to test you with what He has given each of you. So compete with one another in doing good. To Allah you will all return, then He will inform you of the truth regarding your differences.”

In his view, religious harmony in Islam encompasses several things. First, respecting and not belittling the religion and beliefs of others. This is in line with the basic principles of Islam which teach justice, equality, and tolerance towards differences. Second, helping each other and being fair to others regardless of their religion or ethnicity. Third, refraining from violence or discriminatory actions towards others simply because of their religious or belief differences.<sup>50</sup>

Ashgar Ali Engineer talked about religious harmony not just being tolerance towards differences. Tolerance can lead to social gaps and injustice if there is no appreciation and recognition of religious diversity. Consequently, Ashgar Ali Engineer proposed the concept of mutual recognition as one of the main principles in the theology of peace. This concept implies that every religion is recognized and respected for its existence as a path to truth, and no religion has an exclusive right to truth.<sup>51</sup>

In building a theology of peace based on religious harmony, Ashgar Ali Engineer considered the importance of developing interfaith dialogue skills. These skills are not only necessary to understand the religions and beliefs of others, but also to build collective awareness of the importance of religious harmony. Religious harmony is also inseparable from social and

political issues that affect society. As a result, it is important to consider social and political factors in building religious harmony.

Ashgar Ali Engineer has a specific view on the theology of peace that creates harmony for every religious community. In India, which has incredible religious diversity, religious harmony has become part of the country's social and cultural heritage. However, violence and interreligious conflicts often occur in India, especially in areas with the history of religious disputes, such as Gujarat and Kashmir. Ashgar Ali Engineer responded to this situation by emphasizing the importance of interreligious dialogue as a means of building better understanding and reducing tensions among religious communities. He condemned discriminatory and intolerant practices that occur in Indian society, such as discrimination against minorities and the burning of the Quran and mosques by Hindu extremist groups.<sup>52</sup>

Ashgar Ali Engineer promoted universal values such as justice, equality, and inclusive humanity through the concept of theology of peace, regardless of differences in religion or ethnic background. He also criticizes traditional practices that are perceived to be detrimental to minority groups, such as the caste system in India, which historically marginalized lower-caste groups.<sup>53</sup>

Ashgar Ali Engineer's ideas on theology of peace have significant relevance in the context of Indonesia, which is a country with a multicultural and multi-religious society. Indonesia has a diverse range of religions and beliefs including Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, and traditional beliefs. Harmony and peaceful coexistence among people of different religions are essential to maintaining the integrity of the Indonesian nation.<sup>54</sup> In the archipelago history, Indonesia has experienced religious conflicts that have resulted in significant loss of life and material damage. One example is the Poso conflict in Central Sulawesi, which occurred from 1998 to 2001 and resulted in thousands of deaths. The conflict occurred between Muslim and Christian communities who attacked and killed each other. This conflict arose due to religious differences and the exploitation of the situation by certain political interests.<sup>55</sup>

In this context, Ashgar Ali Engineer's thoughts on peace theology based on religious harmony can be an alternative solution to overcome interreligious conflicts in Indonesia. By prioritizing dialogue and understanding between religious communities and implementing universal values inherent in peace theology, it can be a first step towards creating religious harmony and resolving conflicts. The application of values such

as tolerance, mutual respect, and interfaith dialogue can help reduce polarization and increase understanding between religions.

As regards the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims, Ashgar Ali Engineer highlighted that Islam demands its followers to live in harmony and peace with all people, including non-Muslims. As a universal religion, Islam teaches the importance of peace and harmony in human relationships. Therefore, he argued that there should be an attitude of tolerance and understanding towards differences demonstrating religious harmony in Islam. In addition, Asghar Ali Engineer also featured the importance of implementing the concept of interfaith dialogue in maintaining religious harmony in Islam. He coined that interfaith dialogue can open up space for discussion and understanding between people of different religions, thus minimizing potential conflicts. Through interfaith dialogue, we can gain a better understanding of the beliefs and practices of each religion, as well as build a culture of mutual respect and tolerance towards differences.<sup>56</sup>

In the Indonesia context, Ashgar Ali Engineer's thoughts on religious harmony in Islam are highly relevant in strengthening interfaith harmony. Indonesia has a rich diversity of religions, and has successfully built good religious harmony for years. Consequently, the development of interfaith dialogue needs to maintain and improve the harmony. Moreover, education about tolerance and respect for religious differences as well as the implementation of universal values within Indonesia's religions and culture also help to increase the religious harmony in Indonesia.

## **Conclusion**

Asghar Ali Engineer combines the concept of theology of peace with Liberation Theology, a theological approach that places emphasis on advocating the poor and marginalized ones as the primary focus. According to Asghar Ali Engineer, there are three important points in Liberation Theology that underlie the understanding of theology of peace, namely tauhid, movement, and justice. Tauhid means believing in the oneness of God and rejecting all forms of oppression and injustice. Movement means fighting for human freedom and liberating them from all forms of oppression. Hence, adopting Liberation Theology can articulate the "Theology of Peace" more effectively. "The Theology of Peace" based on "Liberation Theology" underlined the need to free people from all forms of oppression and injustice, so that they can achieve perpetual peace. By implementing the "Theology of Peace", it can be a first step towards creating religious harmony and addressing conflicts. The application of

values such as tolerance, mutual respect, and interfaith dialogue can help reduce polarization and increase understanding between religions.

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