

# THEOLOGICAL-BASED DIALOGUE IN THE PRACTICE OF SCRIPTURAL REASONING AT YOUNG INTERFAITH PEACEMAKER COMMUNITY

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Received: August 8, 2023

Revised: November 1, 2023

Accepted: November 13, 2023

## **Abstract**

*One of the reasons why theological-based dialogue is rarely used as a model for interfaith dialogue at the grassroots level is the assumption that this dialogue model can only involve religious elite groups. This research focuses on the practice of Scriptural Reasoning, as a theological-based dialogue model, which cannot only involve participants from religious elite groups but can also involve a wider range of participants, including at the grassroots level. By examining the practice of Scriptural Reasoning by an interfaith youth community, Young Interfaith Peacemaker Community (YIPC), this case study found that although*

*Scriptural Reasoning was originally a practice among academics and theologians, its core principle of adaptability allows it to be accessible to participants at the grassroots level. Therefore, this study contends that Scriptural Reasoning could be employed as an alternative interreligious dialogue model in Indonesia, which not only emphasizes the significance of theological-based dialogue but also offers adaptability for implementation at the grassroots level, especially among youth.*

*Salah satu alasan mengapa dialog berbasis teologi jarang digunakan sebagai model dialog antar agama di level akar rumput adalah adanya anggapan bahwa model dialog ini hanya bisa melibatkan kelompok elite agama. Penelitian ini fokus pada praktik Scriptural Reasoning, sebagai salah satu model dialog berbasis teologi, yang tidak hanya bisa melibatkan peserta dari kelompok elite agama akan tetapi juga bisa melibatkan peserta yang lebih luas, termasuk di level akar rumput. Dengan melakukan studi kasus terhadap praktik Scriptural Reasoning yang dilakukan oleh sebuah komunitas pemuda lintas iman, Young Interfaith Peacemaker Community (YIPC), penelitian ini menemukan bahwa meskipun Scriptural Reasoning pada mulanya merupakan sebuah praktik di kalangan akademisi dan theologian, prinsipnya untuk bisa beradaptasi pada konteks membuat praktik Scriptural Reasoning ini bisa dilakukan oleh peserta di level akar rumput, khususnya pemuda. Oleh karena itu, penulis berpendapat bahwa Scriptural Reasoning dapat digunakan sebagai alternatif model dialog antar agama di Indonesia, yang menempatkan dialog berbasis teologi pada posisi penting, tetapi juga dapat diterapkan di tingkat akar rumput, terutama di kalangan pemuda.*

**Keywords:** *grassroots level; interreligious dialogue; scriptural reasoning; theological-based dialogue*

## Introduction

Theological-based dialogue is interpreted as a model of interreligious dialogue in the realm of theology. There are four models of dialogue: the dialogue of theology, to understand each other's beliefs, doctrines and teaching; the dialogue of spirituality, to appreciate the feeling when religious people experience their rituals; the dialogue of action, that religious people

confront and resolve common problems together; and the dialogue of life, as the interaction of people with different religions that live in one area (Knitter, 2013, p. 134). In the type of model formulated by Leonard Swidler, we can find theological dialogue in the dialogue of the head model. As he mentioned, there are four models of inter-religious dialogue: dialogue of the head, which focuses in the cognitive area; dialogue of the heart, which focuses in the spiritual area; dialogue of the hand, which focuses in the active area; then all of them are integrated in the dialogue of the holy which achieves the holistic way of interreligious dialogue (Swidler, 2014, p. 25).

Recently, the dialogue of theology or theological-based dialogue is less popular. The common modern interreligious dialogue also considers that the root of conflict is the difference in how each religion understands God. This causes them to avoid discussing theology, doctrine, and scripture, and to prefer dialogue through social projects (Geddes, 2004). However, theological based still has a prominent aspect in a dialogue. Every religious tradition has a variety of moral and spiritual resources that can facilitate rebuilding trust, transform perceptions, and create “a sense of engagement and commitment to the building process” (Abu-Nimer, 2001, p. 686). Küng once said that “no peace between the religions without dialogue between the religions, no dialogue between the religions without investigation of the foundation of the religions” (Küng, 1994). Also, Stalov in his research on Israel and Palestine said that when people engage in deep positive interactions with each other about faith, they overcome prejudices and fears and replace them with mutual understanding, respect, trust, and friendship (Stalov, 2007, p. 131).

In the context of Indonesia, the importance of theological-based dialogue is increasingly apparent. This is regarded to the argument of Van Bruinessen about the emergence of a conservative turn in Indonesian Islam in the post-Suharto era which raises a lot of interreligious conflicts. In the Suharto era, discussion of SARA (*Suku, Agama, Ras, Anti Golongan*/Ethnic, Religion, Race, Intergroup) was very limited, along with religious expression. Discussions about religion that are developing, or which are allowed to develop, have mostly always supported the program of government. After the Suharto regime collapsed, these boundaries were released. This has led to enormous changes in the religious life of the Indonesian. Previously

restricted religious views and expressions began to dare to show themselves in the public sphere, including conservative views. In interpreting the term conservative, Bruinessen refers to "the various currents that reject modernist, liberal or progressive re-interpretations of Islamic teachings and adhere to established doctrines and social orders. Conservatives notably object to the idea of gender equality and challenges to established authority, as well as to modern hermeneutical approaches to scripture" (Bruinessen, 2013, p. 16).

The tendency to return to religious tradition and rejection of the modern view makes theological-based dialogue relevant again. However, one of the main problems with theological-based dialogue is that the participants are too exclusive as it requires participants who are selected, approved, and sanctioned by the appropriate authorities and genuinely represent their faiths when participating in formal interreligious dialogue as in the theological-based dialogue (Kozlovic, 2001, pp. 2-3). Therefore, the problem is that this type of dialogue has excluded the majority of grassroots adherents of a religion that could be in dire need (Scheffler, 2007, p. 175). Scheffler argues that it is important for grassroots groups to participate in the practice of interfaith dialogue because most conflicts in the name of religion are often not perpetrated by top theologians but religious laypeople who may have views about their own religion that deviate from the teachings of their religious scholars (Scheffler, 2007, p. 175). Swidler also expressed the importance of grassroots level involvement in interreligious dialogue. According to him, interreligious dialogue cannot only be limited to official representatives or people who are experts in religious teachings even though their role remains important. Dialogue must involve all levels of the religious community. Thus, religious communities will learn and understand each other as they are (Swidler, 2014, p. 24).

In this context, when referring to the grassroots, it pertains to a group of ordinary people other than the elite group of religious scholars. There are many studies on interreligious dialogue in Indonesia, which also focus on various practices of interreligious dialogue at the grassroots level. To achieve global peace, we should go beyond the liberal and secular framework of peacebuilding but also emphasize the contributions of grassroots peacemakers, including religious leaders, communities, and peace activists (Al-Qurtuby, 2012/2013). Where the dept knowledge on religion is not

available at the grassroots level, dialogue can be initiated by overcoming the common problems together (Muwahidah, 2008). Moreover, local culture plays an essential role in local interreligious dialogue as it happens between Muslims and Christians in Maluku who use an oral process based on *pela* relationships to engage with each other (Lattu, 2014, p. 245).

Together with women's groups and local communities, the youth community in interreligious dialogue is classified as interreligious dialogue at the grassroots level (Kadayifci-Orellana, 2013, p. 156). Regarding the importance of grassroots groups participating in interreligious dialogue, positive change aimed at peaceful coexistence is an ongoing process involving the work of many generations, and youth has a very significant role in for sustaining the harmony and peace (Michaelides, 2009, p. 449). Husein examines the role of youth in building peace through the interreligious movement. She argues that, through the interreligious movement, youth in Indonesia made a positive contribution in the midst of the trend of religious change towards a more conservative direction (Husein, 2019). Jonathan, through his research on an interfaith youth community, argues that youth or students can build peace among religions effectively and can be involved in various types of interfaith dialogue (Jonathan, 2017). Kusuma and Susilo researched young interfaith activists in Indonesia and concluded that the multiculturalism inherent in Indonesian culture provides a strong foundation for interfaith activists in addressing cultural and religious differences (Kusuma & Susilo, 2020).

Along with the movement of globalization and the development of the digital world and new media, there are many challenges that must be faced in relation to the role of youth in interreligious dialogue and the next generation to build peace. The new media platform allows the dissemination of information quickly and has a multiplier effect. The ease of accessing this information also has a negative effect - it is easy for them to be exposed to and influenced by religious radicalism ideas. Research on religious expression through new media among the youth in Indonesia found that youth can be radicalized when they tried to seek their manhood (Epafras, 2016, p. 14). Herein lies the importance of theological-based dialogue to also be carried out at the grassroots level, especially youth. Theological-based dialogue is expected to be able to become a counter-narrative of radicalism

ideas that they can quickly and easily get through new media. In this case, this research observes Scriptural Reasoning (SR) as an alternative to answer the need for theological-based dialogue that can involve groups at the grassroots level. SR is a discussion that involves participants from three traditions. They are Jews, Christians, and Moslems who will read and discuss some passages on a common theme from their respective holy books. The discussions revolve around understanding how their traditions interpret the text and explore its relevance to contemporary issues.

This research is based on a case study on the practice of SR by a youth interfaith community in Indonesia called Young Interfaith Peacemaker Community (YIPC). To complete the previous studies that have not explored the significance of theological-based dialogue and youth involvement in interreligious dialogue, this study looks at how SR, as implemented at YIPC, fulfills the conditions and gives theological-based dialogue an important place, while also providing alternatives on how to implement theological-based dialogue at the grassroots level, especially youths, and how youths have their own significance in interreligious dialogue.

## **Method**

With a focus on the research objective, this study used a qualitative method in the data collection and analysis. It is grounded to a tradition of inquiry methodology that focuses on social or human problems. With the qualitative method, the data collection is expected to find a deeper understanding and meaning. To address the research questions, the data required includes the examination of SR as an interreligious dialogue strategy. This involves obtaining information about the objectives, conditions, procedures involved in SR, and evaluating its effectiveness. Additionally, the study explores the adaptation of SR within the Indonesian context. The data can be collected from two sources, empiric and document. Therefore, the author used triangulation techniques: observations, interviews, and documentation.

First, the author did some observation on YIPC SR by participating in their SR practice. From February to April 2021, the author participated in

three SR activities, which were SR with the topic Self Care and Well Being, Human Creation, and Women and Equality. Previously, the author had also participated in SR practices several times as YIPC member since 2016. The author's experience of doing SR was also an enrichment of some observations to conduct the research.

After doing observation, the author did some interviews because it could provide an in-depth and detail to a more general picture/point of view than what is offered by quantitative social data. Interviews were conducted with six interviewees, two of whom were founders of YIPC while the other four were YIPC members who had frequently conducted SR.

Besides the empirical data, the author also used data from the documentation. In doing this, the author collected some literatures and scientific works on SR by the previous scholars. Those documents are expected to know about the development of SR from time to time and the way SR is conducted in various places. Regarding the data about SR in Indonesia or YIPC, the author took the data from YIPC Website, Guidebook, and other publications.

## **Finding and Discussion**

### **The description of scriptural reasoning**

Scriptural Reasoning (SR) is a discussion that involves participants from three traditions: Jews, Christian and Moslem. Participants are divided into small group to read and discuss some passages from the holy book of the three traditions, Tanakh, Bible and Qur'an. Generally, in the practice of SR, they discuss the content of the text, exploring how their traditions understand the text and how the text engages with contemporary issue. SR originally comes from Textual Reasoning, a dialogue between a group of academic Jewish textual scholars and Jewish philosophers led by Peter Ochs (2002, 2005), a Professor of Modern Judaic Studies at the University of Virginia, in the early 1990s. While 'textual' referred to Jewish scripture, 'reasoning' referred to intellectual methods and practices of philosophy and theology grounded to reason. Textual Reasoning seeks to integrate the dominant paradigm of Western philosophy with the practice of scripture

without reducing the particularities of the Jewish tradition (Ford, 2006, p. 347). In its development, there is an awareness of the need to not only readjust the interpretation on their scripture but at the same time also begin to engage other believers about how they understand their beliefs, especially Christians and Moslems. Then, this is manifested when David Ford and Daniel Hardy who came from Christianity and also professor from Faculty of Divinity at the University of Cambridge and Basit Bilal Koshul, which now is a professor at the Lahore University, and Aref Nayed, a Libyan Islamic scholar, came to join the discussion as Muslim participants. From here, Textual Reasoning developed to Scriptural Reasoning (SR).

SR then developed and spread around the world. It was used in a scholarly context as a bridge between scholar and theologian text. SR also made scholarship serve wider human community because it started to be used in interfaith organization as an alternative interreligious dialogue. Until now, SR has been used as a medium of learning in interreligious classes in several academic environments, such as the American Academy of Religion, University of Virginia, Center of Theological Inquiry at Princeton, Faculty of Divinity in Cambridge, University of Birmingham, etc. and also as a model of interreligious dialogue practiced in various interfaith organizations in some countries, such as Rose Castle Foundation in UK, the Institute of Comparative Scripture and Interreligious Dialogue in China, Young Interfaith Peacemaker Community in Indonesia. As a model for interreligious dialogue, SR has several objectives, as stated in [scripturalreasoning.org](http://scripturalreasoning.org) by Rose Castle Foundation and Cambridge Interfaith Program of University of Cambridge, including:

*First*, learning and understanding. By using scripture as the first base in interreligious dialogue, especially in theological-based interreligious dialogue, the discussion does not focus on conceptual and doctrinal categories of analysis which tend to force complex religious traditions into abstract theological concepts and ignore the cultural-linguistic dimensions of religion systems (Kepnes, 2006, p. 373). SR practice aims for the participants to learn and understand how other people understand their scripture and how they reflect on it in a wider tradition. By reading together, we can enrich our perspective in understanding the text so that we can return to wrestling with our own texts with a broader perspective (Young, 2004).



*Second*, exploring differences. In SR practice, participants will find many differences encompassing how their scripture talks about certain things and differences in how they reflect on what their scripture says. However, these differences, as well as the similarities, must still be respected and understood. SR does not aim to build a common ground, an agreement and a conclusion among the participants, but rather tries to improve understanding of their scripture in the presence of others (Avcı, 2018, p. 3). SR does not seek any agreement but is expected to make the participants accept the differences in a better way (Pope & Paulus, 2023).

*Third*, friendship. Like other interreligious dialogue models which aim to build the peace among all religions, SR practices are also intended to foster a sense of friendship between participants so that all barriers and stereotypes against others no longer exist. As the participant of SR practices is expected to be more responsible toward others (Young, 2004), the friendship established is also expected to be able to strengthen their cooperation to solve the problems they face together. As Steven Kepnes states, SR is inspired by the global awareness of the high proportion of human suffering so that the participant of SR can come together and seek resources for healing (Kepnes, 2006, p. 372).

To achieve the objectives, several basic principles of SR are on concerns: *first*, SR is the practice of reflection. In practice, it's important to recognize that SR is initiated to seek solutions to problems that are either experienced or caused by religious individuals in the world. SR is a reflection on what is already happening and performing in the world. Therefore, it should always be reflected with considering the particularity of the context where and when the SR is carried out (Ochs, 2002; Ceetham, 2010). Context is required to guide the actions and clarify the rules of the actions. Therefore, as stated by Nicholas Adam, there are no fix rules of SR (Adam, 2006, p. 240). The theory in SR will continue to evolve as the SR reflection continues.

*Second*, SR is a process of reasoning. Quoting Aref Nayed, Kepnes states that in the SR, each participant brings their own "internal library". By their own internal library and awareness of the contemporary world in the SR process, there is a dialogue between traditional text and the modern values (Kepnes, 2006, p. 375). Therefore, reasoning in SR is the process of

investigating text, be it on the main sources of the religious scriptures – as they have been accepted by their early receiving communities and as they are researched by text history scholarships – or on the way these resources are received by the contemporary community of practitioners (Ochs, 2005).

*Third*, SR is not a consensus. It does not aim to reach an agreement. Although consensus can occur in an SR practice, it is essential to emphasize that what holds greater significance is a profound acknowledgment and understanding of differences. Ben Quash mentions four key marks of SR related to this. They are: particularity, in SR practice, every participant of SR's distinctive perspective, specificity of tradition and other forms of particularity are respected; provisionality, SR practice can be symbolized as a tent, the temporary place to seek wisdom but will never be obtained perfectly; sociality, SR is a group practice where participants share their insights and assumptions with each other and opens up a sensitivity to anyone who is part of the group; open to surprise, SR opens the opportunity for other participants to ask questions and provide perspectives that are sometimes completely new to each other (Quash, 2006).

*Fourth*, SR ethical. In this case, there are some ethics formulated by The Scriptural Reasoning Society/The Oxford School which they call The Oxford Ethic. The Oxford Ethic of SR aims to keep SR as an egalitarian ethic. They are: parity, which is necessary to ensure that the participant of SR is independent and self-governed with the basic of parity among them; equality, in SR, every personal background and life experience have to be equally valued; subordination and subsidiarity, the participants of SR also need to respect their religious law and tradition of their religious background.

### **The implementation of scriptural reasoning at YIPC**

Young Interfaith Peacemaker Community (YIPC) is a youth community that is active in the field of interfaith peace. This community was established by Andreas Jonathan and Ayi Yunus Rusyana in July 2012 after a seminar or peace training for 25 Christian and Muslim students called Young Peacemaker Training that they held in Yogyakarta. Along with the development, YIPC has been formed in Yogyakarta, Medan, Jakarta,

Bandung, Surabaya, Malang, Solo, Salatiga and is pioneering in Borneo and Ambon. Since it was first discussed by YIPC at the Interfaith Peacemaker National Conference in Magelang in 2013, *A Common Word Between Us and You* has become one of the important documents that guides YIPC. Document *A Common Word Between Us and You* is an open letter signed by 138 Moslem scholars and intellectuals to Christian leaders all over the world (*A Common Word Between Us and You*, 2009: v). The contents of the letter are several verses in the Quran and the Bible which show that Islam and Christianity have in common regarding the commandment to love God and love others. This letter received many responses from Christian leaders and became an initiative to carry out interfaith dialogue, especially between Christians and Muslims. This is manifested in the YIPC vision which reads “*generasi damai yang berdasar atas kasih sayang kepada Allah dan sesama* (a peace generation which based on the love for God and the love for the neighbor).” The YIPC mission, is “Building Peace Generation Through Young Peacemakers” and is realized in several steps, including: a) Continuously carry out peace education and interfaith dialogue in an open, honest and deep manner; b) Mobilize the young generation and society to live in peace and love one another; c) To be involved in the process of transforming the nation and the world in realizing global peace.

Apart from the Student Interfaith Peace Camp (SIPC), SR is one of YIPC's main programs which is carried out regularly. Before adopting the SR program, which the reason of the selection is discussed below, YIPC first organized a program called *Kajian Kitab Suci* (Scripture Study) as an activity they carry out at every regular meeting. According to Andreas Jonathan (Interview, 11 February 2021), holy books can also be the cause of conflicts between religions. This is caused by an understanding that is considered incomplete and too narrow. They only focus on verses that are violent and intolerant. Even though in a conflict between religions, scripture is not the only factor, but there is always friction with other factors. The violent verses in the scriptures are often used as legitimacy to commit violence. Therefore, to counter such opinions and people, it cannot be countered with secular sciences or humanism. Because they uphold the scriptures, to counter this, it is also necessary to use scripture by lifting parts of other scriptures that teach peace. This is intended to make a balance. Besides, the using of

scripture as a tool for interreligious dialogue also want to show that the idea of peace is not an import, but is actually an issue that is very close to our beliefs (Rusyana, interview 8 July 2021).

YIPC's founders decide to adapt SR to replace *Kajian Kitab Suci* after they attended an interfaith program held at Drew University, New Jersey in 2013 to represent ICRS. This is where they became acquainted with SR. For one week, they studied and practiced SR guided by Peter Ochs (2002,2005), who is one of the founding fathers of this SR. By adapting SR as a work program carried out by YIPC, Andreas Jonathan hopes that the participants can have an understanding that comes from the scriptures, learn and understand the values of peace from the scriptures and apply what they have learned in more concrete steps (Interview, 11 February 2021). Furthermore, SR could give YIPC members the opportunity to have new experiences, broaden their insights and understandings on a topic from different scriptures, clarify existing negative prejudices, and deepen their respective religious knowledge (Rusyana, interview 8 July 2021).

As a community that only consists of Christians and Muslims, SR in YIPC is only practiced among Christians and Muslims. As it has been explained that the SR in Indonesia is still very foreign, the majority of participants for the first time know SR when they became members of the YIPC. SR was introduced to them when they attended the Peace Camp activities. SR guideline used by YIPC refers to the SR guideline available on the official SR website, [scripturalreasoning.org](http://scripturalreasoning.org), including guidance on what SR is; how to implement the SR; as well as the materials used in the SR practice, with some additions and emphases. Based on the observations the author made while participating in the SR, the following are the procedures carried out in the SR practice at YIPC: (a.) the facilitator has previously determined and prepared the topics and texts to be discussed in the SR; (b.) the YIPC members who attended were divided into groups of four to six people with an equal percentage of Christians and Muslims; (c.) the SR activity was opened and ended with a prayer that is led by representatives from Christian and Muslim; (d.) each participant reads alternately the verses that were discussed in the SR, and; (e.) after the verses have been read, the participants are given time to express their opinions and reflect on the verses that have been read.

In reflecting on the verses used as discussion material in the SR, YIPC has provided guidance for that in the form of the following questions: (1.) What do you learn from the two texts about the characters of God, the main character or the prophet, other characters/people? (2) What do you learn about the value of peace? (3) What verse or point do you personally find or touch your heart? (4) State one practical step you take based on the lesson! (5) Share your personal experiences (if any) that relate to the lessons you learned!

Derived from Textual Reasoning initiated by experts in theology and philosophy, SR activities conducted by YIPC, which is an interfaith movement based on youth and its members come from various study programs, must have difference difficulties and interests with those carried out at the academic level with expert theological and philosophy background. In order to overcome this, there are several innovations that the YIPC facilitators attempt to carry out in the SR activities. First, by combining SR activities with other interesting activities and carried out in interesting places, so the practice of SR is not deemed monotonous and boring. Second, the SR theme is adjusted in accordance with the issues of interest to the youth. Third, including notes on the context of the verse and some basic information about the text that is being discussed in the SR. Regarding the evaluation and modifications carried out by YIPC in response to several things that became difficulties in implementing SR in the context of youth, what needs to be remembered is that, as has been said by Kepnes, SR was first a practice before later academics and SR practitioners theorize it (Kepner, 2006), so there are no fix rules of SR (Adam, 2006, p. 240). Thus, SR will always be adjusted based on the needs of the context where and when SR is practiced, with a note, adaptations and modifications made do not violate the principles of SR.

### **YIPC's scriptural reasoning as theological-based dialogue**

In this part, the author examined whether the implementation of SR at YIPC, based on the SR principle in general, meet the standards of theological-based dialogue following the conditions for interreligious dialogue on religious teaching (Cornille, 2013). *First*, humility. Doing interreligious dialogue requires a humble recognition that one's own religion

is not better than the other. Dialogue needs participants to remove the feeling of superiority towards others. The SR practice at YIPC is implemented when one is willing to understand others and to accept the possibility of enlightenment from others, even from followers of other religions when reading and reflecting the scripture together.

“What I felt the most, after the SR, is the insight that was further enriched. Oh, it turned out Christian friends interpreted the Bible like this. And I was also enriched with another point of view towards the Qur’an. I think it can still be understood that way too. So, you get enlightenment also in the Qur’an. Maybe if you look at it as an insider and an outsider, as an insider I never understand the Qur’an like that, but as an outsider they can. So, besides I know the narrative of the Bible, I also know the narrative of the Qur’an from other readers” (Rahmat, interview 18 February 2023).

*Second*, commitment. Commitment into particular belief differs interreligious dialogue with personal exploration of other's teaching for spiritual enrichment. Before joining YIPC and SR together, each SR participant had their own religious background. Although Christianity and Islam are known to be both Abrahamic religions, this does not deny the fact that they also have many different beliefs on the same thing, for example how they understand Jesus and Isa. In the SR practice at YIPC, if difference occurs related to faith, they will return it to their respective faith.

“There are several different things that involve faith, so it will be returned to each other's faith. If we are Muslims, we believe that Allahu a'lam (God knows better)” (Dayat, interview 9 April 2021) “SR inspires us to learn more about our religion” (Nandyfa, interview 7 April 2021)

*Third*, interconnection. Despite different definitions of religion, all point to human expression of their relationship with some transcendent reality. Many religions provide their answer to some similar questions. As in SR, the dialogue addresses the same theme in two scriptures. Although, once again, SR does not at all demand to find a common ground, this does not mean that they have never found similarities, especially those with regard to social issues. The common concern found is when participants carry out SR, they will also increase their sense of trust and friendship. Moreover, the concern also becomes an impetus for them to carry out further collaborative tasks as a follow-up to dialogue activities.

“For example, regarding the environment, if from a Christian like this, and it turns out that there are other views, then let us hear it. It turns out that in Islam is like this. If it turns out to be the same, it is in line, then it is just a matter of execution. If it can be executed it will be even better” (William, interview 12 February 2021).

*Fourth*, empathy. Interreligious dialogue needs a willingness and pretension to understand each other, and empathy can produce the understanding as an insider. In the SR process, participants share their personal experiences with the scriptures discussed. This process has a great influence in fostering empathy among the participants. With this, they can see and treat each other as human beings, not as followers of other religions.

“Listening to how they explain what is in their scriptures clarified some of my prejudices, and it is amazed me when they want to discuss the Prophet Muhammad in SR, which is not in their holy book, but they still respect and even learn from him” (Dayat, interview 9 April 2021)

*Fifth*, hospitality. When doing a dialogue, one can find some truth in another religion, and they need generosity or hospitality to recognize and integrate that truth. In SR, they try to realize the hospitality by accepting differences as they are without any effort to equate. However, their differences do not prevent them from building peace.

"A lot of things are different. In SR this is disclosed. For example, about Jesus. If Islam is like this, Christianity is like this. So, from there, we build peace. Not a false peace. Oh, you are like this, I am like this. What can we work on together for this? It is not oh you are like this so I come with you. Tolerance is differences, I'm different, you're different, but that's not an obstacle" (William, interview 12 February 2021).

### **The significance of theological-based dialogue at the grassroots level**

In the following, the author examined the opportunities of SR as a model for theological-based dialogue in Indonesia in a sense that several potentials can be achieved when using SR as a model of interreligious dialogue.

#### *Achieving Dialogue of the Holy*

There are three types of dialogue according to Swidler. They are the dialogue of the head (theological), dialogue of the heart (spiritual), dialogue

of the hand (social action). All of them are integrated into the dialogue of the holy, which achieves the holistic way of interreligious dialogue (Swidler, 2014). Some models of interreligious dialogues are only part of one of the three types of dialogue. All of them have their own significance in interreligious dialogue. However, the combination of the three creates a comprehensive interreligious dialogue, which can be found in one SR practice at YIPC.

*First*, theological-based dialogue. In SR practice, participants learn how followers of other religions understand their religion through their scriptures. *Second*, dialogue of the heart or spiritual dialogue. In SR practice, dialogue of the heart can be found when participants share with one another about their experiences and the meaning of one verse in scripture related to their life. *Third*, dialogue of the hand or social action. In the practice of SR at YIPC, participants are asked to state concrete steps that can be taken after implementing SR. Frequently, the established commitments are linked to mutually agreed-upon human values. While these efforts may not be flawless, concrete steps towards realization have been taken in other activities within YIPC that address social issues.

Because the three forms of interreligious dialogue above are fundamental and have their respective virtues, all are equally necessary to do. However, some interreligious dialogue models can only cover one. Differently, the SR practices in YIPC provides an alternative model of interreligious dialogue that can cover the three forms of interreligious dialogue, as what Swidler (2014) terms as the dialogue of the holy.

#### *Building Positive Peace through Theological-based Dialogue*

Positive peace means not only eliminating all forms of negative relationships but also building a harmonious relationship (Galtung, 1969). Positive peace also means that there are no possibilities that can trigger conflict. Although the modern model of interreligious dialogue can sometimes reach peace easily and quickly, it is needed to first discuss the roots where the conflict occurred. If conflict occurs because of tension and prejudice against one another in terms of belief and tradition, before it



comes to social activities, it must first be resolved. Hence, when their beliefs and traditions are touched, the conflict will still occur. This is one background of the need for positive peace.

With SR, all prejudices and sensitive matters that could trigger conflict are discussed because one of the purposes of SR is to explore the differences between religious teachings on the same subject. SR does not aim to build a common ground, an agreement and a conclusion among the participants, but rather tries to improve understanding of their scripture in the presence of others (Avci, 2018, p. 3). The aspect of commitment to one's own religious teachings is present and not eliminated in SR practices. As stated by William, "A lot of things are different. In SR, this is disclosed. For example, about Jesus. If Islam is like this, Christianity is like this. Therefore, we build peace. "Not a false peace..." (William, interview 12 February 2021). Thus, when people claim to have made peace, peace is awakened after an acceptance and understanding of the differences. Instead of avoiding or silencing all the differences in religious teaching that could be the root of conflict and negative prejudice, through appreciation of all forms of particularities, SR tries to deal with them. SR does not aim to make people agree with one belief, even the slightest difference, but rather to accept differences in a good way.

#### *Voicing the Grassroots*

As stated by Swidler, dialogue should involve every level of the religious, ideological communities, all the way down to the persons in the pews. Only in this way will the religious, ideological communities learn from each other and come to understand each other as they truly are (Swidler, 2014). This is indeed not easy. One of the obstacles is that the interreligious dialogue theology model is not usually carried out by the grassroots level of religious adherents. However, YIPC, through SR activities, proves that theological-based dialogue can be carried out at the grassroots level. While Scriptural Reasoning (SR) initially involved individuals considered religious elites, the SR practice at YIPC demonstrates that, with certain adjustments, SR can also be effectively conducted by grassroots groups of religious adherents, particularly among youth. This proves that SR can be an alternative for theological-based dialogue, which can not only be done by

religious elites but can also be carried out by grassroots from religious adherents.

SR at YIPC, as a theological-based dialogue model that can be carried out at the grassroots level, has at least two potentials, to bring up discussions about religious teaching contextually according to the contemporary problems and to help them respond to narratives related to interreligious issues on social media, which they are very close to. In the work of the interreligious movement, it brings about the sustainability of the movement and guarantee that the movement remains in accordance with contemporary audiences and issues.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the explanations earlier, I argue that SR can be an alternative theological-based dialogue. With some modifications and adjustments, the SR at YIPC can also be an example of how theological-based dialogue, through the scriptures, can be done at the grassroots level. As a theological-based dialogue conducted at the grassroots level, SR at YIPC also has other potential in relation to the role of youth in interreligious dialogue. In contrast to the past, where youth were primarily consumers of interpretative products, engaging in Scriptural Reasoning (SR) brings about a shift. Through SR, youth have the opportunity to delve deeper into religious teachings, explore diverse perspectives, and even offer critiques. By directly encountering the first source of religious teaching, they can also get meanings related to their lives and needs, which may not have been previously discussed by religious leaders. Their reading of the scriptures is influenced by knowledge and experience, which are diverse and contextual. Furthermore, they can voice their opinions regarding religious teaching and values to their peers who relate to their perspective as youth, or even to a wider circle.

One of the notes to consider in the practice of SR, as in YIPC, is how to eliminate the tendency to look for similarities between religions as a reason for peace because one of the goals and principles of SR is to respect differences and commitment to the teachings of their respective religions. In addition, one of the challenges in SR practices is that the majority of SR

practices are still carried out among the three religions, commonly known as the Abrahamic religions, where all of them have the written scripture. Whereas in the context in Indonesia, many adherents of indigenous religions do not have sacred written texts in their religion. SR as the process of reflection, that is based on the desire to respond to the religious matter in the world, should also respond to the religious plurality around. It leads to the question for future research regarding how the challenges and ways of SR can be practiced with participants from a wider religious background.

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