Principled Pluralism and the Prevention of Religious Terrorism in Indonesia

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Abstract: A number of religious terrorism acts closely related to the 9/11 event had happened in Indonesia and disrupted the nation’s stability and harmony. The hard-power approach that the Indonesian government had hitherto employed to curb terrorism had not succeeded in eradicating religious terrorist groups entirely. A soft-power approach is needed to contest the indoctrination that the terrorist exercised on their followers and to halt the recruitment of new terrorists. Although the savageness of religious terrorism has given religion a terrifying impression, taking a shortcut by restricting the role of religion to the private sphere—as applied by secular countries—has not proven successful. Rejecting the solution offered by secular countries, this article offers the idea of principled pluralism with its vision of religious freedom as a soft-power solution in treating religious terrorism. By opposing tyranny and authoritarianism, religious freedom would hopefully break the chain of consolidation maintained by religious terrorists with their followers. By using principled pluralism as a hermeneutical lens to read Pancasila, this article argues that civil society is the only channel for religion to contribute significantly to Indonesian society.

Keywords: religious terrorism; radically secular state; principled pluralism; religious freedom; structural pluralism; confessional pluralism; civil society

1. Introduction

The fateful day of 11 September 2001, has been marked as the onset of acts of religious terrorism (Bergen 2001), which until today have continued to happen in many parts of the world. In religious terrorism, in which religious belief is used to justify violence, “violent actions tend to become endowed with cosmic dimensions, and there is nothing left to restrain them” (Mayer 2001, p. 369).

Despite the unanimous curse on the 9/11 event by national and religious leaders from all over the world, the religious terrorists had, in fact, not ceased conducting acts of terror in subsequent years. In Europe, the bomb explosion in Madrid (2004) (Sciolino 2004) and suicide-bombing in London (2005) (Morrison 2021) were both linked to 9/11 since Spain and Britain were viewed as the United States’ accomplices in its attack on Iraq in 2003. As part of the United States’ policy in waging war against terrorism, they had also previously attacked Afghanistan, where Al-Qaeda’s headquarters was located. Indeed, it could be said that the 9/11 event had opened the gate for religious terrorism to enter because since then acts of terror in the name of religion have continued to surge. Data from the Global Terrorism Database have shown that before 9/11, acts of religious terrorism identified in the world numbered 255, while after 9/11 until 2014, the number has risen to 2,237 (Saiya 2018, p. 1).

In Indonesia, a number of religious terrorism acts had also happened in connection with the 9/11 event. They took the form of bomb explosions or suicide bombings in public places, such as the first bombing in Bali (2002), and the bombings at the JW Marriott hotel (2003) and the Australian Embassy (2004), both in Jakarta, then the second bombing in Bali (2005) and at the Ritz-Carlton hotel in Jakarta (2009). The mastermind behind those bombings was...
the Jamaah Islamiyah (JI; the Moslem Congregation), a member organization of Al-Qaeda’s network in Southeast Asia. Many of JI’s members underwent military training in Afghanistan together with the Taliban group that was fighting against the Soviet Union (Arjanto 2021). Ali Imron, a JI member who conducted the first Bali bombing, confessed that the event was originally planned to be conducted on 11 September 2002 in commemoration of the attack on the World Trade Center, but it was canceled due to the unavailability of the bomb at the time and postponed until 12 October 2002 (Andryanto 2021).

The death of Osama bin Laden in an attack in Pakistan (2011) had not deterred religious terrorism. In 2012, ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) appeared in the midst of the global and regional political dynamics of the Middle East. ISIS was rooted in the Al-Qaeda branch in Iraq (Al-Qaeda in Iraq/AQI) but later separated itself from its mother organization due to differences in strategy. However, their real difference originated from their attitude toward the Shi’ah Muslims. AQI’s battle was specifically directed towards the Shi’ah in Iraq since this group had risen to power after Saddam Hussein, while Al-Qaeda on the other hand did not regard the Shi’ah as their enemy (Hikam 2018, pp. 4–5). In its development, ISIS later surpassed Al-Qaeda as this organization owned military forces nearly as strong as that of other Middle-Eastern states, as well as substantial support in financial terms that came from the natural resources of the regions under their authority (Hikam 2018, pp. 2–3).

ISIS’ influence had also reached Indonesia. They recruited a number of Indonesian citizens to join in their fight in Iraq and Syria, using social media to offer them fabulous rewards in return (Alius 2017). They also conducted a number of terror attacks in Indonesia through a local terrorist organization called the Jamaah Ansharut Daulah (JAD) (Mahabarata 2021). The JAD was responsible for several bombing incidents that happened in Jakarta at Jalan Thamrin (2016) and Kampung Melayu (2017), in Surabaya (2018), and at the Makassar cathedral (2021) (Dewi 2018, 2021).

Even though ISIS has now been subdued (Arfan 2021), religious terrorism still has the potential to recur. In reality, identifying religious terrorism only with Islam is actually incorrect. Religious terrorism could also occur in other religions, such as the ones conducted by the Bodu Bala Sena (radical Buddhist group in Sri Lanka), the Khalistan movement (radical Sikh group in India), and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (radical Hindu group in India). These groups had launched violent attacks against believers of other religions in their area (Hume 2014; Juergensmeyer 2000, pp. 92–94; Madhav and Alishan 2021).

In a multi-religion society such as Indonesia, religious terrorism is a threat to peace and harmony. The Indonesian government has engaged in counter-terrorism efforts and still continues to do so. In implementing its counter-terrorism acts the Indonesian government has employed a hard-power approach, which would enable it to suppress terrorist groups. The purpose of the hard-power approach is “to destroy individual terrorist cells, their leaders, their funding and logistic pipelines as well as their immediate support network.” To achieve this goal the Indonesian government has “promulgated anti-terrorism laws as the legal framework and reorganized law-enforcement agencies that implement the law” (Muhammad 2014, pp. 190–91). The anti-terrorism laws took form in the Undang Undang (Law) no. 15/2003 regarding the Eradication of the Criminal Act of Terrorism, which was revised in 2018. A law-enforcement agent called the Detasemen Khusus (Densus) 88 was formed to undertake the implementation of these laws. Densus 88 is a special forces unit to combat terrorism under the Indonesian Police Department (POLRI)—“the mechanism by which the POLRI manages counter-terrorism plans and policy, arranges training, and handles funding as well as deploying counter-terrorist teams throughout the country” (Muhammad 2014, pp. 190–91).

However, this approach has not succeeded in preventing the appearance of new terrorist groups. It has, conversely, flared the anger of the terrorist groups against the government that they decided to consolidate. The approach has also failed to prevent the indoctrination measures taken by the terrorists on their followers. Therefore, the hard power approach needs to be complemented by a soft-power approach in order to combat religious terrorism effectively. As Hikam observes, Indonesia has successfully
prevented acts of terror through law enforcement by the police, especially its counter-terrorism squad Densus 88 along with cooperation from TNI (Indonesian Armed Forces) and state intelligence. A softer approach needs to be developed to ensure that the use of religion as a pretext for violence, however insignificant, can be overcome, minimized, and ultimately eradicated (Hikam 2018, p. 19).

This article attempts to offer a soft-power approach by implementing the Dutch neo-Calvinist view on ‘principled-pluralism’ initiated by Abraham Kuyper. In the past, a close link had been formed by Dutch neo-Calvinism with Indonesia, the largest Muslim country in the world (World Population Review 2021), as van der Kroef observes. Being very familiar with Kuyper’s thoughts, Kroef affirms that four of the five principles of Indonesia’s national ideology, Pancasila—namely, the principles of humanitarianism, nationalism, democracy, and social justice—actually originated in Western concepts as they were formulated by Western-educated Indonesians who became the founding fathers of the nation (van der Kroef 1956, pp. 198–251). Moreover, as Louw has noted, “Kuyperian pluralism” has given shape to Pancasila, so that religious freedom is enforced, thereby blocking the idea of majoritarianism (Louw 2004, p. 210; Ramage 1995, p. 18).

In the following discussion, the authors will focus on four subjects related to this topic, namely, the nature of religious terrorism, the radically secular state and its inability to solve religious terrorism, principled pluralism, and the religious freedom it offers as the right solution for preventing religious terrorism, and finally, the connection between principled pluralism and Pancasila.

2. The Nature of Religious Terrorism

The terrifying nature of religious terrorism has made it a topic of frequent discussion on television and in newspapers since reports of kidnappings, bomb explosions, and killings related to religious terrorism made the news almost every day. Religious terrorism is considered more dangerous than secular terrorism, as motivation becomes the main distinguishing feature between the two. Nilay Saiya defines religious terrorism as “premeditated violence, political in nature, which is perpetrated against noncombatants by subnational actors who are driven by a discernible religious motivation or ideology and whose attacks have the intention of instilling fear in members of society” (Saiya 2018, p. 10).

Religious terrorism becomes extremely dangerous as its perpetrators use transcendent references in carrying out their actions. Religious terrorists consider their actions as having a religious imperative and divine sanction, as Bruce Hoffman, an observer of terrorism, has put it: For the religious terrorist, violence first and foremost is a sacramental act or divine duty executed in direct response to some theological demand or imperative. Terrorism assumes a transcendental dimension, and its perpetrators are thereby unconstrained by the political, moral, or practical constraints that seem to affect other terrorists (Hoffman 1995, p. 272).

Although motivated by religion and transcendent references, acts of religious terrorism are directed toward present-day engagement in political battles such as territorial disputes, changes in government regime, and power struggles (Saiya 2018, p. 11). Juergensmeyer points out that “[w]hat makes religious violence particularly savage and relentless is that its perpetrators have placed such religious images of divine struggle—cosmic war—in the service of worldly political battles” (Juergensmeyer 2000, pp. 84–85). Indonesian suicide-bombers did not act only for acquiring heavenly rewards but mainly to change Indonesia into an Islamic country. What had angered Al-Qaeda in the first place was the presence of American troops in Mekah and Medinah, holy cities to the Moslem religion. Religious motivation has made religious terrorists perceive certain things of the present time—the here and now—as sacred and in need of being striven for.

The violence perpetrated by religious terrorists is different in kind from that committed by secular terrorists, as Saiya observes: “[t]he belief that they [religious terrorists] have divine sanction to wage a spiritual war plausibly influences the nature and scope of the demands religious militants make and the violence they undertake” (Saiya 2018, p. 10).
Hoffman notes that more victims have fallen in acts of religious terrorism than in secular terrorism due to the religious motivation that drives the perpetrators.

As will become apparent . . . terrorism motivated in whole or in part by religious imperatives has often led to more intense acts of violence that have produced considerably higher levels of fatalities than the relatively more discriminating and less lethal incidents of violence perpetrated by secular terrorist organizations (Hoffman 2006, p. 88).

According to Hoffman, secular terrorists avoid committing large-scale killings because they consider this action not only immoral but also unsupportive of their political aim. Religious terrorists, conversely, consider large-scale killings as morally justified and supporting their purposes (Hoffman 2006, p. 88).

Religious terrorism has two common characteristics. First, they divide the world into two groups, the in-group and the out-group, distinguished by religion. Religious terrorists refer to everyone from the same religion as theirs as “us”, and everyone from a different religion as “them”, or, as Saiya calls it, “communitarian lines defined by the participants’ religion” (Saiya 2018, p. 11). The purpose of this division is to create group solidarity. The in-group will see the out-group as their common enemy and this perspective will strengthen their group identity, as Saiya maintains, “The establishment of group solidarity through the identification of characteristics common to those who share the same interpretation of their faith can serve as a powerful tool when a group finds itself in a disadvantaged position or crisis vis-à-vis an enemy out-group” (Saiya 2018, p. 12). Second, religious terrorism embraces an ideology of religion that becomes the metanarrative for religious terrorists in interpreting the situation around them and justifying the violence they perpetrate. This metanarrative is derived from texts considered their holy book (Saiya 2018, p. 10). Every religious terrorist believes that what he or she is doing is a divine duty or a service to God. Saiya (2018) observes:

This ideology imbues a particular cause held by a terrorist group with sacred meaning and justifies the actions taken. It serves to create a set of beliefs about the nature of reality (including political reality) that members of the group internalize, leading combatants to perceive their acts of political violence against enemy out-groups as a divine duty (p. 10).

Saiya also notes two unique features of religious terrorism. The first is ruthlessness (Saiya 2018, p. 14). Religious terrorism has caused much greater fatalities compared to other kinds of terrorism. Religious terrorists desire a pure society in accordance with their religious beliefs; therefore their acts of terror are aimed not only at those holding political power but also at the powerless. To the terrorists, all members of a non-Muslim community, including the powerless, are legitimate objects of violence. As Hoffman (2006) has put it:

[T]errorism motivated either in whole or in part by a religious imperative, where violence is regarded by its practitioners as a divine duty or sacramental act, embraces markedly different means of legitimization and justification than that committed by secular terrorists, and these distinguishing features lead, in turn, to yet greater bloodshed and destruction (p. 83).

The Global Terrorism Database has shown that out of 50 identified terror attacks between 1990–2014, 38 were perpetrated by religious terrorists, and out of 12,371 deaths in those attacks, 8779 (71%) were victims of religious terrorism (Saiya 2018, p. 15).

The second unique feature of religious terrorism is resilience (Saiya 2018, p. 17). Religious terrorism has a greater ability to endure compared to secular terrorism. Research conducted by Jones and Libicki shows how difficult it is to eradicate religious terrorist groups. “The most salient fact about religious terrorist groups”, they write, “is how hard they are to eliminate”. They indicate specifically that out of 62% of terrorist groups that had been eliminated, only 32% were religious terrorist groups (Jones and Libicki 2008, pp. 36–37). These groups were even able to endure enormous pressure on them from totalitarian governments because their members believed that spiritual things are eternal,
whereas physical matters are only temporary. They endured all physical pressures in order to achieve their aim or agenda which is spiritual in nature.

3. A Radically Secular State as Solution?

Religious terrorism has made religion sound extremely frightening. The terrorists’ use of religious symbols and language has disreputed religion as it is seen as problematic. Some suggest that in order to prevent religious terrorism religion has to be limited to the private sphere as certain secular countries have done.

The secularization of the public sphere could be seen in the Anti-Separatism Law enacted in France in 2021. This law was created to prevent the surge of religious radicalization in France. Several cases of terrorism and violence in the name of religion had preceded this law, such as the murder of Samuel Patty and the stabbing of three persons in Nice (2020). President Emmanuel Macron states that France is contending with a separatist group that aims to form a parallel community in which religious law surpasses civil law and thus erodes the values upheld by the Republic of France: liberty, equality, fraternity, and laïcité (French strict separation of religion and state) (Shukla 2021). This law aims to coerce each person to keep his/her religion in his/her private sphere and to adhere only to secular values when he/she is in the public sphere. With this law, the government exerts the right to close a place of worship or a religious organization whenever it criticizes French secular values (Shukla 2021; Donadio 2021).

In a multi-religion or multi-ethnic society, religion could be problematic. If every person considers his/her religion as bearing absolute and exclusive truth and brings it to the public sphere, it could incite horrifying conflicts, as Longstaff (2015) observes that religious wars “have always been especially nasty, for they are ‘all or nothing’ affairs. Their proponents feel justified—and often excused of the need for ethical restraint—by God, the ultimate, universal authority. Each side lays claim to an exclusive and absolute truth that transcends time and place”.

In other words, the problem of religion in the public sphere, as Rawls indicates, is its inability to accept what Rawls calls “the fact of pluralism” (Rawls 1987, p. 4). For Rawls, the inability to accept the fact of pluralism would eventually kill pluralism, and killing pluralism is similar to destroying democracy. Therefore, Rawls felt urged to save religious pluralism, which he believes is something that could never be resolved in the public sphere.

The solution that Rawls offers is that every religion should restrain itself and betray a sympathetic attitude through “the method of avoidance”, namely, by allowing itself to be marginalized from society. He explains further that “[i]n following the method of avoidance, as we may call it, we try, so far as we can, neither to assert nor to deny any religious, philosophical or moral views, or their associated philosophical accounts of truth and the status of values” (Rawls 1987, pp. 12–13). In short, for Rawls, the public domain has to remain neutral and undistorted by religious values. In this condition of status quo, religious values are neither acceptable nor denied in the public sphere.

In this way, a solution to the problem of religious terrorism could be found in the secular state, in which no one is permitted to bring his/her religious values to the public sphere. We know that there are varieties of secular states and we cannot, therefore, generalize that all secular states must have restricted or even marginalized religion in the public square. The appearance of secular states in Europe is clearly a result of the Protestant Reformation. By abolishing the organic system of the middle ages, in which the Catholic Church held a monopoly, the Protestant Reformation has set free secular spaces from the control of religion; in this way, the Protestant Reformation has given religious legitimization to the rise of modern secular states (Casanova 1994, pp. 21–22).

Fox distinguishes five types of secular states, or what he calls political secularism. First, in the absolute separationism type religion and the state are separated in order to prevent the state from interfering with religious freedom. The government should neither support nor restrict religion. In this type of secular state, no religion is given privilege; rather, each religion is free to conduct its activities as long as they do not disturb public order. Second,
in the laicism type, the state not only prohibits the government to support religion but also prohibits the presence of religion in the public square. Third, in the neutralism type the state gives treats every religion equally. The government is allowed to support religion as long as the support does not cause discrimination toward a certain religion. Fourth, in the semi-neutrality type, although in theory it is similar to neutralism, in practice the state gives privileges to religions that have had a long history with the state. Fifth, in the minimalist approach type, the secular state separates between state and religion insofar as this will benefit democracy (Fox 2018, pp. 172–75).

Stepan distinguishes between democratic secularism and authoritarian secularism. In the democratic secularism model, the state exercises control over religion but at a low level, whereas in authoritarian secularism the state exercises control over religion at a high level (Stepan 2011, p. 119).

Turkey and France are often viewed as the laicism type of secular states, but Turkey is actually closer to authoritarian secularism, whereas France is closer to democratic secularism. Turkey not only separates religion from the state but also controls religion through the Directorate of Religious Affairs, also called Diyanet. The Directorate intends to align religion with the reformation and ideology of the Republic of Turkey. It is thus responsible for providing sermon topics and writing sermon notes which every imam would then preach at mosques in Turkey, to guarantee that the sermons’ content reflects Islamic interpretation which is in line with modernity (Van Bruinessen 2018, p. 52). This is not the case with France.

In our article, we view the secular state as a state in which secularism, whether in the form of democratic secularism or authoritarian secularism, is regarded as an ideology. Casanova defines this ideological secularism as “political theories that presuppose that religion is either an irrational force or a nonrational form of discourse that should be banished from the democratic public sphere” (Casanova 2011, p. 67). This type of secularism could also be called radical secularism (henceforth called the “radically secular state”).

Within the radically secular state, the only set of values permitted to be applied in the public sphere is “civic virtue”, which is based on philosophical and secular grounds. In the words of Longstaff, “a secular state will afford a safe and respectful place for people of all faiths—and of none. Indeed, it is only a secular state that can offer a coherent response to the problem of extremism, especially the kind grounded in religious belief” (Longstaff 2015).

The radically secular state inhibits freedom of religion with the purpose of preventing radicalism. Leaders of radically secular states thought that religious radicalism and extremism had found the opportunity to develop themselves in an atmosphere of religious freedom. By inhibiting this freedom in the public sphere, one could only express his/her religion in his/her private sphere.

However, a radically secular state could not become the right solution in the prevention of terrorism, as several of its flaws indicate. First, a radically secular state is founded on a negative assumption about religion. Terrorism has shown a destructive side of religion, but this is not the only truth about religion. In many cases, religion has also shown its constructive side and has rendered many positive contributions to society. A radically secular state prevents religion from rendering its positive contributions. Appleby, in his survey of the history of Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism described in his book, The Ambivalence of the Sacred, argues that every religious tradition has seeds for violence as well as reconciliation (Appleby 2000). This double effect of religion, according to Casanova, stems from “the janus face” of religion that tends to be “exclusive, particularist, and primordial” on the one side, while rich in “inclusive, universalist, and transcending [identities]” on the other (Casanova 1994, p. 4).

Second, while the state and religion are two separate entities, an absolute separation between the two as aspired by the radically secular state would be impossible to carry out. State and religion, as Intan has put it, “are in fact united or integrated into the very self of each individual” and “[e]ach individual is at one and the same time a member of a religious
institution and a citizen of the state” (Intan 2019, p. 83). In Darmaputera’s words, “[e]very person is simultaneously a religious and political creature at the same time” (Darmaputera 1988, p. 179). This fact thus makes absolute separation of state and religion impossible.

Third, the neutrality that the radically secular state aspires to is impossible to achieve. The radically secular state desires a public sphere free from religious values but promotes secular values that are based on a certain philosophical position. Viewed from this perspective, secular values could also be seen as having a religious nature and is therefore in no way neutral. For Abraham Kuyper, the “irreligious neutral standpoint” is thus simply unrealistic (Wolterstorff 1999, p. 198). Starting from the belief that God creates all things, Clouser in his book, “The Myth of Religious Neutrality”, argues that religious belief underlies and directs all knowledge; it also begets all theories of reality (Clouser 1991).

Fourth, the restriction of religion imposed by the radically secular state could in fact cause religious terrorism. Religion is an inherent feature of each individual and whenever this basic feature is stifled, it could trigger a negative reaction. When someone from a religious minority group feels that his freedom of religious expression is repressed, he would be disappointed and this disappointment could develop into frustration that ends up in violence (Saiya 2021, p. 108). Saiya notes, “Religious believers who find the practice of their faith stifled are likely to resist those efforts or support those who do. Sometimes this resistance takes the form of nonviolent protest... At other times, the reaction to repression can turn violent, even to the point of tearing countries apart and threatening the stability of their neighbors” (Saiya 2018, p. 3).

4. Principled Pluralism and Religious Freedom

The solution to religious terrorism is religious freedom. Eliade observes that within every human being, one can find an irresistible desire to attain answers to ultimate questions about life, both the present life and the life after death. Every person wants to know transcendent reality and relate to it, which is why Eliade calls human beings “homo religiousus” (Eliade 1959). In their quest to find these answers, human beings would need religious freedom, namely, the freedom to embrace and practice a religion of their own choice.

Saiya emphasizes that religious freedom should give people not only the right to choose a religion and to practice it in private but also the right “to engage in public religious activity and to bring their faith-based convictions into the public square by influencing societal norms and public policy within broad limits” (Saiya 2018, p. 19). Embracing a religion in private would pose no problems as the principle of separation between religion and state already accommodates it. Therefore it is mere common sense that the government, in order to maintain religious freedom, should not interfere in the internal affairs of religion. However, if the state considers religious participation in the public square as part of political life, then problems would arise.

Religious freedom is closely related to a stable political system because religion forms the basis of an individual’s identity. In the absence of religious freedom, the stability of international as well as domestic political systems could be threatened (Saiya 2018, p. 19). Saiya (2018) gives the following reasons for how religious freedom could prevent religious terrorism:

First, religious liberty creates a de facto marketplace of ideas in which religious extremists have their views openly challenged by peaceful groups—secular and religious—in society. For this reason, countries that strive for religious tolerance and encourage open dialogue are less likely to propagate extremism. Second, religious freedom also allows people of faith to advance their cause through legitimate political institutions, making it less likely that they will feel the need to turn to the gun. Third, religious liberty empowers religious individuals and communities to do good in the world in accordance with the imperatives of their faith. Fourth, the free exercise of religion works against tendencies toward authoritarianism and tyranny—the very characteristics that facilitate religious
radicalism in the first place. Finally, religious liberty can aid in counter-terrorism efforts by driving a wedge between terrorists and their constituencies (p. 146).

The Global Terrorism Database (GTD) has shown that countries without religious freedom have caused an increase in religious terrorism. Following the end of the Cold War, countries that do not acknowledge religious freedom have experienced 4184 unidentified domestic terrorist attacks, whereas countries with moderate religious freedom 1308 attacks, and countries with full religious freedom 659 attacks. Terrorist attacks in countries without religious freedom are 13.5 times higher compared to attacks in countries that support religious freedom. Aside from it, 9 out of 10 countries that suffer severe attacks from domestic religious terrorism are those that strongly restrict religious freedom (Saiya 2015, p. 373). Saiya states that it is possible for religious terrorism to occur also in countries that support religious freedom, but it would not be as widespread and was perpetrated by only a small number of individuals who even lack support from the community. Acts of religious terrorism in a country with religious freedom are usually linked with and can be traced to countries without religious freedom (Saiya 2018, p. 7).

In the discussion on religious freedom, a significant contribution could be drawn from the idea of principled pluralism. Since the late nineteenth century, the neo-Calvinist group in the Netherlands had argued for a pluralistic and tolerant society and had offered principled pluralism as the answer to how religion should relate to the state. Their significant role in “embracing pluralism” is not limited to Europe alone but has reached North America, especially the United States. As Smith describes it, “[Neo-Calvinism] was ahead of its time and should have new resonance and uptake in the fraught pluralization of the democratic West” (Smith 2017, p. 131).

Principled pluralism—first proposed by Skillen (Chaplin 2013)—is rooted in the thought of Abraham Kuyper. In his time, Kuyper had faced both the idea of popular-sovereignty proposed by Liberal individualism which reduces authority and politics to individual volition, and the idea of state-sovereignty found in conservative authoritarianism and central socialism, which requires all social authority to obtain permission from the state (Chaplin 2013). The popular-sovereignty idea that Kuyper contended was the foundation of the atheistic French Revolution, while the state-sovereignty he disputed was the pantheistic view of the Hegelian School of Germany (Kuyper 1987, p. 85).

Kuyper was thankful to the French Revolution for absolving the conspiracy between spiritual authority and politics in the Roman Catholic church and thus creating the beginning of political freedom (Kuyper 1987, p. 109). However, he was also aware that the real crime committed by the French Revolution was not their overturning the Bourbon dynasty but rather their strife against divine authority that lies behind the slogan “ni Dieu ni maître” (no gods, no masters) (Heslam 1998, p. 148).

Kuyper’s objection against the Hegelian School of Germany was prompted by their removal of the distinction between God and creation. Kuyper challenged the monistic Hegelian idea that regards the state as a secular idol and elevated it to be the highest institution. For Kuyper, the state is merely one of the institutions that God created and is forbidden to interfere in the affairs of other institutions (Heslam 1998, p. 152).

Kuyper, who considers himself a Calvinist, acknowledges only the sovereign God as the source of all human authority. Kuyper (1987) writes:

Therefore, in opposition both to the atheistic popular-sovereignty ... and the pantheistic state-sovereignty of German philosophers, the Calvinist maintains the Sovereignty of God, as the source of all authority among men. The Calvinist uphold the highest and best in our aspirations by placing every man and every people before the face of our Father in heaven (p. 90).

For Kuyper, the sovereign God has created various institutions and has given each its unique authority. This view is known as structural pluralism. Kuyper (1987) explains:

In a Calvinistic sense, we understand hereby, that the family, business, science, art and so forth are all social spheres, which do not owe their existence to the state, and which do not derive the law of their life from the superiority of the state, but
obey a high authority within their own bosom; an authority which rules, by the grace of God, just as the sovereignty of the State does (p. 90).

As an ordinance of God, each institution in society has its own authority that cannot be usurped or dominated by the authority of other institutions. This is part of God’s design from the outset and is therefore normative. The institutions do not have ultimate sovereignty but only up to a certain degree and in their own spheres (Kuyper 2015, pp. 29–41). Spykman notes that each institution has its own God-given identity, tasks, and special privileges (Spykman 1976, p. 167). The nature of the sovereignty that each institution owns is God-given, dependent, derived, delegated, and limited. Ultimate sovereignty belongs solely to God. God delegates His authority to human beings concretely in the form of various institutions, for example, the authority of parents in the home, the authority of preaching at church, the authority of teachers at school, the authority of governments in the administration of the state for the sake of public justice (Spykman 2010, p. 95).

Aside from structural pluralism, the second part of principled pluralism is called confessional pluralism or religious pluralism. Spykman defines confessional pluralism as the right of different religious groups to be involved in public life through each of their institutions—schools, political parties, labor unions, worship places, and others—and to introduce their views (Spykman 2010, p. 79). However, confessional pluralism differs from structural pluralism as God does not initially design it but is a result of the Fall, and as such confessional pluralism is not normative. The parable of wheats and tares is one of the biblical texts used to corroborate this view (Kuyper 2015, p. 68). The parable emphasizes that it is not the task of the church of the state to separate those of true faith from its counterfeit; it is Christ Himself who will carry this out at His second coming (Kuyper 1998, p. 220).

God did not, indeed, create many religions but has in the meantime allowed many religions to develop in the world. Kuyper refuses the idea that one religion should hold all privileges in a nation, including Christianity. It is important to note that Kuyper disagrees with Article 36 of the Belgic Confession (1561)—which is based on Calvin’s thought—that indicates the main duty of the government is to protect and promote true worship. Although Calvin does not confer to the government the individual’s right to embrace a religion, still he encourages the government “to defend the sound doctrine of piety” (Calvin 1960, p. 1487). In 1905 Kuyper persuaded his denomination, Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland, to remove the words of Article 36 and amend the confession (Kuyper 2015, p. 64). For Kuyper, every person has the right to choose his or her own religion without the interference of the state.

Both structural pluralism and confessional pluralism—which form the foundation for principled pluralism—are, according to Intan, “indispensable to a genuinely pluralistic society, which would provide equal justice for all in family life, politics, education, and religion” (Intan 2019, p. 66). In short, principled pluralism is able to guarantee religious freedom, which includes not only what David Hollenbach calls “negative immunity”—“a freedom from interference with one’s religious convictions by the state or by other groups in society”, but also positive immunity—“one’s religious convictions in public and to seek to influence the public life of society in accord with these convictions” (Hollenbach 1994, p. 42). In other words, principled pluralism could become the soft power for the prevention of religious terrorism.

5. Principled Pluralism and Pancasila

Principled pluralism could function as a hermeneutic lens in reading Pancasila. In Indonesia, the tension between founding a secular nation or a religious one, between the Nationalist group and the Muslim group, was already present even before its independence. Both groups were involved in a heated debate during the meeting of the Badan Penyelidik Usaha Persiapan Kemerdekaan Indonesia (BPUPKI, The Investigating Committee for Preparatory Work Indonesian Independence) held from 29 May to 1 June 1945. The ideological confrontation was sparked by a question from Wediodiningrat “What is to be our Weltanschauung [philosophical basis] if we intend to establish an independent In-
Indonesia?” (Sukarno 1964, p. 11). The confrontation ended in deadlock. However, on 1 June 1945, Sukarno presented a historical speech that succeeded in ending the deadlock between the two groups. In this famous speech, Sukarno introduced five principles known subsequently as Pancasila, which became the foundation of the state of Indonesia (Intan 2006, p. 39). Thus, through Pancasila, Indonesia became neither a religious nation nor a secular nation. Fikri indicates that “Indonesia’s founding fathers had successfully married religion with secularism, resulting in a neither religious nor secular country” (Fikri 2016). In a similar vein, Intan argues, “Pancasila bridges the distance between Muslims and secular nationalists. Its formulation made a compromise between the ideas of an Islamic state and a secular state” (Intan 2019, p. 73).

In line with Pancasila, the idea of principled pluralism could also become an alternative to the ideas of ecclesiasticism (theocracy) and secularism. While the former promotes a “theocratic state”, the latter, according to Kuyper, argues for “a secular state” (Kuyper 2015, pp. 34–35, 58, 61). Both ideas do not render religious freedom. Theocracy designates one religion to be the official religion of the state so that other religions cannot function freely. On the other hand, secularism removes all religion from public life so that individuals do not have the freedom to express their beliefs. An alternative to both positions, according to Kuyper (1987), can be found in principled pluralism:

And that therefore neither the Caesaropapacy of the Czar of Russia; nor the subject-ion of the State to the Church taught by Rome; nor the “Cuius region eius religio” of the Lutheran jurists; nor the irreligious neutral standpoint of the French revo-lution; but that only the system of a free church, in a free State, may be honored from a Calvinistic standpoint (p. 106).

As Pancasila has become an alternative to a secular state or a religious state, principled pluralism could function likewise.

The application of principled pluralism in Pancasila could be seen in its first principle, “the Principle of One Lordship”, which shows that Indonesia is not a secular state. This principle clearly demonstrates Indonesia’s confession of its belief in God. This is in line with Kuyper’s view that stresses the sovereignty of God over all things, even over the state. As T. B. Simatupang affirms, this principle betrays that God’s sovereignty is higher than the sovereignty of the people (Tobing 1996, p. 176). In line with Simatupang, Intan writes, “Viewed from the neo-Calvinist perspective, the Principle of One Lordship presupposes the idea of God’s sovereignty” (Intan 2019, p. 73).

The first principle has a special placement in Pancasila. According to Darmaputera, the first principle is significant not only in terms of its sequence in the document but also in how it renders guidance to the other principles (Darmaputera 1988, p. 152). As this placement gives a transcendent touch to the four principles that follow, nothing purely secular exists in Indonesia (Intan 2019, p. 73). Here then one could see a similarity between Pancasila with the idea of neo-Calvinism that perceives all aspects of life as religious.

At the same time, the first principle of Pancasila demonstrates that Indonesia is not a theocracy. The term “Lordship” in this principle betrays an acknowledgment of religion in a broad sense, or, in other words, Pancasila does not acknowledge the presence of an official religion of the state. As Intan has put it, “the first principle deals with the idea of the divine, indicating a belief in one supreme transcendence” (Intan 2019, p. 73).

The Indonesian state is neither a religious nor a secular state but a Pancasila-based state. What does this mean? For Kuyper, the government must submit to God’s transcendental norms as it is ordained by God and receives divinely-appointed governing tasks. Therefore the government, in its existence, must “acknowledge its calling to serve God” and its main duty to promote justice and morality in society (Kuyper 2015, p. 49). It is important to note that when carrying out its duties, the government “stand outside the domain of revealed religion”. But the government also owns, Kuyper adds, the “natural knowledge of God” and not “the supernatural kind, at least not directly” (Kuyper 2015, pp. 65–66). In this way, religion is separated from politics. Kuyper emphasizes “no separation between religion and state but only between state and church” (Kuyper 2015, p. 354). In Kuyper’s thought, the
state has the form of a religious state that is neither theocratic nor secular but that believes in the sovereignty of God.

By becoming a religious state—that is neither theocratic nor secular—Indonesia as a Pancasila-based state would certainly render religious freedom. As a non-secular state, Indonesia could provide extensive space for religions to get involved in the life of the nation, while as a non-theocratic state Indonesia could protect all religions that are present within its domain.

This fact shows the presence of both structural pluralism and confessional pluralism in Pancasila. By virtue of its first principle, Pancasila encourages the public roles of religion in Indonesian public affairs. According to Sukarno, the first president of Indonesia, such public roles of religion must be limited “in a civilized way” (Sukarno 1964, p. 33). In other words, Pancasila places religion on the level of civil society—a domain in which the state has no right to interfere. In civil society, every individual has the right to choose his/her own religion and to contribute ideas based on it. Every idea coming from any religion qualifies to be contested and adopted by civil society. In the words of Intan, “the public roles of religion would be legitimate as long as they are addressed at the level of the discourse that occurs in civil society. Civil society is the only channel for religion to make important contributions to Indonesian society. The idea of civil society is thus crucial for our understanding of this principle (One Lordship)” (Intan 2006, p. 20).

The presence of Pancasila could minimalize or perhaps prevent religious fundamentalism—the seed of religious terrorism—as it provides room for religion to present itself in the public sphere. Yudi Latif indicates that what secularism has done in confounding religion to the private sphere is contra-productive as this provides the opportunity for the rise of religious fundamentalism as political power (Latif 2016, p. 104). Pancasila, on the other hand, provides space for religion to contribute to the public sphere in the form of “positive values of Lordship delved from the prophetic values of religions that are inclusive, liberating, and honoring justice and brotherhood” (Latif 2016, pp. 114–15).

The presence of Pancasila in Indonesia does not imply that Indonesia is free from religious terrorism. The infiltration of religious fundamentalism from outside could have caused the radicalization of certain groups in Indonesia. With the easy access to any information in this era of globalization, the detection of any radicalization has been difficult. Pancasila could by no means guarantee success in persuading religious terrorists, and sometimes a hard power approach is needed in dealing with them. However, as a soft-power approach Pancasila could have created a conducive atmosphere for cultivating religious freedom, which could subsequently prevent and minimalize religious terrorism.

6. Conclusions

In a previous article, Intan has pointed out that although the Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution guarantees religious freedom, in reality, religious freedom has not been fully implemented in Indonesia. The Indonesian government still interferes with the internal matters of religion. Such intervention had happened during the period of the Old Order when Soekarno dissolved Masyumi, an Islamic political party. During the New Order period, fear of radicalism had driven the government to enforce adherence to Pancasila as the only principle of belief in religious mass organizations. This policy had created antipathy and anger toward the government in certain Islamic groups that ended up in radicalism. Today, discrimination toward certain religious beliefs still continues. The government defines what religion or non-religion is so that beliefs that the government does not acknowledge as religion are considered equivalent to religious sects. It is no surprise that such injustice done to certain minority groups later caused radical movements to appear.

By interpreting Pancasila from the perspective of principled pluralism and by implementing structural as well as confessional pluralism it is hoped that in the future one could find true religious freedom in Indonesia. In this way, the soft power for the prevention of religious terrorism will hopefully deter the growth of radical groups and even eradicate it.
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